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# Examining Successful Retention Practices Of A Career College Dean Of Education

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EXAMINING SUCCESSFUL RETENTION PRACTICES OF A CAREER COLLEGE  
DEAN OF EDUCATION

By

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BA (Kent State University) 1990  
MAT (Kent State University) 1991

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Affiliated Faculty of

The College of Graduate and Professional Studies at the University of New England

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

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## Examining Successful Retention Practices of a Career College Dean of Education

### **Abstract**

This intrinsic case study examined retention practices utilized by a dean of education at a career college where student outcomes in retention and graduation met and exceeded the standards set forth by the institution's accrediting agency and the U.S. Department of Education. Furthermore, it seeks to understand how members of the campus leadership and faculty perceive and enact these retention practices. The guiding themes of the literature review were leadership in educational settings as related to the actions of successful educational leaders and how these actions influence student persistence and retention. Distributed and transformative leadership were of particular importance. This study had a total of eighteen participants. The dean of education and the campus president were interviewed individually, while the peers of the dean of education, the programs directors, and faculty members were interviewed in four focus groups. Interviews were recorded through an online meeting service, and transcribed by the researcher. Overall, three themes emerged from the data analysis procedure: (a) focusing campus culture on retention, (b) understanding student needs through individual engagement, and (c) engaging program directors and faculty through distributed leadership. The retention initiatives and leadership actions of the dean of education are important to several stakeholders within the educational organization and each career college campus, including educational leadership, faculty, and perhaps most significantly, retention efforts are important to the student.

University of New England

Doctor of Education  
Educational Leadership

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	3
Purpose of the study.....	7
Research Questions.....	8
Conceptual framework.....	9
Assumptions and Limitations .....	12
Rationale and Significance .....	14
Definitions.....	15
Summary.....	16
Organization of the Remainder of the Dissertation .....	17
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	18
Criteria for Review .....	19
Leadership Approaches.....	20
Servant Leadership Approach.....	21
Transformational Leadership Approach .....	22
Transformative Leadership Approach .....	25
Distributed Leadership Approach.....	26
Leadership in Educational Settings.....	26
Actions of Successful Educational Leaders in Relation to Student Outcomes.....	27
In K-12 settings.....	29
At career colleges and community colleges.....	31
With regard to persistence.....	32

With regard to retention .....	32
Theoretical Framework.....	33
Summary.....	37
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY .....	39
Rationale for Research Approach .....	40
Methodology.....	40
Guiding Questions .....	41
Setting.....	42
Participant Selection .....	43
Data.....	44
Participant Rights.....	46
Methods and Procedures for Data Analysis.....	47
Limitations .....	48
Summary.....	49
CHAPTER FOUR: DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS.....	50
Administration and Faculty Participants.....	52
Analysis Method .....	54
Presentation of Results.....	56
Emergent Themes .....	59
Theme 1: Focusing Campus Culture on Retention .....	61
Directing retention efforts in career services.....	62
Directing retention efforts in admissions.....	62
Theme 2: Understanding Student Needs through Individual Engagement.....	63



Engaging in academic advising .....	63
Utilizing tutoring.....	68
Creating student centered learning.....	69
Contacting absent students.....	70
Theme 3: Engaging Program Directors and Faculty through Distributed Leadership .....	71
Empowering action in others. ....	72
Summary .....	73
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSIS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....</b>	<b>77</b>
Review of the Study.....	77
Research Questions .....	78
Interpretation of Findings .....	80
Finding 1: Retention was a Focus of Campus Culture .....	82
Finding 2: Academic Advising was the Primary Retention Action.....	83
Finding 3: Distributed Leadership was used in Implementing Retention Initiatives.....	85
Implications.....	87
Recommendations.....	89
Exception to Recommendations .....	91
Recommendations for Further Study .....	92
Conclusion .....	93
References.....	94
Appendix A: University of New England Exemption from IRB Review and Oversight.....	103
Appendix B: University of New England Consent for Participation in Research .....	104
Appendix C: Interview Guide for Dean of Education .....	107

Appendix D: Interview Guide for Focus Group Interviews .....	107
Appendix E: Rocks in the Road Survey .....	109
Appendix F: Staying on Track Survey.....	110
Appendix G: Mid Mod Assessment.....	111
Appendix H: Academic Advising Form .....	112
Appendix I: Academic Advising Model .....	113

**LIST OF TABLES**

1. Background Profile of Interviewees.....54

2. Examples of Emergent Themes.....76

**LIST OF FIGURES**

1. Emergent Themes.....61

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Career colleges hold a unique place in the world of higher education. They are typically defined as for-profit institutions that offer programs that focus on workplace skills. These programs often require a certificate or license for employment, and include beauty, health care, trades, and computer technology (Papandrea, 2012). The programs offered at career colleges are designed to appeal to working adults, with times and locations convenient for working adults; for example, evening classes held at “malls near the intersections of interstates” (Bailey, Baday & Gumport, 2005, p. 9). At the same time, career colleges offer educational opportunities to students that are “traditionally underserved by other institutions, including minority and non-traditional students” (JBL Associates, Inc, 2014, p. 8). Furthermore, they provide developmental services, career development strategies, and employment assistance (Bailey et al, 2005). Career colleges offer education and training to a diverse student population while preparing them for employment in their chosen fields.

Career colleges enrolled 3.7 million students in the United States in the 2012-2013 academic year, and made up 48% of institutions eligible to participate in federal student aid programs (JBL Associates, Inc., 2014). Most students attending career colleges enroll in certificate, diploma, or associate degree programs. The student body is typically comprised of independent students, working parents, and low-income individuals. Many are ethnic minorities. Often the students come from families where parents have less than a high school education (JBL Associates, Inc., 2014). Due to these socio-economic factors, most career college students participate in federal financial aid and student loan programs. These same socio-economic factors are viewed as risk factors that can interfere with student retention and graduation.

Because of their socio-economic backgrounds, students at career colleges are more at risk of dropping out than those who attend traditional colleges. Risk factors include delaying enrollment in higher education after high school, enrollment without a high school diploma, less than full-time enrollment, financial independence without parental support, incidence of single parenthood and full-time employment while enrolled in college (JBL Associates, Inc., 2014). “[Forty-nine percent] of career college students have 3-4 risk factors versus 18% at public institutions and 17% at private, not-for-profit institutions” (JBL Associates, Inc., 2014, p. 25). In order to support these students, career colleges focus on retaining student by providing academic and career development services to help students persist and graduate (Bailey et al, 2005). The focus on retention and student services at career colleges is reflected in retention and graduation rates. Of students enrolled at both career colleges and community two-year colleges, 63% of students enrolled in career colleges earned a degree after six years of enrollment as compared to 21% of students enrolled in public community colleges (JBL Associates, Inc., 2014).

Because of the risk factors above associated with students enrolled in career colleges, the dean of education at a career college must address the needs for academic support so that students can persist and graduate. Academic support includes student advising regarding academics, attendance and behavior/professionalism, tutoring for both didactic and lab courses, support services for personal issues including childcare, transportation and living arrangements (Bailey et al 2005). However, the relationship between academic support as it affects student retention and graduation rates in career colleges is little studied. The career college sector plays an important role in training individuals for employment opportunities, and educates millions of students each year, yet the career college sector has not received the benefit of research relating educational leadership to student achievement. This study examines retention practices utilized

by a dean of education at a career college where student outcomes in retention and graduation met standards set forth by the campus' accreditor and the U.S. Department of Education, and to understand how campus leadership and faculty perceive and enact these retention practices.

#### **Statement of the Problem**

Career colleges are a rapidly changing part of higher education. In recent years, pressures from outside regulatory bodies have increased. In July 2010, the U.S. Education Department of Education proposed a new rule on metrics for repayment rates and debt-to-income ratios, along with a revised process for new program approval that included projected student enrollment and impartial employer statement regarding existing in-field employment opportunities of the proposed program (Epstein, 2010). This was followed by the release of “Program Integrity: Gainful Employment – New Program Regulations” in October 2010, which established measures for determining whether new programs eligible for title IV federal financial aid funding lead to gainful employment (Program Integrity: Gainful Employment—New Programs, 2010). These regulations articulated metrics for programs offered at career colleges with the goal of ensuring students enrolled in these programs were prepared for gainful employment. As *Inside Higher Ed* reported at the time: “More than ever before, the department emphasized...that for-profit higher education was its target” (Epstein, 2010, para 3).

Additional gainful employment regulations from the U.S. Department of Education took effect July 1, 2015. According to the Department of Education, the regulations “support greater accountability for colleges by requiring institutions to provide key information on program costs, whether students graduate, how much they earn, and how much debt they may accumulate” (“Fact sheet: Obama,” 2015, para. 3). The gainful employment regulations are:

...A framework with three components: certification requirements, accountability metrics, and public disclosures. The [regulations distinguish] programs that provide affordable

training that leads to well-paying jobs from those programs that leave students with poor earnings prospects and relatively high amounts of debt, or which lead to high student loan default rates. (“Obama Administration,” 2014, para. 14)

The Obama administration also pressured accrediting bodies into taking a more active role in the prevention of loan defaults of students enrolled the colleges they approve. Although traditionally accreditors are primarily concerned with the quality of education provided, accreditors of career colleges are increasing the minimum standards for fiduciary responsibility, program implementation, and instructional resources (Kelderman, 2010). These minimum standards include college cost, graduation, debt, and post-college earnings based on the type program completed (“Fact sheet: Empowering,” 2015).

In addition to enacting the stricter regulations for career colleges, the U.S. Department of Education fined the owners of several career college groups, including Corinthian Colleges. Corinthian Colleges owned and operated Everest, Heald College and WyoTech schools, and was fined \$30 million in April 2015 for falsifying graduate job placement data (Douglas-Gabriel, 2015). This was just one of the actions against Corinthian Colleges. In 2014, as part of the agreement with the U.S. Department of Education, Corinthian Colleges agreed to close 12 campuses and sell another 85 campuses after an investigation into practices regarding job placement, attendance and record keeping (Quinlan, 2015).

It is not only the U.S. Department of Education reviewing the practices of career colleges. Several states have filed lawsuits against career colleges. California’s attorney general sued Corinthian Colleges in 2013 for deceptive advertising practices (Quinlan, 2015). In July 2015, the attorney general of Massachusetts settled lawsuits against two other career college groups, Kaplan Career Institute and Lincoln Technical Institute, for violations of admission standards



and misrepresentation of job placement numbers (Mehrotra, 2015). As part of the settlement, both Kaplan and Lincoln agreed to make cash payments to eligible former students, and to forgive private loans made to these students (Mehrotra, 2015). In another case, Minnesota's attorney general sued Globe University for misrepresenting job opportunities available after graduation (Qunilan, 2015).

In response to the increased pressure from the U.S. Department of Education and from states' attorneys general, and less than two weeks after being fined \$30 million, Corinthian Colleges closed all of its campuses, while thousands of students were still enrolled (Quinlan, 2015). In June and July 2015, at least three other education companies, DeVry Education Group, Career Education Corporation, and Education Management Corporation, announced the closure of some campuses (Grasgreen, 2015). For Career Education Corporation, these closures are in addition to the 2014 announcement which closed the 16-campus Le Cordon Bleu culinary school chain (Grasgreen, 2015). Hundreds of career college campuses have closed in recent years ("Postsecondary Education," 2015), and at least some of these campus closings are in response to not meeting U.S. Department of Education mandates. "Career Education Corp. directly called out the gainful employment rule when it announced it would drop some campuses" (Grasgreen, 2015, para. 50).

Perhaps as a result of the negative publicity from fines, lawsuits, and closures, many career colleges have experienced a decrease in student enrollment (Fain, 2014). Enrollments at career colleges are down 20 percent since 2010 (Grasgreen, 2015). The decrease in student enrollment equates to a decreased need for staff and faculty leading to either layoffs or, in some cases, the closure of campus. In July 2015, Education Management Corporation and Apollo, announced job cuts of 300 and 600 jobs respectively (Grasgreen, 2015).

The increased pressure career colleges face from the U.S. Department of Education, the U.S. Department of Justice, and the attorneys-general of several states leads to the ever greater need for career colleges to address the needs of students so they persist, graduate and obtain in-field employment. Although the regulatory environment for career colleges is demanding change, the career college sector believes a conflict exists between the U.S. Department of Education regulation and overall access to higher education, especially by the at-risk population served by career colleges (Hentschke & Parry, 2015). The career college sector argues that the high-risk students they serve may have an increased need for federal financial aid dollars and may be less likely to repay loans; nonetheless, these students deserve access to education that meets their educational needs. Even so, the career college sector must comply with the regulations. In their research on the response of for-profit colleges and universities to the increased regulations by the U.S. Department of Education, Hentschke and Parry (2015) identified initiatives at career colleges that included higher standards in admissions requirements, tuition and fee reduction, an increased emphasis on work-related experiences (such as externship), and increasing staff available for both academic support and job placement.

These are examples of changes in the career college sector caused by external pressures. As Kotter (2012) points out that an increase in outside forces result in "...more and more organizations [being] pushed to reduce costs, improve quality of products and services, locate new opportunities for growth, and increase productivity" (p. 3). Further examples in the career colleges include the decrease in student enrollment that caused a decrease in the need for administration, staff and faculty, and a corresponding increase on demands of the remaining administrators, including the dean of education. These changes are causing the career college sector to reorganize from within. "All of us, even in rigid organizations, have experienced self-

organization, times when we recreate ourselves, not according to some idealized plan, but because the environment demands it” (Wheatley, 2006, p. 24).

In order to explore possible actions for meeting the challenges within the career college sector, this study examined retention practices utilized by a dean of education at a career college where student outcomes in retention and graduation met standards set forth by the campus’ accreditor and the U.S. Department of Education. In response to the increased pressure from the U.S. Department of Education and accreditors, as well as intense financial stresses and decreases in enrollment, educational leadership at career colleges must develop and utilize leadership skills that lead to successful student outcomes in retention, graduation, licensure, employment and potential earnings.

#### **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this intrinsic case study was to examine retention practices utilized by a dean of education at a career college where student outcomes in retention and graduation met and exceeded the standards set forth by the institution’s accrediting agency and the U.S. Department of Education, and to understand how campus leadership and faculty perceive and enact these retention practices. Several studies demonstrate that educational leadership can lead to successful student outcomes (Hallenger, 2003; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999; Love, Trammell, & Cartner, 2010; McComis, 2006; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008; Robinson, 2008; Zito, 2013). However, there are limited studies that examine leadership in career colleges as it relates to student outcomes in retention and graduation, and the research that exists is primarily available through dissertations (Hiatt, 2010; McComis, 2006; Zito, 2013).

Sanzo, Sherman, and Clayton (2011) stated a need for studies linking leadership actions to job performance, as there appears to be a lack of research in successful practices to improve student achievement. Mahdinezhad, Suandi, Silong, and Omar (2013) expressed a need to

conduct future studies on how transformational leadership affects job performance. Both studies point to a lack of research that looks at leadership skills in relation to successful student outcomes in retention and graduation.

Educational leadership at career colleges must enact practices that lead to successful student outcomes in retention and graduation. This study bridges the gap in research examining how leadership skills lead to successful student outcomes by examining the retention practices utilized by a dean of education at a career college where student outcomes in retention and graduation met and exceeded standards of the campus' accreditor and the U.S. Department of Education.

#### **Research Questions**

In an effort to examine the retention practices utilized by a dean of education at a career college where student outcomes in retention and graduation met standards set forth by the campus' accreditor and the U.S. Department of Education, and to understand and how such practices were understood by her supervisor, peers, and those who report to her, the following research questions were developed to direct the study:

1. How do program directors and faculty perceive and enact the retention practices employed by the dean of education at a career college where student outcomes in retention and graduation met standards set forth by the campus' accreditor and the U.S. Department of Education?
2. How does campus leadership perceive and enact the retention practices employed by the dean of education at a career college where student outcomes in retention and graduation met standards set forth by the campus' accreditor and the U.S. Department of Education?

In addition, these principal questions were supported by the following question:

3. How do program directors, faculty, and campus leadership recognize the leadership actions of the dean of education as contributing to student retention?

#### **Conceptual framework**

A conceptual framework is an argument for a topic that includes why the topic is chosen, how the research is conducted, and what theoretical framework for the topic is. It is an instrument that provides coherence to a study, a tool that helps resolve any ambiguity and confusion that arises during the process, and a way to define and explain the study (Ravitch & Riggan, 2012). It is a cyclical process where the conceptual framework is influenced by the research process, and also influences the research process (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

According to Ravitch and Riggan (2012), the way a researcher executes a study is a reflection of how the researcher thinks about it. This study first explores how pressures from the U.S. Department of Education and accrediting bodies have changed the environment for career colleges and how these pressures have increased the demands on educational leadership to create an environment where standards for student outcomes must be met. Programs that do not meet the standards set by regulations "...Would be at risk of losing their ability to participate in taxpayer-funded federal student aid programs" ("Fact sheet: Obama,"2015, para. 4). The regulations from the U.S. Department of Education have created a difficult operating environment. Meeting the regulations may require change, and change provides opportunities to build stronger programs with student outcomes that meet and exceed standards. Wheatley (2006) states that "...Any open system has the capacity to respond to change and disorder by reorganizing itself at a higher level of organization" (p.12).

The conceptual framework has changed throughout the research process. Ravitch and Riggan (2012) emphasized that the research process is non-linear and iterative. As the literature is reviewed and research is conducted, understanding may change or new ideas may present

themselves for study. This has caused changes in the research question, which then influenced the conceptual framework.

