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Influences on Student Attitudes: An Examination of Ten Selected Influence Areas that Impact Community College Students' Attitudes Towards Postsecondary Education and Student Outcomes

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Influences on Student Attitudes: An Examination of Ten Selected Influence Areas that
Impact Community College Students' Attitudes towards Postsecondary Education and
Student Outcomes

By

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Influences on Student Attitudes: An Examination of Ten Selected Influence Areas that Impact Community College Students' Attitudes towards Postsecondary Education and Student Outcomes

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The purpose of this study was to examine different selected influence areas that may have an impact on a community college student's attitudes towards their education. The study was first examined in relation to existing research regarding influences that can affect, positively or negatively, a student's attitude towards education, the courses and type of institution that they select, and ultimately in their decision to pursue higher education in general. Ten different selected influence areas were chosen and aspects of each area were examined to provide insight into influences that may impact student attitudes towards education and ultimately student outcomes. Some of the impacts reinforced those which were represented in existing literature, and some of the influences were new with regard to existing literature. Previous studies and existing literature were discussed in detail to include any connections, similarities, and differences between the existing literature and the current study. A sample of 22 community college students was chosen from Western Nebraska Community College. A 20 question Likert Assessment was implemented, and 8 students were chosen from the sample of 20 to participate in the interview portion, which consisted of 10 semi-structured questions about the selected

influences in an effort to shed more light on why certain influences impacted students and in what ways that occurred. Results varied, with some selected influence areas, such as extra-curricular participation and established goals, receiving considerable support and agreement from students, while areas such as opportunities to learn outside school and high school size received less support.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Background

Community colleges have held a unique place in the landscape of higher education since their early beginnings, and continue to play a significant role in the overarching landscape of higher education. Cohen and Kisker (2010) stated that the community college is a very important part of higher education through the mission of these institutions, the opportunities that community colleges provide to students (p. 447). This is true even when looking at the impact that these schools have on four-year institutions, as Cohen and Kisker (2010) asserted that “community colleges contribute to a hierarchical structure of postsecondary education and in turn influence university perception” (p. 447). As evidenced by the previous statement, community colleges have great influence in higher education in general, and particularly, on the students that these institutions serve. Students are attracted to community colleges for a wide variety of different reasons, some of which are more evident and obvious than others. Cohen and Brawer (2008) stated that students are drawn to community colleges for seemingly as many different reasons as there are students, with factors impacting student choices to enroll in a community college ranging from “employment possibilities, financial aid availability, and the demands of the military” (p. 453). Cohen and Kisker (2010) stated more reasons that students may look to enroll in a community college when they asserted that students are seeking opportunities to gain access to higher education while taking into consideration influences such as location, cost of attendance, and socioeconomic

standing in the community (pp. 446-447). Community colleges are now enrolling close to, and in some places over, 50% of all undergraduate students, all of whom have chosen to enroll at a community college for their own unique reasons (pp. 446-447). Cohen and Brawer (2008) discussed the likely continued trend of community college importance in the overall landscape of higher education when they stated that community colleges are very likely to continue to receive a high number of students enrolling in these institutions because of “their traditional appeal: easy access, low cost, and part-time attendance possibilities” (pp. 454-455). Another reason that has been discussed for the increasing number of students choosing to enroll in community colleges is that while the economy in the country has struggled, there is still a high demand for skilled and trained workers for jobs that require some postsecondary training and schooling but do not necessarily require a bachelor’s degree (p. 455).

Of course with the wide variety of goals, unique and diverse student population, and differing views on student success, community colleges face distinctive challenges with the students who attend these institutions with regard to a students’ attitudes towards their education, persistence, and degree completion (Beach, 2011, p. 97). Reasons for this have been discussed but some of the common explanations deal with the number of part-time students at community colleges, students who generally have “distinct needs and expectations” and usually have “specific learning goals and serious constraints on their time” (El-Khawas, 2003, pp. 54-55). One of the main reasons that have been mentioned as a reason that students choose to attend a community college is the opportunity to pursue their studies part-time, which generally comes with students trying to balance

work and school (p. 55). This difficult balance between work and school can impact a student's ability to persist through their program, but does not necessarily mean it cannot be accomplished. Seeking this balance is one of the reasons that many students choose to attend a community college (Cohen & Brawer, 2008, pp. 454-455). However, while reasons that have been discussed in existing research can certainly explain why some students choose to enroll in a community college, one is left wondering if there are other reasons that could explain why more and more students are choosing to enroll in these two-year institutions.

Context of the Problem

All of this leads to the research question addressed by this research study which is to better understand if student attitudes are impacted by the selected influence areas and which areas are most significant on community college students' overall attitude towards education. Educators must be aware of what can be done to encourage positive attitudes towards learning and how they can better assist students in meeting their academic goals (Porchea, Allen, Robbins, & Phelps, 2010, p. 682). Porchea et al. (2010) stated that understanding the different influences that can impact student attitudes and success is important in helping students reach their potential and continue through their education (p. 682). Nakajima, Dembo, and Mossler (2012) stated that there are many factors that can impact student attitudes and ultimately success and persistence through their programs (p. 592). They stated that influences such as "demographic, financial, academic," and other variables can impact students' attitudes towards their education and decision to stay in school or drop out (pp. 592-593). The purpose of conducting this study

was to examine what influences impact community college students' attitudes towards education and why those influences have an effect on student attitudes and outcomes. The goal of the study was to gain a better understanding of what is driving students' decisions to enroll in community colleges and why those influences are so impactful on their choices.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of conducting this research was to examine the selected influence areas that impact community college students' attitudes towards higher education. Of additional interest was why those selected influence areas are important relative to student attitudes and in what ways. This study was completed in order to help community college professionals better understand how to encourage students towards their educational goals and improve student outcomes. Beach (2011) stated that institutions of higher education need to be "effective at what they do" (p. 132). More completely and effectively understanding what has brought their students to the institution is an important step in bringing about that growth and development in the students and helping them to succeed in their educational endeavors (p. 132).

Research Questions

A grand tour question and three sub-questions helped establish the framework for this study. The grand tour question was: "Are community college students' attitudes towards higher education impacted by selected internal and external influence areas?" The first of the three sub-questions established for this study was: "What selected influence areas impact community college students' attitudes towards education?" The

second of the three sub-questions relating to the study was: “Why do those selected influence areas affect community college students’ attitudes?” The third and final sub-question that helped develop the framework of this study was: “In what ways do the identified influence areas impact student attitudes?”

The grand-tour question helped establish the purpose of the study, which was to examine whether or not students were impacted by selected internal and external influence areas. The first sub-question helped establish what selected influence areas are impactful on students. The second sub-question examined why those selected influence areas are important. The third sub-question helped the researcher understand in what ways the students were impacted by the selected influence areas by providing information not only into why the influence areas are important, but how those influence areas affect their attitudes and behaviors.

Explanations for Research Questions

The examination of what is motivating and influencing student attitudes towards enrolling at community colleges serves as the basis for this study. While location, costs, access, and opportunities to enroll part-time are certainly factors in students’ decisions to enroll at community colleges and their attitude towards education, there are other factors and influences that play a significant role in students’ decisions to enroll at a two-year institution or their decision to drop out. First, many community college students tend to be in a place of indecision and lack of commitment, which can contribute to students dropping out (Nakajima et al., 2012, p. 592). Porchea et al. (2010) described the diversity of community college students and how that can impact their overall goals (p. 682).

Taking that diversity into consideration, college student personnel professionals must understand the importance of understanding the students they are working with on a day to day basis and the influences that impact their attitudes towards education. Nakajima et al. (2012) stated that influences such as “demographic, financial, academic,” and other variables can impact students’ attitudes towards their education and decision to stay in school or drop out (pp. 592-593).

Taking this information into consideration, one can come to the conclusion that financial, scheduling, and academic issues are some of the primary influences that impact a student’s attitude towards attending a community college. However, there are other influences in play that impact student attitudes, including student development. Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, and Renn (2010), discussed Chickering and Reisser’s (1993, 1995) theory of identity development and stated that students develop at different rates, which can impact how they deal with issues and ultimately how they view their education and the purpose of their endeavors (pp. 66-67). Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) echoed that view when they stated that this view of student development theory describes the difficulties and “complexity” of the process students go through during their college years and that they often “struggle to reconcile these new positions with their own ideas, values, and beliefs” (p. 21).

Clearly, there are many influences that can impact students’ attitudes towards education during their college years, whether the influences are external such as financial or location, or internal influences, such as the developmental issues that have been discussed. This has formed the framework for this two-phased, mixed-method study,

which examined ten selected influence areas of particular interest to the researcher in an effort to measure the amount of impact that those influences have on students' decisions to enroll at a community college, persist, and develop during their time at the institution.

Research Design

This study focused on ten selected influence areas that can impact community college students' attitudes towards education and is a mixed-method study. The difference in this study as opposed to previous studies was the intent to examine more closely different influence areas that could have an impact on the attitudes of community college students. These ten areas were selected based on influences discussed in existing research, including Bahr (2010), Eklund-Leen and Young (1997), Horyna and Bonds-Raacke (2012), Ammon, Bowman, and Mourad (2008), Porchea et al. (2010), Bettinger and Long (2005), and Nakajima et al. (2012). The specific influences discussed in many of these studies and others are discussed in Chapter 2. The primary referenced rationale for this study was based on research by Nakajima et al. (2012), who stated that there are many influential factors that can impact students' attitudes and ultimately whether or not they decide to continue their education (pp. 591-592). The current study aimed to look at some of those influence areas from existing research to gain a more thorough understanding of community college students' attitudes and the influences that affect them and in what ways they are affected. The study consisted of a survey and an interview. The Likert Assessment and the questions that appeared on the survey are listed later (see Appendix A). The interview (see Appendix B) allowed for more detailed responses and explanations. The survey portion of the study was a 20 question Likert

assessment that was designed to reveal the influence areas, which are listed later (see Appendix C), that are most influential to students in relation to their attitude towards higher education. The purpose of the Likert survey was to gain a better understanding of what influence areas impact student attitudes at community colleges. The design of the study was intended to have the survey answer the “what” (what influence areas) and the interviews to shed more light on the “why” and “how” (why do those influence areas affect students and in what ways).

Definition of Terms

While there are few terms used in this study that are not relatively well known, some terms used can take on multiple meanings depending upon situational factors and different areas of research. As a result, below are definitions of key terms that were central to the development and implementation of the study. Key definitions include:

Attitudes—A community college student’s personal view towards their education, either positive or negative. Their level of motivation or desire to continue their education and understand how they will learn (King, Patricia M. as cited in Komives, Woodward, & Associates, 2003, pp. 235-236).

Influences—Individual characteristics or outside influences on students that can have an impact on their attitude towards education and desire to continue pursuing education (Nakajima et al., 2012, pp. 592-593).

Goal Achievement—Students reaching their personal goals, even if it is not getting an Associate’s degree. Could involve learning a new skill, getting training in

certain vocation, transferring to a four-year school, or increased involvement (Nakajima et al., 2012, p. 593).

Likert Assessment—Levels measure of agreement to a given statement. Ex. It is very important to study for class. Strongly agree → Agree → Disagree → Strongly Disagree (McMillan, 2012, p. 157).

Student Outcomes—End result of student's educational experience with regard to the institution. Attainment of degree, certificate, vocational training, job training or attitude change. Defines what the institution helped the student achieve (Cohen & Kisker, 2010, pp. 287-288; Nakajima et al., 2012, pp. 592-593).

Significance

The purpose of this study was to examine selected influence areas that impact student attitudes towards higher education and can ultimately help determine student outcomes. This is important for several reasons. The changing landscape of higher education, combined with the remaining economic struggles in the country, are leading more and more students to enroll in community colleges for a variety of different reasons (Cohen & Brawer, 2008, pp. 44-46). Community colleges are being asked to do more with regard to providing opportunities for students for a variety of different reasons (pp. 44-45). These challenges include older students returning to school, providing financial aid or affordable tuition, offering part-time scheduling, convenience with regard to location, and an increase in numbers of students attending, including more minority students pursuing higher education (pp. 44-45). Also, the number of students needing remedial coursework, before they can continue to a four-year school, has also increased

at community colleges, making measuring assessment for each student difficult (pp. 408-409). Educational professionals at community colleges must be aware of the different influences that may be bringing students to their doors in an effort to better assist them in persisting through their programs and reaching their goals, as this can be a better way of measuring not only student success but also institutional success and the quality of the institution and education being offered (Beach, 2011, p. 97).

Furthermore, understanding what influences brought the students to the community college and what influences are impacting their attitudes towards their current experiences at the institution can more effectively help the institution when examining its effectiveness with regard to the institutional mission (Cohen & Brawer, 2008, p. 411). Community colleges, in general, tend to strive to accomplish the missions of assisting students in their pursuit of earning transfer credits, gaining entry into a limited and competitive workforce, changing careers or pursuing a different path in their work life, attaining necessary basic training and general education, and opportunities to learn for the sake of learning and becoming a more well-rounded individual (pp. 411-412). This study and the information yielded from the results are important due to the wide variety of influences that may impact a student's choice to attend a community college. The need for educational professionals to better understand those influences and how they can be used to increase enrollment and retention while helping students achieve their educational goals is evident.

Delimitations

Delimiting variables within the study describe aspects of the study that were specifically defined and restricted by the researcher (McMillan, 2012, p. 96). The study focused on internal and external selected influence areas that can impact individual students who are attending a community college. The study was restricted to focus only on community college students for several reasons. First, many community college students tend to be in a place of indecision and lack of commitment, which can contribute to students dropping out (Nakajima et al., 2012, p. 592). Porchea et al. (2010) described the uniqueness of community college students and how that can impact their overall goals (p. 682). For example, students could be there because they lost their job and decided to go back to school, to get an Associate's degree, to improve their chances in a limited job market, to save money before transferring to a four-year school, to earn a certificate, to take remedial courses to help them prepare for more education, or simply to try out a college class to see if college is appropriate for them (Cohen & Brawer, 2008, p. 411). The challenges of working with the community college population, such as serving a diverse student body with unique goals, are apparent in existing research (pp. 453-456).

Also, while there are likely hundreds of different influences that can impact student attitudes towards education, this study restricted the number to ten, which will be listed in detail later (see Appendix C). This restriction was made based on the existing research studies previously mentioned which discussed influence areas that seemed to be most impactful on students. The restrictions were also made for cost and time saving purposes, and some of the influence areas that were chosen were selected to shed light on

areas that previous research has not focused on as much. Because of time and cost saving, the sample size was limited to 22 for the Likert assessment and eight for the interview portion in order to make it feasible to interview the subjects and have the most productive and detailed conversations possible, while still having enough subjects to provide a representation of student attitudes.

Limitations

Limitations within a research study describe certain characteristics or confines of the study that address the “generalizability, translatability, or comparability of the findings” (McMillan, 2012, p. 370). In other words, with regard to educational research, one can define limitations as characteristics of the study that may restrict the consideration of “whether it is reasonable to expect the results to represent a general pattern that would occur again and again,” perhaps in different settings or with different participants (p. 370). While the hope for this study was to provide useful, new information to community college professionals as to what situational and personal influences impact student attitudes towards education, there were certain to be limitations to the results of the study (pp. 370-371). The results may not be as useful as they could be in large part because of the wide variety of influences that could in some way impact students. While the study limited the number of influence areas being examined to ten and will provide new and useful information in those areas, there are certainly numerous influence areas that could affect students outside of those ten. Examining only ten selected influence areas is a limitation of the study as this limits the opportunity to

understand any and all influence areas that students could have possibly indicated were impactful on their attitude.

Secondly, the study was limited by the sample that was used. Due to cost, time, and scope limitations, only 22 students were able to take the Likert assessment and only 8 were able to be interviewed, and those students likely were only representative primarily of one or two Midwestern states. One must emphasize the limitation of only having 22 students, as that small sample size greatly limits the generalizability of the study. Also, it is entirely possible that influence areas that affect students in Nebraska or Wyoming are not all the same influence areas that would impact students in California or New York. While conclusions and generalizations can be made for a certain class within this institution, there is certainly no way to assume that this sample from this institution was entirely representative of every community college student, and generalizing the findings beyond this point may not be productive or possible. Other possible limitations include potential response set or faking, if students chose to answer dishonestly just to give off a different impression than perhaps they were actually feeling (McMillan, 2012, pp. 162-163). Since this is a mixed-method study, attempts could be made to eliminate any answers that displayed response set or faking, but the possibility of that taking place does exist and is a limitation that must be recognized.

Assumptions

Through existing research and literature, the researcher approached this study with the assumption that of the ten selected influence areas examined in the study that were chosen based on influences discussed in Bahr (2010), Eklund-Leen and Young

(1997), Horyna and Bonds-Raacke (2012), Ammon et al. (2008), Porchea et al. (2010), Bettinger and Long (2005), and Nakajima et al. (2012)., some of the influence areas would likely be much more prominent than others. While there are certainly a wide variety of different influences that can impact student attitudes towards higher education and their desire to persist through their educational program, the researcher conducted the study with the assumption that there would likely be a few of the influence areas that were shared among the vast majority of the sample as influence areas that had a significant impact on the student, while other influence areas would likely not have any impact on students choices to enroll and persist at a community college.

Additionally, the researcher assumed that working with community college students and gaining useful answers would be difficult because many students may not yet know exactly what influence areas are most important or impactful to them. The researcher approached the study with the assumption that there very likely could be students in the sample who are still unsure of what is influencing their attitude towards higher education because they are still unsure of their goals. While this uncertainty was addressed to a certain extent in the study, the assumption was still made that there would be students who participated who may not provide as useful of information as others due to their indecisiveness towards future goals or uncertainty with regard to their current attitude towards higher education.

Conclusion

This study examined ten different selected influence areas that were selected by the researcher to observe which of those ten influence areas were impactful on student

attitudes towards higher education and their desire to persist through their program. Results were gathered through a Likert Assessment pertaining to the ten selected influences and interviews that provided more in-depth information into the reasoning behind why certain influence areas had an impact while others did not. The literature review relevant to the current study is described in detail in Chapter 2. The review of literature examines in greater detail previous research that is either directly or indirectly related to the current study and draws application from previous research to the current study on influences that impact student attitudes towards higher education.

Chapter 2

Review of Relevant Literature

Purpose Statement

The purpose of conducting this research was to examine the selected influence areas that impact community college students' attitudes towards higher education. Of additional interest was why those influence areas are important relative to student attitudes and in what ways. This study was completed in order to help community college professionals better understand how to encourage students towards their educational goals and improve student outcomes. Beach (2011) stated that institutions of higher education need to be "effective at what they do" (p. 132). More completely and effectively understanding what has brought students to the institution is an important step in bringing about growth and development in students and helping them succeed in their educational endeavors (p.132).

Research Questions

A grand tour question and three sub-questions helped establish the framework for this study. The grand tour question was: "Are community college students' attitudes towards higher education impacted by selected internal and external influence areas?" The first of the three sub-questions established for this study was: "What selected influence areas impact community college students' attitudes towards education?" The second of the three sub-questions relating to the study was: "Why do those selected influence areas affect community college students' attitudes?" The third and final sub-

question that helped develop the framework of this study was: “In what ways do the identified influence areas impact student attitudes?”

Introduction

Previous and existing research in the area of student attitudes and how those attitudes can impact student outcomes have shown many different influences to be of importance when examining this issue. The purpose of the following review of literature was to provide some foundation to the current study by examining studies that have been done relating to college students, some specifically at community colleges, and influences that can impact their attitudes or development while at college. Some of the studies dealt directly with influences that can impact students, while other studies were indirectly related but still relevant to the current study on community college students.

The literature was found primarily through books and online databases that contained scholarly, peer reviewed journals and articles contained in those journals. Key search words and phrases that were used in the search of relevant literature include: “community college students,” “student attitudes,” “influences on student attitudes,” “impact of student attitudes on development,” “student retention,” and “factors that can affect student outcomes in college.” This review certainly did not encompass every study that either directly or indirectly relates to student attitudes and influences that impact them, but rather provided a description of some of the existing research as it relates to the current study.

