

# Increasing Affinity toward a University through Meaningful Student-Centric Activities

by

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## ABSTRACT

How does a university create a culture of affinity where students seek and maintain life-long connections to the institution? The purpose of this action research study was to examine how affinity increased or developed for undergraduate students at the Arizona State University Polytechnic campus through meaningful student-centric activities. Three theoretical frameworks guided the study including the work of Baumeister and Leary, Kuh, and Ajzen.

In this mixed method study, quantitative data about affinity, attitude, toward Arizona State University was collected using pre- and post-intervention surveys and qualitative data were gathered through individual semi-structured interviews at the conclusion of the study. Study participants were degree-seeking, undergraduate students whose degree programs were affiliated with the Polytechnic campus. The study was conducted during the first semester for first-year students. The intervention was implemented over a four-week period and consisted of providing information and opportunities to students to initiate connecting to the institution.

Quantitative data exhibited slight upward changes or slight to modest decreases in the dependent variables between pre- and post-intervention assessments. Qualitative data provided a content-rich explanation that helped in understanding the quantitative results. For example, students indicated high behavioral beliefs, attitudes toward involvement, and intentions. Moreover, they demonstrated high levels of connectedness and loyalty to the institution. Discussion focused on describing the complementarity of the data, explaining outcomes relative to the theoretical frameworks, limitations, implications for practice and future research, and lessons learned.

## DEDICATION

My family's support was critical in my pursuit of a doctoral degree. My parents sacrificed so much to provide my brothers and me with a solid education after leaving war-torn Nicaragua in 1979. I can never thank my parents enough and can only aspire to do so by sharing my achievements. I can never thank my children, Xavier and Isabel, enough for their unwavering support and their flexibility the last three years. They adjusted and made life work while I immersed myself in my graduate experience. I will never forget our joint study halls and our study session playlists. From the first time I articulated that I planned to pursue a doctoral degree, my husband Michael was nothing but supportive. Every time I wavered, he was there to make sure I jumped back in the game. Thank you, Michael. Thank you for always believing in me.

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## Chapter 1

### LARGER AND LOCAL CONTEXT OF THE PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

The current environment in higher education has been competitive on multiple levels including recruitment, retention, and graduation. It has not been sufficient to compete on the athletic field, instead universities have constantly adapted their approaches to recruiting and retaining students to maintain their place in the market. Further, public universities have been required to maintain a competitive edge while facing decreasing financial support from their state governments. Universities have been required to cultivate complex, life-long relationships with their prospective alumni rather than merely connecting with students during their four years of undergraduate study. In the corporate world, businesses have been discerning in courting and maintaining relationships with their customer base. Companies have capitalized on the newest technologies, including data mining capabilities that have enabled continuing relationships with customers. Additionally, in the current technological age, Americans have come to expect customization and innovation at every turn. Thus, it has not been a surprise that students expected the same from universities. According to Bowden (2011), universities have benefitted from adopting a student-centered approach mirroring the customer-centered approach used in the business world.

Arizona State University's (ASU) Alumni Association office has defined affinity as,

a complex relationship between the constituent and the brand. It is comprised of both perceptions of excellence and positive feelings that generate loyalty, social

identification, and emotional connection. Affinity is personal but is affected by perceptions of belonging to a group (ASU Alumni Association, 2017, p. 56)

By 2025 the number of ASU alumni will have reached 734,000 members from its current total of close to 400,000 Sun Devils living across the world. Thus, it has become increasingly important for ASU to build alumni connections. Specifically, alumni membership has become important because it may lead to an increased and recurring giving level; advocacy and support within local, state, and federal entities; as well as overall participation in university initiatives (ASU Alumni Association, 2017).

How does a university create a culture of affinity where students seek and maintain life-long connections to the institution? I have worked within the division of Educational Outreach and Student Services (EOSS) and served as the Assistant Dean of Students at the Polytechnic campus. For the last few years, EOSS has been charged with creating student experiences that cultivate a sense of spirit, pride, and tradition at ASU. Thus, affinity was the necessary foundation to establish a life-long relationship between the students and the university. Examples of large scale, affinity-building initiatives included the ASU residential college model; student engagement through membership in student organizations; and game day attendance, specifically football and basketball. My own portfolio included student engagement and I was responsible for creating a robust set of events and programs that enhanced students' experiences and complemented the academic experience.

According to Vianden and Barlow (2014), students who had an emotional connection to their university were more likely to persist and graduate than their peers who had not developed a positive relationship with the institution. Further, institutional

service quality and student satisfaction predicted students' loyalty. In this situation, loyalty resulted from the quality of the relationship between the student and the university (Vianden & Barlow, 2014). In addition to feeling satisfied about the services received, students must also have developed an emotional connection to the university. Notably, student experiences played a vital role in the development of students while they attended college and these experiences affected the life-long relationships between the student and the institution. According to McAlexander, Koenig, and Schouten (2005), the university was a brand community where students shared a common bond to the institution. Although college student relationships may be temporary, these bonds had the potential to last a lifetime. McAlexander et al. (2005), explained that participating in formative college experiences had the potential to result in enduring bonds.

A collaboration between Sun Devil Athletics, student government, and EOSS resulted in a strategic initiative focused on increasing game day attendance at all athletic events, with increased focus on football and men's basketball. In 2014, the Associated Students of Arizona State University, including undergraduate and graduate government branches, voted to include athletic season tickets as part of the Student Athletic Fee. Full-time ASU students who paid the Student Athletic Fee have access to all student athletic contests throughout the year (ASU, 2017). The intent was to facilitate student engagement and increase affinity through attendance at athletic events. Since that time, one of the engagement metrics monitored by EOSS was tracking attendance in the student section at Sun Devil Stadium during football games with a goal of 13,000 students attending each football game. This approach was explained as follows:

Within the context of the university community we find that by providing challenging and fun experiences for students, fostering the development of bonds among students, and actively attending to the maintenance of these relationships, the university can build alumni loyalty as expressed in purchases of university branded merchandise, donations, investments in continuing education, and the encouragement of the next generation of students. (McAlexander, et al., 2005, p. 77)

### **Institutional Background**

Arizona State University has served as a comprehensive public research university based in Phoenix. As one of the three state universities governed by the Arizona Board of Regents, ASU was founded in 1885 as a teacher preparation school, the Normal School. Later it became Arizona State College and in 1957, it became a university when voters approved the change in a statewide referendum. Currently, four locations have served the Phoenix metropolitan area including Downtown Phoenix, Polytechnic, Tempe, and West campuses. As the New American University, ASU's focus has been on inclusion and not exclusion, resulting in an aggressive enrollment goal in which ASU has been targeted to reach more than 110,000 total student enrollment by fall 2020 (Arizona State University, 2016). Overall university enrollment surpassed 100,000 students in 2017 and has continued to expand with the growth of the ASU digital immersion population. This fall, the largest freshman class ever admitted was also the most diverse class with 53% of students coming from underrepresented populations (Arizona State University, 2017).

## Local Context

Since its establishment in 1996, the ASU Polytechnic campus has developed as an educational hub for students pursuing applied studies in interdisciplinary sciences, engineering, management, technology, business, arts, and education. Sustainability and business administration degree programs were added in fall 2017. The Polytechnic degree programs have emphasized project-based learning within advanced laboratory spaces, allowing students to focus on innovative approaches in collaboration with industry partners. A unique blend of family and student housing, dining facilities, student recreation and innovation spaces, commercial printing, design services, flight simulators, and on-demand digital manufacturing, fostering the innovative and entrepreneurial spirit that exemplifies ASU has enhanced student life at the Polytechnic campus. A detailed list of additional Polytechnic demographics were included in Table 1.

Table 1

### *Polytechnic Important Facts*

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Total enrollment at Polytechnic, fall 2018 = 5,162

Total undergraduate enrollment at Polytechnic, fall 2018 = 4,580

Total number of students living at Polytechnic, fall 2018 = 1,200

Total number of first-year students living at Polytechnic, fall 2018 = 419

All regular full-time and part-time faculty at Polytechnic, fall 2018 = 322

All regular full-time and part-time staff at Polytechnic, fall 2018 = 674

Degrees awarded at Polytechnic (summer, fall, and spring 2017-18) = 1,226

Undergraduate degree programs at Polytechnic, spring 2019 = 90

Graduate degree programs at Polytechnic, spring 2019 = 36

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ASU has come to be known by the phrase, “One university in many places.” Each of the four ASU locations in metropolitan Phoenix has a distinct identity that allowed students to benefit from attending a large, research institution, with customized student-centric services and programs. It was this identity that required specialized attention to programming that was specific to the population targeted. The Polytechnic campus has been nicknamed the maker campus due to the students’ propensity to create applied solutions to everyday problems. In addressing affinity or institutional loyalty, it was vital to keep in mind the identity of the campus and the students served. What may work at the West campus may not necessarily work at the Polytechnic campus. Thus, part of the challenge was to create long-term affinity to the larger institutional identity, while taking into account the identity of the location with which the student identified.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The problem of practice (PoP) I have identified was, increasing affinity for undergraduate students at the Polytechnic location through meaningful student-centric activities. I elected to focus my PoP at the Polytechnic location because such an approach was within my own sphere of influence. In my role as Assistant Dean of Students, I have had access to the undergraduate student population as well as oversight of student engagement opportunities for this population. In my professional role, student feedback has been critical as more activities and programs were developed for students and this study allowed me to remain true to that intent. In this study, undergraduate students were defined as bachelor degree-seeking students whose degree programs were affiliated with the Polytechnic campus.

## **Research Questions**

This study was guided by the following research questions.

RQ1: How and to what extent did participation in the ASU Polytechnic Affinity Program influence students' connectedness (loyalty) to ASU?

RQ2: How and to what extent did students' activity and engagement influence connectedness (loyalty) to ASU?

RQ3: How and to what extent did staff and faculty members influence connectedness (loyalty) to ASU?

## Chapter 2

### THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND RESEARCH GUIDING THE STUDY

In Chapter 2, I have presented the theoretical perspectives and research guiding the action research project. The purpose of my action research project was to examine how affinity increased or developed for undergraduate students at the Polytechnic campus through meaningful student-centric activities. The study was guided by three theoretical frameworks including the work of Baumeister and Leary (1995), Kuh (2003, 2009), and Ajzen (1991, n.d.). Each theoretical framework has been described in Chapter 2. Relevant studies and research related to this action research project, have also been discussed in Chapter 2. My own previous research efforts also offered frameworks for the methodology and instrumentation proposed in this action research project.

#### **Affinity/Loyalty**

Research connecting affinity or loyalty of students to universities was limited, which signaled the need to increase scholarship in this area. Literature anchored on consumer behavior and services marketing concepts provided the background for further discussion of affinity for an institution. Before proceeding to the discussion of theoretical frameworks, a more comprehensive understanding the relation between the student and the university brand has been provided to aid conceptualization of affinity or institutional loyalty. Various marketing terms critical to the action research project were defined in the context of the study.

**Branding.** As defined by the American Marketing Association (n. d.), branding referred to “a name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller’s good or service as distinct from those of other sellers.” Notably, the differentiation or

customization of the good or service provided the seller with a competitive market edge. Further, Ntarelli and Plapler (2017) suggested that strong brand connections were built upon reciprocity, active involvement by the buyer and the seller. In sustaining brand loyalty and retaining the relationship with the customer, effort and intention on the part of the seller were key actions.

The dynamic nature of the relationship between brand and customer contributed to brand intimacy. As with any intimate relationship, a constant courting took place to sustain the relationship at the desired interaction level. According to Ntarelli & Plapler (2017), “Emotional connection is at the heart of intimacy and aligns with all we’ve learned about decision making from neuroscience and behavioral science” (p. 97).

Stephenson, Heckert, and Yerger (2016) examined branding related to college selection. Participants were incoming first-year college students who were not yet acclimated to the institution. One of the resulting themes indicated that family and friends influenced decision-making, or served as brand ambassadors for the institution.

