

5-2014

A Study of the Student Retention Programs at Two Different Institutions of Higher Learning in the State of Arkansas

Roxanne (Woods) Bradow
Harding University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.harding.edu/hu-etd>

 Part of the [Educational Leadership Commons](#), and the [Higher Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

(Woods) Bradow, Roxanne, "A Study of the Student Retention Programs at Two Different Institutions of Higher Learning in the State of Arkansas" (2014). *Dissertations*. 37.

<https://scholarworks.harding.edu/hu-etd/37>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by Scholar Works at Harding. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Scholar Works at Harding. For more information, please contact scholarworks@harding.edu.



A STUDY OF THE STUDENT RETENTION PROGRAMS AT TWO DIFFERENT
INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING IN THE STATE OF ARKANSAS

by

Roxanne Woods Bradow

Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty of

Harding University

Cannon-Clary College of Education

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

The Degree of

Doctor of Education

In

Educational Leadership P-20

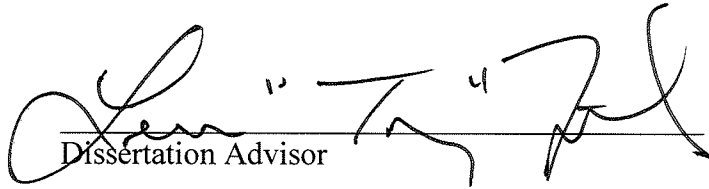
May 2014

A STUDY OF THE STUDENT RETENTION PROGRAMS AT TWO DIFFERENT
INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING IN THE STATE OF ARKANSAS

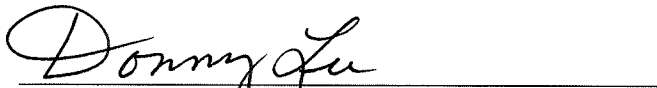
by

Roxanne Woods Bradow


Dissertation


Dissertation Advisor

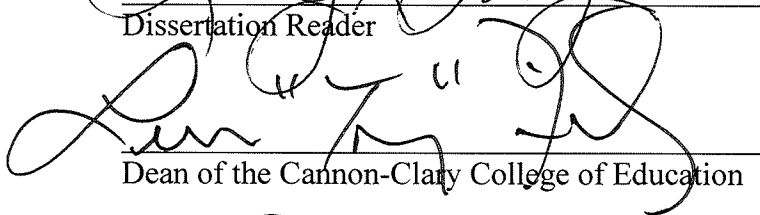
3/6/14
Date


Dissertation Reader

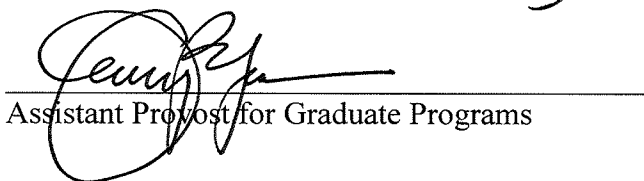
3-6-14
Date


Dissertation Reader

3-6-14
Date


Dean of the Cannon-Clary College of Education

3/6/14
Date


Assistant Provost for Graduate Programs

3-6-14
Date

©2014

Roxanne Woods Bradow

All Rights Reserved

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This dissertation represents the attainment of a lifelong goal. It was only possible because of the ongoing support and encouragement of many people: family, colleagues, teachers and mentors. My parents provided a solid foundation of high expectations and motivation to learn that has always served me well. My husband and friend, Bill Bradow, who passed away during my doctoral studies, always encouraged my every effort as a wife, mother, educator, and life-long student during our time together; and although he would occasionally laugh and say that someday he would quit bankrolling my “habit” of continuous education, he never did. His support, above that of all others, was invaluable and will be forever cherished. My children, Christian and Nathaniel, and my grandchildren, Hannah and Jacob, never indicated that they needed more personal attention as the years of graduate school went on and on. As adults, my sons constantly inspire me. Another great inspiration is my daughter-in-law, Carrie, a phenomenal educator, who is always willing to let me talk through my ideas on the importance of education. She graciously helped with the editing of this document.

I also want to thank the wonderful group of educators at my high school and my church family who pushed me to continue my studies when I felt overwhelmed and ready to give up. And the graduate teachers who generously shared their knowledge and wisdom are too numerous to mention. All of these people have influenced what I know

and do every day and, in the process, have helped me to become a better educator and person.

Finally, this dissertation is the product of the learning and encouragement acquired from my wonderful doctoral committee—Dr. Tony Finley, Dr. Larry Long, and Dr. Donnie Lee. Thank you for helping make my dream become a reality.

ABSTRACT

by
Roxanne Woods Bradow
Harding University
May 2014

Title: A Study of the Student Retention Programs at Two Different Institutions of Higher Learning in the State of Arkansas (Under the direction of Dr. Tony Finley)

The purpose of this qualitative multi-case study was to determine how two universities in the state of Arkansas with differing student demographics approach the problem of student retention in order to increase their graduation rates. College student retention has long been a concern in the United States and in the state of Arkansas. Providing a well-educated workforce is the only way either can thrive in the future knowledge-based economy. The research of Astin (1993), Tinto (1993, 1999, 2005, 2006), Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt & Associates (2005), Pascarella & Terenzini (2005), and others has shown that students choose to discontinue their postsecondary studies for many reasons over which institutions have little control. Even high admission standards cannot guarantee that the students matriculated will remain until they attain their degrees. Institutions do, however, have a great deal of control over a student's quality of experience while attending the institution. This quality of experience has been shown to increase student satisfaction, and as a result, student persistence and graduation rates.

Data used for this study included information from focus groups moderated by the researcher, individual interviews with members of the institutional retention teams, and

institutional information found at the universities and on the university websites. Focus group interviews were held on both campuses, from which the data were collected and analyzed for emerging themes. The focus groups used for this study were made up of institutional staff members directly involved with student retention on their respective campuses. Individual phone and face-to-face interviews were also used to collect data and to clarify information that had been collected. The programs, practices, and procedures of both university's retention efforts were first analyzed according to an analysis checklist of institutional best practices as determined by research. Then the two retention programs were compared using a cross-case analysis. Findings show that both universities use at least some of the strategies recommended by present research to increase student retention and graduation rates to their advantage.

This qualitative study provides a description of both retention programs, including how and why the programs were begun, what major events occurred during the program building process, what barriers to the process were encountered, and where both programs are now in their move toward greater student retention. This study also describes how the two universities have attempted to put assessments in place to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of their student retention efforts.

The research findings indicate that many factors influence the student retention efforts of institutions of higher learning, not the least of which is student demographics. These unique student demographics were at the heart of both retention programs, and while some problems were easily and quickly addressed, other problems were identified as more difficult to address due to time, staffing, and funding issues. One university's program was more systematic in its approach to retention, while the other's program was

only beginning to consider a systemized approach to retention. Despite the difficulties, however, both universities expressed determination to continue and expand their student retention efforts.

The descriptions of the two retention programs included in this study may provide other universities with ideas to help them expand their own student retention programs. Educational researchers may use the findings of this study as the basis for future qualitative or quantitative research to add to the existing knowledge base concerning college student retention.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| LIST OF FIGURES | xi |
| CHAPTER I—INTRODUCTION..... | 1 |
| Statement of the Problem..... | 3 |
| Research Questions..... | 4 |
| Description of Terms | 6 |
| Significance..... | 8 |
| Process to Accomplish..... | 12 |
| CHAPTER II—REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE | 18 |
| A Brief History of College Retention in the United States..... | 18 |
| Student-Centered Retention Research | 22 |
| Institution-Centered Retention Research | 39 |
| Current Reality within the United States | 44 |
| Current Reality in Arkansas..... | 51 |
| Best Practices Research | 57 |
| CHAPTER III—METHODOLOGY | 60 |
| Research Design..... | 62 |
| Sample..... | 66 |
| Instrumentation | 67 |
| Data Collection Procedures..... | 68 |

| | |
|----------------------------|-----|
| Analytical Methods | 73 |
| Limitations | 75 |
| CHAPTER IV—RESULTS | 77 |
| Case 1 | 77 |
| Case 2 | 107 |
| Summary | 129 |
| CHAPTER V—DISCUSSION | 131 |
| Cross-case Analysis | 137 |
| Conclusions | 141 |
| Limitations | 143 |
| Implications | 144 |
| Unexpected Results | 147 |
| Recommendations | 148 |
| REFERENCES | 153 |
| APPENDICES | 159 |

LIST OF FIGURES

1. Percentage of students in the 2005 cohort who completed a bachelor’s degree at 4-year institutions within 6 years – sorted by institutional control and gender.....26
2. Percentage of 25- to 29-year-olds who completed bachelor’s degrees for the selected years 1990-2012 - sorted by gender27
3. Full-time undergraduate enrollment by institutional level and control for the Fall of 2011 – sorted by student age28
4. Percentage of bachelor’s degrees for the selected years 1900-2012 – sorted by ethnicity.....30
5. 6-year graduation rates for full-time, first time students for the 2005 cohort – sorted by institutional selectivity32
6. Student retention rates among full-time, first time students who enrolled in a 4-year, post-secondary degree-granting institution in 2010 – sorted by admission type34
7. Average total cost of attending 4-year degree-granting institutions for first time, full-time students during the 2011-2012 school year by level and type of institution – sorted by living arrangement36
8. Percentage of employed full-time undergraduate students in October of 2011 – sorted by hours worked per week38

| | |
|--|----|
| 9. 2012 unemployment rates – sorted by age group and educational attainment..... | 47 |
| 10. Employment to population ratios in 2012 – sorted by age group and educational attainment | 49 |
| 11. The percentage of college graduates for the nation members of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and development compared to the percentage of United States college graduates for the years 2001, 2005, and 2010..... | 50 |
| 12. First-year retention rates for 4-year colleges in Arkansas – sorted by age | 57 |

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Student retention rates in colleges and universities across the United States have not substantially increased despite over 60 years of research. College enrollment reached 21 million in the Fall of 2010, an increase of 37% between the years of 2000 and 2010. Yet in 2003, over 43% of the American students who began their post-secondary education at 4-year colleges failed to earn a degree within 6 years (United States Department of Education, 2012).

The economic strength of any country heavily depends upon the education and skills of its workers, so the federal government has set a goal of raising the number of students who earn bachelor's degrees every year. In 1990, Congress enacted the Student Right-to-Know Act requiring colleges and universities to disclose the rate students complete academic programs at postsecondary education institutions (United States Department of Education, 2012). President Barack Obama stated in his address to Macomb College in Warren, Michigan, "by 2020, this nation will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world" (Whitehouse, 2012b). Presently, the United States ranks ninth in the number of young students enrolled in college behind such countries as Korea, Canada, and Japan (Whitehouse, 2012a). In 2009, the White House Office of the Press Secretary released a statement declaring that "jobs requiring at least an associate's degree are projected to grow twice as fast as those requiring no college

experience.” In that same year, Arkansas’s degree attainment for young students was 105,953 or 28% of those entering college. The President’s goal for the state is to increase the rate to between 48-60% by 2020 (Whitehouse, 2009). Having a continuously growing population of college graduates is crucial to the economies of both the United States and Arkansas.

Early research on retention in institutions of higher learning focused on student characteristics, attributing poor retention rates to several variables. Among these were the student’s high school grade point average (GPA), ACT composite score, socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity, the area or region from which the student came, placement in remedial courses, first semester college GPA, the number of courses a student enrolled in for the second semester, and whether the student lived in a dorm or commuted to school.

However, the results of these studies had the effect of blaming the victim and perpetuating the idea that some students were not ready for college. This conclusion suggested that an institution could do nothing to improve its retention rate other than increase exclusivity and enroll only the students who fit into the institution’s culture. Students were chosen on the basis of personal characteristics that made them more likely to remain in college.

The ensuing avoidance of lower achieving students did not appear to harm institutions much during the 1960s and 1970s because the Baby Boomer generation had begun to attend postsecondary institutions. Students were relatively abundant when young college-aged men could delay or avoid military service by attending college. Nevertheless, as the number of students decreased and the cost of a college education increased toward the end of the 20th century, student dropout rates became an issue. In

later decades as the number of technology-based businesses began to rise and American manufacturing jobs were increasingly out-sourced to other countries, it became apparent that many jobs in America required a workforce that was college-educated. This necessitated finding ways to keep students enrolled in college until they had earned a degree.

When researchers began to study the retention programs of various institutions, results indicated that some of these programs seemed to beat the odds by retaining a larger number of students until their graduations than expected. Tinto (1999) suggested that there was now a need for research into institutional retention programs to see what practices might lead to the successful program implementation that continues over time. In this project, the researcher studied the retention programs of two different institutions of higher education in the state of Arkansas that serve students of differing demographics in order to determine how each deals with the ongoing need to increase student retention.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this qualitative, multi-case study was to describe how each of two different institutions of higher learning in Arkansas respond to the need to increase the retention rate of its students, especially that of first-year, first time freshmen. Four main facets of inquiry guided the study. The first purpose of this multi-case study was to determine why retention programs were implemented at the two institutions, describing the characteristics and goals of each. The second purpose of this study was to review the data utilized in determining where and how limited resources are used to meet the needs and goals of the two programs. Tinto (1993) stated, “the beginning point of any

institutional policy consists of both an assessment of institutional mission and therefore of institutional priorities and an assessment of student attrition on campus” (p. 192). Since each institution is different based upon its mission, its purpose, and the demographics of the students that it serves, the policies and practices that each institution implements will vary. The third purpose of this study was to explore what assessments the institutions used to determine whether the programs met their chosen goals and how the assessment data were used to plan for program improvements. The fourth purpose of this study was to do a cross-case analysis (Yin, 2009) to compare and contrast the two programs according to present models of “best practices.”

Research Questions

The brief review of the literature strongly suggested that it is possible for institutions of higher learning to increase the number of students who attain degree completion by changing the institutional environments. This increase can be accomplished despite the demographic characteristics of the students who are admitted to that institution. The study focused on the attributes of two college retention programs in Arkansas and their success or failure in keeping their students until degree completion. The two programs were assessed according to the best practices described by the retention research of Astin (1993), Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt & Associates (2005), Pascarella & Terenzini (2005), and Tinto (1993).

“To be useful for purposes of institutional policy, retention assessment systems must be systematic and comprehensive in their study of student experiences” (Tinto, 1993, p. 226). Because each institution and the students each admits are different, there is no simple formula for student success. However, the research points to areas of action

that have been shown to positively affect a student's choice to stay in college once he or she becomes part of the institutional community. These retention factors are within what Covey (1989) called the institution's "circle of influence", and these are the things a successful student retention program will more than likely address. Each institution has a different set of attributes and circumstances, as do the students that each serves. For this reason, institution-specific studies of departure are needed (Tinto, 1993). Therefore, the following research questions guided this study.

Central Question

How do two different institutions of higher learning in Arkansas respond to the need to increase the retention rate of their students, especially that of first-year first time freshmen?

Subquestions

- Implementation
 - What are the unique characteristics that affect each institution's retention rate?
 - What decision-making process does each institution use to determine how retention problems will be addressed?
- Data analysis
 - What data were used to determine which retention problems would be addressed?
 - What goals did each institution choose to improve student retention?
 - Why were these particular goals chosen?

- What retention program components have been implemented, especially those targeting at-risk students as determined by the data?
- Assessment
 - What assessment systems, if any, have been put in place to determine the effectiveness of the implemented programs and services?
 - Who is responsible for the implementation, assessment, and success of the retention program components?
 - What changes have been or will be implemented to improve the programs?
- Cross-case analysis
 - How do the practices of the two retention programs compare with each other in regards to the best practices as determined by recent research?

Description of Terms

Associate's degree. An associate's degree is defined by the Arkansas Department of Higher Education (ADHE) as a degree granted upon completion of a program that requires at least two, but fewer than four, academic years of postsecondary education. It includes a level of general education necessary for growth as a lifelong learner and is comprised of 60-72 semester credit hours.

Baccalaureate (bachelor's) degree. A baccalaureate (bachelor's) degree is defined by the ADHE as a degree granted upon completion of a program that requires 4 to 5 years of full-time college work and carries the title of Bachelor.

Dropout. The term is defined by the ADHE as any student who leaves an institution of higher learning without completing either an Associate's degree (for 2-year

institutions) within 4 years or a Bachelor's Degree (for 4-year institutions) within 6 years. This does not include students who transfer to another institution of higher learning.

Fall-to-fall retention rate. The fall-to-fall retention rate of an institution is defined by the ADHE (2012) as the percentage of students within a single year's cohort of beginning students that re-enroll for the fall semester of their sophomore year.

First time students. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2013) defines first time students as those who have no prior postsecondary experience (except as noted below) attending any institution for the first time at the undergraduate level. This includes students enrolled in academic or occupational programs. It also includes students enrolled in the fall term who attended college for the first time in the prior summer term, and students who entered with advanced standing (college credits earned before graduation from high school).

Semester credit hour. The NCES defines a semester credit hour as equivalent to 750 clock minutes of instruction; a quarter-credit hour equates to 500 clock minutes. The hours of instruction must be spread over no more than 16 weeks.

Full-time student. The ADHE (2012) defines a full-time student as one who is enrolled in 12 or more credit hours in a semester or quarter.

Part-time student. The ADHE (2012) defines a part-time student as one who is enrolled in fewer than 12 credit hours in a semester or quarter.

Graduation rate. The ADHE (2012) defines the institutional graduation rate as the percentage of students within a cohort who begin at the institution and finish within a set amount of time (4 years for a 2-year college or 6 years for a 4-year college) with a

degree (bachelor's degree for 4-year institutions or associate's degree for 2-year institutions.)

Institution of higher education. The NCES defines an institution of higher education as an institution that is accredited at the college level by an agency or association recognized by the Secretary of the United States Department of Education. These schools offer at least a 1-year program of study creditable toward a degree, and they are eligible for participation in Title IV federal financial aid programs.

Integrated Post-Secondary Education Data System (IPEDS). The Integrated Post-Secondary Education Data System (IPEDS) is a system of interrelated surveys conducted annually by the U.S. Department's NCES. IPEDS gathers information from every college, university, and technical and vocational institution that participates in the federal student financial aid programs. The Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended, requires that institutions that participate in federal student aid programs report data on enrollments, program completions, graduation rates, faculty and staff, finances, institutional prices, and student financial aid.

Remedial courses. The ADHE (2012) defines remedial courses as those courses required for students who do not score high enough on the ACT in language and math in order to improve their skills in those areas.

Student Information System (SIS). Arkansas' Student Information System is the demographical and informational database compiled by the ADHE (2012).

Significance

Research Gaps

A great deal of research has been done to determine the factors affecting college retention rates in American colleges; yet, most colleges have not been able to take what is known and use that knowledge to make significant increases in student persistence.

Because the federal government has requested that states increase the graduation rates of students attending college, and because the state of Arkansas is trying to find ways to meet this request, it is necessary that institutions within the state learn from recent research and implement ways to keep their students in school. “What is needed and what is not yet available is a model of institutional action that provides guidelines for the development of effective policies and programs that institutions can reasonably employ to enhance the persistence of all their students” (Tinto, 2006, p. 6). Finding such a model will be impossible without first studying what institutions are presently doing and determining which policies actually work. Few, if any, descriptive case studies of college retention programs have been done in the state of Arkansas; there have been no case studies done to determine how these programs align with what research has said institutions can do to retain their students. This study of two demographically diverse institutions of higher learning within the state of Arkansas will increase the knowledge of how diverse institutions in Arkansas are trying to expand the number of their students who attain a college degree.

Keeping students in college is an economic problem. It is crucial for the economies of both the United States and the state of Arkansas to have a well-educated workforce. Marx (2006) stated in his book, *Sixteen trends: Their profound impact on our*

future, that knowledge will be the engine of the new world economy. He asserted that society will be pressured to prepare people for jobs that presently do not exist, and that the primary role of education will be to release human ingenuity by creating intellectual entrepreneurs. Building a population of workers that can meet the demands of this new economy requires that higher education graduate more students, so it is important to understand why students discontinue their college education before attaining a degree. As Tinto (1999) argued, “In accepting individuals for admission, institutions necessarily accept a major responsibility to insure, as best they can, that all students without exception have sufficient opportunities and resources to complete their courses of study should they so wish” (1999, p. 205). Understanding the reasons why students leave a particular college will enable that institution to determine what programs and policies should be put in place to help individual students overcome the obstacles that cause them to leave before attaining a degree. Since students must stay in school long enough to leave an institution with the skills and knowledge necessary to participate in and contribute to society and the economy, institutions of higher education must find ways to keep students in college by providing the services they need to complete their degrees.

The retention of students is also an ethical problem. The pursuit of a college degree has long-term socioeconomic outcomes for individuals. Pascarelli and Terenzini (2005) concluded that

a bachelor’s degree conferred average net advantages over a high school degree of about one standard deviation in occupational status (job desirability), 20% to 40% in earnings, and about 9% to 11% in return on personal investment in postsecondary education (private rate of return)” (p. 582)

They continued, “an associate’s degree provides a 17.5% increase in earning for men and a 27% increase in earnings for women over a high school diploma” (p. 584). To keep students in college, student retention programs must focus on effectiveness. This is especially true for institutions in Arkansas. Tinto (1993) said, “Effective retention programs are committed to the students they serve. They put student welfare ahead of other institutional goals” (p. 146). The basis of this commitment must be rooted in the education of all, not just some, of the students that are admitted.

Finally, the inability of institutions to hold on to the students they admit every year threatens their solvency. Colleges and universities depend upon the tuition that students pay to provide the programs, facilities, and technology that higher education requires. When enrollment declines, the institution’s finances decline, reducing the institution’s ability to provide the services needed to keep the students that it needs.

Possible Implications for Practice

Increasing the body of knowledge surrounding individual retention programs will help colleges and universities determine their own effectiveness in a number of ways. First, identifying the practices that lead to greater student retention may lead to changes in institutional retention programs, allowing schools to self-evaluate according to practices that are shown to best promote student persistence.

Second, further dialog about institutional retention programs may help institutions improve their retention efforts by implementing new policies or by expanding upon research-based strategies that have already been put into place. These strategies may serve as an internal accountability system for institutions.

Finally, reviewing internal systems of accountability for student retention program components that currently have few to no external means of accountability may lead to the development of a broader-based, standardized system of evaluation of the common retention practices within institutional communities. This may help institutions meet the goals and expectations of state and/or national agency demands for greater graduation rates.

Process to Accomplish

Design

The design chosen for this study was a qualitative multi-case study that explored and described the student retention programs of two demographically different institutions of higher learning in the state of Arkansas. “In general, case studies are the preferred method when (a) “how” or “why” questions are being posed, (b) the investigator has little control over events, and (c) the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context” (Yin, 2009, p. 2). This study observed and recorded how two differing institutions of higher learning deal with the problem of student attrition, focusing on the study of eight key issues also known as an “analysis of themes” (Creswell, 2007, p. 77). Various institutional members were asked to explain the factors affecting the student retention rate of their undergraduate schools and how they participate in the process of retaining students at their institution.

Qualitative multi-case study research was chosen by the researcher because this format allowed for interaction with informants while gaining information about the retention process within a case. A qualitative multi-case study approach also allowed the researcher to look for emerging patterns across cases. The case study method was

especially suitable for examining phenomena bounded by time and place, such as programs, events, activities, and individual and group behaviors in the context of different institutions (Kuh et al., 2005). A multi-case study allowed the researcher to collect detailed descriptions of what each institution does to promote student success. Although the study explored the retention programs of two demographically different cases, it focused on rich description and not on cause and effect.

In addition, the qualitative information was supplemented by quantitative information that assisted in understanding the effectiveness of the retention programs of the institutions before and after they were put into place. The analysis of the information gathered was holistic (Yin, 2009), and a detailed description of each case and the themes within each case were provided. This process, called a within-case analysis was accompanied by a cross-case analysis, which looked at common themes across the two cases. Finally, an interpretation of the meaning of each of the case analyses was given.

Sample

The institutions (cases) chosen for this study were selected for the diversity in their student demographics. Each represented different student populations within the state of Arkansas. The two institutions chosen were a 4-year private university and a public 4-year university. Points of diversity considered were admissions selectivity, on-campus residence, undergraduate enrollment, and the proportion of different races/ethnicities among the students.

Each case had problems peculiar to its particular type of institution and, therefore, had specific ways of dealing with retention problems based upon the resources available to that unique institution. Some of the areas of differentiation between the two institutions

included student demographics, student population, student entrance requirements, the proportion of full-time to part-time students, the mean student age, the proportion of student on-campus residence, the proportion of student ethnicities, and the amount of resources available. A within-case analysis was done based on the qualitative information gathered at each institution. Then, a cross-case analysis revolving around themes common to all effective retention programs compared each institution's retention methodology.

