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The Retention and Persistence of First-Year, First-Generation College Students at a Mid-Size Public University: A Mixed Methods Case Study

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The retention and persistence of first-year, first-generation college students

at a mid-size public university: A mixed methods case study

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Abstract

Student retention is an intricate and multi-layered issue facing postsecondary institutions across the United States. Although a complex issue, one trend is clear, research (Tinto, 1975; Isher & Upcraft, 2005) on student persistence reveals that more students withdraw from their institution within the first year of college. An additional and continuing dilemma is the disproportional attrition of first-generation college students, particularly those from ethnic minority backgrounds.

The purpose of this case study is to examine the transition of Governors State University (GSU) from an upper-division graduate university to a four-year traditional institution and its impact (in terms of curricular and co-curricular programs and services) on the retention and persistence of first-year, first-generation college students.

This study employed a mixed-method sequential explanatory research design in which quantitative data was collected first followed by two qualitative methods. Statistical institutional data on GSU's enrollment, persistence, and retention was analyzed for trends. An online qualitative survey was sent to nineteen administrators of curricular and co-curricular programs and/or services. Additionally four one-on-one interviews were conducted with senior executive administrators in Academic and Student Affairs units.

The quantitative results reveal declining enrollment and persistence rates of the institution's first-year and second-year students-suggesting the institution's ineffectiveness in retaining first-year students. However, qualitative results reveal that administrators have positive perceptions about the institution's effectiveness in retaining first-year and first-generation college students. These findings show a clear disconnection between quantitative and qualitative data.

Despite GSU's low retention rate of its first-year students, with its internal efforts, the institution shows promise to stand alongside its higher ranking national peers.

Approval

Governors State University
Doctor of Interdisciplinary Leadership Program

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Chapter 1. Introduction to the Project

Student retention is the greatest problem that nearly all postsecondary institutions in the country are faced with (Lau, 2003). Reasons students voluntarily or involuntarily withdraw from higher education are varied. However, students' withdrawal impacts both the institution and the student. Institutions with declining enrollments encounter financial repercussions and compromised reputations. Students who are unable to successfully transition into college miss out on the benefits of a college education that could ultimately lead to economic growth and stability (Astin, 1975). Therefore, it is critical for postsecondary institutions to proactively seek effective ways to retain students.

While student retention is a vast problem in general; first-to-second-year student persistence is an even greater problem because students primarily withdraw from college during their first-year (Isher & Upcraft, 2005). First-year students have high expectations of achieving academic and social success in inclusive environment (Martin, 2010). Their high expectations are shaped by the educational experiences of their family and peers (Krieg, 2013). The transition to college can be exceptionally difficult for first-generation college students (Thayer, 2000; Hottinger & Rose, 2006). When first-generation college students transition to college, they are entering unfamiliar physical and social territory that neither their family nor peers experienced before (Thayer, 2000). Therefore, they do not know how to successfully navigate through higher education. As a result, first-generation college students tend to persist at lower rates than their non-first-generation peers (Thayer, 2000; Hottinger &Rose, 2006).

In this ever-changing landscape of higher education, postsecondary institutions are implementing new strategies to maintain and/or increase their competitiveness in hopes that it would lead to enhanced academic and social experiences for students, and ultimately, improved

student retention rates. Governors State University, a mid-size, public institution located in the

Midwestern United States, recently changed its structure from an upper-division graduate

university to a four-year traditional university; serving first-year students for the first time in its

history-changing the institutional culture. Revealed in a sequential explanatory case study, the

institution's change was ultimately sparked by its need to increase enrollment in order to become

financially sustainable.

Governors State University's first-year students are predominantly first-generation

college students as well as from predominantly underrepresented ethnic groups. Through the

lens of Spady's (1970) model of student dropout and Tinto's (1975) theory of student departure,

this study examines the transition of Governors State University to a four-year traditional

institution and its impact on the retention and persistence of first-year, first-generation college

students.

1.1 Statement of research problem

First-year student persistence has been a concern in postsecondary institutions across the

United States for more than 150 years (Levine, 1988; Isher & Upcraft, 2005). This study

specifically focused on the retention and persistence of first-year, first-generation college

students at a mid-size, public university located in a Midwestern state of the United States:

Governors State University (GSU). Findings from this study may be beneficial for other

postsecondary institutions.

GSU is a public university and has operated as an upper-division graduate institution for

nearly 45 years. In 2014, GSU transformed into a four-year institution opening its doors to its

very first cohort of 242 first-year students. According to the National Survey of Student

Engagement (NSSE) 66 percent of these students reported that they were first-generation college

students. To foster the academic success of these students, GSU implemented several programs and services such as learning communities, college success courses, and writing intensive courses. Research (Hottinger & Rose, 2006; Kuh, 2008) links the success of first-generation college students, particularly those from underrepresented groups, to these types of programs. Although many of these programs were initiated, only 202 students (83.47 percent) persisted to the spring 2015 semester and only 143 students registered for courses in the fall 2015 semester, resulting in an overall 59 percent retention rate of its first-year students.

This is problematic because GSU retention of its first cohort of first-year students, falls below the national average threshold of between 64.2 percent and 77.9 percent for four-year public universities (American College Testing, 2014). As a public institution, GSU relies on government appropriations to maintain its operations. This poses as an additional problem because state and federal policymakers have considered using retention and graduation statistics as measures of institutional effectiveness in determining levels of state and/or federal support (Voigt & Hundrieser, 2008).

1.2 Statement of the purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to examine the transition of GSU from an upper division university to a four-year institution and its impact (in terms of curricular and co-curricular programs and services) on the retention and persistence of first-year, first-generation college students. Research (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011) shows that many variables have either directly or indirectly impacted undergraduate student retention. Among those, the most cited variables include, academic preparation, academic engagement and social engagement, college financing, and demographic characteristics.

One way to examine the transition of GSU, with consideration of the popularly cited variables that impacts undergraduate student retention, was to seek the perspectives of campus administrators. If campus administrators are able to recognize the contributing factors of GSU'slow retention rate of its first cohort of first-year students, then proper adjustments can be made to curricular and co-curricular programs and services as well as university processes. Recognition of these factors would better support the transition process for first-year, first-generation college students and ultimately lead to improved retention rates for future student cohorts.

In this sequential mixed-methods explanatory case study, the following information will be reviewed:

1. GSU's institutional data on student enrollment and retention of its first-year and second-year students. Specifically, data will be reviewed for GSU's 2014 cohort of first-year students, 2015 cohort of first-year students, and its 2015 cohort of second-year students.

2. Results from a qualitative online survey, conducted via survey monkey software, that was sent to nineteen key administrators in academic and student affairs at GSU.

3. Results from one-on-one, face-to-face interviews with three key senior administrative leaders at GSU.

The research questions that will guide this study are as follows:

1. To what extent did the transition of GSU from an upper-division university to a traditional four-year institution impact the retention and persistence rates of first-year students?

2. To what extent did the transition of GSU from an upper-division university to a traditional four-year institution impact the retention and persistence rates of its first cohort of second year students?

3. How do administrators at GSU perceive the institution's transition from an upper-division university to a traditional four-year institution and its effectiveness on retaining first-year students?

4. How do administrators at GSU perceive the institution's transition from an upper-division university to a traditional four-year institution and its effectiveness on retaining first-generation college students?

1.3 Operational definitions

For the purposes of this study, the following terms and their definitions are presented. As it relates to retention, the following research offers several definitions. Often the words "persistence" and "retention" are used interchangeably (Hagedorn, 2005). In this study the definition offered by the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), the primary source of retention information for the nation, will be used. A separate definition for the word persistence is not provided in the IPEDS online glossary.

- **Retention-** A measure of the rate at which students persist in their educational program at an institution, expressed as a percentage. For four-year institutions, this is the percentage of first-time bachelors (or equivalent) degree-seeking undergraduates from the previous fall who are again enrolled in the current fall. For all other institutions this is the percentage of first-time degree/certificate-seeking students from the previous fall who either re-enrolled or successfully completed their program by the current fall (IPEDS, 2015).

- **Persistence** – The enrollment headcount of any cohort compared to its headcount on its initial official census date. The purpose is to assess the number of students who persist from one term to the next and eventually to completion (Noel-Levitz, 2013).

- **Freshman-to-sophomore retention rate** – Measures the percentage of first-time, full-time students enrolled at universities the subsequent fall semester (Voigt & Hundrieser, 2008).

- **Cohort graduation rate** – The percentage of an entering class that graduates within three years with an associate's degree, and within four to six years with a baccalaureate degree (Voigt & Hundrieser, 2008).

- **Student success** - Quantifiable student attainment indicators, such as enrollment in postsecondary education, grades, persistence to the sophomore year, length of time to degree, and graduation (Venezi et al., 2005).

- **First-year students** – Students who have completed less than the equivalent of one full year of undergraduate work; less than 30 semester hours (in a 120-hour degree program) (IPEDS glossary, 2015-2016). These students are often referred to as freshmen.

- **First-time, full-time students** – Students who are attending a post-secondary institution for the first time (except as noted above)….and are enrolled for 12 or mere semester credits (IPEDS glossary, 2015-2016).

- **First-generation college students** – Students whose either parent have not completed a college degree (Hottinger & Rose, 2006).

- **Second year students** – Students who are in their second year of college; often used interchangeably with the term "sophomores" at traditional, four-year institutions (Schaller, 2005).

- **Attrition** - the failure to enroll a previously enrolled student in a subsequent semester.

Chapter 2. Review of the Literature

Student retention is essential to the survival of higher education institutions across the nation. Students persisting to the completion of their degree programs is not only a key measure of student success, but also institutional success (Voigt & Hundrieser, 2008). When students fail to return to campus for another year, it can result in significant loss to the institution such as financial loss and degraded institutional perceptions by internal and external stakeholders (Lau, 2003).

The freshman-to-sophomore retention rate and the cohort graduation rate (six years for baccalaureate institutions) are two of the most commonly cited statistics pertaining to student success. These are generally considered as primary indicators of institutional performance (Voigt & Hundrieser, 2008). Together, these statistics depict the overall quality of student learning and intellectual involvement; the depth of student integration in campus life; and how effectively a campus meets the expectations and needs of students (p. 1). Tinto (1993) asserts that institutional commitment to students is essential in assuring student success. He notes, "it is a commitment that springs from the very character of an institution's educational mission" (p. 146).

Retention is an important concern of all practitioners and scholars at post-secondary institutions especially those in the public sector. A 2014 survey of administrators on attrition, conducted by American College Testing (ACT), National Collegiate Retention and Persistence to Degree Rates, revealed average retention rates between 64.2 percent and 77.9 percent for four-year public universities. According to Tinto (1993), the number of students who enroll in higher education and then withdraw exceeds the number of students who enroll in higher education and stay. Tinto's (1993) findings is troubling as public institutions primarily rely on revenue from tuition and state governmental appropriations to functionally operate.

Tuition policy and state government-provided operating support are priority issues leading both discussion and action in state capitols across the United States (American Association of State Colleges and Universities, 2015). According to the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), activity from tuition policy will be fueled with opposition and will involve numerous competing forces: call for holding the line on tuition, maintaining academic quality, and effectively managing dormant or declining enrollment in many states (p. 1). State and federal policy makers have mandated requirements for reporting retention and graduation statistics. Additionally, they have deliberated using the statistics as measures of institutional effectiveness in determining levels of state and/or federal support (Voigt & Hundrieser, 2008). For example, in 2010, Pat Quinn, former Governor of the State of Illinois, signed into law "Budgeting for Results (BFR)", a spending reform that requires funding decisions to be based on merit as opposed to the automatic funding of programs. BFR focuses on performance and changes the prioritization and implementation of the State's budget. The State of Illinois will only fund programs that can demonstrate effectiveness (Budgeting for Results Commission Report, 2011).

Freshmen persistence and graduation rates are considered academic indicators of excellence and are commonly among the metrics used to define the prominence of postsecondary institutions (p. 1). These metrics, along with others, are weighed and compared to peer institutions, resulting in national rankings by popular publications such as the U.S. News and World Report. U.S. News and World Report provides nearly 50 various types of rankings and lists to assist students refine their college search (U.S. News & World Report, 2015). The publication's reach to more than 253 million decision-making professionals in education,

business, and policy arenas (U.S. News & World Report, 2015) can be indicative of the reliance on and popularity of college rankings.

There are mixed views about the influence of rankings in higher education. On one hand, rankings are popular with the public, provide a way to categorize colleges on a national and international scale, and support an expansion of uniform data collection and reporting strategies. On the other hand, existing college rankings do not cover the entire higher education landscape, have the potential to incentivize behaviors that contradict public policy goals, and are based on educational inputs at a time when educational outcomes are of increasing importance to policymakers (Sponsler, 2009). The general assumption is that the higher the institution's selectivity (students with high standards of academic achievement), the higher the institution's quality, resulting in higher retention and graduation rates (Voigt & Hundrieser, 2008).

However, a report by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) refutes the notion that high selectivity equates to high quality. The 2006 report reveals that there are some comparatively less selective institutions serving large, diverse, and economically disadvantaged student populations that have surpassed similar institutions enrolling students from higher income brackets and comparatively even more selective institutions. This suggests that student success may be the outcomes of institutional commitment as opposed to high income levels and the standardized test scores of its students (Horn, 2006).

2.1 Student populations

2.1.1 First-year students' retention and persistence.

First-year student persistence has been a topic of interest and concern in American colleges and universities for many decades (Isher & Upcraft, 2005). This concern is frequently focused solely on retention of first-year students and their persistence to graduation at the

institution in which they originally enrolled (p. 28). Research on first-year student persistence reveals that the greatest percentage of institutional leaving occurs during the first year and prior to the second year (p. 28).

According to a 2013 Snapshot Report on persistence and retention, from the National Student Clearinghouse® Research Center™, the percent of first-time students who were still enrolled at any college in their second fall term declined 1.2 percentage points since 2009. Additionally, approximately one in nine freshmen transferred to other institutions for their sophomore year, in spite of steady retention rates. The report also revealed that of all first-time students who started in fall 2012, 68.7 percent returned to college at any U.S. institution in fall 2013. Fifty-eight percent returned to the same institution. For each entering cohort year, the overall persistence rate ranks higher than the retention rate by nearly 11 percentage points. Consequently, about one in nine students who start college in any fall term transfer to a different institution by the following fall. The percentage rate among first-time students age 20 and under is rapidly declining, down 1.8 percentage points since 2009, while the retention rate has remained nearly constant. Finally, the persistence rates among first-time students at four-year private institutions represent the largest decline, as it fell 2.8 percentage points, followed by four- and two-year public institutions, which both fell 2.3 percentage points.

Access to postsecondary education has been steadily increasing (Carnevale & Strohl, n.d.) however the enrollment rates of entering first-year students has reduced since the late 1990s (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Although more students are starting college, these same students are not persisting to graduation (Martin, J., 2010). This disturbing problem is described as an "expectations gap" in a report produced by Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings' Commission on the Future of Higher Education (2006). Specifically, this reports states that

"substandard high school preparation is compounded by poor alignment between high schools and colleges, which often creates an expectations gap between what colleges require and what high schools produce" (p. 1).

First-year students are entering college with unrealistic expectations and perceptions of what it means to be a college student to find out later that their impractical expectations and perceptions are not congruent with their environment and reality (Kreig, 2013). Additionally, these students' perceptions' are influenced by family, peers, educators, and students' personal experiences with education (p. 34). Students' academic and social expectations play a significant role in student progress towards graduation (Martin, 2010). First-year students enter college with great expectations of achieving academic and social success in an integrative environment (Martin, 2010).

A 2007 report from the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California-Los Angeles shows a significant disparity between the students' expectations and the reality of their first year (p.18). 96.9 percent predicted that there was "some chance or a very good chance that they would earn at least a B average, be satisfied with their college (96.3 percent), socialize with someone of a different racial or ethnic group (95.3 percent), participate in student clubs and groups (86.1 percent), get a job to help pay for college expenses (81.3% and participate in volunteer/community service work (74.6 percent)" (Hurtado, S., Sax, L., Saenz, V., Harper, C.E., Oseguera, L., Curley, J., et.al., 2007). Conversely, students' first-year experiences met their high expectations on only one of these measures: 96.8 percent socialized with someone of a different racial or ethnic group as first-year students (p. 19). These findings clearly illustrate the disharmony between students' expectations and reality.

Tinto (1993) suggests that incongruence, a lack of fit between the needs, interests, and preferences of the individual and those of the institution, are the reasons students leave college (p. 50). Astin (1975) highlights the importance of social experience in college retention. He postulates that students stay in college because of their peers' social backgrounds rather than the academic selectivity of the institution.

The notion that first-year students leave college because the academic coursework was too difficult for them to persist is a common misconception (Martin, 2010). Research reveals that college is not as challenging as expected by first year students (Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, & Associates, 2005). Pre and post-test measures of engagement and involvement from the College Student Expectations Questionnaire in comparison with the National Survey of Student Engagement, or the Annual Survey of College Freshmen with Your First College Year, generated such results (p. 5). While, engagement in the social aspects of college may be experienced, many students do not encounter the intellectual challenge that they expected (Kuh, Gonyea, & Williams, 2005).

First-year seminars. The implementation of "first-year seminars" or "first-year experiences" are becoming a more prevalent approach, by postsecondary institutions of all types, to assist students' transition into college as well as to address deplorable rates of student attrition (Hunter & Linder, 2005). There are many variances among first-year seminars. There are five categories that first-year seminars mainly fit into: extended orientation seminars, academic seminars (with uniform content across sections), academic seminars that focus on a variety of topics, professional or discipline-linked seminars, or basic study skills seminars (p. 279). Although many variances exist, the ultimate goal of first-year seminars is to successfully assist students in their academic and social development and in their transition to college (p 275).

First-year experiences have become an essential component of the first-year curriculum. These seminars exist in some form on nearly 74 percent of college campuses across the United States (Hunter & Linder, 2005). While many survive and are considered as an educational innovation, some first-year seminars are not sustained due to lack of broad-based campus support, which is a key element to ensure longevity (p. 277). According to Barefoot & Fidler (1996), successful first-year seminars are:

- Offered for academic credit;

- Are centered in the first-year curriculum;

- Encompass both faculty and student affairs professionals in program design and instruction;

- Include instructor training and development as a fundamental element of the program;

- Provide compensation or some type of award for instructors teaching the seminar;

- Involve upper-level students in seminar delivery;

- Include ways of assessing their effectiveness and disseminating these assessments to the campus community (as cited in Hunter & Linder, 2005).

The University of South Carolina (USC) serves as the "poster-child" of contemporary first-year experience course offerings. Starting in 1974, USC began offering University 101 and tracking and comparing the retention rates and grade point averages of student participants and non-participants (Haroun, 2005). For more than 20 years, USC found that students who participated in their first-year seminar were more likely to persist into their sophomore year than those who did not participate in the seminar (Goodman & Pascarella, 2006). The unique aspect

of USC's University 101 course is its award-winning faculty training program. The university

offers annual teaching workshops for its faculty, staff, peer and graduate leaders, as well as

visitors from national and international postsecondary institutions. As a result of USC's

successful outcomes, other postsecondary institutions began to follow their footsteps and

achieved similar results.

  Learning communities. Learning communities are another program that postsecondary

institutions offer students to foster academic and social success (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt &

Associates, 2005; Laufgraben, 2005). Learning communities – "a cluster of courses organized

around a curricular theme that students take as a group" – strengthen and enhance students'

connections to each other, their instructors, and the subject matter they are studying (Laufgraben,

2005). Some learning communities have a residential component to it and therefore are referred

to as living-learning communities. Living and learning together sparks more active involvement

in courses as well as create a sense of community among faculty and students centered on

intellectual experiences (Kuh, et. al., 2005). Learning communities are also applied in the

formats of individual classrooms, curricular, online and faculty communities (Laufgraben, 2005).

  Learning communities are particularly beneficial for first-year students as they provide an

introduction to the academic and social life of an institution (Laufgaben, 2005). These

communities are more advantageous when coupled with first-year seminars or small group

discussion sessions because they provide an ideal setting to familiarize students with the

expectations of the college classroom (p. 375).