**Reciprocity.** According to Ntarelli & Plapler (2017), strong brand connections were founded on reciprocity. To establish a brand connection, both the brand and the individual must have been actively engaged in constructing and maintaining the relationship. At the earliest stage of brand intimacy, the individual and the brand are mutually exchanging information, or engaging in reciprocal behavior. For example, students attending a football game may have used a school branded Snapchat filter while attending the game. Thus, when the school provided the branded Snapchat filter, the students reciprocated by using the filter and disseminating the brand to their networks.

Through this simple exchange of information, the school's reach was extended through the students' networks.

**Emotion.** In a consumer setting, when individuals were emotionally connected to a brand, the individuals purchased more brand-associated items, were less affected by price fluctuations, were more in tune to brand communications, and recommended the brand on a more frequent basis. Notably, brands created emotional intimacy by projecting emotions and evoking emotional responses from the individuals (Naterelli & Plapler, 2017). For example, a university may have projected an emotion by using certain imagery in its marketing collateral. Something as simple as the font used on all university communication could have elicited a certain emotion, such as confidence, reliability, or stability. In a competitive market, universities have made substantial investments to establish emotional connections with various stakeholders, including students.

**Loyalty.** In a study of institutional loyalty, McAlexander, et al., (2005) specified that a university should be considered to be a brand community with a diverse set of experiences and relationships. Moreover, when people participated in transformational experiences, there was an opportunity for forming relationships. In the study, McAlexander et al. (2005), made an important distinction that extended the concept of loyalty, which customarily had been defined as repeated purchases. Two groups participated in the study. The first was asked to consider *current behavior and attitudes* (wearing logo items), whereas, the second was to contemplate *behavioral intentions* (future alumni engagement or future donations, etc.) to measure loyalty in a university setting where repeated purchases were not the appropriate measure. McAlexander et al.'s

(2005) findings indicated that transformational experiences, such as studying for a critical common final or the collective cheering of the student body at a football game, in the education environment influenced future brand-loyalty outcomes. The findings pointed to the importance of having an environment where students were challenged, but also experienced fun. Further, McAlexander et al. (2005) suggested that it was through shared formative university experiences that students built long-lasting relationships. Building alumni relations does not begin after graduation, instead, McAlexander et al. (2005), claimed universities should attend to building these long-lasting relationships throughout the students' academic experiences. Investment in athletics, intramurals, fraternity and sorority life, clubs, and student events should be considered part of a long-term strategy to build loyalty (McAlexander et al., 2005).

One of the basic tenets of customer relations has been to dedicate significant efforts to the initial interaction to establish a foundation leading to customer loyalty. In the university environment, this meant developing first-year experiences that resulted in high levels of satisfaction (Vander Schee, 2010). When students initially exhibited high institutional commitment, the commitment resulted in positive perceptions of the university and institutional loyalty (Vianden & Barlow, 2014).

**Relationship management.** Ackerman and Schibrowsky (2007) proposed implementing the use of a student relationship management (SRM) model where student retention was viewed similarly to customer relationship management (CRM) systems use to foster customer retention. They referenced three benefits for adopting an SRM approach, including higher retention and graduation rates; financial benefits to the institution related to higher student retention; and the potential to build life-long

relationships with graduates that could result in long-range donations back to the institution. The SRM approach required everyone in the institution to become student relationship managers, from the front-line staff to the highest-level administrators. Moreover, instead of viewing SRM as an operational expense, SRM was implemented as a long-term investment strategy in relationship-building. One key aspect of customer relations that translated to the SRM approach was the need to know the students. Ackerman & Schibrowsky (2007) emphasized the need for communication with students to learn what students deem to be important, to anticipate student needs, and to identify ways to establish value-added initiatives. The best way to find out what students needed was to have established clear communication channels and to have nurtured student-led initiatives.

Literature related to institutional loyalty or connectedness highlighted student satisfaction levels. Vianden and Barlow (2014) urged institutions to create environments where students felt the institution's commitment and care as a way to increase levels of satisfaction. Vander Schee (2010) pointed out that early student satisfaction developed into future brand loyalty, which was exhibited in retention, graduation and eventually giving back to the institution. Nevzat, Amca, Tanova & Amca (2016) suggested individuals reciprocated support when the institution was attentive to their needs. In this context, reciprocity was evident when students played an active role in the university, as researchers, by sharing feedback, and by making decisions along with university administrators.

Schlesinger, Cervera and Perez-Cabañero (2017) conducted a study based on a relationship management framework and measured how several variables including

image, trust, and shared values influenced alumni loyalty. The premise was that university graduates have been critical stakeholders and universities should have cultivated them to become loyal alumni. Schlesinger et al. (2017) defined loyalty as, “a deeply held commitment to rebuy or repatronize a preferred product or service,” and pointed out that in the higher education environment student satisfaction and student loyalty have had a positive relation. Results indicated that student loyalty was influenced by four variables: graduate satisfaction, trust, shared values, and image. Based on the findings, the authors suggested aligning strategic plans and organizing university structures in a manner to cultivate relationships with future alumni.

### **Theoretical Perspectives**

Three theoretical frameworks guided this study, including the work of Baumeister and Leary (1995), Kuh (2003, 2009), and Ajzen (1991, n. d.). In the following sections, the Theory of Belonging, high impact practices, and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) were described in detail in relation to the study. Further implications of the theoretical perspectives and supporting research were also discussed.

### **Theory of Belonging**

Baumeister and Leary (1995) hypothesized that humans needed to establish and maintain interactions within ongoing relational bonds. Thus, humans were motivated to form ongoing, positive, and definite relationships. As a result, belongingness was considered to be a basic human motivation. The two criteria required to satisfy the need to establish these relationships were (a) regular and meaningful interactions with a small network of people and (b) these positive interactions must take place in a stable and lasting framework. Individuals’ motivation to belong led them to engage in active



cultivation of relationships and to build long-term established bonds. In these relationships, there was also a certain level of reciprocity in which both individuals displayed mutual care and concern for each other.

According to Baumeister & Leary (1995), feelings of inclusion were associated with positive emotions including happiness, contentment, and calm. By comparison, feelings of exclusion were displayed as anxiety, depression, and isolation. In this case, social bonds were maintained when emotions regulated behavior. In instances when individuals did not have adequate support networks, individuals experienced higher levels of stress, illnesses, and eating disorders. Baumeister & Leary (1995) maintained,

At present, it seems fair to conclude that human beings are fundamentally and pervasively motivated by a need to belong, that is, by a strong desire to form and maintain enduring interpersonal attachments. (p. 522).

Thus, research findings suggested a lack of support networks may have led individuals to experience increased stress, whereas a supportive network served as a buffer when individuals faced stress. Until individuals reached the desired level of contact, they continued to seek out and cultivate relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). It was noted that optimally, repeated interactions with a specific individual were preferred over repeated interactions with multiple individuals. Changes in individuals' status of belongingness resulted in emotional responses. Inclusivity led to positive emotions of happiness; whereas rejection led to negative emotions such as anxiety and loneliness. Research results indicated lack of support or lack of connection to resources resulted in higher levels of stress (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Interventions based on belongingness offered an effective, successful approach to addressing student needs (Crockett, 2017). Walton and Cohen (2011) also commented that interventions based on social belonging resulted in broad benefits. For new college students, the transition from a familiar environment and an established group of high school friends may have taken a negative turn when faced with new cliques in a new environment. Walton & Cohen (2011) noted, “Students who feel more assured of their belonging may also initiate more social interactions and form better relationships on campus, facilitating their social integration and further benefiting their wellbeing, performance, and health” (p. 1448).

### **The Student Engagement Framework**

For student affairs professionals, Kuh’s (2003, 2009) construct of student engagement has been considered to be a pillar of the profession. Kuh’s definition of student engagement addressed the link between desired institutional outcomes such as persistence, satisfaction, learning, graduation, and student involvement. Kuh (2009) stated, “Student engagement represents the time and effort students devote to activities that are empirically linked to desired outcomes of college and what institutions do to induce students to participate in these activities” (p. 683).

Although the concept of active learning has been used in the higher education literature for years, Kuh emphasized the need to educate the campus community about the empirical and conceptual basis of the student engagement construct. According to Kuh, student engagement was not the prevue of one department or area; rather it was the responsibility of all university departments/divisions to engage students in meaningful activities. Kuh cautioned that institutions must customize a method specific to the

campus. The reciprocal nature of the student-university relationship requires both the institution to plan and the student to engage in meaningful activities. By taking a value-added approach, a college or university may influence student experience through intentional programming or engagement (Kuh, 2009).

Kuh's (2009) philosophy on student engagement indicated "what the institution does to foster student engagement can be thought of as a margin of educational quality—sometimes called value-added" (p. 685). Kuh also emphasized that student engagement was reciprocal and both the students and the institutions must invest in engagement opportunities when he stated,

Moreover, engagement increases the odds that any student—educational and social background notwithstanding—will attain his or her educational and personal objectives, acquire the skills and competencies demanded by the challenges of the twenty-first century, and enjoy the intellectual and monetary advantages associated with the completion of the baccalaureate degree. (Kuh, 2009, p. 698)

Kuh (2008) introduced the concept of high-impact educational practices connected to increased student retention and student engagement. According to Kuh, universities can proactively design undergraduate experiences that foster student success. High-impact educational practices included learning communities, first-year seminars, team-based projects, writing courses, global/cultural studies, undergraduate research, internships, and capstone projects (Kuh, 2008). Kuh (2009) pointed out that although new students understood the importance of involvement in extra-curricular activities, the reality was that 32% of incoming students did not participate in any of these activities

during their initial year on campus. Research findings indicated low income, first-generation, and historically underrepresented students benefitted from high-impact educational practices at an even higher rate than their counterparts (Kuh, 2009).

### **National Survey of Student Engagement**

Originally established through a grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) has been used as an annual survey of college students that assessed the level of engagement students had in high-impact educational practices. In 2017, the NSSE was distributed at more than 700 four-year colleges and universities in the U.S. and Canada with an average institutional response rate of 30%. Aggregated data results have been shared widely; however, institution-specific results were only available for each institution to share as appropriate. NSSE results were intended to be used as a way to inform practice and improve student learning (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2017).

Data from the NSEE have been used widely to improve the undergraduate college experience. In particular, NSSE focused on assessment directed at improving students' experiences and making institutions more accountable in terms of meeting students' needs. Since its introduction, the most widely used student engagement, assessment tool has been the NSSE. Second, the NSSE was aimed at establishing a way to capture, assess, and disseminate best practices. By focusing on empirically successful activities, the NSSE has been useful in continuing to improve college outcomes. In addition to student engagement findings, success measures have also included class completion rates, retention and graduation rates, and student satisfaction among others (Kuh, 2009).

**Relevant NSSE constructs.** The dimensions of student engagement were represented by ten Engagement Indicators (EI) from the 47 core NSSE items. The four NSSE themes and corresponding EIs have been presented in detail in Table 1 below. By grouping the EIs into themes, actionable information about student engagement was more readily achieved.

**Table 2**

*NSSE Engagement Indicators*

<u>Theme</u>	<u>Engagement Indicators</u>
Academic challenge	Higher-order learning Reflective & integrative learning Learning strategies
Learning with peers	Quantitative reasoning Collaborative learning Discussions with diverse others
Experiences with faculty	Student-faculty interaction Effective teaching practices
Campus environment	Quality of interactions Supportive environment

Although the NSSE has not been distributed at ASU since 2006, multiple, similarly focused surveys have been employed to assess ASU students’ satisfaction and engagement. The surveys were developed internally and the results were used almost immediately to address students’ needs. The surveys were distributed by the University Office of Evaluation and Educational Effectiveness and data distribution and follow up was coordinated by Educational Outreach and Student Services. Results have also been shared with the Arizona Board of Regents, the Higher Learning Commission and the Arizona State Legislature. The results were intended to inform practice, improve the student experience, and support program review and accreditation initiatives.