The first section of the literature review discussed the study by Peter Bahr (2010) dealing with behavioral typologies and student classification. This study, while not

specifically focusing on certain influences that impact community college students, does provide useful information with regard to better understanding the college student, what makes them who they are and behave the way they do, and ultimately what “variables,” as Bahr (2010) referred to them, impact and influence student behaviors and attitudes (pp. 741-742).

Impact of Behavioral Typology on Students

Some researchers have focused on certain specific influences or impacts that can affect a student’s attitude towards their education, and others have focused on examining different types of students with regard to classification schemes. One such example is Peter Bahr’s (2010) study on behavioral typologies of first-time students at community colleges. Cohen and Brawer (2008) noted that there are very few, if any, educational phenomena that are more multifaceted than the community college student (as cited in Bahr, 2010, p. 725). Understanding this concept further explains why determining what influences impact community college students’ attitudes towards education is so difficult. However, the challenge of the task does not override the importance of gaining more information in this area, as researchers are increasingly “pushing the boundaries of known groups of students in an effort to capture the bigger picture of who is enrolling in community colleges and for what benefit or purpose” (p. 726).

To help gain some perspective on the importance of understanding what motivates students and influences their attitudes and behaviors, Bahr (2010) argued that understanding what may influence student attitudes and actions through typology and classification schemes is important not only in an effort to better understand, serve, and

guide our students, but also due to the increasing amount of accountability that is being required of community colleges (pp. 725-726). Community colleges are being asked to do more and more with less and less, all the while upholding the mission and goals of the institution and meeting the requirements of lawmakers and those who fund the institutions, which increases the importance of understanding why students are choosing community colleges, what impacts their attitudes towards their education, and whether or not they are persisting and accomplishing their goals (p. 727). Through a k-means cluster analysis, Bahr's (2010) study yielded mixed results with regard to types of students and understanding what may impact student behaviors (pp. 731-733). In this study, there were 13 different variables that were used to measure students' behavioral tendencies and explanations of those behaviors (pp. 741-742). Relevant information such as student characteristics can be drawn from the 6 different typologies that were a result from his research. Those typologies, or "clusters," were listed as "transfer, vocational, drop-in, noncredit, experimental, and exploratory" (p. 742).

Bahr (2010) reported that there was a significant amount of variation among the different clusters when considering demographic characteristics and stated that there was "considerable variation in the representation of important demographic characteristics" which was particularly evident with regard to race, ethnicity, and age (p. 742). Results of the study also showed that there are a very significant portion of community college students who have very short durations of enrollment, with 32% of the students in this study falling into the "drop-in" typology and another 30% that were categorized as "experimental" (p. 742). These typologies described students who were simply trying out

college or were unsure of the educational goals. This is very valuable information to consider when looking at the present study on influences that impact student attitudes because this particular study showed that there are a very significant portion of the students at community colleges who are simply there in an effort to try out higher education, to “experiment,” or to temporarily pursue their options (p. 742). Bahr’s (2010) study reinforced the importance of the research question of the present study, looking into what is influencing those 32% of students who “drop-in” or experiment with pursuing a community college education.

Another important and relevant result of Bahr’s (2010) study is that outcomes showed that nearly 70% of all students who were classified in the drop-in or experimental category reported an “initial academic goal other than a credential or transfer, and an additional 14% did not report a goal” (p. 742). In other words, according to Bahr’s (2010) study, nearly 85% of those students in the drop-in or experimental category, which consists of over 60% of the students in the study, either have other motives influencing their attitudes and outcomes in higher education or have no real stated goal or established purpose for being at the institution (pp. 742-743). The results of this study reemphasized the research of Nakajima et al. (2012) that there are a large majority of community college students who are at a place of indecision and uncertainty in their lives, and in turn are experiencing a lack of true commitment to any one goal, path, or direction, but rather are experimenting with college to try to find that purpose (p. 592).

Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) discussed the relevance of using typological theories to better understand students’ behaviors and attitudes because the process allows

for researchers and educational professionals to identify “stable differences among individuals and categorize individuals according to these distinctive characteristics” (p. 45). These studies can shed additional light on why students may make the choices they make or lack a certain direction in their educational endeavors (p. 46). Bahr’s (2010) study reinforced the notion that many students who are at community colleges are struggling to find their path, establish goals, and ultimately have likely been influenced by something, someone, or some situation in choosing to enroll at a community college for “differing objectives and desired benefits” (Shulock & More, 2007, as cited in Bahr, 2010, p. 743). Also, Pascarella and Terenzini stated an important point that when considering studies such as Bahr’s (2010), one must realize that while typology studies may not always be able to explain all individual differences between students, that this research still can be useful in understanding basic “differences between college students and in illuminating why students may respond in different ways to the same college setting or experience” (p. 46).

Influences that Change Attitudes

While there are fewer studies that specifically focus entirely on community college student attitudes and influences that impact them, other existing literature examines student attitudes and motivations that impact their decisions and actions. One such research study is by Cheng, Lin, and Su (2011), which focused on attitudes and motivations of business studies students in Taiwan when pursuing additional certifications (p. 1307). While this study did not focus on community college students, relevant information can be applied when looking at what motivates students, what

causes changes in attitudes towards their education, and ultimately what motivates and impacts students' attitudes when they attend college and pursue degrees or certificates. Cheng et al. (2011) found that when examining student attitudes towards pursuing certificates, there can be internal motivational factors and external factors that can impact the student in many ways, either encouraging the student and improving their attitude or having the opposite effect (p. 1305). Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, and Ryan (1991) stated that some external influences that can impact student attitudes are compliments from others, where peers are influencing the student based on their choices or success in pursuing a certificate, possible threats from others if the student does not pursue a certificate, monetary rewards or some other reward based incentive, scores on examinations and other performance based assessments, or possible fame that may be acquired as a result of the student's choice to pursue the certificate (as cited in Cheng et al., 2011, pp. 1304-1305). Deci et al. (1991) also stated that there are internal influences that can impact student attitudes, including a student's desire for a sense of belonging and autonomy, as well as a sense of capability (as cited in Cheng et al., 2011, p. 1305). Cheng et al. (2011) found that the quantity of rewards and the overall incentive for students to pursue a certificate or a certain educational path can have a large impact on students' attitudes towards pursuing those goals when they indicated that "sufficient motivation can change a previous attitude" and that "high incentives can change a student's attitude" (p. 1305).

Another influence that Cheng et al. (2011) discussed that can have a significant impact on student attitudes towards a task is commitment (p. 1306). They discussed how

students who have significant commitments to a task, such as enrolling and pursuing an education at a community college, are much more likely to experience less dissonance towards the task and have a more “improved attitude” if they have made a public commitment to the task at hand (p. 1306). Knowing and understanding the importance of encouraging student commitment is very important information for student personnel professionals not only for understanding student behavior and attitudes towards their education, but also in working with the student and striving to help assist in the development of the whole student. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) talked about this in their discussion of the importance of students making commitments not only with regard to their attitude towards education, but also to the overall process of students developing their identity (p. 24). This is where the student comes to a point where they truly understand and identify with their “personal, occupational, religious, political, and sex-role commitments” (p. 24). Nakajima et al. (2012) echoed the importance of commitment through his research on student persistence when they stated that the more involved and committed to their goals students are, the more integrated they become in the institution and ultimately, “greater commitment will lead to increased persistence” (p. 592). Love and Guthrie (1999), in their discussion of Kegan’s (1994) theory about human cognitive development, also noted the importance of assisting students in committing to their identity because the “human tendency is to pretend towards completeness while actually being incomplete” (p. 73). Understanding the importance of this student commitment appears to not only help them with their identity or improve their attitude towards a task,

such as education, but can also eliminate dissonance between what they are expected to do and their resulting behavior (Cheng et al., 2011, p. 1306).

Other relevant information from this study indicated that other influences that can have a significant impact on student attitudes include the level of responsibility students feel (Cheng et al., 2011, p. 1306). The amount of responsibility that students take on when performing a task can have an impact on whether they have a positive attitude and ultimately a successful experience, because “when one feels a high level of responsibility for a task, one’s attitude will be positively altered” (p. 1306).

Cheng et al. (2011) used a Likert Assessment to measure how much internal and external motivators influenced students’ attitudes towards taking the certificate examinations (p. 1308). After a statistical analysis had been performed on the data, the results showed that “effort or cost, responsibility for consequences, commitment, and reward were all significant predictors of attitude” (p. 1311). The study found that with regard to these certificate certification exams, the more that the advantages and benefits of taking these examinations were made known to the students and the more that the students understood what could be gained, the more positive their attitude toward the task (p. 1311). Also, when examining the amount of responsibility that the students accepted with regard to their performance on the assessments, the study found that students who accept responsibility for the consequences of the outcomes of the examinations were much more likely to have a positive attitude towards taking the assessments and also experienced more positive results and outcomes (p. 1312). The researchers stated that the end results of the study showed that there are many different factors or influences that

can impact student attitudes and that the results could be applied to other schools as well, while at the same time emphasizing the connection between external and internal influences on student attitudes (p. 1312). The researchers determined that external motivators do have an impact on internal motivators, and that students' attitudes can be influenced by both in different ways (p. 1312).

Impact of Social Influences and Relationships on Students

One particular study that discussed student attitudes towards social influences that can impact student outcomes was that of Kelly, Lavergne, Boone, and Boone (2012). This study examined 280 different students' attitudes towards certain social factors that either strongly encouraged their persistence through their educational studies or factors that discouraged their participation and desire to persist through their educational programs (p. 653). Rosenthal (1995) and Tinto (1993) stated that one of the most important facets of a student's college experience and in turn student persistence and retention is the social communities of a school (as cited in Kelly et al., 2012, p. 654). The researchers focused on the impact that social factors can have on students' attitudes towards continuing their educational goals and gaining a better understanding of certain influences that are most impactful. When considering student outcomes, one must be aware that "as an individual enrolls into a college or university, their personal characteristics, prior experiences, and personal commitments play a large role in student persistence" (p. 654). This reinforces the results asserted by Cheng et al. (2011) when they discussed the importance of the level of commitment that students accept and the

level of responsibility that students take on with regard to performing or completing a task such as persisting through their educational programs (p. 1312).

The design of Kelly et al.'s (2012) study focused on describing personal and educational characteristics and described and assisted in understanding how the selected students' perceptions of the selected social issues would either encourage or discourage participation (p. 656). The researchers used a Likert-type questionnaire to measure students' perceptions of selected influences that impacted their attitudes towards persisting through their educational program (p. 657). The results of the study showed a wide variety of different social influences that student attitudes are influenced by with regard to student persistence.

Kelly et al.'s (2012) findings supported those of Tinto (2010), who stated that "students are more likely to succeed and continue within the institution when they find themselves in settings that provide needed academic and social support" (p. 73). Results of the Kelly et al. (2012) study showed that of all the influences that can impact students towards a positive educational experience and ultimately persisting through their program, 95% of all the students that responded to the Likert-type assessment stated that family encouragement was a very big factor in their educational efforts (p. 659). While this number may seem surprisingly high, the findings of the researcher's study also support the results of Pearson and Dellman-Jenkins' (1997) study about the influence that parents can have on a student's choice of a college or major area of study (pp. 310-312). Pearson and Dellman-Jenkins (1997) also found that parental influence can have a big impact, particularly when looking at a student's decision to enroll in college at all, having

stated that “the overwhelming majority of both decided and undecided students reported that their mothers and fathers had encouraged them to attend college” (pp. 310-312).

Another result of the Kelly et al. (2012) study was that positive relationships with faculty and staff can influence student attitudes with regard to persistence, as there were about 90% of all students who indicated that positive relationships with faculty and staff encouraged them towards persistence (p. 659). The researchers suggested that they found the more effectively and frequently that faculty and staff interacted with students, the more successful they found the student outcomes to be (p. 660).

While there were many different influences that were observed, other notable results from the Kelly et al. (2012) study included that 82% of students’ attitudes were influenced by a desired social status among peers and 79% of students expressed that attitudes towards friends that were in college influenced their persistence and desire to continue their studies (p. 659). These findings are consistent with other existing research, particularly literature on student development theory that discusses the important role that peer and parental influence can have on a student and their overall development (Evans et al., 2010, p. 161). Bronfenbrenner’s (1993) ecological theory on student development discussed this very issue, focusing on four different components that can impact a student’s developmental process and influence student behavior. In particular, the context component of the theory focused on what Bronfenbrenner (1993) described as “microsystems,” or influences and interactions that are close to the developing student that can have an impact on their development and behavior, such as peer or friend groups (p. 15). One can observe the influence that friends and family can have through the

amount of time spent with the student, and the results of this study and previous literature and theory suggest that is the case (Kelly et al., 2012, p. 661). As Kelly et al. (2012) noted, students are influenced by those they are around the most, as students generally “develop a social support network which consists primarily of friends, family, and a significant other” (p. 661).

While becoming more aware of influences that positively impact student outcomes is very useful and important, one should also note influences that negatively impact student outcomes and discourage persistence that were revealed through this study. Kelly et al. (2012) discussed certain influences such as students experiencing “burn-out” and struggling with time management skills as influential factors that would negatively impact student outcomes, with 57% and 52% of students agreeing with those two negative influences respectively (p. 660).

Ironically, results of the research study showed that while students’ attitudes towards positive relationships with peers, family, and faculty were very influential on persistence and student outcomes, negative peer pressure and negative experiences with faculty were the lowest ranked influences, with there being only 18% of students who agreed that negative peer pressure is influential and only 14% of students who agreed that negative experiences with faculty could cause negative student outcomes and less persistence (Kelly et al., 2012, pp. 660-661). This research study shows how difficult it can be to determine what influences are impacting students the most, as “students are connected to a wide range of social factors” that can affect their attitude towards education and their desire to persist throughout their program (p. 662).

Other Relevant Research

Other relevant research that focuses on the community college student and their demographics, characteristics, and overall attitudes towards other issues, aside from the previously mentioned influences, is also relevant when examining the broader picture of the community college and the students these institutions serve. While behavioral and social influences can certainly impact a student's attitude towards college, there are other relevant influences to examine that can also strongly impact student attitudes and overall outcomes regarding their education.

Access and Affirmative Action's Impact on Students

In some instances, a student's ability to gain access to higher education can have a significant impact on their attitude towards further pursuing college. Zamani-Gallaher (2007) reported a study on the attitudes of students at community colleges towards access and affirmative action (pp. 241-242). In this research study, which took place at UCLA, different student attitudes were measured with regard to affirmative action issues, as well as gaining a better understanding of student demographics such as race and ethnicity at community colleges (p. 241).

One of the most notable aspects of the earlier portions of this research study was that the existing literature reinforced previous studies that student attitudes at community colleges can be greatly impacted by many different influences, particularly when considering students' goals and aspirations (Zamani-Gallaher, 2007, p. 242). Considering that student attitudes and desire to enroll at a community college may be influenced by things such as "continuing education, receiving a certificate of completion, pursuing an

associate's degree, and transferring to a four-year institution," one must be able to understand what motivates students, what impacts their attitudes, what brings them to a community college, and ultimately what will impact them to remain there until they are finished (p. 242). This study focused on that through examining access and affirmative action issues.

The findings of the study ultimately showed that when examining student attitudes towards access and affirmative action issues, that race and ethnicity was a "significant predictor of attitudes" towards those issues (Zamani-Gallaher, 2007, pp. 248-249). Other noteworthy influences that were discovered to have an impact on student attitudes were annual family income and political views, although there was some slight differentiation between males and females with regard to the impact those influences had (p. 248). Those differences showed males being more likely to be impacted by political views, while females were not influenced by family income or desire for a higher, more acceptable socioeconomic status (p. 248). This is consistent with Nakajima et al. (2012) when they discussed that unique student characteristics can have a big influence on a student's commitment to the institution, as well as eventual student outcomes, as these characteristics have an impact on each individual student, from the initial process of choosing to enroll in an institution and what goals they hope to accomplish (p. 592). This highlights the importance of understanding each student as an individual. While grouping students and classifying them into certain typological groups can be helpful in understanding their characteristics, each student is still a unique

individual with distinctive goals and influences that impact their decisions and behaviors (p. 592).

Psychosocial and Situational Influences

Porchea et al. (2010) also examined influential factors that can ultimately impact student outcomes with regard to the community college, and they stated the importance of gaining this knowledge because of the “important role of the community college in society, the sheer volume and diversity of community college students, and the low degree attainment and transfer rates from community colleges to four-year institutions” (p. 682). Their research focused on factors that could predict student outcomes and tracked 4,500 students for five years to determine the level of impact that the factors being examined had on the students (p. 687). The study classified the factors and influences in different categories and examined how the different types of influences impact overall student outcomes (p. 683). Classifications for student factors were academic preparation, psychosocial, socio-demographic, and situational (pp. 684-686).

Results from the study revealed that nearly 50% of the students who had been part of the research study had dropped-out of college, not obtained a degree, and had not transferred to a four-year school (Porchea et al., 2010, p. 696). The research also showed that the likelihood of transferring to a four-year institution increases when considering the student’s academic preparation, supporting the notion that high school experiences and successful prior educational experiences can have a significant impact on students’ attitudes towards education and outcomes (p. 696). Other significant influences that were impactful in student outcomes were academic discipline, motivation, and commitment to

college (p. 698). Those influences that were found significant by Porchea et al. (2010) are also influences that were found to be impactful on student attitudes and outcomes by Nakajima et al. (2012), Kelley et al. (2012), and Cheng et al. (2011). Family income and parental influence were also found to be significant influences on whether or not students desired to persist through their education and obtained a degree, with wealthier students and students with parents who had a degree being found much more likely to obtain a degree, whereas students from lower socioeconomic situations and first-generation students were far more likely to drop-out (Porchea et al., 2010, pp. 700-701). The researchers recommended that institutions use this information to better identify students who are at-risk for dropping out of college and understand influences that are affecting those students desire to persist and pursue their educational goals (p. 703).

Influence of Community Involvement on Students

Eklund-Leen and Young's (1997) study on student attitudes towards community involvement also draws relevant applications to the current study in that the researchers wanted to gain a better understanding of how student attitudes towards campus involvement impacted the student's overall involvement in the community and association with campus organizations (p. 72). This study revealed that students with a positive attitude towards campus organizations and those who were more highly involved in campus organizations were also more likely to have positive attitudes towards being an active member in community involvement (p. 77). These findings were consistent with Cohen and Kisker (2010) and their research on student involvement and the impact that it has on student outcomes and success (pp. 484-485). Citing the National Survey of

Student Engagement (NSSE) and the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE), they stated that these students with positive attitudes towards involvement, who are more involved and in turn more engaged on campus and in their educational environment, are “less likely to drop out and more likely to display higher GPA’s, graduate, and value their college experiences; findings that transcend their entering abilities” (p. 485). This research study by Eklund-Leen and Young (1997) as well as the subsequent information discussed by Cohen and Kisker (2010) highlight the importance for college student affairs staff to encourage student participation and involvement on campus and throughout the community while building a sense of community on campus, as research has shown that positive student attitudes towards involvement and building a sense of community on campus leads to more positive student outcomes (p. 485). Roberts (2003) discussed the importance of encouraging positive attitudes among students towards involvement and a sense of community on campus (pp. 539-540). Roberts (2003) stated that not only does this process provide opportunities for students to make connections and build networks that may help make their collegiate experience more meaningful and encourage them to persist, but ultimately this process provides more opportunities for students to learn (p. 540). Research by Eklund-Leen and Young (1997) also stated that the process goes beyond just simply being involved in one activity or attending one meeting by showing that the more intense the involvement, the more positive a student’s attitude towards overall community involvement was found to be (p. 78). Citing Astin’s (1984) theory on student involvement, the researches came to the conclusion that the more positive a student’s attitudes towards involvement, the more

they found that the students not only were involved in helping build a sense of community, on campus and off, but that the students also experienced a more meaningful and beneficial college experience (p. 78).