Representatives of the institutions were contacted via email, by phone, and through personal visits; those willing to participate were sent a follow-up letter of acceptance into the study. Focus groups were formed, and each group was asked the same open-ended questions. The representatives were employed by the two institutions during the 2013-2014 school year. They were selected because each primarily served a different demographic of students, and each had a retention program in place. Data on these retention programs were gathered using individual interviews, focus group discussions, and researcher observations.

Instrumentation

The researcher obtained data from two focus groups by conducting interviews and interactive discussions. The researcher was the facilitator for the groups and served as moderator. The researcher's role as moderator was the primary instrument for collecting data. Questions were asked of the participants (informants), and as the questions were answered, the researcher recorded the information and made field notes both during and after the interviews. Audio and video recordings were used for the group interviews, and transcriptions of verbal responses were analyzed.

The researcher used a moderator's guide for the implicit and necessary purpose of including all questions and sequencing them in the proper order. Open-ended questions were used to address the research questions, and the sequence of questions moved from general to specific. This guide was used to keep the researcher focused, to provide continuity as the research moved from one focus group to another, and to prevent the focus group process from becoming stalled.

The researcher recorded all focus group interviews using audio and video equipment in order to uncover emergent themes and organize the data for analysis. The number of participants in the two focus groups depended upon the number of administrators, faculty members, and other staff personnel involved with each institution's retention program. The researcher planned for 5-10 total participants in order to accommodate absences or no-shows. A comfortable setting for the interviews was provided, and the researcher modeled a familiar, conversational type of discussion when questioning participants. The qualitative data were used to explore, describe, and explain events at a higher level and to provide for a stronger analysis of the overall data (Yin, 2009).

The research established content validity within the focus groups by making sure informants were asked for clarification of the comments, for verification of summaries and interpretations by the researcher, and for additional areas of discussion that informants thought should be included in the discussion. As moderator, the researcher documented any comments from informants, which questioned the relevancy of the questions.

Quantitative data were collected from various sources, such as institutional records and the ADHE (2012), in order to understand and explain the unique context of each individual retention program. Yin (2009) noted that a substantial amount of quantitative data is acceptable for inclusion in certain case studies in order to follow a strong analytic strategy. Quantitative data were relevant to this study to explain certain institutional behaviors or events pertaining to the individual retention programs. The data assisted with the evaluation and explanation of each case, especially in regards to program and policy effectiveness.

Data Analysis

A review of the evidence gathered through documentation and from the recorded interviews and observations was used to give an accurate description of each case and its setting. A checklist that displayed the data from each individual case according to a uniform framework was used to compare and contrast the two retention programs and to establish themes or patterns between the cases. The information was directly interpreted by the researcher to develop naturalistic generalizations concerning the programs in order to present an in-depth picture so that the reader might learn from these cases and possibly apply the information to other cases (Creswell, 2007, p. 163).

The researcher took numerous field notes during the focus group interviews to accurately record the responses of participants. Discussions during the interviews helped to identify emergent themes. The field notes were transcribed, and the recordings of the discussions were reviewed to enhance understanding of the participants' comments. The video recordings and data from the recordings were reviewed. Field notes and transcripts were analyzed and organized according to common themes in a written document. The

analysis was aligned to the research questions. All information was arranged in order to search for recurring themes surrounding the research questions.

The researcher used a conceptual scoring matrix to develop a correspondence between research questions and focus group questions. All data explanations and descriptions were organized to relate the results of the original research questions as displayed in this matrix.

The findings of this study were based on an analysis of the data provided by the institutional staff members who participated. A discovery was made of how the two institutions perceive and influence factors that affect student retention, what strategies are needed and implemented by the institutions to increase student retention, and what institutional supports are provided to student retention programs in order to create a more positive system that promotes and increases student retention and graduation rates.

The results of this study were shared with participants in the hope that the institutions might find the results helpful as they assess and improve the student retention programs in their schools. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) stated that sometimes the research process itself may improve the situation, and results of a study can help define what stands between what exists and what one would like reality to be. Research shows that an institution of higher education can directly affect a student's decision to remain in college until receiving a degree by changing the institutional environment and curriculum. Although there is much research to be done, especially in the state of Arkansas, as the study concluded, it is important to know how colleges and universities presently meet the challenges of student attrition.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

The studies of factors that influence student persistence have always addressed the various concerns, issues, and needs that have arisen as the United States has developed economically. These factors have affected the contexts in which institutions function. Before reviewing the history of student retention, it is important to understand how these factors have changed and how they have affected the study of college student retention.

A Brief History of College Retention in the United States

Colleges were first founded in the United States in the 1600s to provide religious denominations with the ministers and missionaries they needed to spread the Gospel in the New World. The idea of improving society through educating the populace did not come until the 1700s when the demand for professionally trained lawyers and public servants increased. The federal government acknowledged the importance of higher education in the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 stating that “Knowledge, being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged” (United States National Archives and Records Administration, 2003).

The number of colleges grew rapidly in the early 1800s, and the focus of college education moved from religion, law, and public service toward a foundation of classical

learning. In 1862, Senator Justin Morrill of Vermont introduced “An Act Donating public lands to the several States and [Territories] which may provide colleges for the benefit of agriculture and the Mechanic arts” (United States National Archives and Records Administration, 2003) known as the Morrill Act which was the first Federal aid to higher education. This act gave federal land to the states to support the building of colleges and universities. These land grant colleges brought higher education to millions of students, and in doing so, reshaped American society and supported the nation’s growing economy.

During this time, only young men were admitted into colleges. The education provided by the institutions emphasized liberal arts with classes in classical languages, philosophy, science, ethics, and metaphysics. There was little expectation of college completion during this time, but the college experience had become important in and of itself. Institutions began to create social programs and extracurricular activities to balance the academic programs, not necessarily to retain students but to create institutional loyalty.

By the 1900s, the United States had become solidly industrialized, and earning a college degree became more important and desirable as companies demanded college educated professionals to manage them. The increase in applicants allowed colleges to put admission standards into place, although students from wealthy families were given admissions preference. Selectivity in the admissions process allowed the institutions to matriculate the best and brightest from across the country, and, in the process, weed out those students who did not meet the college’s criteria. This selectivity caused a rise in colleges that specialized in serving women, blacks, Jews, Catholics, and other groups

who were thought of as undesirable by many universities. Junior colleges were also established during this time to provide a post-secondary education to those who would otherwise be denied access. More attention was paid to admitting students than holding on to them. In fact, student attrition spoke to the selectivity and high standards of the institution and was held as a kind of badge of honor.

The federal government became involved in funding the post-secondary education of American citizens when in 1935 the National Youth Administration was formed to help combat the effects of the Great Depression. Through this agency, the government provided college educations to citizens who would not otherwise have access to college. The United States Department of the Interior and the Office of Education, realizing the importance of college educated workers to the country, sponsored a study on student retention in the 1930s. The study, titled “College Student Mortality”, was conducted by John McNeely and published in 1938. McNeely collected data on the student attrition rates of 60 American colleges. He examined various student factors that affected dropout rates, including where students lived, their gender, age of enrollment, extracurricular participation, finances, part-time work, academic dismissal, lack of interest, and illness/death. He also studied the effects of institutional size. He examined the point at which students withdrew from college and the average time it took students to attain a degree. The study was the predecessor of the even more comprehensive student retention studies that were begun in the 1960s.

The economic upheaval caused by the Great Depression caused the government to put the study of college attrition aside, but the economic boom that occurred after World War II renewed interest in the benefits of a post-secondary education. After World War

II, additional educational aid was provided through the GI Bill to returning soldiers who needed the skills necessary to return to civilian life. This program greatly increased the number of college students as over 1 million soldiers entered post-secondary institutions in order to further their educations.

The launching of Sputnik by the Russians in the 1950s fostered another push for college graduates, and the federal government passed the National Defense Education Act of 1958. Then, as the Cold War between the United States and Russia grew, an increased desire for American stability and safety caused Congress to pass the Higher Education Act of 1965. The intent of the law was to produce highly trained scientists, mathematicians, and engineers. The combination of these two laws not only increased the number of college graduates, but it also emphasized the governmental interest in the funding of higher education. Community colleges became important during this time as well.

Colleges did not lack for students in the 1960s. The Baby Boomer generation had reached college age, and the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s increased the opportunities for minority students to attend college. As the population of college students grew at both 2- and 4-year institutions, the student demographics of these institutions became increasingly diverse. Lower- and middle-class students took advantage of the access to higher education, often to avoid being drafted to fight in the Vietnam War. College deferments were granted for a while to those young men who were accepted and remained in college. However, deferments ceased, and many students began to question the usefulness of a college education.

This questioning, added to the political unrest on college campuses that was fueled by the Civil Rights Movement and the growing discontent with the Vietnam War, caused institutions to turn their focus on student satisfaction and the characteristics that cause those students to discontinue their college education. As college enrollments increased, the need to retain those students until the attainment of a degree increased.

Student-Centered Retention Research

An upsurge in research in college student retention began in the 1970s. This renewed interest in retention was fueled by various economic needs and focused on student characteristics. The earliest of these studies looked at student-oriented variables that might contribute to the student dropout rate. Among these were sociological variables, environmental variables, pre-admission variables, psychological variables, and demographic variables. Researchers focused on student attributes such as high school grade point average (GPA), ACT composite score, socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity, the area or region from which the student came, placement in remedial courses, first semester college GPA, the number of courses a student enrolled in for the second semester, and whether the student lived in a dorm or commuted to school. Some of these variables were found to have correlations to the rate of student retention.

The results of these studies, however, had the effect of “blaming the victim,” perpetuating the idea that some students were just not “college material.” This conclusion assumed that there was nothing an institution could do to improve its retention rate other than be more exclusive and enroll only the “best” students who would fit into the institution’s culture and who, because of personal characteristics, were more likely to remain in college.

Sociological Variables

W. G. Spady, who studied attrition from a sociological standpoint, based his theories of college attrition on the suicide theories of Eric Durkheim (Graybeal, 2007). Spady hypothesized that dropping out of college was similar to making the decision to commit suicide since both actions ended an association with a social system.

Spady found that five sociological variables affected college retention: academic potential, grade performance, intellectual development, normative congruence, and friendship support (Graybeal, 2007). He concluded that students withdraw from college because of a lack of family support, financial support, or social support. Further research caused Spady to revise his predictors of persistence within 4-year colleges to academic integration, social integration, socioeconomic status, gender, choice of department, and SAT/ACT score. An extension of Spady's research found that satisfaction and institutional commitment were also linked to the decision of students to drop out of college (ACT, 2004).

Pre-admission Variables

The longitudinal model of student departure developed by Tinto (1975, 1993), created a renewed interest in student retention. Many institutions have used his model to understand the reasons why students drop out of college with the hopes that their student attrition rates would decrease. His theory, like Astin's and Spady's, was based on the work of Durkheim. Tinto proposed that pre-admissions variables like family history, academic background, and abilities and skills determined a student's commitment to persist in college. These attributes, combined with college interaction, caused the students to either acquire or not acquire the academic and social integration needed to remain in

college (Tinto, 1993). Tinto's later work expanded this theory, recognizing the need for group-specific retention strategies to accommodate the diversity of college students. He also concluded that each type of college or university needed to develop its own programs and services to encourage students to stay in higher education (ACT, 2004).

Psychological Variables

Bean and Eaton (2000) theorized that psychological processes were the determinants of a student's academic and social integration during their years at college. Their model was based on four theories: attitude-behavior theory; attribution theory, in which the student has a strong sense of internal control; coping behavioral theory, which they defined as the ability to assess and adapt to new environments; and self-efficacy theory, which is the student's perception of his or her ability to deal with specific tasks or situations (Bean & Eaton, 2000). Because of their study, Bean and Eaton suggested that institutions should develop service learning programs, freshman learning communities or interest groups, orientation seminars, and mentoring programs to help incoming students be successful (ACT, 2004).

Demographic Variables

Many demographic variables have been studied to determine their association with student retention. These include a student's admission test scores (ACT Assessment, 2006), ethnicity (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1978), gender (Leppel, 2002), and student expectations (Astin, 1993). More than a decade later, an Education Trust study stated that there was still a large gap between the graduation rates of lower and higher income students, as well as large variances among the graduation rates of different ethnic groups (Carey, 2004).

The studies found that these variables were associated with persistence in college. Subsequent studies have focused on the effect of student age on college success.

Gender

Historically, college students were predominantly male. However, this has changed over the years, and females are now in the majority, with 4,645,338 male students and 5,917,820 female students enrolled in undergraduate classes during 2011 (NCES, 2012). The gap between the number of male and female students has widened over the past decade and is predicted to continue. So far, research on the effect of gender on fall-to-fall retention has been mixed. Gender roles and expectations, which compete for student time, can affect student success (Leppel, 2002). According to research, males were more likely to discontinue college because of academic difficulties while females tended to drop out for social and/or cultural reasons. When combined with other factors such as race and age, gender may be much more significant.

Presently, the graduation rate of males lags behind that of their female counterparts. Figure 1 shows the percentage of students in the cohort year of 2005 who were seeking a bachelor's degree at 4-year degree-granting institutions and completed that degree within 6 years by institutional type and sex.

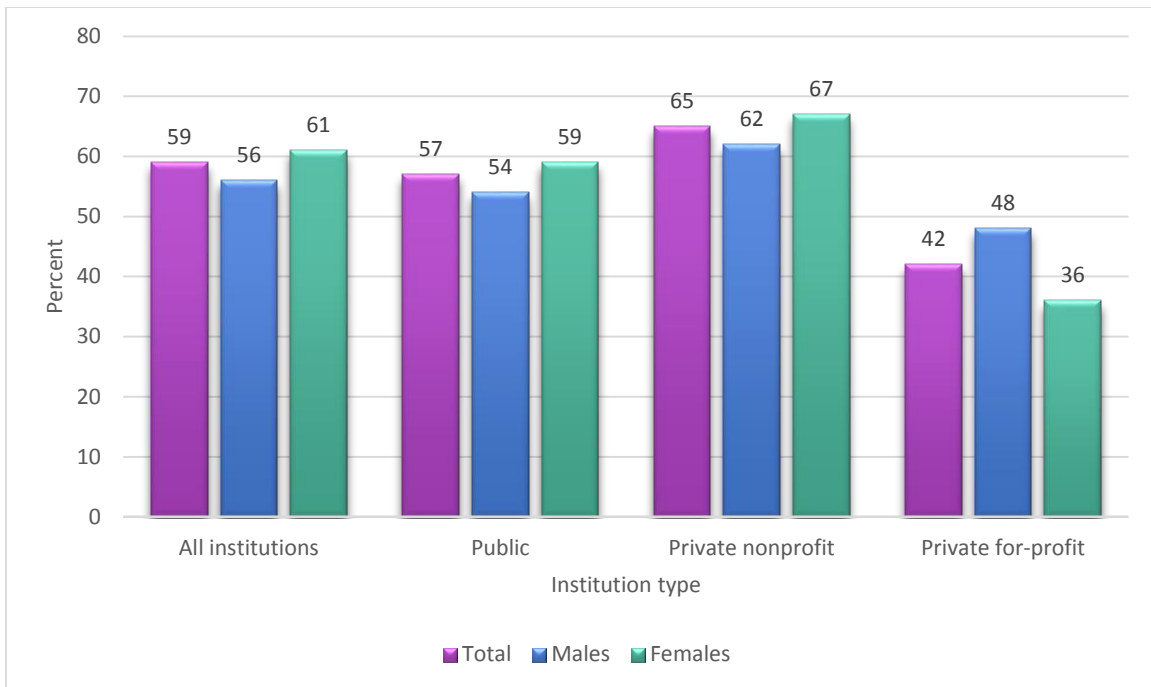


Figure 1. Percentage of students in the 2005 cohort who completed a bachelor's degree at 4-year institutions within 6 years – sorted by institutional control and gender.

The above graduation rates apply to full-time, first time undergraduates seeking a bachelor's or equivalent degree. Students who transferred to another institution and graduated are not counted as completers at their initial institution (NCES, 2012b). It is interesting that only at private for-profit institutions do the numbers of male graduates exceed the number of female graduates.

Between 1990 and 2012, the percentage of students completing a bachelor's degree or higher increased from 23% to 33%. In 1990, however, the percentages of students who had attained a bachelor's degree or higher differed little between males and females. Figure 2 shows that in 2012 the percentage of female students attaining a degree was 7% higher at 37% than male students at 30%. The same trend is seen in the attainment of master's degrees as well, although the percentage for females was only 3 points higher than that of males (NCES, 2012b).

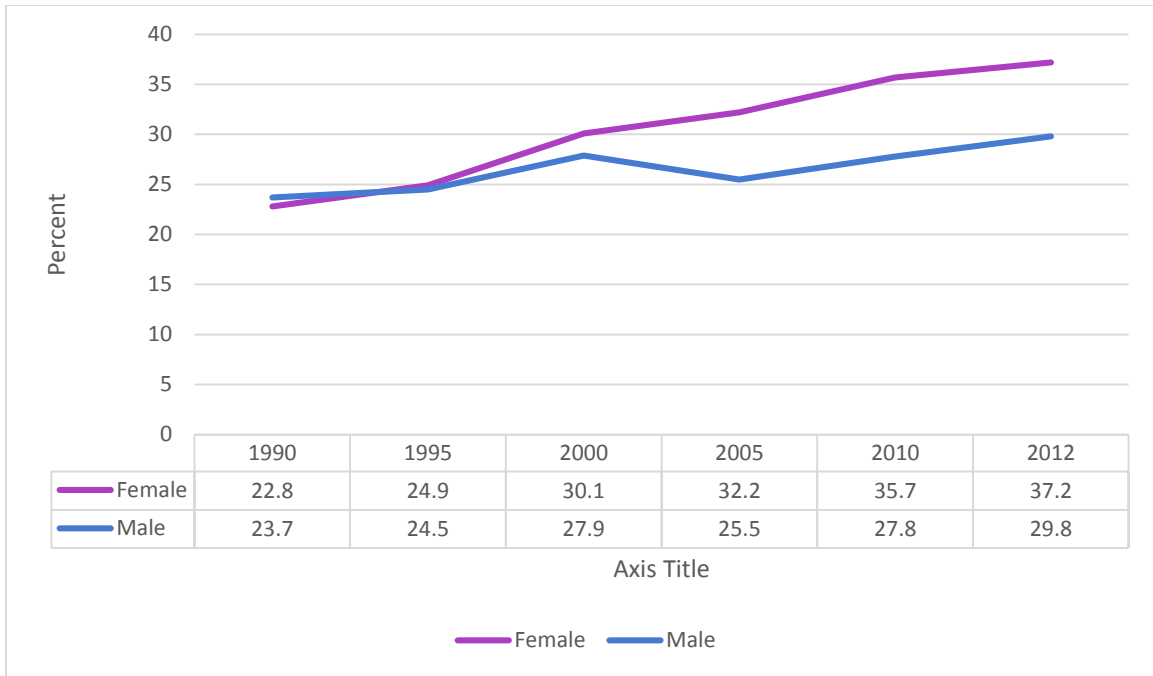


Figure 2. Percentage of 25 to 29 year-olds who completed bachelor’s degrees for the selected years 1990-2012, sorted by gender.

Age

The number of non-traditional students enrolled in higher education has increased over the last decade. During this period, female students in this category increased at a greater rate compared to male students. The research has been inconclusive in regards to the effect of age on attrition rates. Older students did tend to be more goal-oriented and had a greater understanding of their needs as they related to continuing in college.

Of undergraduate students enrolled part-time in 4-year institutions in 2011, young adults made up 50% of the enrollment at public institutions, 32% of the enrollment at private nonprofit institutions, and 21% of the enrollment at private for-profit institutions. Thus, students ages 25-34 and 35 and older accounted for the other half of the part-time enrollment at public 4-year institutions (29% and 21%, respectively), two-thirds of the part-time enrollment at private nonprofit 4-year institutions (30% and 36%, respectively),

and over three-quarters of the part-time enrollment at private for-profit 4-year institutions (39% each).

In 2011, some 52% of part-time students at public 2-year institutions were young adults, while 25% were between the ages of 25 and 34, and 23% were 35 and older. At private nonprofit 2-year institutions, some 40% of part-time students were young adults, 32% were between the ages of 25 and 34, and 27% were 35 and older. At private for-profit 2-year institutions, 39% of part-time students were young adults, 35% were between the ages of 25 and 34, and 26% were age 35 and older. Figure 3 shows the percentage distribution of full-time undergraduate enrollment in degree-granting institutions, by institutional level and control and student age for the Fall of 2011. The percentages may not sum to totals because of rounding and the absence of "age unknown" students (NCES, 2012b).

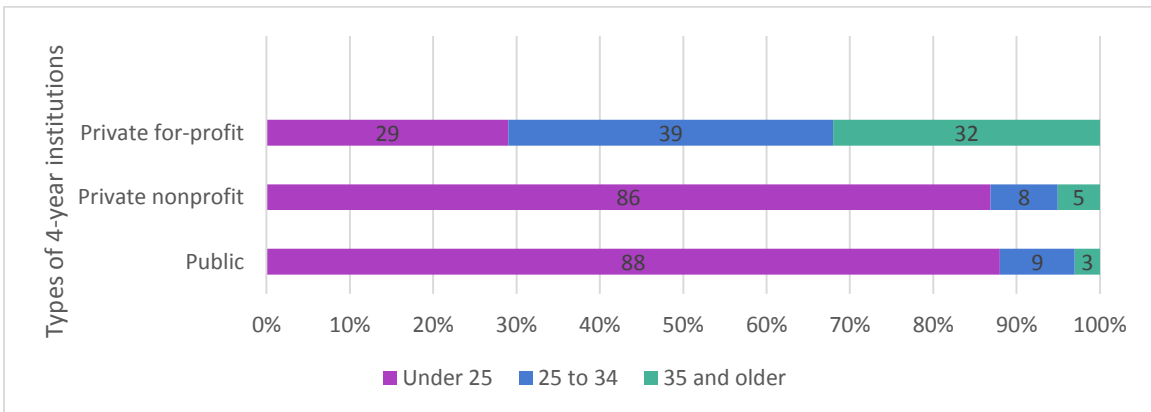


Figure 3. Full-time undergraduate enrollment by institutional level and control for the Fall of 2011—sorted by student age.

Ethnicity

From 1990 to 2012, the percentage of 25- to 29-year-olds who attained a bachelor's degree or higher increased from 26% to 40% for Whites, from 13% to 23% for Blacks, and from 8% to 15% for Hispanics. For Asians/Pacific Islanders, the educational attainment rate of at least a bachelor's degree in 2012 (60%) was higher than the rate in 1990 (43%). Between 1990 and 2012, the gap in the attainment rate between Whites and Hispanics at the level of bachelor's degree or higher widened from 18 to 25 percentage points. The apparent difference in the White-Black gap between 1990 (13 percentage points) and 2012 (17 percentage points) was not statistically significant. However, from 1990 to 2011, there was a widening in the gap. The size of the White-Black gap at the bachelor's degree educational level in 2012 was not measurably different from that in 1990 while the White-Hispanic gap widened from 18 to 25 percentage points (NCES, 2012b).

Figure 4 shows the percentage of 25- to 29-year-olds with a bachelor's degree or higher, by race/ethnicity for the selected years of 1990-2012. Estimates for persons from other racial/ethnic groups are included in the percentages but are not shown separately.