## **First-Year Experiences**

Freshmen year retention has been a critical metric in higher education. Colleges and universities have invested a considerable amount of time and effort in developing and implementing programming aimed at helping first-year students transition successfully to campus. One of the high-impact practices (HIPs) referenced by Kuh (2008) was programming associated with first-year experiences. As defined by the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition at the University of South Carolina (n. d.), the first-year experience encompasses intentional and comprehensive initiatives implemented as curricular and co-curricular experiences. The first-year seminar has been adopted at more than 90% of colleges and universities since the University 101 course was developed at the University of South Carolina in the early 1970s (National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, n. d.). Considered to be the model course, University 101 facilitates the transition from high school to college by engaging students in college exploration and enhanced learning during the students' first year. ASU implemented a similar approach where most academic programs have required a first-year seminar. Due to the critical importance of the first-year experience, the intervention for this action research project was focused on first-year undergraduates at the Polytechnic campus.

## **Theory of Planned Behavior**

Icek Ajzen (1991, n. d.; see also Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010) explained the relation between beliefs, intentions, and behaviors using the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). Ajzen hypothesized that behavioral beliefs, normative beliefs and control beliefs influenced mediating variables such as attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control

beliefs (self-efficacy), respectively, which collectively guided human behavior by influencing intentions to engage in the behavior. Ajzen developed the theory as a way to explain and predict behavior within defined contexts. Changes in one or more of the three constructs—attitudes, subjective norms, or perceived behavioral control—should have resulted in changes in the behavioral intentions. TPB extended the Theory of Reasoned Action by including the third component, perceived behavioral control by which Ajzen (1991, n. d.) addressed the prior limitation of the Theory of Reasoned Action that did not account for behavioral control.

The three independent determinants of behavioral intention, according to Ajzen (1991, n. d.), were (a) attitude toward the behavior; (b) subjective norm; and (c) perceived behavioral control. Behavioral intentions were influenced by these three determinants of behavioral intention. A structural diagram of the TPB has been presented in Figure 1, which illustrates how beliefs influence attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, and the subsequent influence of these three variables on intention to engage in a behavior. See Figure 1 on the next page.

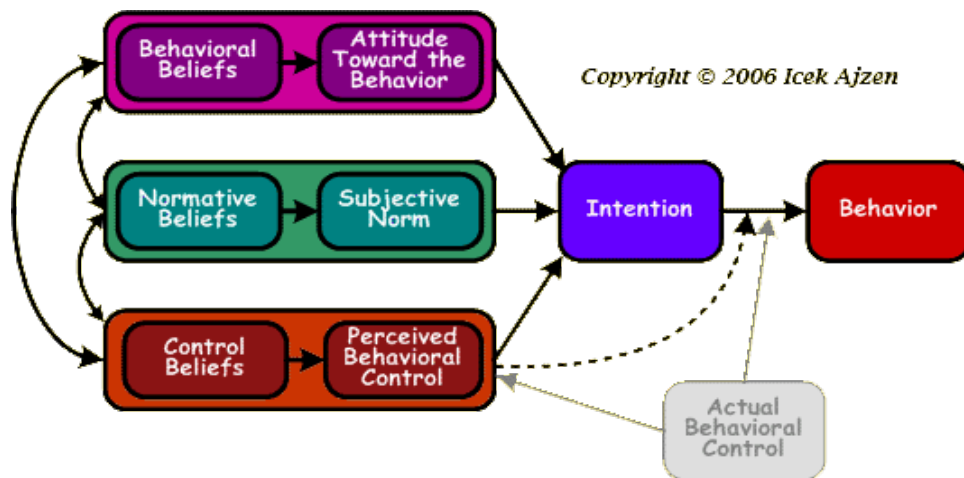


Figure 1. The theory of planned behavior. Used by permission.

Generally, when attitude and subjective norm were positive in relation to behavioral control, more individuals were shown to intend to perform the behavior. Nevertheless, fluidity was expected because predictors varied between situations and actions. Ajzen also explained the importance of the three *salient* beliefs, or determinants of the individual's actions and intentions. Salient beliefs were defined as those beliefs that came to mind readily or with minimal prompting. Behavioral beliefs influenced attitudes toward the behavior. Normative beliefs affected subjective norms, whereas control beliefs prompted perceived behavioral control, similar to Bandura's self-efficacy (Ajzen, 1991, n. d.).

In day-to-day situations, subjective norms were influenced by what "important" others said, whereas control beliefs had a close connection to self-efficacy (Ajzen 1991, n. d.). For example, a parent (important other) may have influenced which university a high school senior selected. An individual was more likely to act when there was a strong intention to enact the behavior. As a result, TPB provided a strong framework for



understanding how various factors affect intention to perform a behavior. Notably, changing one or more of the three constructs—attitudes, norms, or perceived behavioral control—may lead to changes in behavioral intentions. Thus, interventions aimed at affecting these variables may affect intention, for example, to affiliate with an institution.

The TPB has been referenced widely when researchers have explored the connections among beliefs, intentions, and behaviors. For example, the TPB model has been used to explain the influence of various health interventions including those related to smoking, drinking, breastfeeding, and substance abuse. Studies across various disciplines, including the social sciences, education, and business have also been founded on the TPB framework. In studies aimed at understanding and predicting individual intent, TPB served as the ideal framework. TPB was identified as the theoretical framework for the proposed intervention aimed at changing a behavior. In the following section, each of the TPB constructs has been described in detail with respect to the action research project.

**Behavioral beliefs.** “Behavioral beliefs link the behavior of interest to expected outcomes” Ajzen (n. d., Behavioral Beliefs link). Further, behavioral beliefs reflect the likelihood that some outcome will be attained. Although individuals may have had many behavioral beliefs with respect to certain behaviors, only a limited number including the most accessible, or salient beliefs in combination with their valuing of the outcomes determined their attitudes toward the behavior (Ajzen, n. d.). For example, if students believed that joining a club facilitated making new friends and they valued new friends then this would influence their attitude toward the behavior (Ajzen, n. d.).

**Attitude toward the behavior.** “Attitude toward a behavior is the degree to which performance of the behavior is positively or negatively valued” (Ajzen, n. d., Attitude toward the Behavior link). Similarly, Fishbein & Ajzen (2010) suggested attitude was, “the evaluation of an object, concept, or behavior along a dimension of favor or disfavor, good or bad, like or dislike” (p. 78). The connection between behavioral beliefs, expectations about outcomes related to beliefs, and attitudes was evident in Ajzen’s formulation about attitudes where he indicated  $A \sim \sum b_i e_i$ , where A, attitude is proportional to the sum of accessible behavioral beliefs, the  $b_i$ s times the evaluations,  $e_i$ s for the beliefs. Thus, attitudes were dependent on accessible behavioral beliefs and valuing, evaluation, of the outcomes of the beliefs. For example, a student who was very involved in high school organizations may already have had a favorable attitude toward joining a club in college. As new beliefs about an object were formed, attitudes about the object were automatically created, as well.

This action research study will be conducted to examine how affinity developed for undergraduate students at the Polytechnic campus through meaningful student-centric activities. Prior to the intervention, the goal was to measure the degree to which each student had a favorable or unfavorable affinity (attitude) toward ASU. Then, at the post-intervention assessment, attitude toward ASU will be assessed again.

**Normative beliefs.** Generally, norms have been defined as a set of standards that guided the appropriateness of behavior. Azjen (n. d., Normative Beliefs link) defined normative beliefs as “the perceived behavioral expectations of such important referent individuals or groups as the person’s spouse, family, friends, ...” In other words, normative beliefs are those beliefs affected by important others who influence

individuals' behaviors. Thus, individuals were cued by those influencers about how to behave or comply with perceived expectations. For example, high school students have been influenced by parents, teachers, and friends. However, as students transitioned to college, new referent groups may have included roommates, classmates, and faculty members. If students observed that the roommate did not engage in any activities outside of class, then those students may have formed beliefs that involvement outside of class was not important. By better understanding who influenced students, the university gained an opportunity to develop more intentional programming and activities that could have resulted in increased affinity toward the institution by leveraging the new referent group(s).

**Subjective norms.** Ajzen (n. d., Subjective Norm link) claimed, "Subjective norm is the perceived social pressure to engage or not engage in a behavior." This social pressure typically was perceived to have come from normative groups discussed above. Notably, subjective norm was also influenced by the motivation to comply with the social pressure to engage in some behavior or action (Ajzen, 1991, n. d.). Thus, individuals perceived that influencers guided or did not guide expected behaviors because the degree to which the individual complied with subjective norms depended on the strength of the normative belief including the motivation to comply. Thus, Ajzen (n. d., Subjective Norm link) maintained subjective norm was related to normative beliefs and motivation to comply in the following way:  $SN \sim \sum n_i m_i$ , where SN, subjective norm was proportional to the sum of accessible normative beliefs, the  $n_i$ s times the motivation to comply,  $m_i$ s to the normative beliefs. Thus, subjective norms were dependent on accessible normative beliefs and motivation to comply to the normative beliefs. In the

presence of strong social norms, the individual was more likely to have performed the behavior as guided by the influencer. For example, first-year, college students may have decided to attend an event on campus if upper classmen shared their interest and support for attending the event.

**Control beliefs.** According to Fishbein & Ajzen (2010), human action is psychologically founded on the behavioral, normative, and control beliefs. In the case of control beliefs, individuals believed specific factors facilitated or impeded the subjective probability that a behavior was able to be performed. For example, some individuals encounter “roadblocks” in their lives and view them as insurmountable; where as others interpret the same roadblock as a challenge to be overcome. Further, it was important to note, that control beliefs do not need to be veridical. In other words, because beliefs may have been formed from direct observations, from outside sources of information, or through inference, control beliefs did not need to be based on truth. Control beliefs may have lacked accuracy, may have been biased, or may have been founded on inaccurate generalizations. However, individuals assumed that their beliefs were veridical and readily took action or no action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010).

**Perceived behavioral control.** “Perceived behavioral control refers to people’s perceptions of their ability to perform a given behavior” (Ajzen, n. d., Perceived Behavioral Control link). Thus, when individuals believed they were able to perform the behavior, they were said to have perceived behavioral control (PBC). PBC was similar to Bandura’s self-efficacy because, individuals must have believed they could perform the behavior. Perceived behavioral control accounted for resources and skills required to perform the behavior while also accounting for possible behavior deterrents. Like self-

efficacy, PBC was tied to both internal and external elements that either supported or impeded the behavior, which Ajzen (1991, n. d.) characterized as perceived power to exert control over the situation and influence the behavior. Thus, Ajzen (n. d. , Perceived Behavioral Control link) suggested PBC was related to control beliefs and perceived power of the control factor in the following way:  $PBC \sim \sum c_i p_i$ , where PBC, perceived behavioral control was proportional to the sum of accessible control beliefs, the  $c_i$ s times the power of the control factors,  $p_i$ s to the control beliefs. Thus, PBC was dependent on accessible control beliefs and perceived power of the control factors. When an individual did not have perceived behavioral control, he did not have intentions to perform the behavior, regardless of attitude and social norms.

In relation to the action research study which examined how affinity increased or developed for undergraduate students at the Polytechnic campus through meaningful student-centric activities, the following example illustrated the PBC concept. Game day attendance at a football game was identified as a measure of affinity toward the university. A student was expected to have attended the home football game; however, the student did not have transportation to and from the game. The lack of behavioral control, in this case resources, could have predicted that the student was not going to the football game. Although the student wanted to go to the game and was encouraged and expected by friends to go to the game, without the resources (transportation), the student did not go to the game.

**Intention.** The best predictor of a behavior was intention. As defined by Fishbein & Ajzen (2010), “intention refers to the subjective probability of performing a behavior” (p. 40). In other words, how ready was the individual to perform the behavior?

In combination, the three constructs—attitude toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control—have been shown to influence intention to perform a behavior. Intention can be assessed by weighing each of the three constructs as related to the behavior. Further, intention has been demonstrated to be a good predictor of both new and routine behaviors. Finally, behavioral intentions were changed whenever there was a change in one of the three independent determinants of behavioral intention: (a) attitude toward the behavior; (b) subjective norm; and (c) perceived behavioral control. With respect to this action research project, intent to increase affinity toward ASU is based on (a) attitude toward ASU; (b) perceived social pressure from important others about ASU; and (c) perceived behavioral control to develop affinity toward ASU.