The literature review was conducted to explore and document the current conversation about the subject and related issues, to determine how to add to the conversation, and to identify the best theory and methods to use (Ravitch & Riggan, 2012). This literature review looked at effective leadership actions of educational leadership as they affect student outcomes, with a review of educational leaders in K-12, community colleges, and career colleges. Successful educational leadership has been linked to good student outcomes (Hallenger, 2003; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999; Love, Trammell, & Cartner, 2010; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008; Robinson, 2008). Since there is a link between educational leadership and student outcomes, there is a need to examine the actions of a successful dean of education at a career college where standards of the campus' accreditor and the U.S. Department of Education for retention and graduation outcomes were met and exceeded.

Strong leadership by a dean of education is needed in order to meet minimum student outcomes in retention and graduation as required by the U.S. Department of Education regulations; however, this leadership requires each team member's participation in the planning and implementation of tasks to successfully react to these changes. Carroll and Wolverson (2004) demonstrated that the majority of strategic decisions are made at the department level. Robinson (2008) showed that effective leadership looks at both the performance of tasks and the exchange between leaders and followers in the graduation of the task. Leaders and followers are interconnected. "Individual behaviors co-evolve as individuals interact with system dynamics. If we want to change individual or local behaviors, we have to tune into these system-wide influence" (Wheatley, 2006, p. 142).

The researcher's engagement with the literature shaped the research design and helped identify a theoretical framework (Ravitch & Riggan, 2012). This study used a post-positivist framework to examine retention practices utilized by a dean of education at a career college where student outcomes in retention and graduation met and exceeded standards of the campus' accreditor and the U.S. Department of Education regulations. In practice, post-positivist researchers view inquiry as a series of logically related steps, believe in multiple perspectives from participants rather than a single reality, and espouse rigorous methods of qualitative data collection and analysis" (Creswell, 2013, p 24). Post-positivism holds that the process of understanding requires that one simply describes the phenomena as it is experienced. The purpose of research is to note what can be observed and measured. The positivist approach relies on the assumption that anything beyond what can be observed and measured cannot be known (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). The post-positivist approach, "...with its goal of discerning the statistical regularities of behavior, is oriented toward counting the occurrences and measuring the extent of the behaviors being studied" (Wildemuth, 1993, p. 451).

In the post-positivist view, research is used to find the "truth," and to understand the ideas being researched well enough to develop a hypothesis and predict outcomes. The theory developed can then be tested and revised as needed. Post-positivists use the scientific method in the attempt to understand the research subject through direct manipulation and observation. "Research is concerned with causal relationship, and the aim is to advance the relationship between variables" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 28). The research in this study was concerned with the causal relationship between the retention practices of the dean of education at a career college and their student outcomes that met and exceeded standards set by accreditors and the

U.S. Department of Education. The post-positivist framework provided a lens to view this relationship.

In order to find the truth and to understand the retention practices utilized, an intrinsic case study approach was used. This methodology was chosen because the researcher is interested in a particular case, one that is intrinsically interesting (Stake, 1995; Merriam, 2009). In this case study, the actions of one dean of education as they relate to the implementation of the retention practices were intrinsically interesting. Understanding retention practices is important as they result in outcomes that met and exceeded required standards, and the goal of meeting and exceeding student outcomes in career colleges is increasingly important due external regulations (Epstein, 2010). Additionally, understanding the leadership actions of the dean is important. As Robinson, Lloyd and Rowe (2008) and Sirkis (2011) demonstrated, leadership impacts the success of an organization. Also of inherent interest are the perceptions of the program directors, faculty, peers of the dean of education and the campus president. The perceptions of these individuals are important in understanding how the retention practices are enacted. Developing a conceptual framework was a process, and the conceptual framework matured along with the research.

#### **Assumptions and Limitations**

Due to the nature of qualitative research, it is important for the researcher to understand and acknowledge the inherent limitations and assumptions which are made in the process of conducting the study. Assumptions are ideas relative to the study that are presumed to be true, and from which conclusions may be drawn (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Roberts, 2010). This study examined retention practices utilized by a dean of education at a career college where student outcomes in retention and graduation met and exceeded standards set forth by the campus' accreditor and the U.S. Department of Education regulations. Perhaps the most



overarching assumption of this study was that in order to successfully meet retention and graduation outcomes, the dean of education would demonstrate some aspects of transformative and/or distributed leadership. This assumption was based on the premise that educational leadership works best when the leadership capacity of the education department is developed. This idea leads to the assumption that educational leadership must be seen as the collective activities of all individuals within a department, who then become leaders, both formal and informal. An assumption was also made that participants would be forthcoming and honest in relating their experiences. This assumption was based on the idea that the participants would share their perceptions of the actions taken to retain students. As Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) state, while these perceptions are not facts, they are what the participants perceive as facts, and these facts will be communicated in a truthful manner.

Limitations of this study included the utilization of an intrinsic case study approach. Findings in an intrinsic case study may not be applicable to other similar environments because the study is of only one specific case and may not be representative of other similar cases (Baxter & Jack, 2008). However, Stake (1995) stated that while an intrinsic case study should not be to understand a specific phenomenon, this approach may be used to understand the phenomenon. So while an intrinsic case study is not designed to understand a phenomenon, the results may be used to understand the phenomenon.

A second limitation to the study was that the researcher was biased by her theoretical approach, cultural experiences, and worldviews, and had existing opinions regarding effective retention practices. Objectivity is an important part of inquiry, and a lack of objectivity can affect the reliability and validity of a study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). The researcher had predetermined opinions concerning the types of retention efforts which successfully affect

student retention. To battle these biases, the researcher cautiously documented the research process and engaged in triangulation to verify the data collected. Triangulation refers to using multiple sources of data, and comparing and cross-checking this data (Merriam, 2009). Triangulating the sources of data built a reliable picture of the data by utilizing multiple observers to overcome the researcher's biases, and the biases of any single participant.

### **Rationale and Significance**

Studies of educational leadership showed that leadership impacts the success of an organization, and that effective leadership provides a shared vision towards a common goal (Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008; Sirkis, 2011). The goal of meeting and exceeding student retention and graduation outcomes in career colleges is increasingly important due to U.S. Department of Education regulations. Consequently, understanding the relationship between leadership and student retention and graduation outcomes in career colleges was critical to recognizing how career colleges may use educational leadership to achieve successful student outcomes.

This study sought to examine retention practices utilized by a dean of education at a career college where student outcomes in retention and graduation met and exceed standards set forth by the campus' accreditor and the U.S. Department of Education regulations, and to understand how campus leadership and faculty perceive and enact these retention practices. It also sought to document the perceptions of not only the dean of education, but the program directors, faculty, peers of the dean of education and the campus president in relation to their ideas on what retention practices are important. The expectation was that the findings from this study be used to develop retention practices used at other career colleges. Additionally, the study's findings may inform the hiring and training practices of career colleges in need of a dean of education.

### Definitions

For the purposes of this study, the following definitions were used:

**Career College** – A private, post-secondary, educational institution that offers vocational and career oriented programs of study. These programs include both non-degree and degree programs up to the baccalaureate degree level. Career colleges are also referred to as private career colleges, proprietary schools, and for-profit schools (JBL Associates, Inc., 2014).

**Dean of Education** – the leadership of the education department at the career college where the study was conducted. The Dean of Education oversees only the education department, program directors, faculty, and program delivery.

**Distributed Leadership** – a leadership approach that looks at how work is shared among individuals in an organization. Instead of focusing on the characteristics of a leader or the facets of a situation, distributed leadership looks at how each team member participates in the development, implementation and graduation of tasks (Hallenger, 2003).

**Graduation Rate** – “the progress of students who began their studies as full-time, first-time degree- or certificate-seeking students to see if they complete a degree or other award such as a certificate within 150% of ‘normal time’ for completing the program in which they are enrolled” (“U.S. Department,” 2015, Overall Graduation Rate section, para. 1).

**Persistence** – “The rate at which students attending postsecondary education institutions remain enrolled in that institution or another institution. Persistence can be measured in terms of whether a student remains enrolled full time or is simply enrolled at least part time” (JBL Associates, Inc., 2014, p 36).

**Retention** – “A system put in place by an institution which facilitates those students who enter a program, complete it” (“Accreditation Manual,” 2015, p. 225).

**Student Achievement Outcomes** – the rates at which students persist in a program, graduate, obtain certification, and are employed in the field related to the program of study (Bailey et al 2005).

**Transformative Leadership** – a leadership approach that challenges the existing structure of an organization and acknowledges disparities outside of the organization that can affect the success of individuals, groups, and the entire organization (Shields, 2010).

### Summary

The career college sector trains hundreds of thousands of students each year for a variety of employment opportunities. Students attending career colleges have a number of socio-economic factors that may interfere with their persistence and graduation of a program (JBL Associates, Inc., 2014). These students have a need for academic support, including student advising, tutoring and support services for personal issues including childcare, transportation and living arrangements.

The dean of education at a career college must address the need for academic support so that students can persist and graduate. However, the relationship between academic support as it affects student retention and graduation rates in career colleges is little studied. The career college sector plays an important role in training for employment opportunities, yet the career college sector has not received the benefit of research relating educational leadership to student achievement. This study examines retention practices utilized by a dean of education at a career college where student outcomes in retention and graduation met and exceeded standards set forth by the campus' accreditor and the U.S. Department of Education. Career colleges are responding to increased pressure from the U.S. Department of Education while maintaining adherence to accreditors and state approval bodies. With an increased emphasis on student

outcomes, it is important to examine educational leadership in career colleges as it relates to student retention and graduation.

#### **Organization of the Remainder of the Dissertation**

The remainder of this dissertation is divided into four chapters. Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature concerning effective leadership actions of educational leadership as they affect student outcomes, with a review of educational leaders in K-12, community colleges, and career colleges. Chapter 3 focuses on the design and methodology used for this study. Chapter 4 encompasses the findings of the intrinsic case study conducted at one Career College. Finally, Chapter 5 provides a summary of the findings, and proposes conclusions and recommendation for further study.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Career colleges are a rapidly changing part of higher education. In recent years, pressures from outside regulatory bodies have increased. In July 2010, The U.S. Education Department of Education proposed a new rule on metrics for repayment rates and debt-to-income ratios, as well as a revised process for new program approval that included projected student enrollment and impartial employer statement regarding existing in-field employment opportunities of the proposed program (Epstein, 2010). In October 2010, the U.S. Department of Education released “Program Integrity: Gainful Employment – New Program Regulations”. These regulations established measurements for determining whether new programs eligible for title IV federal financial aid funding lead to gainful employment (“Program Integrity,” 2010). They also established measurements for programs offered at career colleges with the goal of ensuring students enrolled in these programs were prepared for gainful employment.

An additional regulation from the U.S. Department of Education took effect July 1, 2015. This regulation was created to increase accountability for career colleges by requiring they report information on program costs, student graduation rates, earnings upon graduation and employment, and the amount of debt a student accumulates while enrolled (“Fact sheet: Obama,” 2015). The gainful employment regulations are devised to be a framework of metrics provided to students that demonstrate a program is affordable and leads to well-paying jobs (“Obama Administration,” 2014).

The requirements from the U.S. Department of Education add to existing requirements of accreditors and approval bodies with which campuses need to comply. These regulations have forced changes throughout the career college structure, including all levels of management.

These changes then created a greater need for educational leadership to develop and utilize leadership actions that lead to successful student outcomes in retention, graduation, licensure and employment.

#### **Criteria for Review**

To conduct this specific literature review, books, dissertations, professional journals and periodicals were used. The process of locating articles began by using the ProQuest database with a search of keywords that included leadership, transformative leadership, servant leadership, transformational leadership, organizational performance, principal, achievement, student outcomes, career colleges, proprietary college, leaders, followers, and characteristics. Articles were first limited to peer-reviewed and published since 1995. As articles were chosen and read, resources for the first articles were reviewed and a list of possible resources developed. Additional articles were reviewed if they appeared in the literature reviews of studies, or if they were known to be important to the development of leadership theory. Published dissertations were included if they addressed leadership aspects at career colleges (also referred to in the literature as trade schools, proprietary schools, postsecondary vocational education, or for-profit schools) since journal articles on this topic within leadership theory were not widely available. A ProQuest search of Leadership + Career Colleges resulted in one relevant journal article and one relevant dissertation, and a search of Leadership + Career Colleges + Student Outcomes resulted in three relevant dissertations. It should be noted that although these resources did pertain to leadership at career colleges, they addressed campus president leadership, and did not specifically address leadership within the education department.

The literature review begins with a summary of several leadership approaches, including servant leadership, transformational leadership, transformative leadership, and distributed leadership. It then looks at the actions of successful educational leaders in K-12 settings, and at

career colleges and community colleges. Finally, successful educational leadership is viewed with regard to persistence and retention. The literature review also notes when ideas converged, as well as when gaps emerged.

### **Leadership Approaches**

The purpose of this literature review was to examine the effective leadership actions of educational leadership as they affect student outcomes, with a review of educational leaders in K-12, community colleges, and career colleges. Because of the lack of research related to educational leadership at career colleges, and because there are similarities in student population between community colleges and career colleges, leadership at community colleges was important to this literature review.

Successful educational leadership has been linked to good student outcomes (Hallenger, 2003; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999; Love, Trammell, & Cartner, 2010; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008; Robinson, 2008). Since there was a link between educational leadership and student outcomes, there was a need to examine the actions of a successful dean of education at a career college where successful educational leadership was linked to good student outcomes in terms of retention, graduation, licensure, employment and earning in a field related to the diploma or degree earned. Defining these leadership actions may offer insight into how leadership skills of deans of education can be developed.

The objectives of this literature review were (a) to identify key leadership actions noted in the literature; (b) to show how key leadership actions relate to good student outcomes; and (c) to demonstrate the need to investigate leadership actions at of deans of education at career colleges as they relate to good student outcomes. The sections on leadership review leadership actions from the point of view of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 2008; Hays, 2008; Smith, Montango & Kuzemenko, 2004), transformational leadership (Burns, 1978; Avolio & Bass,



1991; Bass, 1990), transformative leadership (Fullan, 2007; Shields, 2010), and distributed leadership (Hallenger, 2003; Spillane, Halverson and Diamond, 2004; Robinson, 2008). These actions were then viewed as they apply to educational leadership in the K-12 setting, community colleges, and career colleges, with specific interest in how leadership actions lead to successful student outcomes, with particular interest in persistence and retention (Hallenger, 2003; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999; JBL Associates, Inc., 2014; Love, Trammell, & Cartner, 2010; McComis, 2006; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008; Robinson, 2008; McClenney, 2007; Sirkis, 2011; Somerville, 2008).

### **Servant Leadership Approach**

The idea of the leader as servant derives from Lao-Tzu in the *Tao Te Ching*. “The sage has no mind of his own. He takes as his own the mind of the people” (Lau, 1963, p. 110). Heider (1997) used Lao-Tzu’s text in describing a leader as needing followers to serve. In *The Servant as Leader*, first published in 1970, Greenleaf created the term servant-leader. A servant-leader attends to followers within the organization and is a steward of available resources while meeting fiscal goals. The highest priority of the servant-leader is the needs of those being served understanding that followers respond to leaders who are dependable as servants (Greenleaf, 2008). Servant leadership philosophy advocates developing people, creating a work environment that attracts and retains talented workers, and encouraging followers to lead (Wong & Davey, 2007; Kahl & Donelan, 2004). Spears (2010) named ten traits of servant-leaders, including listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community. Although this list is not meant to be complete, these ten characteristics are meant to “communicate the power and promise that this concept offers to those who are open to its invitation and challenge” (Spears, 2010, p. 29).

Hays (2008) looked at servant leadership in the classroom to determine the central traits of the teacher as servant-leader. Among the important characteristics were listening, empathy, persuasion, and a focus on building a community (Hays, 2008, p. 117). Smith, Montango and Kuzemenko (2004) examined similarities of transformational and servant leadership theories, and analyzed areas in which the two theories intersect. “Servant leadership creates a communal productive environment, and transformational leadership creates an empowered interactive environment” (Smith, Montango & Kuzemenko, 2014, p. 89). The two types of leadership are points on a continuum. One mode may be more appropriate than the other for an organization depending on the organization’s objectives, with high change environments needing a transformational leadership culture, and static environments needing a servant leadership culture (Smith, Montango & Duzemenko, 2014). Hiatt (2010) also found that using of a variety of leadership styles, including servant, situational and transactional can be an effective leadership method, even though it is not strictly a servant-leadership style.

A servant-leader focuses on followers within the organization whose highest priority is to meet the needs of those followers. The servant-leader understands that followers respond to leaders who are dependable as servants (Greenleaf, 2008). A servant leader listens to followers, conceptualizes the path needed to reach a goal, commits to helping followers grow in ways needs to reach a goal, and builds the community needed to reach a goal (Spears, 2010). Servant leadership can produce a communal productive environment, while transformational leadership produces an empowered interactive environment (Smith, Montango & Kuzemenko, 2014). Both types of leadership can be practiced by a leader to reach the desired outcomes.

#### **Transformational Leadership Approach**

Leadership theory is often a description of leadership characteristics as they relate to the decision making process. Leadership in this environment often consists of the leader telling the

follower what needs to be done. This type of leadership is known as transactional leadership, and has an inherent leader-follower dichotomy. Harris, Day and Hopkins (2002) define transactional leadership theory as “doing something for, to and on behalf of others” (p. 16). Tasks are delegated to followers for completion. Transactional leadership emphasizes procedures and hard data as part of the decision making process. The role of the leader is focus on the organizational goals, and to assist the followers to recognize tasks that need to be completed in order to reach the goals (McComis, 2006; Smith, Montagno & Kuzmenko, 2004; Mahdinezhad et al, 2013).

However, in order to create a dynamic organization, leadership can be more than transactional; it can be transformational. Burns (1978), Bass (1990), Avolio, and Bass, (1991), Bennis and Nanus (2007), Fullan (2007) and Shields (2010) contribute to the theory of transformational leadership. Burns (1978) distinguished between transactional and transformational leadership, and linked transformational leadership to the culture of the organization wherein the leadership has the potential to change the culture in which people work.