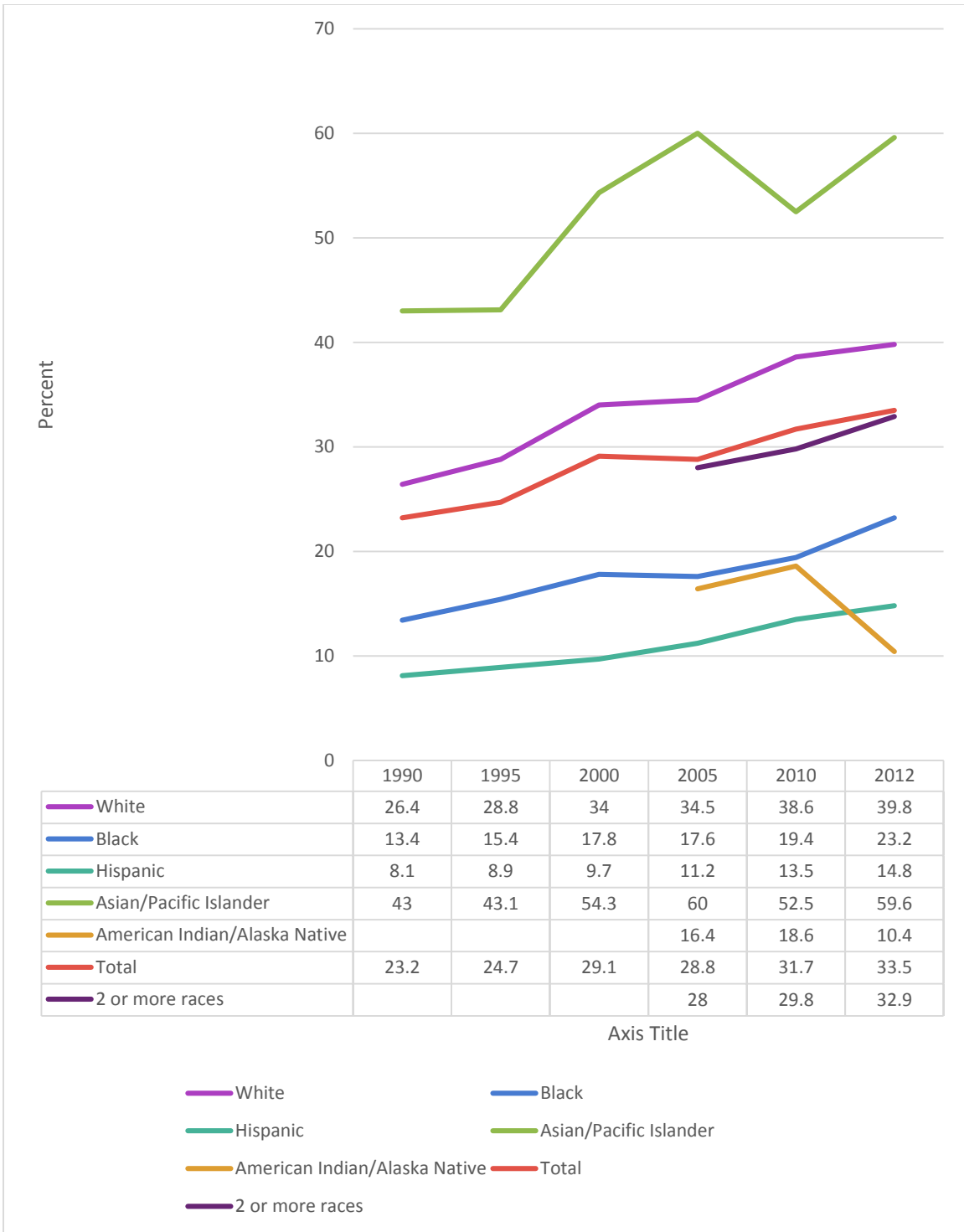


Figure 4. Percentage of bachelor's degrees for the selected years 1900-2012—sorted by ethnicity.

The race categories in this chart exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. Prior to 2005, data on American Indians/Alaska Natives and persons of two or more races were not available (NCES, 2012b).

Admission Test Scores

Admission test companies such as College Board and American College Testing (ACT) state that admissions tests are a standardized indicator of college readiness (ACT Assessment, 2006). The ACT is used by all of the colleges and universities in the state of Arkansas for college placement and for determining whether students require remediation. The test is made up of 215 questions in four areas: English, math, reading and science. Sub-scores are determined for each of the four areas and an overall composite score is given using these sub-scores. High school juniors and seniors usually take the ACT, and it is accepted nationwide. Colleges also use the ACT as a criterion for scholarships.

ACT contends that performance on the ACT is directly related to first-year college GPA (ACT Assessment, 2006). It has not been decided whether admissions test scores are associated with college persistence.

Institutional Selectivity

The more selective an institution is in its admission process, the higher the institutional graduation rate will be. Figure 5 shows the differences in 6-year graduation rates for full-time, first time students who began seeking a bachelor's degree in the Fall of 2005 according to institutions' levels of selectivity. Post-secondary degree-granting institutions that were the most selective (i.e., had the lowest admissions acceptance rates) graduated the highest percentage of students. Of 4-year institutions with open admissions

policies, only 31% saw their students complete a bachelor's degree within 6 years, while 4-year institutions with acceptance rates of less than 25% of applicants had a 6-year graduation rate of 88%.

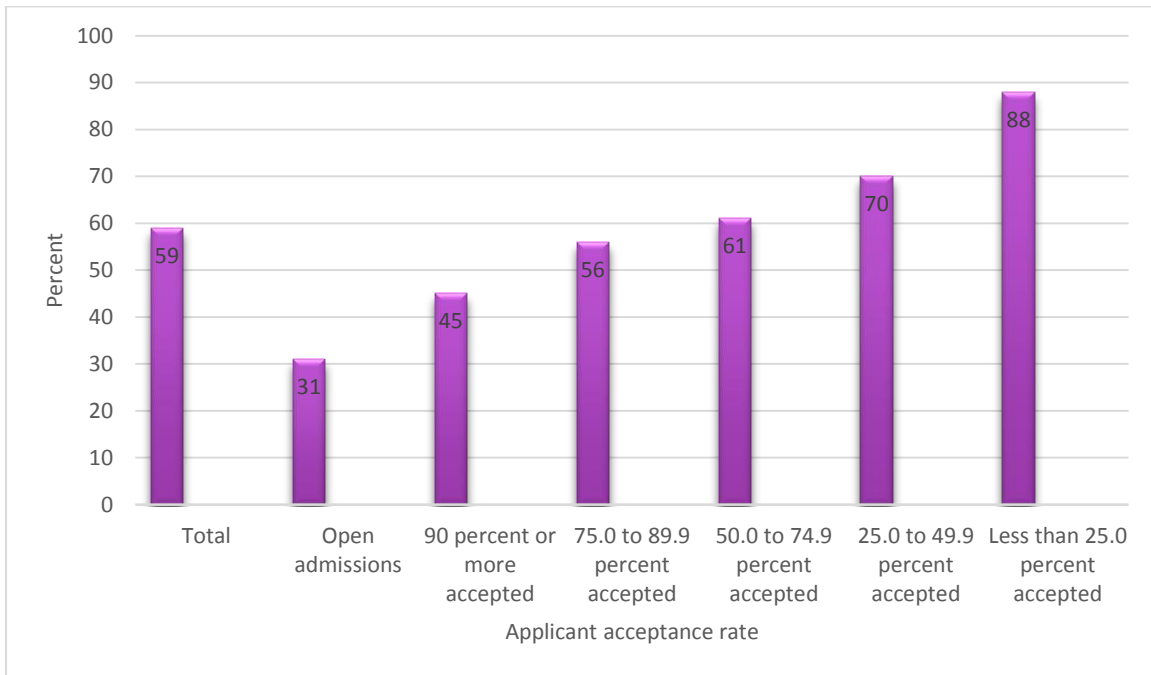


Figure 5. 6-year graduation rates for full-time, first time students for the 2005 cohort—sorted by institutional selectivity.

The above chart shows the percentage of students seeking a bachelor's degree at 4-year degree-granting institutions who completed a bachelor's degree within 6 years, by institutional applicant acceptance rate. The chart shows the freshman cohort of 2005 that completed college by 2012 (NCES, 2012b).

These statistics are taken from the United States Department of Education's NCES (NCES, 2012b) that collects information from degree-granting institutions that grant associate or higher degrees and participate in Title IV federal financial aid programs. The graduation rate is the percentage of full-time, first time bachelor's degree-

seeking students who completed their degree from their initial institution within 6 years. Students who transferred to another institution and graduated are not counted as completers at their initial institution by the NCES.

Figure 6, taken from the NCES (2012b), shows the student retention rates among full-time, first time students who enrolled in a post-secondary degree-granting institution in 2010. Approximately 79% of those college students returned to their 4-year institutions and about 60% of those college students returned to 2-year institutions in the following fall. The retention rate for 4-year institutions ranged from 62% at the least selective institutions (those with open admissions) to 95% at the most selective institutions (those where less than 25% of applying students are accepted).

This chart shows the annual full-time student retention rates at 2- and 4-year degree-granting institutions by institution level, acceptance rate, and institution control in 2011. It is notable that, as stated earlier, the more selective the university the higher the student retention rate. The 4-year institutions, both public and private, that were more selective (accepted less than 25% of the students who applied) have a much higher retention rate. Their student retention rates were 30% higher compared to those of their less selective 4-year counterparts. There was little difference (1%) between the retention rates of the public and private institutions within the two categories. Note that the category for less than 25% accepted is not applicable to private for-profit institutions. All acceptance rates include open admissions, all percentages of applications accepted, and information not available (NCES, 2012b).

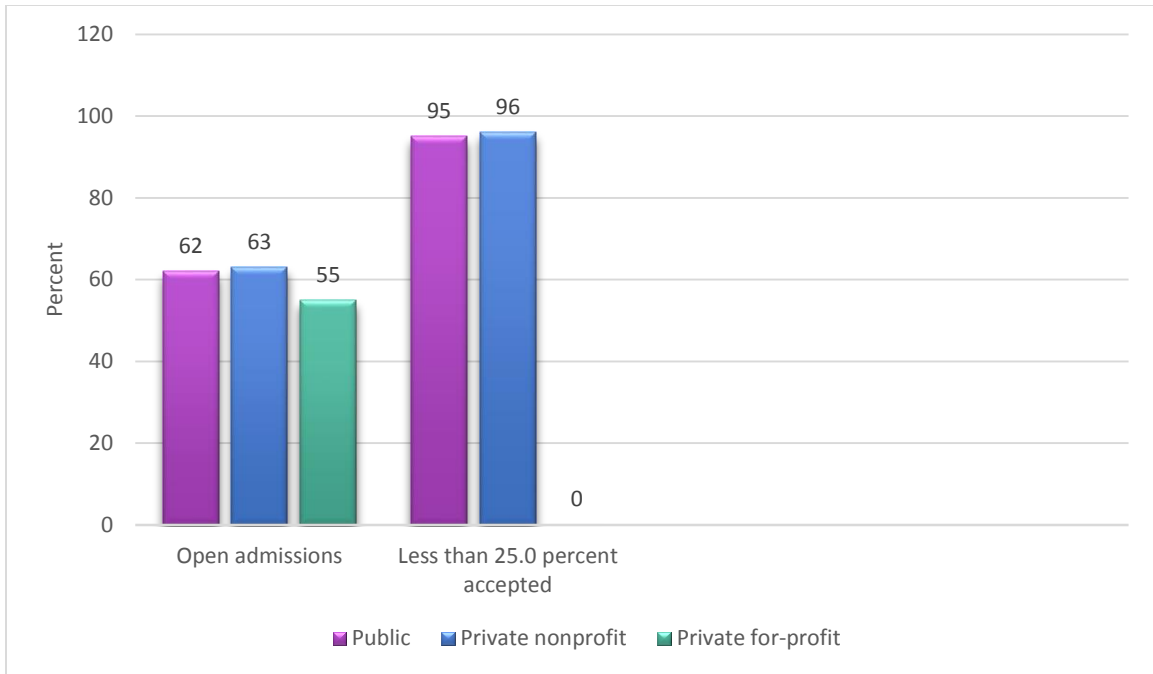


Figure 6. Student retention rates among full-time, first time students who enrolled in a 4-year, post-secondary degree-granting institution in 2010—sorted by admission type.

In terms of student retention, among full-time first time students who enrolled in a post-secondary degree-granting institution in 2010, about 79% returned to 4-year institutions and 60% to 2-year institutions in the following fall. At public 4-year institutions, the retention rate was 79%, with a range of 62% at the least selective institutions (those with open admissions) to 95% at the most selective institutions (those where less than 25% of students are accepted). Retention rates for private nonprofit 4-year institutions followed a similar pattern: the overall retention rate was 80%, ranging from 63% at the least selective institutions to 96% at the most selective. The retention rate at private for-profit institutions was 54%; it differed by 2% or less in terms of institution selectivity level. At 2-year institutions overall, the retention rate was 60%. The retention rate for 2-year institutions was highest at private for-profit institutions (67%),

followed by private nonprofit institutions (61%) and public institutions (59%) (NCES, 2012b).

Remedial/Developmental Course Placement

Anyone who has a high school diploma or GED may register for college, but if they do not score high enough on the admissions test required by the institution, they most likely will be required to take one or more remedial courses. 40% of the students entering as freshmen in the United States require at least one remedial course (Parsad & Lewis, 2003). Students who were required to take remedial courses were found to be more likely to drop out of college than those students who did not need to take remedial courses (Bradburn, 2002). Little research could be found on the effectiveness of remedial/developmental courses, so their effect on fall-to-fall retention is unknown at this time.

Financial Aid Status

The cost of a college education has risen over the past 10 years, increasing the need for student aid. The ability to pay for college can directly affect student retention. Many types of aid exist, from Pell Grants provided by the federal government, to academic scholarships, to work-study. In Bradburn's (2002) study of short-term enrollment in higher education, he stated that students who received larger amounts of aid were more likely to continue their college studies than those students who received smaller amounts of aid. However, when he compared students who received aid with students who did not receive aid, he found no significant difference in their retention rates. Wei and Horn (2002) found that recipients of Pell Grants were more likely to have

other characteristics associated with attrition than were those who did not receive this type of aid.

The average total cost of attendance in 2011-2012 for first time, full-time students living on campus and paying in-state tuition was \$21,000 at public 4-year institutions, \$41,420 at private nonprofit 4-year institutions, and \$30,840 at private for-profit 4-year institutions (United States Department of Education, 2012). Figure 7 shows the average total cost of attending 4-year degree-granting institutions for first time, full-time students, by level and type of institution and living arrangement for the academic year 2011-2012.

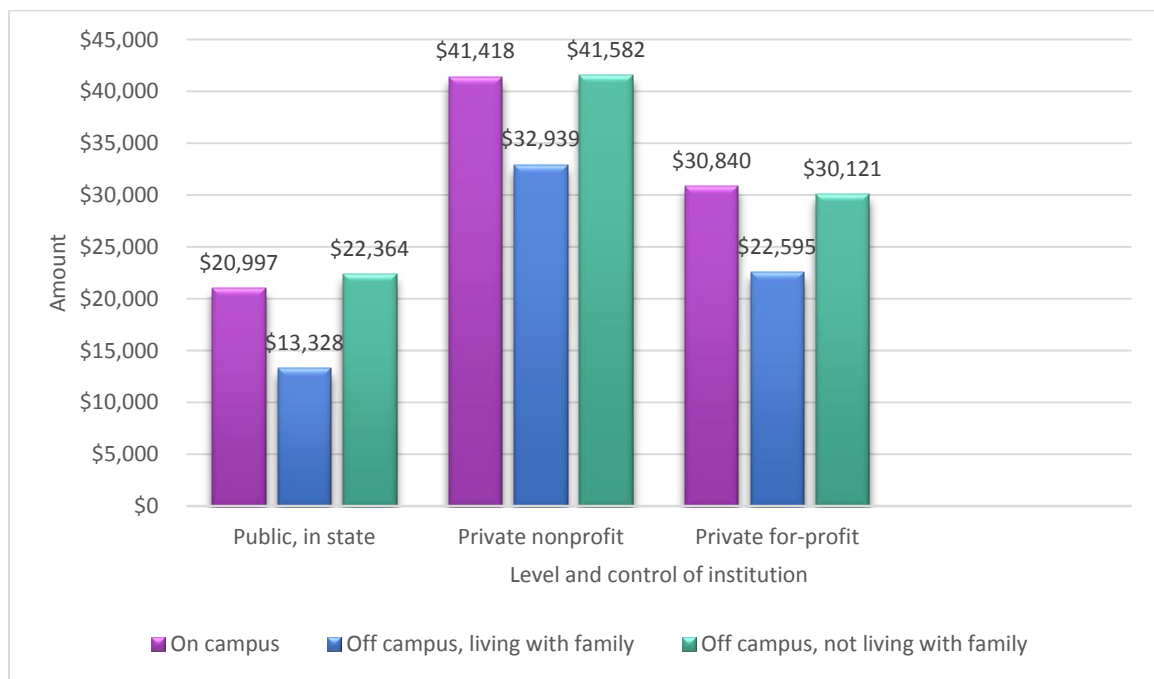


Figure 7. Average total cost of attending 4-year degree-granting institutions for first time, full-time students during the 2011-2012 school year by level and type of institution – sorted by living arrangement.

The chart above excludes students who have already attended another post-secondary institution or who began their studies on a part-time basis. Data illustrating the

average total cost of attendance for all students are weighted by the number of students at the institution receiving Title IV aid (NCES, 2012b).

The United States Department of Education (2012) stated the total cost of attending a post-secondary institution as the sum of published tuition and required fees, books and supplies, and the weighted average for room, board, and other expenses. In 2011-2012, the total cost of attendance differed by institution level and control and by student living arrangements. At 4-year institutions, the average total cost of attendance for first time, full-time students living on campus and paying in-state tuition was \$21,000 at public institutions, \$41,420 at private nonprofit institutions, and \$30,840 at private for-profit institutions. All of the averages are weighted by the number of students at the institution receiving Title IV aid including grant aid, work-study aid, and loan aid (NCES, 2012b).

Full and Part-time Work

Astin (1993) stated that outside work negatively affects the completion of a bachelor's degree. Figure 8 shows the percentage of employed full-time undergraduate college students by hours worked per week in October of 2011. Students were classified as full-time if they were taking at least 12 hours of classes during an average school week and as part-time if they were taking fewer hours (United States Department of Commerce, 2012).

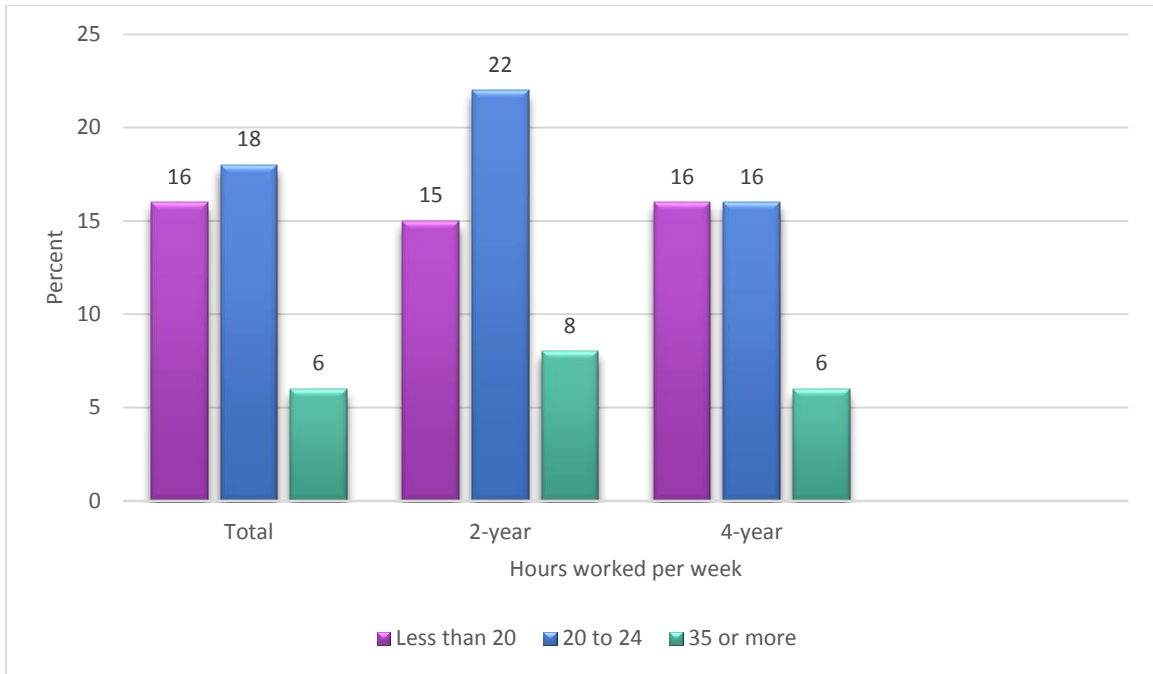


Figure 8. Percentage of employed full-time undergraduate students in October of 2011 – sorted by hours worked per week.

In 2011, approximately 41% of all full-time undergraduate students and 74% of all part-time undergraduate students ages 16 to 24 worked in addition to being enrolled in a post-secondary institution. 16% of full-time undergraduate college students who were employed reported working less than 20 hours per week, 18% reported working 20 to 34 hours per week, and 6% reported working 35 hours or more per week. Of the part-time undergraduate students who reported employment while attending college, 11% said that they were working less than 20 hours per week while they attended school, another 28% reported working 20 to 34 hours per week, and 33% reported working 35 or more hours per week.

The Department of Education (2012) said that, in general, smaller percentages of all post-secondary students (ages 16 to 24 years old) were working in 2011 than had been working in 2000. The decline in the percentage of full-time students who worked

decreased from 52% in 2000 to 41% in 2011. The decline was from 85% to 75% for part-time students during the same period. In addition, for full-time students who were employed, the percentage of all students who worked less than 20 hours per week decreased from 20% in 2000 to 16% in 2011. Those full-time students who were working 20 to 34 hours per week decreased from 22% to 17%, and those who were working 35 or more hours per week decreased from 9% to 7% over the same period (NCES, 2012b).

Meanwhile, nearly half (47%) of all part-time students worked 35 hours or more per week in 2000, while only 35% worked over 35 hours per week in 2011. The percentages of part-time students who worked less than 20 hours per week or between 20 and 34 hours per week did not change measurably between 2000 and 2011. In some cases, students must supplement their incomes by taking on off-campus work in order to make tuition payments. Full-time work is more harmful to persistence than part-time work (Tinto, 1993). The reason for this may be that the more time a student spends working off campus, the less time that student has to interact with the campus community. The less time a student has for interaction with the campus community the more negative the effect on persistence (Astin, 1993, Tinto 1993).

Institution-Centered Retention Research

There are many reasons why students leave college without degree completion, some of which pertain to factors that were in place before the student ever walked onto a college campus. Colleges can screen for students who seem to be a good fit for the institution, but high school GPA, socio-economic status, demographics, ACT scores, and other ways of describing incoming freshman cannot guarantee that a student will stay in

college until the completion of a degree. Indeed, these things are already in the past and cannot be changed by the institution.

Environmental Variables

Realizing that they have little control over pre-admission student variables (other than through the process of selectivity), institutions of higher learning have begun to pinpoint the variables over which they have control to determine if these factors can be used to increase the number of students who stay in college. To assist in this effort, researchers have tried to determine what institutional conditions positively and negatively affect the retention and graduation rates of college students.

Astin's (1993) early studies of college attrition were an attempt to determine if an institution's environment affected a student's growth, development and retention. His Input-Environment-Outcome model (IEO) contained various environmental variables found at public and private, historically black, and women's 4-year colleges and universities across the nation. The institutional environment, according to Astin, referred to "the various programs, policies, faculty, peers, and educational experiences to which the student is exposed" (p. 7). In his model, he combined input (student) factors and environmental (institutional) factors that potentially could affect the student outcomes of satisfaction, career development, academic and cognitive abilities, values, and beliefs.

Tinto (1993) spent many years studying the distinct academic and social components of colleges and developed his longitudinal model of student departure from this research. His model took into account the student's family background, skills and abilities and prior schooling, intentions and goals, and external commitments. Tinto figured in the academic and social integration of the student once he or she entered

college. He concluded that the quality of the interactions between students and other members of the college community (students, staff members, and faculty) can make a difference in the rate of student persistence. Furthermore, he stated, “researchers generally agree that what happens following entry [into college] is, in most cases, more important to the process of student departure than what has previously occurred” (Tinto, 1993, p. 45).

Institutional Characteristics

The environmental factors related to institutional characteristics shown by Astin (1993) to have a positive effect on student retention and over which an institution has some measure of control include whether the students lived on campus, whether the faculty was oriented toward the students, and whether resources were allocated for student services. Negative effects on student retention were found to be associated with the size of the university (the larger the university the lower the retention rate) and the lack of student community.

The amount of money used by institutions to provide student services indicated the institution’s commitment to students, and it directly affected the satisfaction students felt with the faculty and their perception that the faculty was student-oriented. Student services expenditures also positively affected student perception with regards to trust of the administration, general educational requirements, the faculty and the overall quality of instruction, and overall satisfaction with the college experience in a positive way. The investment in student services was found to be more critical than investment in the curriculum because it had a greater positive effect on student satisfaction and, therefore, retention. Indeed, the more an institution strives to positively affect the student’s social

and intellectual experiences through integration into the world of college, the more satisfied the student will be and the more likely he or she will persist to degree completion. (Tinto, 1993).

Institutions that provide high levels of career or vocational counseling have a higher retention rate (Astin, 1993), possibly because student commitment toward a goal is a strong factor in determining whether or not a student stays in college. Both high and low ability students were found to be more likely to persist in college if they had medium to high levels of commitment. (Tinto, 1993). Enrolling in honors programs also had positive effects on student retention (Astin, 1993).