  Learning communities are not only beneficial for students, but also for faculty. Like

student learning communities, there are learning communities designated for faculty as well.

Faculty learning communities lead to more attentiveness to pedagogy and enhanced relationships

with peers. In learning communities, faculty report more use of collaborative work and learning strategies in their classrooms (Laufgraben, 2005). Additionally, learning communities widens faculty cognizance of students' out-of-classroom commitments and demands such as jobs and financial concerns (p. 374). As a result of thoughtful pedagogy and understanding faculty, students learning experiences are greatly enriched.

The impact of learning communities transcends first-year students and faculty and leads to institutional transformation as well (p. 375). Learning communities foster collaborative partnerships with various units on campus, particularly between academic and student affairs units. The partnership of faculty and student affairs professionals ensures a coherent shared learning experience (Tinto, 2003). The implementation of student learning communities enables postsecondary institutions to carefully examine students' college experience, specifically during the first year. Campuses learn how students adjust and navigate through the curriculum, use academic support resources and/or perceive programs and services (Laufgraben, 2005).

2.1.2 First-generation college students' persistence and retention

First-generation college students are popularly defined in literature (Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez, 2001; Chen, 2005) as students who are the first in their families to attend college. These students' parents have earned a high school diploma or less. A second definition, defined by Hottinger & Rose (2006), considers first-generation college students as students whose parents have never earned a bachelor's degree but may have some postsecondary experience (p. 116). In this study, the definition by Hottinger & Rose (2006), students whose parents have never earned a bachelor's degree but may have some postsecondary experience, was used.

First-generation college students are the same as their non-first-generation peers in the sense that they are working to achieve a college education. However, they have distinct differences in substantial ways. First-generation college students are:

- Typically older in age

- More likely to come from low-income families

- More likely to be married and have dependents

- More likely to enroll in college as part-time students

- More likely to enroll in public two-year institutions, private for-profit institutions, and other institutions that do not require four years before earning a degree or certificate

- In dire need of financial aid (p. 119).

Additionally, about two-fifths of first-generation college students are from underrepresented groups, primarily Hispanic and African-American. Fifty-seven percent of students in this demographic set are more likely to be female (Hottinger & Rose, 2006). Most importantly, this subpopulation of students have inadequate academic preparation (Thayer, 2000; McDonough, 2004; Hottinger & Rose, 2006), interact less with faculty (Hottinger & Rose, 2006; Kim & Sax, 2009) and peers (Hottinger & Rose, 2006), and are also more likely to drop out of college after their first year (Hottinger & Rose, 2006).

Academic preparation. The transition to college can be particularly difficult for first-generation college students (Thayer, 2000). Thayer (2000) states "entering the university means not only that first-generation college students must leave home for an unfamiliar academic setting, but they also must enter an alien physical and social environment that they, their family and peers have never experienced" (pp. 4-5). It has been noted that various factors play a critical role in first-generation college students' ability to adapt. First-generation college students are

likely to have limited access to resources (Thayer, 2000; McDonough, 2004), lack the knowledge

of how to successfully manage time, how to navigate the bureaucracies of higher education, and

have been less likely to encounter a welcoming college environment or campus (Thayer, 2000).

Consequently, first-generation college students are likely to persist at lower rates in comparison

to their non-first-generation peers (Thayer, 2000).

Through an examination of literature on first-generation college students and programs

aimed to assist at-risk student populations, Thayer (2000) discovered that first-generation college

students were more likely to enter college with inadequate academic preparation. In a study

conducted by Choy (2001), it was discovered that first-generation college students were 52

percent less likely, than their continuing generation-peers, to be enrolled in a bachelor's program

three years after initial college enrollment. However, this indicator decreased for first-generation

college students who completed a challenging high school curriculum.

Consistent with findings by Choy (2001), a study conducted by Wimberly & Noeth (2005)

found that successful completion of a rigorous high school curriculum was a strong predictor of

college entrance and degree completion. This study reports findings from a survey and focus

group discussions with middle and early high school students across fifteen schools and six

school districts in the United States (Wimberly & Noeth, 2005). These findings reveal how

people and school-based factors (i.e., classes, extracurricular activities, and pre-college

programs) helped to mold students' educational and postsecondary planning (Wimberly &

Noeth, 2005). Furthermore, these findings align with the findings from a report developed by

Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings' Commission on the Future of Higher Education

(2006), which suggests that postsecondary institutions and high schools must work in harmony to

better prepare students for college. Shortcomings in high schools not only causes a longer

journey to college degree completion, but an increase financial burden to students' families due to the need to take expensive remedial courses (p. 7).

    Low socioeconomic status. The financial aid needs of first-generation college students may far exceed those of their non-first-generation peers. First-generation college students are more likely to be "low-income" and receive financial aid such as loans and grants (Amaya, 2010; Hottinger, 2006). Such governmental and institutional support, including scholarships, has been primarily awarded on the basis of academic merit as opposed to need-based awards (Hottinger & Rose, 2006). This has been the primary trend for more than 20 years (Hottinger & Rose, 2006) and provides evidence that appropriate high school academic preparation is critical in the retention of first-generation college students.

    Research (Choy, 2001; Wimberly & Noeth, 2005; Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings' Commission on the Future of Higher Education, 2006) has made clear that high school academic performance is a stronger determinant of enrollment in four year post-secondary institutions, than socioeconomic backgrounds. The growing trend of shifting state-level aid from need-based to merit-based, illustrates that aid expansion is generally targeted to help middle-class families, and not those from underprivileged backgrounds (Amaya, 2010). This has directed first-generation college students' focus more on working and less on studying or attending classes (Carey, 2004).

    Pryor, Hurtado, Saenz, Lindholm, Korn, and Mahoney (2005) found in the annual Higher Education Research Institute survey of incoming first-time, full-time freshmen, enrolled in four-year colleges and universities, nearly 16 percent of the total students surveyed were first-generation college students. Consistent with prior research on this subpopulation of students, Pryor et. al. reported that first-generation college students are more likely to attend public

institutions as (17.5 percent) opposed to private institutions when compared to their non-first-generation peers (12.8 percent), and were more likely to choose a four-year college (18.5 percent) over a university (11.5 percent). However, the majority of first-generation college students attending private institutions cite better employability, the need to make more money and most notably, the offer of attractive financial aid packages as reasons for their institution selection as opposed to students attending public institutions. Institutional size was also a major factor for first-generation college students. First-generation college students prefer institutions smaller in size because it allows for smaller classes, greater opportunities to interact with faculty and enriched student learning (Higher Education Research Institute, 2007).

Ethnic minority students. Historically, ethnic minorities, particularly African-Americans and Hispanics, have been underrepresented in higher education. Consequently, they are more likely to be first-generation college students (Herndon & Hirt, 2004; Horwedel, 2008). All ethnic minority students or first-generation college students are not from underprivileged families, however when they enroll in college, they are likely to require available resources, but are less likely to access them (Amaya, 2010).

African-American students. "African-American college students are among the most researched populations in higher education today" (Mauk & Willis, 2006, p. 70). For nearly four decades, there has been a rise in the number of African-Americans enrolling in post-secondary education institutions. From 1976 to 2012, the percentage of African-American students rose from 10 percent to 15 percent (U.S. Department of Education, NCES, 2015). The rise in enrollment among this student population has triggered post-secondary institutions to become more attuned to issues that confront African-American students (Mauk & Willis, 2006).

According to Herndon & Hirt (2004), African-Americans are traditionally hesitant about seeking assistance from trained professionals because they do not want to be stigmatized. They are not as trusting and are suspicious about institutional motives (p. 493). This could contribute to the disparity in institutional graduation rates between white and African-American students of nearly 10-13 percentage points (Amaya, 2010). The representation of African-Americans and first-generation college students has declined at a concerning rate. There is significant concern because the decrease is comparatively faster than the percentage of African-American adults without a college education as well as the decline of first-generation students in other racial/ethnic groups (Higher Education Research Institute, 2007).

African-American women enrolled in post-secondary institutions have far exceeded their male counterparts. Recent data from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2015), reveals that women comprised 56 percent of total undergraduate enrollment at 9.8 million in 2013. Males comprised 44 percent at 7.7 million. In 2008, the overall enrollment of African-American students in post-secondary institutions were 2,269,000. African-American women enrollment comprised 64 percent (1,452,160), compared to 36 percent of African-American males (816,840). If enrollment trends among African-Americans maintains, African-American women will outnumber African-American men in post-secondary institutions by a nearly 2-to-1 ratio (Mauk & Willis, 2006).

Hispanic students. Hispanics represent the largest group of first-year, first-generation college students than first-year students from most other backgrounds (Amaya, 2010). Of all Hispanics that enroll in four year postsecondary institutions, only 47 percent complete their degree in six years or less (Horwedel, 2008). Issues beyond academics contribute to this attrition

such as lack of integration into the university community, a sense of belonging, institutional affinity, and personal-emotional adjustment (Amaya, 2010).

Similar to the African-American student population, disparities exist in the gender and enrollment percentages of Hispanic students. Hispanic women enroll in college in greater numbers and percentages than their male counterparts (Gamboa & Vasquez, 2006), thus graduating in higher percentages. According to the Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac (2005-2006, p. 14), 46.3 percent of Hispanic women that enrolled in four-year postsecondary institutions in 1996-1997 graduated within six years. Forty-one percent of Hispanic males graduated within that same time frame. This provides evidence of an ongoing trend considering that Hispanic enrollment nearly quadrupled between 1990 and 2013 (from 0.7 million to 2.9 million students). While the number of undergraduate students was lower in 2013 than in 2010 for most ethnicity groups, Hispanic student enrollment increased by 13 percent during this time period (U.S. Department of Education, NCES, 2015).

Despite the reasonably positive graduation rates of Hispanic students, concerns about the successful retention of this student population prevail among student affairs professionals and postsecondary institutions' administrators (Gamboa & Vasquez, 2006). The barriers that prevalently impact the persistence of Hispanic students (disparities of familial, cultural, and social capital; disparities in financial and community resources; lack of peer support for academic achievement, etc.) illustrates the need for postsecondary institutions to take intentional actions to increase institutional diversity across the board (faculty, staff, and students), as well as to become better educated about how to best support diverse student populations (Gamboa & Vasquez, 2006).

Student support services. The implementation of student support services is an effective method to help increase persistence and retention of first-generation college students at postsecondary institutions (Tinto, 1993). The oldest and most popular support services initiated are the federally-funded TRiO programs. TRiO programs are federal outreach and student services programs designed to identify and provide services for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

TRiO programs have a progressive history. It first started with Upward Bound, which came out of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 in response to President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Upward Bound is an early intervention program that aid high school students through numerous academic and cultural enrichment activities on college campuses. In 1965, Talent Search was created as part of the Higher Education Act as the second outreach program (U. S. Department of Education, 2016). Talent Search is a college access program designed to assist youth in grades six through twelve by providing counseling, and information on college admission requirements, and various financial aid programs. In 1968, Student Support Services (SSS) was approved by the Higher Education Amendments and became the third educational outreach program. SSS was originally known as Special Services for Disadvantaged Students (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). This program provides tutoring, counseling, and remedial instruction to postsecondary students. The term TRiO was created to describe these federal programs in the late 1960s (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Throughout the years, the TRiO programs have been expanded and enhanced to provide more comprehensive services and to reach and support more students. In 1972, the fourth TRiO program-Educational Opportunity Centers-was added as a result of the Higher Education

Amendments of 1972 (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Educational Opportunity Centers

provides counseling and information on postsecondary education as well as financial aid options

to adults looking to enter or re-enter a postsecondary education program. Education

Amendments in 1976 approved the fifth program-Training Program for Federal TRiO Program

(U.S. Department of Education). The Training Program offer professional development

opportunities such as conferences and seminars to project directors and staff of TRiO programs.

In 1986, the Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program was created as

the sixth program; and in 1990, Upward Bound Math-Science Program was created (U.S.

Department of Education, 2016). The Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement

Program's goal is to prepare underrepresented postsecondary students for doctoral studies

through involvement in research and other scholarly activities. The Upward Bound Math-Science

Program provides rigorous and advanced instruction in math and science for high school students

interested in this subject area. Data from national studies conducted on TRiO programs by the

U.S. Department of Education, reveals that participation in a TRiO program has a significant

impact on the educational outcomes of low-socioeconomic, first-generation students as well as

students with disabilities (The Pell Institute, 2009).

In addition to TRiO programs, postsecondary institutions across the nation are developing

and implementing a vast number of other programs and initiatives to foster the success of first-

generation college students. Fifty member colleges of the Council of Independent Colleges

(CIC), through support provided by the Walmart Foundation, were awarded $100,000 grants

aimed at creating and/or enhancing existing programs that promote the success of first-

generation students. The CIC is a major national service organization for small and mid-sized,

independent, teaching-oriented liberal arts colleges and universities in the United States (Strand,

2013). Because research shows that first-generation college students at private institutions are more likely to graduate within six years or less than those at public institutions, the best practices implemented by these institutions can successfully promote the success of first-generation college students (Strand, 2013).

The programs and initiatives developed and/or enhanced by the CIC member institutions of the Walmart College Success Award, widely vary. For example, Thomas College, a career-oriented college in Maine, implemented a week-long Bridge program named "EDGE" for those first-generation students who score low on the math SAT. These students participate in workshops, academic coaching and service projects. Additionally, they are required to take an intensive three-credit course in quantitative analysis which is mandatory for graduation. The EDGE program has resulted in a 12 percent retention rate of first-generation students (Strand, 2013).

The College of Mount Saint Vincent in New York, developed a parent support initiative that educate and support families of its first-generation commuter students. This program is designed to assist parents gain a better understanding of the rigors and expectations of college life through annual orientation programs and parent dinners. This program garnered noticeable improvement in the retention rates of students from first to second year. The retention rate for the first cohort of commuter students was 80.6 percent which was higher than for first-generation resident students (Strand, 2013).

Alma College in Michigan implemented a mentorship program "First-Generation Connection" to provide first-generation college students with additional guidance in the various facets of their lives (personal, family, social, and academic). This program pairs each student

with a faculty and peer mentor closely aligned with their academic, career, and personal

interests. Implementation of the First-Generation Connection yielded a retention rate among

participants of 81 percent in the program's second year. Similarly, after the program's inception,

participants GPAs resembled those for all students in their cohort – a 2.94 end of year GPA for

participants, compared to a 2.96 GPA for all students (Strand, 2013).

It is clear that support services specifically aimed at first-generation college students is

effective at increasing their persistence and retention. As evidenced by the collective success of

the CIC member institutions, implementation of non-traditional and new approaches to increase

the graduation rates of this at-risk student population, can result in desired outcomes of all

institutional types of higher education.

2.1.3 Second-year college student persistence and retention.

Just as first-year college students, the persistence and retention of second-year college

students is a concern of postsecondary institutions as well (Gahagan & Hunter, 2006).

"Historically [second-year] students have been overlooked, both on college campuses and in

higher education literature, [yet] there has long been an awareness that many students struggled

during their second year in college" (Tobolowsky & Cox, 2007, p. xi). The discovery of second-

year college student dissatisfaction was initially revealed sixty years ago by Freedman (1956).

Freedman discovered that "socially oriented" sophomores found the demands of college to be

very onerous, and stated that many are likely to withdraw at the end of their sophomore year

(p.23). Margolis (1976) believed that sophomores experienced phases of identity crisis as it

pertained to their academic, social and personal life. Whereas Furr & Gannaway (1982) found

that the second year of college brought forth much confusion and uncertainty due to the new challenges that they experience.

Sophomores' challenges generally lie in the areas of academics, personal, and relationships (Furr & Gannaway, 1982). When they return to college, they do not receive as much attention as freshmen, feel pressured to declare a major, are unsure about the direction of their life, and experience diminishing relationships with friends and family (Furr & Gannaway, 1982).

According to The Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange (2003), nearly 81 percent of first-year students at 440 institutions returned to college for their second year but of those who do return, only 70.7 percent of those students returned for a third year (as cited in Lipka, 2006). Noel-Levitz (2007) surveyed 193 postsecondary institutions across the United States and found that only 19.7 percent of the institutions had programs designed specifically for second-year students. These findings demonstrate that second-year students continue to be "overlooked" by many postsecondary institutions.

2.1.4 Collaborative partnerships between academic and student affairs.

Students' academic success and personal development is dependent upon the services of both academic and student affairs professionals. Collaborative partnerships between academic and student affairs has been a topic of discussion that dates back to the Student Personnel Point of View. "*The Student Personnel Point of View* has been a catalyst for dialogue on the purposes of student personnel and student affairs work for 75 years" (Roberts, 2012). It encompasses the whole student (American Council on Education, 1949) and communicates the need for academic

and student affairs professionals to work together to achieve curricular and co-curricular goals.

Such a partnership will enhance the learning experiences of students (Williamson, et.al.).

Historically, successful partnerships between academic and student affairs has been

challenging to develop. The division between the two units stems from their differences in roles

in the academy. Academic units are primarily concerned with discipline-based in-class learning,

while out-of-class experiences are the primary focus of student affairs units (Schuh & Gansemer-

Topf, 2010). This division of roles has caused higher education leaders to advocate for a change

in the culture of learning by moving toward a more seamless approach: the integration of roles

(Kezar, 2003).

Increased collaboration and cooperation between faculty and student affairs professionals

is needed to ensure seamless learning (p. 138). A seamless learning environment provides

learning opportunities for students through curricular and co-curricular activities. This type of

environment enables students to develop a deeper connection with faculty and staff as well as

enhance their personal growth and development by participating in in-class and out-of-class

experiences (Kellogg, 1999). Many institutions have embraced and fostered a collaborative

relationship between academic and student affairs by developing several programs and activities

that require the efforts of faculty and staff. Some popular collaborative programs comprise of

first-year experience programs, faculty-in-residence programs (Kellogg, 1999; Bourassa &

Kruger, 2001), and learning communities (Kruger, 2001).

The examination of strategies for improving collaboration in postsecondary institutions is

limited in existing research. However, Kuh (1996) developed a model of collaboration that

include six principles to assist institutions with curriculum and extra-curriculum integration:

- "generate enthusiasm for institutional renewal;

- create a common vision of learning;

- develop a common language;

- foster collaboration and cross-functional dialogue;

- examine the influence of student cultures on student learning and;

- focus on systematic change" (Kezar, 2003).

It is believed that Kuh's (1996) model to create academic and student affairs partnerships may be more effective for smaller institutions to utilize than larger institutions due to the complexity of values (Kezar, 2003).

Cuseo (n.d.) presented a compelling case as to why academic affairs and student affairs professionals should join forces. Advancing institutional assessment, accountability, and quality was among the reasons that he cited. He believes that the unification of academic and student affairs units is vital to preserve the quality of undergraduate education because the impact of college encompasses students' total experience, both inside and outside of the classroom (p. 3). Empirical support for this notion is provided by Pascarella & Terenzini (1991) through an extensive review of research on how college affects students that was conducted over a twenty-year span. They came to the conclusion that,

> "one of the most inescapable and unequivocal conclusions we can make is that the impact of college is largely determined by the individual's quality of effort and level of involvement in both academic and nonacademic activities." (p. 610).

The cry for greater accountability in postsecondary institutions is noticeable and will garner more national visibility for campus collaborations (Bourassa & Kruger, 2001). It is clear that

collaborative efforts between academic and student affairs is critical to support and foster student learning.

2.2 Theoretical frameworks guiding the study

The two theoretical frameworks guiding this study are William G. Spady's (1970b) model of student dropout and Vincent Tinto's (1975) model of student departure. Both of these theories play an integral role in understanding student attrition. Furthermore, these theories focus heavily on the importance of social and academic integration for all college students and how it impacts their persistence to graduation (Taylor, 2012).

Spady's model of student dropout. Spady's (1970b) model of student dropout in higher education, was the first widely recognized model in retention study (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011). Spady's (1970b) belief was that "no one theoretical model can hope to account for most of the variance in dropout rates" of college students (p. 64). However, Spady (1970b) expressed that institutional and peer social connections are critical to students and without them they are more likely to dropout.