### **Implications**

Taken together, the theoretical perspectives on belongingness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) and engagement (Kuh, 2008, 2009) suggest students do want to feel connected to others and to the institution and to the extent they are engaged with an institution develop feelings of being connected and affinity for the institution. Further, Ajzen's (1991, n. d.) theory of planned behavior provides a means to examine more closely the development of intention to affiliate with an institution. It will allow for an exploration of the mechanism by which development of affinity occurs. Specifically, examination of how attitudes toward the institution, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control affect intention to affiliate with the institution following a student-centric program that was provided to first-year students. Details about the method and how the study was conducted have been presented in the next chapter, Chapter 3 on the Method.

## Chapter 3

### METHOD

Chapter 3 addressed the method used in the study and included details about the setting, participants, role of the action researcher, innovation, and instruments. The purpose of the study was to examine how affinity increased or developed for undergraduate students at the Polytechnic campus through meaningful student-centric activities. The study was guided by theoretical frameworks by Ajzen, Kuh, Baumeister, and Leary. In this study, undergraduate students were defined as bachelor degree-seeking students whose degree programs were affiliated with the Polytechnic campus. The study was guided by the following research questions.

RQ1: How and to what extent did participation in the ASU Polytechnic Affinity Program influence students' connectedness (loyalty) to ASU?

RQ2: How and to what extent did students' activity and engagement influence connectedness (loyalty) to ASU?

RQ3: How and to what extent did staff and faculty members influence connectedness (loyalty) to ASU?

#### **Setting**

Arizona State University (ASU) is a comprehensive public research university based in Phoenix. As the New American University, ASU's focus has been on inclusion and not exclusion, resulting in an aggressive enrollment goal in which ASU will reach more than 110,000 total student enrollment by fall 2020 (Arizona State University, 2016). Overall university enrollment surpassed 100,000 students in 2017 and has continued to expand with the growth of the ASU digital immersion population. In Fall 2017, the

largest freshman class ever admitted was also the most diverse class with 53% of students coming from underrepresented populations (Arizona State University, 2017).

Currently, four locations serve the Phoenix metropolitan area including Downtown Phoenix, Polytechnic, Tempe, and West campuses. ASU has come to be known by the phrase, “One university in many places.” Each of the five ASU locations in metropolitan Phoenix has a distinct identity that allowed students to benefit from attending a large, research institution, with customized student-centric services and programs. It was this identity that required specialized attention to programming that is specific to the population targeted. Since its establishment in 1996, ASU Polytechnic has evolved as an educational hub for students pursuing applied studies in interdisciplinary sciences, engineering, management, technology, business, arts and education. The campus is located in east Mesa on the site of an old Air Force base. Although a number of campus buildings were built in the last 10 years, many of the structures were part of the original Air Force base. The Polytechnic degree programs emphasized project-based learning within advanced laboratory spaces, allowing students to focus on innovative approaches in collaboration with industry partners.

### **Participants**

The Polytechnic campus has been called the maker campus, due to the students’ propensity to create applied solutions to everyday problems. The Problem of Practice I identified was, increasing affinity for undergraduate students at the Polytechnic location through meaningful student-centric activities. In addressing affinity or institutional loyalty, it was vital to keep in mind the identity of the campus and the students served.



In the context of the study, affinity was defined as student connectedness or loyalty toward the institution.

During the fall 2017 semester, there were 4,307 undergraduate students enrolled in 105 degree programs at ASU Polytechnic. The undergraduate population was comprised of native freshmen, or students who started their academic career at ASU Polytechnic, and transfer students. First-year students were expected to live on campus and there were 381 freshmen living in one of two freshmen communities. ASU Polytechnic has been the only ASU campus where single-home units were a residential option for undergraduates. Additionally, it has been the only campus where family living has been an option for students, staff and faculty. In fall 2017, 1,179 students lived at the ASU Polytechnic campus.

One striking difference between ASU Polytechnic and the other four ASU locations was the population breakdown by gender. For years, the number of male students outnumbered female students by a significant percentage. This may have been related to the higher number of science, engineering, and technology majors associated with the campus. Much effort and progress has been made to increase the number of females on campus. One way the gender inequity was addressed was to diversify the programs of study available. For example, by increasing the elementary education majors and the liberal arts majors, there has been an increase in the female population. In addition to focused recruitment of females entering careers in science, there was also an intentional effort to retain female students.

In fall 2018, 88 student organizations were registered at ASU Polytechnic. The student organizations focused on various interest areas including academic, professional,

sports/recreation, and technology. Funding for student organizations was available through the Student Fee administered by Undergraduate Student Government, department funding, and college funding. Student organizations also had the flexibility coordinate their own fundraising activities. Six organizations had additional staff and financial support from Educational Outreach and Student Services including Changemaker, Inferno Insiders, the Programming and Activities Board, the Residence Hall Association, Undergraduate Student Government and the wellness organization. In my role as Assistant Dean, I advised the Undergraduate Student Government at ASU Polytechnic.

In terms of thematic or programmatic interests, Polytechnic students were interested in activities that foster entrepreneurship, service, and technology as evidenced by organizational membership, event attendance and coursework selection. Most campus activities were scheduled in the Student Union, the Sun Devil Fitness Center, Century Hall (freshman residence hall) and the academic classrooms. Students favored the Tuesday/Thursday class schedule, with Monday/Wednesday classes being second favorite. There was a visible decrease in the number of students taking classes on Fridays. Documented event attendance was highest on Tuesday and Wednesday evenings or midday Tuesdays and Thursdays.

### **Role of the Researcher**

My professional role as Assistant Dean of Students required me to seek input regularly from the students I served. I was required to have a visible presence on campus and I worked with students daily. I had access to the undergraduate student population as well as oversight of student engagement opportunities for this population. I focused my

Problem of Practice on the Polytechnic campus since it was within my professional sphere of influence.

The majority of study-related activities took place during the fall 2018 semester at the ASU Polytechnic campus. Throughout the action research study, I took the role of observer, data collector, and intervention manager. As the data collector, I administered pre- and post-intervention surveys to participating undergraduate students. I also conducted interviews with participating undergraduate students. I also managed all aspects of the intervention. Study participants were recruited through various avenues including club announcements; residence hall announcements; and advisor/faculty/staff recommendations. A special arrangement to visit three sections of a first-year seminar also took place.

### **Intervention**

The ASU Polytechnic Affinity Program was scheduled to take place during the first half of the fall semester with many of the planning activities starting prior to the start of the semester. Prior to the beginning of the innovation, participants completed a pre-innovation survey. The same survey was distributed again at the completion of the innovation. At the end of the study, the pre- and post-survey results were analyzed to measure change. The activities included attending an ASU Football game; attending the Inferno Concert; meeting with a faculty member outside of class; meeting with a staff member from the Dean of Students office; attending a club/organization meeting or a club fair; and meeting with the staff at Career and Professional Development Services. I had an opportunity to observe the participants at some of the scheduled activities.

## Instruments

This action research project employed a mixed method approach including both quantitative and qualitative data. According to Creswell (2015), combining qualitative and quantitative methodologies allows the researcher better leverage to address the research question than using separate methods. The quantitative data were gathered through pre- and post-intervention surveys. The surveys included two major areas. The first area was composed of seven constructs based on Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and included: (a) behavioral beliefs, (b) normative beliefs, (c) control beliefs, (d) attitudes toward the behavior, (e) subjective norms, (f) perceived behavioral control, and (g) intention to become involved at ASU. Examples of items included: "If I become involved at ASU, there will be benefits for me;" "Whether I become involved at ASU, is entirely up to me;" and "I plan to become involved at ASU." See Appendix A for the complete set of items related to the TPB constructs. Students responded using a six-point Likert scale with 6 = *Strongly Agree*, 5 = *Agree*, 4 = *Slightly Agree*, 3 = *Slightly Disagree*, 2 = *Disagree*, and 1 = *Strongly Disagree*.

In addition, the second major area of the surveys included items related to the following five constructs: (a) feelings upon admission to ASU; (b) perception of ASU's reputation prior to arriving on campus; (c) feelings of organizational connectedness to ASU; (d) feelings of social connectedness to ASU; and (e) loyalty toward ASU. Examples of items included "I am proud to be studying at ASU;" "It is important to join a club or student organization at my university;" and "I consider myself a Sun Devil for life." See Appendix A for the complete set of items related to these five constructs. Each construct included five questions, which used the same six-point Likert scale. The survey

also included six demographic questions. Surveys were administered before and after the intervention to assess whether there were changes in students' perceptions.

The qualitative portion of the study included ten participant interviews. The participant interviews allowed the researcher to explore more deeply how undergraduate students felt about affinity, loyalty, and connectedness to the institution. The interview included 13 questions. Examples of questions included "What has contributed to your feeling of being connected to ASU;" "How loyal do you feel toward ASU;" and "What attitudes do you have about becoming involved at ASU?" The complete set of interview questions has been provided in Appendix B. See Appendix B.

### **Procedure and Timeline**

Once participants were identified, the quantitative, pre-intervention surveys were conducted. The surveys were distributed through Qualtrics for easier student access. Once students completed the pre-intervention survey, the innovation was implemented. Following the conclusion of the innovation, participants completed the quantitative, post-intervention survey.

Qualitative data were gathered through ten semi-structured interviews conducted with student participants once the intervention was complete. The researcher conducted the ten interviews and audio recorded each interview using a phone application. Interviews took place in various campus locations including the student union, the researcher's office, and the campus fitness center. All ten interviews were transcribed by an online service, Rev.com.

Table 3 detailed the timeline and procedures for the study including each step such as approvals, implementation of the innovation, data collection, and data analyses.

See Table 3.

Table 3

*Timeline and Procedures for the Action Research Project*

Timeframe	Actions	Procedures
By August 20, 2018	Finalized survey and interview questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Secured IRB approval</li> </ul>
By August 27, 2018	Identified study participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identified participants based on first-year class enrollment; residence hall assignment</li> </ul>
Week of September 3, 2018	Conducted introductory session	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Distributed pre-intervention survey</li> </ul>
Week of September 10, 2018	Conducted intervention cycle one	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conducted individual meetings with each participant</li> <li>Monitored required event attendance</li> </ul>
Week of September 17, 2018	Conducted intervention cycle two	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conducted individual meetings with each participant</li> <li>Monitored required event attendance</li> </ul>
Week of September 24, 2017	Conducted intervention cycle three	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conducted individual meetings with each participant</li> <li>Monitored required event attendance</li> </ul>
Week of October 1, 2018	Conducted intervention cycle four	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conducted individual meetings with each participant</li> <li>Monitored required event attendance</li> </ul>
Week of October 8, 2018	Conducted final student meetings, including in-person interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conducted individual meetings with each participant</li> <li>Distributed post-intervention survey</li> </ul>
Week of October 15, 2018	Conducted data analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Began interview transcriptions</li> <li>Began data analysis</li> </ul>

## **Data Analyses**

The initial analysis of the quantitative data included reliability analyses. Subsequently, quantitative data analyses included computation of descriptive statistics. The qualitative data were entered into HyperRESEARCH (HyperRESEARCH 4.0.2., 2014) and analyzed using the constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As such, qualitative data coding started with key words, or initial open codes. These initial open codes were then combined into larger categories called theme-related components, which were then aggregated into themes. These themes were the basis for the assertions, which were connected to the original interview quotes. The researcher read the transcripts several times, coded them, and conducted the higher-level interpretive work to derive the themes and assertions. According to Saldaña (2013), assertions address the specifics of a study through aggregate and data-supported statements. At each step of the process, the researcher carefully reflected on the interpretations to ensure the data continued to support these higher-level understandings. Thus, the researcher used thorough, careful, and reflective processes in the qualitative data analysis.

## Chapter 4

### DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The purpose of this action research study was to examine how affinity increased or developed for undergraduate students at the Arizona State University Polytechnic campus through meaningful student-centric activities. The study was guided by three theoretical frameworks including the work of Baumeister and Leary (1995), Kuh (2003, 2009), and Ajzen (1991, n.d.). Results from the study have been presented in two sections that included results from the qualitative and quantitative data. The first section of Chapter 4 has detailed the data collection process as well as the data analysis process used in the study.