Faculty Characteristics

Positive environmental factors having to do with the faculty include the humanities orientation of the faculty, faculty morale, faculty liberalism, faculty diversity orientation, the percentage of women faculty, the percentage of faculty Ph.Ds., and the faculty perception of racial conflict on campus. Negative effects were related to time stress and use of active learning in the classroom (Astin, 1993). Low student-to-faculty ratios had positive effects on student perception of the faculty as student-oriented and was associated with a high degree of student satisfaction. Likewise high student-to-faculty ratio led to negative effects on virtually every measure of student satisfaction including individual support services, overall quality of instruction, general education requirements, opportunities to take interdisciplinary courses, and the overall college experience (Astin, 1993).

Astin (1993) also found that student interaction with the faculty had a strong positive effect on retention rates. The types of faculty interactions that had the largest

positive effects on student retention had to do with talking with faculty members outside of class and being a guest in the faculty member's home. Other methods of interaction might include the mentoring of a student by a faculty member or faculty-facilitated student projects outside of the classroom. These interactions prevent student isolation and integrate the student into college life. The negative factors included having a full or part-time job and not living on campus, which may be directly related to the inability of students who work and commute to interact with other students and with faculty members.

Curricular Characteristics

Variables having to do with curriculum that had positive effects on student persistence included the presence of progressive curricular offerings, adherence to a true core curriculum, and a senior comprehensive examination requirement (Astin, 1993). These factors speak to the rigor of the institution's curriculum. Curricular variables that negatively affected student persistence were associated with large college size, the lack of student community, and whether the university was a research university.

Student Involvement

Peer interaction had the greatest positive effect of all environmental factors with faculty interaction following close behind. Students who remain isolated from college life are much more likely to be dissatisfied and drop out (Astin, 1993; Tinto, 1993). The quantity and quality of student-to-student and student-to-faculty interactions are critical to student retention (Tinto, 1993, Astin, 1993). Institutions can improve their retention rates by providing opportunities for students to interact with each other and with the faculty and staff. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) reviewed three decades of college

retention research, including their own, in an attempt to answer six fundamental questions:

1. Do students change during college?
2. What net effects does college attendance have over other non-college changes?
3. Does the type of college determine the changes students undergo?
4. Are the student changes related to institutional experiences?
5. Do student characteristics affect the changes?
6. Are the changes brought about by college continue long term?

They found that attending college affects the learning and cognitive changes, psychosocial changes, and attitudes and values of students. These changes are less important when taken individually than when combined. There is no scientific evidence that colleges actually change their students since no control group of non-college students was included in any study. However, Pascarella and Terenzini state that this does not mean that college has no impact on students (2005).

Over the past 40 years, the evidence supporting the changes brought about by a college education on the cognitive skills, moral reasoning, and economic success of post-secondary students may be stronger, but Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) contend that this does not lessen the fact that colleges also affect the attitudes, values, and/or psychosocial characteristics of students.

Current Reality within the United States

Although the United States once led the world in college student graduation and retention rates, it now falls increasingly behind. From the academic year 2000-01 to

2010-11, the total number of bachelor's degrees increased from 1,244,171 in 2000-2001 to 1,715,013 in 2010-2011, an increase of 37.9%. The total bachelor's degrees conferred upon students in public colleges increased from 812,438 to 1,088,297 for an increase of 34%. The total number of degrees conferred by private colleges went from 431,733 in 2000-2001 to 627,616 in 2010-2011, for an increase of 45.4%. Private non-profit colleges increased the number of bachelor's degrees by 25.5% going from 409,000 to 513,000 degrees, but the greatest amount of growth occurred in the private for-profit colleges which increased the number of bachelor's degrees from 23,000 to 115,000 for a 10-year increase of 397.2%. The number of postsecondary degrees conferred by private for-profit institutions increased by a larger percentage than the number conferred by public institutions and private nonprofit institutions for all levels of degrees (NCES, 2012b).

Public institutions accounted for 63% of all bachelor's degrees earned. Meanwhile, private non-profit colleges awarded 30% of the bachelor's degrees. The private for-profit colleges accounted for 7% of all the bachelor's degrees given. Older students, sometimes known as non-traditional students, who were 25 to 29 years old completing a bachelor's degree or higher between 1990 and 2012 increased their numbers from 23% to 33% (NCES, 2012b).

Economic Impact

The increased earning power associated with a post-secondary degree not only affects individual economies, but also influences the economy of the United States as well. By the year 2018, 62% of the jobs in the United States will require at least some college education (United States Department of Education, 2011b). The unemployment rate for workers with at least a bachelor's degree was lower than the unemployment rates

of workers with only a high school diploma, GED, or less. “During the most recent economic recession (December 2007 through June 2009), the unemployment rate increased less for those who had at least a bachelor's degree than for those who had less than a bachelor's degree” (NCES, 2012b).

In 2012, some 15.5% of young adults between the ages of 20 and 24 were unemployed. The unemployment rate for 25 to 34 year olds was 9.2% for the same period. Overall, the unemployment rate for 25- to 64 year-olds, which included the 25 to 34 year-old subset, was 7.4%. This pattern was consistent across several levels of educational attainment in 2012, such as the attainment levels of high school completion and of some college education (NCES, 2012b).

The NCES (2012b) definition of educational attainment in this indicator refers to the highest level of education achieved (i.e., less than high school completion, high school completion, some college education, or a bachelor's degree or higher). The unemployment rate is defined by the NCES as “the percentage of persons in the civilian labor force who are not working and who made specific efforts to find employment during the prior 4 weeks. The civilian labor force refers to the civilian population employed or seeking employment” (NCES, 2012b).

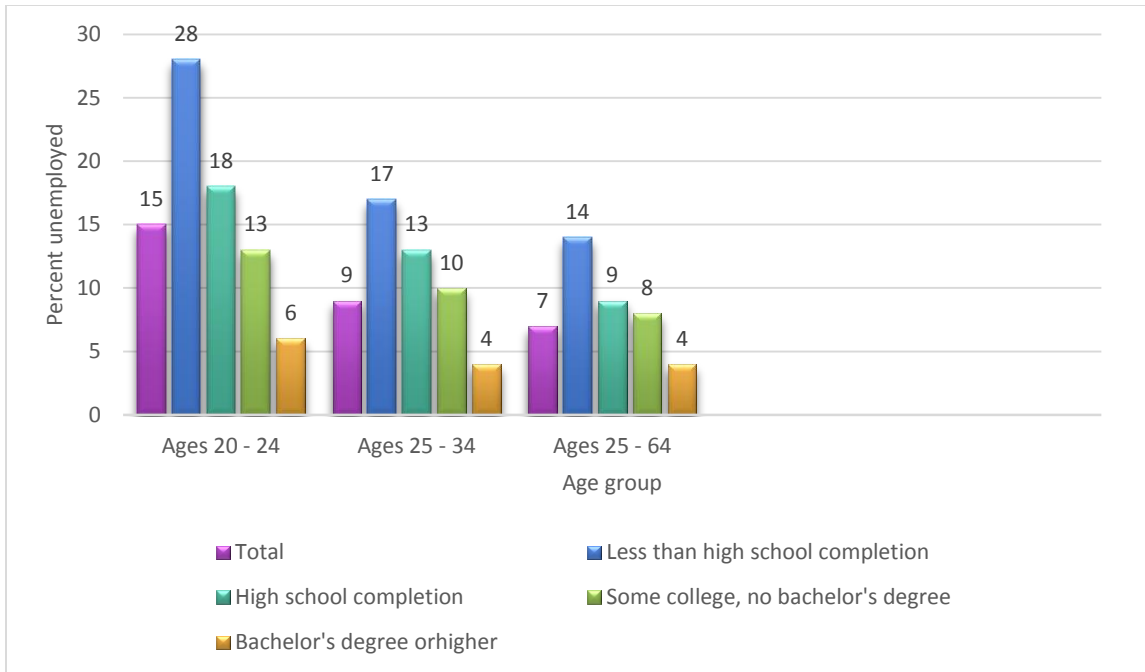


Figure 9. 2012 Unemployment rates—sorted by age group and educational attainment.

This chart shows the 2012 unemployment rates, by age group and educational attainment. The data for 20- to 24-year-olds above exclude persons enrolled in school. High school completion includes equivalency credentials, such as the General Educational Development (GED) credential (U.S. Department of Labor, 2012).

As the chart shows, the individuals across all age groups with a bachelor's degree or higher had a lower unemployment rate than their peers who had only a high school diploma between 1990 and 2012. The gap is especially striking in the 20-24 age group where the statistics show a 10% difference between people with a bachelor's degree to those without a bachelor's degree. These unemployment rates corresponding with lower levels of educational attainment were also consistent for males and females across each age group during this time (NCES, 2012b).

The federal government also tracks the employment rate, also known as the employment to population ratio. The employment rate shows the proportion of the non-military population that is employed and measures the economy's ability to provide jobs. Although the terms are used interchangeably, the employment rate reflects the number of people who are looking for work but cannot find it, whereas the employment to population ratio shows whether the economy is generating jobs quickly enough to provide employment for a constant proportion of those looking for work.

The chart below shows that 87% of those who were 20 to 24 years old with a bachelor's degree or higher were employed in 2012. 82% of the 25 to 34 year-olds were employed during the same year, and 82% of all individuals between the ages of 25 and 64 were employed. Even individuals with some college education fared better compared to their high school graduate peers. Figure 10 shows the employment to population ratios by age group and educational attainment for 2012.

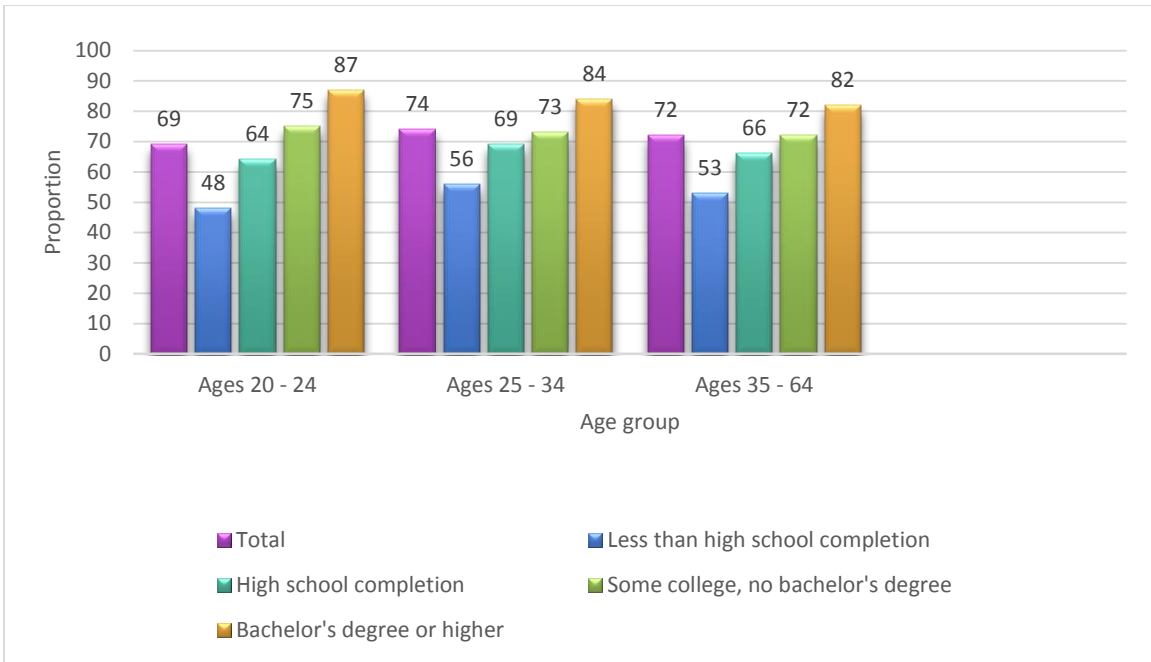


Figure 10. Employment to population ratios in 2012—sorted by age group and educational attainment.

The high school completion category in Figure 10 includes students with equivalency credentials, such as the General Educational Development (GED). The category of some college includes persons with no college degree as well as those with an associate’s degree.

The employment-to-population ratio is defined as the proportion of the civilian population that is employed. Educational attainment refers to the highest level of education achieved (i.e., less than high school completion, high school completion, some college, or a bachelor’s degree or higher). Data for 20 to 24 years old exclude persons enrolled in school (United States Department of Labor, 2012).

President Barack Obama stated in his address to Macomb College in Warren, Michigan, “by 2020, this nation will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world” (Whitehouse, 2012b). Presently, the United States ranks ninth in

the number of young students enrolled in college behind such countries as Korea, Canada, and Japan. The White House Office of the Press Secretary released a statement declaring that “jobs requiring at least an associate’s degree are projected to grow twice as fast as those requiring no college experience” (Whitehouse, 2009).

The chart below shows the increase in the number of college graduates for the nation members of The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), an organization of 34 countries whose purpose is to promote trade and economic growth, from 15% to 22% as compared to the small increase (28% to 32%) in the number college graduates in the United States from 2001 to 2010. This chart also reflects data on high school completion rates for the adult population (ages 25 to 64) of OECD member countries.

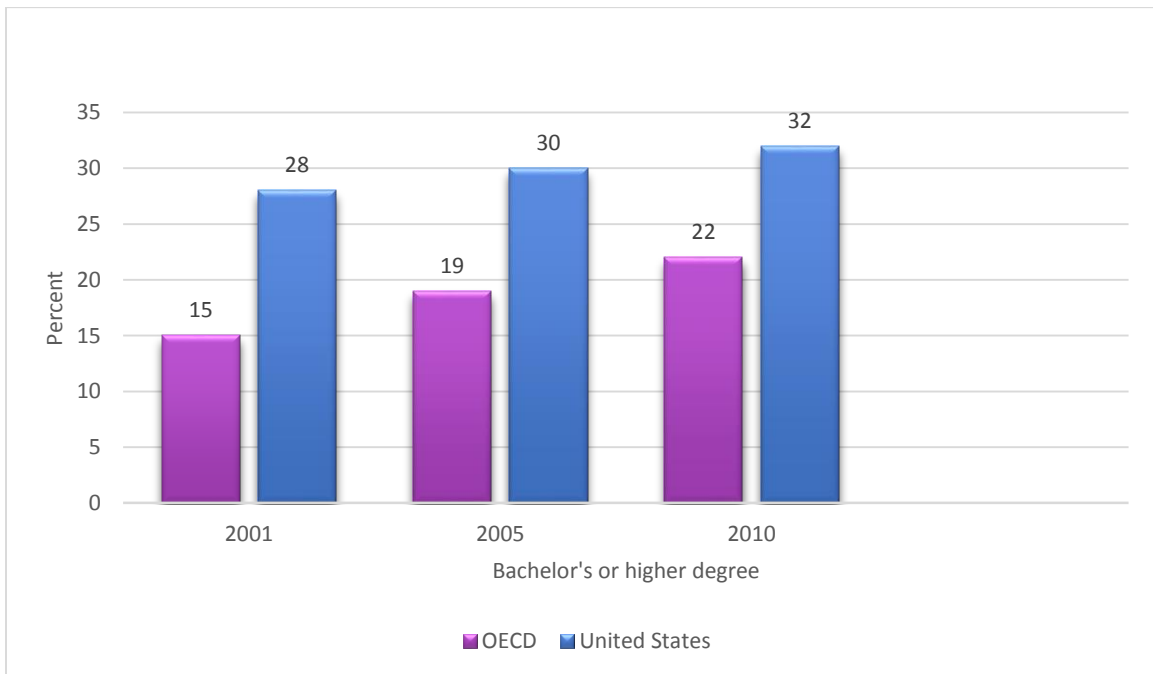


Figure 11. The percentage of college graduates for the nation members of the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development compared to the percentage of United States College Graduates for the years 2001, 2005, and 2010.

The OECD average number of post-secondary degrees increased by 7%, and the percentage of United States graduates increased by only 4% between the years of 2001 and 2010. Attainment data in Figure 11 refer to comparable levels of degrees as classified by the International Standard Classification of Education (OECD, 2010).

More than half of all new jobs in the next decade will require a postsecondary certificate or degree. (United States Department of Education, 2011). In the coming decade, the levels of employment and growth in wages will be much higher for individuals with professional certificates and postsecondary education degrees at the associate, bachelor's, and graduate levels than those with only a high school diploma.

This also means higher earnings and to state, federal, and local governments in the form of increased tax revenue. Each 4-year college graduate generates, on average, \$5,900 more per year in state, federal, and local tax revenue than each high school graduate. Over a lifetime, each generates, on average, \$177,000 more in tax revenue than those with only a high school degree (United States Department of Education, 2011b).

Current Reality in Arkansas

Increasing Arkansas' bachelor's degree attainment level by 10% would mean hundreds of millions of dollars in additional tax revenue each year for the state. However, to attract the best jobs and fastest growing firms, the state must have a highly qualified workforce. 62% of the jobs predicted to be available within the next decade will require some college education.

In 2009, 28% of Arkansas's 105,953 students entering college attained a degree. The President's goal for the state is to increase the rate to between 48% and 60% by 2020 (Whitehouse, 2009). The economic strength of Arkansas depends heavily upon the

education and skills of its workers. According to the Chronicle of Higher Education's College Completion microsite (2013), 19.7% of Arkansas' first time, full-time college students graduated within 4 years from 4-year public schools in 2010 and 38.7% graduated within 6 years. The United States percentage for first time, full-time students graduating within 4 years is 31.3% and within 6 years is 58.9% (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2013). This statistic is influenced by many factors. Students who begin full-time but spend most of their undergraduate experience attending part-time while taking on other responsibilities will drive this statistic down. In addition, transfers across institutions are not accounted for in this statistic.

Governor Mike Beebe (2011) discussed Arkansas' college completion goals in his 2011 State of the State address. He stated, "Our woefully low rates of degree completion must change if we are to truly claim educational success. . . . We can and must double the number of college graduates in Arkansas by 2025 if we are to stay competitive" (2011). He also said that he wants to tie the funding to higher education institutions to "coursework completion and graduation rates, not simply to enrollment" (2011). "These tax dollars," he said, "must produce college graduates, not just fill up seats" (2011).

The state of Arkansas has long struggled with the need to increase the college graduation rate of its students. The Chronicle of Higher Education microsite (2013) shows Arkansas as fourth from the bottom in 6-year college student graduation rates at 4-year public colleges (38.7%) just above Idaho (37.8%), Alaska (26.6%), and the District of Columbia (7.7%) (2013).

Private 4-year colleges in Arkansas do a better job of graduating their students than their public counterparts with 56.6% of students graduating within 6 years, but they

still rank 37th in the number of students graduating in the United States (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2013).

The overall percentage of adults from the ages of 24 to 64 residing in the state of Arkansas with bachelors or higher degrees was 21.6% in 2011. This places Arkansas as 47th in the nation (NCHEMS, 2013). The per capita income of Arkansas residents was just over \$34,000 in 2011 ranking Arkansas as 44th in the nation (NCHEMS, 2013). The difference in median earnings between a high school diploma and a bachelor's degree for 25 to 64 year olds in 2010 was \$16,904 (NCHEMS, 2013). The median household income in 2010 was just over \$38,000, lower than all surrounding states except Mississippi (NCHEMS, 2013). This is important to Arkansas because personal income is highly correlated with the percentage of the population with a bachelor's degree and with a growing economy.

Arkansas ranks 48th in educational attainment beyond high school. The percentage of 24 to 64 year-olds with a bachelor's degree or higher was 18.2% in 2000, according to the decennial census (NCHEMS, 2013). It is important for any state to raise the educational attainment of its adult population because of the positive relationships between an educated citizenry, successful business and industry, and high paying jobs. In addition, much evidence has shown that higher levels of education lead to fewer health problems and greater levels of civic engagement (NCHEMS, 2013).

Arkansas ranks 45th in the nation for the total number of credentials and degrees awarded by Arkansas' public 4-year colleges per 100 full-time equivalent (FTE) students. In 2009, the total number of credentials and degrees given out per 100 FTE students was

18.1. This number is lower than the number for all of the surrounding states except for Louisiana. The national number per 100 FTE students was 20.8 (NCHEMS, 2013).

Arkansas has been aware for some time that the agriculturally based job market is disappearing and must be replaced by higher paying jobs in the technology and information services areas so that its citizens can earn higher incomes and have more economically sustainable employment. According to the United States Census Bureau, the median household income for Arkansans between the years of 2007-2011 was \$40,149 compared to the median income in the United States of \$52,762 (2013). During this same time, 18.4% of all Arkansans were living below the poverty rate. This makes Arkansas one of the poorest states overall, despite the number of colleges and universities within the state.

The salaries for technology-based jobs are substantially higher. Although the state can do and has done things legislatively to bring higher paying jobs to the state, new industries will not come if the state cannot provide a sustainable workforce for those jobs. The two main ways to provide this workforce are either to import in workers who have been trained in other states or to create those workers within the state through college and university programs and degrees.

Over the years Arkansas' graduation rate for bachelor's degrees has been low in comparison to other states. The overall graduation rates for 4-year universities has remained relatively stagnant through the cohort years of 2002 (38.4%) to the cohort year of 2006 (39.3%). The graduation rate for 4-year universities for the cohort year 2006 (freshmen entering in the Fall of 2005) ranges from 21.9% (University of Arkansas Little

Rock) to 58.1% (University of Arkansas Fayetteville) followed by Arkansas Tech University (42.7%) and the University of Central Arkansas (40.1%) (NCHEMS, 2013).

During each of the 5 cohort years, female students kept higher graduation rates than their male counterparts, averaging between 40.2% (2003) to 42.4% (ACT, 2006). Male graduation rates averaged from 33.1% (2003) to 35.7% (ACT, 2006). Within the 2006 cohort, the graduation rates by race/ethnicity showed that the highest graduation rates were found among the Asian and Caucasian students. The race/ethnicity with the lowest graduation rates for all four-cohort years was African American (NCHEMS, 2013).

The Arkansas Higher Education Comprehensive Report on student retention and graduation (2012b) states that students who entered college at the age of 19 or younger had the highest and most consistent graduation rates at Arkansas' 4-year universities. These rates hovered around the 40% mark, with 39.1% being the lowest and 41.1% being the highest. Students who entered college between the ages of 20 and 34 had the lowest graduation rates with averages between 11% (the lowest among the 20 to 24 year-olds) and 21.6% (the highest among the 25-34 year-olds). The graduation rates of those who entered college between the ages of 35 and 44 averaged between 32.9% and 38.9%, although this has somewhat declined over the last 4 cohort years; students who entered college between the ages of 45 to 54 have less consistent graduation rates with cohort year 2003 averaging only 21.7% and cohort year 2006 averaging the highest of all groups with a 58.3% graduation rate. There is no reported data for the cohort year of 2005, but the graduation rate among the 55 and older group for 2006 dropped to 28.6% (ADHE, 2012).

The 1-year fall-to-fall retention rates at Arkansas' 4-year universities for the cohorts that entered college between the years of 2006 to 2010 has remained consistently around 68%. This rate is consistently 15%-20% above the completion rates of students who enter a 2-year college in the state of Arkansas. The state also calculates the student fall-to-fall success rate which is defined as the total number of students retained added to the number of students graduating divided by the number of students in the original cohort (ADHE, 2012). Arkansas' 4-year universities have higher success rates (retained students and graduating students) than the 2-year colleges, averaging between 68.1% and 70.4%. The 2-year college success rates average between 64.2% and 67%.

The reported 1-year retention rates for the 2010 to 2011 school years show that females remained in college at a higher rate than their male counterparts in both 4-year and 2-year colleges, with an overall retention rate of 57.8% for males and 64.4% for females. Asian and Hawaiian Islanders had the highest 1-year retention rate at 4-year universities with 79.6% and 83.3% respectively, followed by Hispanics at 71.1%, Caucasians at 70.9%, American Indian/Alaskan at 61.0%, and African Americans at 56.2%.

By age group, the first-year retention rates for 4-year colleges were 67.9% for students who were entering college when younger than 18, 69.7% for students entering between the ages of 18 and 19, 48.2% for students entering between the ages of 20-24, 49.8% for students entering between the ages of 25-34, 56.7% for students entering between the ages of 35-44, 65.7% for students entering between the ages of 45-54, and 77.8% for students entering at the ages of 55 or older (ADHE, 2012).