Tinto and Russo (1994) also discussed the importance of student attitudes towards community and involvement in their research study that examined the impact of a Coordinated Studies Program (CSP) at Seattle Central Community College in Seattle, Washington (p. 16). The researcher's purpose was to discover if the program, which required students to register for a set of "thematically linked courses," had any impact on student involvement and community (p. 17). Results of the study, through questionnaires that were distributed throughout the study along with interviews, found that students who were involved in the coordinated studies program were more involved in several different academic and social activities, and also showed "greater developmental gains" than students who did not participate in the program (p. 19). In another finding of the study that could be very influential and important with regard to student attitudes, outcomes and retention, the researchers found that students who participated in the coordinated studies program conveyed more "positive views of the college, its students and faculty, its classes and climate, and of their own involvement in the college" (p. 19). While different programs and different institutions could certainly lead to different results, it is worth noting that during the months following the study, the researchers found that students who were in the coordinated studies programs and had more positive attitudes towards their institution, faculty, and own involvement in their educational experience also were much more likely to persist than those who did not participate in the programs

(p. 21). The results were conclusive with nearly 84% of students persisting through the spring semester (p. 21). When examining influences that can impact student attitudes towards their education and outcomes, the researchers discovered that the coordinated studies programs did greatly assist in encouraging a sense of community on campus, helped students build relationships and ultimately led some students to persist and “continue college as a direct result of their CSP experience” (pp. 21-22).

Impact of Remedial Courses on Student Attitudes and Outcomes

Bettinger and Long (2005) discussed another influence that can impact a student’s attitude towards education and ultimately student outcomes when they examined the impacts of remedial courses on student outcomes (p. 18). One influence that may lead students to choose to enroll in a community college is that they need to take courses that four-year institutions require them to complete before they can get into a four-year school (p. 22). One of the reasons students may choose to take these courses at a community college is that many four year schools do not offer these courses, feeling that “community colleges and high schools are more appropriate places to provide such instruction” (p. 19). This may influence students to enroll in community colleges, particularly if they have a desire to transfer to a four-year school. However, the researchers found that students choosing to enroll in community colleges for remediation purposes were not always following through with those courses (p. 22).

This brings up a significant issue when looking at how these students view their education and the resulting outcomes from that attitude, as the researchers stated that only 56% of students who had not taken the ACT actually completed their program (Bettinger

and Long 2005, p. 22). The researchers found that, in line with previous literature that has been discussed, previous influences and personal characteristics had a very significant impact on the students and their desire and motivation to complete these courses (p. 22). The study revealed that students were heavily influenced by impacts such as age, race, high school experiences, and previous academic preparation and training, reemphasizing the importance of understanding each individual student and how they are influenced in their decision making (p. 22). While not statistically significant according to the study, other influences such as income, degree intent, and type of high school also had impacts on whether or not students were likely to finish their remediation programs (p. 22).

Bettinger and Long (2005) found that students who were in remedial courses were actually failing to complete their degrees more than those who were not taking those courses, were taking fewer credit hours, and were transferring to four-year institutions less (p. 23). In fact, they stated that, when looking at remedial math courses as an example, there were nearly 15% more drop-outs for full-time students who were taking remedial courses, and nearly 90% of all part-time students who were taking remedial math courses had dropped out by the spring semester of that study (p. 23).

Geneva Escobedo (2007), in a discussion on a retention and persistence intervention model, stated that many students are entering college underprepared for the expectations that await them, which has forced many colleges, particularly community colleges, to offer remedial courses (p. 12). According to Escobedo (2007), a key aspect that was mentioned that could improve students' perception of college and enhance student outcomes was intrusive advising, which includes making early contacts with the

student and making sure that any potential issues or influences that may be causing negative student attitudes towards education are uncovered and dealt with before they cause the student to drop out of the institution (p. 12). Remedial offerings are definitely an influence that may lead students to enroll in community colleges initially, but from the results of Bettinger and Long's (2005) discussion, clearly much work remains to be done in order to make sure those students are persisting throughout their educational programs and attaining their initial goals of pursuing higher education.

Diversity, Student Attitudes and Success

One more aspect of the ever-changing landscape of higher education that cannot be overlooked is the fact that as community colleges continue to provide an opportunity for access into higher education, diversity continues to increase at these institutions. Mozella Garcia (2010) addressed this issue by examining situational and personal influences that impact student attitudes and outcomes of Hispanic students at community colleges (p. 840). Nora and Rendon (1996) stated that many Hispanic students that enter institutions of higher education do so while dealing with negative influences such as "poverty, poor quality of elementary and secondary education, infrequent student/faculty interaction in higher education, the absence of college-educated role models, lack of commitment to educational goals, and institutional right-to-fail policies" (as cited in Garcia, 2010, p. 840). Along with those negative influences, Garcia (2010) found that Hispanic students are drawn to community colleges because these institutions typically have little or no entrance requirements and generally have an open door policy (p. 840).

Taking that information into consideration, Garcia (2010) studied and focused on 461 first semester Hispanic students who attended a community college and discovered several internal barriers that impacted Hispanic students' attitudes towards education and their persistence through their educational program (p. 841). One of the barriers or negative influences that the study showed to be significant was the lack of parental guidance with regard to higher education because the student was the first in their family to enroll in an institution of higher education (pp. 841-842). This research supports the findings of Porchea et al. (2010), who suggested that students with parents who had a degree were found much more likely to obtain a degree, whereas students from lower socioeconomic situations and first-generation students were far more likely to drop-out (pp. 700-701). Along with that issue of lacking parental guidance and experience when dealing with college, Hispanic students often have difficulty with financial aid issues, as they have no prior experience with working through those situations, and struggle with timelines to which financial aid becomes available (Garcia, 2010, p. 841).

Another issue that can negatively impact Hispanic students' desire to persist through their program is dealing with online registration processes (Garcia, 2010, p. 842). The researcher noted that while community colleges may think that they are simplifying the process by going to a registration system that is completely online, many Hispanic students perceived the process to be intimidating and complicated, feeling as though the institution was inferring that they could no longer meet with their advisors and could no longer register on campus (p. 842). Along with those registration issues, the study also found that Hispanic students generally struggled more when being placed in online

courses, particularly early on in their program (pp. 842-843). This can be an issue that is linked to the influence of previous educational background and lack of experience with those situations, as the research found students lacking the skills to persist through those courses often lead those students to just completely stop participating in those courses (pp. 842-843). One final influence that the researcher found to be significant with regard to Hispanic students and efforts to improve student outcomes was the general sense that these students are enrolling in college underprepared (p. 843). This is consistent with the findings of Escobedo (2007) of community college students in general, and seems to be intensified in the case of Hispanic students who are largely first generation students (Garcia 2010, p. 843). Perhaps one of the most relevant and important statements of the study to the current research study was when the researcher stated that this is an important area of research for higher education to help students not only enter college more prepared, but also in understanding the students more effectively, which can improve student outcomes (p. 846). The researcher found that gaining a better understanding of what influences either encourage or discourage positive student attitudes towards education and persistence starts with having this discussion with students, because when students are “asked about barriers, they will answer, and often feel relieved that someone asked” (p. 486).

Conclusion

Taking the literature and research studies that have been discussed into consideration, one can conclude that gaining a better understanding of what influences are impacting student attitudes towards education is crucial. As discussed above, the

previous research has shown that as students' attitudes improve towards education, as students make more commitment and increase the responsibility they feel towards their own education, and as students start to feel connected and part of the campus community, they will become more likely to experience positive student outcomes and institutions will benefit from greater student persistence. The previously discussed literature provides some background and context of the issue of student attitudes towards education and the impact those attitudes can have on outcomes while also highlighting some of the different benefits that can come from the current study.

Worth noting is that while many different influences, both internal and external, were examined through the review of literature, there are others that have not been focused on as much in the literature. A common theme in the results of much of the existing literature was that while there were certain influences that may have stood out as more impactful than others, that there are a vast number of different influences that can have an effect on a student's attitude and desire to pursue higher education.

Also worth noting is that certain influences that may have an impact on students at a community college are not always necessarily the same influences that would impact students at a four-year institution. The focus of this study was on students at the community college level, and as the previous research showed, there are many different ways and many different influences that can impact student attitudes towards higher education at any kind of institution. The researcher hoped to address some additional influences that can impact student attitudes through this mixed-method study. The following information in Chapter 3 will examine the methodology and rationale of the

study, the purpose and design of the study, the sample, the location, and the instruments used in the study, and how the data were collected and analyzed.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Purpose Statement

The purpose of conducting this research was to examine the selected influence areas impact community college students' attitudes towards higher education. Of additional interest was why those influence areas are important relative to student attitudes and in what ways. This study was completed in order to help community college professionals better understand how to encourage students towards their educational goals and improve student outcomes. Beach (2011) stated that institutions of higher education need to be "effective at what they do" (p. 132). More completely and effectively understanding what has brought students to the institution is an important step in bringing about growth and development in students and helping them succeed in their educational endeavors (p.132).

Research Questions

A grand tour question and three sub-questions helped establish the framework for this study. The grand tour question was: "Are community college students' attitudes towards higher education impacted by selected internal and external influence areas?" The first of the three sub-questions established for this study was: "What selected influence areas impact community college students' attitudes towards education?" The second of the three sub-questions relating to the study was: "Why do those selected influence areas affect community college students' attitudes?" The third and final sub-

question that helped develop the framework of this study was: “In what ways do the identified influence areas impact student attitudes?”

The grand-tour question helped establish the purpose of the study, which was to examine whether or not students were impacted by selected internal and external influence areas. The first sub-question helped establish what selected influence areas are impactful on students. The second sub-question examined why those selected influence areas are important. The third sub-question helped the researcher understand in what ways the students were impacted by the selected influence areas by providing information not only into why the influence areas are important, but how those influence areas affect their attitudes and behaviors. The ten selected influence areas examined are listed in the table below in Table 1. These ten were selected by the researcher based off of a review of existing literature and relevant studies that have been discussed. Table 2 details each influence area and the existing research studies that assisted the researcher in choosing that particular influence area.

Table 1 lists the ten selected influence areas that had two different aspects each which were examined through the Likert assessment, with one question for each aspect. Those aspects are listed in Table 6 and Table 7, along with the corresponding question. Table 2 displays the existing research studies that were utilized by the researcher in establishing the rationale and ten selected influence areas for the current study.

Table 1
Ten Selected Influence Areas Being Examined

Selected Influence	Related Likert Question	Related Interview Question
High School Experience	1-2	1
College Involvement	3-4	2
Access to College	5-6	3
Childhood Educational Opportunities	7-8	4
Established Goals	9-10	5
Finance	11-12	6
Social Status	13-14	7
Peer Impact	15-16	8
High School Size	17-18	9
Uncertainty	19-20	10

Research Design

College students are very unique and diverse, and higher education has, since its early beginnings, been “deeply involved in shaping student attitudes, values and beliefs” (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 271). In an effort to better understand what influence areas impact students before they come to college and while they are there, the researcher designed a mixed-method study that allowed for both quantitative and qualitative data collection to take place. Quantitative data were gathered through a Likert assessment survey, where students ranked statements from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The qualitative portion of the study was comprised of interviews of a random sample from a computerized list of the students who participated in the assessment.

Table 2

Rationale/Research Studies for Selected Areas

Selected Influence Area	Research/Rationale
High School Experience	Bettinger and Long (2005) Bahr (2010) Porchea, Allen, Roberts, and Phelps (2010)
College Involvement	Kelly, LaVergne, Boone Jr., and Boone (2012) Rosenthal (1995) Tinto (1993) Cheng, Lin, and Su (2011) Tinto (2010)
Access to College	Zamani-Gallaher (2007) Garcia (2010)
Childhood Educational Opportunities	Porchea, Allen, Roberts, and Phelps (2010)
Established Goals	Bahr (2010) Cheng, Lin, and Su (2011) Nakajima et al. (2012)
Finance	Cheng, Lin, and Su (2011)
Social Status	Kelly, LaVergne, Boone Jr., and Boone (2012) Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, and Renn (2010)
Peer Impact	Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, and Ryan (1991) Pearson and Dellman-Jenkins (1997) Bronfenbrenner (1993)
High School Size	Horyna and Bonds-Raacke (2012)
Uncertainty	Nakajima et al. (2012) Bahr (2010)

The reason for the mixed-method design being chosen was to allow for the researcher to understand and make meaning of the quantitative portion of the study through interviewing students to expand upon the information gathered through the survey portion of the study. McMillan (2012) stated that mixed-method studies are very useful in this regard, as this particular study design greatly assists when “the results of

quantitative data collection and analysis do not adequately explain the outcomes and additional data is needed to help interpret the findings” (p. 317). This process is reflected in the research questions for this study. The research questions were addressed in the quantitative and qualitative portions of the study. The quantitative portion provided very useful information with regard to what influences were most impactful on students. However, as McMillan (2012) noted, sometimes more information is required, and so the second and third sub-questions were addressed through qualitative procedures to more completely explain the results of the Likert assessment.

The researcher developed the study with a sequential explanatory design (McMillan, 2012, p. 323). This design consisted of two phases, with the initial phase involving collecting the quantitative data first, followed by collecting the qualitative information through the interviews second (p. 323). This allowed for the researcher to “elucidate, elaborate on, or explain quantitative findings” (p. 323). As a result, triangulation was not used in this study, as the sequence and timing involved only one phase occurring at a time (p. 328). In turn, the qualitative data received more of the priority or weight through the study due to the exploratory design, allowing students to expand beyond just agreeing or disagreeing with how a certain selected influence area affected them (p. 328). This was particularly helpful in gaining a better understanding of the uniqueness of the community college student. As previously mentioned, Nakajima et al. (2012) stated that there are many influential factors that can impact students’ attitudes and ultimately whether or not they decide to continue their education (pp. 591-592). The design of this study allowed for the researcher to gain a better understanding of different

selected influence areas that impact students, in what specific ways that process takes place, and for what reasons students are impacted by certain influences. Bahr (2010) stated that there are different types of students who may react differently to certain situations and be motivated by different things (pp. 725-726). This sequential explanatory designed study allowed for an analysis of those phenomena.

Institutional Review Board Approval

The researcher, at the beginning of the research study, completed the Consortium for IRB Training Initiative in Human Subjects Research (CITI) for research involving human subjects. The researcher also received approval from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board upon completion of the protocol, submission of the required documents and approval letters, and completion of any corrections that needed to be made. The approval letter is included at the end of the study in Appendix D. The researcher also received an approval letter (Appendix F) from an administrator at Western Nebraska Community College in Scottsbluff, Nebraska, granting the researcher permission to conduct the study on campus.

The protocol for the study initially described 20 participants who would take part in the study. However, an additional 2 students were selected to be a part of the study, and also to be interviewed, resulting in a final total of 22 students taking the Likert assessment and 8 students participating in the interview. The study was originally designed for 20 students, but 2 students that had been selected did not attend the day the Likert assessment was administered, so 2 replacement students were selected through convenience sampling. After the new students had participated, the original students

came to take the survey and were allowed to participate, resulting in a total sample of $n= 22$ students. In an effort to maintain confidentiality, the researcher had no access to student identification numbers, but rather the administrator from WNCC selected the sample and arranged the meeting place. Once the students were selected for the sample, they were given the informed consent sheet (Appendix G), notifying them of their role in the study. The students then signed the informed consent sheet if they agreed to the conditions of the study and were subsequently allowed to participate.

Confidentiality was maintained at all times by not requiring any identifying information to be written on the assessments. The researcher had no access to any student identification numbers, and students who were randomly selected to participate in the interview were given a pseudonym in an effort to prevent any identifying information to be connected to their answers and replies. Students were notified the project was guided by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and all documents, assessments, and interview recordings and transcriptions were kept in a locked and secure location that was only accessible to the researcher.

Research Site

This research study took place at Western Nebraska Community College in Scottsbluff, Nebraska. The institution opened its doors in 1926 and is a Midwestern community college with three different campus locations (WNCC Fast Facts, 2012, p. 1). The most recent data available for the institution indicated that the school has a total headcount of 2,280 students, with 1,109 students enrolling full-time and 1,171 enrolling part-time at the institution (p. 1). The institution offers 111 total scholarships and

performance grants to deserving students and boasts of a job placement rate of nearly 88% (p. 1). The institution has students representing 24 different countries, with 278 students living on campus in the residence halls (p. 1).

All of the surveys that were given and interviews for the study took place on the WNCC campus in the Vice President for Student Services' office. This location was chosen for a couple of different reasons. First, the office is located in a convenient location for students who were participating in the study. The office was in the main building of the campus and was just down the stairs from almost all of the classrooms. Secondly, the office was in the back corner and down a hallway, providing for a safe, quiet, and relaxed environment for the students who were participating in the study. Also, the location allowed for the researcher to keep track of students, as students had to check-in with staff in the office before they came back for their appointment.

Population/Sample/Participants

The population involved in this study consisted of community college students enrolled in at least one course at this institution. McMillan (2012) described a population as "a larger group to whom results can be generalized" (p. 96). However, in this case, generalizing the results cannot go much beyond perhaps a class at WNCC due to the small sample size. The sample ($n = 22$) involved a group of students out of the entire population from whom data were actually gathered, and that included any student over the age of 19 who was enrolled in at least one course at the institution (p. 95). Eight of the students who were surveyed were chosen to be interviewed and provided additional data that contributed to the study.

Simple random sampling and convenience sampling were both used in this study. Students were selected, through the assistance of a WNCC administrator, to participate in the study. McMillan (2012) stated that random sampling gives everyone in the population, which is all first-year community college students at the institution, an equal chance of being selected (p. 98). This type of sampling is also generally more representative of the population, easier to analyze, and easier to understand (p. 111). This method also helped avoid any sampling bias on the part of the researcher in order to avoid only choosing students who clearly would answer a certain way (p. 112). However, this method did not yield enough students, so in an effort to help increase the sample size, convenience and snowball sampling methods were also used (pp. 103-107). For example, convenience sampling was used by contacting RA's who were working in the residence halls, and snowball sampling occurred when they in turn told their friends about the survey. As a result, this became a limitation of the study, as the initial sample was not scientifically random, thus becoming much less representative of the entire population. Through these sampling methods and with the assistance of an administrator, the researcher then began to work with the students. Again, only 20 students were chosen due to time, cost, and scope limitations for the study, and although two additional students were added to the study, the small sample size was a limitation of the study.

Students who were participants in the study were given a hard copy of the informed consent sheet (Appendix G) to look over, read, and sign before they participated in any way in the study. Because of the fact that the researcher had no access to any student e-mails, ID numbers, or phone numbers, students were not able to receive

the informed consent sheet through e-mail. The sample (n = 22), after they had read and signed the informed consent sheet indicating their willingness to participate in the study, were then given a Likert assessment by the researcher to fill out. From those students, a random sample of 8 was selected from a computer generated list to participate in the interview portion of the study. All eight students who were selected to participate in the interview agreed to do so.

There was no identifying information collected at any time during the study, nor was there any demographic information, aside from gender, collected. As a result, there is no demographic information other than gender available in this study with regard to the sample. All students who agreed to participate in the interview after being randomly selected came back after taking the survey or the following day after scheduling an appointment. All interviews were audio-recorded in the meeting room. In an effort to keep each student's identity safe, pseudonyms were assigned to each of the eight students. Table 3 lists each interview, each participant's pseudonym and their gender.

As indicated in the information above, the eight students for the interview were randomly chosen through a computer generated list. Table 3 shows there was not an equal distribution of males and females participating, but in an effort to remain with a random sample of the students for the interviews, the researcher did not manipulate the process in an effort to obtain a more equal representation of male and female participants. The sample included two males and six females, equaling 25% males to 75% females. The campus has about a 36% male population, so the sample had 11% more girls than the general population (WNCC Fast Facts, 2012, p. 1).

Table 3

Participants

Interview	Pseudonym	Gender
1	Jan	Female
2	Bob	Male
3	Jill	Female
4	Liz	Female
5	Emma	Female
6	Julie	Female
7	Josh	Male
8	Amy	Female

Data Collection

Before the data collection process began, the researcher obtained IRB approval for the project as well as an approval letter from Western Nebraska Community College (Appendix F). Once permission was obtained from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln IRB and from WNCC, the researcher worked with an administrator to recruit the sample. Once the sample had been recruited and informed consent sheets had been signed, the researcher began the data collection process. Students were made aware that there were no known risks involved and that they were free to discontinue participation at any time, though all students chose to complete the surveys and interviews. All data collection took place on the WNCC campus and was under the supervision of the researcher, an administrator, or student services staff member at all times.