Spady's (1970b) theory of student dropout is reliant upon two variables: social and academic rewards as well a student's sense of integration (Taylor, 2012). Social rewards are rewards that pertain to the society or college community (involvement in co-curricular activities, friendships). Academic rewards are achievement related rewards (high grade point average, test scores) (Spady, 1970a). These variables provide opportunities for students to fully acclimate to the college experience and aid in the production of student satisfaction (Spady, 1970b). Conversely, if students cannot adjust to these variables, withdrawing from the institution becomes an option (Spady, 1970b).

Spady's (1970b) theory of student dropout stems from Durkheim's (1951) theory on suicide (Taylor, 2012). Durkheim postulated that the act of suicide in a particular group was an indication of weak social cohesion. Through an examination of government data, Durkheim (1951) proved that suicide varies with the degree of social integration (Elwell, 2003). Two major types of suicide derived from Durkheim's (1951) research: egoistic suicide (occurs among individuals who are not adequately integrated into social groups), and anomic suicide (occurs when a group fails to provide the individual enough regulation and guidance). Spady's (1970b) model built upon Durkheim's (1951) theory by suggesting that students drop out of college when they have minimal (or no) connection with their community, have been unable to develop relationships with other students, and have conflicting values from the norm of their college community.

Spady (1970b) developed his model of student attrition because he wanted to create a "reasonable synthesis of some of the more consistent findings on college attrition…and a valuable conceptual framework for guiding future research" (p. 79). Normative congruence, friendship support, grade performance, intellectual development, and social integration are the five independent variables that make up the synthesis described by Spady (1970b). The first four variables influences social integration; and attrition is swayed as a result of this interaction (Taylor, 2012). Spady (1970b) also claimed that the derivative variables of integration: satisfaction with the college experience and commitment to the social system, causes social integration to have an indirect link to dropping out. This model is outlined in Figure 1.
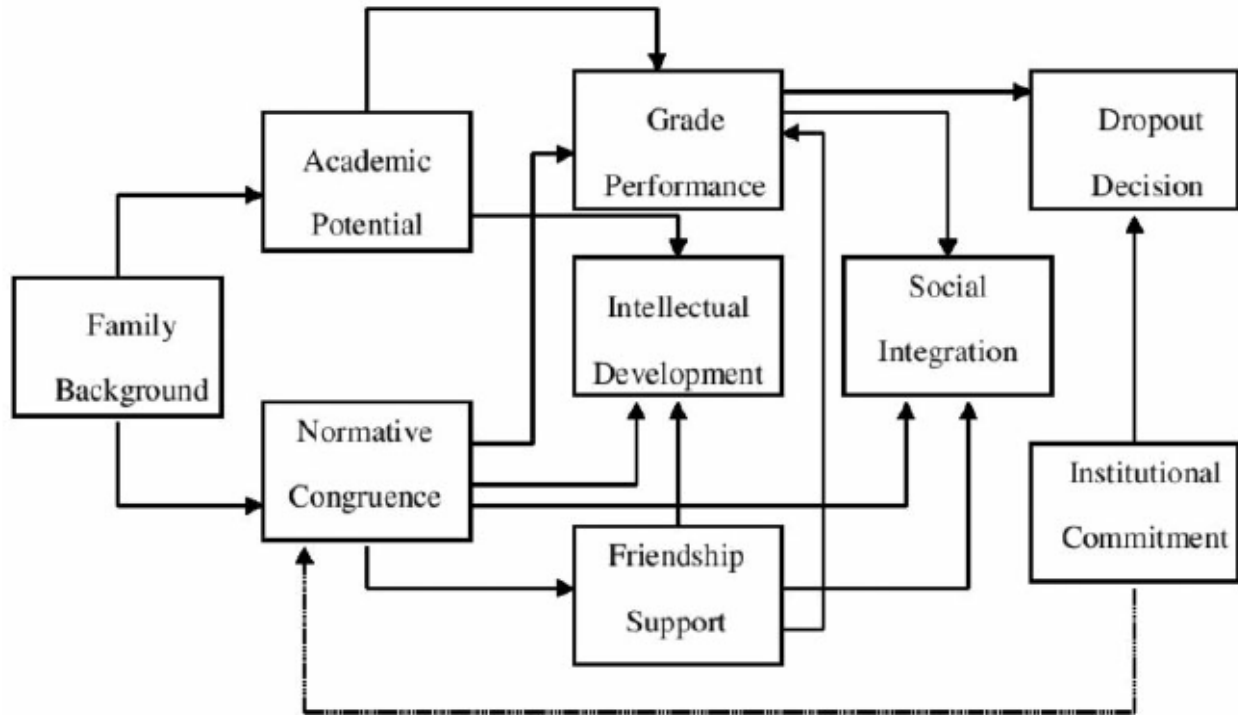
Figure 1: Spady's Model of Dropout

Spady's (1970b) model of student dropout has been tested by numerous researchers (Zeitlin-Ophir, Melitz, Miller, Podoshin, & Mesh, 2004; Eggens, Van der Werf, & Bosker, 2008). Zeitlin-Ophir et.al. (2004) study examined the variables that influence the academic integration of nursing students. The researchers found that the most prominent variable that influences academic integration is the social integration of students with colleagues and educational staff (Zeitlin-Ophir et. al., 2004). Additionally, the researchers discovered that country of origin was vital to both social and academic integration, and that institutional facilities had a positive impact on academic integration (Zeitlin-Ophir et. al., 2004). Eggens et. al. (2008) examined the influence of personal networks and social support on study attainment of students in university education (p. 553). The researchers discovered that students' personal networks,

which is comparable to Spady's (1970b) independent variable friendship support, had an effect on degree attainment.

Tinto's model of student departure. Tinto's (1975) theory of student departure builds upon Spady's (1970b) theory of student dropout. Tinto's 1975 work on retention focused specifically on students' transitions in their first year of college. He argues that if a first-year student is able to make the initial transition into college, then the student must be intellectually and socially assimilated into the institution's culture (Isher & Upcraft, 2006). He also contends that the institution has equal responsibility in ensuring students' academic and social integration as both are integral to student retention (p. 31).

Tinto (1975) postulate that the variations of dropout behaviors among students is a longitudinal process and that students' individual characteristics are contributing factors.

"…..the process of dropout from college can be viewed as a longitudinal process of interactions between the individual and the academic and social systems of the college during which a person's experiences in those systems (as measure by his normative and structural integration) continually modify his goal and institutional commitments in ways which lead to persistence and/or to varying forms of dropout" (Tinto, 1975, p. 94).

This model of dropout is illustrated in Figure 2.

Individuals' attributes, along with precollege experiences and family backgrounds, directly and indirectly impacts college performance (Tinto, 1975). Additionally, these elements also influences the development of the educational experiences and commitments individuals bring with them upon entrance into the college environment (p. 96). Tinto (1975) believes that these goal and institutional commitments are critical predictors of students' experiences.

Students' goal to complete college is dependent upon institutional commitment. If the level of institutional commitment is high, students will commit to the goal of completing college. Conversely, if institutional commitments are low, students may depart from the institution (Tinto, 1975).

Tinto's (1975) postulation about goal commitment and its linkage to student departure is consistent with findings in Caison's (2005) study. This study examined students who withdrew from their original postsecondary institution prior to graduation (Caison, 2005, p. 425). Caison (2005) found that students' first year grade point average, along with parents' educational background, and minority affiliation had an impact on students' goal commitment to completing college.

Tinto (1993) states that financial challenges also impact student persistence. The question of finances has the ability to sway students' decision on the type of institution to attend (e.g. affordable two-year public institution, less expensive four year public institution) (p. 65). More importantly, and most unfortunately, financial challenges can aid in the departure of students, especially in the early stages of their college career, when the goal of college completion appears distant (Tinto, 1993). However, if students' collegiate experiences are rewarding, they will assume the financial burden, whereas students with less rewarding experiences will opt to depart (Tinto, 1993). Tinto (1982) suggested that the issue of finances should be taken into consideration when creating models for student dropout (as cited in Taylor, 2012).

Although finances play a major role in students' decisions to withdraw from postsecondary institutions, the more significant reasons relate to academic and social integration (Tinto, 1975). Therefore, it is important for postsecondary institutions to develop successful

methods to academically and socially integrate students into their cultures. The more students interact with their institution, the more attrition rates will decrease (Taylor, 2012).

Tinto's early work in 1975 focused primarily on first-year students' transition into college, however, it was simplistic and lacked detail (Tinto, 2006). His early work was not inclusive of all institutional types and excluded students from minority backgrounds. Since then, Tinto's research on retention has evolved and increased its focus on diverse student populations. His research expansion on students from underrepresented populations revealed that these students can be successfully retained at postsecondary institutions if they remain connected to their past communities (2006). Previous research argued that separation from their communities was necessary for retention (Tinto, 1988).

The evolution also encompassed gaining a better understanding of how varying institutional settings influence student retention (Tinto, 1994). The outcomes are not the same from institution to institution. A variety of sociological, psychological, and economic models of student retention models now exist (Tinto, 1993; Tinto, 2005), whereas in the past these models were primarily psychological (Tinto, 2006). The evolution of retention research also brought forth one constant variable: engagement. Engagement is an important element in student retention and is most critical during the first year of college (Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005).
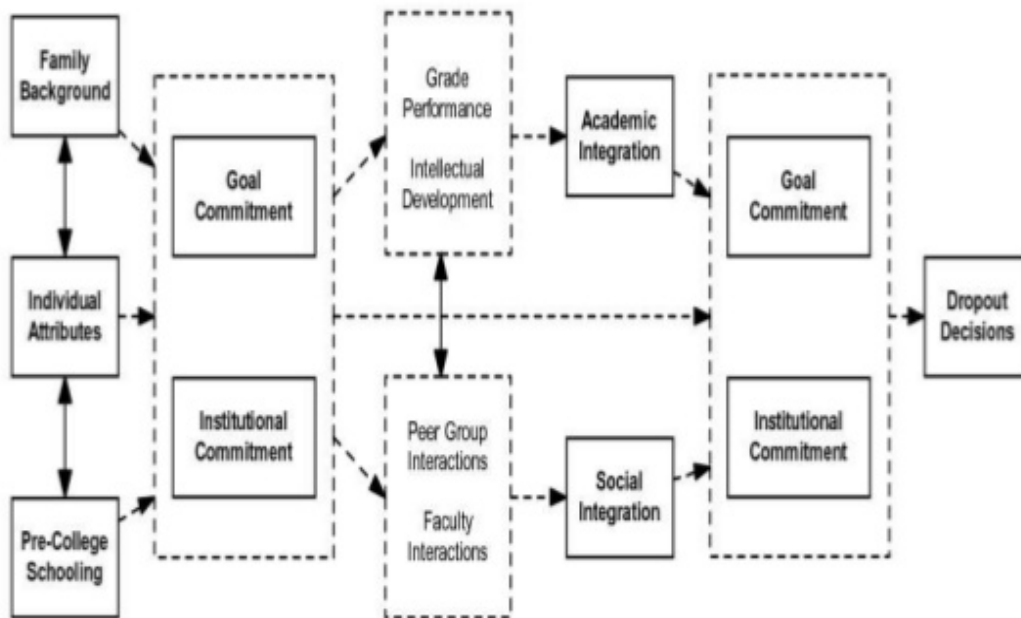
Figure 2: Tinto's 1975 model of student departure

2.3 Conclusions drawn from the literature

This literature review focused on the retention and persistence of first-year, first-generation students at postsecondary institutions. Four themes was explored: first-year student retention and persistence, first-generation student retention and persistence, second-year student retention and persistence, and collaborative partnerships between academic and student affairs. Included in this literature review was the examination of two theoretical frameworks that play a vital role in the understanding of student attrition: William G. Spady's (1970b) model of student dropout and Vincent Tinto's (1993) model of student departure.

Overall, the literature discussed and emphasized the critical role the first-year of college plays in the retention and persistence of students. Because a great percentage of students

withdraw from their institution within the first-year of college (Tinto, 1993; Isher & Upcraft, 2005) and ethnic minority students are retained at lower levels more difficult to retain (Tinto, 1975; Herndon & Hirt, 2004; Horwedel, 2008), more postsecondary institutions are implementing programs and services to ensure the academic and social success of these student populations. The literature review highlighted research studies and postsecondary institutions that resulted in successful outcomes as it relates to increasing freshman-to-sophomore retention rates and the retention rates of first-generation college students.

Chapter 3. Methodology

This chapter presents the mixed methodological approach that was employed in this study

to examine the transition of Governors State University (GSU) from an upper-division graduate

university to a four-year institution and its impact on the retention and persistence of first-year,

first-generation college students. This chapter describes the six types of mixed methods designs

frequently used in educational research and specifically highlights the design used in this study.

Additionally, this chapter includes the description of research site, participants, data collection,

and data analysis procedures.

3.1 Characteristics of mixed methods designs

Mixed methods research is defined as "a procedure for collecting, analyzing, and mixing

both quantitative and qualitative methods in a single study or a series of studies to understand a

research problem" (Creswell, 2012). The primary strength of mixed methods designs is that they

foster the development of research in the most comprehensive manner (Morse, 2003). Mixed

methods designs are generally used when quantitative and qualitative data are collected and both

types of data, collectively, provide a greater understanding of the research problem, than either

type does independently (Creswell, 2012). A mixed methods study is also conducted when one

type of research (qualitative or quantitative) is not sufficient to tackle the research problem or

answer the research questions (p. 535). Therefore, when quantitative and qualitative data are

combined they create "a very powerful mix" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 42).

Conversely, the primary characteristic that strengthens mixed methods research – its

comprehensiveness--may also be perceived as its weaknesses (Morse, 2003). Methodological

purists believe that a researcher should either choose the qualitative or quantitative paradigm and

not both (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2004). Other disadvantages of mixed methods research

include the amount of time and expense associated with this method, as well as the ability to interpret conflicting results and analyze both qualitative and quantitative data (Onwuegbuize & Johnson, 2004).

History and trends. The onset of mixed methods research date back to the 1930s when researchers in education and the social sciences collected multiple methods of data (Creswell, 2012). However, Campbell and Fiske (1959) were among the first researchers to introduce the multitrait, multimethod approach in a single study. This multitrait, multimethod approach began with the collection and measurement of various forms of quantitative data, enabling researchers to establish validity. Campbell and Fiske's (1959) seminal work paved the way for future researchers to collect multiple forms of data, but with the utilization of both quantitative and qualitative data.

As years progressed, quantitative and qualitative data started being used in in-depth case studies. Eventually, researchers began developing comprehensive studies by mixing methods through the utilization of surveys, semi-structured interviews, observations, and archival documents--popularly known as data triangulation (Creswell, 2012). Triangulation is an effective technique used to gain a deeper understanding of data, from two or more sources, on the same phenomenon (Brown, Ryan, Thorpe, Markle, Hutchison, Glazier, 2015; Creswell, 2012). In triangulation, quantitative and qualitative data could be collected separately in two or more phases to allow data from one source to enhance or explain data from another source (Creswell, 2012).

Mixed methods research has certainly evolved since its early introduction. A research approach that began as the compilation of one data type in multiple forms, advanced to an approach that utilizes predetermined and emerging methods, open and closed ended questions,

and numerous forms of data collection that derive from both statistical and text analysis (Watson, 2004). Advocates for mixed methods research has provided justification for its use through their written works (Creswell, 2012). Although skepticism and challenges still exists in using this methodological approach, the mixing of various forms of quantitative and qualitative data serves as an innovative way to study various phenomena (Watson, 2004).

  Types of mixed methods research designs. The emergence of mixed methods studies provides researchers with numerous design choices (Terrell, 2011). Mixed methods research designs can be identified by determining (1) the priority in which the researcher gives to quantitative and qualitative data (2) the sequence in which quantitative or qualitative data was collected (3) if data was analyzed jointly or independently (4) the stage in the study in which the researcher(s) "mix" the data (e.g. data collection, data analysis, etc.) (Creswell, 2012). The mixed methods research design commonly used in educational research can be identified by making those four determinations (Creswell, 2012).

  Illustrated in Figure 3 are four basic mixed methods designs currently in use by researchers (i.e. convergent parallel design, explanatory sequential design, exploratory sequential design, and embedded design). Illustrated in Figure 4 are two complex mixed methods designs that are gradually becoming popular (i.e. transformative design, multiphase design) (Creswell, 2012). Each research design has distinct defining features.

  The convergent parallel design collects and analyzes two independent strands of quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously in a single phase, gives equal priority to both data types, and merges the data through interpretation (Creswell & Plano, 2011; Creswell, 2012). The basis for this design is that one data type provides strength to balance the weaknesses of the other data type, enabling a thorough understanding of the research problem (Creswell, 2012).

The explanatory sequential design is typically a two-phase model that collects quantitative data first and subsequently collects qualitative data to provide support for the quantitative results. The quantitative data in this approach provides an overall picture of the research problem and the qualitative data is needed to refine the overall picture (Creswell & Plano, 2011; Creswell, 2012).

The exploratory sequential design is also normally a two-phase design. However, qualitative data is collected first to explain a phenomenon and then the quantitative data provides explanation for qualitative findings. This design is also used to develop a research instrument in the event one is not available (Creswell & Plano, 2011; Creswell, 2012). The embedded design simultaneously or sequentially collects quantitative and qualitative data only to have one type of data provide support to the other type. The addition of qualitative data into a quantitative design is most commonly used (Creswell, 2012).

Beyond the four basic mixed methods designs just described are the transformative and multiphase designs. The transformative design addresses social issues particularly for underrepresented or marginalized populations. Typical frameworks found in transformative study designs are feminist, racial, ethnic, sexual orientation, and disability perspectives (Creswell & Plano, 2011; Creswell, 2012). The multiphase studies employ a mixture of sequential and concurrent designs and is popularly used in large scale research programs (Creswell & Plano, 2011; Creswell, 2012).

Figure 3: Basic mixed-methods research designs

Convergent parallel design

Quantitative Data Collection and Analysis → Merge the two sets of results → Interpret the merged results

Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis → Merge the two sets of results

Explanatory sequential

Quantitative Data Collection and Analysis → Connect from the quantitative results → Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis → Interpret the connected results

Exploratory sequential

Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis → Connect from the qualitative results → Quantitative Data Collection and Analysis → Interpret the connected results

Embedded (example of qualitative embedded within a quantitative design)

Quantitative Design — Quantitative Data Collection and Analysis / Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis to enhance larger design → Interpret the embedded results

Source: Adapted from Creswell, 2012, p. 541

Figure 4: Complex mixed methods designs

Transformative Design

Quantitative Data Collection and Analysis → Follow up with → Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis → Interpretation

Multiphase Design

Overall Program Objective: Study 1: Qualitati → Informs → Study 2: Qualitative → Informs → Study 3: Mixed Method
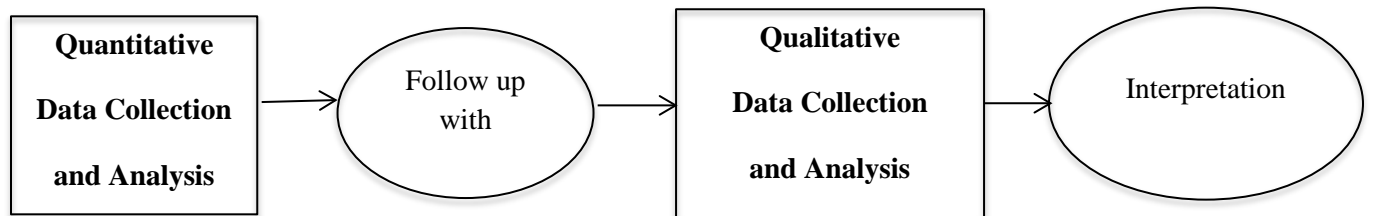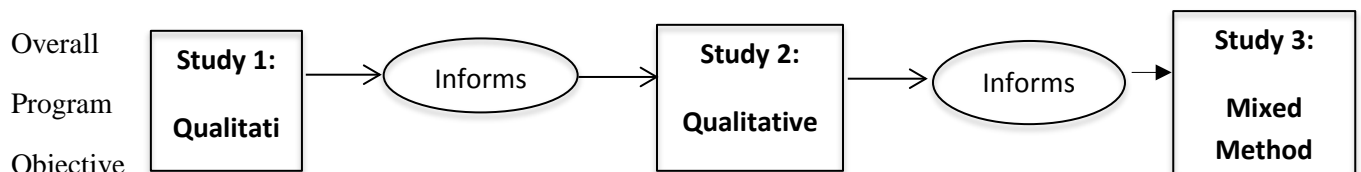
Source: Adapted from Creswell, 2012 p. 541

3.2 Research Design

In light of the characteristics of mixed methods research designs, this case study employed an explanatory sequential design. The explanatory sequential design is popularly used among researchers and involves data collection in two consecutive phases within one study: the collecting of quantitative data first, followed by the collection of qualitative data (Ivankova, Creswell, & Stick, 2006). Researchers who select to conduct a mixed methods explanatory sequential study, have to consider which data type will be given priority, the sequence of the data collection and analysis, and the juncture in which integration of the quantitative and qualitative data occurs (p. 4).