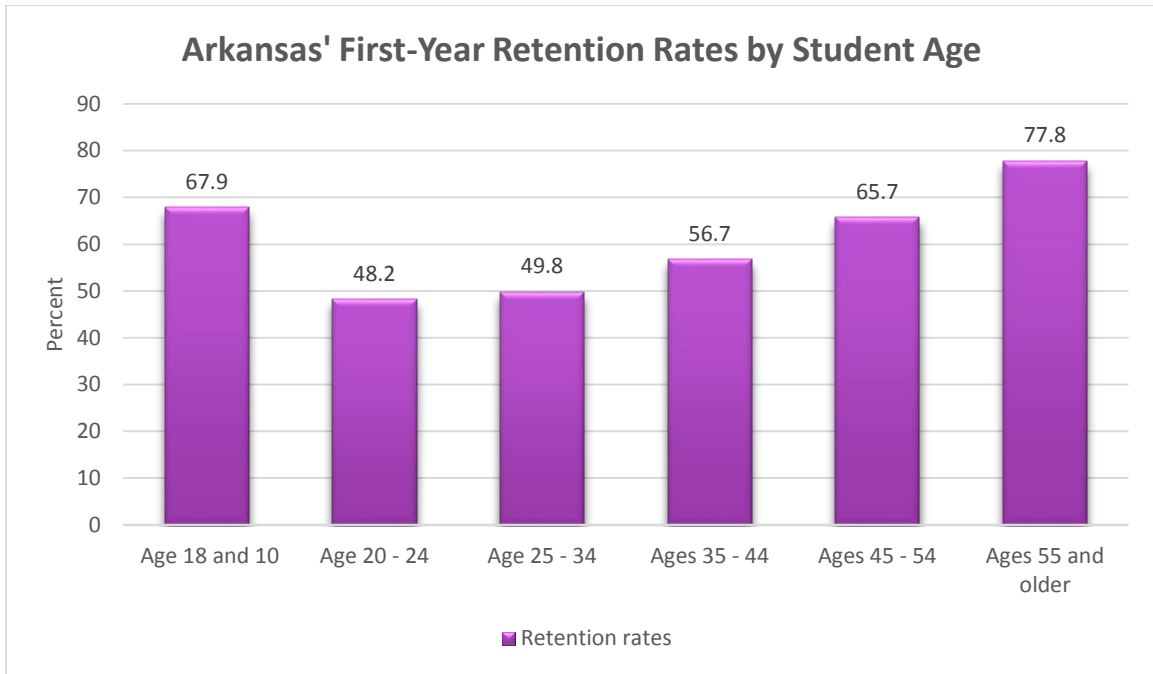


Figure 12. First-year retention rates for 4-year colleges in Arkansas—sorted by age.

Best Practices Research

Because each institution and its students are different, there can be no one “magic formula” for student success. However, the research points to areas of action that can make a difference in the life of a student once he or she becomes part of the institutional community that can positively affect a student’s choice to stay or go. These retention factors are within the control of the institution, and these are the things that successful student retention programs will more than likely address. Each institution has a different set of attributes and circumstances, as do the students that each serves.

Kuh et al. (2005), studied 20 successful retention programs across the country in an attempt to determine “best practices” in student retention. They found that colleges with successful retention programs, based upon higher-than-predicted graduation rates, addressed four basic areas of student need: student engagement, student satisfaction,

student learning, and student personal development. These 20 top-performing institutions' practices included high academic expectations, active and collaborative learning, adaptation of the learning environment, clear pathways to student learning, innovation and improvement based on data-informed decision making, and shared responsibility for high quality student education and success Kuh et al. (2005). The properties and conditions that Kuh et al. found were common to all of the 20 institutions that he studied were the following: a commitment to their educational philosophy, a focus on student learning, a willingness to adapt their environment for educational enrichment, clear pathways for student success, a drive toward improvement, and a shared responsibility for educational quality and student success.

The practices of these institutions stressed academic challenge through high expectations for student performance, which included extensive writing, reading, and class preparation. The institutions required their seniors to participate in rigorous culminating experiences, and celebrated scholarship. Through the use of peer learning communities, students engaged in active and collaborative learning. The colleges were also mindful of the diverse learning styles of their students. Opportunities for serving and learning in the local community were provided. The institutions' faculty members were accessible and responsive, and student-faculty interaction was made available through academic advising, undergraduate research, and electronic technologies. Each college had some sort of enriching educational experience such as study abroad, online learning, civic engagement, internships or some other type of experiential learning, and/or co-curricular leadership opportunities. These colleges provided supportive campus environments through the use of transition programs, advising networks, peer support, multiple safety

nets, special support programs, and welcoming residential environments (Kuh et al., 2005).

Likewise, Tinto (2005) concludes that successful retention is based upon institutional commitment to students, a commitment to the education of all students, and the commitment to supportive social and educational communities in which all students are integrated. Effective implementation of a student retention program, according to Tinto, should include providing resources for retention program development, an incentive for program participation that reaches out to faculty and staff members, a commitment to a long-term process of program development, putting the ownership for institutional change in the hands of those who are implementing it, a systematic, collaborative, campus-wide approach to retention, the assurance that the faculty and staff have the skills needed to implement the program, frontloading student retention efforts by attending to student needs as soon as possible, and continuous assessment of the program aimed toward improvement (2005).

This study focused on the attributes of two college retention programs in Arkansas and the success of those programs in holding on to their students to degree completion. A functional analysis was done of both of the institutions' student retention programs. Cognitive and non-cognitive demographics and pre- and post-admissions variables of their students were studied to determine how each institution meets the needs of their different student populations. The programs will be assessed according to the "best practices" of the recent retention research.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative, multi-case study was to describe and compare how two demographically different institutions of higher learning in Arkansas respond to the need to increase the retention rate of their students, especially that of first year, first time freshmen. The units of analyses were the two student retention programs. The first subquestion addressed the need to determine why and how the retention programs at both institutions were implemented, describing the characteristics and goals of each. The second subquestion reviewed the data utilized in determining where and how limited resources are used to meet the needs and goals of the two programs, what processes were used to determine what students were targeted as *at risk* for dropping out of college, and what programs have been put in place to counteract possible student attrition. The third subquestion dealt with the assessment of the student retention program as a whole – what assessment systems were used to determine the overall effectiveness in preventing student dropout, who was responsible for the success of the program, and what changes have been made based on the institution’s program assessment and determined goals. Additionally, the researcher did a cross-case analysis of the two programs, comparing the two programs with each other and with best practices as determined by recent research. The secondary questions addressed by this study were as follows:

- Implementation
 - What are the unique characteristics that affect each institution's retention rate?
 - What decision-making process does each institution use to determine how retention problems will be addressed?
- Data Analysis
 - What data were used to determine which retention problems would be addressed?
 - What goals did each institution choose to improve student retention?
 - Why were these particular goals chosen?
 - What retention program components have been implemented, especially those targeting at-risk students as determined by the data?
- Assessment
 - What assessment systems, if any, have been put in place to determine the effectiveness of the implemented programs and services?
 - Who is responsible for the implementation, assessment, and success of the retention program components?
 - What changes have been or will be implemented to improve the programs?
- Cross-case Analysis
 - How do the practices of the four retention programs compare with each other in regards to the best practices as determined by recent research?

Qualitative data were gathered from individual interviews conducted either over the phone or face to face and from focus group interviews conducted at the respective campuses. There was no direct observation of the programs at work. Additional data were gathered to inform the study including resources from the Southern Regional Education Board (2007), the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), the U.S. Department of Education's NCES (2011a), and the 2012 Arkansas Higher Education Comprehensive Report.

The United States Government Accountability Office (1990) lists four different variations and applications of case studies. The first is to explain real-life interventions-- explanatory or causal, descriptive, and exploratory. This study describes an intervention and its real-life context.

Research Design

This descriptive qualitative multi-case study compares student retention programs in two demographically different universities in Arkansas. Creswell (2007) defined qualitative research as “an inquiry process of understanding based on a distinct methodological tradition of inquiry that explores a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting” (p. 249). Since “a comprehensive ‘catalog’ of research designs for case studies has yet to be developed” (Yin, 2009, p. 25), the researcher developed a holistic view of the retention programs of the two studied institutions through the review of multiple sources, including interviews, documents, and quantitative data. The researcher used an analysis checklist, which served to organize the various data into meaningful categories so that an inductive data analysis could be made.

This focus on a few key issues is known as an analysis of themes (Creswell, 2007), and is not intended for generalizing beyond the two cases. The analytic strategy in this study is to “identify issues within each case and then look for common themes that transcend the cases” (Creswell, 2007, p. 75).

Creswell (2007) described qualitative research as emergent because “all phases of the process may change or shift after the researchers enter the field and begin to collect data” (p. 39), so the data collected from the focus group and individual interviews guided the interpretation of the quantitative data. This allowed for a holistic account of the two programs studied through the multiple perspectives of those involved in the programs (Creswell, 2007). Bogdan and Biklen stated (2007) that case studies move from “broad exploratory beginnings...to more directed data collection and analysis” (p. 59). The focus of the study developed as information was gathered.

The study also took the historical context of the individual institutions into account (Creswell, 2007) because there is a relationship between the histories of the universities and the ways in which these universities approach student retention (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The researcher needs to understand the structure of the organization before its parts can be understood. However, the main focus of this study was the individual retention programs. Documents and research that were used to design the two retention programs contributed to the literature review and an understanding of the programs. Document review included reviewing processes within the program and an understanding of the performance requirements determined by the institutions.

A functional analysis of one of the retention programs completed in 2008 served as a modified field test. The information collected for the field test was taken from individual

telephone interviews and from retention program documents published by the institution. The interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and coded according to a preliminary matrix which was expanded for this study. Notes and analytical memos were written to capture the interview information and to inform a reflective analysis. Based on reflection and analysis of the field test, the protocol was determined to be an effective tool for the interview. It was also decided that adding focus groups to the interviews would enrich the data collection.

After approval from the Harding University Institutional Review Board (Appendix A) and the dissertation committee, interviews with potential respondents were scheduled and signed consent forms obtained. One-to-one interviews were conducted to collect perceptual data from most of the Master Principals using the protocol found in Appendix B. Two of the principals were interviewed together. Two interviews were conducted over the telephone while all the others were face-to-face and lasted from 30 to 60 minutes each.

Interview and focus group questions were determined ahead of time, but qualitative research design is an evolving process. The interview schedules allowed for open-ended responses and were flexible enough for the observer to note and collect data on unexpected dimensions of the topic (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The focus group occurred before or after individual interviews based on convenience scheduling. The protocol for the focus groups is included in Appendix C.

Interviews and the focus groups were recorded to ensure the reliability of the data. Field notes were written immediately after the interviews and focus groups. Transcription of the recorded interviews and focus group data occurred as soon as possible. Charts and documents created during the focus groups provided additional sources of data.

The quality of case study research designs involves the study's construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability. Construct validity is determined by whether or not the correct operational measures are used for the concepts being studied. In case studies, construct validity is achieved by using multiple sources of evidence, establishing a chain of evidence, and having key informants review the draft of the case study report (Yin, 2009). This study used several types of data, including quantitative governmental and institutional documents, physical artifacts, archival records, individual interviews, and focus group interviews. Yin (2009) stated, "For case studies the most important use of documents is to corroborate and augment evidence from other sources" (p.103).

The documents used in this study helped verify correct spellings, names, titles and other information that was obtained from interviews and provided specific detail to corroborate information from other sources (Yin, 2009). Interview protocols were used to follow the case study line of inquiry and to remain unbiased when asking questions. The focused interviews were used mainly to corroborate facts and gather further information about program implementation while remaining as open-ended as possible.

Internal validity mainly addresses case studies that try to explain causal relationships, not descriptive or explanatory case studies, which are not causal in nature. But internal validity also deals with inference-making. Because inferences are made in case studies every time an event cannot be directly observed (Yin, 2009), the researcher used a pattern-matching logic comparing the analytic checklist of best practices to the real-life practices of the two cases. This study sought a replication of results based on the assumption that the larger the number of best practices each institution used in their

student retention programs, the greater the number of students each would retain until graduation. It did not try to explain the reason for those results.

It is difficult to attain external validity in case studies because the research's analysis depends upon generalizing a particular set of results to some broader theory (Yin, 2009). It is difficult to generalize to other institutional retention programs using only one case study as evidence. In an attempt to overcome this problem, the researcher has done two separate case studies using the same analytical checklist. Replicating the results between the two cases strengthens support for the theory.

The reliability of any research depends upon the minimization of errors and biases. Having a case study protocol was essential to increasing the reliability of this study since two different institutional case studies were done. The protocol included data collection procedures, outlines of the case studies, detailed case study questions, and an evaluation (see Appendix D).

Sample

The research sites were selected based on purposeful sampling. Creswell (2007) explained, "This [purposeful sampling] means that the inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study" (p. 125). This sampling strategy may be well-suited to collecting data valuable to answering the research questions related to a phenomenon, according to Creswell.

Two demographically different 4-year universities in the state of Arkansas were chosen for the cases to be studied. One of these universities is public while the other is private. One is less selective in its choice of students than the other is, causing the student

populations to be demographically different. Each university has a well-established student retention program. One uses an outside consulting firm to build and assess the program. One builds and assesses its program from the inside. Despite their differences, both have increased their student retention rates over the past few years.

These two case studies illustrate contrasting strategies for designing and implementing successful student retention programs. Creswell suggested that in multi-case studies maximum variation is a good sampling strategy “to represent diverse cases and to fully describe multiple perspectives about cases” (p. 129). Maximum variation “documents diverse variations and identifies important common patterns,” according to Creswell (p. 127). This multiple-case inquiry focused on how and why the increasingly successful outcomes of these two diverse programs occurred, looking for literal replication of this success between the two cases. In addition to participant perceptual data gained through interviews and a focus group, context information was collected from both published and unpublished documents from the two universities related to their respective student retention programs.

Instrumentation

Before data collection began, the researcher designed an interview protocol to guide both the individual and the focus group interviews (Appendices B & C). The protocol assured the inclusion and sequencing of the questions to be asked, all of which were aligned to the research questions. The order of the questions was tied to the analysis checklist (Appendix E), following the six areas of best practice as determined by the research in order to fully determine which of these practices were implemented by the respective programs and to what extent. This was to aid in the analysis of the focus group

data. The interview protocol was a tool to assist focusing the discussions, but the sequence of questions retained flexibility in order to support a fluid discussion of the issues (Piccardi, 2005).

To determine validity, the researcher listened to the participants, observed how they answered the questions, and sought clarification on areas of ambiguity. Then, at the conclusion of each focus group and individual interview, the researcher asked participants to verify or summarize their comments (Krueger & Casey, 2009). Accepted protocol included giving advance notice of the focus group sessions, developing and practicing questions to be asked, planning and scheduling of all logistics, practicing moderator skills, and debriefing immediately after each focus group session (Krueger & Casey). The researcher followed this accepted protocol by using the checklist for focus group interviews included in the guide for focus group research developed by Krueger and Casey to ensure that results were trustworthy and accurate.

In reconstructing the dialogues that took place during the individual and focus group interviews, the researcher used the subject's own words as often as possible to provide accuracy. A description of the physical setting and a list of participants were noted. Gestures, accents, and facial expressions were also noted (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The behavior and assumptions of the researcher were also noted to determine if any undue researcher influence might have occurred.

Data Collection Procedures

The data collection, analysis, interpretation and reporting of the research led to a thick, rich description and interpretation of the two cases. Several different kinds of information were needed to answer the study's research questions. The matrix shown

below, which was designed as modeled by Bloomberg and Volpe (2008), explained the alignment between the types of information, what the research required, and the method which was used. Bloomberg and Volpe stated that, "Creating this type of alignment ensures that the information you intend to collect is directly related to the research questions, therefore providing answers to the respective research questions" (p. 71).

Table 1

Overview of Information Needed

| Type of Information | What the Researcher Needed | Method |
|---------------------|---|---|
| Contextual | Background and organizational information about each student retention program | Document review Interviews |
| Demographical | Descriptive information regarding participants and their schools | Document review Interviews Focus groups |
| Perceptual | Thick perceptual description of the participants' role in the student retention program | Focus groups Interviews |
| Theoretical | Research and theory relevant to the larger context of the study | Literature review Data analysis |

Contextual information

Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) described contextual information as, "...knowledge about an organization's history, vision, objectives, products or services, operating principles, and business strategy" (p. 70). This information was gained by reviewing each institution's internal documents and from personal knowledge of the program obtained

from personal and focus group interviews. Data placing the focus group participants within the context of the retention programs were also obtained through the document review and interviews.

Demographical information

Basic demographic information for each site was needed to understand the context of the student retention programs. Student ethnicity and socio-economic status, other general information about various student cohorts, and institutional admission standards were determined.

Perceptual Information

Participant perceptions of their student retention programs were needed for study. To answer the research questions, semi-structured interview questions helped the respondents reflect on their experiences and the changes that, in their view, have occurred as a result of the student retention program. The perceptual information gained during data collection was essential to telling the story of what the participants believe to be true in this descriptive study.

Theoretical Information

A review of relevant literature contributed to an understanding of the theoretical foundations of student retention research. This research included the historical background pertaining to student retention, the theories regarding the effect of institutional environment upon retention, and the determination of best practices in student retention improvement gathered from recent research. Review of institutional contributed to a deeper understanding of the underlying retention program theory and context for the study. During the course of data analysis, further research was required to

deepen theoretical understanding of emergent themes and was referenced along with the report of the findings.

The researcher contacted the respective “gatekeepers” (Creswell, 2007, p. 125) of the student retention programs to request access to university records and to set up interviews and focus group discussions. The gatekeeper was told why the university was chosen for the study and what would be done at the site during the study, including the amount of time to be spent at the site by the researcher. He was told how the results would be reported and what the benefits to the gatekeeper, the participants, and the site would be.

The interview participants were selected based on purposeful sampling. Creswell (2007) explained, "This [purposeful sampling] means that the inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study" (p. 125). The gatekeepers were asked to prepare a list of people who had direct knowledge of the planning, implementation, and assessment of the respective programs to be part of the focus groups.

Data were obtained from two focus group interviews. The researcher played the role of moderator of the groups, the primary instrument for collecting data, and facilitator that kept individuals in the group focused on the topic being discussed. Throughout these interviews, the researcher obtained in-depth information about the participants' thoughts, beliefs, knowledge, reasoning, motivations, and feelings about a topic (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). All participants were encouraged to share their experiences, to listen to others and to respond to each other to maximize data collection (Piccardi, 2005).

As the questions were asked and answered, the researcher made judgments about what information was significant and made field notes during each focus group. Time

was set up to go through the course of the interview chronologically immediately following the focus group and to write up descriptive, detailed field notes on a computer (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The focus group discussions were both audio and video tape-recorded. The audio recordings were transcribed to assist in data analysis.

Data collection for the focus group discussions took place at times and in places that were convenient for the participants. The protocol and processes for the focus groups were explained in advance and consent forms acquired. The gatekeeper at the university located a meeting place that was easy to find and comfortable for the participants (Krueger & Casey, 2009). A familiar setting was used as a location for the focus groups. Krueger and Casey (2009) suggested that the ideal size of a focus group for most noncommercial topics is 5 to 8 participants. For this study, each focus group was composed of members of the institutional student retention program. The researcher encouraged a less formal, conversational style of discussion (Piccardi, 2005).

Because the focus group discussions were audio and videotape recorded, it was necessary to have the recording equipment located in the room. The recording equipment directly documented the important thoughts of the participants. The focus groups were reminded that all recordings were confidential (Krueger & Casey, 2009).

The researcher asked each of the questions from the interview protocol, and as participants answered the questions, the discussion was allowed to flow naturally, using pauses and asking probing questions as appropriate. The researcher occasionally interrupted participants to keep the group focused and to move the conversation along from question to question until closure was brought to the discussion (Krueger & Casey, 2009). To maintain accuracy of the data collection, the researcher presented a summary

of the discussion at the end of each focus group (Krueger & Casey, 2009). The use of this method allowed for participants to verify or clarify the data collected and thus enhanced the content validity of the discussion.

Analytical Methods

Following the focus groups, as well as the individual interviews, field notes were taken by the researcher. Those field notes, transcripts of the discussions, audio tape recordings, and video tape recordings were reviewed for analysis. By analyzing the notes, transcripts, and recordings, the researcher analyzed the data into the concrete identifiable themes (Krueger & Casey, 2009).

The central research question and subquestions and the analysis checklist (Appendix E) directed the analysis for this study. The researcher systematically arranged and reviewed the collected data for recurring patterns of information to articulate the analysis clearly (Krueger & Casey, 2009). Through the process of sorting information and coding categories, a description of each of the student retention programs was obtained. The descriptive information was entered into the analysis checklist to connect the focus group questions to the research questions.

Codes were created for the context and description of each case. Codes were also created for themes within each case and for themes that are similar and different to facilitate cross-case analysis. Codes for assertions and generalizations across both cases were also included (Creswell, 2007). These codes assisted the researcher in locating text and video segments associated with a code or theme.

Since this research involved a chronology of events, multiple sources of data were collected to determine evidence for each step and phase in the evolution of the two

retention programs (Creswell, 2007). A direct interpretation was obtained by performing a cross-case synthesis to analyze the two cases using a word table that was created to display the data from the two cases according to the items in the analysis checklist.

Two elemental methods of coding, descriptive and in vivo, were used. A codebook captured the definitions and examples of codes used. Actual words from the respondents were captured in coded in vivo statements. Six initial domain codes were derived from the best practices analysis checklist. The researcher analyzed the data for these specific themes and collected data into clusters of ideas and providing details that supported those themes (Creswell, 2007). Analytic memo writing during analysis enhanced understanding of the properties and dimensions of the themes taken from the best practices in college student retention. Diagrams were created to assist in understanding relationships between categories of data.

A coding and analysis plan was developed before the data were collected for this study to begin the process of data collection and analysis. It was not restrictive but rather flexible and responsive to emerging understandings and the need for further inquiry as data were collected and analyzed. The final steps of the research design included synthesis and interpretation of the findings to provide a thick description of each case.

The written report was developed and organized by conceptual coherence of the data gathered for the central research question and subquestions to appropriately report the data using principles that stated the analysis clearly and effectively (Krueger & Casey, 2009). Through the multi-case design, the researcher used the resulting descriptive narrative to synthesize the knowledge and develop an expanded knowledge base concerning college student retention (Krueger & Casey, 2009).

Limitations

Researcher bias is inherent in all qualitative research since the gathered data must “go through the researcher’s mind before they are put on paper” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 37). Information must be interpreted as it is collected to determine if the data is contradictory and to decide if more information is needed (Yin, 2009). The extensive background research that must be done before the case study data collection stage can influence the attitudes of the researcher, causing pre-conceived notions about the information. A major part of any qualitative study is drawing inferences from what is learned as the various data are collected. This researcher, as a native of Arkansas and a high school principal in the state, has a vested interest in keeping students who have graduated from high school and have been accepted into college in college until graduation. It is also the belief of the researcher, drawn from the research, that colleges can and do affect the retention rates of their students through their policies, despite the demographics of the students they admit.

The researcher attempted to limit this bias by searching for patterns within and across the cases. A uniform framework through which the data from the cases were disaggregated was created. This analytic technique has been advanced by Yin (2009) for cross-case synthesis when two or more cases are studied. The data from each case were sorted into predetermined categories that had been divided into six distinctive themes.

The researcher also used “member checking” (Creswell, 2007, p. 208) to insure that the collected data were interpreted correctly. This was done by sending a draft of the case study to the participants so that any researcher misconceptions in the analyses, interpretations, and conclusions could be found and corrected. The intention was to

increase the accuracy of the study so that the results would be determined to be credible. The triangulation of multiple and different sources of data also helped to limit researcher bias. Quantitative data were used to corroborate the qualitative data that were collected. Some of the data were taken directly from the institutional websites, some data were taken from governmental documents, and some data were taken from mandated university reporting.

The nature of this qualitative, case study research did not allow the results to be broadly generalized (Bogdan, 2007). The assumption was that each university setting was unique, and generalization was, at best, tentative. The researcher did not attempt to identify trends that would produce reliably predictable and controllable phenomena. When referring to transferability, Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) stated that, "Although qualitative researchers do not expect their findings to be generalizable to all other settings, it is likely that the lessons learned in one setting might be useful to others" (p. 78). By constructing a rich and holistic description of the college student retention programs described in this study, the information gained should be informative and may be transferable to similar programs.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The central question of this qualitative case study asked how two different institutions of higher learning in Arkansas have responded to the need to increase the retention rate of their students especially that of first-year first time freshmen. The subsequent subquestions delve further into that response by looking at retention program implementation, the analysis of student demographic and retention data, and overall program and policy assessment. Each institution was contacted and key personnel were interviewed via phone and personal contact.

Case 1

History and Student Demographics

Case 1 is a public 4-year university in the state of Arkansas. It was founded in 1909. It maintains two campuses with a total of 10,950, but this study only examined the student retention program on the main campus, which has an on-campus enrollment of 3000 students. All students are required to live on campus, as space permits, until they have acquired 60 credit hours. This university has the second highest graduation rate of all the 4-year institutions in the state. It is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association. The main campus degree programs include Bachelor's degrees, Associate's degrees, and Pre-professional programs.