The Likert assessment. The first portion of the study involved the students taking a Likert assessment (Appendix A). McMillan (2012) described a Likert scale as a “series of gradations that describes something” and that these usually include a “value or positive or negative direction, and the subject indicates agreement or disagreement with the statement” (p. 157). The assessment involved students ranking 20 questions with regard to how they felt the questions applied to them and their attitude towards postsecondary education and attending a community college, ranging anywhere from strongly agree to neutral to strongly disagree. While there are different variations of the Likert assessment as far as how many response options are provided, the researcher decided to provide a neutral option for students, because if there is no option for students who do not feel they agree or disagree with a statement, then participants are “forced to give an inaccurate response (or may chose not to respond at all)” (p. 157). Most students took 5-10 minutes to complete the assessment. The survey provided an excellent opportunity to gather more information on which specific selected influence areas (Appendix C) were most impactful on students with regard to their attitude towards postsecondary education. Certain patterns became apparent, which will be discussed later in Chapter 4.

The interview. A random group from a computer generated list of 8 students was chosen from the sample (n = 22) for the interview portion of the study by a WNCC administrator. All eight students that were selected agreed to participate, and were willing to open up about the questions that were asked. The interview protocol (Appendix B) consisted of ten questions, with one question for each influence area being examined.

However, often times the most informative data that comes from interviews comes from “probing” questions, which are follow up questions that encourage the participant to expand upon their initial answer (McMillan, 2012, p. 167). Another benefit of the interview is that this method of collecting data tends to eliminate neutral responses and encourages students to really think about how the questions apply to their current situation (p. 167). All of the interviews took place in the same office the Likert assessments were given, and students were made aware that the interviews would be audio-recorded for later coding and analysis of their answers. Most of the interviews took anywhere from 15 to 20 minutes. Students tended to be somewhat brief in their answers; however, they provided much useful data. The interview questions were based on the influence areas being examined with regard to the existing literature and studies listed in Table 2 pertaining to each influence area and were designed in a semi-structured format, which involves questions that are “open-ended yet specific in intent, allowing individual responses” (p. 168). Students were asked to detail specifically why and how certain influences impacted their attitudes towards postsecondary education and a community college, as well as explain why their attitude was not impacted by a certain influence, if their answer justified that probing question. The students’ responses were recorded with a digital, audio recorder for later transcription and analysis.

Data Analysis

The Likert assessment. After the data were gathered, the analysis of the data was completed. Due to the design of the study and the mixed-method scheme that was used, there were two different data analysis methods used. The first method dealt with the

Likert assessment. The purpose of the Likert assessment was to provide an overview of what influence areas were most important to students and had the greatest impact on their attitudes towards postsecondary education and persisting in their educational endeavors. In effort to better establish what students were most frequently answering with regard to each question, which was representative of one of the ten selected influence areas, the researcher used simple statistical formulas dealing with frequencies and percentages and developed a frequency distribution for each question (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2009, pp. 37-40). This displayed how many students answered each option for each question, ranging anywhere from strongly agree to strongly disagree (p. 38). Once the frequency distribution had been created for each of the 20 questions, proportion and percentage formulas were used to assist in more accurately representing how many students answered each option on each question of the Likert assessment. The formula ($p = f/N$, where f represents the frequency of each answer and n represents the total number of students) was used to establish the proportions for each option of each question (p. 39). As an example, 16 out of 22 students answered that they strongly agreed that having established educational and career goals positively influenced their attitude towards postsecondary education, for a proportion of $p = 16/22 = .73$ (p. 39).

Once the proportions for each option listed under each question were established, the researcher then utilized the formula [$p(100) = f/N(100)$] for percentages to complete the process and provide a final percentage for each response under each question (pp. 39-40). From the example above, where the proportion for students answering that they strongly agreed that established goals positively impacted their attitude was .73, there

was $p(100) = f/N(100) = .73(100) = 73\%$ of the students who stated that established goals positively affected their attitudes towards higher education (p. 40). This represents an important result for the influence of educational and career goals, as nearly three out of every four students who participated indicated that this influence strongly impacted their attitude in a positive way. Detailed tables are listed in Chapter 4 that provide frequencies, proportions, and percentages for each reply regarding each of the 20 questions, and how those reflect on the 10 selected influence areas examined through this study.

Worth noting is that since the Likert assessment involved an ordinal scale, determining the proportions and percentages for each question was deemed to be the most effective way to provide a representation of what influences were most commonly impacting students. Gravetter and Wallnau (2009) stated that ordinal data or an ordinal scale involves “a set of categories that are organized in an ordered sequence” (p. 21). For example, an ordinal scale could involve tee-shirts being ranked or organized in an ordered sequence of small, medium, or large (p. 22). This provides an idea of where a shirt may fall along that scale, but one finds determining “how much” smaller a small is than a large to be difficult (p. 22). In the same way with the current study, students could answer that they “agreed” or “strongly agreed,” and while that indicated the direction of difference with regard to how that influence impacted them, numerically determining “how much more” they agreed or “how much less” they agreed was not possible through the Likert assessment (p. 40). As a result, the frequency distributions were created for each question and proportions and percentages were found through the stated formulas to

provide an overview of what influences were most commonly impacting student attitudes.

The interviews. After the data analysis was completed on the Likert assessments, the analysis process began on the interview transcripts. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Once the interviews were transcribed, the coding process began. Interview answers were read several times in an effort to identify themes and trends throughout student responses. According to McMillan (2012), codes represent “words, phrases, or events that seem to stand out” (p. 298). Creswell (2009) described this process as taking the data that was collected throughout the interview process and “segmenting sentences (or paragraphs) or images into categories, and labeling those categories with a term” (p. 186). This term is often in the language of the participant, and is referred to as an *in vivo* term (p. 186).

Participant wording or responses, also referred to as emic data, was used to create the researcher’s representation or codes of the emic data, which is referred to as etic data (McMillan, 2012, p. 297). This process was used in an effort to provide a way to make meaning of the students’ responses, and also to have a way to examine each student’s response to each question, as the response related to the influence area being discussed. This process was necessary for each specific question rather than the entire interview transcript as a whole because each question represented one of the ten selected influence areas. Thus, the researcher examined the data and developed themes that then reflected more specific patterns and categories, which finally led to one of five possible codes for each influence (pp. 297-298).

The researcher modeled this process after Weston, Gandell, Beauchamp, McAlpine, Wiseman, and Beauchamp (2001), who, in a study on the development and evolution of a coding system, described an example of a coding format that very closely resembled the goals of this research study and interview process (p. 396). The purpose of the interview portion of the study was to expand upon and gain more insight into why students answered the way they did on the Likert assessment, and Weston et al.'s (2001) example represented this process. The codes that were developed from the emic data dealt with whether a student's response indicated a strong agreement (SA), agreement (AG), neutral (NU), disagreement (DA), or strong disagreement (SD). Table 4 describes the coding process used, and displays the categories and patterns that were used to determine the codes.

Table 4

Coding Process for Transcripts

Code	Categories	Pattern
Strong Agreement (SA)	Significant Impact	Aware of Influence's Impact
Agreement (AG)	Some Impact	Acknowledged Influence
Neutral (NU)	Indifference Impact	Inconsequential
Disagreement (DA)	Little Impact	Slight Impact of Influence
Strong Disagreement (SD)	No Impact	No Impact of Influence

Table established by information from McMillan (2012) and Weston et al. (2001).

There were anywhere from 20-30 different initial identifying themes created in an effort to establish the 5 patterns, categories, and codes, which were taken from the emic data and turned into etic data (McMillan, 2012, pp. 296-298). For example, when discussing the question about the influence of financial motivation, emic data were stated that “I need to be able to support my family, and a certain way of life, living” and “having more money gives us a lifestyle that we want, so I do think that it is important.” This brought about etic themes such as “recognizing a need, not just a want” and “desiring a certain way of life they believe money provides.” These themes and others were then divided down into five patterns, which led to the five categories, and finally the final codes for each response (Weston, et al. 2001, pp. 200-201). A more detailed description of the themes and results is described in Chapter 4.

Researcher Reflexivity

The researcher conducted all eight of the interviews. As a result, it is important to understand the researcher’s background with regard to community colleges and influence areas that might impact attitudes towards postsecondary education. The researcher did not attend a community college, but rather enrolled in a four-year institution. Consequently, the researcher did not have the experience of dealing with the influence areas on the level that the participants were dealing with them, in particular with regard to how those influence areas impacted their decision to enroll in a community college. However, the researcher did share several of the prior experiences and influence areas examined in this study in similar ways to many of the students who were interviewed. This information was not shared prior to the interviews in an effort to prevent response set or faking, where

participants might have answered in a certain way because they felt a certain amount of pressure or expectation from the researcher to do so (McMillan, 2012, p. 163).

Verification Strategies

Verifying the validity and reliability of any research study is a very important process that deserves time and consideration (Creswell, 2013, pp. 248-250). McMillan (2012) stated that validity is the understanding and application of the “proper use of the information that is gathered through measurement” (p. 136). In other words, did the measurements and assessments that were used measure what they were intended to measure (p. 136). Reliability involves the replication of the process and consistency of the scores, or the extent to which the measurements and data collected are free from error (p. 136). For quantitative research, this issue deals with if the study was performed again and again, could similar results be gathered (p. 136). Ensuring the validity and reliability of the study is an important step in making sure that the information and data collected from the study is applicable and useful to the field from which the data was gathered, in this instance, higher education, and in particular, community colleges (Creswell, 2013, pp. 248-250).

For qualitative research, there are many different verification and validation strategies that are available. Creswell (2013) listed several, including: (a) “prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field;” (b) “triangulation;” (c) “peer review of debriefing;” (d) “negative case analysis;” (e) “clarifying researcher bias;” (f) “member checking;” (g) “rich, thick description;” and (h) “external audits” (pp. 251-252). In this study, clarifying researcher bias, rich, thick description, and external audits were used to

make sure that the measurements and assessments measured what they were intended to measure, to ensure the quantitative portion could be replicated with similar results and outcomes, and to allow for someone not associated with the research project to “examine both the process and the product of the account, assessing their accuracy” (p. 252).

Conclusion

The previous information in this chapter has discussed in detail the methodology of this study. Some important information regarding the data collection procedures, how the data were analyzed, and how the study was verified for accuracy, reliability, and validity were also discussed. Creswell (2013) discussed the importance of understanding that we “always bring certain beliefs and philosophical assumptions to our research” and that one must be aware of this when establishing the methodology and the basis of research studies (p. 15). This is important when understanding how a research study is designed, and for this purpose the researcher used a variety of different techniques and methods from previous literature when establishing the methodology for this study. Chapter 4 goes into greater detail about the findings and results from the assessments and interviews and Chapter 5 includes discussion of how those results were interpreted, the implications of the study, and the importance of the study with regard to future research.

Chapter 4

Findings

Purpose Statement

The purpose of conducting this research was to examine the selected influence areas impact community college students' attitudes towards higher education. Of additional interest was why those influence areas are important relative to student attitudes and in what ways. This study was completed in order to help community college professionals better understand how to encourage students towards their educational goals and improve student outcomes. Beach (2011) stated that institutions of higher education need to be "effective at what they do" (p. 132). More completely and effectively understanding what has brought students to the institution is an important step in bringing about growth and development in students and helping them succeed in their educational endeavors (p. 132).

Introduction

This chapter describes the findings of this research study. The ten influence areas were examined through a Likert Assessment survey and an interview session with eight of the students. These influence areas were determined through existing studies and literature described in Chapter 2 and in Table 2 in Chapter 3. Two different aspects of each influence area were observed, which resulted in very distinct findings for some of the influence areas, while others were more consistent in both aspects of the influence. The following information lists the research questions that were the foundation for this study, followed by a brief description of the sample and the participants. The findings are

then presented as they related to each of the three research questions and a concluding summary of the findings from the study. The findings are reported in tables for the first research question that dealt exclusively with quantitative data, and the findings from the second and third research questions are reported with quotes and descriptions of qualitative data.

Research Questions

A grand tour question and three sub-questions helped establish the framework for this study. The grand tour question was: “Are community college students’ attitudes towards higher education impacted by selected internal and external influence areas?” The first of the three sub-questions established for this study was: “What selected influence areas impact community college students’ attitudes towards education?” The second of the three sub-questions relating to the study was: “Why do those selected influence areas affect community college students’ attitudes?” The third and final sub-question that helped develop the framework of this study was: “In what ways do the identified influence areas impact student attitudes?”

The grand-tour question helped establish the purpose of the study, which was to examine whether or not students were impacted by selected internal and external influence areas. The first sub-question helped establish what selected influence areas are impactful on students. The second sub-question examined why those selected influence areas are important. The third sub-question helped the researcher understand in what ways the students were impacted by the selected influence areas by providing information not only into why the influence areas are important, but how those influence areas affect

their attitudes and behaviors. The first research question was addressed through the Likert Assessment, and the second and third research questions were addressed through the interviews. The design of the study was to have student responses to the qualitative portion of the study describe reasons why and how selected influences impacted their attitude.

Summary of Participants and Data Collection

The data for this study were collected through two different methods and utilized both quantitative and qualitative methods. The participants in this study were all enrolled at Western Nebraska Community College in Scottsbluff, Nebraska. Participants had to be enrolled in at least one class at the institution in order to participate. The sample consisted of $n = 22$ students for the Likert Assessment, with a smaller group of 8 students who were randomly selected from a computer generated list for the interview process. The study was originally designed for 20 students, but 2 students that had been selected did not attend the day the Likert assessment was administered, so two replacement students were selected through convenience sampling. After the new students had participated, the original students came to take the survey and were allowed to participate, resulting in a total sample of $n = 22$ students. The sample was gathered by a WNCC administrator through convenience sampling for the overall sample, and then 8 students were randomly selected from a computer list of the 22 students to participate in the interview. Again, the sample size was limited due to time, cost, and scope limitations, thus limiting the generalizability of the study. All information was collected in the same room on campus at Western Nebraska Community College.

Findings

Research Question 1: What influences areas impact community college students' attitudes towards education? This question focused exclusively on determining what selected influence areas were impactful and important to students and their attitudes. This research question and the subsequent findings were addressed and retrieved solely through the Likert survey. The Likert survey measured a "level of agreement to a statement" (McMillan, 2012, p. 157). In the case of this research study, the statements dealt with the ten selected influence areas that were examined for their impact on community college students and their attitudes towards higher education. The statements on the Likert survey were designed in an effort to measure the level of agreement or disagreement that students had towards the given statement, and as a result provided some insight into which selected influence areas most commonly were impactful on students and which selected influence areas had little or no impact on students. Table 5 contains the statements from the Likert survey, Table 6 provides an overview of how the students responded to each statement on the Likert survey, also stating what selected influence area is represented by each question. The formula ($p = f/N$, where f represents the frequency of each answer and N represents the total number of students) was used to establish the proportions for each option of each question (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2009, p. 39). Once the proportions for each option listed under each question were established, the researcher then utilized the formula [$p(100) = f/N(100)$] for percentages to complete the process and provide a final

Table 5

Statements from the Likert Assessment

Statement Number	Statement
1	My previous schooling experience impacts my attitude positively towards continuing my education at a community college.
2	High school success motivated me to pursue higher education at a community college.
3	Participating in extra-curricular activities impacts my attitude towards education.
4	Being part of student or campus organizations at this community college is a positive influence on my attitude towards education.
5	Gaining access into higher education was relatively easy for me to achieve and positively influenced my attitude towards education.
6	Tuition, scheduling, location, and programs offered positively impacted my attitude towards continuing my education in college.
7	Opportunities to learn outside of school during my childhood positively impacted my attitude towards continuing my education.
8	Access to educational programs and resources outside of school during my childhood positively influenced my attitude towards education.
9	Clear educational and career goals, such as transferring to a four-year school, improving career opportunities, or improving a certain vocational skill positively influence my attitude towards college.
10	I feel that continuing my education through college will help me achieve my academic and career goals.
11	The thought of earning more money is a motivating factor towards continuing education.
12	Desiring to get a better job positively influences my attitude towards college.
13	I want to continue my education in college so I can live a more comfortable lifestyle.
14	Achieving a higher social status is an influential factor in choosing to continue my education.
15	Knowing how many of my friends were going to college influenced my attitude towards attending college.
16	Pressure from my peers was an important factor in choosing to go to college.

Table 5 continues

Statement Number	Statement
17	The size of my high school impacted my attitude towards college and ultimately my decision to enroll in a community college rather than a four year institution.
18	The size of my high school positively impacted my attitude towards education by providing the opportunity to get the help and attention I needed.
19	Being uncertain of what I want to do for a career was a key factor in choosing to attend a community college.
20	Not knowing what else to do after high school led me to choose to enroll in a community college.

Table 6

Likert Assessment Findings

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q 1: High School Experience	22.7%	50%	18.2%	9.1%	0%
Q 2: High School Success	13.6%	45.5%	22.7%	18.2%	0%
Q 3: Extra-Curricular Participation	63.6%	31.8%	4.5%	0%	0%
Q 4: Membership in student or campus organization	72.7%	27.3%	0%	0%	0%
Q 5: Access to Higher Education	36.4%	59.1%	4.5%	0%	0%
Q 6: Location, Costs, Programs	45.5%	36.4%	13.6%	4.5%	0%
Q 7: Opportunities to Learn During Childhood	27.3%	45.5%	22.7%	4.5%	0%
Q 8: Access to Educational Opportunities During Childhood	4.5%	54.5%	13.6%	27.3%	0%
Q 9: Educational and Career Goals	72.7%	27.3%	0%	0%	0%

Table 6 continues

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q 10: Desire to Obtain those Educational Goals	90.9%	9.1%	0%	0%	0%
Q11: Financial Motivation	45.5%	36.4%	13.6%	0%	4.5%
Q 12: Desire for a Better Job	54.5%	45.5%	0%	0%	0%
Q 13: Achieving Comfortable Lifestyle	63.6%	22.7%	13.6%	0%	0%
Q 14: Higher Social Status	9.1%	18.2%	50%	18.2%	4.5%
Q 15: Peer Influence	0%	18.2%	31.8%	31.8%	18.2%
Q 16: Pressure from Peers	0%	0%	13.6%	63.6%	22.7%
Q 17: High School Size's Impact on Attitude	4.5%	9.1%	40.9%	36.4%	9.1%
Q 18: High School Size- Opportunity for help and attention	9.1%	27.2%	36.4%	27.2%	0%
Q 19: Career Path Uncertainty	22.7%	13.6%	22.7%	36.4%	4.5%
Q 20: Nothing Else to Do	0%	13.6%	9.1%	59.1%	18.2%

percentage for each response under each question (pp. 39-40). Decimals for the percentages were rounded to the nearest tenth.

Table 5 lists each statement from the Likert survey (see Appendix A) and represents the statements from which students based their answers, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

The findings from the Likert survey showed that some of the selected influence areas seemed to be very impactful on students, while other selected influence areas yielded mixed results depending on which aspect of the area the statement discussed. The researcher added strongly agree, neutral, and strongly disagree options on the assessment

in order to better gauge student attitudes and the degree to which those students were impacted by each selected influence area. Refer to Table 6 to view the detailed breakdown of responses for each aspect of each influence area. Table 7 simplifies the results by displaying the students' responses and combining all agree responses and all disagree responses for each aspect of the ten selected influence areas to provide a more condensed picture of what influences students felt impacted them the most.

The purpose of Table 7 was to help one understand more clearly what aspects of the ten selected influence areas were most impactful. The researcher must acknowledge that some students may have felt strongly one way or another in agreement or disagreement, but combining all the agree answers and all the disagree answers allows the researcher to get a better view of which aspects of the ten selected influence areas were most impactful. As shown in Table 7, certain aspects were viewed as very impactful on student attitudes, while others had little or no impact on the students' attitudes. Taking social status as an example, students agreed that improving their lifestyle, such as living more luxuriously or comfortably was a significant influence, but were mostly neutral or in disagreement when considering the importance of how others view them. More detailed discussion of what influence areas were most impactful on students' attitudes is included in Chapter 5.