In this case study, statistical institutional data on the enrollment and retention of first-year and second-year students from Governors State University (GSU) was analyzed and introduced first. Priority was given to the quantitative data obtained from the institution because it provided a comprehensive picture of the research problem identified in Chapter 1. Secondly, a qualitative survey that consisted of both open-ended and closed-ended questions, was sent to administrators of curricular and co-curricular programs and services at GSU. The information gathered from the qualitative survey enabled the researcher to carefully explore participants' views and to refine the overall picture (Creswell & Plano, 2011; Creswell, 2012). Although atypical in an explanatory sequential design, a third phase was instituted. The third phase consisted of one-on-one interviews with select senior executive administrators at GSU. However, information obtained from the in-depth interviews were used to tell the story of transformation at GSU in the case study.

3.3 Description of participants

Purposeful sampling, specifically, criterion sampling was utilized in this study. "In purposeful sampling, researchers intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon" (Creswell, 2012, p. 206). Criterion sampling, involves seeking cases or individuals who meet specific or predetermined criteria of significance (Patton, 1990). The purpose of criterion sampling, is to select participants and sites that are "information-rich" (p. 169) because they may possibly disclose organizational weaknesses that can transform into opportunities for program or organizational improvement (Patton, 1990).

Using criterion sampling, two groups of individuals were purposefully selected to participate in the qualitative phase of this study. The first group of individuals were purposefully selected to participate in an online survey that consists of both open and closed-ended questions. The second group of individuals were purposefully selected to participate in a one-on-one interview.

For purposes of this study, nineteen administrators at GSU were selected to participate in an online survey based on the following criteria: (1) each individual had to be an administrator of a curricular or co-curricular program or service offered at GSU (2) as a result of GSU's transition to a four-year institution, each individual's unit or specific job responsibilities had to have been directly impacted (3) modifications had to be made to programs and/or services in each individual's unit or specific job responsibilities to accommodate first-year students. This enabled the researcher to garner a variety of perspectives on GSU's transition from an upper-division graduate university to a four-year institution.

In addition to using criterion sampling among the survey participants in this study, the one-on-one interview participants were selected in a similar manner. For example, each

individual had to be a member of the executive leadership cabinet at GSU, or a senior leader in student affairs, with direct oversight of academic or student affairs initiatives. Information obtained from the interviews was used in the case study section of Chapter 4. These data enabled the researcher to tell the overall story of GSU's transformation by sharing key thought processes behind the decision to convert to a four-year institution, the specific actions taken to ensure a successful transition, and lessons learned along the way. The information obtained from both survey and interview participants provide valuable insight into the retention and persistence rates of first-year students at GSU.

3.4 Data collection methods

In this study, multiple sources were used to collect data: (1) statistical institutional data on the enrollment, retention, and persistence rates of GSU's very first cohort of first-year students (2014), second cohort of first-year students (2015), and first cohort of second year students (2015); (2) an online survey using the Survey Monkey software, was emailed to nineteen administrators at GSU; and (3) in-depth, semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with four participants was conducted.

Institutional research data was used for the quantitative phase of this study. Institutional research data is particularly appropriate for this study because it is data made available to assess student success and to aid postsecondary institutions determine where to "concentrate improvement effort and to measure the impacts of these interventions" (Achieving the Dream, 2009, p. 5). Therefore, the institutional data obtained from GSU's institutional research office, provides a comprehensive picture of matters relating to the institution's students success rates, specifically as it relates to matters of retention and persistence of its first-year students.

An online survey using Survey Monkey software was used in the qualitative phase of this study. According to Creswell (2012), survey research describe trends, determine individuals' opinions, and helps identify important beliefs and attitudes of individuals. Specifically, web-based surveys, like the survey that was used in this study are becoming increasingly popular and have the ability to collect extensive data quickly. Conversely, they garner low response rates (Creswell, 2012).

Survey research is a quantitative research design popularly used in education (Creswell, 2012). In this design, a set of predetermined questions are administered to a specific sample or population of individuals. Survey research designs are used to statistically analyze collected data to describe trends about responses to questions, as well as to test research questions or hypotheses (Creswell, 2012). Although the mention of qualitative surveys are nearly absent in textbooks on general social research methodology and in textbooks on qualitative research methods, they do exist, and is recommended for the exploration of meanings and experiences (Jenson, 2010).

A qualitative survey is used in the qualitative phase of this study. This survey type is beneficial in this study because it enables the researcher to pose both closed-ended and open-ended questions. Closed and open-ended questions are advantageous for both the research participant and the researcher. Closed-ended questions allowed for participants to provide quick responses and enable the researcher to easily analyze data trends. Open-ended questions allowed participants to respond in a thorough manner and allowed the researcher to uncover unanticipated findings. Additionally, the information obtained from survey participants enabled the researcher to explore the general thoughts, feelings, and experiences of administrators at GSU.

In-depth, one-on-one, semi-structured interviews were used in the qualitative phase of this study. Semi-structured interviews are commonly used among researchers because questions can be prepared in advance, they allow freedom to expand, and provide reliable, comparable, qualitative data (Crabtree, 2006). Three interviews were conducted face-to-face, and one interview will be conducted over the telephone. Face-to-face interviews are advantageous because they enable the interviewer to pick up on social cues such as voice, intonation and body language. These cues are important because they allowed the interviewer with additional information that can be added to the interviewee's verbal answer (Raymond, 2006). Telephone interviews are not ideal because they reduce the social cues from body language that the interviewer can see and cannot be used as an additional source of information. However, telephone interviews allow for easy access to individuals that are not in the same geographical location (Raymond, 2006).

One-on-one interviews, whether face-to-face or via the telephone, are a popular approach in educational research (Creswell, 2012), and allow for a greater understanding of participants' feelings and experiences. According to Creswell (2012), one-on-one interviews are ideal for interviewing participants who are influential, articulate, and can comfortably share ideas. The one-on-one interview participants in this study, were members of GSU's executive leadership cabinet or senior leaders in GSU's student affairs division. One-on-one interviews are appropriate in this study because they offered the breadth and depth needed for this case study.

3.5 Procedures

Quantitative phase. A request for statistical data on the enrollment, retention, and persistence rates of GSU's 2014 cohort of first-year students, second cohort of first-year students (2015), and first cohort of second year students (2015), was emailed to GSU's Institutional

research office. The review and analysis of the institutional data provides the foundation of this study's research problem stated in Chapter 1.

Qualitative phase. Nineteen administrators at GSU were emailed an informational letter (Appendix A). The informational letter introduced the researcher, invited them to participate in the research study, stated the purpose of the study, the reasons they were selected to participate, informed them that they will receive the survey link within the next couple of days, and communicated the significance of their participation in the study. Following, the nineteen administrators were emailed the actual link to the online survey requesting their participation in the study. The survey protocol consisted of 17 open and closed-ended questions (Appendix B). Before proceeding to take the survey, each participant was asked to read the letter of consent (Appendix C). If the participant agree to the survey, they were asked to click the next button to proceed. Each participant was required to define their role as an administrator of curricular programs and/or services or an administrator of co-curricular programs and/or services before they were able to answer the rest of the questions.

Three senior executive administrators were emailed an informational letter (Appendix D). The informational letter introduced the researcher, invited them to participate in the research study, stated the reasons they were selected to participate, and communicated the significance of their participation in the study. A 12-14 open-ended question interview protocol was developed. The protocol varied for each administrator that was interviewed.

The three interviews ranged from thirty-five to sixty minutes. The first interview was conducted over the phone and the two planned interviews were conducted in administrators' offices. All three senior executive administrators agreed to be recorded. At the beginning of the semi-structured interviews, a letter of consent was given to each participant for them review and

sign (Appendix E). They were also given a brief overview of the study, and were informed that they could opt to stop the interview at any time.

During the third interview session, the participant strongly recommended that the researcher contact another senior administrator that was instrumental in working with GSU's faculty groups. The researcher took the advice of the research participant and scheduled an interview session with the fourth senior administrator. The fourth interview session took place in the participant's office. The participant agreed to be recorded, was given a letter of consent for review and signature, was given a brief overview of the study, and was informed that the interview session could stop at any time upon request.

Documents. In addition to statistical institutional data and interviews as data collection methods, a document analysis of materials were used to supplement the study. Document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents. Document analysis requires that data be examined and interpreted in order to obtain meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge (Bowen, 2009). The document analysis in this study consisted of reviewing the following documents:

- GSU's Vision 2020 strategic plan;

- White paper written by GSU's former Provost outlining the institution's reasons for transitioning to a four-year university;

- Letters of support from Presidents of two local community colleges;

- October 4, 2011 executive summary from the GSU Board of Trustees approving the institution to seek operating authority for the admission of lower division students from the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE);

- Letter from GSU's President to the IBHE's Executive Director requesting operational approval to offer lower division;

- Frequently asked questions (FAQ), with responses, regarding GSU's new lower division program;

- GSU's President's Fiscal Year 2016 budget testimony to the Illinois House of Representatives' and Illinois Senate's budget/appropriation committees in the state legislature;

- Welcoming Freshmen 2014 letter (a handout used by administrators, faculty and staff at meetings, etc. to explain GSU's transition);

- GSU's general education themes (a document developed in April, 2013 that provides descriptive information about three themes embedded in the Freshman Program);

- GSU's 2014 Freshmen Experience Curriculum Summary.

3.6 Data Analysis

Survey data analysis. The Survey Monkey online program contains a data analysis feature that display results for the instrument, provide reports documenting answer frequency and compare answers and/or populations. Using the data download feature on Survey Monkey, an Adobe pdf and Power Point presentation was downloaded for review and analysis of trends.

Interview data analysis. After the interviews were conducted, audio data from the interviews were sent to a transcription service for transcription. Upon receipt of the transcribed interviews, extensive review of the interview transcripts extracted emerging themes that relates

to the literature. Data from the interviews were not coded. Instead, data was used in an illustrative manner to tell the story of GSU's transition to a four-year institution in Chapter 4.

   Validating findings. To ensure the quality and credibility of findings, the researcher engaged in data triangulation. Triangulation is a significant component of mixed methods research designs. Triangulation involves the researcher to validate findings by generating and comparing various data types, and various perspectives, on the topic of study (Torrance, 2012). In this study, such data sources included: statistical institutional data, an online survey, interviews, and analysis of institutional documents.

Chapter 4. Case Study: Governors State University

Governors State University (GSU) was founded in 1969 as an upper-division graduate public university. The university is located 40 miles south of Chicago and is popularly known for offering the most affordable undergraduate tuition in the state of Illinois. While the students at GSU in the years following its founding were at least of junior year status, and primarily non-traditional-aged adult students, the student profile has since then evolved. In 2014, GSU transformed into a four-year traditional university, welcoming its very first cohort of 242 first-year students. GSU's student body is still predominately comprised of non-traditional students, however, the institution's recent transition resulted in nearly thirty-one percent of traditional-aged students (18-24) on its campus. The average age of undergraduate students at GSU is 30; and the average age of graduate students is 35 (GSU Office of Institutional Research, 2015).

The university currently serves more 5,938 students and offers 64 degree and 24 certificate programs across four colleges: College of Arts and Sciences, College of Business, College of Education, and the College of Health and Human Services. GSU has established partnerships between 17 Chicagoland community colleges with its Dual Degree Program (DDP). The DDP enables qualified full-time community college students who has completed 12-45 credit hours, at one of their partnering schools, to transfer into GSU after completion of an associate's degree.

As illustrated in Table 1, GSU has a diverse student population. The student population is comprised of White (2,149; 39 percent), African-American (2,145; 39 percent), Hispanic (575; 11 percent) students, and nonresident alien (397; 7 percent) with African-American and Hispanic students as slightly predominant. Sixty-seven percent of the student population are female and thirty-three percent of the student population are male.

Table 1: Governors State University Student Race/Ethnicity & Gender

Race/Ethnicity	Enrollment	Percentage
White	2,149	39%
Black or African-American	2,145	39%
Hispanic	575	11%
Asian	102	2%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	10	0%
Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	3	0%
Two or More Races	113	2%
Nonresident Alien	397	7%
Race/Ethnicity Unknown	444	
Gender		
Male	1,981	33%
Female	3,948	67%
Unreported	9%	

Adapted from GSU's Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness, Fast Facts-2015

Unlike GSU's majority minority student population, the university's faculty are sixty-three percent White, twenty-one percent African-American, and three percent Hispanic. Forty-nine percent of faculty are females and forty-three percent are males. As it relates to staff, fifty-three percent are White, thirty-seven percent are African-American, and four percent are Hispanic. Sixty-nine percent of GSU's staff are female and thirty-one percent are male. The data in Tables 2 and 3 illustrates the diversity among GSU's faculty and staff.

Table 2: Faculty Diversity

Diversity	Tenured	Tenure Track	Not Tenure Track	Total Faculty
Female	49 (53%)	38 (58%)	55 (57%)	142 (56%)
Male	43 (47%)	28 (42%)	42 (43%)	113 (44%)
Totals	92	66	97	255
African-American	19 (21%)	17 (26%)	18 (19%)	54 (21%)
Hispanic	4 (4%)	1 (2%)	2 (2%)	7 (3%)
White	54 (59%)	34 (51%)	73 (75%)	161 (63%)
Others/Unknown	15 (16%)	14 (21%)	4 (4%)	33 (13%)
Totals	92	66	97	255

Table 3: Staff Diversity

Diversity	Non-Faculty	Totals
Female	228 (69%)	370 (63%)
Male	103 (31%)	216 (37%)
Totals	331	586
African-American	124 (37%)	178 (30%)
Hispanic	12 (4%)	19 (3%)
White	176 (53%)	337 (58%)
Others/Unknown	19 (6%)	52 (9%)
Totals	331	586

All Status Employees on the FY14 State Funds Budget
60% of GSU vice presidents are minority
60% of GSU vice presidents are female
Tables adapted from GSU's Office of Institutional Research

Although GSU has less minority faculty and staff than its students; the institution surpass the

national average for American universities. The national average for minority faculty is 18.6

percent and twenty-three percent for staff (GSU Fact Book, 2014).

GSU's transformation preparation. While GSU accepted its first cohort of first-year

students in 2014, the planning for the students' arrival began several years prior. With

recognition that the upper-division concept is no longer viable, discussions of GSU's transition

to a four-year university began in August 2011 with the development of a white paper prepared

by Dr. Terry Allison, GSU's former Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs. The white

paper outlines the challenges and opportunities of GSU transitioning to a four-year traditional

university, reviews its potential barriers, provides a conceptual framework for execution,

examines the financial impact of a lower-division addition (freshmen students), presents a draft

planning process and timeline (see Table 4), and makes a recommendation for the feasibility of

GSU's transition to a four-year university. The white paper was discussed with GSU's Board of

Trustees at an August 2011 Board of Trustees retreat.

Following discussion with the Board of Trustees, GSU's administration engaged its internal and external constituencies in discussions about the institution's expansion to a four-year university. These dialogues encompassed all community college partners, the Student, Faculty, and Civil Service Senates, local and regional elected officials, and the general community. Additionally, a town hall, open to the entire campus community was also hosted by administration.

GSU attained letters from community college presidents (their community college partners in their DDP), and the president of a private university. They articulated their full support for the institution's expansion to a four-year university. Other statements of support included formal resolutions from the Faculty Senate, the Student Senate, the Alumni Board, and the Executive Board of the Civil Service Senate. In October 2011, GSU's Board of Trustees granted the administration approval to pursue operating authority for the admission of lower division students from the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE). GSU received IBHE's approval on December 6, 2011, with two dissenting votes.

While GSU's expansion to include lower division students was going to have some impact on the enrollment of local community colleges, GSU agreed to the following (1) to only admit a small fraction of first-year students (270), (2) not to recruit sophomore students, and (3) not to implement plans to offer any associate degree programs. This agreement preserves GSU's commitment to fulfill its role as a national model for successfully serving transfer undergraduate students.

Table 4: GSU's draft planning process and timeline

August 2011	Board of Trustees retreat discussion
August 2011	Draft a special communication plan that articulates who should speak to whom and when. Draft a multi-year recruitment plan.
AY 2011/12	Form a university-wide planning committee with subcommittees. Develop a General Education curriculum and outcomes committee. Begin drafting admission standards. Begin to survey high school students and parents. Institutional Advancement begin efforts to develop Presidents' Scholars or similar means to attract well-qualified first-time freshmen. Continue to increase service learning, international education, undergraduate research, and other high impact learning experiences that would attract both freshmen and transfers.
AY 2011/12	Concept proposal to Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE). Approval sought during AY 2011/12. Begin early recruitment of first entering freshmen class, the Class of 2018, entering Fall 2014.
AY 2012/13	Finalize general education curriculum, outcomes, and assessment plan.
Spring 2013	Higher Learning Commission (HLC) focused visit combined with substantive change review. Continue early recruitment efforts including a campus open house for all potential new students. Expand marketing.
Summer 2013	Hold targeted information sessions for prospective students and families.
Fall 2013	Intensify recruitment efforts. Hold an open house just focused on freshmen. Accept first applications.
Early Jan. 2014	Deadline for applications.
End of March 2014	Send admission letters by end of the month, plus scholarship offers.
Spring 2014	Continue cycle of spring and fall open houses.
August 2014	Orientation week. Launch freshmen class.
August 2015	Accept the same freshmen class size of 2014.
August 2016-2020	Gradually accept more freshmen, up to 625 per year, assuming demand is there.

Source: Allison, T. (2011). *Becoming a full four-year university? A White Paper*

Upon IBHE's approval to expand to a four-year institution, on December 11, 2011,

GSU's Faculty Senate approved the formation of a General Education Taskforce at the request of

executive leadership. The taskforce consisted of two faculty members from each academic

college, one from the University Library, four Provost appointees, and four volunteers (non-

voting members). The General Education Taskforce were responsible for a substantial amount

of research on topics including the Illinois Articulation Initiative (IAI), general education

requirements, and the fundamental structures for general education courses. Specifically, the

General Education Taskforce was charged with the following:

- Reviewing current General Education curricula and requirements;

- Developing a curriculum that meets the 37-41 credit hour bachelor's requirements in Communication (oral and written), Mathematics, Humanities and Fine Arts, Physical and Life Sciences, and Social Behavioral and Social Sciences;

- Creating the core general education curriculum that all entering first-year college students will be required to follow.

GSU never had a general education curriculum before due to its long-standing upper-division status. Therefore, a new curriculum had to be developed from the ground up. The first charge of the General Education Taskforce was to work on student learning outcomes. The student outcomes that the General Education Taskforce developed were influenced by the work of the American Association of Colleges and Universities' "Liberal Education and America's Promise" launched in 2005, and the Lumina Foundation's "Degree Qualifications Profile for Undergraduates." The Taskforce also worked with the Committee on the Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes (CASLO). CASLO is an internal committee developed at GSU. The committee was formed in the fall of 2010 and began to participate in the Higher Learning Commission's Assessment Academy, focusing on General Education outcomes and writing at the undergraduate level (GSU Faculty Senate Meeting Minutes, December, 2011).