As of the Fall of 2012, the university has had 14 years of record enrollment. Its students come from every county in Arkansas, 44 of the 50 states plus the District of Columbia, and from 35 foreign countries. The number of students who live on the main campus equals 2,700. The student to faculty ratio is 18:1 with most of the classes being taught by credentialed professors rather than graduate assistants. The average ACT of the students has been higher than the state or national average for the past 18 years. The average ACT score of the freshman class of 2012 was 22.

The requirements for unconditional admission for entering freshmen include a composite ACT score of 15 or above, a composite SAT score of 1060 or above, or a composite COMPASS score of 47 (averaging scores in algebra, writing, and reading) or above for students who graduate from a public secondary school; composite ACT score of 19 or above, composite SAT score of 1330 or above, or a composite COMPASS score of 68 (averaging scores in algebra, writing, and reading) or above for students who graduate from a private secondary school, home school, or received a GED. The ACT writing exam is not required for admission. Students must prove completion of graduation requirements from a public secondary school, private secondary school, or a home school program documenting a minimum 2.0/4.0 cumulative GPA, and completion of the university's secondary school core curriculum or have earned a minimum GED score of 450.

Retention Program Initiation

In 2001, the administration recognized a need to decrease its student attrition rates. The first time, full-time entering student cohorts had been tracked since the Fall of 1993, and data showed a loss varying from 15% to 19% from the Fall to Spring Semester

for each of those years. The Fall 2000 entering freshman cohort at the university consisted of 1124 students, but only 910 returned in the Spring of 2001. This was a loss of 19% from the Fall to the Spring Semester.

The administration felt that there were many reasons for the loss of students, and there were several opinions given in regards to the causes of and solutions to the recognized retention problem. Because there were so many strong feelings associated with various approaches to addressing the local retention problem, the Office of Academic Affairs conducted a series of focus groups with various constituencies.

The focus groups consisted of four student groups, four faculty groups, three department head groups, one deans group and one admission/advising group. The Vice President of Student Services was put in charge of the research. A total of 77 students, faculty and staff participated in the focus groups. In each case, the participants were asked to make a list of ideas to answer the question, “What should the university do to improve student retention?”

Data Analysis

After making the list, each participant shared one idea in a round-robin fashion. A secretary projected the ideas on a wall for all the participants to see and attempts were made to obtain clarification before moving on to the next participant. This process was repeated until all ideas were exhausted. The list was then printed and copies were given to each participant. The participants were then given instructions to rate the top five items on a Likert scale with a 5 representing the idea the participant believed would have the most impact on retention and a 1 for the idea having the least. The results were then

tallied with a possible maximum score for any idea being five times the number of participants in the group.

The two highest-scoring ideas from each group were compiled into a list; and after omitting duplications, the total number of suggestions was 21. The ideas naturally fell into four areas: orientation classes/programs, improving/expanding advising, creating a more student-service/student-friendly attitude among faculty and staff, and improved/expanded student support/tutoring. The answers reached by the participants closely followed the national research on student retention.

Some of the highest-rated suggestions made by the various groups were as follows:

1. Create a freshman web page containing relevant information to assist freshman;
2. Develop a freshman orientation course that emphasizes study skills, time management, and information about the campus;
3. Improve academic advising at all levels;
4. Encourage faculty to be more student friendly; and
5. Establish an academic center for tutoring to improve tutoring programs.

Pilot Program

The first year of the strategic plan, the university chose to enlist the aid of an outside consulting firm, Noel-Levitz, to determine the needs of their incoming students and to better know how to meet these needs. Toward this end, the Student Life Department administered the College Student Inventory (CSI), a part of the Noel-Levitz Retention Management System to one-third of its incoming students in the Fall of 2001.

This instrument is a standardized survey designed to gauge a student's perceived readiness for college in terms of finances, academics, and socialization. The other two-thirds of the students became control groups.

The Student Services and resident hall staffs were given the task of using the CSI to provide services for the experimental group. Other departments on campus helped with tutoring, advising, and various types of support. In February, a report concerning the CSI program was presented to the administration. Approximately 90% of the freshmen who participated in the program had continued the Spring Semester. The decision was made to expand the program.

Full Implementation

Year 2. The next year the program was renamed *Bridge to Excellence* (B2E); and in its mission statement, the university declared its intention "to help freshmen make a successful transition from high school (or work) to college." The B2E program goals were to increase the university's freshmen retention rate, to boost participating freshmen's GPAs, and to build a personal student mentoring system.

Each program participant was assigned to a mentor taken from the Student Services staff and from volunteer faculty members. The B2E mentors were assigned the task of helping their mentees understand and evaluate their CSI results and to function as the student's *go to* person whenever the mentee had a college-related question or concern. B2E mentors were to build relationships with their mentees, offering them encouragement, advice, information, and feedback in order to make them feel welcome.

B2E defines a *program participant* as a student who was a first time, full-time freshman who met two criteria: the student has to have taken the CSI and must have met

at least one time with his or her assigned mentor during the fall semester. A *non-participant* was a student who did not meet with his or her mentor. Mentors notified the B2E Director of any meetings with their mentees so that accurate records were kept. The fall-to-fall retention rate after the second year of the program for first time freshmen was 71.93% for the B2E students and 63.6% for the others.

Year 3. In the third year, the Assistant to the Vice President of Student Services was assigned the duty of B2E program director, and a full-time staff member was hired to be the Retention Counselor. The program was expanded to include all freshmen, with the CSI given to each one during the first 2 days of the fall semester.

The university defined a *mentor* as a faculty or staff volunteer who establishes a relationship with his or her assigned students to help them successfully make the transition from high school to college. Each mentor was given a report on his or her mentees which included student background information, the student's motivational assessment, and specific recommendations for assisting the student. Mentors were asked to attend 2 days of summer training with a follow-up training in the spring. If the mentor could not attend one of the trainings, a one-on-one meeting with B2E staff was set up.

The retention rate continued to be in the 70% range, and there was the added advantage that the students in the program were maintaining a higher GPA than their non-participatory counterparts. The university received a Noel-Levitz Award for the program's accomplishments in 2003.

Year 4. In the fourth year, the director of the B2E program was moved to another position within the college and another director was chosen. Rather than administering the CSI over a two-day period, the decision was made to administer the test over the

summer as students enrolled. The goal of increasing the student graduation rate was added. The number of students participating in the program was still only a portion of the incoming freshman, and the mentors' role was only that of a campus contact. Nevertheless, the fall-to-spring retention rate for participants was over 87%, 17% higher than that of the non-participants, and their GPAs continued to be higher than those of their cohorts.

Year 5. Year 5 saw an expansion in the administration of the B2E program. At the end of this year, the annual report also included the retention rates of each cohort as they progressed through college. The graduation rate of students who were freshmen during the first year of the B2E program that remained in college and/or graduated from college by the end of their fourth year was 43%. In fact, the number of students who remained in college declined each year for each cohort, but the retention rate never dropped lower than 40%. The percentage of students in the first cohort that graduated within 4 years was 21.9%, which was the highest graduation rate for the university since 1993. This increased graduation rate was attributed to the B2E program.

Year 6. In the sixth year of the program, the students were assigned mentors who were in their chosen programs of study or, if that was not possible, their mentors were selected from within their chosen academic school. Undecided students were mentored by staff members. The role of the mentors was expanded to be more of a mentor, rather than just a campus contact. The mid-term grades of the participating students were sent to the mentors, who were encouraged (but not required) to either encourage success or provide aid if the student was struggling. The mentors also received the final grades of the students.

The percentage of participants in the B2E program that returned in the spring was 90% as compared to a fall-to-spring return rate of 72% for the non-participants. The average GPA of B2E students was .635 points higher. The fall-to-spring and fall-to-fall retention rates remained higher for the participants. The 5-year graduation rate for the first cohort was 33.77%. The fifth-year retention rate was 44.17%. Of the first-year cohort B2E students, 55.77% graduated within 5 years. The 5-year graduation rate for non-B2E students was 31.7%, approximately a 24% difference.

Program Structure

In 2008, the B2E program director was in charge of disaggregating the data, and he reported the results to the Vice President of Student Services who met with the Dean of Students throughout the year to discuss the program. The Dean of Students shared information about the program with the university's Executive Council. The program director, who was in charge of the day-to-day workings of the B2E program, passed on information to the other campus stakeholders through an online newsletter.

The Dean of Students began serving as Retention Services Director in July 1, 2008, and continued in this position through October 31, 2008. On November 1, an Associate Dean took over as the new Supervisor of Retention Service, and his full title was changed to Director of the CSS.

Of the 1260 first time full-time freshmen, 890 participated in the program for Year 8. The gender and ethnicity demographics of Year 8 B2E participants mirrored those of the Fall 2008 freshman class as a whole, with the demographics for the 2008 cohort 52.7% female, 47.2% male, 5.1% African American, 1.2% Native American/Alaskan, 1% Asian/Pacific Islander, 3.1% Hispanic/Latino, 87.7% Caucasian,

and 1.8% other or non-resident alien. According to the 11th Class Day Report data for the Spring 2009 Semester, 87.64% of B2E participants returned for the second semester, while only 78.65% of the non-participants came back, making the retention rate for B2E participants 8.99% higher than that of non-participants.

In 2007, the university president implemented a mandatory new student orientation program, and some departments created their own orientation classes that met that requirement. Those students who were undeclared or had a major that did not have an orientation course were required to attend Class 1001, which is the orientation to the university. The College Student Personnel Department also created the CSP 1013, *Principles of Collegiate Success*. That department created the 3-hour orientation course for incoming freshmen. The students spent the semester learning things like their Learning Styles Inventory, the way that the student best could spend their time studying, and how the university functions and works. They were given assignments like getting involved on campus and were required to attend events. These created courses were part of a collaborative effort to increase student retention. Feedback from faculty members said the students were much more prepared. They had an understanding of the policies of the university, and they were better equipped to schedule their courses the following semester.

The freshman advisory program was a collaborative effort between the Student Services Department and Academic Affairs. The university organized a task force committee that meets twice a semester. The task force was composed of representatives from both Academic Affairs and Student Services personnel. On the academic side,

members included faculty, an assessment person, and other administrators including the person who oversees the Class 1001 program, and the Academic Vice President.

On the Student Services side, members of the task force included the Student Services Vice President, the program directors from B2E and Campus Life (a division of Student Services), and other areas that the university thought influential to student success. Future task force meetings will also include a representative from the Fiscal Affairs; including this department is an attempt to be more global in determining how to help students succeed. The task force's thought is that even the administration of a student's account in the account office administers affects student retention.

In December 2011, a new Coordinator of Retention Services took on the role of B2E coordinator. Participants in Year 11 of the B2E program numbered 731 and 780 first time, full-time freshmen chose not to participate. The demographics of the program participants were approximately the same as the college population as a whole. Ninety faculty and 46 staff members volunteered to be mentors ($n = 136$). The job of the mentors continued to be the same as in previous years: to build a relationship with the student and help with the transition from high school to college. Mentors were assigned to their students by the B2E Coordinator. For Year 11, the Fall 2011 to Spring 2012 retention rate was higher (90.97%) than that for non-participants (78.97%). The Fall GPA for participants was 2.943, as compared to the overall GPA of 2.407 for non-participants. B2E participants had a Fall GPA that was 0.536 higher than the Fall GPA of non-participants.

There has been a push for a centralized academic advising center where students have access to a professional academic advisor for any questions that they have for

scheduling and degree completion information. About this time, the departments decided to streamline the degree programs and allow the transfer of course credits from one degree program to another so that students who decided to change majors would not lose too many credits. The eight-semester degree completion program was developed.

In this program, mentors were selected for students. Half were faculty; half were staff. Undeclared students were assigned to staff mentors whose training focused on the resources that are available for students like Career Services. Students were given an assessment called the Focus 2, which determines the best major/career fit for the students. Department specific faculty mentors were chosen for declared students. These students also had an academic advisor who goes beyond just discussing fall scheduling and curriculum. These advisors use the CSI report to determine the areas in which the students will potentially struggle and suggest the university resources that may be beneficial to them.

Institutional Mission and Vision

“One of the things that our president, who is in his 21st year and is retiring this year, has been good at is being clear on what our objectives are,” the Student Services Director said. The university engaged in a strategic planning process on campus several years ago and identified what goals they specifically were trying to accomplish at the institution.

And if I’ve heard him (the president) say it once, I’ve heard him say it a thousand times - when we’re thinking about developing and implementing new programs we always need to look back and see if it fits one of those criteria. If it fits, great. But if it doesn’t, we need to stop and ask ourselves, why are we engaging in this

practice because we have identified where we're going and what we're trying to do, so we need to make sure that they align When we set a mission, whether it's the B2E program or any smaller area, everyone is looking back to the overall mission statement to make sure it aligns with one of those core areas identified. I really feel that everyone here has been so well-educated on what we're trying to accomplish that it's almost second nature to us; we're not referring back to a plan. We've just heard it, we know it, and we've seen it demonstrated at the leadership level that this is what's expected. That's one of the clear objectives that we have for the institution, to make sure that we're helping students graduate, that's what they're here for, and that's what we're trying to help them accomplish. (Student Services Director, personal communication)

The B2E program funding comes from the Executive Council level, but the Vice Presidents for Academic Services and Student Services are in charge of the budgets for their areas. The vice presidents ask for feedback, recommendations, and proposals from each of their program directors who are, in turn, expected to look at their current budgets, anticipate future needs, request new positions, request new money for proposed new programs, and put together that written proposal. This process usually begins in February. All information is then collected by each vice president who then looks at what all is being requested in their area, and creates a proposal to present to the Executive Council. The Vice presidents for Finance and Administration have the responsibility of informing their colleagues about budgeting restrictions and funding availability for any current or future projects.

Focusing on Student Learning

Besides the regional institutional accreditation of the Higher Learning Commission, the institution has been awarded 15 program accreditations. This indicates that value is placed on rigorous and relevant student learning. The mission statement of this institution states that it is “dedicated to nurturing scholastic development, integrity, and professionalism.” Both traditional and non-traditional learning environments are used, with lecture being the most common form of teaching followed by practicums or work experiences, specialized labs, and one-on-one tutoring. The least used teaching methods included volunteer/service experiences, team-based learning, and peer learning. In a 2008 report, over 70% of the university’s academic departments reported that they use an internship or practicum learning environment at least sometimes.

The university’s Center for Teaching and Learning provides professional development to the faculty in the form of several workshops, seminars, teleconferences, online videos, technology training, and consulting. One of the center’s goals is to develop a conversation among the faculty members in order to promote the sharing of teaching practices and learning strategies. The university also funds professional development for individual faculty members. In 2010, a total of \$222,333 was spent on professional development.

The institution has intentionally developed a plan to find those key freshmen that might assist the institution by becoming student leaders using the On Track program. Incoming freshmen are invited to a leadership retreat in the fall. This involves a local ropes program for developing leadership and team building. The leadership classes are included in the On Track program, and there is a separate track for freshmen,

sophomores, juniors, and seniors. The focus for each level is different. Freshmen are taught basic leadership skills, and seniors are taught how to use those skills through community involvement and service. The cost of travel, lodging, meals, and activities for the students are covered by the university.

The Leadership Emerging Advancing and Developing (LEAD) Academy is another new leadership development program for students. It is designed to prepare students to take on current leadership roles on campus and within the community as well as to train students for leadership roles in the future by discovering individual strengths and applying leadership techniques. There are three phases to this program, and each allows students to examine how they approach leadership and learn skills to enhance their experiences.

Approximately 100 upper class students are trained to be orientation leaders for the incoming freshmen. Student feedback has been one of the most positive; the freshmen have responded that they enjoy getting to know upper classmen. At least 30 upper class students are also selected to serve as student ambassadors. Each lives on campus, and their responsibilities include building a community among students. Each freshman has an opportunity to meet one-on-one with an ambassador to help them get through the college registration process.

The institution provides counseling, consultation, and outreach to the university community. Its Counseling Center supports the educational mission of the university by working to “establish and maintain healthy and effective behavior patterns and lifestyles that enhance learning and personal development.” Three licensed professional counselors provide personal counseling for students in individual, couples, or group sessions. The

counseling staff also provides consultations to students, parents, staff, faculty and administration. The center schedules presentations and programs throughout the year.

The university provides opportunities for undergraduate research overseen by faculty mentors within the various academic departments. This research is presented at a Senior Honors Symposium each year in the spring. The Undergraduate Research webpage states: “We believe that collaborative faculty-student research activity provides valuable experience for our students and is an essential component of university teaching.” One of the stated objectives of the Undergraduate Research Office is the improvement of the undergraduate research environment, which resulted in the creation of undergraduate research courses in several departments. These courses allow advanced students to carry out independent research relating to a significant problem in a major field of study under the tutelage of a faculty mentor. Ten such projects were funded in 2007 at a cost of over \$30,000. The Office of Academic Affairs budgets funds each year for undergraduate research projects with additional funds being provided by other university and outside resources. Students in all departments are encouraged to submit research proposals and to attend state-wide undergraduate research meetings.

Opportunities are provided for group projects and learning outside of the classroom through the Campus Life volunteer initiatives. These are mainly active, collaborative learning opportunities with peers. Students are also provided assistance in finding internships within the university and business community by Career Services and by faculty members within individual academic departments. Some departments include internships as part of their graduation requirements.

The institution provides access to up-to-date- technology and equipment. In the past few years technology purchases have increased. The university now has a state-of-the-art computer lab and a stock market trading lab. The library has over 300 computers available to the entire campus community. In addition, art majors have access to Macintosh computers which are the industry standard for various design programs. Wi-Fi is available everywhere on campus.

Another relatively recent technology addition is a program that offers degrees completely online. As this program is being implemented, the university will work toward providing the same services to online students they provide to students in regular classes. This includes having a mentor that can meet with a student online. This has yet to be implemented, but Student Services is working on the project and research on the process is ongoing. There are also plans for providing orientation classes online. The availability of tutors online through Skype has been implemented on a small scale. “Online learners are really an area that we need to address, especially adult learners who are returning to school after many years. Some don’t even know how to use a computer,” stated the Assistant Dean for Student Conduct, who for the past 2 years was the Coordinator of Retention Services overseeing the B2E program.

Designing Environments to Enhance Institutional Community

The University Relations Office, which reports to the Student Services vice president, reaches out to the alumni community, and the Development Office is responsible for community relations. Since both departments focus on outreach, their efforts are often combined. One example is a party that is hosted before every home football game. The community is invited, along with the students; and food, activities,

and games are provided. The purpose of this is to bring the students and community together and to provide opportunities for involvement that instill within the students a sense of connectedness to the institution. The Student Services Department sees this community interaction as a positive when it comes to retention and persistence. Another way the institution interacts with the community is through the student government association which has connections with businesses that offer student discounts.

The Campus Life Department sponsors a program called *Volunteer Action Days*. Local areas that need volunteers are identified by the director of that program, who then organizes students who are looking for service opportunities. Recent opportunities for student service in the community have included a food drive for a local mission and the collection of school supplies for the Boys and Girls Club. Career Services publicizes available internships and helps students apply and prepare for them. The academic departments also stay in touch with businesses that are looking for interns and help students get connected to those. Some departments are embedding service learning into the students' course work.

Faculty, staff, and students also have other opportunities outside of class to interact with each other. Every one of the 100 student organizations has an advisor. Faculty members serve as representatives for student organizations, and student/faculty interaction is also promoted through student work-study jobs and lecture series. Some faculty members volunteer in academic help labs. All faculty members have mandatory office hours.

The Campus Life Department oversees the On Track program, which filters and organizes co-curricular activities into seven main areas of interest - active mind and body,

advance to career, aspiring leader, elevated citizen, global focus, leader identified, and unite. This program was developed by the faculty and first piloted in 2012 with the Greek organizations. On Track is designed to enhance student development beyond the classroom setting, encourage students to network socially among peers, and to include students in traditional and signature university events, according to the university website. Students are encouraged to attend the scheduled events, and incentives and certificates are given to students who complete the various tracks. The students register for the program, and a record of the activities in which they participate is kept. Students that choose to complete all seven tracks become eligible to apply for an all-expense paid trip following the completion of the last track. Trips to major metropolitan areas are taken in May, following graduation. Destinations will vary from year to year, giving students different opportunities to apply what they have learned while participating in On Track programs. Students who are selected to travel are actively exposed to leadership practices, cultural heritage, community service, professional networking, and other college and university campuses that are part of the destinations they visit. The On Track program was offered to the entire student body in the Fall of 2013, and the first trips will be taken in May of 2014 to New York City, Philadelphia, and Washington, D. C.

The early feedback for the On Track program has been positive, according to the Student Services Director. The students are tracked through ID cards. The institution can see which students are attending what events and activities and match that to what their major is and what are they doing academically. The Director of the Campus Life program is responsible for the On Track program and assistance to help with the data the program generates.

Improvements have been made to buildings across the campus. Ten computers have been added to the Tutoring Center so that students can have access to online software programs such as MathXL. The Tutoring Center has also been redesigned to be more inviting so that students will feel more comfortable there. The library has study rooms that can hold 10 to 20 students to accommodate study groups. Every classroom now has an interactive presentation system.

Outdoor spaces have also been recently renovated. Lights have been added to the intramural fields, and the college has improved the quality of the turf. A growth in intramural participation has been seen since these improvements were put in place. The participants are mostly students who were in sports in high school but not in athletics in college.

Other outdoor gathering spaces are provided by the university. The peer-led Student Activities Board, which elects representatives each year, usually does 2 events each week in which students may participate. They show movies on the screen on the scoreboard, hold activities at the bell tower, have t-shirt giveaways, and sponsor t-shirt exchanges.

The cafeteria was recently renovated to provide inviting spaces that encourage students to group together. The seating was changed from elementary-style tables to regular table seating. There are also bistro-type seating with bar stools where students can sit. Fifteen Food stations have increased student dining options through expanded menus. There has been an increase in student gathering inside the cafeteria as opposed to the students choosing to get “to go” meals from the cafeteria. The university also contracts with franchise fast food restaurants to provide further culinary options.

Providing Pathways to Student Success

The Academic Advising Center has a faculty outreach program targeting at-risk students, and every faculty member is required to maintain office hours. This past summer approval was given to have the Academic Advising Center meet with all students rather than those just in the B2E program. In the past students had to declare a major after 45 hours. It will still be that way, but if a student declares a major prior to that time, they are given an advisor in that area immediately. If they have an interest in a particular department, but they not sure about choosing it for their field of study, the students have access to an academic advisor for their first 60 hours through the Advising Center.

Because advisors in the departments have other duties and not much time for students during the registration period, the B2E program functions to connect and engage students with the department they are interested in with the mentor relationship. Four new academic advisors have been hired in addition to the three the university already employed. All students will have access to professional advisor who is there 8-5 Monday through Friday in addition to a faculty advisor in their department especially for their junior and senior years. They will be going to the same place even if they change their major.

The university has a Testing and Disability Services office. This office manages the TRIO program called Student Support Services. Students who fall into certain at-risk categories such as minority, first-generation college, and low income get additional tutoring and support. The office also oversees the Upward Bound and Upward Bound Math and Science programs for high school students.

There is also an international and multi-cultural Student Services Office that provides English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. Students are tested to see if they need to be enrolled in an ESL class before they are enrolled in regular classes. As part of this program the students are provided with tutors who are mainly faculty and staff. International and multicultural students who are learning English as a second language may take advantage of the English Language Institute which offers an English language curriculum designed to prepare the student for university level academic courses. The courses cover English writing, grammar, reading, listening and note taking, and speaking skills. Computer-based language learning programs are available through the Institute, and conversation partners are provided for one-on-one English practice. The International Institute also hosts events to help the campus community learn more about the diverse cultures that are represented at the university and to help foreign students understand American culture.

Driving Toward Continuous Improvement

Each individual department is responsible for the assessment of the programs that it implements. Student Services monitors the B2E program and the Tutoring Center. They keep detailed records of which students are using the tutoring center. The department has tried different assessments for determining if the students who use the tutoring center receive higher grades but admit that many variables can affect student grades. They feel that the growing number of students using the tutoring center is an assessment of the quality of tutors that they have in place.

The B2E program is assessed through the publication of a report that is compiled each semester. Student Services records the retention rates and GPAs for the students

who chose to participate in the program and compare them to the retention rates and GPAs of those students who did not participate. Over the past 13 years, the students who have participated in the B2E program have returned at higher rates and have boasted higher GPAs than non-participants. The Student Services office believes that there is some self-selection in this success, but the numbers between the two groups are so different some of this difference has to be attributed to the program participants having a B2E mentor during their first year.