Avolio and Bass (1991) see a need to use both transactional leadership and transformational leadership styles depending on the needs of the organization. Bass (1990) states that:

Superior leadership performance – transformational leadership – occurs when leaders broaden and elevate the interests of their employees, when they generate awareness and acceptance of the purposes and mission of the group, and when they stir their employees to look beyond their own self-interest for the good of the group. (p. 19)

A transformational leader develops and articulates a vision (Garcia, Duncan, Carmody-Bubb, & Ree, 2014; Valentine & Prater, 2011). “A transformational leader must have the ability

to coagulate their vision with a strategic plan for design and implementation” (McKnight, 2013, p. 107). The vision of the transformational leader is important to the followers in order to successfully implement change. The vision illuminates the overall course for change, inspires action, and aligns the actions of followers. Sirkis’ (2011) research supported the importance of sharing the responsibility of implementing vision with department chairs at community colleges. “Execution of the vision and strategy can then be handled in smaller, more manageable pieces, relying upon faculty subgroups” (Sirkis, 2011, p.55).

Robinson, Lloyd and Rowe (2008), demonstrated a connection between higher achieving schools and leadership that took ownership of a goal and made that goal of central importance to the school. In addition, Burns (1978), Konorti (2012), Brown, Bryant and Reilly (2006), and Mahdinezhad et al., (2013) emphasized the need for transformational leaders to motivate, empower, and inspire their followers. “Finally, and most importantly by far, leaders address themselves to followers’ wants, needs and other motivations, as well as their own, and thus they serve as an *independent force in changing the makeup of the followers’ motive base through gratifying their motives*” (Burns, 1978, p. 20). Educational leaders can exhibit transformative, servant, and transformational leadership styles and achieve successful outcomes (Hallenger, 2003; Hiatt, 2010).

Transformative leadership focuses on the moral values and the actions of a leader. The leader’s emphasis on the organizational goals helps followers to recognize tasks that need to be completed in order to reach the goals (McComis, 2006; Smith, Montagno & Kuzmenko, 2004; Mahdinezhad et al, 2013). Additionally, the vision of the transformational leader is important to the followers as it provides the overall course for change, inspires action, and aligns the actions of followers. Robinson, Lloyd and Rowe (2008) demonstrated a connection between

the actions of a leader who took ownership of a goal, made the goal central to the success of a school, and student achievement. Hallenger (2003) and Hiatt (2010) showed that educational leaders can utilize transformative, servant, and transformational leadership styles and achieve successful outcomes when acting in ways that included followers in reaching the desired goals.

### **Transformative Leadership Approach**

The transformative leadership perspective focuses on the moral values and the activities of a leader. Fullan (2007) states, "...moral purpose cannot just be stated, it must be accompanied by strategies for realizing it" (p. 19). In this way, moral purpose guides a leader's choices and the strategies used to complete tasks. In addition, transformative leaders can empower others. Bennis and Nanus (2007) see "The new leader... [as] one who commits people to action, who converts followers into leaders, and who may convert leaders into agents of change" (p. 3).

According to Shields (2010), "Transformative leadership begins with questions of justice and democracy, critiques inequitable practices, and addresses both individual and public good. (p. 558). Transformative leadership starts by challenging the existing framework, although it acknowledges that there are "disparities outside the organization that impinge on the success of individuals, groups, & [the] organization as a whole" (Shields, 2010, p. 564). The idea of social justice is central to education and teaching. Freire (1998) and Shields (2003) both present the educator as one who seeks to change the existing social framework and to speak out for the rights of others. This version of transformative leadership takes apart the social framework, and puts it back together in a way that creates desired outcomes.

Transformative leadership focuses on the moral values and the actions of a leader to empower followers. A transformative leader commits followers to action, creates leaders from followers so that change happens (Bennis & Nanus, 2007). Transformative leadership

challenges existing framework in order to create an organization that can better meet the needs of the community (Shields, 2010).

### **Distributed Leadership Approach**

The distributed leadership approach is one where leadership is shared between leaders and followers. Leadership is distributed because the tasks are distributed (Robinson, 2008). In a distributed leadership approach, all are expected to contribute and to support each other through action. “Distributed leadership can make more expertise available to staff if those with relevant expertise are willing and able to exercise leadership, and if colleagues are willing and able to be influenced by them” (Robinson, 2008, p. 253).

Distributed leadership is most effective where individuals at all levels of the organization participate in action and act as leaders in areas of expertise (Hallenger, 2003). Distributed leadership is fixed in both the performance of tasks and the exchange between leaders and followers in the completion of the task (Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2004). According to Robinson (2008) the task should be linked to expected outcomes, and the steps to reach the expected outcomes should be chosen according to what is known to be effective. Additionally, leadership must create the environment where it is possible to reach the desired outcomes (Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008). Through shared leadership and dynamic engagement, distributed leadership can develop a leadership capacity in the organization that will result in improved learning outcomes (Hallenger, 2003; Robinson, 2008).

### **Leadership in Educational Settings**

Instructional leadership and transformational leadership were two of the dominant models of educational leadership studied in the 1980s and 1990s (Hallenger, 2003). The instructional leadership model has many transactional leadership features. “[Instructional leadership] identified strong, directive leadership focused on curriculum and instruction from the principal as

a characteristic of elementary schools that were effective at teaching children in poor urban communities” (Hallenger, 2003, p. 329). However, instructional leadership fell out of favor in the 1990s as it was seen as too focused on the principal as the center of knowledge and power (Hallenger, 2003; Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008). Distributed leadership and transformational leadership emerged as new leadership models within education. “Rather than focusing specifically on direct coordination, control, and supervision of curriculum and instruction, transformational leadership seeks to build the organization’s capacity to select its purposes and to support the development of changes to practices of teaching and learning” (Hallenger, 2003, p. 330). Further, the distributive leadership approach shares work among individuals in an organization, and requires each team member to participate in the development, implementation and completion of tasks (Hallenger, 2003). This section looks at actions of successful educational leaders using transformational and distributive leadership styles in relation to student outcomes in both the K-12 setting, and in the community college and career college settings.

#### **Actions of Successful Educational Leaders in Relation to Student Outcomes**

Several resources presented information on characteristics of successful leaders, as noted in the literature (Bai & Roberts, 2011; Konorti, 2012; Marques, 2013; McKnight, 2013), by followers (Garcia, Duncan, Carmody-Bubb, & Ree, 2014; Valentine & Prater, 2011), or by leaders (Valentine & Prater, 2011). In addition, school leaders’ impact on student success was explored (Hallenger, 2003; Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe, 2008; Sanzo, Sherman & Clayton, 2011; Valentine & Prater, 2011).

Leadership characteristics were noted in various studies throughout the literature review. Bai and Roberts (2011) named five leadership characteristics in their mode: benevolence, propriety, faithfulness, justice, and wisdom (p. 732-733). Konorti (2012) included wisdom, courage and vision as three key transformational leadership characteristics. Washington, Sutton

and Field (2006) name empathy as an important characteristic for leaders. McKnight (2013), Valentine and Prater (2011), and Brown, Bryant and Reilly (2006), name the ability to motivate others as a key characteristic needed by school leaders. In their study of school leaders, Sanzo, Sherman, and Clayton (2011) define actions of successful leaders as sharing leadership, facilitating professional development, leading with instructional orientation, and acting openly and honestly. Honesty is essential to good leadership as it helps establish trust in the leader-follower relationship (Kotter, 2012; Marques, 2013; McComis, 2006).

These types of leadership skills are often seen as soft skills, or interpersonal and social skills. These are different from hard or technical skills, which can be measured. Marques (2013) conducted research of both hard and soft skills of leaders, with a view that the soft skills of a leader are important to successful leadership. The study described a number of findings concentrating on soft leadership skills, such as self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. Marques (2013) contends that these skills are increasingly sought-after, and they should be developed in future leaders (p. 167). Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008) found that “Leaders in higher performing schools are distinguished from their counterparts in otherwise similar lower performing schools by their personal involvement in planning, coordinating, and evaluating teaching and teachers” (p. 662). These characteristics and actions of educational leaders as identified by Bai and Roberts (2011), Brown, Bryant and Reilly (2006), Marques (2013), McKnight (2013), Sanzo, Sherman and Clayton (2011), Valentine and Prater (2011), and Washington, Sutton and Field (2006) provide a comprehensive list that can be related to successful student outcomes.

Several studies directly examine how leadership actions lead to successful outcomes. Brown, Bryant and Reilly (2006) look at the impact of emotional intelligence on organizational



outcomes and confirmed findings of previous studies that transformational leadership can effectively predict organizational outcomes.

Thus, it might be argued that inspiration, charismatic leadership, motivation and to a lesser extent, idealized influence are at least partially affective in origin, and that a leader who was emotionally aware might be better able to understand and thus influence their followers. (p. 335)

Jantzi and Leithwood (1996) examine teacher perceptions of improvement, teacher engagement, and student engagement, and linked transformational leadership to principal effectiveness.

A school leader must have the ability to motivate followers (McKnight, 2013; Valentine & Prater, 2011; Brown, Bryant & Reilly, 2006). Successful school leaders share leadership and facilitate professional development (Sanzo, Sherman, & Clayton, 2011). Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008) concluded that leaders in high performing schools are personally involved in planning, coordinating, and evaluating teachers, and Leithwood and Jantzi (1999) demonstrated a link between principal leadership and student engagement with school. Shared leadership, teacher leadership, distributed leadership, and transformational leadership are viewed as effective leadership models within education (Hallenger, 2003; Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008). These leadership models focus on supporting faculty in the change process and building the school's capacity to reach its goals (Hallenger, 2003).

**In K-12 settings.** Valentine and Prater (2011) studied the relationships between managerial, instructional, and transformational leadership and student achievement in public high schools, and found differences in student achievement when schools were grouped according to principal leadership factors. "Principal leadership behaviors promoting instructional and curriculum improvement were linked to achievement. Within transformational leadership,

the principal's ability to identify a vision and provide an appropriate model had the greatest relationship to achievement" (p. 5). Findings showed that principals in schools with higher levels of achievement were perceived by the teacher to be more competent than principals in schools with lower levels of student achievement. Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008) showed that effective K-12 principal leadership "includes creating an environment for both staff and students that makes it possible for important academic and social goals to be achieved" (p. 664). Similarly, according to Hallenger (2003), studies "consistently found that the skillful leadership of school principals was a key contributing factor when it came to explaining successful change, school improvement, or school effectiveness" (p. 331).

In an analysis of studies on the relationship between K-12 principal leadership and student outcomes, Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008) demonstrated that instructional leadership style had a positive effect on student outcomes. Sanzo, Sherman, and Clayton (2011) examined best leadership practices of five male and five female middle-school principals leading in a standards' driven school environment where success is defined by high-stakes testing results. Findings included common themes of sharing leadership, facilitating professional development, leading with instructional orientation, and acting openly and honestly.

Research shows that educational leadership can lead to improved student outcomes. In a study of K-12 principal leadership, Leithwood and Jantzi (1999) demonstrated a link between principal leadership and student engagement with school. It should be noted that student engagement refers to the degree of student involvement in a school, and is not tied to student achievement in specific subjects. Additionally, greater focus by leaders on relationship building and the core business of teaching lead to increased influence on student outcomes (Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008).

In K-12 settings, leadership actions that promote instructional and curriculum improvement were linked to student achievement (Valentine & Prater, 2011). Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008), showed that leadership focus on relationship building and on teaching increases influence on student outcomes. Both transformational and distributed leadership styles can lead to improved student outcomes. Successful transformational leadership actions include first explaining how to reach goals, then creating an environment where it is possible to reach the goals (Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe, 2008; Hallenger, 2003). Successful distributed leadership actions include sharing work and requiring each team member to participate in the development, implementation and completion of tasks (Hallenger, 2003).

**At career colleges and community colleges.** Distributed leadership is important for task completion. Spillane, Halverson and Diamond (2004) saw distributed leadership as rooted in both the performance of tasks and the exchange between leaders and followers in the completion of the task. In other words, leadership is distributed because the performance of tasks is distributed (Robinson, 2008). Transformational leadership at community colleges can be used to build distributed leadership and produce a learning environment that involves the entire learning community (Hallenger, 2003; Love, Trammell, & Cartner, 2010; McClenney, 2007; Sirkis, 2011; Somerville, 2008). A transformational leadership approach that engages students early in their college experience is important because community colleges lose large numbers of students during their first term and first year of college (McClenney, 2007).

Systematic distributed leadership in community colleges and career colleges is needed for student success (Carroll & Wolverton, 2004; Sirkis, 2011). Carroll and Wolverton (2004) estimated that 80% of strategic decisions are made at the department level, and notes that skilled department level leadership in community colleges is vital to student success. Sirkis (2011)

listed the following seven leadership skills needed for successful transformational and collaborative leadership (1) building relationships and networks; (2) advocating for the faculty; (3) creating and implementing a shared vision; (4) developing faculty as teachers and leaders; (5) earning trust; (6) rethinking and initiating; (7) adapting.

In a case study of a career college president, Hiatt (2010) found that the subject displayed various leadership styles, including servant, situational and transactional. Although the use of multiple leadership styles is not indicative of a servant-leader, this career college campus president was seen as effective by her employees (Hiatt, 2010). McComis (2006) demonstrated that while the campus leader at career colleges established the needed campus dynamic through positive and motivational leadership, student success is dependent upon all departments in the school working together.

**With regard to persistence.** Persistence is the rate at which students attending postsecondary institutions at least part-time remain enrolled (JBL Associates, Inc., 2014). Students attending career colleges have a number of socio-economic factors that may interfere with their persistence (JBL Associates, Inc., 2014). These students have a need for academic support, including student advising, tutoring and support services for personal issues including childcare, transportation and living arrangements. The Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) showed that frequency and quality of student interaction with faculty, administration and other students was linked to persistence (McCleeney, 2007).

**With regard to retention.** Retention is a system put in place by an institution which facilitates students entering a program to complete the program. Several studies show that engaging students frequently in a variety of ways leads to better student retention (Love, Trammel & Cartner; 2010, McCleeney, 2007; McComis, 2006). Results of the Community

College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) showed that student interaction with faculty, administration and other students aligned not only with persistence, but also to “course completion, credit hour accumulation, grade-point average, and certificate or degree attainment” (McCleeny, 2007, p. 140). In their study of the impact of transformational leadership on student retention of African American students attending predominantly white institutions, Love, Trammel and Cartner (2010) demonstrated links between an inclusive educational environment and student success. Hallenger’s (2003) research showed that successful transformational leadership created a framework for improved retention. In his study of career college leadership, McComis (2006) showed a significant relationship between student program completion outcomes and employment outcomes and leadership actions.

In career colleges and community colleges, transformational and distributed leadership actions can build a learning environment that encompasses the whole learning community (Hallenger, 2003). Specific actions like engaging students early, frequently, and in multiple ways is important to student success, and leads to student persistence and improved outcomes in retention and graduation (McCleeny, 2007). An inclusive educational environment also improves student outcomes (Love, Trammel & Cartner, 2010). The campus leader at career colleges can create a positive campus dynamic, but distributed leadership actions are needed because student success is dependent upon all departments in the school working together (McComis, 2006). Using distributed leadership in community colleges and career colleges is necessary for student success.

#### **Theoretical Framework**

A theoretical framework is a lens that informs a study (Creswell, 2013). This lens guides a study and provides a context for the formation of the questions asked, the development of the research, and the presentation of the information learned. Desjardins (2010) defines a theoretical

framework as "... a logically structured representation of all the concepts, the variables, and your relationships involved in the scientific study you wish to do with the purpose of clearly identifying what was explored, examined, measured, or described." Merriam (2009) stated that "this framework ... will generate the 'problem' of the study, specific research questions, data collection and analysis techniques, and how you will interpret your findings" (p. 67).

The problem compelling this study began with the pressure from the U.S. Department of Education and from accreditors on Career Colleges. These bodies seek to assure that training leads to well-paying jobs and debt in correlation to level of employment ("Obama Administration," 2014). Although this pressure caused changes within the Career College sector, it also provided an opportunity for educational leadership to develop actions that improve student outcomes. Kotter (2012) stated that external forces that cause organization change can also cause the organization to "... improve quality of products and services, locate new opportunities for growth, and increase productivity" (p. 3). Educational leadership at career colleges must take actions that lead to successful student outcomes in retention, graduation, licensure and employment.

Adding to the problem of increased pressure to retain students is decreased student enrollment at many career colleges (Fain, 2014). The decrease in student enrollment caused a decrease in the need for administration, staff and faculty, and a corresponding increase on demands of the remaining administrators, including deans of education. Wheatley (2006) encourages organizations to use these times of change to recreate an organization according to the environmental demands. Career colleges are operating in an environment that demands change, and educational leadership at career colleges must take actions that lead to successful student outcomes.

These underlying problems lead to the purpose of this study, which was to examine retention practices utilized by a dean of education at a career college where student outcomes in retention and graduation met and exceeded standards set forth by the campus' accreditor and the U.S. Department of Education. Furthermore, it sought to understand how members of the campus leadership and faculty perceive and enact these retention practices. Several studies demonstrated that educational leadership lead to successful student outcomes (Hallenger, 2003; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999; Love, Trammell, & Cartner, 2010; McComis, 2006; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008; Robinson, 2008). Additionally McCleeny (2007), pointed out that the frequency and quality of student-faculty interactions ties directly into student persistence and academic outcomes.