#### **Quantitative Results**

Prior to the analysis of the quantitative data, Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients were computed for all the dependent variables based on the pre-intervention assessments. Cronbach's alphas ranged from .74 to 1.00, which indicated the scores for the variables were reliable. Typically, coefficients above .70 have been considered to indicate reliable measures. The complete set of variables and their respective Cronbach's alpha coefficient has been provided in Table 4. See Table 4.

The first seven variables in Tables 4 and 5 were based on Ajzen's (n.d.) TPB, whereas the latter five were researcher-based and developed specifically for this study.



Table 4

*Dependent Variables and their Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients from the Pre-intervention Assessment*

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Dependent Variable	Cronbach's alpha coefficient
Behavioral Beliefs	.92
Normative Beliefs	.76
Control Beliefs	.95
Attitudes toward the Behavior	.97
Subjective Norms	.89
Perceived Behavioral Control	.74
Intention to Become Involved at ASU	1.00
Feelings about Being Admitted to ASU*	.86
Perception of ASU Reputation	.82
Feelings of Organizational Connectedness to ASU	.82
Feelings of Social Connectedness to ASU	.95
Feelings of Loyalty to ASU#	.89

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\*—Note: Item 5 was deleted because it was not consistent with other items on the scale.

#—Note: Item 1 was deleted because it was not consistent with other items on the scale.

Next, descriptive statistics for the pre- and post-intervention assessments of these variables have been presented in Table 5. See Table 5. Descriptive statistics were

chosen rather than inferential statistics because of the small sample size,  $n = 9$ , for individuals who provided both pre- and post-intervention scores.

Table 5

*Means and Standard Deviations\* for Dependent Variables for Pre- and Post-intervention Assessments*

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Dependent Variable	Pre-intervention	Post-intervention
Behavioral Beliefs	5.26 (0.78)*	5.52 (0.77)
Normative Beliefs	4.89 (0.93)	4.93 (1.09)
Control Beliefs	5.59 (0.49)	5.41 (0.72)
Attitudes toward the Behavior	5.17 (1.10)	5.11 (0.53)
Subjective Norms	4.50 (1.18)	4.78 (1.02)
Perceived Behavioral Control	5.39 (0.57)	5.28 (0.85)
Intention to Become Involved at ASU	5.00 (1.66)	5.04 (1.65)
Feelings about Being Admitted to ASU	5.33 (0.85)	4.97 (1.01)
Perception of ASU Reputation	4.49 (1.07)	3.89 (1.15)
Feelings of Org. Connectedness to ASU	5.31 (0.60)	5.09 (0.74)
Feelings of Social Connectedness to ASU	4.78 (1.42)	4.38 (1.59)
Feelings of Loyalty to ASU <sup>#</sup>	5.75 (0.40)	5.72 (0.44)

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\*—Note: Standard deviations have been presented in parentheses.

At the pre-intervention assessment of the TPB variables, means for five of the seven TPB variables (the first seven variables in Table 5) equaled or exceeded 5.00 on

the 6-point semantic differential scale employed in the study for these variables. As a result, growth on these variables was constrained from the beginning. In fact, increases in those five variables ranged between -0.18 and +0.26 point, which indicated very little change, generally no change. For the other two TPB variables, changes were nominal, as well. For the last five variables in Table 5, the researcher-developed variables particular to the study, which were assessed on 6-point Likert scales, gains were either very small +0.03 point or decreases ranging from -0.22 to -0.60 point were observed.

Taken together, the quantitative data exhibited a pattern that can be characterized as one, which showed no change or slight to modest decreases in the variables between pre- and post-intervention assessments. These slight declines may result from students' 'coming to know/experience ASU,' which informed their post-intervention ratings as compared to a more 'idealized perception of ASU' that may have influenced their initial pre-intervention ratings.

With respect to students' participation in various activities designed to foster development of connections to ASU, data for these nine students showed participation in the activities ranged from 1 to 6 with a mean of 3.89 activities and a SD = 1.69. Thus, of this sample of students, participation was fairly high at about four activities out of six possible activities.

### **Qualitative Results**

Ten first-year students were interviewed upon completion of the intervention. All Polytechnic majors were represented, including students representing the College of Integrative Sciences and Arts, Fulton Schools of Engineering, Mary Lou Fulton College and the W. P. Carey School of Business. Students from Barrett, the Honors College were

also represented in the interview. There were five female and five male students interviewed. All ten students were employed on campus by the time the interviews were conducted. Table 6 displayed theme-related components, themes, and assertions from the qualitative data.

Table 6

*Theme-Related Components, Themes, and Assertions Based on Ten Student Interviews*

Theme-related components	Themes	Assertions
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Living in a community</li> <li>2. Building a sense of community</li> <li>3. Working on campus</li> </ol>	Developing a sense of community	1. Students connected to the university by being members of the campus community.
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Interacting with university faculty and staff members</li> <li>2. Using university services</li> <li>3. Enlisting academic support</li> <li>4. Utilizing university physical resources</li> </ol>	Using university resources	2. Students engaged with the university by using various representatives, resources, and services.
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Building a sense of affinity to the university</li> <li>2. Building connections to ASU through engagement</li> </ol>	Emerging student sentiments of affinity toward ASU	3. Students developed initial feelings of loyalty toward ASU

In the following section, a detailed discussion of the themes including interview quotes to support the assertions that have been presented.

**Developing a sense of community.** Assertion 1 - Students connected to the university by being members of the campus community. The theme-related components that led to Assertion 1 were (a) living in a community, (b) building a sense of community, and (c) working on campus.

*Living in a community.* Currently, all ASU first-year students have been expected to live on campus. For colleges and universities, requiring first-year students to live on campus has been shown to be directly related to higher retention rates of those students. At ASU, students who lived on campus retain at a higher rate than the overall university first-year retention rate of 86.8% for the fall 2017 cohort (Arizona State University, 2018). During the interview, the researcher asked what contributed to students' feelings of connectedness to ASU. One student shared her experience about living in a residential community as a Barrett, Honors College student when she said,

My feeling of being connected to ASU, I honestly, I contribute [*sic*, attribute] it to being part of the Barrett community, being in that community of scholars, who from the very get-go freshman year, everyone living in the same dorm room where we have our doors open and then the Barrett space. If it wasn't for people in Barrett, I don't think I would be as connected with ASU as if I wasn't in Barrett.

According to students interviewed, living on campus made it easier to meet other students and connect with them. To illustrate, one student suggested,

Since I live on campus, there is [*sic*] obviously people around me all the time. And I see the same people every day, but I also tend to meet new people. And whenever I meet new people, it's always nice to know their story, get to know what they're doing, their major, and everything like that. I feel like especially being on a campus as small as Poly, it's easier to surround yourself with a community of people you'll see every day and get to know them better.

Several students mentioned they felt more connected when they got out of their residence hall rooms. Although living on campus was beneficial for various reasons, students shared that staying in the room was detrimental to the overall student experience as one student noted, “You get to know people and you feel less trapped in your room. You can get out and do something. It’s mentally relieving, I guess.” When asked what kept students in their residence hall rooms, one student shared the following, “It was a fear of not being accepted. It’s a fear of, ‘These people aren’t going to like me. I’ve never known them before. I don’t know how I’m going to fit into this group.’”

By comparison, students who did not live on campus may have felt disconnected, as illustrated in one student who shared, he did not feel as connected to ASU, when he said.

Not as connected as I would’ve liked, but that’s because I don’t stay on campus. Otherwise, it’s not something that they [ASU] don’t offer us, the ability to talk and make those connections with students.

***Building a sense of community.*** For students, building a sense of community was an important differentiating feature of the campus environment. One student emphasized the reciprocating nature of community engagement when she claimed,

I would just say the amount of engagement, especially out here on this campus, we see from this campus. Just the ways that we try to outreach and try to engage our community is beautiful and I don’t think you would get that at any other university.

Although students focused on the small size of the Polytechnic campus, they also talked about ASU as a large, but welcoming university community as demonstrated when a student maintained,

But I think here at ASU, we have a large community who is very accepting, and I think as student organizations all the time, we're trying to let people know, like, 'Hey, we want you in our groups. We want you to come join us. We want you to have fun like we are.'

Interacting with peers and creating groups or teams was important with respect to building a sense of community. Intramural sports offered students a structure to create that sense of community while engaging in a physical activity they enjoyed. For students who engaged in organized sports growing up, intramural activities offered them an opportunity to be part of a team in a campus environment, which afforded them a community building activity as described by one student who stated,

Intramural sports is actually a really big thing for me. Being able to be on a team with other people on campus that you've never met before, you've never met, or you have met before, you made a team with your friends, it kind of strengthens your bond with them and makes it like, 'We're doing this as a team. We're a team base.' Plus I feel like by doing team-based activities, like sports, with people that are in the same major as you, it kind of boosts your strength of doing stuff together and group projects.

Although many of the engagement activities were social activities, students recognized that having a supportive peer group was important to their success on campus.

Students identified a need to engage with a support network that understood what they were experiencing as in the case of the student who shared,

Sometimes it's hard to feel connected because everybody's going through so many different things, but then at the same time, at the end of the day, we're literally all going through it together at our own pace. We just all be there for each other.

This sense of camaraderie among university students was evident through in various comments offered by the students. According to one student, the level and intensity of student interaction was different than high school as noted when she acknowledged,

What has contributed to the friendships that I've made? They're a lot closer than they were in high school. 'Cause we go outside a lot. And we eat a lot of food together. And all the clubs, finding people that like the same things that I like. And, also, having the same type of energy.

*Working on campus.* Students were encouraged to work on campus if they needed to work. Over the years, I have hired many student workers and always encouraged students to work on-campus. As a supervisor of students, I have been committed to prioritizing academics over work and have offered my student staff some flexibility to support their academic endeavors. One student shared that sentiment when she stated,

Having a job on campus is really good for, like my school schedule, and stuff like that. And overall, I would just say everyone thinks that it's really cool and just good that you can be involved with your college for more than just academics.



With respect to campus engagement, students recognized the value of having a job on campus as observed when one student affirmed,

I mean here at the office, you guys are always, let's go to the events, go see what they got going. Without having you guys letting us know about the events and stuff like that, then I definitely wouldn't be as involved.

For students working on campus, it was easier to familiarize themselves with campus events as illustrated when one student claimed, "Something that actually helped a lot was having an on-campus job because it got me engaged with the ASU surroundings, what everyone has, all the events."

Further, students also believed working on campus affected their outlook on their academic success as observed when a student maintained,

I would say it's probably the best thing you can do while you're in college. I didn't have a job at Changemaker and wasn't involved in any clubs for most of the first semester. And I can say everything drastically changed when I became involved, my grades improved and I just was, I guess happier, had more friendships in general.

***Summary for developing a sense of community.*** Taken together, the data with regard to developing a sense of community indicated students capitalized on a variety of living, working, and other formal and informal opportunities to develop a sense of community. This sense of community served as the means for them to connect to the campus and to ASU.

**Using university resources.** Assertion 2 - Students engaged with the university by using various representatives, resources, and services. The four theme-related

components that led to Assertion 2 were (a) interacting with university faculty and staff members, (b) using university resources, (c) enlisting academic support, and (d) utilizing university physical resources.

*Interacting with university faculty and staff members.* Students consistently referenced the importance of relationships they had built with university faculty and staff members upon arriving on campus. For one student, the connection with university faculty and staff members began before classes started through the E2 Camp for new engineering students. The student shared that university faculty and staff members made him feel at home when he said, “Definitely [connected through] faculty and staff, the way I was introduced to this college through the retreat (E2 Camp for first-year engineers), through many of the different programs that they offer and just made me feel like at home.”

Although students connected with university faculty and staff members early in the semester, students also understood the value and long-term potential of those connections as noted when one student shared,

Networking. I guess the only people that I feel connected is like my professors and my co-workers. I think there’s a lot of cool people and professors and faculty that have a considerable amount of connections, that if you can make that, they can help you out for your future career or they can help you, lead you in a path. I’m in touch with my professor right now to be able to become an air traffic controller. So I’m about to get into this program in Oklahoma. And he’s like, ‘Yeah, I’ll email you whenever that opening happens.’