Another area of assessment concerns the reporting of student/advisor meetings. After a mentor meets with a student, a feedback report is sent to the coordinator's email account which gives details of the meeting. The Coordinator of Retention Services keeps records of these meetings, so that any issues that arise can be addressed throughout the year. Information is communicated to the tutoring center or other departments. Each department is responsible for assessing the success of the faculty tutors. Surveys are also sent to all students and mentors who participate in the B2E program. Participant responses to those surveys indicate things that the students and mentors felt were helpful and allow students and mentors a voice in program improvements.

The university utilizes a database that many of the departments use called TracDat, a centralized location where all types of data can be stored. The faculty members that are in charge of assessment in their department have access to this program, making the department heads ultimately responsible for the success of the retention component that they oversee. These department heads answer to the Vice President of Academic Affairs on the academic side and the Vice President of Student Services on the Student Services side.

The Office of Institutional Research and Assessment “provides reporting and decision making data and information to both internal and external constituents in support of efforts to improve the quality and functioning of the programs and services of the university,” as stated on its webpage. The office provides information relating to the B2E program as well as other relevant retention information.

The other person who plays a major role in assessment is the Director of Assessment, a newly created full-time position. In the past a faculty member was given leave time to take on this responsibility. There is a university assessment committee that is made of up of faculty and other representatives who do not necessarily evaluate the effectiveness of individual programs, but who are in charge of making sure that overall the institution is actively engaged in assessment and monitoring programs to make sure they are effective.

The program director follows each mentor closely throughout the year, paying special attention to the new mentors. Retention conferences are offered by Noel-Levitz each year, which the B2E director has attended in years past. Much of what the university does has been based on research and a genuine desire to improve student services.

In recent years, the university has shifted its attention from teaching to the assessment of teaching effectiveness that results in student learning. The university also gathers indirect evidence of student learning through numerous means, including surveys such as the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). As stated above, the university is encouraging faculty members to explore new methods of teaching. Professors are required to keep portfolios of their teaching practices.

Sharing Responsibility for Student Retention

The final area of institutional practice that enhances student retention pertains to the shared responsibility among those who are involved in helping students graduate. This includes the institutional evidence of shared leadership in the development and implementation of the retention program, a collaborative effort among the administration, staff members, and faculty to retain students, and movement toward diversity in the faculty and staff.

There is evidence of shared leadership in decision-making and a collaboration in retention efforts in the way the institution plans and implements change. One of the most recent changes that has come from the task force and the collaboration between academics and student services involved a complete overhaul of the freshman orientation program. In the past this program had been optional for freshmen during the summer before their first year. But as a result of a push by the task force and some research done in regards to how many students were attending the class and what types of participation rates were occurring, an institutional change was made to require all new students to attend the freshman orientation training.

Learning objectives and outcomes were developed for the orientation by the coalition based upon perceived student needs. The task force presented the mandatory orientation plan to the Executive Council to get its approval, which then presented the idea to the board of trustees to get final approval. The initiative was directly tied into university retention efforts, covering the 10 learning objectives that had been identified as what a student needs to know on day one of class and for the first 6 weeks of class that will help them feel more prepared, feel more at ease, and ultimately be more successful.

The plan for mandatory orientation began in April of 2013. The proposal went forward and received approval, and from that point on, it was worked on daily. The program was implemented on August 26th and 27th in that same year. This was a short turn around to accomplish such a large undertaking. The university has gone from seeing about 3% of their freshman class attend orientation over a summer period with multiple sessions to having close to 1500 freshmen in one sitting at an orientation program. “It required a great deal of collaboration, a great deal of organization and planning,” the Director of Student Services said. “. . . in a quick turnaround time we did it, and now we have the luxury of a whole year to be modifying, tweaking, evaluating, assessing. That’s where we are right now – getting feedback from the surveys we sent to students.” The faculty will also be answering surveys to see if they were able to see student improvement and to help identify whether the university is meeting their learning objectives.

It is illegal for the university to pay the mentors a stipend for their work, so the faculty and staff members who participate in this capacity volunteer their time to make the program a success. The university shows its appreciation by giving lunches for them during the year, and the Student Services Department provides meal tickets for each mentor and their students if they should wish to meet during breakfast, lunch, or dinner.

Much of what the university does has been based on research and a genuine desire to improve student services. Realizing that their student population changes and the needs that students have evolve, the Student Services Department strives to stay ahead and not be reactive. Conversations about what can be done differently, what is working, what is not working take place daily. “That’s one thing nice about this campus,” the Student

Services Director said. “It does not feel very change-adverse. If we can implement it and show that it’s good we’ll do it.”

Moving forward Student Services would like to see a peer-mentoring aspect to retention specifically targeting students on academic probation, especially those who are on probation during the 2nd semester of their freshman year and those who are on probation during their 2nd year of college. The university would have to train about 150 peer mentors to accomplish this task, and staff members are presently working on how to implement such a program so it will best help students.

Shared responsibility also includes a faculty and staff that reflect the ethnic makeup of the student population. The movement toward diversity in the faculty at this university has been limited. According to the NCES, 92% of the full-time faculty were White (non-Hispanic) in the Fall of 2012. 1% of the faculty was African American, while almost 10% of the freshman population in the Fall of 2012 were listed as African American. Another 1% of the faculty was American Indian/Alaska Native. 4% of faculty members were listed as Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1% was Hispanic. These percentages have remained relatively the same since the Fall of 2000. Male faculty members made up 53% of the teaching staff while 47% of the faculty was female. No statistics were available for staff members. The university is aware of the discrepancy between the ethnicities of the student body and faculty but have not made much improvement in this area.

Program Analysis

The strongest external force affecting the B2E retention program has been the Department of Higher Education, which has made student retention and graduation rates

in higher education a priority in the state of Arkansas. The program has cost the university approximately \$15,000 to run each year, with the cost of administering the CSI test accounting for a majority of the expense. The Vice President in charge of Student Services handles the budget for the program and sets aside money every year to cover the cost. Noel-Levitz retains a set fee for its services.

An analysis of this university's practices in relation to the six major areas through which an institution of higher learning can improve student retention provides evidence that the key practices are in place:

- (a) living the educational philosophy
- (b) focusing on student learning
- (c) designing environments to enhance institutional community
- (d) providing pathways to student success
- (e) driving toward continuous improvement
- (f) sharing responsibility for student retention

The purpose and mission are clearly articulated among the participants administering the programs involved with the student retention effort. This coherent philosophy is emanates from the university president's strong leadership and a vision of success for every student. This vision and mission is contained in the 10 student learning objectives that have been adopted by the university community aligns the policies, programs, and practices that are researched, proposed, and maintained by the various departmental vice presidents. These vice presidents and their staffs collaborate with each other on a regular basis to improve student retention and graduation rates. Funding for

programs is measured by how the programs fit within the parameters of the university's mission and goals.

There is evidence of collaboration between the university campus and the community with regards to both academic programs (internships) and non-academic programs (regular activities for students, alumni, and community members held on campus and volunteer outreach programs). Students, including first time freshmen, are given multiple opportunities to interact with community members and organizations.

The institution's focus on learning is shown through its extensive student talent and leadership development programs such as the freshman leadership ropes training and the LEAD program. The On Track program also builds on the talents of students by cataloging campus and events into student interest areas, rewarding those who fully complete the program with a trip after graduation.

The non-academic and social needs of students are shown through the ESL program for international students, the counseling center services, and the activities provided for them through the Student Services Department. This also includes improving the health and well-being of the student body through the university's emphasis on the student intermural activities.

Funding for undergraduate research overseen by faculty mentors is provided by the university, and symposiums and seminars are held so that students may present this research. Although active and collaborative learning opportunities with peers and groups of peers are available presently they are not used on a regular basis. Opportunities for internships, volunteerism and other experiential learning are well-organized and provided on and off campus.

The institution has increased the amount of technology over the entire campus, providing Wi-Fi in all areas and presentation systems in each classroom. The library has both PC and Macintosh computers for students who may need a particular operating system to complete their class work. The tutoring center has also been updated to include computers for online remediation.

Institutional spaces are commonly used by the community, alumni, faculty and staff, and the students, although parking is somewhat difficult. Non-academic interactions between these groups are carefully planned and provided for throughout the year. The On Track program provides opportunities for students to interact especially with community and faculty members through events and lecture series.

A shared culture of high expectations among members of the institutional community in both academic and non-academic areas is shown by the mission statements of each department. These mission statements are written at the top of each divisional webpage, and each is aligned with the overall mission and vision of the university. Continuing support is provided for students who may be having social problems through the counseling center or language problems through the multi-cultural center. An organized, intrusive early warning system is provided through the B2E program and through the Academic Advising Center. A freshman orientation class has been made mandatory for all incoming freshman, although the B2E program is still voluntary. Various departments also provide orientation classes for freshmen.

Diversity is welcomed and valued by the university, although only a small portion (8%) of the faculty members are from ethnic groups other than white. The Multicultural Center provides avenues for international students to learn about American culture and

share their own cultures through various programs. The university has a Testing and Disability Services office which manages the TRIO program that supports students in their efforts to overcome class, social and cultural barriers to higher education. Students who are identified as at-risk are supported by academic advisors, peers leaders, and student services staff members.

The B2E program seems to have increased the number of students who are retained from their first year until their sophomore year, and tracking of the freshmen cohorts that move through this program show increased graduation rates over their peers. Although many other variables can affect student drop out and retention rates, the B2E cohorts have consistently graduated in larger numbers than those students who did not participate in the program.

Staff members confirm that the university continually looks for new ways to improve student retention and graduation rates. Most of these efforts come from the departments (both academic and non-academic) and are presented to the Executive Board for approval. The different departments often collaborate, and decisions are made after evaluating multiple forms of data. There is an emphasis on developing research-based, effective and innovative curricula, and there is a formal assessment system through which all programs and curriculum changes are evaluated.

There have been initiatives that were mandated by the president of the university, but as a rule the leadership in the development and implementation of the retention program is shared. New ideas are encouraged and openly discussed among members of the faculty, staff, administration. Staff members state that there is a collaborative effort

among the administration, staff members, and faculty members which allows changes to be made quickly and easily if necessary.

The former coordinator of retention services who oversaw the Bridge to Excellence (B2E) program for 2 years summed up this university's retention program efforts with the following statement: "Some come to college out of a sense that it's what to do. But you have to want to be in college. You (the members of the institution) have to find the right fit for them." The speaker felt that a sense of belonging - finding the right program, finding the right fit, and being fully engaged – has a great deal to do with student retention. He believes that this is why a quality academic advisor is important from the beginning of the student's interaction with the university community.

Case 2

History and Student Demographics

Case 2 is a private, 4-year, religiously-affiliated, coeducational liberal arts university in Arkansas. It is the largest private university in the region, founded in 1924. The university has more than 6,800 students, of which 4,300 are undergraduates. The number of students who reside on the campus is 3400. The university also maintains campuses in Australia, Chile, England, France, Greece, Italy, and Zambia. Its students represent all 50 states and 52 foreign countries. The university is accredited by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools of the Higher Learning Commission.

There are 332 instructional faculty members, 68% of whom hold a Ph.D. or other terminal degree. The university offers 10 undergraduate degrees in more than 100 academic majors, 14 pre-professional programs, and 15 graduate and professional

degrees in its colleges of Allied Health, Arts and Humanities, Bible and Ministry, Business Administration, Education, Honors, Nursing, and Pharmacy and Sciences.

The university had an acceptance rate of 74.7% in 2012. The student-faculty ratio is 17:1, and 52.4% of its classes have fewer than 20 students. The average freshman fall-to-fall retention rate, an indicator of student satisfaction, is 80.8%. The gender distribution of the university is 46.4 % male students and 53.6% female students. At this school, 72% of the students live in college-owned, -operated, or -affiliated housing and 28% of students live off campus. The university's overall 6-year graduation rate is 61%. The 6-year graduation rate for females is 66% and 55% for males (NCES, 2012).

The university is relatively selective; and students who attain a 3.0 high school GPA and an ACT composite score of at least 19 or a SAT combined critical reading and math score of at least 900, qualify academically for unconditional admission. Academic and character recommendations are required.

Of the 2,477 applicants (1,102 females and 1,375 males) who applied for the Fall 2012 semester, 75% were admitted. Of those admitted, 55% enrolled in the university. In the 2012 cohort, 92% were full-time students, and 8% were part-time students; 54% were female and 46% were male. The racial/ethnic distribution for this cohort was as follows: 83% White, 4% Black, 1% Native American, 3% Hispanic, 1% Asian, and 7% non-resident/alien. Most of the cohort (93%) was 24 years or younger; 7% were 25 years or older. Of the admitted students, 25% scored at or below an ACT composite score of 22. An additional 25% scored at or above an ACT composite score of 28.

The university does not have many online classes, and only 2% of the students were enrolled exclusively in distance education during the 2012-2013 school year. That

same year, only 8% of the students were in some distance learning classes leaving 90% of the students taking no distance learning classes at all. Of the enrolled undergraduate students, 5% were formally registered with the Office of Disability Services.

The university's tuition and fees increased from \$14,610 in 2011-2012 to \$15,240 in 2012-2013, a 4.3% change. Of all the full-time undergraduates, 60.4% receive some kind of need-based financial aid and the average need-based scholarship or grant award is \$8,476. Of the full-time beginning undergraduate students who were enrolled in the Fall of 2012, 98% received some kind of financial aid. 96% received grant or scholarship aid, 28% received Pell grants from the federal government, 14% received other types of federal grants, 22% received state or local government grants or scholarships, 96% received institutional grants or scholarships, and 63% received some sort of student loan aid (NCES, 2013).

The total number of full-time faculty members is 289, and 120 faculty members are part-time. All of the faculty members have instructional duties. The university has only 1 graduate assistant whose primary duties are research (NCES, 2013).

In 2012, the NCES reported that 63% of the university's Caucasian students who began as first-year full-time students in the Fall of 2006 graduated within 6 years, while only 20% of the African Americans in the same cohort graduated within 6 years. The cohort students who identified themselves as Asian had a 67% graduation rate; American Indian/Native Alaskan students had a 31% graduation rate. 68% of the non-resident/alien students graduated within the same 6 years as did 31% of the Hispanic students.

Retention Program Beginnings

Case 2 first began a formal effort to increase the retention and graduation rates of its students in 2011. Retention and graduation had always been a concern, according to the Dean of the Center for Student Success (CSS), but since the university is relatively selective, student retention has never been a major problem: “We traditionally enjoy a very good retention rate, so we did not come into this out of a sense of need,” he said. “Everyone is involved with retention. We want to know what we are doing well and what’s working. We want to continue to do what’s working.”

A committee was formed in 2011 at the behest of the university’s president to address retention and graduation rates in particular and student success in general. The former Dean of Students (who now serves the university as Executive Vice President) chaired the committee, and the members included the directors of student programs such as the Disabilities Director, Academic Resources Director, two counselors, an educator, and the two TRIO undergraduate program grant directors. A goal was to create a Center for Student Success (CSS) that would centralize student support on the university campus.

The committee studied the freshman retention numbers and graduation data in the light of serving students in both academic and non-academic areas. The intent was two-fold: to improve the communication of information about the student population between the academic and non-academic areas and to combine their efforts under the one umbrella. The focus was on creating a CSS rather than on creating a retention program, but retention was always understood as an area that would be addressed. According to the Dean for the CSS:

We understood that there was a lot more to retention than student success . . . The student life side of the house has a lot to do with retention. Dorms, social clubs, and intermural sports all lead to social integration and institutional integration, and that keeps people here.

Living the Educational Philosophy

Student retention and success are built into the university's mission which states: "The University is a private Christian institution of higher education committed to the tradition of the liberal arts and sciences." It is composed of the following academic units: a College of Allied Health, College of Arts and Humanities, a College of Bible and Religion, a College of Business Administration, a College of Education, a College of Nursing, a College of Pharmacy, a College of Sciences; and graduate and professional programs in business, education, marriage and family therapy, ministry, pharmacy, physician assistant studies, physical therapy, and theology.

The University serves a diverse, coeducational student body from across the United States and around the world, although the primary constituency for students and financial support is from the faith-based fellowship. The Board of Trustees, the administration and the faculty believe that the freedom to pursue truth and high academic achievement is compatible with the Christian principles to which the University is committed. The faculty is dedicated to excellence in teaching, scholarship, service, and modeling of Christian living. The university community seeks to provide an environment that both supports students and challenges them to realize their full potential. Thus, the institution's mission is to provide a quality education that will lead to an understanding

and philosophy of life consistent with Christian ideals. This involves the following goals that align with the Liberal Arts Pillars:

- **Generally, the integration of faith, learning and living** - developing the whole person through a commitment to Christ and to the Bible as the Word of God, an emphasis on lifelong intellectual growth, and the encouragement of Christian service and world missions through a servant-leadership lifestyle.
- **Specifically, the development of Christian scholarship** - while acknowledging dependence on God, stressing Christian commitment to intellectual excellence through a strong liberal arts foundation and effective professional preparation.
- **The promotion of Christian ethics** - creating an atmosphere that emphasizes integrity and purity of thought and action.
- **The development of lasting relationships** - fostering personal and social relationships through interaction among faculty, staff and students; and stressing a lifelong commitment to marriage and the Christian family.
- **The promotion of wellness** - emphasizing that the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit and that lifetime health habits contribute to a better quality of life.
- **The promotion of citizenship within a global perspective** - developing a Christian understanding of and respect for other cultures through an emphasis on liberty and justice.

Specific to this study are the following statements within the mission and goals statement as found on the university website:

The university emphasizes lifelong intellectual growth, and the encouragement of service and world missions through a servant-leadership lifestyle. It seeks to provide an environment that both supports students and challenges them to realize their full potential. It is concerned with the development of the whole person and the development of lasting relationships - fostering personal and social relationships through interaction among faculty, staff, and students.

Departmental changes in retention efforts are relatively easy, but multi-departmental changes are more difficult and take longer. The Dean of the CSS manages the funds for the main retention effort, but he gives the directors under his department some leeway as to where the money is spent within their offices. The Executive Vice President has to sign off on all spending. The directors have been known to share their funding with each other if there is some project or process that needs additional money.

Focusing on Student Learning

The selectivity of the university and the fact that a majority of the faculty have doctorate degrees shows that value is placed on a rigorous curriculum. Various departments arrange for their students to participate in real-world activities using the skills they have learned in class mainly through service learning projects. One example of group work and learning outside of the classroom is a previous mission trip to a Haitian school jointly planned by the counseling and engineering departments.

Evidence that academic excellence is expected is shown in the selectivity of the university, the mission statement of the university, and the procedures that identify

struggling students and require them to attend classes to aid in their success. No evidence was found to show that academic efforts are rewarded or that there is an emphasis on intensive reading and writing within the undergraduate classes.

The university lists their honors program, international studies program, and peer tutoring program as among the ways that student leadership and talent is developed. There have been discussions of developing a student leadership council, but the program has yet to get off the ground because no one has been willing to spearhead the initiative. The purpose of a student leadership council would be to take the students that presently serve as group leaders, such as the RAs and members of the student government, and work with them to strengthen their leadership skills.

Social clubs also have student leaders, and there is a dean just for these clubs. The Interclub Council meets once a week to listen to speakers and/or participate in leadership activities. The American Studies Institute also has leadership-type activities for students. There are also students who lead Bible studies and students who lead campus campaigns during spring break.

Some of the university's departments include collaborative learning opportunities for peers and/or groups of peers within their curriculum. There are also departmental internship courses available for some students. A committee that discusses improvements in the internship programs is in place to make sure that the student expectations within the programs are consistent.

The university is regularly recognized for the number of service hours it logs. The Campus Activity Board and the Student Life Office usually lead the volunteerism efforts,

and community members and businesses can sign up with one of the two groups if they need some kind assistance.

Student service is regarded as an activity at the university. The Student Association is service oriented. In addition to representing the student body, the Student Association also organizes students to do community service, and it organizes relief programs. The organization also sponsors a student service fair on the front lawn where students can sign up for volunteer work. The individual departments also provide opportunities for service learning where students learn to use their curricular skills in the field. Clubs are required to do a service project for the community each year, and there is a student-led group that assists community members. Some of the volunteer efforts involve the Alumni Relations Office, as well.

Designing Environments to Enhance Institutional Community

Institutional spaces are used for both student and community engagement. Activities such as lecture series, concerts, 5K runs, and the university-sponsored *Day of Caring* bring the community and the campus community together. Even people from other states attend the programs, which have featured a variety of people from former President George Bush to country artist George Strait. The university was once voted the best destination environment for road-trip basketball games.

Faculty and staff interaction with students is planned for outside of the classroom. Faculty members (98-99%) are advisors in some capacity. All students have faculty advisors, and they are supposed to meet with their faculty advisor at some point. Some students are advised by staff within the Academic Advising Department. Faculty

members also serve as club sponsors, sponsor the McNair student research-volunteer program, and lead extracurricular Bible studies.

Providing Pathways to Student Success

Chapel is another way students are institutionally integrated. Key people make announcements during the service, and the entire student body worships together on a daily basis. Students are required to attend, and absences are recorded. A student who misses too many services is flagged and contacted. The focus group felt strongly that the mandatory chapel services were a big part of keeping students at the university:

One thing that helps with retention is that our students are similar; they all come from the same culture. Although we have a lot of different kinds of students, and we have a lot of diversity here, there is a sense of purpose among them that is pretty similar. The students tend to take care of each other. (CSS Dean, personal communication)

The university encourages personal interaction between upperclassmen and freshmen through the dormitory resident assistants (RAs). Students have a midnight curfew, so the dormitory RAs have personal interaction with students who live in a residence hall at curfew time. These RAs are trained in noticing abnormal or troublesome behaviors, which they report. The group believes that the curfew helps with student retention. “Here everybody is coming in at the same time. When students go into the dorm the students are together and have this community that is kind of interesting,” the Dean of the CSS said.

There are two tutoring programs on campus. The Academic Resource Center provides general tutoring for all students, while the federal grant-funded TRIO Student

Support Services tutoring program provides academic support and 1:1 counseling/support to any university student that meets one of the following criteria: (a) is a first generation college student (mom, dad, or guardian did not graduate from a 4-year degree institution), is income-qualified (based on calculations from a government scale and student financial aid information), or (c) the student has an identified, documented disability (but only one-third of the students may be *disability only*). An additional TRIO program, Upward Bound, provides specialized tutoring for at-risk high school students that are being groomed for college admittance.

There is also an International Programs Office and a Chinese program. The university had 130 students from China during the 2013-2014 school year. The university also has the Walton Scholars Program, which supported by the Walton Foundation, provides scholarships for students from Central America.

In 2012, the university initiated the existing Freshman Experience program, which was continued for the next year. Before 2012, there were freshmen experience initiatives but not as formally structured as the existing program. The Director of the First Year Experience also serves as the Director of the Academic Resource Center. This office focuses on freshmen and transfer students, primarily students in transition. The responsibilities are spread out through several offices, with freshman orientation being handled in an activities office connected to Student Life. In order to be integrated and interdisciplinary and to bring resources, interests, and concerns from several areas, the office was intentionally placed where both the curricular and co-curricular sides could develop and have input into the first year experience activities. The direction of this new

program, and the core elements that will best fit it into the university's mission, are still being investigated.

The university does not have a required freshmen transition course for all new students, so a great amount of importance is placed upon other support opportunities. Peer mentors, for example, are used in an academic setting in a bible course that all freshmen are required to take. No other formal peer mentoring is used within other courses, although there is an supplemental instruction program as well. The bible course is taught 5 days a week, "and there is a special community that is formed in that class," stated the Director of the First Year Experience and Academic Resource Center. The university does have welcome week/orientation activities for new students during the summer and week before the fall terms begin. Peer mentors, as well as other student leaders, participate as leaders in orientation.

Student advising is not so much about scheduling as it is about building relationships and helping students succeed, according to the focus group. For the first year, students have the same advisor. After that they move on to choose their major and are advised through that department. Advisors have the responsibility of contacting faculty members who teach their advisees and ask for reports. These reports come back to the advisors for assessment. Students who get poor reports are worked with to develop a plan for improvement. They write and sign a contract, which may include tutoring, and they are given ideas on ways to improve their study skills.

The faculty members are required to flag any student about whom they may have concerns. The faculty may be worried about a student's grades, attendance, or may just notice that the student seems to be socially awkward. If a student is flagged three or more

times, he or she is targeted and encouraged to meet with someone from the advising office. Those students have a hold put on their accounts so that they cannot register for the next semester until they contact the advising office. The purpose of this early alert program is to prevent students from going into probationary status. It is also an attempt to quickly catch any students who may be at risk of failing.

The Director of Advising contacts each student personally and encourages that student to meet with one of the academic advisors. Graduate assistants who are taking master's degree courses in professional counseling work with the CSS office, which trains them to be academic coaches. These graduate assistants then function as academic counselors for at-risk students. Most academic counselors meet with their students weekly. They look for things like depression and anxiety. Students who are perceived to have problems are referred to the counseling center. This year the Director of the Counseling Center has set aside 1-hour a day to see any student referred to him by the CSS/Academic Resource Center.