This research used an intrinsic case study approach with a post-positivist theoretical framework to examine retention practices utilized by a dean of education at a career college where student outcomes in retention and graduation met standards set forth by the campus' accreditor and the U.S. Department of Education, and to understand how campus leadership and faculty perceive and enact these retention practices. The intrinsic case study approach was used to illuminate a particular case, and the investigation was motivated by a desire to understand what makes the case unique (Stake, 1995). The researcher uses this approach because something in the case is intrinsically interesting (Stake, 1995; Merriam, 2009). An intrinsic case study approach was chosen because the actions of one dean of education as they relate to the implementation of the retention practices are of particular interest to the researcher since this dean of education leads a department where student outcomes in retention and graduation were met and exceeded.

Additionally, a post-positivist lens was used to generate research questions, to guide the interviews, and to interpret the data. Post-positivist researchers view inquiry as a series of logically related steps, believe in multiple perspectives from participants, rather than a single reality, and espouse rigorous methods of qualitative data collection and analysis” (Creswell, 2013, p. 24). For the post-positivist, the goal in research was to accurately depict reality. Yet because human knowledge is based on a set of conjectures which can change with new information, depicting reality was difficult. Because all measurement and observation was fallible, the post-positivist stressed the value of using multiple measures and observations (Trochim, 2006). The post-positivist researcher also understood that all measurements and observations were theory-laden and that everyone had inherent biases. However, it was also possible to learn from the experiences of others (Trochim, 2006).

In the post-positivist view, multiple measures and observations were used to find the truth, and to understand the ideas being researched so that a hypothesis may be developed and outcomes can be predicted. The post-positivist approach used the scientific method to discover if there is a causal relationship existed between the variables of the research subject (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). This approach was concerned with examining behaviors and understanding how these behaviors cause the desired events (Wildemuth, 1993). A theory that explained the relationship between the behaviors and the desired events may then be developed, tested, and revised as needed. A post-positivistic lens that uses multiple measurements from an intrinsic case study approach provided the framework for the examination of the retention practices utilized by a dean of education at a career college where student outcomes in retention and graduation met standards set forth by the campus’ accreditor and the U.S. Department of



Education, and to understand how campus leadership and faculty perceive and enact these retention practices.

### Summary

An effective leader is able to share a cohesive vision, explain goals, and provide a path to reach goals. Effective educational leadership had been linked to good student outcomes (Hallenger, 2003; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999; Love, Trammell, & Cartner, 2010; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008; Robinson, 2008). While there are many styles of leadership, transformative and distributed leadership were of primary importance to leadership in educational settings (Hallenger, 2003; Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008). McKnight (2013), Valentine and Prater (2011), and Brown, Bryant and Reilly (2006), demonstrated that a school leader must have the ability to motivate followers. Sanzo, Sherman, and Clayton (2011) named showed effective school leaders shared leadership and facilitated professional development. Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008) established that successful leaders are personally involved in planning, coordinating, and evaluating teachers. These are hallmarks of transformational and distributed leadership models, which focused on supporting faculty while creating an environment for success.

Though there were a few studies that link leadership to student outcomes, a lack of empirical research remains (Robinson, 2008). "Of the thousands of published studies of educational leadership, less than 30 have empirically tested the relationship between leadership and student academic and non-academic outcomes" (Robinson, 2008, p. 241). There is also limited research examining leadership in career colleges, and this research is primarily available through dissertations (Hiatt, 2010; McComis, 2006). The literature demonstrates that successful educational leaders must use transformational and distributed leadership actions in their approach to building an environment where student outcomes can be successfully met. While

leadership theory validates that effective leadership in career colleges could have a significant impact on student success, the literature points to a need for studies that link leadership actions to student outcomes.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

Career colleges are under pressure from the U.S. Department of Education and accreditation bodies to meet specific standards related to retention and graduation. In July 2010, the U.S. Education Department of Education released a notice proposing a rule on metrics on repayment rates and debt-to-income ratios along with a program approval process for new program approval that included a requirement for employer affirmations of existing demand for jobs in the field related to the new program (Epstein, 2010). The release of the “Program Integrity: Gainful Employment – New Program Regulations” in October 2010 followed. These regulations established measures for determining whether new programs eligible for title IV federal financial aid funding lead to gainful employment, and were the first step in establishing metrics for programs offered at career colleges (“Program Integrity,” 2010).

Gainful employment regulations from the U.S. Department of Education requirements took effect July 1, 2011, with additional requirements taking effect July 1, 2015. Gainful employment requires that career colleges provide information regarding program costs, whether students graduate, how much they earn, and how much debt they may accumulate prior to student enrollment (“Fact sheet: Obama,” 2015). The guidelines add to existing requirements of accreditors and approval bodies with which career colleges must comply. These regulations have forced changes in career college organizations. These changes have created a greater need for educational leaders to develop and utilize retention techniques that lead to successful student outcomes in retention and graduation.

### **Rationale for Research Approach**

The purpose of this intrinsic case study was to examine retention practices utilized by a dean of education at a career college where student outcomes in retention and graduation met and exceeded standards set forth by the campus' accreditor and the U.S. Department of Education, and to understand how campus leadership and faculty perceive and enact these retention practices.

### **Methodology**

Yin (2003) recommended that a case study be used when the study focuses on “how” and “why” questions, the behavior of those being studied cannot be manipulated, and the setting and context are important to the phenomena being studied. An intrinsic case seeks to illuminate a specific case, and the investigation is motivated by a desire to understand what makes the case unique (Stake, 1995). An intrinsic case study approach was chosen because the actions of one dean of education as they relate to the implementation of the retention practices are of particular interest because this dean of education leads a department where student outcomes in retention and graduation were met and exceeded. Understanding the retention practices utilized at this campus is important as they result in outcomes that met and exceeded required standards. The goal of meeting and exceeding student outcomes in career colleges is important due external regulations (Epstein, 2010). Understanding the leadership actions of the dean is also important. As Robinson, Lloyd and Rowe (2008) and Sirkis (2011) demonstrated, leadership impacts the success of an organization.

This intrinsic case study was also bounded as it was concerned with “a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries” (Merriam, 2009, p. 40). A case can be bounded by whatever is of interest to the researcher. The researcher identifies the boundaries, and keeps these boundaries in focus while conducting research (Stake, 1995). This case study was bounded

by the selection of one leader whose actions were evident in the perceptions of the campus president, peers of the dean of education, and the program directors. The case is set in a career college in the eastern United States where the campus has met standards for retention outcomes.

This intrinsic case study used a post-positivist framework to examine the actions of the dean of education in order to identify the retention practices that lead to successful student outcomes in retention and graduation. The leadership actions of this dean of education as they relate to the implementation of the retention practices were also identified. Through the post-positivist view, the research is used to find the truth, and to understand the ideas being researched well enough to develop a hypothesis and predict outcomes. The theory developed can then be tested and revised as needed. Post-positivists use the scientific method in the attempt to understand the research subject through direct manipulation and observation. “Research is concerned with causal relationship, and the aim is to advance the relationship between variables” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 28). Post-positivist researchers are concerned with a specific action within a specific context with a goal of understanding what is being studied through observable behaviors (Wildemuth, 2006). The post-positivist framework provided a lens through which the research retention practices of a successful dean of education at one Career College was viewed.

### **Guiding Questions**

The guiding questions for this research were:

1. How do program directors and faculty perceive and enact the retention practices employed by the dean of education at a career college where student outcomes in retention and graduation met and exceeded standards set forth by the campus’ accreditor and the U.S. Department of Education?

2. How does campus leadership perceive and enact the retention practices employed by the dean of education at a career college where student outcomes in retention and graduation met and exceeded standards set forth by the campus' accreditor and the U.S. Department of Education?

In addition, these principal questions were supported by the following question:

3. How do program directors, faculty, and campus leadership recognize the leadership actions of the dean of education as contributing to student retention?

### **Setting**

This study focused on the dean of education at a career college located in the north-eastern United States with a student population of 400. The college offers eight programs in the fields of allied health, medical technology and trades. This campus is accredited by the Accrediting Bureau of Health Education Schools (ABHES), a national accreditor recognized by the United States Secretary of Education as an accreditor of private postsecondary institutions located in the United States that primarily offer allied health education programs ("Recognition," n. d.). ABHES requires the submission of an annual report each year that reports the retention, licensure and placement rates of students enrolled in these programs. Each of the programs offered at the campus has met the minimum standard set by ABHES of a 70% retention rate in the 2013, 2014 and 2015 reporting years ("Accrediting Agency," 2015). In the 2011-12 reporting year, the most recent year for which data are available, the campus had a 76% cohort graduation rate for first-time students in full time programs at the campus ("U.S. Department," 2015). While retention rates are reported annually, graduation rates are reported after students have the opportunity to attempt 150% of the program length. Therefore, graduation rate reporting years do not align to retention rate reporting years. The outcomes for retention and

graduation demonstrated the campus has a history of successfully meeting and exceeding standards set by accreditors and the U.S. Department of Education.

The researcher works for the corporate office of this career college as a regional dean of education providing support for various campuses in the organization, and has a work relationship with the dean of education at the campus. However, this campus is not one of the campuses assigned to this researcher, and the researcher is not directly involved with this campus on a regular basis.

This intrinsic case study focused on one area of concern and one selected case, retention and graduation rates in a career college that have successfully met outcomes in retention and graduation. Data available for this campus showed that retention and graduation rates met and exceeded standards of regulatory bodies. This study provided a way to better understand the role of the dean of education in improving retention (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). This case study utilized semi-structured interviews guided by a list of questions to be explored (Merriam, 2009). The interviews focused on the retention practices employed by the dean of education of this career college. Questions also addressed the leadership actions of this dean of education.

#### **Participant Selection**

Participants of the study included the dean of education, program directors and a cross-section of faculty. Additionally, the researcher interviewed the campus president, as well as department leadership in admissions and career services. This dean of education was interviewed as she is the individual who leads the implementation of retention initiatives. Program directors and faculty were interviewed because they work with the dean of education to implement the retention initiatives. Department leadership and the campus president were interviewed because these individuals saw the retention initiatives in action and provided insight as to how retention initiatives were implemented.

Focusing on these participants and the retention efforts on the campus aligned with the purpose of identifying retention practices employed by the dean of education. Meeting required standards is increasingly important due external regulations (Epstein, 2010, (“Fact sheet: Obama,” 2015). Additionally, understanding the leadership actions of the dean is an essential goal of the study. As Robinson, Lloyd and Rowe (2008) and Sirkis (2011) demonstrated, leadership impacts the success of an organization. The interviews conducted allowed for the examination of the perceptions of the program directors, faculty, peers of the dean of education and the campus president as they relate to retention practices and the leadership actions of the dean of education.

#### **Data**

Creswell (2013) states that qualitative research collects data in a setting that is natural and familiar to the subject being studied. By examining retention practices that led to retention and graduation rates that met and exceeded standards of regulatory bodies at one career college, the researcher was able to report on these practices that lead to success for this career college. An Institutional Review Board (IRB) is required to review a study that utilizes human subjects (Creswell, 2013). Before beginning the interviews for this study, the researcher sought and was granted an exemption from the IRB at the University of New England (Appendix A). Additionally, permission from the researcher’s organization was sought and was granted.

Once approval was obtained, the researcher requested interviews with the campus president, the dean of education, department leadership in admissions and career services, program directors, and a cross-section of faculty. Through an email, the researcher explained the purpose of the study and the motivation of the researcher, and study participants were provided anonymity (Creswell, 2013). Each participant then signed a consent form (Appendix B) prior to the interview, which was returned to the researcher.



The dean of education was interviewed individually so that she could articulate her understanding of the U.S. Department of Education rules, her retention goals for the campus, the retention initiatives enacted to reach the retention goals, and her leadership actions that guide her program directors and faculty to reach the goals. As Kotter (2012) noted, with clearly stated goals, “managers and employees can figure out for themselves what to do without constantly checking with a boss or their peers” (p. 72). The campus president was interviewed individually, while the peers of the dean of education, the programs directors, and faculty members were interviewed in four focus groups. Focus group interviews were utilized because as Creswell (2013) states “Focus group interviews are advantageous when...interviewees are similar and cooperate with each other” (p. 164). Additionally, these individuals might have been hesitant to speak in one-on-one interviews, but were comfortable in a group setting with peers. The campus president was interviewed individually in order to maintain the comfort of the focus group interviews as participants did feel pressured by the presence of the president. The interview protocol for the dean of education is presented in Appendix C, and the interview protocol for program directors, faculty, and campus leadership is presented in Appendix D.

Data from the recorded interviews was transcribed by the researcher and shared with the participants so they could review and verify the data. Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) and Merriam (2009) recommend the use of member checks. Although the data presented had been interpreted by the researcher, the members should have been able “to recognize the experience...or suggest some fine-tuning to better capture their perspectives” (Merriam, 2009, p. 217). Participants were asked to submit an artifact or artifacts or documents that represented their retention efforts. Merriam (2009) noted the use of artifacts as a way to verify the data collected in interviews, and a way to supplement this same data. Artifacts are objects that exist in the environment that help

understand the culture being studied (Merriam, 2009). The researcher also analyzed retention and graduation data available through the campus and through the College Navigator, a program of the National Center for Education Statistics. The purpose of this data analysis was to verify data related to retention and graduation.

### **Participant Rights**

Merriam (2009) stated, “In any qualitative study, ethical issues relating to protection of the participants is a concern” (p. 161). To address these concerns, the identity of each participant has been kept confidential to the extent provided by law. The information recorded during the interviews was stored on a computer and two back-up drives in the researcher’s home. Only the researcher listened to the recorded responses. Participants did not listen to the recorded responses, and each transcript was shared only with the participants of the interview. Names were changed so that participants could not be identified by name. Findings of the study are presented with pseudonyms assigned to protect the participants’ identities. Participation in the study was voluntary, and participants could refuse to answer any of the questions or stop the interview at any time. They also were able to stop participating in the study at any time, although no one chose to. Finally, the researcher utilized a debriefing session after each interview in which participants could make comments and ask questions. This helped the researcher ensure that the participants understood the questions and procedures used in the interviews (Merriam, 2009).

The researcher took precautions to minimize risks of harm to program directors and faculty. The researcher explained the potential risk to these individuals and reiterated that they did not have to participate. Further, the researcher explained that if they chose to participate, they could withdraw at any time. However, the researcher believed that the risk was minimal because the campus had retention and graduation outcomes that met and exceeded the

requirements of both the accrediting body and the U.S. Department of Education. Since the outcomes met and exceeded the required measurement, the retention related actions taken by the dean of education are viewed positively. Because these outcomes are viewed positively, there would be minimal risk for retribution.

#### **Methods and Procedures for Data Analysis**

Interviews were recorded through an online meeting service, transcribed by the researcher, and then coded for themes. “Themes in qualitative research (also called categories) are broad units of information that consist of several codes aggregated to form a common idea” (Creswell, 2013, p. 186). Using this thematic approach, the researcher identified recurring patterns, viewpoints and concepts. Data analysis strategies also involved the use of coding to develop recommendations (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Recommendations regarding how successful retention practices of one dean of education and her leadership actions can be used to improve outcomes at other career colleges, along with recommendations about using the findings from this study to inform the hiring and training practices of career colleges in need of a dean of education, are presented in Chapter 5.

A post-positivist framework was used to understand the causal relationship between the retention practices enacted and the retention outcomes at this campus. Post-positivism focuses on a research process that includes multiple measures, while understanding that each of these measures can contain errors. It advocates the use of a data collection and analysis process that utilizes multiple sources in order to better understand reality. Triangulation was also used to inform decisions about data collection. “Triangulation using multiple sources of *data* means comparing and cross-checking data collected through...interview data collected from people with different perspectives or from follow-up interviews with the same people” (Merriam, 2009, p. 216). Triangulating the sources of data helped build a more complete picture of the data.

### **Limitations**

The first limitation was the use of the intrinsic case study approach. This methodology concludes with findings specific to the case at hand; and the results of this type of case study may not be applicable or generalizable in a similar environment. However, the intrinsic case study approach was used because the researcher was interested in a particular case that was intrinsically interesting to the researcher (Stake, 1995; Merriam, 2009). This approach “is not undertaken primarily because the case represents other cases or because it illustrates a particular trait or problem, but because in all its particularity and ordinariness, the case itself is of interest” (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 548). However, Stake (1995) stated that while an intrinsic case study should not be to understand a specific phenomenon, this approach may be used to understand the phenomenon. So while an intrinsic case study is not designed to understand a phenomenon, the results may be used to understand the phenomenon.

A second limitation to the study was that the researcher is biased by her theoretical approach, cultural experiences, and worldviews. “Being objective is an integral component of inquiry, and the standards of reliability and validity are important” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 28). The researcher also has established opinions on the types of retention efforts that can successfully affect student outcomes in retention and graduation. These opinions may have created a bias in the research. To combat these biases, the researcher monitored her biases through the use of reflective field notes throughout the research process (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). The researcher carefully documented the research process and engaged in peer review to verify that the data collected was representative of participant views.

Finally, the use of interviews to gather data “raises questions about power and authority and giving appropriate voice to participants about the process of research” (Creswell, 2012,

p. 439). The researcher is an employee of the parent company of the career college being studied, and has a working relationship with the dean of education at this campus. However, the researcher was not directly involved with the dean of education or the campus regularly, and the campus was not one which the researcher supports. The researcher had no knowledge of the program directors, faculty or campus leadership. Additionally, the campus was already engaging in successful retention and graduation practices as they met and exceeded benchmarks required by accreditors and the U.S. Department of Education, so there is little risk for retribution.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this intrinsic case study was to examine retention practices utilized by a dean of education at a career college where student outcomes in retention and graduation met and exceeded standards set forth by the campus' accreditor and the U.S. Department of Education, and to understand how campus leadership and faculty perceive and enact these retention practices. The leadership actions of this dean of education as they relate to the implementation of the retention practices were reviewed as part of this study. Data to examine the retention practices utilized by the dean of education, program directors and faculty that result in successful retention and graduation rates was collected through interviews. Records were also used to verify retention and graduation outcomes. The researcher utilized recognized ethical guidelines and addressed potential limitations and biases. The next chapter will focus extensively the participants interviewed, the results of the interviews, and the themes that emerged from the data analysis.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The purpose of this intrinsic case study was to examine retention practices utilized by a dean of education at a career college where student outcomes in retention and graduation met and exceeded the standards set forth by the institution's accrediting agency, which is recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education. Furthermore, it sought to understand how members of the campus leadership and faculty perceive and enact these retention practices. In an effort to examine the retention practices this particular dean of education employs at her school and how such practices were understood by her supervisor, peers, and those who report to her, the following research questions were developed to direct the study:

1. How do program directors and faculty perceive and enact the retention practices employed by the dean of education at a career college where student outcomes in retention and graduation met and exceeded standards set forth by the campus' accreditor and the U.S. Department of Education?
2. How does campus leadership perceive and enact the retention practices employed by the dean of education at a career college where student outcomes in retention and graduation met and exceeded standards set forth by the campus' accreditor and the U.S. Department of Education?