To develop the new curriculum, the General Education Taskforce divided into several subcommittees that looked at different areas such as first-year experiences at other institutions, as well as literature on sophomore and junior year experiences. The taskforce's efforts culminated with the development of a thematic general education curriculum. The curriculum begins with a two-week "Smart Start" program held during the summer months, and a First-Year

Seminar course held in the fall semester. Smart Start is a "bridge" program that is designed for conditionally admitted students.

4.1 GSU's transformation execution

For the first time in the institution's history, 242 first-year students began taking classes on the GSU campus in August 2014. One hundred thirty one students became residents of GSU's first on-campus residence hall called Prairie Place. As a mechanism to promote student success, GSU implemented the cohort model for its first-year students. The thematic general education curriculum features three required linked courses per semester during the first three semesters of college. The linked courses are taught by full-time faculty in groups of no more than 30 students, except for the writing courses which are capped at 18 students. As illustrated in Table 5, the courses are organized around three themes: civic engagement, global citizenship, and sustainability.

Students will stay in the same thematic area and have courses with the same group of students for three semesters. The curriculum structure is designed to guarantee that each student meet the general education requirements. Additionally, the curriculum exposes students to various disciplines and enable them to work with faculty and students in small groups. Students also take one to two courses per semester outside of the cohort to meet the requirements in math and science.

Table 5: Proposed course sequence by themes

Year	Fall Semester	Spring Semester	Summer
Final HS Year	Begin admissions process	HS Graduation; GSU Admission and course selection	SMART START in specific areas as needed Math and/or English
Fall 2014	Civic Engagement	Global Citizenship	Sustainability
Cohort	US History/Civilizations	Cultural Anthropology	Geography of the Developing (non-western) World

Cohort	First Year Seminar-Interdisciplinary Humanities	First Year Seminar-Interdisciplinary Humanities	First Year Seminar - Interdisciplinary Humanities
Cohort	Written Comp I	Written Comp I	Written Comp I
Non-cohort (individual)	Math-4 courses offered	Math-4 courses offered	Math-4 courses offered
Non-cohort (optional)	Recommend a science course	Recommend a science course	Recommend a science course
Spring 2015	**Civic Engagement**	**Global Citizenship**	**Sustainability**
Cohort	US Government	General Psychology	Intro to Philosophy
Cohort	Intro to Visual & Performing Arts	World Civilizations	Cultural Anthropology
Cohort	Written Comp II	Written Comp II	Written Comp II
Non-cohort	Individual selection	Individual selection	Individual selection
Non-cohort	Individual selection	Individual selection	Individual selection
Fall 2015	**Civic Engagement**	**Global Citizenship**	**Sustainability**
Cohort	Macroeconomics	Cross Cultural Relationships	Intro to Sociology
Cohort	General Psychology	Non-Western music	Art Appreciation
Cohort	Oral Communications	Oral Communications	Oral Communications
Non-cohort	Individual selection	Individual selection	Individual selection
Non-cohort	Individual selection	Individual selection	Individual selection
GE Requirement Met in Cohort Courses	All 3 Communication including 2 in writing and 1 in oral comm. (9 credit hours)		
	All 3 Humanities and Fine Arts including one in humanities and one in fine arts (9 credit hours)		
	All 3 Social & Behavioral Sciences with courses selected from at least two disciplines (3 credit hours)		
GE Requirements Met Outside the Cohort	1 Life science and 1 Physical science at least one with a lab section (7-8 credit hours)		
	1 Math (3 credit hours)		

In the fall of the junior year, the curriculum is designed so that students will take a Junior Seminar course that will provide foundational information about the major. Junior transfer students and students who were admitted as freshmen, will take the Junior Seminar course together. In the senior year, students will complete a scholarly capstone project.

Co-curricular activities. GSU has nearly 80 registered student organizations, clubs, and teams. After one year of transforming into a four-year university, an athletics program was added to include men's basketball, women's basketball, volleyball, golf, cross country, and table tennis. Additionally, GSU became members of the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics and will be members of the Chicagoland Collegiate Athletic Conference in 2016-2017. According to a senior administrator in Student Affairs, GSU added an athletic program to provide a comprehensive experience for lower division students. The addition of sports enhances the college experience aid in the development of well-rounded individuals.

Enrollment goals and trends. In the planning stages of GSU's transformation to a four-year institution, GSU's goal was to admit 270 first-year students in 2014, and 270 students the following year, with an 80 percent retention rate. By the year 2020, the institution's goal is for the freshmen class to grow to 625 students. As articulated in the white paper written by the institution's former Provost and Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, Dr. Terry Allison, the growth of freshmen students is vital to the fiscal health of GSU and to its mission.

While GSU's goal was to enroll 270 first-year students in 2014, the institution actually enrolled 242 first-year students. Of those 242 students, 202 students persisted to the Spring 2015 semester. Thus, GSU had an 83.5 percent Fall 2014 to Spring 2015 persistence rate. Of the 202 first-year students that persisted to the Spring 2015 semester, 143 of them enrolled in the Fall 2015 semester as sophomores. Thus, GSU had a 70.8 percent spring 2015 to Fall 2015 persistence rate of its first-year students. However, GSU's fall 2014 to Fall 2015 retention rate of first-year students is 59.1 percent - -21 percent below their 80 percent retention goal.

In Fall 2015, 233 students enrolled as GSU's second cohort of first-year students. This enrollment number is lower than GSU's goal and lower than the number of first-year students

enrolled in fall 2014. Of the 233 students, 171 students persisted to the spring 2016 semester.

Thus, GSU had a 73.4 percent Fall 2015 to Spring 2016 persistence rate of its second cohort of

first-year students. Additionally, GSU's spring 2016 enrollment encompasses 120 students from

GSU's 2014 cohort of first-year students. Thus, from Fall 2014 to Spring 2016, GSU only

retained 50 percent of its first cohort of first-year students. These metrics are illustrated in below

in Table 6.

Table 6: Enrollment, persistence and retention of first year students

Freshman Cohort	Term	First Day of Class Headcount	Census 10th Day of Class Headcount	Persistence Rate	Overall Retention Rate
2014 Freshman Cohort	Fall 2014	242	242		
	Spring 2015	187	202	83.5 % (fall to Spring)	
	Fall 2015*	141	143	70.8% (Spring to Fall)	59.1% (Fall to Fall)
	Spring 2016*		120		49.5% (Fall 2014 to Spring 2016)
2015 Freshman Cohort	Fall 2015	219	233		
	Spring 2016		171	73.4 % (Fall to Spring)	

*Now second year students

The students that were accepted and enrolled in GSU's first cohort of first-year students

had an average ACT score of 19, an average grade point average of 2.7 and 65 percent came

from low performing high schools (75th-100th percentile) while only 8 percent came from high

performing high schools (top 25th percentile). The race and ethnicity make up of GSU's first

cohort of first-year students consisted of 2 percent Asian, 60 percent African-American, 12

percent Hispanic, 15 percent White, 2 percent bi-racial (two or more races), and 8 percent race

unknown. According to the National Survey of Student Engagement (2014), 66 percent of

GSU's first cohort of first-year students reported being first-generation college students. In GSU's second cohort of first-year students, 85 percent reported being first-generation college students (NSSE, 2015).

Challenges. One of the institution's strategic goals is to "provide a seamless and supportive pathway from admission to graduation focused on personal and academic success…." (GSU, Vison 2020 Strategic Plan). Specifically, GSU's aim to develop a model first-year experience program designed to both support student success and achieve first-year to second year retention rates that surpass the national average for peer institutions (GSU, Vision 2020 Strategic Plan). Based upon the data presented in Table 6, it is evident that GSU's transformation to a four-year institution has brought forth several challenges with the first to second year retention of its first-year students.

Executive administrative leaders in academic and student affairs believe that GSU's transformation to a four-year university was successful, but recognize that there were some challenges that may have impacted the retention of its first-year students. Some of the primary challenges cited by executive leadership include:

- The enrollment of some students who were not a "good fit" for GSU.

- Some faculty members having to get accustomed to teaching freshmen students.

- Communication to stakeholders about the benefits of having freshmen and sophomore students.

- Financial aid

- Students' motivation such as low class attendance rates

To increase the institution's retention rates of its first-year students, adjustments to

recruitment efforts have to be made. Recognition of this is held among administrators in GSU's executive leadership cabinet. One administrator stated that recruitment efforts were refined with GSU's second cohort of first-year students, as students who were a better fit for the institution were recruited. Because of this, the administrator predicted that the institution will have a better retention rate with the class of 2019.

While first-year students typically experience difficulty navigating through unfamiliar territory when it comes to college, faculty at GSU shared the same experience, but in a different manner. According to an administrator in academic affairs, many of GSU's faculty have not taught first-year students in a long period of time due to the previous upper division status of the university. Moreover, there are some faculty who have served at GSU for their entire academic career and have never worked with freshmen students. Another administrator in academic affairs stated that some resistance among the faculty did arise, but mostly due to their uncertainty about the institution's transformation. There seemed to be a lack of communication to stakeholders about the benefits of adding lower division. In essence, students, faculty, and administrators were simultaneously learning how to adjust to their new environment and experiences.

Financial aid, or the lack thereof, contributed to GSU's low retention rate of first-year students. Research (Hottinger & Rose, 2006; Amaya, 2010) shows that many students, especially first-generation college students, are more likely to be from low socioeconomic backgrounds and therefore, are dependent upon financial aid such as loans and grants to finance college. GSU offers various types of financial advising. However, many first-year students who would have been eligible for the Illinois Monetary Award Program (MAP) applied too late. This contributed to the students' financial challenges that could have been remedied by applying in a timely manner.

The Illinois MAP provides grants to Illinois residents who demonstrate financial need, based on the information provided on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA®). In addition to demonstrating financial need, for students to be eligible to receive the MAP grant, they must be (1) a U.S. citizen or an eligible non-citizen (2) be an Illinois resident (3) be enrolled a minimum of 3 hours per term at an approved Illinois college, in a degree or certificate program (4) maintain satisfactory academic progress (5) not be in default of any student loan, nor owe a refund on any state or federal grant (6) have not received a bachelor's degree (7) have not used the equivalent of 135 MAP Paid Credit Hours as determined by the students' enrollment status each term (8) comply with federal Selective Service registration requirements (9) not be incarcerated (Illinois Student Assistance Commission, 2016).

Administrators in Academic Affairs at GSU stated that low class attendance among first-year students was among the problems relating to the retention of this group. As one administrator stated, class attendance equates to 99 percent of success. Therefore, students' poor class attendance negatively impacted their grades. This problem existed mainly with those students living in Prairie Place, GSU's new residence hall. The institution addressed this issue from the beginning with first-year students in its second cohort by clearly communicating the institution's expectations and stressing the importance of attending class.

Support structures. While GSU was faced with several challenges that may have impacted the retention of its first-year students, the institution implemented several preemptive and reactive support structures to aid in the success of its first-year students. The initial preemptive structures, as displayed in Table 5 (p. 65), consist of the Smart Start course and the Mastering College course. Smart Start is a two-week program offered to students who would like the opportunity to strengthen their academic skills and to develop a peer support network. The

program is offered prior to the start of the fall semester. All first-year students are encouraged to

participate in Smart Start, however students who are identified through admission as needing

additional instruction in Math and/or English are required to participate.

Sixty-six percent (161) of GSU's 242 first cohort (2014) of first-year students were

identified as required participants of the Smart Start program. Forty-nine percent (120) were

required to participate in Smart Start Math and English; 14 percent (33) were required to

participate in Smart Start Math only; and 3 percent (8) were required to participate in Smart Start

English only. Thirty-three percent (81) students were direct admits and were not required to

participate in the Smart Start program. These metrics, along with those who persisted to the

Spring 2015 semester, are illustrated in Table 7.

Table 7: GSU's Admission Decision for Fall 2014 Cohort of First-Year Students

	Fall 2014		Spring 2015	
	AVG	N	AVG	N
Overall average	2.07	242	2.45	202
Full Admits	2.34	81 (33%)	2.71	63 (31%)
Smart Start Math & English	1.87	120 (49%)	2.24	104 (52%)
Smart Start Math Only	2.09	33 (14%)	2.57	29 (14%)
Smart Start English Only	2.14	8 (3%)	2.89	6 (3%)

Source: GSU Office of the Dean of Students

The Smart Start program is offered at no extra cost to students and is intentionally

designed to serve as a supplemental course rather than remedial courses. Research shows (Long

2005; Commission on the Future of Higher Education, 2006) that students taking remedial

courses are less likely to persist than students not enrolled in remedial courses. Remedial courses

do not count toward degree credits, is an increased financial burden to students, and lengthen the

time to degree completion (Commission on the Future of Higher Education, 2006). In

recognition of this national problem, GSU implemented the Smart Start program to help students

persist to degree completion.

GSU constructed their admission standards to identify students who were slightly below typical standards but could be successful in college. Those students qualified for Smart Start rather than direct admission. An administrator in academic affairs stated that early data is showing that the students in Smart Start English performed as well as direct admissions of students in terms of their grade point averages. Table 7 shows that students who were directly admitted into the university earned an average grade point average of 2.34 in the Fall 2014 semester; and the students that were enrolled in Smart Start English earned an average grade point average of 2.14. Of the students that persisted to the Spring 2015 semester, directly admitted students earned an average grade point average of 2.71; and the students that were enrolled in Smart Start English earned an average grade point average of 2.89. The program is being refined through faculty approaches and course expectations.

GSU's First-Year Seminar Course, *Mastering College: Navigating Higher Education*, is a one-credit course designed to support the successful transition of incoming freshmen into the university community. Students are introduced to a diverse range of topics critical to student success in higher education. Each section of First Year Seminar has an assigned peer mentor, who attends each class and assists the instructor in facilitating the course. In the 2014-2015 academic year, upper division students (third and fourth year status) served as peer mentors. Now that the institution has second year students, peer mentors consist of primarily sophomore students. Peer mentors serve as a resource for questions about classes, academic, cultural, and social activities. In addition to peer mentors, each section of the First-Year Seminar course has assigned student success teams. These teams consist of a math tutor, library liaison, writing fellow, and a mental health counselor. Student success teams were put in place to make available resources more accessible and less intimidating to students.

The Association of American Colleges and Universities' High Impact Practices (HIPs) are embedded in the courses such as learning communities, writing intensive courses, common intellectual experiences, collaborative assignments, and service learning. These practices are positively associated with student learning and retention and share several traits: They demand considerable time and effort, facilitate learning external of the classroom, require meaningful interactions with faculty and students, encourage collaboration with individuals from diverse backgrounds, and provide frequent and substantive feedback (GSU NSSE High-Impact Practices, 2015). It is recommended that postsecondary institutions aim for all students to participate in at least two HIPs in their undergraduate experience (NSSE, 2007).

First-year students at GSU engage in three HIPs: learning communities, service-learning, and research with faculty. By the time students reach their senior year, many of them would have engaged in six HIPs. According to GSU's National Survey of Student Engagement (2015), 35 percent of the institution's first-year students have participated in two or more HIPS and 58 percent have participated in one HIP. When assessed alongside postsecondary institutions in GSU's comparison group, first-year students at GSU are leading in HIP engagement. This is illustrated in Table 8.

As freshmen participation in HIPs relates to student characteristics, traditional-aged, African-American students were the only ethnic group that reported participation in learning communities, service-learning and research with faculty. Most HIP participants live on campus in Prairie Place, and are non-first generation college students. However, participation among first-generation college students slightly trail behind their non-first generation peers. These student characteristics, illustrated in percentages in Table 8, provides a comprehensive understanding on how levels of engagement varies within GSU's first-year student population.

Table 8: Overall First-Year Student HIP Participation
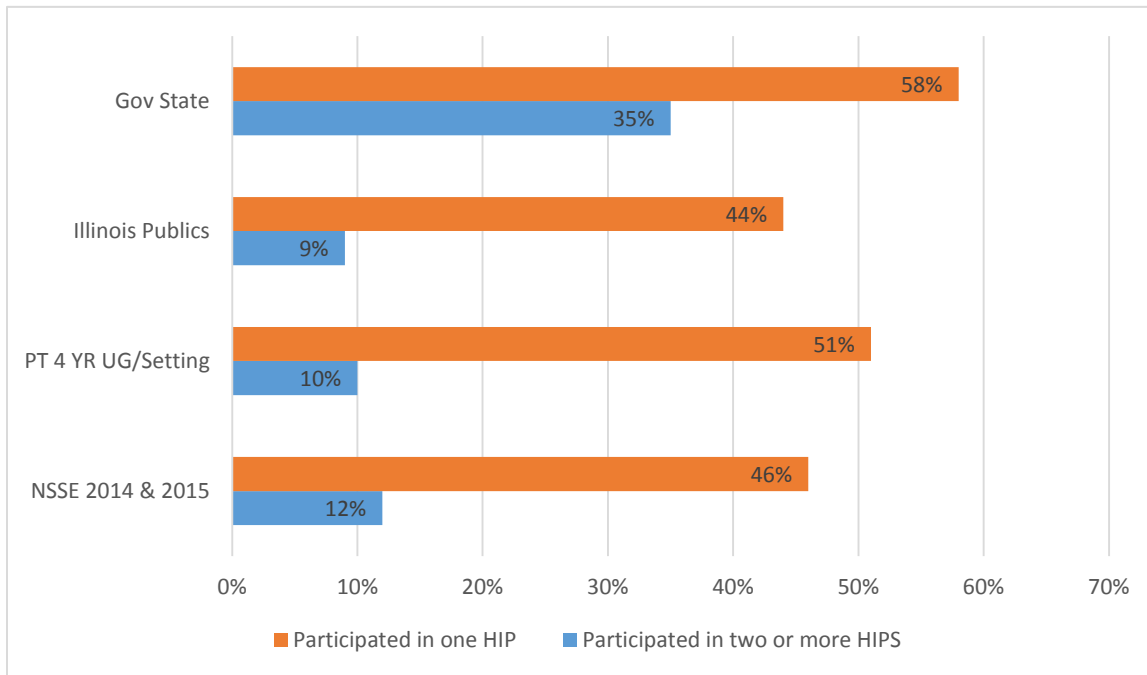
Source: Adapted from GSU's National Survey of Student Engagement (2015).

Table 9: Participation in HIP by Student Characteristics

Characteristic	Learning Community	Service-Learning	Research with Faculty
Sex*			
Female	24%	94%	17%
Male	40%	90%	0
Race/Ethnicity*			
Black/African-American	27%	92%	7%
Age			
Traditional (FY <21)	31%	91%	17%
First-generation**			
Not first-generation	33%	91%	17%
First-generation	27%	92%	15%
Enrollment Status*			
Full-Time	27%	93%	13%
Residence			
Living off campus	29%	87%	13%
Living on campus	31%	100%	21%
Overall	30%	92%	10%

* Institution-reported variable
**Neither parent holds a bachelor's degree
Source: Adapted from GSU's National Survey of Student Engagement (2015).

While the Smart Start program and the First-Year Seminar course are preemptive measures put in place to foster first-year students' success, several reactive measures were also instituted. For example, students' low attendance rates in classes negatively impacted their grades. Thus, mid-term grades were implemented for the first time in GSU's history. This mechanism was employed to help students gage their academic progress early on so that they will take the necessary steps to improve and/or seek support services for assistance. Although all students were not able to reverse undesirable grades, those students whose mid-term grades were D's and/or F's were sent letters encouraging them to take advantage of available resources such as tutoring sessions or workshops. According to an administrator in Academic Affairs, the implementation of mid-term grades also helped professors to make sure that they were providing students with early feedback. These reactive institutional wide measures were established in response to the experienced challenges or lessons learned from GSU's first cohort of first-year students.