Research Question 2: Why do those selected influence areas affect community college students' attitudes? The second research question for this study was designed to address why certain selected influence areas were impactful on students.

Table 7

Combined View of the Data

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Q 1: High School Experience	72.7%	18.2%	9.1%
Q 2: High School Success	59.1%	22.7%	18.2%
Q 3: Extra-Curricular Participation	95.4%	4.5%	0%
Q 4: Membership in Student and Campus Organizations	100%	0%	0%
Q 5: Access to Higher Education	95.5%	4.5%	0%
Q 6: Location, Costs, Programs	81.9%	13.6%	4.5%
Q 7: Opportunities to Learn During Childhood	72.8%	22.7%	4.5%
Q 8: Access to Educational Opportunities During Childhood	59%	13.6%	27.3%
Q 9: Educational and Career Goals	100%	0%	0%
Q 10: Desire to Obtain those Educational Goals	100%	0%	0%
Q 11: Financial Motivation	81.9%	13.6%	4.5%
Q 12: Desire for a Better Job	100%	0%	0%
Q 13: Achieving Comfortable Lifestyle	86.3%	13.6%	0%
Q 14: Higher Social Status	27.3%	50%	22.7%
Q 15: Peer Influence	18.2%	31.8%	50%
Q 16: Pressure from Peers	0%	13.6%	86.3%
Q 17: High School Size's Impact on Attitude	13.6%	40.9%	45.5%
Q 18: High School Size- Opportunity for help and attention	36.3%	36.4%	27.2%
Q 19: Career Path Uncertainty	36.3%	22.7%	40.9%
Q 20: Nothing Else to Do	13.6%	9.1%	77.3%

However, as the study took place and students were interviewed about why the selected influence areas were impactful on their attitude, participants tended to answer why their attitudes were impacted by describing how the selected influence areas impacted their attitude. As a result, the researcher did not get the desired results from Research Question 2, as there was little differentiation between participants' responses to why they were impacted and how they were impacted by the selected influence areas.

Research Question 3: In what ways do the identified influences impact student attitudes? The researcher gained valuable information through research question one and utilized the Likert survey in establishing which of the selected influence areas impacted students' attitudes, and then used interviews to determine why students were impacted by certain aspects of the influence areas and how or in what ways. After the Likert surveys had been administered to the sample of $n = 22$ students, 8 students were randomly selected by a computer generated list to participate in the interview portion of the study. The sample included two males and six females, equaling 25% males to 75% females. The campus has about a 36% male population, so the sample had 11% more girls than the general population (WNCC Fast Facts, 2012, p. 1).

After the interviews were conducted, recorded, and transcribed by the researcher, the coding process began. According to McMillan (2012), codes represent "words, phrases, or events that seem to stand out" (p. 298). Creswell (2009) described this process as taking the data that were collected throughout the interview process and "segmenting sentences (or paragraphs) or images into categories, and labeling those categories with a term" (p. 186).

Overview of Themes and Codes

For this study, the researcher examined students' responses to identify themes that emerged through their replies. Those themes were then put into one of five patterns, which then led to categories, and finally to the code that helped the researcher determine the level of impact the selected influence area had on the student. The chart describing this process was discussed in Chapter 3, and the following information will explain each code and what types of answers were included in each code. The codes were modeled after information provided by Weston et al., (2001), who, in a study on the development and evolution of a coding system, described an example of a coding format that very closely resembled the goals of this research study and interview process (p. 396). The intent in coding was to remain consistent with the Likert assessment with regard to how students described the selected influence area's impact on their attitude and higher education experience, from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Quotations included in the chart as examples of the themes, patterns, and categories are direct responses from students in the study (see Table 8).

Description of Interview Findings

Eight students were interviewed, with each answering ten semi-structured questions that dealt with the ten selected influence areas and allowed students to expand upon and describe the rationale behind their answers on the Likert scale. This was done in order to gain a better understanding of how certain aspects for each selected influence

Table 8

Codes and Explanation of Consisting Themes, Patterns, and Categories

Code	Consisting Themes-Patterns-Categories
Strong Agreement (SA)	Consisted of words or phrases that indicated the student felt the selected influence area strongly impacted their attitude towards their education, such as “my attitude dramatically increased.”
Agreement (AG)	Consisted of words or phrases that indicated that the student acknowledged the selected influence area had some impact on their attitude but they didn’t express or use words that would indicate a very strong feeling, such as “I enjoyed high school; I thought that continuing my education would be good for me.”
Neutral (NU)	Consisted of words or phrases that indicated the student felt largely indifferent towards the selected influence area being discussed, such as “I can go back and forth on this” or “I didn’t even really think about it.”
Disagreement (DA)	Consisted of words or phrases that indicated the student was aware of the selected influence area and a slight impact that it may have had, but overall felt that the influence area did not affect their attitude, such as “Um, it didn’t have a huge impact on me” or “that wasn’t something I hugely considered as I was considering a college”
Strong Disagreement (SD)	Consisted of words or phrases that indicated the student felt strongly that the selected influence area being discussed had no existing impact on their attitude, for example, when discussing peer influence, “I already had my goals set in mind, whether my friends were going to follow me or not, that was their choice”

area were impactful on students’ attitudes towards higher education at a community college. Students were assigned pseudonyms by the researcher to protect their identity. Since each question was unique to the selected influence area being examined, the eight interviews were coded by question, with student responses ranging from a strongly agree (SA) code all the way to a strongly disagree (SD) code.

This question was solely addressed through the interview portion of the study. This research question also provided more information into which of the two aspects of each of the selected influence areas were most impactful on student attitudes regarding

higher education and pursuing further education. The following information describes the findings of the interviews that related to research question three. These student responses addressed how and in what ways certain selected influence areas impacted students' attitudes and what aspects of each area caused that impact. Codes for the students' responses will be referred to by their abbreviation from Table 7 throughout the description of findings section. Sections are divided into selected influence areas. Questions from the interview can be found in Appendix B.

Previous school experience and success. All but one of the students who were interviewed received an SA or AG code regarding how previous school experience and success in high school impacted their attitude towards education. One student's response received an NU code. When looking at why these aspects of high school were important to them, students indicated that a common reason was confidence. Students were in agreement that these experiences improved their confidence, provided them with motivation to continue on, and improved their attitude towards education. Regarding Research Question 3, students indicated a variety of ways in which this selected influence area impacted them. Jan agreed that high school experiences and successes influenced her attitude.

You know, when I was 18 or 19 years old, I didn't appreciate education. I didn't, I took it for granted. I just kind of had that attitude where, I just had kind of basically flown through it, and so I knew that I needed to go. I realized there was some kind of importance; everyone had kind of told me there was an importance, but I didn't quite understand it. So I did it out of obligation, and I totally changed my major the second time now that I'm here. But college wasn't a struggle for me the first time, so I think with the success I had in high school, I think it was positive because I knew I could do college, so ultimately yes, I do think that.

Jill indicated through her responses that her attitude was influenced by her previous school experiences and that her desire to continue to be a part of the school environment was an influence on her choices to pursue higher education.

Well I did enjoy high school, and I have always liked studying and being in school since I would usually get bored during the summers. I thought that coming to school and continuing my education would be good for me.

Jill did indicate that her past school experiences and success did not specifically lead her to a community college, but rather to “coming to college in general.” Amy also echoed others’ replies about past success. “I think that since I was successful in high school that I can be successful in college.” Amy’s statement was a good example of many of the students’ responses. Past success seemed to indicate to students that they could enjoy future success in college as well. Bob noted that high school “set up the groundwork” for his education and in that way impacted his attitude towards wanting to continue with the confidence that he could succeed.

Other students whose responses received an AG code shared similar experiences and reasons that supported why past school experiences and success were impactful on their attitude towards higher education. Liz stated that she “really enjoyed high school” and that she wanted to “further my education and become something for myself.” Similarly, Julie also stated reasons why she was influenced by her high school experiences. “I think that because I did very well in high school and that I enjoyed high school a lot, I wanted to continue.” Josh indicated that his previous experiences really influenced his attitude towards higher education because of the support he got from school programs.

I had the opportunity to be in an Upward Bound program, I don't know if you are familiar with that or not. So again, I had more emphasis on college. So I already knew I wanted to go to college, but I think getting involved in a lot of the activities; I was a three sport athlete and I just kind of felt like it was the natural thing to do with the way my school taught it.

Emma was the only student to indicate that previous high school success was not really important to her and received an NU code. She stated that she "doesn't really think it does" matter with regard to her attitude towards higher education. "I think high school and college are totally different, from my perspective."

Extra-curricular participation/student organizations. All eight students who were interviewed indicated through their responses that their attitudes were greatly impacted by participation in extra-curricular activities and involvement in student organizations. The focus of this influence area was college, but one student, Josh, indicated that this impacted his attitude even back in high school. After analyzing the themes from each response, the researcher applied the SA code to each of the responses, indicating that the students were very much aware of the impact the selected influence area had on their attitude towards their education. Students indicated that they felt participation helped them make meaning of their experiences and meet new people.

Jill agreed that relationships are a valuable result of participation and can positively influence attitudes. She said that "I have met a lot of new people and seen a lot of different perspectives from what they think and I've gotten a lot of good advice." Liz and Emma both stated that they felt that one of the most important aspects of extra-curricular activities and student organizations was the motivation to do the best they could, which improved their attitude towards school. Liz said that participation "helps

with your academics too, because you want to show your groups that you can succeed at this.” Emma stated that activities and organizations “motivate you to keep pushing forward.” Josh indicated that he not only enjoyed participation and found that his attitude improved, but noted that another reason is that many students look at these as an opportunity to refresh from the stresses of school.

I wouldn't say that I hate school or don't like school, but I feel like you can't just do school all the time. You have to have something on the side that gets you away from it, and that's why I was really involved in high school. . . . But like I said, again, getting away from the school atmosphere is always good, and then also, having the coaches that are your teachers, and then also are out there on the field too, you kind of get to see someone from a different aspect, a different job, and that is definitely something I liked coming from a smaller school.

This finding was very consistent with the findings from the Likert survey, referring back to Table 6 and Table 7, as 95% of students agreed or strongly agreed that involvement in activities and organizations positively impacted their attitude towards higher education.

Considering how or in what ways this area impacted their attitudes, students indicated that increased participation seemed to improve their attitudes. Jan stated that “once I actually started participating in organizations, my attitude dramatically increased.” She felt that she was “doing good” and that she truly valued feeling as though she was “a part of something better, something beyond” just herself. Bob also agreed that this influence has a significant impact when asked how participation in extra-curricular activities or organizations impacted his attitude.

Probably drastically. If you have that group that understands what you are going through, to fall back on when you need help, it helps a lot. Especially if you are in a pretty tight-knit organization like I am in, you know, so it is a good thing to at least be in one.

Julie was very involved in extra-curricular activities and indicated that those areas of her education were some of her most valued moments of college. “I love it! I mean, I go to my classes every day like I need to, but I spend the majority of my time in my extra-curricular activities.” Julie indicated through her response that she truly found meaning and enjoyment in her college experience through participation in extra-curricular activities.

Amy indicated that shared experiences in extra-curricular activities are something very valuable that impacted her attitude towards her education. She said that “we are all college students; we all kind of have the same problems and same worries and stuff.” She indicated that knowing those people are there for support can improve attitudes because “being able to talk to other people about it, and depending what activity it is, you know, we can help other people.”

As evidenced through their answers, students seemed to be very motivated and impacted by extra-curricular activities and student organizations. Students indicated they gained motivation, made connections, and received support through participation, which improved their attitude. Students received SA codes when they used terms that signified strong agreement or strong feelings, such as “most definitely” and “very much” and “drastically.”

Access to higher education/cost, location, and programs. When examining the impact that access and opportunity due to cost or location had on students’ attitudes, the results were more mixed. Three students received SA or AG codes, three students were NU, and two students were DA or SD. Three of the students still at least agreed, if not

strongly agreed, but there were varying results. Students indicated that while this was an important influence to them, access was perhaps less impactful on their attitude than some of the other selected influence areas when considering how access and opportunities impacted their attitudes. Emma was assigned an SD code because she indicated that access had no influence on her attitude. Getting into college “was just more something that was expected.”

Three students received NU codes, indicating that they were not really impacted positively or negatively by access, cost, or location. Julie had an NU code, particularly because she described access as something that has given her “a greater perspective” but not something that drastically impacted her attitude. However, when she discussed the actual institution and what access to WNCC had ultimately given her, she was more enthusiastic.

WNCC has greatly, positively affected me. I have had such an amazing education here that I don't think I could have gotten at any four-year university because I have gotten so much individual attention. And the class sizes, some of my classes are smaller than in high school, and so I have really enjoyed it.

Julie's focus concentrated more on what she had experienced as a result of her access rather than what the initial process of getting into college or the location and cost of attending did for her attitude. Josh was an NU code as he noted that he agreed, like Julie, that the results from gaining access were significant, but access alone was more just “something that you just said you did.”

Amy was also NU and indicated that WNCC was “easy to kind of get into” and that if she got into a four-year school she would “feel more accomplished.” She stated that she was not very worried about getting into WNCC but that she was feeling anxious

about applying to four-year schools and that the process was “nerve racking.” Amy was assigned an NU code primarily because she seemed to indicate that access and location of the community college really had no impact on her attitude, but noted that getting into a bigger school, one she perceived to be more difficult to gain access to and be able to afford, would improve her attitude and make her feel better about herself.

Jan was one of the students who strongly agreed. She had already attended college once and stated, with regard to why access to higher education impacted her attitude, that she had “taken it for granted.” However, this time around, her attitude seemed to have changed positively when she discussed access.

It did, it did change my attitude. It very much improved it. As I go through school, I am so thankful for the opportunity to get the education, and I love to learn, which I didn't when I was younger. Everything is just, like, it is a new day. I can't wait to learn something new. It was very positive.

When she discussed the admissions process to WNCC and how that impacted her attitude, she stated that although the process was “very simple,” she said she “wasn't sure” she was going to get in. However, now that she had gained access to the institution, she said “it is a very good experience for me to be here.”

Bob also had an AG code and stated that access to higher education was also a very positive impact on his attitude. His reason with regard to why this selected influence area impacted him was that he wanted to continue his education. He said that the influence had impacted his attitude “positively” and that since he was “pursuing further education beyond an Associate's, it helps quite a bit.” Liz also agreed that the influence was impactful, and said this was important to her because she realized that not everyone has that opportunity. “Just, I think being accepted into a college, having the ability to go

to a college and further my education was unbelievable. I mean, not everyone gets that chance.” Jill indicated through her responses that she felt strongly that access influenced her attitude. She indicated that access improved her confidence because she said “it made me feel good about myself to get accepted into different colleges.”

Student’s responses indicated that, particularly at a community college, access was more something that they just expected to be able to achieve, rather than something that dramatically changed them. Answers such as: the college was “easy to get into” and that access was just “more something that was expected” displayed students’ indifference to this selected influence area.

Access to education/opportunities to learn during childhood. Educational opportunities outside of school were not very impactful on the students that were selected for the interviews. Only one student agreed that this selected influence area was important. Six students were NU codes and two were SD codes. When looking at how and in what ways they were impacted by this influence area, they focused more on the fact that they just lacked opportunities during their childhood to experience such opportunities. Jan was an NU and described her experiences with what she considered educational opportunities growing up.

Outside of school, um, my parents taught us more life lessons. There were six kids, so it wasn’t really flashcards. We learned a lot of the educational stuff in school, but we learned work ethic; we learned other things that were also valuable in life. And my parents, they were fantastic at trying to teach us everything they possibly could. They would read with us, you know, different books to try to encourage us. They have always encouraged us to try to get as much education as possible, but as far as their means, they were meager means with that many kids.

She indicated that those few learning opportunities did exist, but that she “took it for granted” and did not really understand the importance of those opportunities, thus they did not really have much of an impact either way.

Bob was an NU code because he indicated he only had a few opportunities, and those were mostly “athletics based” and said that as long as a student is doing something while they are growing up, “it doesn’t really matter.” Julie was also neutral and indicated that she had some opportunities, but again, most were related to school or a school she was attending. “I went to a school of performing arts outside of school, and so I did that, but there wasn’t a lot.” Jill and Liz also indicated that they really did not have a lot of opportunities outside of school. Liz said that she had some opportunities, but they were still “school” related. “I mean, when I was in elementary school, I was homeschooled, so we had homeschool groups . . . but other than that, that is about it.” Josh was assigned an SD code because he indicated that those opportunities outside of school had no impact at all on his attitude. “Everything was kind of directed with the school or for the school. I don’t know that I would say specifically that I was really a part of anything else.” Emma was also an SD code and said the reason she was not influenced by childhood opportunities outside of school was simply a lack of opportunity. She said “I didn’t really have any, no.”

Most students indicated that this influence area was primarily indifferent to them in how their attitude was impacted because they lacked opportunities growing up to experience those opportunities outside of the classroom. Students who were assigned NU indicated that the issue was not that they had those opportunities and did not care, but

rather that they simply lacked opportunities outside of school. Amy was the student who received an AG code, and stated that opportunities she had to study the Bible outside of school gave her a desire to learn and positively impacted her attitude towards education.

Yeah, definitely! From going to church and stuff, it made me, like, have a passion for learning the Bible. So obviously, that has a huge effect on like, in order to study the Bible, I obviously need to know how to read, and read well.

Her desire to learn and study the Bible was the reason she felt this selected influence area impacted her attitude. She expressed that she had opportunities to learn outside of school through her church activities and that her passion for studying the Bible improved her attitude towards learning.

Education and career goals/desire to obtain goals. All eight students received SA or AG codes with regard to how career and educational goals impacted their attitude. Students were very assertive that this selected influence area had an impact on their attitudes towards higher education and continuing their education. One of the main areas that students indicated with regard to how these goals impacted their attitude was that they did not feel they would try as hard if they did not have established goals. This was reflected in the Likert assessment as well in Table 6 and Table 7, with 100% of the students indicating that their attitude was impacted by career and educational goals and a desire to achieve them. When students discussed why this was important to them, many indicated that they felt setting goals would help open more opportunities and keep them on track. Jan stated that school is difficult, but worth the effort.

Absolutely, I don't think that I would put everything into it that I do now. I work long hours and then having . . . I put everything into it, every last bit of energy that I have. I do the very best that I can. If I don't feel like I have achieved my

personal goal, it is hard for me, and I know I have to try harder next time. I have a very high standard for myself, so I always do the best that I can.

Bob stated that having a plan at the beginning of the semester and setting goals is very important towards his attitude and success in higher education. "I usually have a set plan, as far as, I know what is required of me and I just step forward from there and work with my personal schedule." He indicated that goals and plans are important to him because they helped keep him moving forward. Jill indicated that she agreed that career and educational goals have an impact on her attitude towards school because, as she said, "I want to get scholarships, and because if they see that I am trying hard here, it would make them think that I would try hard there also." Jill indicated that her attitude was influenced by goals and a desire to achieve them because she wants to be able to afford to continue her education, and scholarship opportunities encourage her to set those goals. Several students noted throughout the interview process that transferring was eventually their goal, and that with regard to this question, those goals motivated them to try harder. Julie wanted to transfer to a four-year school, and having that as a goal motivated her to do her best.

Oh definitely. I am so excited to go on to a four-year school because now I have those . . . that work ethic that I might have been lacking a little bit in high school. Now I know what I need to do and how I need to get it done. I have to set aside time for homework, and I have to say no to things. I want to be a part of everything, but I can't, and so I need to learn to say no. That is a big thing.

Josh stated that he needed a plan as well, and those goals helped his attitude. "I am a guy who always has to have my future kind of planned out, at least have a view of kind of what it looks like. That is what keeps me moving forward every day." He noted that attaining goals just motivated him to set new and higher goals. "You can't just settle and

get use to this.” Amy also agreed that goals help her attitude. “If I was just coming to school here just to do whatever, I don’t think that I would work very hard.”