In addition, these principal questions are supported by the following question:

3. How do program directors, faculty, and campus leadership recognize the leadership actions of the dean of education as contributing to student retention?

This chapter is meant to offer the reader an understanding of the retention efforts of one career college campus. Furthermore, it presents the findings of the study, which were obtained

from interviews with employees at this particular career college, which is located in the northeastern United States with a student population of 400. The college offers nine programs in the fields of allied health, medical technology and trades. The campus has a long history of successfully meeting and exceeding standards set by its institutional and programmatic accreditors. Each of the programs offered at the campus has met the minimum standard set forth by the Accrediting Bureau of Health Education Schools (ABHES) of a 70% retention rate in the 2013, 2014 and 2015 reporting years (“Accrediting Agency,” 2015). In the 2011-12 reporting year, the most recent year for which data are available, the campus had a 76% cohort graduation rate for first-time students in full time programs at the campus (“U.S. Department,” 2015). While retention rates are reported annually, graduation rates are reported after students have the opportunity to attempt 150% of the program length. Therefore, graduation rate reporting years do not align to retention rate reporting years.

The researcher conducted a total of six participant interviews. Individual interviews were held with the campus president, and with the dean of education. A focus group interview was held with the director of career services and the director of admissions, who are both peers of the dean of education. Two focus group interviews were held with the program directors, with four program directors in each focus group. The last focus group interview was held with a cross section of faculty representing six of the eight programs offered at the campus. Focus group interviews were utilized because these types of interviews are beneficial when participants hold similar positions and collaborate with each other (Creswell, 2013). A debriefing session was also held after each interview in which participants could make comments and ask questions. This process confirmed the participants understood the questions and procedures used in the interviews (Merriam, 2009). Participants were asked to read and verify the transcripts to ensure

their perspectives were correctly represented (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Merriam, 2009). The names of the all participants in this study were changed, and pseudonyms were assigned to protect their identities. Participation in the study was voluntary, and the participants were not compensated in any way.

The findings include a synopsis of responses to various questions, along with tables representing common answers. Additionally, illustrative quotations taken from the interviews were used to give voice to the participants and to represent their perceptions and actions that support retention efforts at this career college. All of the participants conveyed their understanding using a first-person account. Overall, three themes with related sub-themes emerged from the data analysis procedure: (a) focusing campus culture on retention, (b) understanding student needs through individual engagement, and (c) engaging program directors and faculty through distributed leadership.

#### **Administration and Faculty Participants**

Participants in this study included the campus president, the dean of education, the director of career services, the director of admissions, eight program directors and six faculty members. The relationship to the dean of education is important because this study seeks to understand how campus leadership, program directors and faculty perceive and enact the retention practices employed by the dean of education, and how these individuals recognize the leadership actions of the dean of education as they relate to student retention. In addition to the dean of education, one participant was the supervisor of the dean of education, two participants were peers of the dean of education, and fourteen of the participants were subordinates to the dean of education.

Fifteen participants, including the dean of education, the program directors and the faculty, were directly responsible for implementation of retention initiatives within the education



department. For example, these participants contact absent students, meet with students for academic advising, and create a student centered learning environment.

Three participants, including the campus president, the director of career services, and the director of admissions, were observers of the retention efforts in the education department listed above. However, all eighteen participants were directly responsible for the implementation of broader campus retention initiatives. For example, the admission department held student appreciation events, the career services department held career fairs, with support from the campus president and the education department. Additionally, all participants worked together to make retention a focus of the campus culture. Table 4.1 illustrates the demographic profile of all 18 participants, as well as each participant's relationship to the dean of education.

Table 4.1  
*Background Profile of Interviewees*

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Role on Campus</b>	<b>Relation to Dean of Education</b>	<b>Level of Retention Initiative Implementation</b>
Wyatt	Campus President	Supervisor	Campus Wide
Cecily	Director of Admissions	Peer	Campus Wide
Nina	Director of Career Services	Peer	Campus Wide
Tina	Dean of Education	Self	Campus Wide & Education Department
Marta	Program Director	Subordinate	Campus Wide & Education Department
Adele	Program Director	Subordinate	Campus Wide & Education Department
Jerome	Program Director	Subordinate	Campus Wide & Education Department
Angeline	Program Director	Subordinate	Campus Wide & Education Department
Dwight	Program Director	Subordinate	Campus Wide & Education Department
Stephanie	Program Director	Subordinate	Campus Wide & Education Department

Rocco	Program Director	Subordinate	Campus Wide & Education Department
Nina	Program Director	Subordinate	Campus Wide & Education Department
Mariela	Faculty	Subordinate	Campus Wide & Education Department
Danelle	Faculty	Subordinate	Campus Wide & Education Department
Delphia	Faculty	Subordinate	Campus Wide & Education Department
Alfonzo	Faculty	Subordinate	Campus Wide & Education Department
Alton	Faculty	Subordinate	Campus Wide & Education Department
Roslyn	Faculty	Subordinate	Campus Wide & Education Department

#### **Analysis Method**

This study utilized an intrinsic case study approach to illuminate a particular case, and to describe the experience of participants in a given case (Stake, 1995). This particular case was chosen because the dean of education leads a department where student outcomes in retention and graduation rates were met and exceeded. The purpose of this study was to understand the retention practices of this dean and how these retention practices were perceived and implemented by others on campus, which is intrinsically interesting to the researcher (Stake, 1995; Merriam, 2009).

This case study was also bounded by “a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries” (Merriam, 2009, p. 40). A case can be bounded by whatever is of interest to the researcher. The researcher identifies the boundaries, and keeps these boundaries in focus while conducting research (Stake, 1995). This case study was bounded by the dean as the subject of the study. The perceptions of the campus president, peers of the dean of education, the program directors, and faculty inform this case study.

Further, a post-positivist framework was used in the implementation of this bounded intrinsic case study. Post-positivist researchers are interested in specific actions within a particular context in order to recognize and understand what is being studied (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Wildemuth, 2006). A post-positivist framework was used to identify the specific actions related to retention at this career college, and to understand how these actions relate to the retention of students.

Interviews were completed and recorded through an online meeting service, then transcribed by the researcher. Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) and Merriam (2009) recommend the use of member checking to confirm their experience was correctly captured. As part of member checking, participants were asked to read and verify the transcripts to ensure their perspectives were correctly represented. Participants responded by stating they approved of the transcripts with no suggestions or corrections.

Participants were also asked to submit an artifact(s) or document(s) that represented their retention efforts. Artifacts are objects that exist in the environment that help understand the culture being studied, and they are used to both verify the data collected in interviews and to supplement this same data (Merriam, 2009). The artifacts submitted were documents that represented academic advising efforts on the campus. These documents were meaningful to the participants as they were utilized to support instruction, which then helped retain students. All eighteen participants viewed academic advising, with six distinct components, as vital to the retention efforts on the campus, and each participant mentioned academic advising when discussing retention initiatives. Examples of these academic advising documents are included in Appendices E, F, G and H.

After the interviews were transcribed, they were coded for themes using three separate actions. First, an open-coding system was utilized wherein each interview was read, relevant words and phrases related to the research were highlighted, and a list of categories, or themes, was developed and grouped to form a shared idea (Creswell, 2013). Prior research informed the choice of categories, while the framework stayed flexible to allow for new directions to emerge from the data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). The interviews were then coded using these categories. A triangulation method was utilized wherein sections of text from various interviews were evaluated, and similarities and differences were noted (Merriam 2009). Second, data summary tables for each question were created. These tables compiled answers to each question, and recorded where answers fell into the same categories (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2012). Third, emerging themes were noted in a separate memo, and quotations were identified for possible in the presentation of the findings (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 1995).

#### **Presentation of Results**

The interview questions addressed three main topics. The first group of questions addressed the U.S. Department of Education requirements that took effect July 1, 2011, and those additional requirements that took effect July 1, 2015. These mandates require that career colleges provide information regarding program costs, whether students graduate, how much they earn, and how much debt they may accumulate prior to student enrollment so that students can make an informed decision when enrolling in an institution.

Overall, participant awareness of these regulations was directly related to their leadership roles on the campus. The campus president, the dean of education, the director of admissions, and six program directors said the requirements had been discussed with them when asked if the requirements of the U.S. Department of Education that require career colleges to provide information regarding program costs, whether students graduate, how much they earn, and how

much debt they may accumulate prior to student enrollment were discussed with them. However, the director of career services, two program directors and all six faculty members said the requirements had not been discussed with them. For those who had knowledge of the U.S. Department of Education requirements, they noted the information was shared by corporate leadership or campus leadership. These responses reveal that the requirements were discussed with only the top leadership positions at the campus as a way of addressing the importance of retention on the campus. Additionally, the participants in the top leadership positions, in particular the dean of education, stated they did not find it necessary to discuss the requirements with their subordinates. This lack of discussion of the U.S. Department of Education requirements may be because the campus already had a history of meeting the required retention and graduation benchmarks. Furthermore, when asked about what actions were taken to address retention and graduation requirements, most participants stated that the U.S. Department of Education regulations had no effect on their retention efforts because their retention efforts were already addressing retention needs.

The second group of questions addressed retention goals, and sought to understand what the retention goals were for the campus, how each participant made sense of the retention goals, and how the retention goals were communicated between members of staff and faculty. When asked about the retention goals of the campus, the most common response was the need to retain every student, or striving for a 100% retention rate. All participants gave responses that demonstrated that retention is the focus of the campus culture, as well as the desire to retention every student. The campus president, the dean of education, and the director of career services stated the retention goal was 90%, or the goal the campus president set for the campus, the remaining participants stated the retention goals was 100%. This message was communicated

from the campus president to the dean of education, then from the dean of education to the program directors, and finally from the program directors to the faculty. This communication stream shows that the focus of retention is discussed with all levels of participants.

The third group of questions addressed retention initiatives. When asked about the retention initiatives enacted to reach the retention goal, responses converged on retention as a focus of the campus culture, treating students as individuals, creating opportunities for academic advising, offering tutoring, creating student centered learning, and contacting absent students. Academic advising was described as being offered through a series of sessions that begin with the *Rocks in the Road* survey given at orientation (Appendix E), continue with the *Staying on Track* survey given on day three, with follow-up for the program director and faculty on days five and seven of the first term a student attends (Appendix F). The participants described additional opportunities for academic advising, including *Mid-Mod* advising (Appendix G), *End-of-Mod* advising, as-needed academic advising (Appendix H), and advising in preparation for externship. All eighteen participants mentioned at least one of the categories of academic advising as an important retention initiative, and all viewed academic advising as part of the process of treating students as individuals.

Participants directly involved in instruction stressed academic advising to a greater degree than those not directly involved in instruction. For example, the campus president discussed academic advising on an as-needed basis. He stressed that academic advising be completed early and often so that all students were aware of their progress. For him, this academic advising helped prevent failure and facilitated the goal of all students to stay on track to graduate on time. The campus president viewed a delay in graduation for a student as a problem because this delay may have meant that a student who cannot afford to be in school for

a longer time would instead choose to drop out. The dean of education and the peers of the dean of education discussed the academic advising that took place at the beginning of a student's program. The program directors and faculty discussed not only those forms of advising but the continuous academic advising that takes place throughout a student's enrollment. With the exception of the director of admissions and the director of career services, sixteen of eighteen participants saw the academic advising initiatives as the most effective retention initiatives.

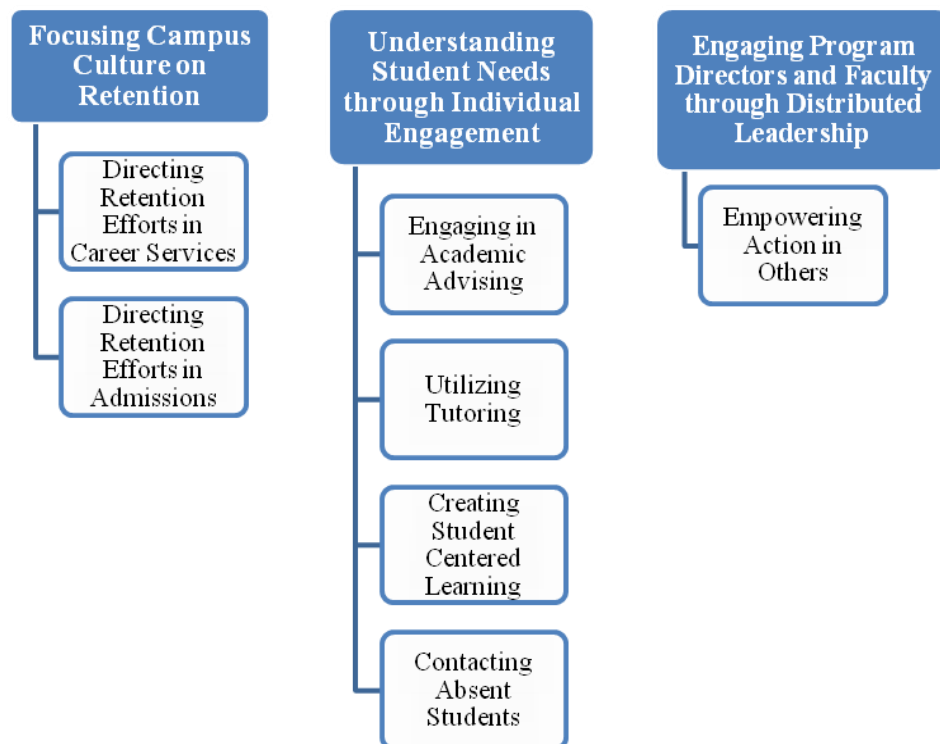
Only the dean of education named a least-effective retention practice, the at-risk student list used on campus. She stated that this list was important in identifying and tracking students known to be at-risk for dropping due to personal, academic or attendance issues. However, the dean of education noted the goal of all the retention initiatives was to keep students off the at-risk student list. Additionally, while faculty members stated that although academic advising was one of the most effective retention initiatives, it was also one of the least effective as some students do not take advantage of the academic advising they receive. These faculty members were frustrated by students who may respond while academic advising took place and immediately after an academic advising session, but then returned to poor academic habits until the next academic advising session. All remaining participants stated that there was not a least-effective retention practice. Instead, they saw all retention practices combining to make the retention efforts effective.

### **Emergent Themes**

Three main themes emerged from the open coding process with a triangulation method, utilization of the data summary tables, and the creation of memos that recorded emergent themes

along with participant quotations related to these themes: (a) focusing campus culture on retention, (b) understanding student needs through individual engagement, and (c) engaging program directors and faculty through distributed leadership (Figure 4.1). The theme of focusing campus culture on retention had two sub-themes, including directing retention efforts in career services and directing retention efforts in admissions. The theme of understanding student needs through individual engagement had four sub-themes, including engaging in academic advising, utilizing tutoring, creating student centered learning, and contacting absent students. The theme of engaging program directors and faculty through distributed leadership had one sub-theme of empowering action in others.

Figure 4.1  
*Emergent Themes*





**Theme 1: Focusing Campus Culture on Retention**

All participants stated that retention was a focus of the campus culture. Adelle, a Program Director noted that “Information on retention is communicated through our chair meetings. The dean of education keeps us comprised of... retention rates.”

Delphia, a faculty member, described how retention efforts are emphasized on the campus and how the focus on retention is shared:

It’s communicated...from the hierarchy down... students are individuals. My chairperson tells us in meetings and we incorporate that into how we teach. And when we have meetings with students, it’s incorporated into what we tell them. But it’s the school policy really to keep that as a focal point.

Another faculty member, Danelle, provided additional information:

We have those meetings where the dean talks about the retention numbers. It comes from the president down about...how to keep kids in school. So...we get it from everywhere.

Furthermore, Mariela, a faculty member, noted how retention goals are discussed in department meetings, and how it is important to retain every student:

It comes up in department meetings as well. We talk a lot about retention, and the understanding is that it should be as high as possible and...every student who drops is a lot. We don’t want that. So I think it’s just the atmosphere that we want to keep the retention as high as possible.

The process described above demonstrates how each discussion builds on the previous discussion, creating a multi-faceted and dynamic approach to retention.

Nina, the Director of Career Services, supported the idea that communication of the retention goals is a focus for the campus and stated “The dean of education keeps all of the program chairs up-to-date on what the retention status is, as far as per class and per program.”

Further, Nina stated that the retention efforts are a priority for the dean of education and the program chairs. She described the focus on retention as a keen awareness of retention as a top priority. For Nina, as for many others, the focus on retention started with the dean, moved to the program directors, and eventually involved everyone on the campus.

**Directing retention efforts in career services.** Each department on campus had specific initiatives that supported the focus on retention. The career services department included working with program directors on placing program graduates, creating bulletin boards that showcase employers, and career fairs. Nina described the career fairs as vital to retention:

The last few years...we've had very large career fairs here on campus where we try and invite as many in-house students as we can so that they can see employers that want to come and talk to them. And while that's something that's happening out of the placement department, it is absolutely something that encourages and improves retention on campus.