Additional reactive measures consist of the implementation of the ACHIEVE Program and the Lower Division Academic Recovery Program (LDARP). The ACHIEVE Program connects freshman students placed on academic warning, as well as those needing additional support, with peer mentors, and tutoring sessions to aid in the successful completion of their first semester. The LDARP provides similar support to freshman and sophomore students placed on academic probation. Both programs require students to meet with their advisors to develop study plans.

To address students' financial issues, GSU increased their efforts to promote earlier admission so that they could assist students with applying for financial aid. Early application of financial aid is critical because the Illinois MAP funds are exhausted by the end of the month of

February every year. The early application deadline for first-year students is November 15th and students will receive an early admission decision by December 15th. Additionally, GSU has established designated days throughout the fall, spring, and summer semesters for freshmen to apply for early admission. These days are called Freshman Fridays. On Freshman Fridays, students have the opportunity to tour GSU's campus and have the ability to meet with financial aid advisors and admission counselors. Students seeking admission on Freshman Fridays have to meet specific criteria in terms of high school grade point average and ACT scores.

First-generation college student support. According to the National Survey of Student Engagement (2015), 66 percent of GSU's first cohort of first-year students reported that they were first-generation college students; and 85 percent of GSU's second cohort of first-year students reported that they were first-generation college students (NSSE, 2016). GSU's entire freshmen program is structured to foster the success of first-generation college students. Senior administrators in Academic Affairs and Student Affairs stated that many first-year students at GSU are not only the first-generation in their immediate families to attend college, but the first in their extended family and possibly their neighborhoods.

Research (Thayer, 2000; McDonough, 2004; Hottinger & Rose, 2006; Kim & Sax, 2009), indicate that first-generation college students typically are not academically prepared, in dire need of financial aid, have minimal to no interaction with faculty and/or peers, and are more likely to drop out after their first year of college. The composition of GSU's freshman curriculum and its support structures addresses the critical needs of first-generation college students. For example, its Smart Start program focuses on strengthening academic skills prior to the start of the academic year; the First-Year Seminar course assists with college transition and navigation of the university; its HIPs ensures interaction and relationship building with faculty

and staff; the newly implemented mid-term grades help students monitor their academic

progress; and financial aid advising and early admission efforts help students to circumvent

greater financial aid troubles through the promotion and encouragement of early application.

While GSU's freshman program is structured to foster the success of first-generation

college students, the institution does not have a program that specifically serves this student

population. However, GSU has initiated the First Matters program. First Matters is a

multidimensional program that provides first-generation college students and other

underrepresented student populations with support and resources that help them to adjust to the

college environment and matriculate to graduation. The First Matters program is still under

development, but has been offering workshops on topics to aid students with achieving curricular

and co-curricular success. As of Fall 2015, two workshops were held for First Matters. The

workshops were held on the following topics: "You're First, You Matter" and "Learning When

to Say No" (GSU, Student Affairs and Enrollment Management Newsletter, 2015).

4.2 GSU's stance among regional and national peer institutions

As illustrated in Table 10, GSU is one of 12 public universities in the state of Illinois.

When compared to four year public institutions in the state of Illinois--its regional peers--GSU

ranks among the lowest in its first to second year retention of first-time, full-time students

seeking a bachelor's degree. When compared to its 12 national peer institutions, GSU ranks last

in the retention of first-time, full-time students seeking a bachelor's degree and is illustrated in

Table 11.

GSU's overall retention rate of its first year students is 59.1 percent. This percentage

include full-time freshman students that had previous college enrollment. However, its retention

rate of strictly first-time, full-time, first-year students is slightly higher at 60 percent. This

percentage consist solely of students who have never enrolled in college before. The 60 percent

rating is the national statistic used in comparison with other institutions.

Table 10: Fall 2014 First to second year enrollment and retention rates of first-time, full-time, students seeking a bachelor's degree at four year Illinois public institutions

Institution	Location	Full-Time Enrollment	Retention Rate
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign	Champaign, IL	6,926	93%
Illinois State University	Normal, IL	3,581	81%
University of Illinois at Chicago	Chicago, IL	3,011	80%
University of Illinois at Springfield	Springfield, IL	302	79%
Eastern Illinois University	Charleston, IL	1,120	76%
Southern Illinois University- Edwardsville	Edwardsville, IL	2,093	73%
Western Illinois University	Macomb, IL	1,578	72%
Northern Illinois University	DeKalb, IL	2,499	71%
Southern Illinois University- Carbondale	Carbondale, IL	2,756	68%
Northeastern Illinois University	Chicago, IL	726	60%
Governors State University	University Park, IL	242	60%
Chicago State University	Chicago, IL	253	53%

Source: IPEDS Data Center (2014)

Indicated below in Table 11 with an asterisk*, GSU is among seven of its national peer

institutions that have undergone a downward expansion. A downward expansion is the

transformation of an upper-level institution to a traditional four-year institution (Richardson,

2014). GSU and the University of Houston-Clear Lake (UHCL), both opened its doors to its first

group of freshman students in 2014. Of the institutions listed, both are the last to transition to a

traditional four-year university.

Table 11: Fall 2014 First to second year enrollment and retention rates of first-time, full- time,
students seeking a bachelor's degree: GSU's national peer institutions

Institution	Location	Full-Time Enrollment	Retention Rate
University of Maryland-Baltimore	Baltimore, MD	1,616	89%
California State University-San Marcos*	San Marcos, CA	2,127	83%
University of North Florida*	Jacksonville, FL	1,792	83%
CUNY Brooklyn College	Brooklyn, NY	1,347	82%
Montclair State University*	Montclair, NJ	2,889	81%
Bridgewater State University	Bridgewater, MA	1,506	81%
University of Michigan-Dearborn*	Dearborn, MI	908	80%
University of Missouri-Saint Louis	St. Louis, MO	497	79%
University of Baltimore*	Baltimore, MD	226	79%
Austin Peay State University*	Clarksville, TN	1,184	72%
University of Houston – Clear Lake**	Houston, TX	211	71%
Metropolitan State University of Denver	Denver, CO	1,760	63%
Governors State University	University Park, IL	242	60%

Source: IPEDS Data Center (2014)
**Source: University of Houstion-Clear Lake Office of Institutional Effectiveness

4.3 Perspectives of senior executive administrators on GSU's transformation

The senior executive administrators in GSU's Academic Affairs and Student Affairs

units, who were interviewed for the development of this case study, are supportive and

enthusiastic about the institution's transformation to a four-year institution. Despite some

challenges, they believe that GSU was fully prepared to accept first year students. Furthermore, they believe that GSU has a good structure of support to foster the success of its students.

The senior executive administrators in Academic Affairs attribute the institution's good support structure to the collaborative efforts across departments within the university. Specifically, the unique composition of Academic and Student Affairs units. Contrary to conventional institutional structures, both units report to the Office of the Provost, enabling cohesive curricular and co-curricular efforts among academic and student affairs units.

Recognition of GSU's 59.1 percent overall retention rate of its first cohort of first-year students exists among three of the four administrators; and all of the administrators recognized that the institution had a higher retention rate of its first-time, full-time freshman students. While they are in agreement about the need to increase the retention of its first year students, they all are also proud of the institution's ability to retain the percentage of first-year students that remained on campus from the first cohort. Furthermore, the administrators believe that with continuous and consistent efforts, each year the institution will experience an increase in the retention rate of its first year students.

Cultural inclusiveness. GSU's freshman cohorts predominantly consist of students from ethnic minority backgrounds. In recognition of this, one senior administrator noted how important it is for GSU to have a diverse faculty. The administrator stated that having faculty from diverse backgrounds will enrich the experience of students as well as the entire institutional culture. The administrator emphasized GSU's efforts in recruiting diverse faculty members, and stated that faculty searches have been limited due to the institution not having a budget.

Although improvement is needed with diversity among GSU's faculty, administrators believe that GSU offers a culturally inclusive environment. High levels of students' involvement

in extracurricular activities and leadership roles and the university's small size is cited as

evidence of the institution's culturally inclusive environment. Together, these elements create an

environment of inclusion because it enables students to personally connect with faculty and their

peers.

   Conclusion. The senior executive administrators in Academic and Student Affairs, each

believe that GSU's transformation to a traditional four-year university was necessary for the

growth of the institution. They noted, that the university's faculty, staff, students, worked

together for the first time to ensure the institution's successful transition. Although the

transformation from an upper-level graduate institution to a four-year traditional institution has

already taken place, efforts to sustain its transformation continue. For example, the offerings of

campus-wide development workshops for faculty and staff. GSU's transformation is a constant

learning experience for the institution's faculty, staff, administrators, and students. Thus,

program modifications will result from each learning experience to ensure better experiences for

not only subsequent cohorts of first-year students, but the institution's entire student population.

Chapter 5. Results

The results of this mixed-methods case study are presented in two sections. The first section of results presents quantitative data. The quantitative results consist of statistical institutional data on the enrollment and retention of first year and second year students at GSU. This data is the foundation of the research problem identified in Chapter 1. The second section of results presents qualitative data. The qualitative section represents data from an online survey of open and closed-ended questions sent to administrators of curricular and co-curricular programs and/or services at GSU. The qualitative section also presents common themes that derived from one-on-one interviews with GSU executive administrators in academic and student affairs.

Quantitative results. Institutional data on the enrollment and retention of first-year students, obtained from GSU's institutional research office, revealed that the institution has an overall retention rate of 59 percent of its first cohort of first-year students. As outlined in Table 6, originally located in Chapter 4, and again below, 242 freshman students enrolled at GSU in Fall 2014. Of those 242 students, 202 students persisted to the Spring 2015 semester. This resulted in an 83.5 percent Fall 2014 to Spring 2015 persistence rate for first-year students.

Of the 202 first-year students that persisted to the Spring 2015 semester, 143 of them enrolled in the Fall 2015 semester as sophomores. This resulted in a 70.8 percent spring 2015 to Fall 2015 persistence rate of first-year students at GSU. With an enrollment of 242 first-year students in Fall 2014, and a final enrollment of 143 returning students in Fall 2015, GSU's Fall to Fall retention rate of its first cohort of first year students amount to 59 percent. As of Spring 2016, 120 students (now sophomores) from GSU's first cohort (2014) of first-year students remain enrolled in classes. Thus, 50 percent of its first cohort of first-year students persisted from Fall 2014 to Spring 2016.

Table 6: Enrollment, persistence and retention of first year students

Freshman Cohort	Term	First Day of Class Headcount	Census 10th Day of Class Headcount	Persistence Rate	Overall Retention Rate
2014 Freshman Cohort	Fall 2014	242	242		
	Spring 2015	187	202	83.5 % (fall to Spring)	
	Fall 2015*	141	143	70.8% (Spring to Fall)	59.1 (Fall to Fall)
	Spring 2016*		120		50% (Fall 2014 to Spring 2016)
2015 Freshman Cohort	Fall 2015	219	233		
	Spring 2016		171	73.4 % (Fall to Spring)	

*Now second year students

In Fall 2015, a final count of 233 students enrolled as GSU's second cohort of first-year

students – 10 percent fewer students than Fall 2014's enrollment. Of the 233 students, 171

students persisted to the spring 2016 semester. This resulted in a 73.4 percent Fall 2015 to Spring

2016 persistence rate of GSU's second cohort of first-year students.

Qualitative survey results. An online survey, via Survey Monkey software, was emailed

to 19 administrators of curricular and co-curricular programs and/or services at GSU. Seven

administrators responded to the survey, *The retention and persistence of first-year, first-*

generation college students at a mid-size public university: A mixed methods case study.

Therefore, the N = 7. Four (57 percent) were administrators of curricular programs and/or

services and 3 (43 percent) were administrators of co-curricular programs and/or services.

Administrators answered a total of 17 questions. The first question was a classifying

question used to determine if the respondents were an administrator of a curricular or co-

curricular program and/or service. The remaining 16 questions related to GSU's retention goals

for its first and second year students, collaborative efforts, established and/or planned initiatives

for first-generation college students, established curricular and co-curricular programs for first

year students, program effectiveness in retaining first year and first-generation students, lessons learned and modifications made from the institution's transition, student and institutional readiness, persistence issues, and cultural inclusiveness. The 16 questions and numerical results are later displayed in Table 16.

First-year student retention goals. As indicated in Table 16 (p. 91), seventy-one percent (5) of administrators indicated that their units have established retention goals for first year students; and 29 percent (2) of the administrators units does not. For those units that have established retention goals, administrators were asked to list them. Two units reported having 80-85 percent fall to fall retention goals and one unit reported having a 60 percent fall to fall retention goal of first year students. Seventy-one percent (5) of administrators indicated that their unit's goals were developed in collaboration with another unit on campus, while 29 percent (2) indicated that their unit's goals were not. Four administrators named academic advising, the admissions office, Prairie Place, career services and financial services as their collaborating unit(s).

First-generation college student initiatives. As it relates to units having initiatives specifically targeting first-generation college students, 43 percent (3) of administrators indicated that their unit does, and 57 percent (4) of administrators indicated that their unit does not have specific initiatives targeting first-generation college students. The three administrators that responded yes to their units having initiatives specifically targeting first-generation college students, listed the ACHIEVE Program and the Lower Division Academic Recovery Program (LDARP) as the initiatives. In addition to the ACHIEVE Program and the LDARP, one administrator listed the First Year Seminar course, midterm grades, Back on Track Program, tutoring and study group sessions, Save My Semester and Intersession, as initiatives specifically

targeting first-generation college students. In terms of units having future plans to implement

initiatives specifically targeting first-generation college students, 20 percent (1) of administrators

responded that their unit have plans and 80 percent (4) of administrators responded that their

units already have initiatives targeting first-generation college students.

Retention plan for s**econd-year students.** Fifty-seven percent (4) of administrators

indicated that their program, service or unit have an established retention plans for second-year

students and 43 percent (3) responded that their units did not have established plans. Participants

were asked to list the reasons why their units have established retention plans for second-year

students and why their units did not establish them. One administrator stated that their unit's goal

is to support and increase student persistence. Thus, her/his unit created Vision 2020 goals,

which is a five year plan, to provide services and initiatives to increase student performance.

Another administrator stated that the retention of second year students is critical to degree

completion. A third administrator listed the LDARP as their unit's established retention plan for

second-year students.

Student success and support initiatives. Administrators were asked the open-ended

question *"What programs and/or services, in which you are aware of, did Governors State*

University have in place to ensure the curricular and co-curricular success of its very first

cohort of first-year students?" Six administrators responded to the question and responses are

listed below in Table 12.

Table 12: Student success and support initiatives responses

No.	Responses
1	"First year seminar, peer mentors, special programming for cohort students, Smart Start, Safety net, Save your semester.
2	"First time on campus orientation program with optional attendance previous evening; restricted registration (had to have prior Academic Advisor approval)."
3	"Smart Start One-on-one advising."

4	"Clearly articulated student learning outcomes, block-scheduled, themed required courses; designated first year advisor; designated student success teams (five member per themed cohort); trained peer mentors (1 per 30 students); early start for those who needed extra work in English or Math; and supplemental instruction during the fall semester in English and Math."
5	"Services in place for first-year cohort in 2014 were, supplemental instruction, Smart Start Program (previously Early Start), Academic Recovery Program, and Peer Mentoring Program."
6	"Developmental academic advising, peer mentor program, cohort based curriculum."

Administrators were also asked if they believe the programs listed above are effective in

retaining first-year and first-generation students, eighty-six percent (6) of administrators

indicated that they believe the programs are effective in retaining first-year and first-generation

college students; and 14 percent (1) indicated that they did not believe the programs were

effective. One administrator stated that the students that were recruited were not academically

prepared for a cohort model program.

Lessons learned. Administrators were asked the open-ended question *"What did*

Governors State University (or your unit) learn from its first cohort of first-year students?" Six

administrators responded to the question and responses are listed below in Table 13.

Table 13: Student success and support initiatives responses

No.	Responses
1	"I learned much from teaching first year seminar, but only a small amount from my role as an administrator. As a first generation college grad, I know you need to meet students where their skills are."
2	"Many were not prepared for the rigors of a university curriculum."
3	"They learned that the students needed a much greater amount of assistance than expected."
4	"Students had greater financial needs that were anticipated; they didn't understand the reasons for the curricular design; they didn't take full advantage of the student success teams; they over-estimated their academic success (particularly mid-term of fall); they made tremendous changes in a short time, when they realized what they needed to do to become academically successful; they became leaders when they returned to campus as sophomores."
5	"We learned quickly after the first semester that we had to implement additional services, programs and early alert systems to assist students. During the first semester (fall 2014), we learned that a lot of freshmen were not prepared for college based on

	academic and behaviors. We had to implement many of the programs/initiatives listed above to provide additional support.”
6	“My unit learned that the university has a lot of work to do each year as we prepare for another cohort to enter the university. We are lacking significantly on the student engagement aspect of having traditional-aged students. We need to increase the impact of positive peer influence.”

Modification to practices. Administrators were asked the open-ended question *"How did Governors State University (or your unit) modify its practices for its second cohort of first-year students?"* Six administrators responded to the question and responses are listed below in Table 14.

Table 14: Modification to practices

No.	Responses
1	“More planning.”
2	“Not aware of any modifications.”
3	“Retrained staff and updated communication plan.”
4	“Many subtle changes including more faculty training (ongoing), more peer mentor training (ongoing), adding a second academic advisor, adding mid-term grades this fall, issuing more dependable laptops (instead of tablets) and requiring training before disbursing them; added P/NP grades to Early Start (now Smart Start) program; required attendance at supplemental instruction.”
5	“We have programs and early alert strategies in place to flag at-risk students earlier. We also created programs such as the ACHIEVE Program (Piloted Fall 2015) to support freshmen who did not successfully complete the Smart Start Program Also last year, freshmen Math and English supplemental instruction were outside class tutoring sessions and were not well attended. This year for fall 2015, supplemental instruction is embedded in the classes.”
6	“Our department increased the staff.”

Students' academic preparedness. Forty-three percent (3) of administrators believe that GSU's 59 percent retention rate of its first cohort of first-year students is primarily due to students' lack of academic preparedness. Fifty-seven percent (4) of administrators do not believe that GSU's 59 percent retention rate is related to students' lack of academic preparedness. Five administrators listed the reasons for their responses. One administrator stated that the retention rate is primarily due to the institution's learning curve of teaching a younger, less experienced

demographic. The respondent further stated *"while some students are not as prepared as we may wish, that is only a small contributor."* Another administrator responded *"it is also our preparation and service for them."* The remaining three administrators cited immaturity, students' inability to handle the rigors of a 15 credit hour cohort program, attendance and lack of turning in assignments, as reasons for the 59 percent retention rate.

Institutional preparedness. Seventeen percent (1) of administrators believe that GSU's 59 percent retention rate of its first cohort of first year students is primarily due to the institution's lack of preparedness. Eight-three percent (5) believe that GSU's 59 percent retention rate is not due to the institution's lack of preparedness. One administrator listed the following reason for his/her response *"the university took many steps to prepare for first-year students. However, the best preparation is experience. You can only do so much to prepare for something that comes with a high level of unpredictability. I do think that the 59% retention rate is due to the university's inability to be flexible and quickly react to the needs of our first-year students as they arose."*

Financial impact on student persistence. Eighty-six percent (6) of administrators believe that financial concerns played a role in nearly 40 percent of GSU's first cohort of first year students not persisting to their second year. Fourteen percent (1) of administrators do not believe that financial concerns impacted first to second year persistence. Two administrators listed reasons for their response. Both administrators believe that financial concerns played a role, but not a role of significance. One administrator indicated that the university addressed students' financial concerns after the first semester. The other administrator believed that the lack of knowledge about available financial options was more of an issue.

Educational and career goals. One hundred percent (7) of administrators believe that GSU's programs and services can assist first year students achieve their educational and career goals. Five administrators listed reasons for their response. One administrator stated that the students are very low performing, therefore, GSU's programs and services can only assist students achieve their educational and career goals to a certain extent. The other administrators stated that GSU have many programs and services to assist students reach their goals.