Liz said that knowing what she wants to do was a big influence on her attitude because she wanted to be able to pursue her passion. “Well, the career I have chosen, it is like my passion, so I want to do something that I love and so I want to further my education.” Emma reinforced Liz’s answer about wanting to do well in order to reach her career goals. “I can get a better job when I get old. I can have more security, you know.”

A common theme that emerged through student responses was that when students knew they needed this education to reach their career goals, their attitude improved significantly, as did their effort and their desire to do their best in their classes. Both aspects of career and educational goals and a desire to achieve those goals seemed to motivate students to try harder, give more effort in their classes, and strive to succeed.

Financial motivation/desire for better job and lifestyle. Financial motivation received differing results. Three students received SA or AG codes, while three students were DA codes and two were NU. Jan received an AG code with regard to her response, because she acknowledged the influence and noted that finances had some influence on her attitude towards school. “It is important to me because I need to be able to support my family, and a certain way of life. Everyone needs money to pay bills.” She noted that her emphasis on financial motivation came more from responsibility to care for her family more than just desiring money. Jill was an SA code and noted that financial motivation was an influence that impacted her attitude towards higher education because she wanted to be able to provide for her family and give them things she was not able to have.

I think it is, because my family, since it is a really big family, we don't have that much extra money to spend on certain things that I want, so sometimes I don't get those. I want to be able to give my family the things that I didn't have.

Amy indicated that she agreed that money influenced her attitude towards higher education and was an AG code for her response. She indicated that lifestyle had an impact on her attitude, as she wanted to travel and be able to afford to do other things besides work. "I want to travel and just kind of do whatever I want, and in order for that, I don't want money to be the question."

Liz was an NU code and seemed to sway back and forth between indicating that she thought that financial motivation was important and feeling like instead, she should pursue her passion. She noted that money was not the most important thing to her, but that "it would be good to have a good income." She seemed indecisive and went back and forth on whether or not money was that important to her, as she would state a reason that money is important, followed by a reason why money is not the most important thing to her. Ultimately she noted that she thought pursuing her passion was more important. "I think that doing something that you love is more important than just making money."

Like Liz, Julie was also an NU code, seemingly going back and forth between whether or not money was all that impactful on her attitude. She said she knew money was necessary, but that she would rather do something she loves. "If that means I have a bad salary, but I know that I am doing something worthwhile, that is fine with me." Josh also acknowledged money was necessary and that many in society place a lot of value on achieving wealth, but ultimately was a DA code and disagreed that money or the desire for a better lifestyle influenced his attitude.

You know, earning more money is something that everyone looks for. I mean, that is pretty much how the United States is set up, but I don't like to look at what I am getting into so much for the money. I mean, my job kind of averages . . . the median is kind of around fifty thousand. I don't do it so much for the money. You have got to go by your passion. You have to like it to actually get into the job.

Bob received an SD code, as he noted that he was not impacted by money or the thought of earning more money. "It is not really that important to me. . . . I am a secondary education major. That's not . . . no it is not financially rewarding but there are other rewards to being a teacher that are far better." This was a common theme, with students who noted that pursuing their passion is greater by far than earning a lot of money. Emma was an SD code on her answer to this influence area. She stated that "it is really not that important" and that she does not believe that one is "necessarily happier when you have more money."

Most students noted that money was important to a certain extent, even if they disagreed that money was an impactful influence on their attitude towards their education. Differentiating between NU and DA codes throughout these responses was difficult because many students would begin to say that money was important, or they understood that money was necessary, but would then begin to express that doing something they love is more important than how much they get paid to do that job, regardless of the lifestyle money could provide. Students seemed to be in agreement that when they had to choose, they would rather do something they love than get paid a lot of money to do something they do not enjoy or do not view as meaningful. However, the students whose attitudes were most impacted by financial motivation indicated that they

either had a desire to support their family or they wanted to be able to enjoy a certain lifestyle.

Comfortable lifestyle/higher social status. Achieving a higher social status did not appear to be very important to the students that were interviewed. Six students were assigned SD codes and two were given NU codes. No students indicated that they agreed that achieving a higher social status or improving how others view them had an impact on their attitude. Considering research question three and looking for how this selected influence area impacted students, responses indicated that neither aspect of this area was that impactful on their attitude. Jan received an NU code and went back and forth to an extent when she discussed the impact social status had on her. She stated that while she could understand that social status is important to some people, ultimately she was indifferent to the influence. "Social status maybe is not the most important thing to me, because I kind of don't really care what people think." However, she added that she did think that "for most people, it is very important." Josh received an NU code and really seemed to examine the issue from both sides. He was indifferent on whether or not this influence impacted his own attitude, but he did take time to note why some may view social status as important.

I can go back and forth on this. Having a social status is nice. You feel like you can get that interconnectedness with higher up people who can get you into that spot. It is a lot harder when you are in a lower social class to get into that group. So I feel like I can go again with college, too. Getting into certain colleges or whatnot, if you do not have that big last name or something like that, it is really hard to get into that college.

Bob was an SD code and the themes from his responses seemed to indicate he was not interested in social status; much less that social status impacted his attitude. "I

don't think social status really has a lot to do with education. I don't think it affects it that much." Jill was also an SD code and noted that her family values taught her that social status was not something that was worth giving any attention. "I have never really seen the point of it. I have never been taught that it is that important in my family, so that is probably why I don't see it." Liz and Emma were also an SD code. Liz stated in her response that while having connections is a good thing, she did not think "that having a high social status is really important." These students indicated social status had no real impact on them or their attitude towards why they are in school and pursuing higher education. Emma stated that as long as she is doing her best, she does not care what anyone else thinks or how they view her and where she ranks.

It isn't important to me. As long as I know that I did the best that I could do . . . like my dad always told me, if you want to be a hair dresser, just make sure you are the best hair dresser. If you want to be a teacher, make sure you are the best teacher. If you want to be a doctor, just be the best doctor. It doesn't really matter what you are going to do.

Julie was also an SD code and noted that social status had no impact on her attitude or on what she wanted to become. "It doesn't matter to me. I have always just been who I am, regardless of my surroundings." Amy was an SD code and did not agree in any way that social status was an influence that impacted her attitude towards her schooling. "Throughout my life I have just never really paid attention to social status." She said that she never felt like social status really ever affected her relationships with people. "It is not an issue to me."

Students seemed very set on their disagreement or indifference to a higher social status. While some students indicated that they understood that society as a whole tends

to place emphasis on social status and perhaps look favorably upon some people for the level they have reached, most students felt this influence was a non-issue. They again reinforced their previous discussion that doing something one loves and being as good as one can be was more important than how people viewed one's status. However, as was reflected in Table 6 and Table 7 in the question about money and about lifestyle, students hinted that they would like to be able to have some things that would generally come along with a higher social status, such as nice things that perhaps they could not currently afford or to be able to travel and enjoy a comfortable lifestyle. As Jan noted, "Well, my husband and I have been married for ten years and we have never taken a vacation. I really want a vacation!" While Jan tended to disagree to the aspect of how others view her, her answers showed that she was aware of things she could perhaps enjoy as an end result of her education.

Pressure from peers/peer influence. Six students were SA or AG codes and two students were DA codes for the selected influence area of the impact of peers on student attitudes. When looking at how and in what ways this selected influence area impacted their attitudes, students indicated that they were aware of what their friends were doing and the success they were enjoying through their college experiences. Jan was an SA code who indicated that for her, peer influence was something that was very important and impactful on her attitude. She stated that her peers strongly influenced her attitude towards higher education.

I think that peers play a significant role. When I am around my peers that are very driven, I find that it reinforces my drive. Whereas if I am around peers that are . . . that say "eh, I am over this," I kind of take on that attitude also. Though for me, I try to stay around the peers that are driven as much as possible.

Jill was an SA, but for different reasons than some of the other students. She indicated that she felt like her peers strongly motivated her because she was a leader in her group, and that knowing that other friends were looking up to her motivated her to do her very best in school. "I feel more of a leader with some of my peers . . . I feel that I am being better, more of the example rather than the follower." Liz also agreed and received an AG through her responses. Liz said that a lot of her friends went to college and that they "just kind of motivated each other." Jill and Liz clearly felt that this aspect of the selected influence area was impactful on their attitude because others were looking up to them and they wanted to set a good example and help motivate each other to do their best.

Julie, Josh and Amy were all SA and AG codes and indicated that their peers influenced their attitude towards their education. Julie noted that she was influenced by seeing all her friends going to college, particularly in today's economic climate.

I think it is somewhat important because you see all of these other people going on and getting degrees and that kind of thing. And in this society today, it is a very difficult thing to get a job without an education, especially even a four-year degree. Now that is common, rather than a two year degree, and so it is pretty big. And plus, it is nice to have friends for a while.

Julie's response showed that she felt her peers influenced her attitude because of how difficult getting a job can be in today's economic climate. Knowing there is competition for jobs from her peers and knowing a lot of her friends were getting degrees had an impact on her attitude to pursue college.

Josh said that back in high school, peers were a huge influence on him. "Back in high school, it seemed like that was really kind of what shaped me." He also noted that

now in college, his peers also influence his attitude towards school and his goal is to transfer to a four-year school, so he tries to surround himself “with people like that.” He also stated, however, that now he is more concerned with his set goals and that he is motivated to achieve regardless of what his friends end up doing, but that they influenced his attitude towards pursuing higher education and higher goals, such as transferring.

Amy also indicated that peers strongly influence her.

I think I am kind of a jealous person. Seeing my friends going to big universities and stuff like that kind of motivates me to want to do the same. I see the great opportunities that they are getting through it and just some awesome things that they are doing. So that kind of, not a bad jealousy, but a good jealousy, motivates me . . . I think that knowing that they are being successful just kind of shows me that I can be successful.

Bob was a DA who indicated that he, unlike Jan, did not feel that his peers really had any influence on his attitude towards his education. “They didn’t really have much of an effect on me. I didn’t really talk to a lot of my peers about it.” Bob was also in the military prior to college, and stated that he was “one out of eight or nine guys that actually ended up going back to school.” Emma was a DA and indicated that she was aware of peer influence but did not think that the influence had any impact on her. “I have some friends that are really motivated and want to go and transfer and everything, and then I have some that aren’t. Then I just do what I want to do.”

Students noted that peer influence was more impactful on their attitude than peer pressure. Students did not indicate they attended college because their friends were pressuring them to do so or because they felt like they would lose friends if they did not attend. Rather, students seemed to observe their friends successes and find motivation through that to pursue higher education and as a result, noted a positive impact on their

attitude. Students seemed to indicate through their answers that they either were really independent and wanted to do their own thing, regardless of what their friends were doing, or that they were influenced and motivated to do their best in school and pursue higher education because they saw their friends doing so and saw their friends enjoying success. Table 6 and Table 7 support this distinction between the two aspects and showed that roughly 86% of students disagreed that pressure from peers impacted their attitude towards higher education, supporting what the interviewed students stated.

High school size/opportunity for attention. Four students agreed, three students disagreed, and one student was neutral when discussing high school size and the opportunity to get help and how that impacted student attitudes. In respect to research question three, students indicated that this selected influence area either impacted their attitude in different ways or not really at all. Jan was one of the AG codes and responded that her desire to leave her small high school and get back to the big city led her to a large, four-year school. However, she realized once she got there she valued a smaller school after all. “I was just this little, tiny number, so when I came back I very much wanted to come here because I wanted the small, close interaction.”

Josh, Jill, Julie, and Jan all indicated they were in some ways influenced by the size of their high school to pursue higher education at a community college. Josh said that he went to a smaller high school, and also one that was very close to WNCC. “I did come from a smaller high school. My class was only like 133, I think was the final graduating number.” He mentioned that having opportunities at a smaller school influenced his attitude towards enrolling at a community college because “there are more opportunities

to be involved, to get attention from teachers, and be involved in other activities at a smaller school.” He indicated that college size may be as much of an influence on his attitude as his high school size.

Jill also agreed that her school size influenced her attitude. She stated that she attended two different high schools of varying sizes, and said that the smaller one was better for her and as a result, she chose a community college. “I think a smaller college was good for me to begin with . . . I think that a community college, since it is smaller, helped a lot.” Jan also indicated that her high school had an impact on her attitude towards higher education and where she wanted to be, but that the size of her high school initially had the opposite impact.

I wasn’t originally from this area. I was from a big town, a big city. So the drive for me was to get into a big city once again. But then I realized that I prefer the small, one on one, and here you get that in every way.

Julie was an SA and seemed to indicate that her high school size and experiences she had as a result impacted her attitude to pursue higher education at a community college. “Yes definitely! I think that I probably would have been lost had I gone to a huge university and had that freshman depression thing, where I start feeling like I am no one.”

Students who did not indicate that this influence area was important to them noted that they felt opportunities existed in large and small schools to get the help and attention that they needed, even if there were more students to compete with. Liz was NU and seemed to think that the influence did not impact her one way or the other. She attended two different high schools, one large and one small, and did not indicate either one influenced her one way or another. Emma and Bob were SD codes and indicated that

this influence had no impact on them at all. Emma simply answered that high school size did not matter to her. Bob echoed those feelings as well. "I didn't really . . . I have had experience with smaller high schools and big. It did not really affect it too much." Amy was a DA code and stated that her desire to pursue higher education and find a school where she felt she could succeed was not impacted by the size of her high school or the size of any college.

It did not have a huge impact. I went to (small Nebraska school), so it was small, smaller than a huge high school, but I want to go to a bigger place. I am tired of being in this small town, but I did not really think about the size of . . . the size of colleges does not really affect me. Small or big, I think they are good. I think you can have opportunities in both.

The aspect of high school size seemed to be very similar in themes and patterns as peer influence. Students either indicated that they were impacted significantly by the influence or they felt strongly that size had nothing to do with them choosing higher education and in particular, a community college. The aspect of opportunities to get attention from teachers however did seem to impact student attitudes. For example, Josh was an AG code who stated that at a smaller high school, and even a smaller college like WNCC, there were "more opportunities to be involved" and to "get attention from teachers." Students did not appear to consider the size of the school as something that impacted their attitude, but did agree that aspects of smaller schools allowed for more attention, which did improve their attitude towards higher education and enhanced the opportunity to succeed.

Career path uncertainty/nothing else to do. The final influence area and aspects that were examined in the interview process were career path uncertainty and

lacking a plan after high school. Five students agreed or strongly agreed, two students disagreed or strongly disagreed, and one student was neutral when considering how and in what ways this selected influence area impacted their attitude towards their education.

Jan and Jill were AG codes and noted that their attitudes were influenced as they hoped to resolve their uncertainty while at WNCC. Jan said “there is always that certain amount of uncertainty and it can cause anxiety sometimes” but that she hoped to resolve that anxiety and uncertainty at a community college through the amount of “positive reinforcement that encourages you to keep going.” Jill also agreed that there are some things she doesn’t know. “I am not sure about that career path.” She agreed that being at a community college and taking “a lot of the courses” helped her resolve that uncertainty and positively influenced her attitude. Amy was one of the AG codes for this question and indicated that her uncertainty has a role in how she approached school and what classes she took.

I have no idea what I want to do. . . . Other opportunities have shown up in my life, and I am possibly going into pre-occupational therapy. I don’t know, and so I think my view on college; I mean I am happy I came to WNCC because that means I can just get done with my generals and then decide what I want to be, what I want to do, because I have no idea.

Amy was a good example of a student who expressed why this influence area was impactful to her. She mentioned that community college was a place she could go to figure the uncertainty out while she looked for what she really wanted to do. She stated that she had changed majors and was really searching for her career path.

Josh also agreed that there is uncertainty, but that the community college positively influenced his attitude by helping resolve that uncertainty.

Once I switched to criminal justice, I started applying myself more into the classes and I feel like I am gaining a lot more out of the classes than just feeling that I have got to just drag myself through this so I can get a job. I actually found something that I am passionate about!

Liz also had a very similar experience, and uncertainty about her career path influenced her attitude to come to a community college to resolve that uncertainty.

Well, at first I wasn't certain, which is kind of why I came to a community college; to figure that out. But studying here has helped me see what I love to do, and so I have been able to make a career choice through my classes.

Julie was an NU and stated that while she has a fairly certain career path, she has still benefited from a community college. She indicated that uncertainty really had not influenced her attitude, but that she was still gaining valuable lessons at a community college. "I am pretty certain of what I want to do, and so it has been very nice to have so much personalized time and help."

Bob and Emma were SD and DA codes, as themes throughout their responses indicated that this area really had no influence on them. Themes such as certainty, goal achievement, and established plans and goals frequently surfaced in their responses. Bob gave a very brief reply to the question, but stated that he did not feel uncertainty had any impact on his attitude. "There is really no uncertainty. I have had a set plan for about two years, and it is falling through the way I want." Emma was a DA code who stated that this influence area really was not impactful to her. Emma said, "When I was coming in, I knew what I wanted to do." She noted that established career plans and goals helped eliminate the uncertainty. She stated that career uncertainty or just not having anything else to do was not impactful because she knew before she even enrolled at the institution what she wanted to pursue.

Most students who said that uncertainty had an impact on their attitude also said that the community college was helping them resolve that uncertainty by assisting them in finding their career path and finding their passion. Students who disagreed were students who were very set in their educational and career plans and felt no uncertainty about what they wanted to do.

Research Question 3 was: “In what ways do the identified influences impact student attitudes?” The previous presentation of findings from the study described how students responded to each of the interview questions regarding how and in what ways the selected influence areas impacted their attitude. Selected influence areas such as career and educational goals and extra-curricular and student organization participation were very impactful on student attitudes, while other selected areas such as social status and educational opportunities during childhood were not impactful on students. Other selected influence areas, such as peer influence and financial motivation, received mixed responses from students.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the findings from the Likert assessment and interview portions of the study as those findings related to each of the three research questions. The chapter began with a statement of purpose, followed by a description of the research questions addressed in the study and the sample and participants that were part of the study. Findings were presented for the Research Question 1, which examined what selected influence areas impacted student attitudes. This involved the Likert assessment, with charts describing percentages of students who responded to each option of each

question. The interview portion of the study addressed Research Questions 2 and 3, which examined why certain influence areas impacted students' attitudes and how and in what ways those areas impacted student attitudes. A brief summary of the final codes used in the interview process was described, followed by detailed descriptions of selected students' responses to each of the selected influence areas under each research question. Chapter 5 will discuss the findings of the study, the implications of the study, and the possible impact of the study on future research.

Chapter 5

Discussion

Purpose Statement

The purpose of conducting this research was to examine the selected influence areas impact community college students' attitudes towards higher education. Of additional interest was why those influence areas are important relative to student attitudes and in what ways. This study was completed in order to help community college professionals better understand how to encourage students towards their educational goals and improve student outcomes. Beach (2011) stated that institutions of higher education need to be "effective at what they do" (p. 132). More completely and effectively understanding what has brought students to the institution is an important step in bringing about growth and development in students and helping them succeed in their educational endeavors (p. 132).

Research Questions

A grand tour question and three sub-questions helped establish the framework for this study. The grand tour question was: "Are community college students' attitudes towards higher education impacted by selected internal and external influence areas?" The first of the three sub-questions established for this study was: "What selected influence areas impact community college students' attitudes towards education?" The second of the three sub-questions relating to the study was: "Why do those selected influence areas affect community college students' attitudes?" The third and final sub-

question that helped develop the framework of this study was: “In what ways do the identified influence areas impact student attitudes?”

The grand-tour question helped establish the purpose of the study, which was to examine whether or not student were impacted by selected internal and external influence areas. The first sub-question helped establish what selected influence areas are impactful on students. The second sub-question examined why those selected influence areas are important. The third sub-question helped the researcher understand in what ways the students were impacted by the selected influence areas by providing information not only into why the influence areas are important, but how those influence areas affect their attitudes and behaviors.

Summary of Findings

The findings from this study revealed that a variety of different selected influence areas can impact students’ attitudes towards pursuing higher education at a community college, which in turn can influence their decision to persist and succeed.