**Directing retention efforts in admissions.** The admission department viewed high retention rates as a contributing factor in a student's decision to enroll. Additionally, the admissions department had their own initiatives that supported retention. Cecily, the Director of Admissions, stated that having high retention rates helps her department. "Retention is so important to the admission department because that is something that we...we brag on." Additionally, the admissions department holds student appreciation days that typically involve serving food to the students, like popcorn or ice cream. Both Cecily and Nina, the Director of Career Services, described an event at Thanksgiving where the staff and faculty made cookies and treats to serve the students. "The staff was also involved in baking. I know that I baked. I

know that you baked Nina” (Cecily). These retention efforts serve to focus the campus on retention and ensure that the entire campus is part of the retention efforts.

### **Theme 2: Understanding Student Needs through Individual Engagement**

The participants described several retention actions they take that create a culture where each student is treated as an individual. These actions include academic advising, tutoring, student centered learning, and following-up with absent students. As Danelle, a faculty member, said, “We’re so focused on the individual and trying to keep the individual here is school that the numbers aren’t important.” Participants stressed the importance of engaging with each student in order to understand the individual’s needs as a means for retaining the student. Another faculty member, Delphia, described the goal of this engagement. “If a student has any difficulties...we see what we can do within our scope to keep them in school” (Delphia).

**Engaging in academic advising.** Academic advising, with six distinct components, emerged as the main retention action of program directors and faculty (see Appendix I for the academic advising model). Academic advising was unanimously noted as the most important retention action. Lori, a Program Director, described the *Rocks in the Road* survey, the first component in the advising process given to new students at orientation (see Appendix E):

We have certain steps that we take from day one, and these are the actions I think that we’ve created to...make sure that we meet the requirements for retention all the way through graduation. The first thing is at orientation, all the chairs are present. All the chairs get to meet all their students and we go into break out groups. And during the break out groups we do something called *Rocks in the Road*. Basically we’re asking them about what their motivation is to come to school, and who would benefit the most from them graduating and getting a new job. And we also ask them what kinds of stumbling blocks they might have that are *Rocks in the Road* for them finishing their

education. And we try to help them, before they even start, come up with a plan of how we can address those road blocks, whether it child care issues, transportation issues, illness, things like that. And then lastly on that form we ask them, if you were to withdraw, or decide that you couldn't continue with school, what would you want me to say to you. And I really find that that tool really sets the stage.

The *Rocks in the Road* survey provides the program directors an opportunity to work with each student as an individual, and also helps the program director to understand reasons students may have for withdrawing before they do so. This gives them time to work with the student to eliminate these reasons for withdrawing.

Delphia, a faculty member, described academic advising as an opportunity to instill confidence in new students:

We have a very, very large start this mod and out of the seventeen new students I found that they all have issues. And when we sat and met with them individually, really I think it gave them more confidence to stay in school once they knew that we were going to let them vent, talk to us, see what we could do. We could tell them that there's tutoring....tell them that we can help you with this. I think it makes a major difference in the school when you do *Rocks in the Road* and follow-them-up because they're all very nervous. I think it's extremely helpful to them because it really weeds out what their concerned about and what we can help them with as a team, and also as an individual.

As Delphia described the process of *Rocks in the Road*, the program directors and faculty work with the students to create a community where everyone functions as a team to help the students reach individual goals.

Tina, the Dean of Education, described the *Staying on Track* survey which is given to students once they start class (see Appendix F):

The *Staying on Track* survey...is handed out to the student on the first day and as late as the second day that they're in session. The *Staying on Track* survey...has a three, a five, and a seven day initiative that goes along with it...what happens is...a teacher within that program will take the *Rocks in the Road* and look at it with the student, and sit down with the individual individually in private and discuss...particular items that were checked off on *Rocks in the Road*. And then they have a discussion, an advisement session if you'd like to call it that. And all the while the details of that discussion are written on what we call the *Staying on Track* form so that we can track the discussion between the teacher and the student. At this point, the student doesn't know the campus that well, or the teachers, so it's a very vague conversation. But it's really for the teacher to open up the lines of communication with the student so that that student realizes that 1) there was follow-up from the *Rocks in the Road* and not just...another form that you have to fill out, and 2) it starts that line of communication with that student so they realize that... this faculty member obviously cares about me and that's why we're sitting down.

The *Staying on Track* survey step in the advising process adds three points of contact with the student after using *Rocks in the Road*. These advising opportunities all help maintaining the focus on retention.

Adele, a Program Director, discussed how the *Rocks in the Road* survey and the *Staying on Track* survey worked in combination with *Mid-Mod* (Appendix G) and *End-of-Mod* academic advising to provide academic support for the students:

I think that *Rocks in the Road* and *Staying on Track* surveys are good because that's a chance where maybe you can start to pick up if somebody has an issue that they may need...help with down the line. *Mid-Mods* are great because that's that mid-way point where someone might be struggling and then that's a good opportunity to ask how can we get you back on track? Do you need some tutoring? How can we help you? Then the end of the mod is really important also because that sets you up for the next mod.

Mariella, a faculty member, looked for additional opportunities to advise students who were struggling academically (Appendix H):

I'm not really dealing with the *Rocks in the Road* since I'm teaching the...later modules. But we have the advisement sheet that lets...students know where they seem to have problems...and what we can do about it. And we'll write it out and the program chair follow-up on that.

Lastly, students in programs with externships received advising prior to beginning the externship, with the goal of showing the student how to successfully complete the training. The day-to-day contact the faculty members and program director have with each student end when the student begins externship. Lori, the program director who described *Rocks in the Road*, stated why academic advising was important for students entering externship:

The chairperson or the externship coordinator must have meetings [with a student entering externship]... because once the student]leaves the campus and is on externship, it can be a challenge...to keep the student going.

Lori is describing the difficulty of working with a student in the externship portion of the program when there is no longer daily contact, so advising prior to externship is the final opportunity to support the student. The Program directors and faculty view academic advising

that is used from the beginning through the end of a student's enrollment as vital to each student's success, and this advising process they describe is an integral part of the campuses retention initiatives which result in high rates of retention and graduation rates in all programs.

Student advising was also recognized as important by administrators on campus. Cecily, the director of admissions, depicted *Rocks in the Road* as an opportunity for the student to "identify some of their areas of concern...that might throw them off track. And it gives the program chairs a chance to meet with that student and address any of those concerns..." All academic advising was viewed as helping faculty, program directors, and the dean of education understand potential reasons for student drops. Proactively eliminating the reasons students may give for not being able to continue is viewed as having a great impact on retention.

Although faculty members believe academic advising vital to the retention process, students don't always take advantage of advising opportunities. Some students lose focus as they get closer to graduation. One faculty member, Danelle, described her frustration:

*Mid-Mod* advising is wonderful for catching up your students...when they don't realize...they have things that they have to make up. And I have students who...catch up really well and get everything in by *Mid-Mod*. And then, it's almost like we need a three-quarter mod or something, because the same people who have lagged behind at *Mid-Mod* and then get everything in with a rush. Then just slack off again and don't want to do the rest of the things. They think half is just good enough.

Another faculty member, Mariela, was concerned that the effectiveness of the advising wears off:

I do think ...that sometimes when students get to later... quarters or modules...they take advising a little less seriously than at the beginning. At the beginning... advising is a bigger deal. Later they know that work can be caught up. It seems less effective later on. However, by the time the effectiveness of advising lagged, the students were part of the campus culture and continued to progress.

**Utilizing tutoring.** Several participants viewed tutoring as way to build the campus community. Providing students with a variety of tutoring options made also worked to retain students, and was also a support to academic advising. Wyatt, the Campus President, saw the tutoring and mentoring offered through academic advising as a way to build community:.

We try to have activities on the campus that pull the students together...We have tutoring here with our teachers, but sometimes peer tutoring is more effective.

Something that's kind of not talked about but something that's very powerful, and it's the social aspect of coming to school. And if you can get students that really want to be here...the excuses go away.

Tina, the Dean of Education, further illustrated the tutoring available through academic advising:

Tutoring is every single day on this campus, in every single program. Tutoring occurs before school for those students that can come early. It occurs after school for any student that can't come early but can stay late. The tutoring is conducted by the instructor that the student is requesting, and that can be a program chair or an actual instructor in the program. We do peer-to-peer tutoring, which also helps. Tutoring actually helps because students learn at different levels.

Delphia and Adele, faculty members, see tutoring as part of the academic advising process:



I really do find that allowing time for tutoring is a big plus. I also think...sometimes like Adele said...when an instructor is really accessible to a student, it really helps them feel not a number, not that they're a number but that they're individualized here at the school. And if we reach out to them and do the tutoring with them, and it is free so they can tutor as much as they want, I find that a very big plus.

Offering tutoring to students with academic issues focuses on students' individual needs while supporting the academic advising process.

**Creating student centered learning.** Faculty developed student centered learning activities as additional ways to address retention. These activities include creating a fun environment in the classroom, stressing the importance of attendance to employers, and addressing professionalism in the classroom. Below is an exchange between faculty members where these ideas are discussed. First, Angel describes how she stresses the importance of attendance:

I help them in many ways by telling them that the attendance is very important because as an individual working, you do not want an employer saying, hey the attendance is poor. I try to explain that to them. That's very important.

Delphia adds that she stresses the importance of working with the students to treat school like a job:

And we try to...point out that this is not...high school. They need]to treat it more like a job where everyone gets to work on time...The other thing is that just as I think Angel said, when...we get put down as references, the employers, when they call, it's not your grades they ask about. They ask what attendance is like.

Roslyn adds that she creates a work-like atmosphere in her classroom:

What I do is I group them together, and I mix them, and they work together as a team because when you go and work in the dental office, we also work as a team. So in the classroom, we make sure that ...they feel the spirit of working together.

This conversation between the faculty members illustrates how faculty members create a learning environment where students can reach their goals. These efforts further enhance retention and graduation rates.

**Contacting absent students.** Campus leadership and faculty viewed contacting absent students as an important retention practice. Efforts to contact absent students included calling, emailing, texting, and messaging on Facebook. Wyatt, the Campus President, explained the process for calling absent students:

The culture has been set that each day when the...attendance has been submitted to the registrar, she now communicates back to the dean and the program chairs of who's missing. And now they act accordingly. Either they're on the phone with the student...or we already know a student's going to be out. Really by 1:00 p.m.....each and every day, we know each student that's out and why.

Tina, the Dean of Education, explained that this effort was led by her, but that it is driven by faculty:

On this campus we have a policy that at the end of the first period, which is for us at 8:50 a.m. time frame for those courses that started at 8:00 a.m., and at 9:50 a.m. for the courses that started at 9:00 a.m.. At the end of that 50 minute first period, whatever teacher had a student who was absent in that period, it is their job to go to a phone or a text, whichever method, and contact that individual to find out where he or she is, or at least try to. That information is recorded on what we call a telephone report.

This practice is explained by Delphia, a faculty member:

One of the things that we do in the MA program is that if they're late or absent in your first class, we always call them to find out what the reason is, and then we log it so that if it's a continuous pattern then we know that there's an issue coming. Because if it's two or three days and we see the same pattern. Then it gets handed over to Lori [the program director] and she has a meeting with them.

Contacting absent students was seen as a way to understand and document the reason for the absence, and was also used to create a point of contact with students once the students returned to class.

### **Theme 3: Engaging Program Directors and Faculty through Distributed Leadership**

Distributed Leadership is a leadership style that looks at how work is shared among individuals in an organization. Distributed leadership is most effective where individuals at all levels of the organization participate in action and act as leaders in areas of expertise (Hallenger, 2003). Additionally, leadership must create the environment where it is possible to reach the desired outcomes (Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008). Although participants do not describe the dean of education's leadership approach in this manner, the approach can be identified through the descriptions used by peers, program directors and faculty.

A distributed leadership approach can be seen in the way that participants shared their perception that retention efforts start with the dean of education, but everyone is responsible for it. Nina, the Director of Career Services, explained how the dean of education led the retention efforts:

The dean of education is...so keenly focused on retention here. She does have a weekly one-on-one meeting with every program chair. Her office is next to mine, and she will very frequently have a student or two sitting outside her office waiting for an

appointment because they need to talk about something, or because there is a student issue and it has been discussed with the teacher and the program chair perhaps, and now she wants to have a meeting with that student and discuss it. She's very much on top of every single student issue.

**Empowering action in others.** The dean of education empowered her program directors to lead retention efforts in their programs. Program directors also empowered their faculty to lead retention efforts in their classrooms. This view was supported by Nina's description of the dean of education as being involved in the retention process at all levels. Additionally, Tina, the Dean of Education, explained how she shared information on retention with program directors, and how she worked with them to set individual goals for their programs:

And then I take that retention information, and I'm all about transparency with my program directors, so I sit down with them also on a...formal basis once a week and talk about retention and we talk about their goals. But then on an informal basis, I met with them as well a couple of times a week, each one of them, to discuss what their problems are, what their suggestions are, if they have any additional goals that they'd like to meet, or do they think they're not meeting their goals and why.

Tina's view was that she supports her program directors, encourages them to set their own goals, then follows up with additional meetings as needed. This is the definition of distributed leadership, or leadership that shares work among individuals in an organization.

Additionally, while academic advising is implemented by program directors and faculty members, Lori, a Program Director, described the academic advising process as being led by the dean of education. "The fact that our, our dean...made sure that we put the *Rocks in the Road* survey into play...is a big reason why our retention is so good on this school" (Lori). Program

directors also stated that they can return to the dean of education or the campus president to discuss retention. Stephanie said “If we have an issue, we discuss it with either our dean or the campus president just to make sure we can retain the students.” Program directors stated that they share ideas on their retention efforts with each other. “I think that as a team we all try to give each other hints as to how to keep the students, so retention is always being talked about on a daily basis” (Stephanie).

The exchange between faculty members regarding how retention is a focus of campus culture also demonstrates distributed leadership. As Delphia described it:

It’s communicated...from the hierarchy down...It’s...instilled that the students are individuals. My chair person tells us in meetings and we incorporate that into how we teach. And when we have meetings with students, it’s incorporated into what we tell them. But it’s the school policy really to keep that as a focal point.

Both Danelle and Mariela support this idea that leadership is distributed from the president down, and that faculty members are empowered with the knowledge of “how to keep kids in school” (Danelle). Mariela explains that the campus has set an “atmosphere that we want to keep the retention as high as possible.”

Faculty members demonstrate that meetings take place at all levels, beginning with the campus president, then the dean of education, then program directors, and faculty members. These examples demonstrate that the dean of education utilizes a distributed leadership by working with all members of the education department to act as leaders in their areas of expertise (Hallenger, 2003).

### **Summary**

This chapter described the results and findings of an examination of retention practices utilized by a dean of education at a career college where student outcomes in retention and

graduation met and exceeded standards set forth by the campus' accreditor and the U.S. Department of Education. It also described how campus leadership and faculty perceived and enacted those retention practices.

This chapter also explained the themes that emerged through the interpretation of participant descriptions using an open coding process with a triangulation method, data summary tables, and memos recording emergent themes along with participant quotations related to these themes. Three main themes with related sub-themes emerged from the data analysis procedure: (a) focusing campus culture on retention, (b) understanding student needs through individual engagement, and (c) engaging program directors and faculty through distributed leadership. The theme of focusing campus culture on retention had two sub-themes, including directing retention efforts in career services and directing retention efforts in admissions. The theme of understanding student needs through individual engagement had four sub-themes, including engaging in academic advising, utilizing tutoring, creating student centered learning, and contacting absent students. The theme of engaging program directors and faculty through distributed leadership had one sub-theme of empowering action in others. Table 4.2 shows examples of these themes as mentioned by the participants throughout the interviews.

Table 4.2  
*Examples of Emergent Themes*

Emergent Themes			
Main Theme	Examples	Sub Theme(s)	Examples

<b>Focusing Campus Culture on Retention</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Our retention goal right now overall is 90%. How we manage that is through my DOE with her chairs on a weekly and monthly basis reviewing our drops. (Wyatt)</li> </ul>	<b>Retention Efforts in Career Services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We've had very large career fairs here on campus ...and while that's something that's happening out of the placement department, it is absolutely something that encourages and improves retention on campus. (Nina)</li> </ul>
		<b>Retention Efforts in Admissions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Retention is so important to the admissions department. We're proud of our high retention of students. (Cecily)</li> </ul>
<b>Understanding Student Needs through Individual Engagement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We're so focused on the individual and trying to keep the individual here is school that the numbers [aren't important] (Danelle)</li> </ul>	<b>Engaging in Academic Advising</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We try to get every student to be treated as an individual with whatever their individual issues are, in order to get them to stay in school, to keep them in school. And if they have any difficulties, to try to see what we can do within our scope to keep them in school. (Delphia)</li> </ul>
		<b>Utilizing Tutoring</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tutoring is every single day on this campus; in every single program. Tutoring actually helps because students learn at different levels.</li> </ul>
		<b>Creating Student Centered Learning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We try to keep them here so that they, they can learn the skills that they need to get out into the world and actually acquire a job. (Stephanie)</li> </ul>
		<b>Contacting Absent Students</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If a student is late or absent in your first class, we always call them to find out what the reason is, and then we log it so that if it's a continuous pattern then we know that there's an issue coming. (Delphia)</li> </ul>
<b>Engaging Program Directors and Faculty through Distributed Leadership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I'm all about transparency with my program directors, so I meet with them on a ... formal basis once a week and talk about retention and we talk about their goals.</li> </ul>	<b>Empowering Action in Others</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I think that as a team we all try to give each other hints as to how to keep the students, so retention is always being talked about on a daily basis." (Stephanie)</li> </ul>

The next and final chapter presents interpretations, conclusions, implications, and recommendations.





## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **ANALYSIS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The purpose of this intrinsic case study was to examine retention practices utilized by a dean of education at a career college where student outcomes in retention and graduation met standards set forth by the campus' accreditor and the U.S. Department of Education. The study also sought to understand how campus leadership and faculty perceive and enact these retention practices.

Chapter 5 first provides answers to the research questions, and presents interpretations of the themes developed in Chapter 4, and offers conclusions based on a comprehensive examination of the findings. It then suggests implications for theory and practice, and concludes with recommendations for future research.

#### **Review of the Study**

Career colleges are a rapidly changing part of higher education. In recent years, pressures from outside regulatory bodies have increased. Gainful employment regulations from the U.S. Department of Education requirements took effect July 1, 2011, with additional requirements taking effect July 1, 2011. Gainful employment requires that career colleges provide information regarding program costs, whether students graduate, how much they earn, and how much debt they may accumulate prior to student enrollment ("Fact sheet: Obama," 2015). The guidelines add to existing requirements of accreditors and approval bodies with which career colleges must comply. These regulations have forced changes in career college organizations. These changes have created a greater need for educational leaders to develop and utilize retention techniques that lead to successful student outcomes in retention and graduation.

## Research Questions

The study sought to examine retention practices utilized by a dean of education at a career college where student outcomes in retention and graduation met standards set forth by the campus' accreditor and the U.S. Department of Education. The study also sought to understand how campus leadership and faculty perceive and enact these retention practices. The research questions were developed to understand how the dean of education, campus leadership, program directors and faculty perceive and enact the retention practices utilized at the campus.

Research Question 1: How do program directors and faculty perceive and enact the retention practices employed by the dean of education at a career college where student outcomes in retention and graduation met standards set forth by the campus' accreditor and the U.S. Department of Education?

To answer this question, two focus group interviews were held with two groups of program directors, and one focus group interview was held with faculty. Program directors and faculty perceived that retention as a focus of the campus culture was an important retention practice employed by the dean of education. This focus on retention was seen as starting with the campus president, and was shared and disseminated by the dean of education, program directors and faculty. Program directors and faculty stated that understanding student needs through individual engagement was vital to the successful retention and graduation efforts on the campus. The program directors and faculty utilized various methods to engage students as individuals, including academic advising, tutoring, creating student centered learning experiences, and contacting absent students.

Participants stressed the importance of engaging with each student in order to understand the individual's needs as a means for retaining the student. Faculty described engaging students through advising to determine any barriers that could prevent a student from continuing, and

expressed a desire to do what was needed “within our scope to keep them in school” (Delphia). Academic advising emerged as the main retention action of program directors and faculty, and was named by all eighteen participants as the most important retention action. Faculty also developed student centered learning activities as additional ways to address retention, including creating an entertaining classroom environment, as well as stressing the importance of attendance, and addressing professionalism in the classroom. Program directors and faculty also saw contacting absent students as an important retention tool.

Research Question 2: How does campus leadership perceive and enact the retention practices employed by the dean of education at a career college where student outcomes in retention and graduation met standards set forth by the campus’ accreditor and the U.S. Department of Education?

Campus leadership provided responses similar to those of program directors and faculty. Participants unanimously felt that retention as a focus of the campus culture was an important retention practice employed at the campus. Campus leadership also viewed this focus on retention as starting with the Campus President, and was shared and disseminated by the dean of education, program directors and faculty. Additionally, campus leadership stressed the importance of understanding student needs through individual engagement as a way to successfully meet retention and graduation standards. Campus leadership saw academic advising, tutoring, and contacting absent students as ways to engage students as individuals. The director of admissions and the director of career services also believed they had a role in supporting retention, and developed their own events as part of campus retention efforts, including student appreciation days and career fairs.

Supporting Question: How do program directors, faculty, and campus leadership recognize the leadership actions of the dean of education as contributing to student retention?

Program directors, faculty and campus leadership recognized that the dean of education utilized a specific leadership method that they described as contributing to student retention. Program directors, faculty and campus leadership all identified components of a distributed leadership when describing the dean of education's approach to the focus of the campus culture on retention. Furthermore, they noted that this leadership model aids the dean when working with program directors and faculty on understanding student needs through individual engagement by utilizing academic advising, tutoring, creating student centered learning experiences, and contacting absent students. Distributed leadership is a leadership style that embraces the concept that work is shared among individuals in an organization, and is viewed as most effective where individuals at all levels of the organization participate in action and act as leaders in areas of expertise (Hallenger, 2003).

#### **Interpretation of Findings**

A post-positivist framework was used to understand the causal relationship between the retention practices enacted and the retention outcomes at this campus. Post-positivism focuses on a research process that includes multiple measures, while understanding that each of these measures can contain errors (Creswell, 2013). As Trochim (2006) states, it is possible to learn from the experiences of others. And multiple measures and can be used to find the truth and to understand the ideas being researched.

Participants of the study included the campus president, the director of admissions, the director of career services, the dean of education, program directors, and a cross-section of faculty representing six different programs offered at the campus. Data from the interviews was collected and analyzed using these multiple voices in order to better understand reality.

Triangulation was also used to support data collection. In the triangulation process, interview data was collected from participants with different perspectives, and these multiple sources of data were compared and cross-checked (Merriam, 2009). Triangulating the sources of data helped determine where the data points merged to form distinct ideas, and, conversely, where a data point was an outlier from other data points.

When interpreting the data, emerging themes were identified by moving beyond the understanding of the codes and themes in order to extract greater meaning from the data (Creswell, 2013). Three main themes emerged from the open coding process with a constant comparison method, the data summary tables, and the creation of memos that recorded emergent themes along with participant quotations related to these themes: (a) focusing campus culture on retention, (b) understanding student needs through individual engagement, and (c) engaging program directors and faculty through distributed leadership. Seven sub-themes were also found as follows:

- Focusing Campus Culture on Retention
  - Directing Retention Efforts in Career Services
  - Directing Retention Efforts in Admissions
- Understanding Student Needs through Individual Engagement
  - Engaging in Academic Advising
  - Utilizing Tutoring
  - Creating Student Centered Learning
  - Contacting Absent Students
- Engaging Program Directors and Faculty through Distributed Leadership

- Empowering Action in Others

Three findings stand out from the interpretation of the data: (a) retention as a focus of campus culture, (b) academic advising was the primary retention action, and (c) distributed leadership was utilized in implementing retention initiatives.

**Finding 1: Retention was a Focus of Campus Culture**

The first key finding of this research is that retention as a focus of the campus culture promoted retention throughout the campus and played an important role in the successful student outcomes in retention and graduation at the campus. Program directors, faculty, and campus leadership perceived this focus on retention as an important retention practice employed by the dean of education. Although this focus started with the campus president, it was shared with the dean of education, program directors and faculty. It was important for the campus president and the dean of education focus the campus culture on retention so that all members of the institution understand the value of meeting and exceeding student outcome measurements. This focus helped each member of the institution to internalize the student outcome-focused approach by concentrating on each student as an individual. The high retention goal was reinforced through meetings, and the actions taken to retain students, including academic advising, tutoring student centered learning, and contacting absent students, were reinforced in through daily follow-up from the dean of education, programs directors and faculty.

This focus on retention is an important finding because it established the understanding that successful retention efforts were shared by many on the campus. As stated previously, each of the programs offered at the campus has met the minimum standard set forth by the Accrediting Bureau of Health Education Schools (ABHES) of at least a 70% retention rate in the 2013, 2014 and 2015 reporting years (“Accrediting Agency,” 2015). A closer look at retention on this campus showed that retention by program ranged from a low of 78% in a program with

68 students enrolled, to a high of 100% in a program with 35 students enrolled. The two largest programs had retention rates of 89% with 258 students enrolled, and 87% with 189 students enrolled.

While retention rates are reported annually, graduation rates are reported after students have the opportunity to attempt 150% of the program length. Therefore, graduation rate reporting years do not align to retention rate reporting years. In the 2011-12 reporting year, the most recent year for which data were available, the campus in this study had a 76% cohort graduation rate for first-time students in full time programs at the campus (“U.S. Department, ” 2015). This 76% graduation rate compared to a 63% graduation rate for students enrolled at career colleges who earned a degree, and 21% of students enrolled at community colleges who earned a degree (JBL Associates, Inc., 2014). The focus of the participants in this study to retain every student showed in the exceptional outcomes for retention and graduation.

**Finding 2: Academic Advising was the Primary Retention Action**

The second key finding of this study is that academic advising, with six distinct components, emerged as vital to the retention efforts on the campus. All participants mentioned one of these components of academic advising when discussing retention initiatives, and academic advising was described throughout the responses as the most important retention action.

The components of academic advising were named as:

- Rocks-in-the-Road Survey
- Staying-on-Track Survey
- Mid-mod assessment
- End-of-mod Assessment
- Academic Advising When Needed

- Externship

Academic advising was proven to be an important tool for retaining students. A student's relationship and interaction with the academic advisor and faculty can be the single biggest factor in increasing student retention (Kramer, 2000). The academic advising process used at this campus had several separate opportunities for interaction with the student. This began at orientation when each in-coming student completed the Rocks in the Road survey for students to self-identify any issues that may result in their leaving the program. Program directors then followed up with an academic advising session with each student to discuss these issues. This survey is followed up with the Staying on Track survey, which allowed students to continue to identify issues, and created three additional meeting points between the student and the program director or faculty.

Once a student was past the first two weeks of attendance, as-needed academic advising began. This advising included the mid-mod evaluation point at the end of week three of a six-week term, designed to make students aware of their progress in the course, as well as to identify opportunities for improvement. End-of-mod advising at the end of week six of a six-week term was used to let the students know their final course grades, but also to show them a path for future success. Faculty members held additional academic advising sessions to those students who struggled and needed assistance beyond the mid-mod and end-of-mod advising points. Lastly, students in programs with externships received advising prior to beginning the externship, with the goal of showing the student how to successfully complete the training.

These advising opportunities were designed to obtain data the dean of education, program directors, and faculty used to identify students at-risk for dropping out or failing. The surveys provide information that is used by the dean of education to understand each student's



background and experiences, and to recognize difficulties each student may have. As the participants in this study continually stated, this information then allowed them to approach each student as an individual, and to provide information specific and useful to each student. This type of academic advising can be described as developmental academic advising.

Developmental academic advising focuses on a student's progress while showing the student how to set and achieve personal and academic goals (Kramer, 2000, Fowler & Boylan, 2010). This form of advising assists students in understanding the value of education, as well as in learning about their own understanding abilities, aptitudes, interests, and limitations. It also assists students in developing an education plan consistent with their life goals and objectives, and may also contain alternative courses of action (Kramer, 2000, Fowler & Boylan, 2010).

Program directors and faculty defined academic advising used from the beginning of a student's enrollment through the end of a student's experience in externship as vital to each student's success. They outline an advising process that is an integral part of the campus retention initiatives which result in high rates of retention and graduation rates in all programs. The academic advising used on this campus is a key component in their retention efforts.

**Finding 3: Distributed Leadership was used in Implementing Retention Initiatives**

The approach to retention taken by the dean of education demonstrates distributed leadership. Distributed leadership is a leadership style that looks at how work is shared among individuals in an organization. Distributed leadership is most effective where individuals at all levels of the organization participate in action and act as leaders in areas of expertise (Hallenger, 2003). Additionally, leadership must create the environment where it is possible to reach the desired outcomes (Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008). Although the dean of education did not describe her leadership approach in these terms, the approach could be identified through the descriptions used by peers, program directors and faculty.

Distributed leadership can be seen in the approach to the campus focus on retention. Participants in this study stated that retention was a focus of the campus. As the evaluation of responses to the questions previously demonstrated, the program directors specified the retention goal was communicated by the campus president and the dean of education, while the faculty stated the retention goal was communicated to them first by the campus president, then by the dean of education, and finally by the program directors. Program directors stated the dean held meetings in which she shared information on retention and to share updates on the implementation of retention initiatives. This description was supported by the director of career services, who stated that the dean of education kept all the program directors up-to-date on retention, and that everyone on the campus was “keenly aware” that retention is a priority for the dean and the program chairs. Program directors and faculty then described how the program directors then shared the implementation of retention initiatives with their faculty. Finally, faculty described their role in retention initiatives, but stated that they also shared the responsibility with the students in the academic advising sessions when developing plans for students to successfully complete their programs. All participants shared their perception that retention efforts started with the dean of education, but understood that everyone was responsible for retention. This fits in the distributed leadership model, where each team member participates in the development, implementation and graduation of tasks (Hallenger, 2003).

In a distributed leadership approach, all are expected to contribute and to support each other through action. In the practice of distributed leadership, the leader can make staff the experts if they are willing and able to exercise leadership, and if coworkers are willing and able to be led by their peers (Robinson, 2008). This type of distributed leadership was evident in the way the dean of education explained how she shared information on retention with program

directors, and how she worked with them to set individual goals for their programs, then met with them to review the actions implemented to meet the goals. The dean of education explained that she supported her program directors, encouraged them to set their own goals, and then followed up with additional meetings as needed. Program directors supported this description, and also stated that they share ideas on their retention efforts with each other.

Distributed leadership is evident in both the performance of tasks and the exchange between leaders and followers in the completion of the task (Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2004). According to Robinson (2008) a task should be linked to expected outcomes, and the steps to reach the expected outcomes should be chosen according to what is known to be effective. As stated previously, academic advising was viewed as one of the most important retention initiatives on the campus. This process begins with the Rocks in the Road survey, which was described as being led by the dean of education, but followed-up by program directors, with additional academic advising initiatives implemented by faculty members.

Through shared leadership and dynamic engagement, distributed leadership can develop a leadership capacity in the organization that result in improved learning outcomes (Hallenger, 2003; Robinson, 2008). At this campus, the use of distributed leadership has led to retention and graduation outcomes that met and exceeded the standards set forth by the campus' accreditor and the U.S. Department of Education.

### **Implications**

The first implication of this study is that retention efforts on a campus should be a shared effort between departments. At the campus studied, retention was promoted by campus leadership as a focus of the campus culture. This focus played an important role in the successful student outcomes in retention and graduation at the campus. This focus helped each member of the institution internalize a student outcome-focused approach by concentrating on

each student as an individual, and established the understanding that successful retention was a shared effort.

The second implication of the study is that academic advising is an important part of retention efforts. Academic advising an important tool for retaining students at the campus studied. As Kramer (2000) demonstrated, a student's relationship and interaction with an academic advisor and faculty can be the most important factor to increasing student retention. These advising opportunities utilized at the campus in this study were designed to obtain data the dean of education, program directors, and faculty used to identify students at-risk for dropping out or failing. This information then allowed them to approach each student as an individual, and to provide information specific and useful to each student. The advising process used on the campus in this study was an integral part of the retention initiatives that resulted in high rates of retention and graduation rates in all programs.

The third implication of this study is that distributed leadership contributed to retention and graduation outcomes that meet, and exceed, standards set forth by the campus' accreditor and the U.S. Department of Education. An assumption was made at the start of this study that in order to successfully meet retention and graduation outcomes, the dean of education would demonstrate some aspects of transformational and distributed leadership. This assumption was based on the premise that educational leadership works best when the leadership capacity of the education department is developed. Educational leadership must be seen as collective activities of all individuals within a department, who then become leaders, both formal and informal. Transformational leaders look beyond their own self-interest and support the group-interests by promoting the goals of the group (Bass, 1990). Distributed leadership is a leadership style that looks at how work is shared among individuals in an organization (Hallenger, 2003). As the

literature review demonstrated, instructional leadership was a dominant model of educational leadership studied in the 1980s and 1990s (Hallenger, 2003). However, instructional leadership was seen as too focused on the principal as the center of knowledge and power (Hallenger, 2003; Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008). Distributed leadership and transformational leadership arose as new leadership models within education since they did not focus on direct coordination and control, but instead sought to build an organization's capacity to successfully change and meet goals (Hallenger, 2003). The distributive leadership approach shares work among individuals in an organization, and requires each team member participate in the development, implementation and completion of tasks (Hallenger, 2003).

The fourth implication of this study is that hiring and training practices at other campuses within this organization, as well as similar career colleges and community colleges, can be informed by the understanding that sharing leadership and work in an organization can improve outcomes. By sharing work and leadership, an organization can improve outcomes (Hallenger, 2003; Robinson, 2008). When hiring deans of education, questions can be developed to gain an understanding of leadership style, with a goal of identifying candidates that express the traits of distributed leadership. Additionally, training for newly-hired deans of education can focus on developing distributed leadership practices.

#### **Recommendations**

The immediate stakeholders in this study are study participants and organization leadership. Additional stakeholders may include leaders at career colleges, hiring managers at career colleges, and leadership in community colleges with comparable student demographics. Three main recommendations regarding how successful retention practices of one dean of education and her leadership actions can be used to improve outcomes at other career colleges,

and inform the hiring and training practices of career colleges in need of a dean of education, are presented.

The first recommendation is that the academic advising implemented at this campus be used as a model for an academic advising initiative (See Appendix I for the academic advising model). As previously stated, academic advising is a proven means for retaining students, and a student's relationship and interaction with faculty can be the single biggest factor in increasing student retention (Kramer, 2000). The academic advising process used at this campus has several separate opportunities for interaction with the student, most of which directly involved faculty. Although academic advising began at orientation with the program director as the first contact, most of the follow up points for academic advising first involved faculty, with follow-up with a program director or the dean of education as needed. Bardach (2011) states that in order to replicate a process, one needs to develop realistic expectations and look for solutions that may have been used previously; look for processes that seem to work well, seek to recognize exactly how and why they work, and assess their usefulness to the new situation. The academic advising used at this campus can serve as a model to replicate.