Cultural inclusiveness. Eighty-three percent (5) of administrators believe that GSU offers a culturally inclusive environment. Seventeen percent (1) of administrators do not believe that GSU offers a culturally inclusive environment. Five administrators provided reasons for their response. One administrator responded *"I think there's a lot of potential, but currently, there's not a significant amount of interactions between students of different cultures. When you look around campus, you'll see a lot of students who come from similar racial backgrounds staying around other students of the same backgrounds."* The other administrators believe that GSU's programming, specifically clubs and student life, attempts to address various cultures.

Seventy-one percent (5) of administrators believe that strengthening GSU's cultural environment could play a key role in increasing the retention rates for first-year students. Twenty-nine percent (2) of administrators do not believe so. Four administrators listed reasons for their responses and it is displayed in Table 15.

Table 15: Cultural inclusiveness

No.	Responses
1	"Obviously, the more welcomed a student is, the more s/he will feel a part of the university."
2	"We need to build the culture of success here, especially for this new population of younger students. The core group of adult students can help with this."
3	"Yes, students need to feel a connection with the University and faculty. In some of our workshops, some first-year students have expressed that they do not have a connection with faculty and cannot approach them to ask about their grades. I just think some instructors had difficulties adjusting to teaching first-year students because they were

	used to teaching adult learners. Instructors automatically assumed first-year students knew things that were common knowledge when in reality the students did not know."
4	"Yes, but I don't think that it is a top priority at the moment. That would not be the area that would have the most significant impact."

Finally, administrators were asked if there was anything else that they wanted to add to

the *survey*. Two people answered the questions. One administrator responded *"my area only*

deals with students on a limited basis." The second administrator responded *"retention is a*

complex concept with many variables to consider."

Table 16: Survey questions to GSU's administrators and responses

Survey Question	Yes	No
1. Does your program, service or unit have established retention goals for first year students? If yes, please list goals.	71% (5)	29% (2)
2. Were your program, service, or unit goals developed in collaboration with another unit on campus? If yes, please list the units.	71% (5)	29% (2)
3. Does your program, service, or unit have initiatives specifically targeting first-generation college students? If yes, please list the initiatives.	43% (3)	57% (4)
4. If your unit does not have initiatives specifically targeting first-generation students, are there any plans to implement such initiatives in the near future? If yes, please list plans. **Note:** *Two people skipped this question.*	20% (1)	80% (4)
5. Does your program, service, or unit have an established retention plan for second year students? If known, please list reasons why or why not.	57% (4)	43% (3)
6. What programs and/or services, in which you are aware of, did Governors State University have in place to ensure the curricular and co-curricular success of its very first cohort of first-year students in 2014? **Note:** *One person skipped this question.*	**	**
7. In your opinion, do you believe that the programs that you listed above are effective in retaining first-year and first-generation students? Please list your reasons why or why not.	86% (6)	14% (1)
8. What did Governors State University (or your unit) learn from its first cohort of first year students? **Note:** *One person skipped this question.*	**	**
9. How did Governors State University (or your unit) modify its practices for its second cohort of first-year students?	**	**
10. Governors State University currently have a 59% retention rate for its first cohort of first-year students. In your opinion, do you think that the current retention rate is primarily due to students' lack of academic preparedness? Please list your reasons why or why not.	43% (3)	57% (4)
11. In your opinion, do you think that the 59% retention rate for Governors State University's first cohort of first-year students is primarily due to the institution's lack of preparedness for first-year students? Please list your reasons why or why not. **Note:** *One person skipped this question.*	17% (1)	83% (5)
12. In your opinion, do you think that financial concerns played a role in nearly 40% of Governors State University's first cohort of first year students not persisting to their second year? Please list your reasons why or why not.	86% (6)	14% (1)

13. In your opinion, do you feel that Governors State University's programs and services can assist first year students achieve their educational and career goals? Please list your reasons why or why not.	100% (7)	0% (0)
14. In your opinion, do you feel that Governors State University offers a culturally inclusive environment? Please list your reasons why or why not. **Note:** *One person skipped this question.*	83% (5)	17% (1)
15. In your opinion, do you feel that strengthening Governors State University's cultural environment could play a key role in increasing the retention rates for first year students? Please list your reasons why or why not.	71% (5)	29% (2)
16. Is there anything else you would like to add? **Note:** *Five people skipped this question.*	**	**

** - Solely open-ended questions.

One-on-one interviews. One-on-one interviews were conducted with four

administrators at GSU. Three administrators were a part of GSU's executive leadership cabinet,

representing academic affairs, and one administrator was a senior leader in GSU's student affairs

division. Each person interviewed was comfortable and open to answering questions about

GSU's transition to a four-year institution, their institutional role, and their departmental

retention practices and goals. The following common themes emerged from each interview:

- GSU's transition to a four-year institution was necessary;

- GSU's general education curriculum fosters student success;

- GSU's co-curricular programs and services target and support first-generation college students;

- Many first-year students were under-prepared for college;

- Students' attendance was a major factor of student success;

- GSU was prepared to accept first-year students.

Chapter 6. Discussion

The purpose of this case study was to examine the transition of GSU from an upper-division university to a four-year institution and its impact (in terms of curricular and co-curricular programs and services) on the retention and persistence of first-year, first-generation college students. The goal is to add to research about the types of adjustments that could be made to curricular and co-curricular programs and services that would support the transition process for first-year, first-generation college students. Additionally, to aid in the development of best practices in retaining first-year, first-generation college students through graduation at GSU and other post-secondary institutions.

6.1 Discussion related to findings of the study

Discussion of quantitative findings. The case study presented in Chapter 4, revealed that GSU's goal was to admit 270 students in its first cohort of first year students; and 270 students the following year in its second cohort of first-year students, with an 80 percent retention rate. As illustrated in Table 6 (located in Chapters 4 and 5), GSU admitted 242 students in its first cohort, 28 students shy of its enrollment goals; and enrolled 233 students, 37 students shy of its enrollment goals, in its second cohort of first-year students. Of the 242 first-year students from its first freshman cohort, 143 students enrolled in the Fall 2015 semester, resulting in a 59 percent retention rate of its first cohort of first-year students. Thus, GSU fell 29 percent shy of its 80 percent Fall to Fall retention goal.

These findings align with research on first-year students' retention and persistence that is discussed in the literature review. Research (Tinto, 1975; Isher & Upcraft, 2005) reveals that more students withdraw from their institution within the first year of college. Additionally, data from the National Student Clearinghouse® Research Center™ 2013 Snapshot Report on

persistence and retention, reveal that 68.7 percent of all first-time students who started in Fall 2012, returned to college at any U.S. institution in Fall 2013. Furthermore, for each entering cohort year, the overall persistence rate ranks higher than the retention rate. This holds true for GSU.

Institutional data on GSU's 2014 cohort of first-year students shows that 40 students left the institution after their first semester of college; and a greater amount, 62 students, in its 2015 cohort of first-year students left after their first semester. Twenty-three students from GSU's first cohort of second year students did not return for the Spring 2016 semester. As evidenced by GSU's institutional data, the number of non-returning second year students is less than the number of non-returning first-year students from GSU's first and second cohorts of first year students. While GSU's overall Fall to Fall retention rate of its first-year students is below average at 59 percent, the institution's Fall to Spring persistence rates, for both cohorts, ranks higher.

GSU's institutional data on its first cohort of second-year students shows that retention and persistence problems exists among this population as well. Also illustrated in Table 6, 143 second-year students were enrolled in Fall 2015 and 120 students persisted to the Spring 2016 semester. The institution's second-year students are remaining students from GSU's first cohort of 242 first-year students. Therefore, GSU's Fall 2015 to Spring 2016 retention rate of its second- year students is 49.5 percent. These particular findings provides validity to research on the persistence and retention of second-year students. Research (Tobolowsky & Cox, 2007) reveals that many sophomore students struggle during their second year of college, and many are likely to withdraw at the end of their sophomore year (Freedman, 1956).

Discussion of qualitative findings. Findings from the online survey, completed by 7 administrators of curricular and co-curricular programs and services, and interviews with four executive administrators at GSU; reveal that overall, administrators' have a positive perception of GSU's transition to a traditional four-year institution, and its effectiveness on retaining first-year and first-generation college students. Additionally, administrators believe that GSU was prepared to admit its first-cohort of first-year students. Providing support to the quantitative results, the qualitative findings reveal that the administrators' responses and beliefs primarily does not align with the reality of GSU's current situation--that is the institution's 59 percent retention rate of its first-year students.

Through the examination of the survey results and the interviews with executive administrators, it is clear that GSU has developed a general education curriculum that is not only designed to foster the academic success of students, but to develop them in a holistic manner. The thematic approach to the curriculum, the collaborative efforts between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs, and the reporting structure of the Academic Affairs and Student Affairs units, provides some evidence for this. Administrators continuously identify five main programs and/or services as mechanisms of support for first-year and first-generation college students, as well as for second-year students:

- Smart Start

- First-Year Seminar

- Lower Division Academic Recovery Program (LDARP)

- ACHIEVE Program

- Peer Mentoring

Although the goal of these programs are to provide supplementary support to students who are experiencing academic difficulties and to help them to persist; these programs are being used as "one-size-fit all" strategies to address the diverse needs of each unique subpopulation of students.

For example, research (Thayer, 2000; McDonough, 2004; Hottinger & Rose, 2006) shows that the transition to college can be particularly difficult for first-generation college students, that this subpopulation of students usually have inadequate academic preparation, and are more likely to drop out of college after their first year. The retention of first-generation college students could be improved through programs specifically and solely targeted to this group. As presented in the literature review, this is proven by the successful outcomes of award-winning programs, specifically targeting first-generation college students, implemented by CIC institutions.

Tinto (1975) argues that if a first-year student is able to make the initial transition into college, then the student must be intellectually and socially assimilated into the institution's culture. Findings show that GSU is taking noteworthy strides to academically and socially integrate first-year students into the institution's culture (e.g. freshman cohort model, student engagement in High Impact Practices). However, and as revealed in Chapter 4, the institution's entire freshman program is targeted to first-generation college students. With the unique problems that this subpopulation of students face, intentional programs and services should be implemented that specifically serves this group.

Like first-year and first-generation college students, second-year students have their own set of unique challenges. Freedman (1956) discovered that "socially-oriented" sophomores found the demands of college to be demanding. Margolis (1976) believed that sophomores experience

phases of identity crisis as it relates to their academic, social and personal life. Therefore, programs designed specifically for second-year students are beneficial for their persistence and retention.

Lessons and Modifications. GSU's administrators are in unison about the lessons learned from the institution's first cohort of first-year students. The commonly cited lessons are:

- Students were academically underprepared for college;

- Students had low class attendance rates;

- Faculty were not accustomed to teaching freshmen students;

- Financial concerns;

- Implementation of additional initiatives were needed to provide further support.

The majority of administrators also cite these lessons as the primary reasons for the institution's 59 percent retention rate of its first cohort of first-year students. In response to the learned lessons, the institution made modifications to its internal processes (e.g. mid-term grades, earlier admission) and developed additional programs (e.g. ACHIEVE Program) in efforts to remedy the problems that existed in its 2014 cohort of first-year students.

Tinto (1975) believes that students' goal and institutional commitments are critical predictors of students' experiences; and that students' goal to complete college is dependent upon institutional commitment. High levels of institutional commitment will result in students committing to the goal of completing college. However, if institutional commitments are low, students may depart from the institution. The modifications to programs and services implemented by GSU's administrators, illustrates the institution's commitment to fostering the academic success of its first-year students. These adjustments were made to help prevent the same outcomes with future cohorts of first-year students.

Despite incorporated modifications, problems with student persistence continue to exist in GSU's 2015 cohort of first-year students. As displayed in Table 6, the Fall 2015 to Spring 2016 persistence rate of first-year students is 73.4 percent, whereas the Fall 2014 to Spring 2015 persistence rate was 83.5 percent. The 10 percent decline in student persistence from Fall to Spring, could be an early indication that the institution's Fall to Fall retention rate of its second cohort of first-year students, may be lower than its existing 59 percent. These findings suggest that there are fundamental problems that transcend those cited by GSU's administrators as primary factors of the institution's low retention rate. These findings further suggest that some accountability of the institution's retention problem, must be accepted by GSU's executive administrative leadership.

Cultural inclusiveness. The majority of administrators (83 percent) believe that GSU offer a culturally inclusive environment. The majority of administrators (71 percent) also believe that the strengthening of GSU's cultural environment could play a key role in increasing the retention rates for first-year students. These are significant findings because both of the institution's freshman cohorts comprise of predominantly minority students. Administrators' unison about the strengthening of GSU's environment suggest that improvement in that area is necessary.

Research (Herndon & Hirt, 2004; Tinto, 2006; Horwedel, 2008) states that ethnic minority students are more difficult to retain. Research (Gamboa & Vasquez, 2006) further states that postsecondary institutions must take intentional actions to better support diverse student populations and to increase institutional diversity among faculty, staff, and students. Considering that African-Americans are hesitant about seeking assistance from trained professionals due to fear of stigmatization (Herndon & Hirt, 2004); and Hispanic students' barriers (e.g. familial,

cultural, financial disparities; lack of peer support for academic achievement) greatly impact

their retention (Gamboa & Vasquez, 2006), more inclusive practices should be implemented to

minimize possible feelings of marginalization and/or isolation. Efforts to strengthen GSU's

cultural inclusiveness could also help to build a culture of success among the institution's first-

year students.

Summation of findings. In summary, the quantitative findings of this study reveal that

GSU has an overall retention rate of 59 percent for its first cohort of first-year students; and a 60

percent retention rate of its first-time, full-time freshman. The 60 percent retention rate falls 4 to

18 percentage points below the national average threshold of 64.2 to 77.9 percent (American

College Testing, 2014). The findings also reveal declining enrollment and persistence rates of

the institution's second cohort of first-year students; as well as declining persistence rates among

its second-year students.

The qualitative findings of this study--administrators' perspectives--reveal that there is a

disconnection from the quantitative findings. While GSU's overall 59 percent retention rate of its

first cohort of first-year students, and subsequent declining persistence rates, show signs of

institutional ineffectiveness; administrators' have positive perceptions about the institution's

effectiveness in retaining first-year and first-generation college students. Administrators also

believe that GSU was prepared to admit its first cohort of freshman.

The study's findings have research support from the literature review that include studies

from Freedman (1956), Tinto (1975), Margolis (1976), Thayer (2000), McDonough (2004), Isher

& Upcraft (2005); Hottinger & Rose (2006), and Tobolowsky & Cox (2007). The research

support provided insight into possible reasons why GSU's first and second-year students

withdrew from the institution; how programs and services could be refined to help the transition

of first-generation college students; demonstrate GSU's commitment to student success as well

as illustrate how the institution's actions may impact student retention. The findings, along with

research support, provide general answers to the four research questions guiding the study:

1. To what extent did the transition of GSU from an upper-division university to a

   traditional four-year institution impact the retention and persistence rates of first-year

   students?

2. To what extent did the transition of GSU from an upper-division university to a

   traditional four-year institution impact the retention and persistence rates of its first

   cohort of second year students?

3. How do administrators at GSU perceive the institution's transition from an upper-

   division university to a traditional four-year institution and its effectiveness on

   retaining first-year students?

4. How do administrators at GSU perceive the institution's transition from an upper-

   division university to a traditional four-year institution and its effectiveness on

   retaining first-generation college students?

Quantitative findings (institutional data) provides general answers to research questions 1

and 2. The declining Fall 2014 to Spring 2015 persistence rate of first-year students; and

declining Fall 2015 to Spring 2016 persistence rate of first-year students, immediately indicates a

recurring problem with retention. Based on that specific data, it is clear that the transition of

GSU from an upper-division university to a traditional four-year university had an impact on the

retention and persistence rates of first-year students. However, further information is needed to

determine the extent of the impact (e.g. upper-division student retention rate patterns prior to

GSU's downward expansion).

GSU's 59 percent Fall 2014 to Fall 2015 retention rate of its first cohort of freshman also serves as an indicator that the institution's transition had an impact on student retention. Specifically, only 141 students from the institution's first cohort of 242 freshmen, enrolled as sophomores in Fall 2015. Additionally, 120 of those students persisted to the Spring 2016 semester, resulting in a 49.5 percent Fall 2014 to Spring 2016 retention rate of its first cohort of first-year students. This data also proves that GSU's transition from an upper-division university to a traditional four-year institution had an impact on the retention and persistence rates of its first cohort of second-year students. Particularly, since modifications were made to the institution's processes, programs, and services to provide additional support.

Qualitative findings answers research questions 3 and 4. As before mentioned, administrators' responses from the survey and one-on-one interviews reveal an overall positive perception of GSU's transition from an upper-division university to a traditional four-year institution and its effectiveness on retaining first-year and first-generation college students.

6.2 Strengths and limitations

The strength of this study is the quantitative institutional data. The quantitative data presents solid numerical facts on enrollment, persistence, and retention trends of its lower division students. Additionally, it provides an overview of institutional performance in terms of its ability to retain first-year and second-year students. The review of supporting documents used in the case study, is also a strength of the study. The supporting documents provided pertinent information about how GSU initiated and culminated its transformation to a four-year traditional university.

The second phase of this study was restricted to qualitative data collection from administrators of curricular and co-curricular programs and services at GSU; and senior

executive leadership in Academic Affairs and Student Affairs units. The findings may be limited in scope due to the small number of participants in this study. Additionally, the study's participants did not include faculty and students. For example, the one-on-one interviews were conducted with senior executive administrators that had specific responsibilities in GSU's transition. Therefore, the results could have potentially presented biased views about the institution's transition to a four-year traditional university and its effectiveness in retaining first-year students. Finally, this study did not factor in persistence rates among residential and commuter students. Research (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991) shows that students who live on or near campus during their first year are more likely to persist and to complete their baccalaureate degrees.

6.3 Future directions

As a whole, this study added to the body of research on the retention of first-year students and first-generation college students at postsecondary institutions. Additionally, this study added to internal research studies on first-year students at GSU. Future research at GSU should continue to focus on uncovering specific curricular and co-curricular and/or institutional factors that can affect the retention of future cohorts of first-year students. For example, does the thematic general education curriculum or cohort model impact first-year student retention?

Future studies should also be conducted among students from the first and second cohorts of first-year students that withdrew from the university. Findings from this particular study may provide the most authentic information on possible programmatic and/or institutional shortcomings. This type of study may also bring forth external factors that played a role in the students' withdrawal; and provide insights on how GSU could better assist them.

Replicating this study by expanding it to include a combination of faculty, staff, and, students would provide wide-ranging viewpoints on the institution's transition and effectiveness, from various stakeholders. Finally, future research could add to this study by individually comparing GSU to one of their national peer institutions that has also experienced a downward expansion. Specifically, the University of Houston-Clear Lake, who has also expanded downward and accepted its first freshman class in Fall 2014. As illustrated in Table 11, the University of Houston-Clear Lake (UHCL) first class of freshmen consisted of 211 students. At the beginning of the 2015-2016 academic year, 71 percent of the institution's freshmen returned to campus as sophomores. Comparing GSU to the UHCL would be beneficial because it would provide GSU's executive leadership with insight into what specific curricular and co-curricular programs and/or services, as well as institutional strategies, enabled the UHCL to achieve a retention rate within the national average range after its first year of transition to a four-year traditional university. This information could possibly steer GSU in the direction of improving its retention of first-year students.

Chapter 7. Conclusions

First-year student retention is a problematic issue that many postsecondary institutions face across the nation (Isher & Upcraft, 2005); and GSU is not an exception. Once operating as an upper-division graduate institution for nearly 45 years, GSU experienced a transformational change by adding a lower division. This new addition to the university not only brought forth new traditional-aged first-year students, but also brought forth new challenges. Ultimately, those new challenges resulted in a low retention rate for its first cohort of first-year students. Although GSU's retention rate of its first cohort of first-year students are below the national average, with its unique thematic general education curriculum, further refinement of its existing support structures, and recruiting efforts, the institution shows promise to stand alongside its higher ranking national peers listed in Table 11.