One student articulated his loyalty toward ASU was a summative experience encompassing relationships with university faculty and staff members; involvement in clubs and organizations; and interaction with peer groups as observed when he claimed, How ASU has made me feel – has given me a reason to be loyal. On top of like the grants that I've got, they help support me through my journey. And all of the professors and advisors that I've met. All show the energy that I want from a school. So I don't feel like I'm being casted out. I feel very invited. And, like I said before, with all the clubs, everything's just so cohesive and interconnected. That people I know here are people I know there. So it's easy to meet people. And so, I don't know, this is my favorite college.

As students reflected on the relationships built at the university, they commented that having someone to visit or chat with informally was important. This was demonstrated when one student maintained,

I am friends with so many different people within ASU, not only students, but staff members. I love being able to go into the offices of our different staff members out here, to just swing by and say, "Hey, can we have a chat?", like, "What's going on with your life?" And the Barrett staff, our EOSS [Educational Outreach and Student Services division] staff, are just all amazing people.

***Using university services.*** Over the years, ASU has invested in various technology upgrades to support research initiatives, as well as, the overall student experience. Although, students generally have been comfortable taking advantage of these resources, they may also have needed some assistance accessing those resources as noted when one student stated, "ASU has lots of resources. If you know how to use them

well, like Handshake, My ASU, just all the resources that they have. Just takes the right person to point you in the right direction.”

Students also relied on various services to support their engagement throughout the semester. One student mentioned this when she said, “One thing I really like is how many academic resources there are especially in like the library. There are so many different research databases that we have access to.” Similarly, others discussed the importance and usefulness of resources like electronic databases to support student research as noted when one student claimed,

I know that most clubs and things like that have a way you can access them through OrgSync [web-based, student organization database] and get their information if you want to contact them about being involved or through emails.

I know there’s also resources directly through the My ASU like Handshake [web-based, career database] if you’re looking for a job. And there’ll be like little announcements at the bottom so you can see what’s going on on-campus. And other than that, I know that ASU really likes people to be involved. Almost, I think all of the events are free and everyone’s always welcome everywhere.

***Enlisting academic support.*** Although the preceding resource examples were tech-based, traditional academic resources were viewed as being important components of student success, as well. To illustrate, consider what one student claimed when she said,

And then I would also say, maybe even my SI [supplemental instruction] leaders for my bio [biology] and chemistry classes. They give me great resources and

going to talk to them gives me ... just makes me feel more welcome and like I'm doing better in my classes obviously.

For some students, the connection to the academic program they selected triggered their connection to the university. For example, one student shared how he felt once he was admitted to a highly selective program at ASU when he declared,

One hundred percent loyal. Yeah, they're the only one that offered my program to study for in a bachelors' degree. Not only one, but one of three in the USA. So with them [ASU] offering that, I was pretty committed. Happy to move out of state and come here.

Close connections to academic programs were vital for some students. One student shared that her university connections were limited to the time in the classroom, "I guess the most important thing that I feel connected to at ASU is the classes, since I don't really go to events or football games and stuff like that. So I guess just like the classes."

*Utilizing university physical resources.* During the interviews, students referred to various physical resources that aided in their development of connections to the university. These resources included designated physical spaces for students, like the Barrett Honors Lounge, where students spent time regularly. For example, one student noted, "I'm always in the Barrett Lounge communicating with not only students, but faculty and staff, as well." For students, having access to physical space was beneficial for several reasons, including easy access to university staff members as noted when one student maintained,

To have that immediate connection to the staff here in the union [Student Union] and you and Jennifer and that definitely helps with that connection and then, again, our community space in the Barrett Lounge and here in the USG office, where students just tend to hang out and tend to just be themselves, rather than sitting cooped up in their dorm rooms. I feel like, not necessarily like I've experienced it, because I haven't been at other colleges, but when I toured other colleges, we didn't see many students on campus. When I toured ASU I feel like students were everywhere.

***Summary for using university resources.*** To summarize, students utilized various university resources, which facilitated connecting to the university. Resources such as engaging with faculty and staff members, university services, academic support, and physical resources all supported students' perceptions of being connected to the university.

**Emerging student sentiments of affinity toward ASU.** Assertion 3 – Students developed initial feelings of loyalty toward ASU. The two theme-related components that led to Assertion 3 included (a) building a sense of affinity toward the university, and (b) building connections to ASU through engagement.

***Building a sense of affinity toward the university.*** When students were asked what contributed to their feelings of loyalty, or affinity, toward the university, the concept of spirit, pride, and tradition surfaced numerous times. Over the last decade, ASU has implemented various campaigns aimed at increasing institutional pride. This sense of pride was demonstrated by one student who claimed, "It's a lot of pride, thinking about the school and just what it means to be here, how lucky I am to be here. You really feel a

part of it.” Another student shared a similar sentiment of how institutional pride influenced his desire to be on campus when he affirmed,

Just everything ASU is, and everything it stands for, all of the awards, all the recognition, all of the spirit that they bring to the games. Just to be at ASU in general, just the general ASU traditions and spirit and everything.

In the following example, a student reflected on her family’s personal connection to ASU and how that affected her sentiments of ASU when she asserted,

I would hate to be at any other school. I’m an ASU-bred through and through. It comes from having grown up on the Tempe campus with my grandfather who taught there, but my blood runs maroon and gold.

Students recognized institutional branding and identified with the ASU brand including the ASU Sunburst, Trident, and Sparky. One student claimed college team brands were perceived to be on a similar level as professional team brands when he maintained,

I think the advertisement for ASU is pretty cool. They got good color schemes and stuff. That’d be part of my loyalty. It’s like a fan club or like a sports fan, Chicago Cubs, New York Yankees, you know, wear their apparel. So ASUs got a good apparel and logo to represent.

In some instances, displaying the institutional brand served as a confirmation to friends and family that the right decision was made regarding selecting ASU as their university as illustrated when one student claimed.

I always show my Sun Devil pride at home. I even have Sparky’s face on my door. And then, when you go inside you see all my foam fingers that I got. And

all my shirts. And so, my mom always jokes about the fact that, ‘You almost went to U of A [University of Arizona].’ And I was like, ‘Yeah, but I didn’t. Now I am a Sun Devil.’ It changed very quickly. As soon as I started ASU I’m ASU all the way.

Branded apparel influenced perceptions of connectedness to the institution and helped solidify a sentiment of community as shared by this student who declared,

Just the opportunities that ASU has given me over any other place and it’s just that feeling of community. Obviously, you may not know that person there that’s wearing an ASU shirt, but you feel connected to them because you come from the same place.

Another aspect of the university that has been focused on fostering connections to it has been the dedicated efforts with respect to building a strong student fan base. For example, during football season, intentional efforts were employed to maximize student home game attendance, including game transportation, t-shirt distributions, pep rallies, and pre-game activities like Devils on Mill. A student articulated how athletic events influenced student life when she claimed,

In the beginning, I didn’t really care. But now that I’m a part of everything, I feel pretty loyal. I really like ASU. I’m getting more into our rivalries and the more I go to games. It’s more of going to sports activities and just getting to cheer on your team, I think. That’s fun. Yeah, and my suitemate is super spirited for ASU, so she gets me pumped up for things. So just other people’s vibe.

***Building connections to ASU through engagement.*** Students shared a number of suggestions related to becoming connected on campus and its importance. They



suggested making connections in college had long-term benefits beyond graduation as one student noted, “Getting involved really helps you build those friendships that are going to last for a lifetime outside of college.” A second student expanded on this notion, when she asserted,

Benefits include lifelong friendships, great community building, great resume building, from being part of the different student engagement organizations.

Those definitely have helped me build my resume, especially as someone who will be a teacher and who will be a part of team building communities in a school or working with different personalities, you will definitely have that big resume building.

Although there wasn’t a special formula for building connections in college, one student articulated how simple it was to start when she claimed,

You don’t have to start off with a big group, but you can start off with making one-on-one interactions with people and building off that. That’s kind of like the domino effect, or it’s like, you make one friend and then that friend introduces you to his friends and then eventually you’re going to have a big group of people.

For new students, establishing peer connections was critical during the first weeks on campus. The transition to a new environment with a new set of peers became easier when other students reached out and welcomed students to campus. This approach was articulated clearly, when one student declared,

Moving out here for college, again, going back to that community feeling of people who were willing to accept me as a freshman who didn’t know what was going on to say like, ‘Hey, come to this event,’ or ‘Hey, join this thing,’ really

helped me feel connected to ASU as a whole, even more so than I did, having been aware of the ASU community as a child.

Moreover, students associated lack of engagement with a negative college student experience. One student pointed out the difference between staying connected to campus activities as compared to merely coming to class and going home when she stated, “I know my friends who aren’t involved, they say that they’re very bored. They take their class and they go home.”

Interview responses pointed to students’ desires to meet new people. One student summarized this perspective best when she noted, “I mean every opportunity and event is an opportunity to meet new people, to meet new experiences.” Further, the sentiment of confidence was intertwined with engagement as in the case of this student who encouraged others not to be afraid to take the first step in getting involved on campus when she asserted,

Being brave enough to go into the Hub, go into USG [Undergraduate Student Government], talk to people. I think go off and being brave enough to go to events, despite maybe being . . . I don’t know, frightened, scared, whatever you will. But, I’d say the most important factor as you’re becoming involved at ASU is not being afraid to become involved.

***Summary for student sentiments of emerging affinity toward ASU.*** Taken together, the data suggested students were developing emerging sentiments toward ASU. These emerging sentiments were being built on a sense of affinity through spirit, pride, and tradition and developing connections to ASU through engagement in various formal and informal opportunities, which were afforded to first-year students.

## Chapter 5

### DISCUSSION

The purpose of this action research study was to examine how affinity increased or developed for undergraduate students at the Polytechnic campus through meaningful student-centric activities. The study was guided by three theoretical frameworks including the work of Baumeister and Leary (1995), Kuh (2003, 2009), and Ajzen (1991, n.d.). In Chapter 5, I discuss the findings of the study including (a) complementarity and integration of quantitative and qualitative data, (b) explaining the results, (c) limitations, (d) implications for practice, (e) implications for future research, and (f) lessons learned.

#### **Complementarity and Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Data**

As defined by Creswell (2015), a mixed method design is one that capitalizes on the combination of both qualitative and quantitative data to provide for a better interpretation of the research data than either approach implemented individually. In this mixed method study, quantitative data are gathered through pre- and post-intervention surveys and qualitative data are collected through individual structured interviews. Greene, Caracelli, & Graham (1989), defined complementarity as one of five purposes for mixed method evaluations in which “qualitative and quantitative methods are used to measure overlapping but also different facets of a phenomenon, yielding an enriched, elaborated understanding of that phenomenon” (p. 258). Thus, complementarity enhances understanding of quantitative and qualitative results.

In this study, the quantitative data show students have a high degree of affinity toward ASU. For example, behavioral beliefs about involvement, attitudes toward involvement, intention to be/become involved, feelings of organizational connectedness

to ASU, and feelings of loyalty toward ASU, which are variables that assess affinity in some, all demonstrate high values exceeding 5 on the Likert scale. In fact, loyalty is the highest score at pre- and post-intervention. These high levels of affinity in the quantitative data are also reflected in the qualitative data. Specifically, the qualitative data results show there is an emerging sense of student sentiments of affinity toward ASU that are connected to two theme-related components surfacing in the qualitative data. Those two theme-related components are (a) building a sense of affinity to the university through such things as spirit, pride, and tradition; and (b) building a sense of belonging and connections to ASU through engagement in various activities like meeting others, participating in events and other opportunities and so on. Thus, the quantitative and qualitative data support one another and point to the same conclusion about a developing sense of loyalty toward ASU.

### **Explaining the Results**

The theoretical perspectives on belongingness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) and engagement (Kuh, 2008, 2009) suggest students want to feel connected to others and to the institution. Moreover, to the extent students are engaged with an institution, they develop feelings of being connected to and affinity for the institution.

Baumeister and Leary (1995) suggest humans need to establish and maintain interactions and do so through the development of ongoing relational bonds. Thus, humans are motivated to form ongoing, positive, and definite relationships. Consistent with these claims, results from the current study indicate students seek opportunities to meet other students and connect with them. With respect to relational matters, they also benefit from living on campus where such connections are easy to make. Various

interview responses are consistent with the theory of belonging such as the case of the student who shared, “I feel like ... it’s easier to surround yourself with a community of people you’ll see every day and get to know them better.” This quote provides evidence about the importance of relationships in building connections to the university.