The second recommendation is that distributed leadership be utilized by leaders at career colleges. Using a distributive leadership approach where work is shared among individuals in an organization, each individual must participate, implement and complete tasks (Hallenger, 2003). Although this study found that retention was a focus of the campus culture, participants noted that the focus on retention started with the campus president. While the dean of education made retention a focus within the education department, the campus president played an important role in creating the campus-wide focus described in this study. Sharing leadership and work in an organization can improve outcomes (Hallenger, 2003; Robinson, 2008). The use of distributed

leadership utilized at this campus that is meeting and exceeding, retention and graduation goals set by accreditors and the U.S. Department of Education can be replicated at other campuses within the organization, and may be useful to other similar career colleges and community colleges.

The third recommendation is that findings from this study inform the hiring and training practices of career colleges in need of a dean of education. The use of distributed leadership utilized at this campus that is meeting and exceeding, retention and graduation goals set by accreditors and the U.S. Department of Education can be replicated at other campuses within the organization, and may be useful to other similar career colleges and community colleges. When hiring deans of education, questions can be developed to gain an understanding of leadership style, with a goal of identifying candidates that express the traits of distributed leadership. Additionally, training for newly-hired deans of education can focus on developing distributed leadership practices.

#### **Exception to Recommendations**

While retention was a focus of campus culture was both finding and an implication of the study, it is not included as a recommendation for actions that can be used to improve outcomes at other career colleges. The reason for not including retention as a focus of campus culture as a recommendation is that the purpose of this study was to examine retention practices utilized by a dean of education at a career college where student outcomes in retention and graduation met required standards, and to understand how campus leadership and faculty perceive and enact these retention practices. The campus culture is typically set by the campus president, and creating a campus culture where retention is the focus is beyond the scope of the dean of education.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

Additional research can be conducted on academic advising by faculty members at career colleges to understand if the model of academic advising used at this career college campus can be replicated at campuses where a distributed leadership model is utilized. Academic advising is an important tool for retaining students. Kramer (2000) found that a student's relationship and interaction with the academic advisor and faculty can have biggest impact on increasing student retention. Distributed leadership models are seen as effective leadership models within education (Hallenger, 2003; Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008). Academic advising utilized at a campus with a distributed leadership model could be a useful tool in building the institution's capacity to reach its goals.

Another possible next step for researchers interested in this topic includes further examining retention practices at career colleges. As noted in the literature review, there are limited studies that examine retention practices in career colleges, and the research that exists is primarily available through dissertations. While institutions and accrediting bodies collect student achievement data in regards to retention, graduation, licensure and/or certification, and employment related to the field at least annually, this data has not been used to study what factors most influence student success.

Research linking leadership actions to improve student achievement is another potential area of study. The literature review demonstrated that a school leader must have the ability to motivate followers (McKnight, 2013; Valentine & Prater, 2011; and Brown, Bryant & Reilly, 2006), and that successful school leaders share leadership and facilitate professional development (Sanzo, Sherman, & Clayton, 2011). However, the literature review also pointed to a lack of research that looks at leadership skills in relation to successful student outcomes in retention and graduation (Sanzo, Sherman, & Clayton, 2011; Mahdinezhad, Suandi, Silong, &



Omar, 2013). This research could include both the role of campus president and the role of the dean of education, and the relationship each has to successful student outcomes.

### **Conclusion**

Career colleges offer programs that focus on workplace skills and often require a certificate or license for employment (Papandrea, 2012). The programs are designed to appeal to working adults, and provide educational opportunities to students that are “traditionally underserved by other institutions” (JBL Associates, Inc, 2014, p. 8). The student body at a career college is typically comprised of independent students, working parents, and low-income individuals. Many are ethnic minorities. Often the students come from low-income families where parents have less than a high school education (JBL Associates, Inc., 2014). Because of these socio-economic backgrounds of the students served by career colleges, these students are more at risk of dropping out than those who attend traditional colleges. In order to support these students, career colleges focus on retaining student by providing academic and career development services to help students persist and graduate (Bailey et al, 2005).

These socio-economic factors also mean that most career college students participate in federal financial aid and student loan programs. Career colleges are heavily regulated by the U.S. Department of Education, as well as by national accrediting bodies and state boards. Regulations from the U.S. Department of Education require that career colleges provide information on program costs, graduation rates, potential earnings, and potential debt (Fact sheet: Obama, 2015). National accrediting bodies also require career colleges to report retention, completion, licensure and job placement rates (Accrediting Agency, 2015). Because of regulations and because of the desire for student success, the dean of education at any a career college must address the needs for academic support so that students can persist and graduate

Retention initiatives at the campus in this study included a campus wide focus on retention, academic advising, utilizing tutoring, creating student centered learning, and contacting absent students. Additionally, the dean of education, program directors and faculty were all engaged in retention efforts through distributed leadership. These retention initiatives, and those involved in enacting the initiatives, all worked together to support students in reaching their career goals. In the words of one program director, “To me, every student’s successful outcome is important, as is keeping every single student. And from day one ...we want to keep every single student” (Lori). Initiatives to retain students are important to several stakeholders, including the educational organization, each career college campus, educational leadership, faculty, and perhaps most significantly, these retention initiatives are important to the student.

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## Appendix A

## University of New England Exemption from IRB Review and Oversight



UNIVERSITY OF  
NEW ENGLAND

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**Portland Campus**  
716 Stevens Avenue  
Portland, ME 04103

To: Victoria Kemper  
Cc: Brianna Parsons  
From: Olgun Guvench  
Date: December 17, 2015  
Project # & Title: 121115-008, Examining Successful Retention Practices of a Career College Dean of Education (Initial)

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects has reviewed the above captioned project, and has determined that the proposed work is exempt from IRB review and oversight as defined by 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2).

Additional IRB review and approval is not required for this protocol as submitted. If you wish to change your protocol at any time, you must first submit the changes for review.

Please contact Olgun Guvench at (207) 221-4171 or [oguvench@une.edu](mailto:oguvench@une.edu) with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Olgun Guvench", written in a cursive style.

Olgun Guvench, M.D., Ph.D.  
IRB Chair

IRB#: 121115-008  
Submission Date: 12/10/15  
Status: Exempt, 45 CFR 46.101 (b)(2)  
Status Date: 12/17/15

## **Appendix B**

### **University of New England Consent for Participation in Research**

**Project Title:** Examining Successful Retention Practices of a Career College Dean of Education

**Principal Investigator(s):**

Victoria Kemper, University of New England doctoral candidate in the Doctorate of Education program.  
Phone: 330-256-4718 Email: vkemper@une.edu

Dr. Brianna Parsons, EdD, Adjunct Faculty Education at University of New England, Educational Leadership Online Doctoral Program.

Phone: 207-299-3627 Email: bparsons4@une.edu

**Introduction:**

Please read this form, you may also request that the form is read to you. The purpose of this form is to provide you with information about this research study, and if you choose to participate, document your decision.

You are encouraged to ask any questions that you may have about this study, now, during or after the project is complete. You can take as much time as you need to decide whether or not you want to participate. Your participation is voluntary.

**Why is this study being done?**

The purpose of this intrinsic case study is to examine retention practices utilized by a dean of education at a career college where student outcomes in retention and graduation met standards set forth by the campus' accreditor and the U.S. Department of Education, and to understand how campus leadership and faculty perceive and enact these retention practices. The study will be funded by the researcher alone.

**Who will be in this study?**

Participants of the study will include the dean of education, program directors and a cross-section of faculty. Additionally, the researcher will also interview the department leadership in admissions, financial aid, and career services, as well as the campus president. The dean of education was chosen as she is the individual who leads the implementation of retention initiatives. Program directors and faculty were chosen because they work with the dean of education to implement the retention initiatives. Department leadership and the campus president will be interviewed as these individuals have the opportunity to see the retention initiatives in action and can provide insight as to how they are implemented. Approximately 15 participants will be involved in this study.

**What will I be asked to do?**

You will be asked to participate in a case study that will employ interviews to examine retention practices that have led to successfully meeting retention and graduation standards. Each interview will range from 45 to 60 minutes.

**What are the possible risks of taking part in this study?**

There are no known risks and/or discomforts associated with this study.

**What are the possible benefits of taking part in this study?**

The expected benefits associated with your participation are the information about the experiences in learning qualitative research and the interview process therein.

**What will it cost me?**

There are no costs to the participants in this study.

**How will my privacy be protected?**

The identity of each participant will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law. The information recorded during the interviews will be stored on a computer in the researcher's home. Only the researcher will be able to listen to the recorded responses. No one at the campus will listen to the recorded responses or will be able to identify the individual participants by name. Study findings will be presented only in summary form and your name will not be used in any report.

**How will my data be kept confidential?**

This study is designed to be anonymous, this means that no one, can link the data you provide to you, or identify you as a participant.

You will be audio-recorded throughout the course of the interview; however, you may choose not to be recorded and may request that the recording be stopped at any time during the interview, either permanently or temporarily. The researcher will have sole access to the recordings. The recordings will not be used for any purpose other than the research study. No names or other information that could be used to identify you will be included in the typewritten version. Anything that could possibly indicate the identity of the participant will not be included in the typewritten version or will be disguised.

Please note that regulatory agencies and the Institutional Review Board may review the research records.

A copy of your signed consent form will be maintained by the principal investigator for at least 3 years after the project is complete before it is destroyed. The consent forms will be stored in a secure location that only members of the research team will have access to and will not be affiliated with any data obtained during the project.

**What are my rights as a research participant?**

Your participation is voluntary. You may choose to stop participating in the study at any time. This will have no effect on any aspect of your employment or your standing at your present or any other career college. You may skip or refuse to answer any question for any reason. Data collected prior to your withdrawal will not be used in the study.

If you choose not to participate there is no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive. You are free to withdraw from this research study at any time, for any reason. If you choose to withdraw from the research there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive.

**What other options do I have?**

You may choose not to participate.

**Whom may I contact with questions?**

If you have any questions, please contact Victoria Kemper, University of New England doctoral candidate in the Doctorate of Education program at 330-256-4718 or vkemper@une.edu.

If you choose to participate in this research study and believe you may have suffered a research related injury, please contact Dr. Brianna Parsons, EdD, Adjunct Faculty Education at University of New England, Educational Leadership Online Doctoral Program, at 207-299-3627 or bparsons4@une.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you may call Olgun Guvench, M.D. Ph.D., Chair of the UNE Institutional Review Board at (207) 221-4171 or irb@une.edu.

**Will I receive a copy of this consent form?**

You will be given a copy of this consent form.

---

**Participant's Statement**

**I understand the above description of this research and the risks and benefits associated with my participation as a research subject. I agree to take part in the research and do so voluntarily.**

---

Participant's signature or  
Legally authorized representative

---

Date

---

Printed name

**Researcher's Statement**

**The participant named above had sufficient time to consider the information, had an opportunity to ask questions, and voluntarily agreed to be in this study.**

---

Researcher's signature

---

Date

---

Printed name

## Appendix C

### Interview Guide for Dean of Education

Time of Interview:

Date of Interview:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Description/Introduction: The purpose of this intrinsic case study is to examine retention practices utilized by a dean of education at a career college where student outcomes in retention and graduation met standards set forth by the campus' accreditor and the U.S. Department of Education, and to understand how campus leadership and faculty perceive and enact these retention practices.

Regulations from the U.S. Department of Education took effect July 1, 2011, with additional requirements taking effect July 1, 2015, and require that career colleges provide information regarding program costs, whether students graduate, how much they earn, and how much debt they may accumulate prior to student enrollment.

Have you discussed the requirements of the U.S. Department of Education with your program directors and faculty?

How have the requirements of the U.S. Department of Education affected your approach to retention?

What actions have been taken to address the retention and graduation requirements of the U.S. Department of Education?

What is your retention goal for the campus? Why?

How has the retention goal been communicated?

What retention initiatives have been enacted to reach the retention goal?

What retention initiatives are the most effective?

What retention initiatives are the least effective?

## Appendix D

### Interview Guide for Focus Group Interviews

Time of Interview:

Date of Interview:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewees:

Position of Interviewees:

Description/Introduction: The purpose of this intrinsic case study is to examine retention practices utilized by a dean of education at a career college where student outcomes in retention and graduation met standards set forth by the campus' accreditor and the U.S. Department of Education, and to understand how campus leadership and faculty perceive and enact these retention practices.

Regulations from the U.S. Department of Education took effect July 1, 2011, with additional requirements taking effect July 1, 2015, and require that career colleges provide information regarding program costs, whether students graduate, how much they earn, and how much debt they may accumulate prior to student enrollment.

Have the requirements of the U.S. Department of Education been discussed with you? If yes, who discussed it with you?

How have the requirements of the U.S. Department of Education affected the approach to retention?

What actions have been taken address the retention and graduation requirements of the U.S. Department of Education?

What is your retention goal for the campus? Why?

How has the retention goal been communicated?

What retention initiatives have been enacted to reach the retention goal?

What retention initiatives are the most effective?

What retention initiatives are the least effective?



**Appendix E**  
**Rocks in the Road Survey**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Program enrolled in:** \_\_\_\_\_

**My reason for getting an education is:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Who will be impacted when you graduate and start a successful career?**

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

**Use your support system (family, friends, co-workers, neighbors, etc.) to hurdle the rocks in your road.**

**List three situations that may arise causing you not to come to class.**

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

**What is your game plan for removing these obstacles?**

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

**What would you like me to tell you if you decide to withdraw?**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix F

### Staying on Track Survey

The faculty and staff at the campus understand that many students experience difficulties during their academic programs. Circumstances such as transportation, financial issues, childcare, work schedule, personal or health problems, etc. can have an impact on your academic performance. It is important to recognize that when these problems are occurring, you identify the cause and seek assistance in resolving them. This survey has been designed so that we may assist you in identifying and providing guidance in areas which may affect your academic performance or cause you to not complete your program of study.

**Please complete this form and return it to your Program Chair so that we may assist you in overcoming your current challenges and help you realize your educational goals.**

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Program: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

---

*Please identify the area(s)/risk factors you are having difficulty coping with and would like to get some assistance by checking the appropriate box(s) below:*

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation           | <input type="checkbox"/> Academic Skills (Reading, Writing, Math) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Medical                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Wrong Program/Major                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Childcare                | <input type="checkbox"/> Course too hard                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Work Schedule            | <input type="checkbox"/> Course too easy                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Financial                | <input type="checkbox"/> Dissatisfied with School                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Stress                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of Interest                         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Personal Issues          | <input type="checkbox"/> Study Habits                             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Legal Issues             | <input type="checkbox"/> Worried About Launching Your Career      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Interpersonal Relations  | <input type="checkbox"/> Worried about finding a job              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Low Academic Performance | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____                             |

**I am worried that I may not be able to return next term because**

\_\_\_\_\_

**I am not currently facing any obstacles that will keep me from completing my program.**

\_\_\_\_\_

#### **To be completed by Program Chair:**

Name of Program Chair: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Advising: \_\_\_\_\_

Student Advising Sheet completed on: \_\_\_\_\_

If necessary, student referred to: \_\_\_\_\_

Communication with student entered into CampusVue on: \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix G**

**Mid Mod Assessment**

**MID-MODULE PROGRESS NOTICE – LAB TECH PROGRAM**

**Student's Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Mod Color:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Instructor:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

E=Excellent    S = Satisfactory    N = Needs Improvement    U = Unsatisfactory

<b>Class</b>	<b>Quality Of Work</b>	<b>Professional Appearance/ Attitude</b>	<b>Grade Average</b>	<b>Incomplete Assignments/ Late Assign</b>
SLOP I	_____	_____	_____	_____
SLOP II	_____	_____	_____	_____
RECOM I	_____	_____	_____	_____
RECOM II	_____	_____	_____	_____
BIOMFG I	_____	_____	_____	_____
BIOMFG II	_____	_____	_____	_____
ADVANCED I	_____	_____	_____	_____
ADVANCED II	_____	_____	_____	_____
CHEM I	_____	_____	_____	_____
CHEM II	_____	_____	_____	_____
MICRO	_____	_____	_____	_____
BIO ETHICS	_____	_____	_____	_____
PHARM	_____	_____	_____	_____
ENGLISH I	_____	_____	_____	_____
ENGLISH II	_____	_____	_____	_____
ENGLISH III	_____	_____	_____	_____
SPEECH I	_____	_____	_____	_____
SPEECH II	_____	_____	_____	_____

Student, the purpose of this notice is to inform you of your current standing in the above classes. To achieve success in this course(s), it is recommended that you:

- \_\_\_\_\_ Seek assistance from your instructor
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Arrange for tutoring
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Improve class attendance
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Make up outstanding classwork or homework
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Make up quizzes or tests that were missed
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ Continue the good work  
\_\_\_\_\_ Good Effort  
\_\_\_\_\_ Excellent Work

**Instructor comments:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Student's Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Instructor's Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\* Instructor – Make 2 copies: One to student, one for instructor, original to office

Appendix H

Academic Advising Form

STUDENT ADVISING SHEET

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Faculty Advisor: \_\_\_\_\_ Program: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please describe the issue/risk factor:**

*(If appropriate, include notation of previous attempts to address student's concern; use the back of this sheet if needed):*

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Faculty Advisor's Recommendation:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of Faculty Advisor:** \_\_\_\_\_

*This section to be completed by an administrative staff member if forwarded to different department.*

**Follow-up:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Title: \_\_\_\_\_

*If appropriate, this section should be completed by the student*

\_\_\_ This situation was resolved to my satisfaction.

\_\_\_ This situation was not resolved to my satisfaction. Why not? (Explain below. Use additional sheet(s) if needed.)

Student Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ Response returned to student on: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ Copy in student file.

Give form to the Registrar's Office for entry into CampusVue: \_\_\_\_\_

Registrar's Initials / Date

**Appendix I**

**Academic Advising Model**