GSU's transformational change is the result of an executed vision by the institution's executive administrative leadership. The vision was fueled by the want to provide an essential service to the region, provide students with a full undergraduate experience, and to improve the fiscal health of the institution. GSU's leadership's decision to implement a transformational change also changed the institution's culture which affected its stakeholders at every level.

To explore the ramifications of GSU's transition, this case study employed a sequential explanatory mixed-methods research design. This design was used to examine the transition of GSU from an upper-division graduate university to a four-year institution and its impact (in terms of curricular and co-curricular programs and services) on the retention and persistence of first-year, first-generation college students. This study analyzed statistical institutional data on first-year student enrollment, persistence, and retention; data from an online survey via Survey Monkey software; and data from four one-on-one interviews. The results reveal solid evidence of

a negative impact on the retention and persistence of first-year students that stemmed from the institution's transition, however, the extent of the impact could not be determined due to missing variables. Additionally, GSU's administrators have a positive perception of the institution's transition and its ability to effectively retain first-year and first-generation college students.

While administrators' have positive perceptions of GSU's transition and ability to effectively retain first-year and first-generation college students, the statistical institutional data on persistence and retention indicates the opposite. However, Chapter 4 revealed genuine institutional efforts to improve student success rates. This is evidenced by the implemented modifications (e.g. mid-term grades, ACHIEVE program, etc.) to its processes and service offerings to provide better curricular support. However, the persistence trends of GSU's second cohort of first-year does not reflect improved processes and/or curricular support.

As discussed in the literature, Spady's (1970b) theory of student dropout is reliant upon two variables: social rewards (e.g. involvement in co-curricular activities, friendships) and academic rewards (e.g. high grade point average, test scores, etc.). These variables assist students to acclimate to the college experience. If students cannot adjust to these variables, withdrawing from the institution becomes an option (Spady, 1970b). First-year students' engagement in GSU's HIPs, learning communities, and the institution's thematic and cohort model general education curriculum; shows that GSU may be successful at helping students garner social rewards. However, declining persistence and retention rates of its first-year students, suggest that the institution has not identified successful ways to help students garner academic rewards.

The literature review points out that the freshman-to-sophomore retention rate and the cohort graduation rate are considered academic indicators of excellence and are commonly among the metrics used to define prominence of postsecondary institutions (Voigt & Hundrieser,

2008). Together, these statistics depict the overall quality of student learning and intellectual involvement; the depth of student integration in campus life; and how effectively a campus meets the expectations and needs of students (p. 1). As it currently stands, GSU's first-year student persistence and retention rates does not indicate the institution's effectiveness in meeting the expectations and needs of students.

When prospective applicants explore GSU as a possible option to obtain their postsecondary education, the institution's first-year student metrics may deter prospective students from following through with the application process--especially higher performing students. The prospective students may not know the institution's internal efforts to improve student success. In light of this, it is imperative that GSU's executive administrative leadership continuously seek and institute proven process improvement measures and strategically refined programs and/or services that ultimately results in competitive first-year student persistence and retention rates. Not only is this necessary for GSU to achieve one of its Vision 2020 goals, "to attain first year to second year retention rates that surpass the national average for peer institutions," but is also necessary for the institution's economic stability.

7.1 Recommendations

To aid in increasing the retention and persistence of first-year and first-generation college students at GSU, the following recommendations are being made:

- Executive administrative leadership make efforts to obtain funding to implement TRiO programs. As discussed in the literature review, TRiO programs has proven to have a significant impact on the educational outcomes of low-socioeconomic, first-generation college students and students with disabilities (The Pell Institute, 2009).

- Implement early recruitment strategies. GSU should begin recruitment efforts at middle schools. Specifically, at seventh and eighth grade levels. Because first-to-second year student retention is a longitudinal process (Tinto, 1993), administrators at GSU could develop relationships with seventh and eighth grade guidance counselors and give annual presentations about the institution and its curricular and co-curricular offerings.

- Develop strategic partnerships with a select number of local high schools in the Chicagoland area and provide college success programs and/or services (e.g. summer academic program similar to Smart Start) to a specific number of freshman and sophomore students identified as academically unprepared for college. Since GSU's recruitment efforts are targeted toward first-generation college students, it would be advantageous for the institution to engage with such prospective students early to make contributions toward their adequate academic preparation for college. These measures will allow GSU to make an early connection with students and could potentially result in an increased amount of direct admits should these students select GSU as their chosen postsecondary institution.

Chapter 8. Implications of the Study

This study has broad implications for administrators at GSU and other postsecondary institutions across the nation. Specifically, executive administrative leadership, administrators serving in the office of enrollment and recruitment, as well as administrators charged with developing curricular and co-curricular programs and services for first-year and first-generation college students. On a professional level, this study added to the body of research on the retention of first-year students and first-generation college students at postsecondary institutions.

The examination of administrators' perceptions about GSU's transition and the primary reasons why they believe that the institution has a low first-year student retention rate, not only illustrates the importance of institutional accountability, but also the importance of having intentional programs and services that specifically targets certain subpopulations of students. One-size-fit all strategies are not effective in retaining first-year students. Particularly, first-generation college students, as research (Hottinger & Rose, 2006; Amaya, 2010) shows that these students are academically underprepared and lack familial support systems.

On an organizational level, this study added to internal research studies on first-year students at GSU. Additionally, it added value to administrators in Academic Affairs and Student Affairs units, as well as instructional faculty, seeking ways to effectively connect with students in efforts to improve students' curricular and co-curricular experiences. The statistical institutional data on the enrollment, persistence, and retention of GSU's first-year and second-year students, is indicative of a clear problem in this important area. This type of problem signals an issue with institutional effectiveness (Voight & Hundreiser, 2008) and can be damaging to the institution's reputation. As a public state institution, dependent upon state and governmental

operating support; and required to report retention and graduation statistics, the organization's

primary goal should be to proactively seek ways to better support and retain its students.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Informational letter to survey participants

Greetings Administrator:

I am Tiffany M. Gethers, a doctoral candidate in the Interdisciplinary Leadership Program in the College of Education at Governors State University (GSU). I would like to invite you to participate in a research study for my doctoral capstone project. The purpose of this study is to examine the transition of GSU's transition from an upper-division university to a four-year institution and its impact (in terms of curricular and co-curricular programs and services) on the retention and persistence of first-year, first-generation students. You were selected to complete the following survey due to your role as a key administrator of a curricular or co-curricular program or service at GSU.

It is my sincere hope that you will participate in this valuable study. The collection and analysis of data from this study will not only enable me to share the story of GSU's transition, but will also inform the types of adjustments that could be made to curricular and co-curricular programs and services that would support the transition process and improve the retention and persistence rates for first-year, first-generation students at GSU and other post-secondary institutions. Participating in this survey is entirely voluntary, but answering each question will make the survey most effective. This survey will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete and all of your responses will be kept completely confidential. There are no risks to participating and you can stop your participation at any time. Additionally, there will not be any direct benefits to you for participating in this study.

Your assistance is greatly appreciated and invaluable. If you are interested in participating in this study, please click next to advance to the next screen and complete the survey. If you have any questions about this study, please do not hesitate to contact me at ████████████████. Thank you for your consideration.

Best regards,

Tiffany M. Gethers
GSU Doctoral Candidate

Appendix B: Survey protocol

*1. What is your role on the Governors State University campus?
 ___Administrator of a curricular programs and/or services
 ___Administrator of co-curricular programs and/or services

2. Does your program, service or unit have established retention goals for first year students? Yes or No. If yes, please list goals.

3. Were your program, service, or unit goals developed in collaboration with another unit on campus? Yes or No. If yes, please list the units.

4. Does your program, service, or unit have initiatives specifically targeting first-generation college students? Yes or No. If yes, please list the initiatives.

5. If your unit does not have initiatives specifically targeting first-generation students, are there any plans to implement such initiatives in the near future? Yes or No. If yes, please list plans.

6. Does your program, service, or unit have an established retention plan for second year students? If known, please list reasons why or why not.

7. What programs and/or services, in which you are aware of, did Governors State University have in place to ensure the curricular and co-curricular success of its very first cohort of first-year students in 2014?

8. In your opinion, do you believe that the programs that you listed above are effective in retaining first-year and first-generation students? Please list your reasons why or why not.

9. What did Governors State University (or your unit) learn from its first cohort of first year students?

10. How did Governors State University (or your unit) modify its practices for its second cohort of first-year students?

11. Governors State University currently have a 59% retention rate for its first cohort of first-year students. In your opinion, do you think that the current retention rate is primarily due to students' lack of academic preparedness? Please list your reasons why or why not.

12. In your opinion, do you think that financial concerns played a role in nearly 40% of Governors State University's first cohort of first year students not persisting to their second year? Please list your reasons why or why not.

13. In your opinion, do you feel that Governors State University's programs and services can assist first year students achieve their educational and career goals? Please list your reasons why or why not.

14. In your opinion, do you feel that Governors State University offers a culturally inclusive environment? Please list your reasons why or why not.

15. In your opinion, do you feel that strengthening Governors State University's cultural environment could play a key role in increasing the retention rates for first year students? Please list your reasons why or why not.

16. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix C: Letter of consent for survey participants

Protocol Title
The retention and persistence of first-year, first-generation college students at a mid-size public university: A Mixed Methods Case Study

Purpose of the Research Study
The purpose of this study is to examine the transition of Governors State University (GSU) from an upper-division graduate university to a four-year institution and its impact (in terms of curricular and co-curricular programs and services) on the retention and persistence of first-year, first-generation students.

What you will be asked to do in the study
If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete a 10-15 minute survey primarily about your role at GSU, the university's programs and services and retention goals and strategies for first-year, first-generation students.

Time required
Approximately 10-15 minutes

Confidentiality
The records of this research study will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law. Your information will be assigned a code number, in lieu of any personally identifying information. The list connecting your name to this number will be kept in a locked file in the researcher's office. Records will be destroyed after the conclusion of the data analysis and the student researcher's capstone preparation and defense. If there are any publications or presentations as a result of this study, there will not be any information included that will make it possible to identify any of the research participants. Additionally your name will not be used in any type of reports.

Compensation
Compensation will not be offered to participants. Participation is voluntary.

Voluntary participation
Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There is no penalty for not participating. If you decide to participate, you are free to refuse to answer any of the questions asked.

Right to withdraw from this study
You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences.

Benefits and risks
There are no direct benefits for this study. However, the information collected in this research study could provide GSU with insights on how to improve the institution's retention practices for first-year students. Additionally, the information collected could also inform the types of adjustments that could be made to curricular and co-curricular programs and services that would support the transition process for first-year, first-generation students. This has broad implications

for admissions, recruitment, increased retention rates, matriculation and graduation at GSU and other post-secondary institutions.

This research poses no risks to you as a study participant.

Whom to contact if you have questions about the study
Tiffany Gethers, Email: ███████████████████ or Dr. Jane Hudak, Professor, College of Arts & Sciences, Governors State University, 1 University Parkway, University Park, Illinois, Office: ██████████ Email: ████████████

Whom to contact about your rights as a research participant in the study
If you have questions about this project, you may contact the Governors State University Institutional Review Board Co-Chairs: ██████████████████████████████
██

Agreement
By continuing to proceed to the next screen I provide my electronic consent to voluntarily participate in this survey.

Appendix D: Informational letter to interview participants

Greetings Administrator:

I am Tiffany M. Gethers, a doctoral candidate in the Interdisciplinary Leadership Program in the College of Education at Governors State University (GSU). I would like to invite you to participate in a research study for my capstone project. The purpose of this study is to examine the transition of GSU from an upper-division university to a four-year institution and its impact (in terms of curricular and co-curricular programs and services) on the retention and persistence of first-year, first-generation students. You were selected as a participant in this study due to your role as a key senior administrator of a curricular or co-curricular program or service at GSU.

It is my sincere hope that you will participate in this valuable study. If you agree to participate, you will be interviewed by me (the principal researcher) via an approximately 60 minute one-on-one, face-to-face interview. You will be asked questions relating to GSU's transition to a four-year institution, your institutional role, institutional and/or departmental retention practices and goals for first-year and first-generation students, modifications to institutional and/or departmental programs and services to support first-year and first-generation students, and your thoughts on institutional policies and strategies that are effective in retaining first-year and first-generation students. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and all of your responses will be kept confidential. Your identity will not be disclosed to any other person or groups outside of the researchers conducting the study. There are no risks for participating and you can stop your participation at any time. Additionally, there will not be any direct benefits to you for participating in this study.

Your assistance is greatly appreciated and invaluable. The collection and analysis of data from this study will not only enable me to share the story of GSU's transition, but will also inform the types of adjustments that could be made to curricular and co-curricular programs and services that would support the transition process and improve the retention and persistence rates for first-year, first-generation students at GSU and other post-secondary institutions. If you are interested in participating in this study, please review and sign the attached letter of consent and kindly email back to me. If you have any questions about this study, please do not hesitate to contact me at █████████████████████ Thank you for your consideration.

Best regards,

Tiffany M. Gethers
GSU Doctoral Candidate

Appendix E: Interview protocol for senior executive administrator (first interviewee)

1. Approximately when did the decision to transition Governors State University (GSU) from an upper-division university to a traditional four-year institution arise? How long did the process take?

2. What was your vision behind transforming GSU to welcome first-year students? Why did you think it was necessary for GSU after nearly 45 years of serving as an upper-division university?

3. Was the transition of GSU significantly supported by faculty, staff, students, and other stakeholders?

4. How were you able to successfully lead the transition of GSU to a traditional four-year university? What specific leadership characteristics were key to obtaining buy-in from stakeholders?

5. What were some of the challenges?

6. Currently, GSU have a 59% retention rate of its first-year students, what are some of the primary strategies in place to increase GSU's retention of this student population to a percentage that matches or surpass the average first-year student retention rates at peer institutions?

7. Does GSU have a retention plan for its second year students?

8. What did GSU learn from its first cohort of first-year students?

9. Based on lessons learned, how did GSU modify its practices for its second cohort of first-year students?

10. In a past interview, conducted by Dr. Jane Hudak a couple years ago regarding leadership, you shared your commitment to ensuring first-generation college students receive a good education, are there any programs and services or initiatives currently at GSU (or underway) that specifically target this student population?

11. Are there plans in the near future for GSU to become the home to any of the Federal TRIO programs? Specifically, Student Support Services? As you know these programs increase retention and graduation rates for first-generation students by providing services, opportunities and resources that enhance personal skills and academic excellence?

12. Thank you for your time, is there anything else you would like to add?

Interview protocol for senior executive administrator (second interviewee)

1. What are your general thoughts about Governors State University (GSU) transitioning from an upper-division university to a traditional four-year university? Were you supportive of this transition, why or why not?

2. How did GSU's transition impact your specific role on campus?

3. How did GSU's transition impact your specific unit? What challenges were your unit faced with?

4. What programs and/or services did your unit have in place to ensure the curricular and co-curricular success of its very first cohort of first-year students in 2014?

5. Do you feel that these programs and/or services were effective in retaining first-year students? Why or why not?

6. Does programs and/or services offered by your unit specifically target (or serve) first-generation students? If so, what?

7. Do you feel that these programs and/or services were effective in retaining first-generation students? Why or why not?

8. In your opinion, what does your unit need to do to strengthen its effectiveness in the retention of first-year and first-generation students?

9. What did your unit learn from GSU's first cohort of first-year students?

10. How did your unit modify its practices for GSU's second cohort of first-year students?

11. Research shows that the retention of first-generation college students, particularly those from ethnic minority backgrounds is seriously problematic. In your opinion, do you feel that GSU offer a culturally inclusive environment? Why or why not?

12. In your opinion, do you feel that there are steps that GSU and/or your unit could take to strengthen a culturally inclusive environment? If so, what?

13. In your opinion, do you feel that GSU was fully prepared to accept first-year students? Why or why not?

14. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Interview protocol for senior executive administrator (third interviewee)

1. What are your general thoughts about Governors State University (GSU) transitioning from an upper-division university to a traditional four-year university? Were you supportive of this transition, why or why not?

2. How did GSU's transition impact your specific role on campus?

3. How did GSU's transition impact your specific unit? What challenges were your unit faced with?

4. Were there any university policies or strategies that had to be modified or newly developed to accommodate GSU's very first cohort of first-year students?

5. Do you feel that these polices or strategies were effective in retaining first-year students? Why or why not?

6. Do you feel that these policies or strategies were effective in retaining first-generation students? Why or why not?

7. In your opinion, what does GSU need to do to strengthen its effectiveness in the retention of first-year and first-generation students?

8. What did your unit learn from GSU's first cohort of first-year students?

9. How did your unit modify its practices for GSU's second cohort of first-year students?

10. Research shows that the retention of first-generation college students, particularly those from ethnic minority backgrounds is seriously problematic. In your opinion, do you feel that GSU offer a culturally inclusive environment? Why or why not?

11. In your opinion, do you feel that there are steps that GSU and/or your unit could take to strengthen a culturally inclusive environment? If so, what?

12. In your opinion, do you feel that GSU was fully prepared to accept first-year students? Why or why not?

13. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Interview protocol for senior executive administrator (fourth interviewee)

1. Please describe your role in the transition of Governors State University.

2. What was the charge of the General Education Taskforce?

3. What was the thought processes behind developing the general education curriculum?

4. What was your perspective of GSU's transformation to a four-year university?

5. Were GSU's faculty accustomed to teaching freshmen students?

6. Were there any adjustments that had to be made for the second cohort of first-year students?

7. Were there any professional development opportunities or trainings required of the faculty?

8. How would you describe the collaborative relationship between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs?

9. What do you think were contributing factors of GSU's 59 percent retention rate of its first cohort of first-year students?

10. What are the university's recruitment efforts?

11. Does GSU or your unit have a mechanism in place to measure the success of first-generation college students?

12. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Appendix F: Letter of Consent for interview participants

Protocol Title
The retention and persistence of first-year, first-generation college students at a mid-size public university: A Mixed Methods Case Study

Purpose of the Research Study
The purpose of this study is to examine the transition of Governors State University (GSU) from an upper-division graduate university to a four-year institution and its impact (in terms of curricular and co-curricular programs and services) on the retention and persistence of first-year, first-generation students.

What you will be asked to do in the study
If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in a 60-minute face-to-face interview session about the transition of GSU from an upper-division graduate university to a four-year university and its impact on the retention and persistence of first-year, first-generation students. Information from your interview session will be used to tell the story of GSU's transformation and will be included in the case study portion of the research study.

Time required
Approximately 60 minutes

Confidentiality
The records of this research study will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law. Your information will be assigned a pseudonym, in lieu of any personally identifying information. The list connecting your name to this pseudonym will be kept in a locked file in the researcher's office. Records will be destroyed after the conclusion of the data analysis and the student researcher's capstone preparation and defense. If there are any publications or presentations as a result of this study, there will not be any information included that will make it possible to identify any of the research participants. Additionally your name will not be used in any type of reports.

Compensation
Compensation will not be offered to participants. Participation is voluntary.

Voluntary participation
Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There is no penalty for not participating. If you decide to participate, you are free to refuse to answer any of the questions asked.

Right to withdraw from this study
You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences.

Benefits and risks
There are no direct benefits for this study. However, the information collected in this research study could provide Governors State University with insights on how to improve the institution's retention practices for first-year students. Additionally, the information collected could also

inform the types of adjustments that could be made to curricular and co-curricular programs and services that would support the transition process for first-year, first-generation students. This has broad implications for admissions, recruitment, increased retention rates, matriculation and graduation at Governors State University and other post-secondary institutions.

This research poses no risks to you as a study participant.

Whom to contact if you have questions about the study
Tiffany Gethers, Email: ███████████████████ or Dr. Jane Hudak, Professor, College of Arts & Sciences, Governors State University, 1 University Parkway, University Park, Illinois, Office: █████████████████████████

Whom to contact about your rights as a research participant in the study
If you have questions about this project, you may contact the Governors State University Institutional Review Board Co-Chairs: ███

Agreement
Your signature below and you decision to respond to the questions in this research study will indicate that you have read and understood the informational letter and you have agreed to participate in this study.

_____   _____   _____
First Name   Last Name   Date