- Participants noted that high school experience and success they enjoyed in high school was impactful on their attitude and gave them the confidence that they could do well in college also.
- Participants noted that participation in extra-curricular activities and membership in student organizations was a very important selected influence area on their attitudes, as they noted through the assessment and interviews that these organizations helped them feel that they belonged, helped them

build relationships and make connections, and added meaning and enjoyment to their college experience.

- Access to higher education, along with the cost of attendance and programs offered also influenced students' attitudes. While several students indicated that access to a community college was something they just expected to be able to achieve, others noted that gaining access increased their confidence and gave them a sense of accomplishment. The programs offered and lower cost of attendance were also aspects mentioned that improved student attitudes.
- Students indicated through the assessment that opportunities to learn outside of school during their childhood were impactful on their attitude, but the seven out of eight students who were interviewed indicated this influence area was not impactful on their attitude because they lacked opportunities outside of school.
- Every student in both the Likert assessment and interviews noted that established educational and career goals, as well as a desire to achieve those goals greatly impacted their attitude towards their education.
- Participants noted that financial motivation was important with regard to providing for their family and impacted their attitude towards their education because they ultimately hoped to receive a better job as a result of their education. All eight students noted in the interviews, however, that doing something one loves is more important than making money.

- Achieving a high social status with regard to how others view them was not important to the participants, but being able to enjoy a more comfortable lifestyle that generally comes along with a high social status was something students indicated was important to them.
- Peers influenced the participants' attitudes with regard to the success they observed their peers enjoying through their college experiences, but none stated that direct pressure from peers influenced their attitude.
- High school size seemed generally unimportant to participants, but four participants who were interviewed did indicate that certain aspects of high school size, such as the opportunity to receive more attention from teachers, was impactful on their attitude as they noted that attention provided them greater opportunities to succeed.
- Career path uncertainty or lack of an alternative plan was another influence area that impacted five students in the interviews but not others. Students either indicated they had no idea what they wanted to do and were impacted by uncertainty or they had a very clear plan and were not impacted at all by uncertainty.

Discussion

This study adds to the existing literature on influences and aspects that impact student attitudes towards their education. Participants indicated through their responses that there are different ways the selected influences impacted their attitude, which supported Cohen and Kisker (2010) and their assertion that each student is unique and the

community college faces unique challenges in dealing with students who have come through their doors for such a wide variety of reasons (pp. 446-447). The ten selected influence areas (Appendix C) used in this study showed that students are not only impacted by a variety of different influence areas, but also different aspects within those selected influence areas. Two separate aspects for each selected influence area were examined in this study, and the findings supported Nakajima et al. (2012), who stated that there are many different factors and influences that can impact a community college student's attitude towards their education (p. 592). Porchea et al. (2010) stated that understanding the different influences that can impact student attitudes and success is important in helping students reach their potential and continue through their education, and this was evident throughout this study (p. 682). Participants noted that there are different aspects of the different influence areas that impact their attitudes in different ways, which displayed the uniqueness of each student (Cohen & Kisker, 2010, pp. 446-447).

Research Question 1: What influences areas impact community college students' attitudes towards education? This research question was addressed primarily through the Likert survey and provided some valuable information with regard to which of the ten selected influence areas that were chosen by the researcher students felt impacted their attitude the most. Students largely agreed that aspects of participation in college, specifically participation in extra-curricular activities and student organizations was very impactful on their attitudes, with 95.4% of students agreeing with extra-curricular participation and 100% of students agreeing with student organization

participation. Rosenthal (1995) and Tinto (1993) stated that one of the most important facets of a student's college experience and in turn student persistence and retention is the social communities of a school (as cited in Kelly et al., 2012, p. 654). Participants supported Rosenthal (1995) and Tinto (1993) by nearly unanimously agreeing that participation in extra-curricular activities and student organizations impacted their attitude positively. The research findings from this study also supported Tinto's (2010) theory, who stated that "students are more likely to succeed and continue within the institution when they find themselves in settings that provide needed academic and social support" (p. 73). Students indicated they felt they received academic and social support through membership and participation in organizations and activities. For example, Bob stated that those groups offer support and assistance through the issues faced in college.

Probably drastically. If you have that group that understands what you are going through, to fall back on when you need help, it helps a lot. Especially if you are in a pretty tight-knit organization like I am in, you know, so it is a good thing to at least be in one.

Another selected influence area that students indicated was important to them was established career and educational goals, as 100% of students agreed that having those goals and a desire to achieve those goals positively impacted their attitude. Participants also seemed to indicate through their responses to Research Question 1 that financial motivation was important to them with regard to being able to afford more things and get a better job as an end result of their education. This finding supported Deci et al. (1991), who stated that, among other influences, monetary rewards or some other rewards based incentive were impactful influences on students (cited in Cheng et al., 2011, pp. 1304-1305).

Participants also indicated that access to college and the affordability of a community college was an influential aspect that impacted their attitudes, as 95% of students indicated that access improved their attitude and almost 82% of students noted that the location and cost of attendance impacted their attitude. This finding was consistent with Cohen and Brawer (2008), who discussed the likely continued trend of community college importance in the overall landscape of higher education when they stated that community colleges are very likely to continue to receive a high number of students enrolling in these institutions because of “their traditional appeal: easy access, low cost, and part-time attendance possibilities” (pp. 454-455). Students indicated through their responses what selected influence areas were most impactful on their attitudes that the opportunity to get into a community college and be able to afford to attend was an important influence on their attitude.

High school experience and success were two other aspects of the ten selected influence areas that participants agreed affected their attitude. Almost 60% of students indicated that success they had in high school influenced their attitude towards pursuing college, and nearly 73% of students responded the same way with regard to high school experiences. This was in contrast to high school size and opportunities to get attention due to high school size, as both of those aspects received fewer than 40% agreement. These findings are somewhat inconsistent with Horyna and Bonds-Raacke (2012), who found in their study on high school size that there was a correlation between actual size of high school and intrinsic motivation and attitude towards college (pp. 715-716). While

some students did indicate that this influence area was impactful on their attitude, there was not the level of support that other studies had shown (pp. 715-716).

Opportunities to learn during their childhood and access to educational opportunities while they were growing up were influence areas that students indicated were impactful on their attitude towards college, with nearly 60% of students who agreed with access to opportunities and 72% of participants who agreed that those opportunities impacted their attitude. This level of agreement was not reflected in the interviews, however, as only one student who was interviewed indicated that these childhood opportunities outside of school impacted their attitude positively towards their education.

Aspects of social status, peer influence, and career path uncertainty were the lowest ranking selected influence areas with regard to what percentage of students agreed that their attitude was impacted by these influences. Social status, when examining how others view them, was not important to the participants, as fewer than 20% of students agreed this was impactful on their attitude. However, when looking at things they could enjoy as a result of social status such as a more comfortable lifestyle, about 86% of participants agreed that this was something that influenced their attitude. This was again consistent with Cheng et al.'s (2011) study that stated that the quantity of rewards and the overall incentive for students to pursue a certificate or a certain educational path can have a large impact on students' attitudes towards pursuing those goals when they indicated that "sufficient motivation can change a previous attitude" and that "high incentives can change a student's attitude" (p. 1305).

Peer influence and peer pressure did not really seem to have much of an impact on students' attitudes, with 18.2% of students who agreed they were influenced by their peers and 0% who indicated they were pressured by their peers to go to college. This differed from studies such as Kelly et al. (2012) regarding peer influence, as the researchers found in their study that nearly 80% of students expressed that attitudes towards friends who were in college influenced their persistence and desire to continue their studies (p. 659).

Career path uncertainty impacted 36.3% of participants and was consistent with Nakajima et al. (2012) when they stated community college students may be at a place of indecision and uncertainty in their lives and experience a lack of true commitment to any one goal, path, or direction, but rather are experimenting with college to try to find that purpose (p. 592). This is also in line with Bahr (2010) who stated that roughly 30% of students fell into the "experimental" category of his behavioral typology, where they were uncertain and had no real goal or stated purpose for being enrolled at the institution (pp. 742-743).

Research Question 2: Why do those selected influence areas affect community college students' attitudes? As noted under Research Question 2 under the findings section in Chapter 4, students tended to reply to the ten semi-structured interview questions in a way that blended their responses of why they were impacted and how they were impacted together. Students had a tendency to describe why they were impacted by a certain selected influence area by describing how and in what ways they were impacted, which directly related to Research Question 3.

Research Question 3: In what ways do the identified influences impact

student attitudes? The third question examined how these selected influence areas impacted student attitudes. Participants offered a wide variety of different responses to the questions regarding how or in what ways they were impacted by these influences. Past school experiences and success was an area where students tended to agree that their attitudes were impacted. Amy said “I think that since I was successful in high school that I can be successful in college.” Amy’s statement was a good example of many of the students’ responses. Past success seemed to indicate to students that they were capable of being able to achieve success in college as well. This coincided with Porchea et al. (2010), who found that the likelihood of transferring to a four-year institution increases when considering the student’s academic preparation, supporting the notion that high school experiences and successful prior educational experiences can have a significant impact on students’ attitudes towards education and eventual student outcomes (p. 696). Confidence seemed to be an area that students felt impacted their attitude, and noted they got that confidence from their previous school successes.

Participants noted that participation in extra-curricular activities and student organizations impacted their attitude because they could lean on each other for support and help. Amy said that they realize they are all college students and that “being able to talk to other people about it; and depending what activity it is, you know, we can help other people.” That rationale supported Bronfenbrenner (1993), who described similar groups of close friends or supporters as “microsystems” (p. 15). Students indicated, even though they did not use Bronfenbrenner’s term, that they viewed these groups as

microsystems that were there for support and encouragement, which in turn improved their attitude towards their education. This also supported Eklund-Leen Young (1997) and Cohen and Kisker (2010), who stated that involvement and engagement on campus can improve attitudes, performance, and add meaning to students college experiences (p. 485). Students agreed and provided reasons as to why involvement was another very impactful selected influence area on their attitude towards higher education. Participants indicated that being in a group and interacting and connecting with others had a noticeable impact on their attitudes. Liz said that participation “helps with your academics too, because you want to show your groups that you can succeed at this.” Emma stated that activities and organizations “motivate you to keep pushing forward.” Jill also indicated she had met a lot of new people, which had allowed her to get “a lot of good advice.” This again fits well with Bronfenbrenner (1993) and his descriptions of “microsystems,” or influences and interactions that are close to the developing student that can have an impact on their development and behavior, such as peers or friend groups (p. 15). Participants indicated that this was indeed the case with their extra-curricular activities and student organization groups. As Kelly et al. (2012) noted, students are influenced by those they are around the most, as students generally “develop a social support network which consists primarily of friends, family, and a significant other” (p. 661).

When looking at access to higher education, including affordability and location, and access to opportunities to learn outside of school during childhood, five students interviewed indicated that their attitudes were not really impacted in any certain way

through these selected influence areas. The three students who agreed regarding access to higher education noted that they appreciated college and the fact that they were able to continue their education, while others are not able to do so. For example, Liz said “Just, I think being accepted into a college, having the ability to go to a college and further my education was unbelievable. I mean, not everyone gets that chance.” However, five of the students generally regarded access into a community college as more something “that was expected” rather than something that had an impact on their attitude, although some students, like Jan, did indicate that getting into a college gave them a greater appreciation for education. Access to educational opportunities during childhood only received agreement from one student with regard to why this impacted their attitude. Seven of the participants stated reasons such as lacking opportunities and experiences as a child that were outside of school as an explanation as to why they were not really impacted by those opportunities as a child. Zamani-Gallaher (2007) focused more on race and ethnicity and the impact those aspects had on student attitudes towards access, but did indicate that access can impact student attitudes, and that contributing aspects such as race and ethnicity can in turn influence student attitudes towards access (pp. 248-249).

Students were unanimous in agreeing that having goals impacted their attitude through providing motivation to work hard. One of the most notable findings from the study was the impact that the participants indicated established career and educational goals had on their attitude towards education. Other influence areas impacted students and their attitudes in varying ways, but no selected influence received as much support from participants as did career and educational goals and a desire to achieve those goals.

This finding is related to Cheng et al.'s (2011) discussion on commitment (p. 1306).

Cheng et al. (2011) noted commitment was a common reason for students to find motivation and desire in an effort to accomplish their goals (p. 1306). Participants noted through the assessment and also through the interviews that having established career and educational goals motivated them to try harder, work more diligently, and be more committed to persisting through their programs in an effort to achieve their goals. An example of this is a statement made by Jan when she discussed how and why career and educational goals and commitment to those goals impacted her attitude.

Absolutely, I don't think that I would put everything into it that I do now. I work long hours and then having . . . I put everything into it, every last bit of energy that I have. I do the very best that I can. If I don't feel like I have achieved my personal goal, it is hard for me, and I know I have to try harder next time. I have a very high standard for myself, so I always do the best that I can.

Nakajima et al. (2012) discussed the importance of commitment through his research on student persistence when they stated that the more involved and committed to their goals students are, the more integrated they become in the institution and ultimately, "greater commitment will lead to increased persistence" (p. 592). This was shown through this study, as student responses indicated this was one of the reasons they needed established goals to strive after. Cheng et al. (2011) discussed how students who have significant commitments to a task, such as enrolling and pursuing an education at a community college in the current study, are much more likely to experience less dissonance towards the task and have a more "improved attitude" if they have made a public commitment to the task at hand (p. 1306).

Another selected influence area that students indicated how and in what ways they were influenced was financial motivation. Three participants indicated that their attitude was impacted by financial motivation because they wanted to be able to provide for their family and give them things that they were not able to have. For example, Amy said “I want to travel and just kind of do whatever I want, and in order for that, I don’t want money to be the question.” Jill also agreed she was impacted by financial motivation.

I think it is, because my family, since it is a really big family, we don’t have that much extra money to spend on certain things that I want, so sometimes I don’t get those. I want to be able to give my family the things that I didn’t have.

Cheng et al. (2011) stated that financial motivation is often important to students, particularly the external rewards that they may be able to enjoy as a result of their college experiences, certificates, or degrees earned (p. 1311).

When looking at ways students are impacted, peer influence was another aspect where students tended to agree. No participants said that pressure from friends or family was really a reason they attended, but rather they were influenced by observing their friends successes. With regard to direct peer pressure, this was contrary to Kelly et al.’s (2012) study that found that 95% of all students were heavily influenced or pressured from their family or friends to attend college (p. 659). Pearson and Dellman-Jenkins (1997) also found that pressure from parents and peers was impactful on students and stated that “the overwhelming majority of both decided and undecided students reported that their mothers and fathers had encouraged them to attend college” (pp. 310-312). Not one student in this study, through the Likert scale or the interviews, mentioned direct pressure from their family or from their friends as an impact on their attitude, which

differed from Kelly et al. (2012) and Pearson and Dellman-Jenkins (1997). Six students instead focused on the impact observing friends' successes had on their attitude.

Four students who indicated that high school size was important to them referenced the opportunity to get more help and attention from teachers. Horyna and Bonds-Raacke (2012) stated that they found a relationship between high school size and intrinsic motivating factors, with students from smaller schools showing more intrinsic motivation and students from larger schools showed greater extrinsic motivation (p. 717). The current study found students who had more attention from teachers, generally at smaller schools, had more positive attitudes towards their education. Not all students felt this way though, as four students indicated this area did not affect their attitude. Bob stated that they had experienced both large and small schools and that "it did not really affect" his attitude. The size of the high school that students attended was not frequently mentioned as an impactful selected influence area, but the attention they received from their teachers was, as was the attention they got from instructors at a smaller community college. This was consistent with Kelly et al. (2012), who found that 90% of students who persisted indicated they had a positive relationship with faculty and staff and were able to get the help and attention they needed (p. 659).

Social status mainly impacted students' attitudes by motivating them to have nice things such as homes or vacations and a more comfortable lifestyle as opposed to having others view them more favorably. This was in contrast to other existing research, such as Kelly et al. (2012), who found students' attitudes were indeed influenced by how others viewed them. Social status was one of the more interesting influence areas addressed due

to the split results that resulted from the two separate aspects that were examined in the study. There were no students who indicated that social status and how others view them and where they would “rank” in society was an important selected influence area to them. However, a couple of students indicated that having nice things, living a comfortable lifestyle, and enjoying the privileges that come along with a high social status was important and influenced their attitude towards pursuing college.

Students’ views on social status seemed to go along with their views on money. All students wanted to earn more money to provide for their family and enjoy a more comfortable lifestyle, but noted they would rather have a job they love than more money. Kelly et al. (2012) stated that 82% of students’ attitudes were influenced by a desired social status among peers and 79% of students expressed that attitudes towards friends that were in college influenced their persistence and desire to continue their studies (p. 659). The findings from the current study differ in regard to the student’s indifference towards perceived social status, but are in line with Kelly et al.’s (2012) study regarding peer influence, as six students indicated that observing their peers influenced their decision to pursue higher education. For example, Jan stated:

I think that peers play a significant role. When I am around my peers that are very driven, I find that it reinforces my drive. Whereas if I am around peers that are . . . that say “eh, I am over this,” I kind of take on that attitude also. Though for me, I try to stay around the peers that are driven as much as possible.

Career path uncertainty impacted five students’ attitudes by motivating them to come to community college to figure things out. Liz was a good example of students who agreed that this influence impacted their attitude.

Well, at first I wasn't certain, which is kind of why I came to a community college; to figure that out. But studying here has helped me see what I love to do, and so I have been able to make a career choice through my classes.

This supported existing research on students at community colleges, some of whom are at a place of indecision in their lives (Nakajima et al., 2012, p. 592). However, one aspect that is supported in existing literature that was missing from participant responses was the impact that needing remedial courses had on their attitude to attend a community college. Bettinger and Long (2005) discussed this issue and found that one of the main reasons many students first chose a community college was they were unprepared for the type of coursework that would be expected of them at a four-year college and needed more developmental classes to get to that level of preparedness (pp. 19-22).

Implications

The findings of this study added to the research that suggests there are numerous and different selected influence areas that can impact students' attitudes towards their education, as well as different aspects within those areas that impact students in different ways. Bahr (2010) stated that students are unique and react differently to situations and are impacted in different ways, which in turn can motivate them in separate ways as well (pp. 725-726). This study showed that to be true, as students indicated throughout the assessment and the interviews how certain selected influences impacted their attitudes and choices with regard to higher education in unique ways.

One of the most common selected influences that students indicated was impactful on their attitude was participation in extra-curricular activities and student organizations. Cohen and Kisker (2010) noted that participation, membership, and

engagement on campus can improve performance and assist in adding meaning the college experience for students (p. 485). This knowledge could benefit student affairs professionals at community colleges and also four-year institutions by providing evidence that students' attitudes are not only positively influenced by participation in these activities and organizations, but that students in this study also expressed a desire to have opportunities to participate and belong to a group or organization. Student affairs professionals could look for ways to improve access to these activities and organizations for students and make those opportunities more noticeable to students on campus. Doing so could benefit the individual by adding meaning to their experiences and improving their academic performance, and could benefit the institution as more students may persist due to the value they have experienced through participation (p. 485).

Another implication of the study could be to improve services provided to students in helping them come to more established educational and career goals. Students in the study indicated this was something that greatly improved their attitude, motivation, and commitment by giving them something to work towards. Students who are in a place of indecision or lack commitment to a certain path or goal to work towards often do not persist through their programs and may drop out of the institution (Nakajima et al., 2012, p. 592). This study showed that continuing to provide services to students that help them not only find a major, but help them find something they are passionate about doing after college and have a desire to work towards is very important. Professionals could use the information in this study to better understand the importance of academic and career advising by helping students "create a plan of study that has a good chance to allow him

or her reach a goal” (Dungy, 2003, p. 342). This process could be improved by placing more emphasis on helping the student find more than just an area of study to pursue by assisting students in finding something they could be successful at and something that is “academically and developmentally appropriate for a given student” (p. 342).