Moreover, this initial sense of connectedness has its roots in a sense of belonging, which is evident in the qualitative data. For example, the following quote attests to the initial development of a sense of belonging when one student maintained, “I feel like especially being on a campus as small as Poly, it’s easier to surround yourself with a community of people you’ll see every day and get to know them better.”

Kuh (2008) introduced the concept of high-impact educational practices connected to increased student retention and student engagement. According to Kuh, universities can proactively design undergraduate experiences that foster student success. By taking a value-added approach, a college or university may influence student experience through intentional programming or engagement (Kuh, 2009). One of the value-added services available to ASU students is supplemental instruction. This additional layer of academic support complements the instructor’s classroom experience by having someone dedicated to smaller groups of students. This intentional support structure is critical for first-year students who are navigating a new academic environment. One participant described her experience with her supplemental instructor when she said,

She’s very willing to email back and forth to make things like Kahoot [game-based, learning platform] to help us study. And she is always in class during the

lectures to help answer our questions as well. And she's just a really good resource.

Moreover, consistent with Kuh's more general notion of involvement, various instances from the qualitative data indicate students are being/becoming involved and connecting to the institution. For example, one student claimed, "And I can say everything drastically changed when I became involved, my grades improved, and I just was, I guess happier, had more friendships in general." Taken together, involvement data from the study can be understood in terms of Kuh's work on student engagement/involvement.

### **Limitations**

There are a number of limitations associated with this study, including (a) the number of participants, (b) length of the study timeframe, (c) timing of the study, and (d) dual role of campus administrator and researcher.

The first limitation is the small number of study participants. This study is aimed at first-year students at the ASU Polytechnic campus. To maximize participants, an arrangement was made to recruit students in three first-year sections of a required Fulton Schools of Engineering class, approximately 60 students. Additionally, a recruitment email for the study was shared with various Polytechnic staff members who worked closely with first-year students. The pre-intervention survey was completed by less than twenty students, and the post-intervention survey was completed by even fewer students,  $n = 9$ . A similar participation pattern occurred with the structured interviews where no less than twenty interviews were scheduled, yet only ten students participated in the interview portion of the study.

The second limitation is the short length of the study timeframe. The intervention was scheduled during the first half of the first semester on campus. This timeframe was selected because a number of key campus events are already scheduled at that time, including home football games. In the initial design, the intervention was scheduled over a six-week period; however, due to changes in scheduled events, the timeframe decreased to four weeks. For some participants, completing the pre- and post-intervention surveys, the intervention, and the interview in a span of four weeks felt rushed. Moreover, this short period may have minimized the effect of the intervention.

The third limitation is the timing of the study in relation to the students' development. The study was scheduled to begin during the first semester for first-year students. The idea was that new students would benefit most from the materials and opportunities with respect to student engagement. Nevertheless, my observation was that first-year students had very limited knowledge of university processes and events. For example, although students may know of the Dean of Students Office, they often share they did not know the purpose of the office. Another example is that first-year students did not have a sense of timing for university events. Although students may intend to attend a football game, they may not realize not every game is played at home or game times vary from week to week, affecting the students' ability to attend a game.

The fourth limitation is a common concern for action research studies; and relates to the dual role played by the researcher who also holds an administrative role on campus. In the case of the ASU Polytechnic campus, this limitation is further influenced by the overall small size of the student body (approximately 5,500 degree-seeking students). In other words, university faculty, administrators, and staff interact on a daily

basis with students and share an established sense of familiarity. This may have manifested itself in the way students answered questions during the interviews. Because students knew that the researcher is also a campus administrator, students may have answered the questions in an overly positive manner.

### **Implications for Practice**

The power of engaging in action research is that one has the opportunity to improve one's practice. From the initial discussions related to topic selection for my dissertation, the focus was on my workplace and the students I serve. When constructing the study research questions, the goal was to address a problem of practice. Thus, there are a number of implications for practice based on the results of this study. One way to focus on the implications for practice is to consider the assertions derived from the qualitative data analysis.

*“Students connected to the university by being members of the campus community.”* For new students, establishing themselves in the ASU community is important. This sense of belonging and sense of community serve as the initial manifestations of a connection to campus and to ASU. Students refer to their living environment, their work environment, and their social environment as providing opportunities for belonging and making connections. Future practice must continue to capitalize on these opportunities for developing a sense of belonging and community building. Encouraging students to live and work on campus are simple engagement tactics. Additional coordinated efforts may include messaging at orientation and welcome programs, as well as training staff to recruit and hire students who may not otherwise be connected.



*“Students engaged with the university by using various representatives, resources, and services.”* In discussions about involvement, frequently there are references to the student who parks the car, goes to class, and leaves campus immediately after class. What is the best approach to engage that student? Some students may not know how to connect with university representatives, resources, or services. Other students will self-select out of engagement opportunities because they do not know about policies, processes, and so on, as in the case of the student who thought all student leadership activities/opportunities are limited to students living on campus. Knowing how students engage with people at the university, it is in our best interest to coach university representatives to become more intentional when meeting students. Providing an inviting experience is critical when encouraging students to join the university community. Thus, part of a successful first-year transition for students includes creating relationships that may lead to achieving a sense of belonging.

In addition to the human connections, we must develop physical spaces that encourage community engagement. We must consider whether there are sufficient study and social areas on campus to support student needs. Further, we must ensure students are aware of such spaces. Finally, we must be intentional in directing students to available physical resources. For example, during finals, some offices with open areas, will make their space available for studying. Although the temporary adjustment meets the students’ initial needs for study space, the department will also benefit from additional student traffic.

*“Students developed initial feelings of loyalty toward ASU.”* Once students decide to become Sun Devils, it is critical that we continue to affirm and support that

decision throughout the student's academic career at ASU. For some students, affinity develops through the branded apparel they wear, the athletic events they attend, or the branded collateral they see on campus daily. For other students, the friendships and connections they make at the university are what instill senses of belonging and spirit, pride, and tradition. Ultimately, increasing loyalty or affinity towards the institution requires intentional, on-going efforts. At best, there are four years to develop a relationship with undergraduates on campus. Developing a strategic engagement plan focused on that effort is key in advancing toward that goal. It is no longer sufficient to create programming opportunities with limited strategic impact on the student experience for the sake of programming. Instead, we must invest the time to reflect, plan, deliver and assess our efforts to create the effect we want to make.

Students are developing an affinity toward the institution through formal and informal experiences throughout their academic career. Based on the highly complementary data results, there appears to be an emerging sense of affinity or loyalty toward ASU for students as early as the first semester. Overall, there are a number of approaches that could be implemented to cultivate affinity on campus. Based on the research results, establishing relationships, creating a sense of belonging, and building a sense of community may lead to increased loyalty.

### **Implications for Future Research**

As required by my doctoral program, I had to implement a mixed method study for my dissertation. My prior experience with qualitative research was minimal and I was dreading the process. However, I was intrigued by the benefits of data complementarity associated with the mixed method design. I could not have anticipated

how much I enjoyed conducting the student interviews. The rich data gathered from each interview helped me gain a better understanding of the pre- and post-intervention surveys. I was surprised by the candor exhibited by the student participants. Their willingness to answer my questions and share their experiences strengthens my commitment to student affairs. Through the study, I confirmed that by investing the time to gather formal feedback from my students, I can make informed decisions that will improve the student experience on my campus. The university already invests in delivering various quantitative studies and if I take the time to understand these surveys and develop corresponding qualitative interviews, I will develop a fuller picture of the student experience. Thus, the implications for a scholar practitioner like myself are many.

Action research is known for its cyclical nature. Knowing what I know after this cycle of research, I could certainly strengthen future cycles of research. As mentioned previously, the study was limited by its brevity. Future cycles could be adjusted to span the entire 16-week semester. Future cycles could also include additional interviews at multiple times throughout the semester. Although I was concerned that my role would bias the participants' answers, I could leverage my position to engage the participants differently. For example, I could encourage pre- and post-intervention survey completion by taking a stronger stance when recruiting students.

Finally, implementation of a well-conceived intervention to foster involvement across a three- or four-year period is worthy of consideration. Clearly, the limited timeframe for the current study does not permit the full effect of an intervention to 'take root' and foster substantial changes in students' perceptions of involvement and affinity

development. On the other hand, providing a strong intervention over a longer timeframe may provide for fostering the desired outcomes.

### **Lessons Learned**

When I reflect on my undergraduate experience, I attribute my success to a mix of grit, luck, fear, and critical connections established along the way. I did not know it at the time, but so many things could have gone wrong. Just as there were opportunities for success, there were equal opportunities for failure. At that time, colleges and universities were not in tune with student retention efforts, and to some extent, it was expected that a percentage of students would fail. In 1998, the first-year retention rate at Arizona State University was 73.3% in comparison to fall 2018, when the university retention rate reached the highest percentage to date, 86.8% (Arizona State University, n. d.). Since my first year in college, university administrators have become savvy, data-informed, decision-makers regarding student success and retention.

Over the last 20 years, I have worked at Arizona State University in various roles as a student affairs practitioner. I enjoy serving students and appreciate the lessons they have taught me. Because of the length of my tenure, I have a sense of what works and what does not. Nevertheless, reality is that I work at a research university where data is the common language or the ‘coin of the realm.’ Engaging in action research allows me to address a problem of practice by identifying possible solutions, implementing those in some kind of intervention, fine tuning it over various cycles of research, and moving forward to the next cycle based on the research findings. By understanding the literature in my field of practice, I am able to glean understandings from various theoretical frameworks to strengthen my efforts and ultimately make decisions that are in the best

interests of students and the institution. The most important lesson I learned throughout the study is that adopting an action research approach strengthened my practice.

The second lesson I learned is the importance of gathering student feedback utilizing a qualitative research approach. In the age of big data, it is important to engage students in localized efforts intended to address questions within the researcher's sphere of influence. One way to do so, is to interview students. Understanding the student experience by conducting formal student interviews is informative *and* vital in developing a scholarly practice. During the interviews, students comment they are encouraged that the university wanted to learn about their experience. For some participants, being able to share their experience offers a way to process their feelings about their first semester on campus. Moreover, some students comment they had not had an opportunity to reflect on their experience and going through the interview allows them to stop and think about what they are experiencing. Processing this information with a university staff member provides students with a different level of dialogue unlike talking to parents or peers. However, the benefits are not limited to the students. When staff engage with students through a formal interview, they benefit from learning directly about the student experience.

Overall, there are many things I could do differently with the study. And I intend to implement a different approach in future cycles of work and research with respect to affinity development. Although I had a solid recruitment plan, I underestimated the lack of student participation and attrition between the pre- and post-intervention surveys. I also underestimated how my relationship with the participants would affect me. Once I interviewed the students, our relationship deepened to the extent that they saw me as a

direct resource. When we run into each other on campus, we always stop to chat and they always want to update me on what's going on in their lives. In my effort to remain unbiased and fully focused on my researcher role, I may have held back in establishing relationships with these students. This is something that I will need to process further before launching the next research cycle.

## **Conclusion**

In my initial literature review, I discovered that the number of peer-reviewed literature related to affinity or loyalty in the higher education setting was quite limited. Yet, as market competition intensifies, the demand for student data continues to grow. This specific research area focused on institutional affinity is full of potential, and there are limitless opportunities for additional studies in this area. My dissertation is just the start of my own research of this topic. I am committed to improving my practice and the student experience on my campus and future cycles of research will allow me to achieve those goals.

The simple notion of relationship building is a powerful approach in creating affinity. For students arriving on campus for their first year, developing a sense of belonging and building new connections is crucial as they acclimate to a new routine, a new environment, and a new set of responsibilities. For student affairs practitioners, it is important to establish programming opportunities focused on reaffirming the notion that students develop a sense of belonging and a sense of community early in their time at ASU. Establishing a mutual commitment to student success as students arrive on campus must be adopted as a formal practice, and not just another item on a task list.