Other implications of the study, particularly for the community college professional, could be to work more closely with their respective communities in improving opportunities and access to educational opportunities outside of school for elementary age children. The study showed that while students indicated these opportunities improved their attitude when they existed, many students lacked opportunities to experience those educational opportunities outside the classroom during their childhood. Cohen and Brawer (2008) stated that as a community college, the institution’s role is to serve the community and help the members of the community, including services provided to potential future students of the institution (pp. 227-228). Part of this could include providing students opportunities to learn outside of school by offering non-classroom opportunities such as academic support, study skill classes, tutoring, mentoring, personal counseling for life skills, seminars, or workshops (p. 228). By providing these opportunities to younger students outside of their normal school setting, the institution could potentially help the community by assisting in the education and development of the youth of the community and also could influence students’ choices to someday enroll in the institution.

Other potential effects of the study could be to assist professionals in working with students through their goals regarding employment after college. Students indicated

that receiving a prestigious job or being viewed in high social esteem with others was not important to them, but being able to get a good job they love to do that could help them pay their bills and live more comfortably was a goal most students indicated they were striving for. Evans (2003) cited in Super (1957, 1990) and stated the importance of career development and assisting students in the “investigation of possible career options” and helping them “become aware of their interests and abilities” (p. 183). This could also relate back to previous discussion on academic and career advising and could help emphasize to student personnel professionals the importance of helping students find something that they are passionate about and also something that they can find a job in after they complete their educational program. With regard to helping students find something they are passionate about, which students in this study indicated was very important to them, Evans (2003), again citing Super (1990), stated that this process could assist students in getting a clearer understanding of “their abilities, interests, and other personal qualities” and also allow them to experience different opportunities (pp. 183-184). When looking at helping students subsequently find employment, which participants in this study also indicated was very important to them, professionals could possibly apply this knowledge by increasing the effort placed on helping students locate opportunities for “career shadowing, internships, and part-time employment” (p. 184). This could greatly assist in helping students not only find meaning and motivation in their educational studies, but also in finding meaningful and favorable employment opportunities once they are done with college. With a difficult economic situation and a

tight and competitive job market, this information could be very valuable to student personnel workers who are helping students through this process.

Future Research

This study adds to existing literature on selected influence areas that can impact student attitudes towards their education. Much of the research that was done supported previous findings on influences that can impact student attitudes, particularly with regard to career and educational goals, participation and involvement on campus, peer influence, and a desire to get a good job. However, additional research would be beneficial to provide more insight into what influence areas are most impactful on students. As Nakajima et al. (2012) stated, there are many different influence areas that can impact students' attitudes towards their education in many different ways (pp. 591-592). This study focused on ten selected influence areas that were established through a review of relevant literature. However, there are many different influence areas and aspects within those areas that can influence student attitudes. This study certainly did not completely cover all influences or aspects that could have, in some way or another, an impact on a student's attitude towards education.

Another area where future research could be beneficial is to focus on other institutions and how these influences can impact students in different settings. While all institutions receive a variety of students from different backgrounds, community colleges tend to attract an even more diverse population (Cohen & Brawer, 2008, pp. 43-46, 50-53). Community colleges attract a unique classification of students, who come through the doors for a wide variety of reasons and may all have a different goal or

motivation for attending, including bettering themselves financially, transferring to a four-year school, acquiring job entry skills, job upgrading, or even simply personal interests (pp. 59-60). While four-year institutions certainly have students enrolling for different reasons, the unique community college population must be acknowledged and educators must be aware of influence areas and aspects of those areas that community college students indicated were impactful on their attitude. One must also acknowledge that these areas may not be the same areas or aspects that students at a four-year school may indicate are important to them. Future research on influence areas that impact students at four-year schools, public and private, as well as for-profit schools, would add much needed perspective and valuable information for comparison to community college students. This could help student personnel professionals better understand the students that they are working with each day and allow those professionals to better serve those students by understanding what impacts their attitude positively towards wanting to pursue their education.

One final area where future research could further add to the findings of this study, as well as other existing research, is to continue to focus on the impact remedial course offerings at community colleges have on students and their attitudes. This was an influence area that was not examined in this study. Cohen and Kisker (2010) stated that community colleges often are the only institutions to offer “essential lower-division coursework necessary for transfer to a four-year university” (p. 448). Community colleges serve students who either graduated from high school or left the system without “the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in college-level coursework” (p. 448).

Since this has recently become one of the primary reasons many students choose to attend a community college, future research focusing on the impact that these courses have on students' attitudes towards continuing their education could be very valuable to student personnel professionals and their respective institutions.

Conclusion

Chapter 5 began a statement of purpose for the current study. This was followed by a summary of the research questions that guided this study and the findings from the study. A discussion of the findings from the current study followed. Selected influence areas that had the most impact on student attitudes were examined, as were some areas and aspects that did not appear to have much of an impact on student attitudes. This was followed by a discussion of the potential implications of the study. Potential ways the study could prove useful to student personnel professionals were discussed, as were possible ways that the findings of this study could improve the services that are provided to students. Finally, the impact of the study was examined with regard to how future research could add to existing literature, as well as the current study, when examining what influence areas are most impactful on student attitudes.

The grand tour question for this study was: Are community college students' attitudes towards higher education impacted by selected internal and external influence areas? When considering the findings from this study, the answer to that question remains dependent upon what selected influence areas are being examined. As expected, some selected influence areas impacted students in greater ways than others. Every student is different and is impacted in unique ways by certain influences (Bahr, 2010, pp. 725-726).

Future research in this area could add important information about not only how these selected influence areas impact students, but other areas as well, including students from different types of institutions, and could also continue to assist student personnel professionals in their effort to serve students effectively.

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Appendix A

The Likert Assessment

Likert Scale Assessment

1. My previous schooling experience impacts my attitude positively towards continuing my education at a community college.
Strongly Agree → Agree → Neither agree nor Disagree → Disagree → Strongly Disagree
2. High school success motivated me to pursue higher education at a community college.
Strongly Agree → Agree → Neither agree nor Disagree → Disagree → Strongly Disagree
3. Participating in extra-curricular activities impacts my attitude towards education.
Strongly Agree → Agree → Neither agree nor Disagree → Disagree → Strongly Disagree
4. Being part of student or campus organizations at this community college is a positive influence on my attitude towards education.
Strongly Agree → Agree → Neither agree nor Disagree → Disagree → Strongly Disagree
5. Gaining access into higher education was relatively easy for me to achieve and positively influenced my attitude towards education.
Strongly Agree → Agree → Neither agree nor Disagree → Disagree → Strongly Disagree
6. Tuition, scheduling, location, and programs offered positively impacted my attitude towards continuing my education in college.
Strongly Agree → Agree → Neither agree nor Disagree → Disagree → Strongly Disagree
7. Opportunities to learn outside of school during my childhood positively impacted my attitude towards continuing my education.
Strongly Agree → Agree → Neither agree nor Disagree → Disagree → Strongly Disagree
8. Access to educational programs and resources outside of school during my childhood positively influenced my attitude towards education.
Strongly Agree → Agree → Neither agree nor Disagree → Disagree → Strongly Disagree
9. Clear educational and career goals, such as transferring to a four-year school, improving career opportunities, or improving a certain vocational skill positively influence my attitude towards college.
Strongly Agree → Agree → Neither agree nor Disagree → Disagree → Strongly Disagree
10. I feel that continuing my education through college will help me achieve my academic and career goals.
Strongly Agree → Agree → Neither agree nor Disagree → Disagree → Strongly Disagree

11. The thought of earning more money is a motivating factor towards continuing education.
Strongly Agree → Agree → Neither agree nor Disagree → Disagree → Strongly Disagree
12. Desiring to get a better job positively influences my attitude towards college.
Strongly Agree → Agree → Neither agree nor Disagree → Disagree → Strongly Disagree
13. I want to continue my education in college so I can live a more comfortable lifestyle.
Strongly Agree → Agree → Neither agree nor Disagree → Disagree → Strongly Disagree
14. Achieving a higher social status is an influential factor in choosing to continue my education.
Strongly Agree → Agree → Neither agree nor Disagree → Disagree → Strongly Disagree
15. Knowing how many of my friends were going to college influenced my attitude towards attending college.
Strongly Agree → Agree → Neither agree nor Disagree → Disagree → Strongly Disagree
16. Pressure from my peers was an important factor in choosing to go to college.
Strongly Agree → Agree → Neither agree nor Disagree → Disagree → Strongly Disagree
17. The size of my high school impacted my attitude towards and college and ultimately my decision to enroll in a community college rather than a four year institution.
Strongly Agree → Agree → Neither agree nor Disagree → Disagree → Strongly Disagree
18. The size of my high school positively impacted my attitude towards education by providing the opportunity to get the help and attention I needed.
Strongly Agree → Agree → Neither agree nor Disagree → Disagree → Strongly Disagree
19. Being uncertain of what I want to do for a career was a key factor in choosing to attend a community college.
Strongly Agree → Agree → Neither agree nor Disagree → Disagree → Strongly Disagree
20. Not knowing what else to do after high school led me to choose to enroll in a community college.
Strongly Agree → Agree → Neither agree nor Disagree → Disagree → Strongly Disagree

Appendix B

Interview Protocol

Interview Questions

1. In what ways does your high school success and previous school experiences impact your attitude towards college?

PROBE: Why do you think your previous success (or lack thereof, if indicated) impacts your attitude towards your education?
2. How does participation in extra-curricular activities or student organizations impact your attitude towards education?

PROBE: Why do extracurricular activities add value or meaning to your college experience?
3. In what ways did gaining access into higher education change your attitude towards education?

PROBE: Explain how getting into this college impacted your attitude towards education, either positively or negatively.
4. What kind of opportunities did you have when you were growing up to participate in educational activities outside of school?

PROBE: How and why have those opportunities impacted your attitude towards education?
5. In what ways do your educational and career goals (such as transferring, skill or vocational improvement, or career advancement) influence your attitude towards education?

PROBE: In what ways do you approach school differently because of those educational and career goals?
6. If financial motivation is an important factor in your attitude towards education, why, and if it not important, why not?

PROBE: In what ways does the possibility of earning more money change your attitude towards education?
7. How does achieving a higher social status impact your attitude towards succeeding in education?

PROBE: Why do this impact, or not impact, your attitude towards succeeding in college?

8. In what ways do your peers influence your attitude towards enrolling in an institution of higher education?

PROBE: How does that change your attitude towards wanting to succeed in college?

9. In what ways did the size of your high school impact your decision to enroll in a community college?

PROBE: Why did the size of the high school you attended impact (or not impact) your attitude towards education? (Were there more opportunities to participate, to get attention from teachers, be involved in other activities?)

10. In what ways does uncertainty about your career path influence your attitude towards education?

PROBE: How do you hope to resolve that uncertainty be attending a community college?

Appendix C

Selected Influence Areas

Selected Influence Areas

- High School Experience
- College Involvement
- Access to College
- Childhood Educational Opportunities
- Established Goals
- Finance
- Social Status
- Peer Impact
- High School Size
- Uncertainty

Appendix D

IRB Approval Letter



December 20, 2012

Luke Stobel
Department of Educational Administration
230473 County Road R
Gering, NE 69341

Richard Hoover
Department of Educational Administration
119 TEAC, UNL, 68588-0360

IRB Number: 20121213133 EX
Project ID: 13133
Project Title: Thesis for Master's in Higher Educational Administration

Dear Luke:

This letter is to officially notify you of the certification of exemption 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: 12/20/2012.

1. The approved informed consent form has been uploaded to NUgrant (files with - Approved.pdf in the file name). Please use this form to distribute to participants. If you need to make changes to the informed consent form, please submit the revised form 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, CIP

for the IRB



Appendix E

Findings for Each Response on Likert Assessment

Table 6

Likert Assessment Findings

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q 1: High School Experience	22.7%	50%	18.2%	9.1%	0%
Q 2: High School Success	13.6%	45.5%	22.7%	18.2%	0%
Q 3: Extra-Curricular Participation	63.6%	31.8%	4.5%	0%	0%
Q 4: Membership in student or campus organization	72.7%	27.3%	0%	0%	0%
Q 5: Access to Higher Education	36.4%	59.1%	4.5%	0%	0%
Q 6: Location, Costs, Programs	45.5%	36.4%	13.6%	4.5%	0%
Q 7: Opportunities to Learn During Childhood	27.3%	45.5%	22.7%	4.5%	0%
Q 8: Access to Educational Opportunities During Childhood	4.5%	54.5%	13.6%	27.3%	0%
Q 9: Educational and Career Goals	72.7%	27.3%	0%	0%	0%
Q 10: Desire to Obtain those Educational Goals	90.9%	9.1%	0%	0%	0%
Q11: Financial Motivation	45.5%	36.4%	13.6%	0%	4.5%
Q 12: Desire for a Better Job	54.5%	45.5%	0%	0%	0%
Q 13: Achieving Comfortable Lifestyle	63.6%	22.7%	13.6%	0%	0%
Q 14: Higher Social Status	9.1%	18.2%	50%	18.2%	4.5%
Q 15: Peer Influence	0%	18.2%	31.8%	31.8%	18.2%
Q 16: Pressure from Peers	0%	0%	13.6%	63.6%	22.7%
Q 17: High School Size's Impact on Attitude	4.5%	9.1%	40.9%	36.4%	9.1%

Table 6 continues

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q 18: High School Size- Opportunity for help and attention	9.1%	27.2%	36.4%	27.2%	0%
Q 19: Career Path Uncertainty	22.7%	13.6%	22.7%	36.4%	4.5%
Q 20: Nothing Else to Do	0%	13.6%	9.1%	59.1%	18.2%

Appendix F

WNCC Approval Letter

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WNCC

PAGE 01



Western Nebraska
Community College

November 27, 2012

Dr. Richard Hoover
Senior Lecturer Educational Administration
University of Nebraska Lincoln
141 Teachers College Hall
Lincoln, NE 68588-0360

Dear Dr. Hoover,

Luke A. Stobel has requested using students at Western Nebraska Community College as research subjects for his thesis the "Impact of Student Attitudes on Development: An Examination of Ten Selected Factors that Impact Community College Student's Attitudes toward Education and Student Outcomes".

I had a chance prior to the Thanksgiving break to meet with Luke and he shared a copy of his Thesis proposal and his interest in this subject. Western Nebraska Community College grants him permission to conduct this research as outlined in his thesis proposal during the spring 2013 semester. I will serve as his contact at WNCC.

We look forward to his research here at Western Nebraska Community College and believe his research will be helpful to us in understanding our student's attitudes towards their education.

Sincerely,

Susan K. Yowell
Vice President of Student Services
Western Nebraska Community College
yowells@wncc.edu
308-635-6004

Appendix G

Informed Consent Sheet



Informed Consent Form

Dear students:

My name is Luke Stobel. I am conducting a study on influences affecting student attitudes towards higher education. If you are 19 years of age or older and are enrolled in at least one class at WNCC, you may participate in this research.

Explanation of Procedures: Participation in this study will require approximately 15 minutes for 14 students and an additional 30-40 minutes for 6 students selected to participate in the interview. You will be asked to take one assessment, ranking statements that describe your attitudes towards ten selected influences, and if you are selected for the interview portion, will be asked 10 different questions. Interview participants are selected randomly from those who completed the Likert Assessment. Participation will take place on campus at WNCC.

Possible Risks: There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research.

Benefits: The results of this study will examine what factors impact student attitudes towards education and their development as an individual. When examining the current issues facing higher education, particularly community colleges, with regard to retention and program completion, the information yielded from this study could be beneficial in many ways. This study will provide insight into factors that may impact community college students' attitudes towards education, and how that may in turn help or hinder their overall development and likelihood of persisting through their program. This could provide educators at the community college level a

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Department of Educational Administration

greater understanding of what could be done to help students remain enrolled until they complete their academic goals, whether that be an Associate's degree, a certificate, or transfer credits.

Confidentiality: Your responses to this survey will be kept anonymous and confidential. There will be no personal information required on either assessment, and even though no identifying information will be present, the results of the assessment will be kept in a locked and secure location at all times.

Opportunity to Ask Questions: You may ask any questions concerning this research anytime by contacting me at lstobel14@huskers.unl.edu or at 308-641-0574 or Dr. Richard Hoover at rhoover2@unl.edu or 402-472-3058. If you would like to speak to someone else, please call the Research Compliance Services Office at 402-472-6965 or irb@unl.edu.

Freedom to Withdraw: Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researchers or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln or Western Nebraska Community College in any other way receive a penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Consent, Right to Receive a Copy: You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. By signing below, your consent to participate is implied.

You should print a copy of this page for your records and bring the signed consent form when meeting for the assessment, or mailed to 717 West Overland, Scottsbluff, NE 69361.

Name and Signature of Student Participating

Name and Signature of Researcher

141 Teachers College Hall / P.O. Box 880360 / Lincoln, NE 68588-0360 / (402) 472-3726 / FAX (402) 472-4300

Appendix H

Interview Themes and Codes

Codes and Explanation of Consisting Themes, Patterns, and Categories

Code	Consisting Themes -Patterns -Categories
Strong Agreement (SA)	Consisted of words or phrases that indicated the student felt the selected influence area strongly impacted their attitude towards their education, such as “my attitude dramatically increased.”
Agreement (AG)	Consisted of words or phrases that indicated that the student acknowledged the selected influence area had some impact on their attitude but they didn’t express or use words that would indicate a very strong feeling, such as “I enjoyed high school; I thought that continuing my education would be good for me.”
Neutral (NU)	Consisted of words or phrases that indicated the student felt largely indifferent towards the selected influence area being discussed, such as “I can go back and forth on this” or “I didn’t even really think about it.”
Disagreement (DA)	Consisted of words or phrases that indicated the student was aware of the selected influence area and a slight impact that it may have had, but overall felt that the influence area did not affect their attitude, such as “Um, it didn’t have a huge impact on me” or “that wasn’t something I hugely considered as I was considering a college”
Strong Disagreement (SD)	Consisted of words or phrases that indicated the student felt strongly that the selected influence area being discussed had no existing impact on their attitude, for example, when discussing peer influence, “I already had my goals set in mind, whether my friends were going to follow me or not, that was their choice”

Appendix I

External Audit Attestation

External Audit Attestation
M. Thomas Perkins, Ph.D., LICSW

Audit Attestation:

I met with Luke Stobel in regards to his request for an external audit of his Master's project, entitled: "Impact of Student Attitudes on Development: An Examination of Ten Selected Factors that Impact Community College Students' Attitudes Towards Education and Student Outcomes." We reviewed the purpose of the study, the methods for conducting the study and its outcomes. The audit was conducted in April, 2013 and its purpose was to determine whether the model could be replicated in other similar circumstances.

Mr. Stobel presented several items for my review including:

- The IRB recruitment procedures and interview protocol
- The Research Proposal
- An explanation regarding the steps taken to ensure the privacy of the students who were interviewed
- The letter granting him permission to engage WNCC Students in the project
- The informed consent documents
- Notes related to the interviews
- The codes he developed related to the interview responses
- The final thesis, which includes student responses, an analysis of the responses and findings and conclusions related to the research project.

Having reviewed the material presented by Mr. Stobel, it is my opinion that this research project has value and could be expanded to include a large cohort of students from several community colleges. Among the issues that community college trustees and presidents are concerned about is to how to measure student satisfaction and the role such

satisfaction plays in student retention. The thesis may offer additional and valuable information for community colleges to use.

I recommend the acceptance of Mr. Stobel's Thesis by the graduate committee.

Sincerely,

M. Thomas Perkins, Ph.D., LICSW
1010 E. 35th St. Scottsbluff, NE 69361

Appendix J

Transcriptionist Confidentiality Agreement



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Department of Educational Administration

Transcriptionist Confidentiality Statement

I, Luke Stobel (name of transcriptionist), agree to hold all information contained on audio recorded tapes/ and in interviews received as the primary investigator for the study "Impact of Student Attitudes on Development: An Examination of Ten Selected Influences that Impact Community College Students' Attitudes Towards Education and Student Outcomes" in confidence with regard to the individual and institution involved in the research study. I understand that to violate this agreement would constitute a serious and unethical infringement on the informant's right to privacy.

I also certify that I have completed the CITI Limited Research Worker training in Human Research Protections.


Signature of Transcriptionist

2-16-13
Date