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APPENDIX A

UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT AFFINITY SURVEY

**UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT AFFINITY SURVEY**

**PART I**

The following items are related to your **feelings about ASU**. Use the scale to indicate your feelings about each item.

		<b>Likely</b>				<b>Unlikely</b>	
1.	If I become involved at ASU, there will be benefits for me.	<input type="radio"/> 6	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 1
2.	If I become involved at ASU, I will make new friends.	<input type="radio"/> 6	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 1
3.	If I become involved at ASU, I will learn some new, useful skills.	<input type="radio"/> 6	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 1

		<b>Should</b>				<b>Should not</b>	
4.	My friends think that I should be involved at ASU.	<input type="radio"/> 6	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 1
5.	My parents think that I should be involved at ASU.	<input type="radio"/> 6	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 1
6.	My peers at ASU think that I should be involved at ASU.	<input type="radio"/> 6	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 1

		<b>Definitely true</b>				<b>Definitely false</b>	
7.	I am knowledgeable about what it takes to become involved at ASU.	<input type="radio"/> 6	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 1
8.	I am knowledgeable about different ways to become involved at ASU.	<input type="radio"/> 6	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 1
9.	I am knowledgeable about various ways to become involved at ASU.	<input type="radio"/> 6	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 1

		<b>Extremely good</b>				<b>Extremely bad</b>	
10.	For me to become involved at ASU is	<input type="radio"/> 6	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 1

		<b>Extremely worthwhile</b>				<b>Extremely worthless</b>	
11.	For me to become involved at ASU is	<input type="radio"/> 6	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 1

		<b>Extremely rewarding</b>				<b>Extremely unrewarding</b>	
12.	For me to become involved at ASU will be	<input type="radio"/> 6	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 1

		<b>Interesting</b>				<b>Boring</b>	
13.	For me to become involved at ASU is	<input type="radio"/> 6	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 1

		<b>Should</b>				<b>Should not</b>	
14.	Most people whom I respect think that I should become involved at ASU.	<input type="radio"/> 6	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 1

15.	Many of my peers will become involved at ASU	<b>Definitely true</b>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<b>Definitely false</b>
			6	5	4	3	2	1	
16.	It is expected of me that I will become involved at ASU.	<b>Definitely true</b>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<b>Definitely false</b>
			6	5	4	3	2	1	
17.	Most people whose opinion I value would approve of my becoming involved at ASU.	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>
			6	5	4	3	2	1	
18.	For me to become involved at ASU will be	<b>Extremely easy</b>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<b>Extremely difficult</b>
			6	5	4	3	2	1	
19.	Whether or not I become involved at ASU will be entirely up to me.	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>
			6	5	4	3	2	1	
20.	I am confident that if I wanted to, I could become involved at ASU.	<b>Definitely true</b>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<b>Definitely false</b>
			6	5	4	3	2	1	
21.	For me to become involved at ASU will be	<b>Possible</b>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<b>Impossible</b>
			6	5	4	3	2	1	
22.	I plan to become involved at ASU.	<b>Extremely likely</b>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<b>Extremely unlikely</b>
			6	5	4	3	2	1	
23.	I will make an effort to become involved at ASU.	<b>Definitely will</b>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<b>Definitely will not</b>
			6	5	4	3	2	1	
24.	I intend to become involved at ASU	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>
			6	5	4	3	2	1	

**PART II**

The following questions are related to your **feelings upon admission to ASU**. Use the scale to indicate your degree of agreement with each statement.

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree	Slightly Disagree	Dis-agree	Strongly Disagree
25.	Arizona State University was my first choice when initially applying to colleges and universities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
26.	I was proud of being admitted to Arizona State University.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
27.	My family was proud that I was admitted to Arizona State University.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
28.	My friends were proud that I was admitted to Arizona State University.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
29.	My high school counselor encouraged me to attend Arizona State University.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**PART III**

The following questions are related to your **perception of ASU's reputation prior** to arriving on campus. Use the scale to indicate your degree of agreement with each statement.

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree	Slightly Disagree	Dis-agree	Strongly Disagree
30.	I chose to attend Arizona State University based on its academic reputation.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
31.	I chose to attend Arizona State University based on its athletic reputation.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
32.	I chose to attend Arizona State University based on its reputation for innovation.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
33.	I chose to attend Arizona State University based on its social reputation.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
34.	I chose to attend Arizona State University based on its reputation of spirit, pride and tradition.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**PART IV**

The following questions are related to your **feelings of organizational connectedness** to your university, ASU. Connectedness is a feeling of belonging or of affinity towards a group, which in this case is ASU. Use the scale to indicate your degree of agreement with each statement.

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree	Slightly Disagree	Dis-agree	Strongly Disagree
35.	I care about my university.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
36.	I feel connected to my university.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
37.	I know who to contact if I need help at my university.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
38.	I am aware of current events happening at my university.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
39.	I feel connected to the faculty in my department of study.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Connectedness may also relate to your relationship or connection with others. The following questions are related to your **feelings of social connectedness** with your university, ASU. Use the scale to indicate your degree of agreement with each statement.

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree	Slightly Disagree	Dis-agree	Strongly Disagree
40.	The majority of my friends are students at my university.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
41.	It is important to join a club or student organization at my university.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
42.	It is important to establish a connection with the faculty in my department of study.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
43.	It is important to support the athletic teams at my university.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
44.	I enjoy attending athletic events at my university.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
45.	I enjoy attending athletic events <i>with my friends</i> at my university.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

#### PART V

The following questions are related to your **loyalty** toward your university, ASU. In this context, loyalty is defined as allegiance, support or faithfulness toward ASU. Use the scale to indicate your degree of agreement with each statement.

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree	Slightly Disagree	Dis-agree	Strongly Disagree
46.	I am a loyal fan of Arizona State University athletics.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
47.	I made the right choice in attending Arizona State University.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
48.	I am proud to be studying at Arizona State University.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
49.	I will complete my degree at Arizona State University.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
50.	I consider myself to be a Sun Devil for life.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



**PART VI (This section was only distributed as part of the pre-intervention survey and not the post-intervention survey.)**

Please select one answer for each question.

51.	Academic Status:	<input type="radio"/>	First Year Undergraduate	<input type="radio"/>	Continuing Undergraduate
52.	What is your home college?	<input type="radio"/>	Business, W. P. Carey School of	<input type="radio"/>	Design & the Arts, Herberger Institute of
		<input type="radio"/>	Teachers College, Mary Lou Fulton	<input type="radio"/>	Engineering, Ira A. Fulton Schools of
		<input type="radio"/>	Future of Innovation in Society, School for the	<input type="radio"/>	Health Solutions, College of
		<input type="radio"/>	Integrative Sciences and Arts, College of	<input type="radio"/>	Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences, New College of
		<input type="radio"/>	Journalism & Mass Communication, Walter Cronkite School of	<input type="radio"/>	Liberal Arts and Sciences, College of
		<input type="radio"/>	Nursing and Health Innovation, College of	<input type="radio"/>	Public Service and Community Solutions, College of
		<input type="radio"/>	Sustainability, School of		
53.	Gender	<input type="radio"/>	Male	<input type="radio"/>	Female
		<input type="radio"/>	Other	<input type="radio"/>	Would prefer not to respond
54.	Residency status:	<input type="radio"/>	In-state	<input type="radio"/>	Out of State
		<input type="radio"/>	International		
55.	Do you live on campus?	<input type="radio"/>	Yes	<input type="radio"/>	No
56.	Are you currently employed on campus?	<input type="radio"/>	Yes	<input type="radio"/>	No
		<input type="radio"/>	I am not currently employed.		

**Part VI (This section was only distributed as part of the post-intervention survey and not the pre-intervention survey.)**

Please indicate which activities you engaged or participated in during your first year on campus.

		<b>Attended the event</b>	
51.	Attended an ASU Football game at Sun Devil Stadium	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No

		<b>Attended the event</b>	
52.	Attended the Inferno Concert at Wells Fargo Arena	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No

		<b>Met with a faculty member outside of class</b>	
53.	Met with a faculty member outside of class	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No

		<b>Met with a staff member</b>	
54.	Met with a staff member from the Dean of Students Office	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No

		<b>Attended a club meeting</b>	
55.	Attended a club or organization meeting	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No

		<b>Attended the club fair on campus</b>	
56.	Attended the club fair on campus	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No

		<b>Met with a staff member from CPDS</b>	
57.	Met with a staff member from Career and Professional Development Services	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No

Thank you for taking the time to complete the survey. Your responses will be anonymous.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact Regina Matos at [Regina.Matos@asu.edu](mailto:Regina.Matos@asu.edu) | 480-266-9756. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance at (480) 965-6788.

APPENDIX B

UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT AFFINITY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

## Undergraduate Student Affinity Interview Questions

1. How connected do you feel to ASU?
2. What has contributed to your feeling of being connected to ASU?
3. How connected do you feel to others at ASU?
4. What has contributed to your feeling of being connected to others at ASU?
5. How loyal do you feel toward ASU?
6. What has contributed to your feeling of being loyal to ASU?
7. What benefits are there for becoming involved at ASU?
8. Who has influenced you in your becoming involved at ASU?
9. What do you know about becoming involved at ASU?
10. What attitudes do you have about becoming involved at ASU?
11. What would others who are important to you say about your becoming involved at ASU?
12. How confident are you about making a decision about becoming involved at ASU?
13. How do you intend to become involved at ASU?

APPENDIX C

RECRUITMENT LETTER

## Recruitment Letter

Dear first-year ASU student:

My name is Regina Matos and I am a doctoral student in the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College (MLFTC) at Arizona State University. I am working under the direction of Dr. Ray Buss, a faculty member in MLFTC. We are conducting a research study to examine your affinity towards your undergraduate institution, Arizona State University (ASU). For the purposes of this study, affinity as defined by the ASU Alumni Association is *“a complex relationship between the constituent and the brand. It is comprised of both perceptions of excellence and positive feelings that generate loyalty, social identification, and emotional connection. Affinity is personal but is affected by perceptions of belonging to a group.”*

As part of the study, we are asking for your help, which will involve your participation in a small-scale intervention, as well as two surveys and an interview concerning your perceptions about affinity to ASU. We anticipate the innovation will take place during six weeks of the Fall 2018 semester. The surveys and the interview are not part of the course. The survey will be conducted prior to the beginning of the project and at the conclusion and will take about 15 minutes each time, for a total of 30 minutes. The interview will occur at the end of the project and will take no more than 30 minutes. I would like to audio record this interview. The interview will not be recorded without your permission. Please let me know if you do not want the interview to be recorded. You also can change your mind after the interview starts, just let me know if you want to stop the interview at any time.

The innovation will consist of participating in various weekly events during a six-week period. To ensure we can match your pre- and post-test survey responses to analyze the data, we will ask you to use a unique identifier known only to you that will be easy to recall. This identifier consists of using the first three letters of your mother’s name and the last four digits of your phone number. Thus, “Sar 4567” would be the identifier for someone whose mother’s name was Sarah and whose phone number was (602) 543-4567.

Each survey will take approximately 15 minutes to complete. The benefit to participation is the opportunity for you to reflect on your student experience at Arizona State University. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from completing the survey at any time, there will be no penalty whatsoever. Your choice to participate in the surveys, intervention, and interview will not affect your grade in the course or your standing at ASU. You must be 18 years of age or older to participate.

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to your participation. Your responses will be confidential. Results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your name will not be disclosed. We may also use results of this survey to inform future iterations of the study. The intended participants are undergraduate students pursuing a bachelor’s degree at ASU. The survey was developed in a doctoral

course during the Summer 2018 semester. The information you share will be used to improve the undergraduate experience at the ASU Polytechnic campus.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact the research team – Dr. Ray Buss at [Ray.Buss@asu.edu](mailto:Ray.Buss@asu.edu) or (602) 543-6343 Regina Matos at [Regina.Matos@asu.edu](mailto:Regina.Matos@asu.edu) | 480-266-9756.

Thank you,

Regina Matos, Doctoral Student  
Ray Buss, Associate Professor

By signing below you indicate your agreement to participate in the intervention and complete the pre- and post-intervention survey and interview.

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Signature	Printed Name	Date
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If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance at (480) 965-6788.