The focus group felt that the Honors Program and the Study Abroad Program may enhance retention among brighter students who might not otherwise persist. There are also discipline specific organizations within departments that involve students. There are also service learning organizations and social clubs in which the students may become involved. "Behavior problems, those who go to the counseling center, and people who go in for tutoring are often historically high-performing academic students," the Director of Academic Resource Center stated.

The Supplemental Instruction (SI) program, one form of peer mentoring, involves upperclassmen who have already taken a traditionally difficult class. These paid

upperclassmen sit in on the course again for no credit so that they can take notes; they later facilitate SI study sessions and guide enrolled students through course content and assignment preparation. The SI program is credentialed and has been effective, according to the focus group. Underclassmen who choose to participate in the program are making As and Bs in those classes, according to the Dean of the CSS. Many times these grades are a letter grade higher than those earned by non-participants are.

It was important to the focus group members that the CSS not be seen as a place for at-risk students. It is a place for all students. The university wants all students to be successful and does not want to focus on just the outliers on the bell curve. Other services, such as help with resumes are offered to all students. Excellent students who want to perform at a higher level are also important to the group: “We don’t speak the language of retention,” the CSS Dean said. “It is more about the students’ well-being and their success.”

Driving Toward Continuous Improvement

This young program assesses within different departments, but does not assess the university’s overall retention efforts. There are plans to talk to a consultant from a company that specializes in helping colleges and universities improve their student retention and graduation efforts, but this is only in the planning stage. The university already uses the consultant company’s college student inventory results to get a general picture of their freshmen. Most incoming freshmen (90%-95%) take the inventory. It is hoped that an outside consultant will get key people to the table to discuss retention.

The university’s retention numbers are good, and the focus group feels that their umbrella program is better than many, although it is behind in formalizing the focus on

retention and finding out why students leave. University staff members are only beginning to learn how to assess student retention data. Presently each office does its own assessments, but there is no common goal or mission in regards to student persistence and graduation rates. There is a committee for assessment, but they focus on the assessment required for accreditation.

Ultimately, the responsibility of assessing student retention will probably fall on the Executive Vice President, who will likely pass on some of the responsibilities to others. The new president's goal is to retain students at a 90% rate. The university's retention level has been, at times, to 85%. Right now, the advising department studies retention data after every semester but saves the major evaluations for the summer.

Sharing Responsibility for Student Retention

The CSS was built to be a one-stop place for the convenience of the students, and its placement was not an accident. According to the CSS Dean,

Where the offices are above the Student Center, above the center of student activities where students gather every day, is the same place that they can access numerous resources that can help them be successful. It was a deliberate choice of location and communicates that this (retention) is a priority.

Previously students would have to go to multiple places across the campus to find the various services. Now the directors of the programs housed in the CSS can communicate with each other regularly and share everything that is going on. They now feel that they are on the same page with one sense of purpose and mission, and they are able to work on various projects and problems together. "We are doing a better job of communicating what we do best so we are not doing other peoples' jobs for them accidentally," the

Director of Advising said. “We are clarifying our roles, and serving the students better that way.” All of the offices have had an increase in student contact. The advising office numbers have tripled over the last 2 years, according to its director. “I think this is because of the Center and having all that come together,” he said.

Student Life works closely with the CSS and the Counseling Center to increase student retention and graduation. The two offices are across the hall from each other, and representatives from the two areas meet weekly. There are four Assistant Deans in the Student Life department who assist the Dean of the CSS.

Not all student services funnel through the CSS, but that office works closely with the Dean of Students to coordinate the student academics side of student success with student life and student services. The CSS houses the following departments/programs: Disability Services; the TRIO SSS program for at-risk students; the TRIO McNair Program which prepares undergraduate students for graduate school and provides a research opportunity with volunteer faculty supervisors; the TRIO Upward Bound program which works with underprepared high school students to groom them for college admittance; the Career Center; the Academic Advising Center; the Academic Resource Center; the First-year Experience Program; and the Advance Program, a developmental education program for students with low SAT and/or ACT scores.

Case 2 has little diversity in the faculty. Of the full-time faculty, 93.2% is White (non-Hispanic) according to the College Factual website (2013), and 1.8% of the faculty is African American. The percentage of faculty members listed as Asian/Pacific Islander is 0.4%, and there are none who are of Hispanic origin (1.9% of the faculty members are of unknown ethnicity). These percentages have remained relatively the same since the

Fall of 2000. Male faculty members made up 52.9% of the teaching staff while 47.1% of the staff was female. No statistics were available for staff members (College Factual, 2013).

Program Analysis

The strongest external force affecting Case 2's retention program is the ADHE, which has made student retention and graduation rates in higher education a priority. Various departments have their own budgets, but there is no one person responsible for determining when and where the money is spent. The different departments meet together and share funding if necessary. An analysis of this university's practices in relation to the six major areas through which an institution of higher learning can improve student retention demonstrate that key practices are in place in the following areas:

- (a) living the educational philosophy
- (b) focusing on student learning
- (c) designing environments to enhance institutional community
- (d) providing pathways to student success
- (e) driving toward continuous improvement
- (f) sharing responsibility for student retention

The focus group members agreed that there is no overall retention goal, but retention is implied within the mission of the university. This mission states: "the University community seeks to provide an environment that both supports students and challenges them to realize their full potential," which implies building student leadership and talent. Other commitments stated in the mission include developing the whole person (talent), commitment to intellectual excellence (academic rigor), development of lasting

relationships (building student involvement), and developing understanding of and respect for other cultures (respect for diversity).

The university has a new president who has emphasized the importance of student retention to the staff and students. In a session of chapel, he asked any student who was thinking about dropping out of college to speak with him first, according to focus group members. There is no stated goal of raising retention and/or graduation rates since the university has always been relatively successful in keeping its students until the completion of a degree. This may be because the student body is like-minded in their beliefs.

The retention program is in its infancy, which would explain why the university community is not yet fully engaged in it. Policies, programs, and practices aimed at increasing retention have not yet been fully aligned, and the only research done in this area has been noting the retention and graduation rates in recent years. This may be because of the change in presidents, or it may be because the university already enjoys high retention and graduation rates. Despite this luxury, those involved with student success realize that there is always room for improvement.

The university recently moved many of the student services to a single location above the Student Center to allow for the various departments engaged in promoting student success to facilitate collaboration and communication among those involved. These deans, department heads, and their staffs collaborate with each other on a regular basis to improve student retention and graduation rates. The funding for specific programs is often shared among the departments if a particular need is agreed upon.

The greatest evidence of collaboration between the university and the community pertains to the volunteerism and service learning activities of university students within the surrounding area. These activities are open to freshmen and upper classmen. Community members are invited to the campus for lecture series, concerts, and other open activities. The university's designated service days bring the community and campus together as well. Some departments assign students to internships within the community as well.

Evidence of a rigorous and relevant curriculum is seen in the opportunities for internships and study abroad for upper classmen. Group projects are sponsored by the various departments, primarily in the areas of community, service, and missions. Some of these projects are interdepartmental and performed off site. Some projects involve mission work in other countries. Some projects are student led.

Student talent and leadership is mainly developed through the university honors program, an international studies program, and a limited in-class peer tutoring program called the Supplemental Instruction program. The development of a student leadership council has been attempted, but still has not gotten off the ground. RAs have the duty of being social mentors for younger students, and they are trained to recognize social problems. The student government members and the members of the Interclub Council participate in leadership activities. Students are afforded multiple opportunities to become leaders, but there are no organized leadership programs for them. The focus group stated that the idea of instituting a student leadership council has not been abandoned; they just need to find someone to organize and sponsor it.

Assistance with the non-academic and social needs of students are shown through the counseling center services and the activities provided through the Student Life Department. The choice to house the Center for Student Services directly above the Student Center shows the university's determination to improve student success.

The university is known for the volunteerism of its student body. Collaboration between the community and the university through internships, missions, and service learning programs is widespread and considered part of the campus activities. Freshmen are invited to participate in volunteer efforts, and any student can plan and put in place a service project.

Opportunities for active and collaborative learning with peers and groups of peers revolve around service projects within the community and in foreign countries. Some of these projects are interdisciplinary and are sponsored by faculty and staff members. Students and social organizations may also plan and execute their own learning experiences on and off the campus.

The non-academic and social needs of students are addressed through support programs in the CSS. The Counseling Center provides services for students with personal, social, or mental health problems using licensed therapists, graduate student counselors, and student peer mentoring. The director of that department has pledged regular support for any student who is referred to him. The RAs are also trained to spot any social or behavioral problems and report them. The university also has employment services for its students.

The institutional spaces enhance engagement between the school and community members through open invitations for lectures, concerts, and athletic events. Big name

speakers often present to large audiences drawn from the university population, the local area, Arkansas, and other states.

Institutional spaces provide a “sense of place” through the beautifully manicured grounds. Students regularly engage with each other in the Student Center and the cafeteria. Students interact with faculty and staff, especially outside of the classroom, through volunteer and service learning projects and during daily chapel. These projects are opportunities for out-of-class student/faculty interaction, since faculty members sponsor all of the social clubs. The faculty members are also required to have regular office hours.

The selectivity of the university and the mandatory chapel attendance fosters a culture of high expectations, which is shared among all of the members of the institutional community. Students who miss chapel or are struggling in their classes are flagged and contacted by their advisor. This functions as a type of early warning system. The university also uses an Early Alert system for supporting students personally and academically.

Although the percentage of minority faculty members is low, the institution shows that diversity is welcomed and valued through promoting services for their international students. For example, in order to serve a large Chinese student population, the university has developed a program specifically for them.

There are no required or mandatory classes or seminars taught specifically to first year students to aid in the transition to college. There are, however, welcome week activities for incoming students. Students who are struggling are required to go to the

advising office for help. The institution provides services such as academic advising and peer/staff mentoring to students.

Tutoring programs are provided for all students through the CSS. Within the center are two separately funded peer tutoring programs, although they function in the same geography. In the center, peer tutoring is available by appointment. The Academic Resource Center, funded by the university, provides tutoring and academic triage for any student on campus. The TRIO SSS tutoring program, however, is funded by a government grant and may only serve undergraduate students that meet at least one of the enrollment qualifications. Both programs provide academic as well as non-academic support through one on one staff counseling, mentoring, and relationship building opportunities. Centralizing these support services has proved beneficial, according to the focus group.

An analysis of the various student programs shows that success is a high priority for the university, but there is little evidence of innovation when developing the institutional curriculum. Faculty members are actively engaged with students, but they are only indirectly included in the university's retention and graduation efforts. Few university-wide forms of data are used to evaluate retention efforts. Only the actual retention and graduation rates and the results of the freshman inventory are used to make decisions. No university-wide formal assessment systems is in place to evaluate programs or to drive institutional improvement, although members of the focus group hope that a more formal conversation about retention and graduation rates will be forthcoming.

Summary

The data show how two demographically different universities in the state of Arkansas approach the problems of student retention and graduation rates. The data were collected through a multi-case investigation and form a descriptive and conceptual representation of the perceptions of those involved with the university retention programs. Additional data were taken from the institutional websites and various governmental websites.

Those interviewed described their experiences, observations, and responsibilities at their schools from their own perspectives. All agreed that college student retention is important and that student retention efforts require constant assessment and improvement. Both approach student retention from a student services and student success perspective. Both emphasize student engagement, but one university approaches engagement through campus activities and environment while the other engages students through volunteerism and service learning.

Although they have different student demographics, the universities had common successes and disappointments in their efforts to retain students until they graduate. The more selective university has a relatively high rate of persistence, and yet they still must address student academic and social struggles through various programs. The less selective university has had a retention program in place for several years and is still struggling with students who do not stay until graduation. Both universities are actively developing ways to improve student retention and graduation rates because both agreed that Arkansas will require higher and higher student retention and graduation rates among undergraduate students.

Each focus group identified several factors that affect the quality, effectiveness, and/or success of their retention programs. They also identified how the process unfolded in their schools, what the major events in the process were, and what role each member played. Those interviewed also identified specific areas of need and university methods to address them. They identified successful programs, policies, and procedures that were implemented, as well as areas that still needed improvement. They discussed some of the barriers that existed when it comes to student retention. Finally, those interviewed identified the benefits and outcomes of a student retention program and strategies that would support a more effective and vibrant student retention culture among all stakeholders.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

So far, the United States governmental policy has limited its involvement with higher education to the federal funding of academic support programs, such as the TRIO programs, and to providing financial aid to enable students attend college. Both the Bush and Obama administrations have discussed ways to hold institutions of higher education accountable for their retention and graduation rates. The states have also left the subject of student retention and graduation mainly up to the institutions, requiring little or no accountability for the number of students that those institutions retain until degree completion. But times are changing.

Several states have begun to hold institutions accountable for their student retention and graduation rates and have implemented systems that tie institutional funding to student retention and graduation. Some (like South Carolina) use complex formulas, which determine how much funding an institution will receive based upon retention and graduation rates, and some (like California and Kentucky) use informal agreements that merely encourage each institution to increase its student success rates. Some have developed incentive programs that provide grants to encourage the development of innovative programs to increase student retention and graduation rates. Some (like Texas) have initiatives that address the gap between access and graduation of majority and minority students. Regardless of how each state addresses the problem of

college student retention and graduation rates, they all have in common the recognition that each university ultimately bears the responsibility for improving the number of students who remain until the completion of a degree.

Retaining college students until the completion of a degree is both an economic and ethical problem, and so it is important that colleges and universities in Arkansas take the need to raise retention and graduation rates seriously. Economically, institutions of higher learning depend upon the tuition of their students to survive. The loss of students creates a reduction in institutional income. The economies of both the United States and the state of Arkansas depend upon having a well-educated workforce. Raising the number of college graduates draws businesses, such as those in highly technical fields, which pay higher wages.

The individual earnings of Americans increase from 20% to 40% when a person receives an undergraduate degree as compared to a high school diploma (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). This adds up to at least \$1 million over a lifetime (Seidman, 2012). The retention of college students creates a ripple effect when it comes to the economy. Increased worker earnings not only bring a higher standard of living to individuals and families; they also bring increased local, state, and national tax revenues, which improve the standard of living for the entire community and nation. Those who are college-educated are more knowledgeable, informed, and apt to be lifelong learners (Pascarelli & Terenzini, 2005).

The Southern Education Foundation (2013) published a report on the effect of education, especially that of minority students, on the economic well-being of the state of Arkansas. The report, which was endorsed by all of the then-living past and present

governors of Arkansas, concluded that Arkansas' economic development flows directly from education. This report was updated in 2003, and stated the following:

- Incomes (in Arkansas) are strongly related to education.
- Arkansas is near the bottom among the 50 states in producing college graduates and per capita income.
- Arkansas has a near majority of low-income African American and Latino students who have the most needs and the least educational resources. These students are falling behind throughout Arkansas' educational systems. The entire state population will pay a high price if Arkansas fails to enlarge educational resources and attainment for these students.
- Only about 15% of high school 9th graders graduate from college within 10 years—close to the same percentage of current Arkansas adults who have a college degree.

One of the major recommendations of this report was for Arkansas to double its percentage of college graduates from all population groups:

During the first three quarters of the 20th century, Arkansas steadily increased per capita income and narrowed the gap in economic prosperity between the state and the nation. In 1950, Arkansas per capita income was 56% of the United States' per capita income. In 1970, 20 years later, Arkansas' level had risen to 70% of the nation's per capita income. Beginning in the mid-70s, as the nation began to move towards a human capital economy that required higher, multiple skills, Arkansas' relative gains in per capita income slowed and stopped. (Southern Educational Foundation, 2003)

Research suggests that since colleges and universities have no control over the pre-admission demographics of the students that they enroll, other than through selectivity, the most effective way to increase student retention (and, therefore, graduation rates) is through changing what the institution does once students arrive on campus (Astin, 1993; Tinto, 1993). Covey (1989) called this the university's circle of influence.

Since each institution is different based upon its mission, its purpose, and the demographics of the students that it serves, the policies and practices that each institution implements to ensure student persistence will vary. Before beginning a program, the institution must be clear on what its mission, vision, and goals are as they pertain to student retention. According to Tinto (1993), "A (retention) program must reflect the unique educational mission of the institution," (p. 154); and research suggested that no matter what avenues an institution may take, the institutional conditions that are important to student development and success revolve around the following:

- (a) a clearly articulated purpose and mission reflecting the importance of student retention
- (b) a focus on student learning that includes engaging pedagogies and rigorous and relevant student learning both on and off campus,
- (c) the creation of institutional environments that enhance institutional community and allow for the interaction of faculty and students outside the classroom,

- (d) the creation of pathways for all students to be successful both academically and socially
 - (e) an institutional drive toward continuous improvement that includes assessment and feedback on a regular basis
 - (f) a shared responsibility for student retention among all stakeholders.
- (Astin, 1993; Tinto, 1993; Kuh et al. 2005).

The purpose of this qualitative, multi-case study was to describe how each of two different institutions of higher learning in Arkansas have responded to the need to increase the retention rate of its students, especially that of first-year first time freshmen, using as guidelines the best practices that foster student success. The areas of inquiry were four-fold. First, the study determined why the two retention programs were implemented and described the characteristics of each. Second, data were reviewed to determine where and how limited institutional resources were used to meet the needs and goals of the two retention programs. Any change in institutional policy should begin with an assessment of the institution's mission and priorities and an assessment of the student attrition on campus (Tinto, 1993). The third purpose of this study was to explore what assessments the institutions used to determine whether the programs met their chosen goals and how the assessment data were used to plan for program improvements. The fourth purpose of this study was to do a cross-case analysis (Creswell, 2007) to compare and contrast the two programs according to present models of best practices as indicated by recent research.

In the previous chapter, interviewees and focus group participants shared their insights into their respective institutions' student retention efforts. The qualitative multi-

case approach allowed a structured analysis of the data to inform the investigation. Using a qualitative research model, this chapter further explores the complex nature of college student retention as it pertains to best practices determined by recent research and spans the distance between the data and discussion of the findings.

This investigation rests upon a theoretical and research-based foundation. The foundation includes the concept that to increase college student retention, and thereby increase the graduation rates of universities, it is desirable for institutions of higher learning to focus on the post-admission variables that the institutions are in a position to improve. These variables can be divided into six general categories of best practices and include the following:

- (a) developing an educational philosophy that emphasizes student retention
- (b) focusing on student learning
- (c) designing institutional environments that enhance student engagement and a sense of community
- (d) promoting student success
- (e) engaging in a drive toward continuous improvement and
- (f) sharing the responsibility for student retention among all stakeholders

(Kuh et al. 2005).

Developing an educational philosophy that emphasizes student retention includes the clear communication of a vision and mission that revolves around student retention to all institutional stakeholders. This vision and mission must lead to goals that focus on limiting student attrition, enhancing student learning, designing environments that encourage institutional community, providing pathways for the success of all students,

driving toward continuous improvement, and sharing the responsibility for student retention among all stakeholders.

Student learning is at the heart of education. An institutional focus on student learning includes placing a value on a rigorous and relevant curriculum that emphasizes engaging pedagogies both inside and outside the classroom. Astin (1993) stated that the overall quality of instruction and its relevance to everyday life increases student satisfaction, which in turn increases retention in college. Academic excellence is expected and academic efforts are rewarded.

Cross-Case Analysis

A cross-case analysis shows that although the two cases have different student demographics and different rates of selectivity, they both approach the problem of increasing student persistence and graduation rates from the viewpoint of student success. Both universities recognized the need to improve student retention rates, and both have implemented programs, policies, and procedures addressing this need.

Case 1 has had a retention program in place for over 10 years. Its purpose and mission among participants is well documented and pervasive throughout the university system. This depth and spread is not yet evident in the retention program of Case 2. Its program is only in the beginning stages, although its mission emphasizes many characteristics of a successful retention program.

Case 1 has a department focused specifically on student retention but that department is only one small part of the overall retention effort. Faculty members are purposefully involved in the retention effort. Case 2 has no retention department or person who is specifically hired to deal with student retention. Instead, it relies on the

collaborative efforts of several departments, which, until recently, were housed at various places around the campus. The majority of these departments are now housed in one area to facilitate easy access among them and to allow each department to play its part in retention without overlapping the efforts of other departments, thus allowing for better program alignment. Both universities have retention committees, which meet on a regular basis to discuss funding, develop policies and programs, and give updates to each other about student success efforts.

The two universities approach advising from similar perspectives. Case 1 and 2 divide the advising responsibility between faculty members, who mainly advise students once they have chosen a degree area, and the advising department, which takes care of students who have not chosen a degree area. Tutoring is also handled differently at the two universities. Both universities have tutoring centers and both utilize upperclassmen for tutors.

It is evident that both universities place great value on rigorous and relevant student learning. The faculties of both universities involve students in relevant, real-world application of the knowledge and skills that are learned in the classroom. Case 1 does this through projects that occur both on and off the campus. Case 2 does this mainly through service learning projects. The faculty members of both universities are encouraged to be innovative when developing their curriculum.

Case 1 rewards the academic and non-academic efforts of all students through its On Track program, which is a relatively new program. Case 2 has no formalized reward program for academic excellence other than its Honors Program. Both universities have remediation programs for students who struggle with reading and writing. Case 1 has a

specific program for students for whom English is a second language. Case 2 provides support for second language students, as well, although there is not a dedicated program—just a dedicated faculty member.

Both universities have programs that address the development of student talent and leadership, but Case 1 has leadership programs for all of its students, even freshman. Case 2's leadership efforts include the Honors Program and the International Program for Study Abroad. Both programs provide opportunities for internships and experiential learning that involve collaborative learning with peers, groups of peers, and/or faculty members. However, Case 2's efforts are much more organized, included as part of the formal curriculum, and primarily focused toward volunteerism and service learning off campus.

Case 1 promotes undergraduate research, which is funded by the university and overseen by faculty mentors. Opportunities for the students to present this research are provided through seminars and symposiums. Case 2 has no such university-wide program, although departmental research may include student-researchers. The TRIO McNair program has a large student-research component but it has limited enrollment and may only include qualified students. .

A concerted effort has been made by Case 1 to improve the institutional environment, making it more student-friendly and engaging. Community members are regularly invited on campus for activities such as lectures, concerts, movies, and athletic events. The cafeteria and library have been redesigned to facilitate student/student and student/faculty interaction with small spaces for study and larger spaces that provide student gathering spots. Case 2's Student Center and Heritage Center are designed for

small and large group gatherings. The outside areas of both universities are inviting and used as gathering places for the campus and community to interact.

There is a culture of high expectations shared among members of both institutional communities, but this culture extends down even into the student body at Case 2 University. Although there is diversity among the students, the culture of the students is similar. There is a sense of caring about one another among the students that probably derives from the fact that the university is a religious institution, according to the focus group. It is also important to note that because Case 2 is selective in admissions, a majority of the students understand the need for study and have a desire to help one another. The smallness of the campus and the regular chapel services may also attribute to this closeness among the students.

The early warning systems of Case 1 and Case 2 are formalized; both depend upon the faculty to point out students who may be in need of assistance in their social and/or academic lives. Only Case 1 has formal, mandatory orientation activities and classes for students in transition, but both universities have safety nets in place to scaffold struggling students. Case 1 has a mandatory class for all first time freshman to help them with the transition from high school to college. Some departments have their own freshman orientation class, but they must meet the same requirements as the general freshman class. According to the Case 1 faculty, these classes have increased student learning and have improved their study habits. They have also familiarized the students with the services that are available at the college. Case 2 had just begun a more formal freshman experience program, but it has no mandatory class for entering freshman to

address the transition to college. The non-academic needs of students at both universities are mainly dealt with through the CSS and Counseling Departments.

The ethnic backgrounds of the faculty members at both university faculties are predominantly White. Case 1 has more female faculty members than male, while Case 2 has more male faculty members than female. Both universities encourage diversity through the admissions process, and both encourage student success by providing specific programs to address student diversity. Academic advising services are provided by both universities, but Case 1's use of peer mentors is more extensive and formalized. Case 2 only uses peer mentoring in a one common freshman class and trains RAs to spot for student problems in the dormitories.

Student success is a high priority on both campuses, but Case 1 has a greater drive toward continuous improvement in its retention program. The system of assessment is much more organized and ingrained in this university. Intentional efforts are made to improve programs, policies, and procedures after multiple forms of data are disaggregated and evaluated. A company, which specializes in helping universities retain and graduate students, aids the university in this effort ;and it has been actively involved with the retention process for many years. Case 2 is only beginning its journey into increasing retention and graduation rates among its students. It has been fortunate to have higher retention and graduation rates than other Arkansas universities over the years, but this success has to some extent, according to the focus group, kept the university from making efforts to improve. The centralization of various student services offices above its Student Center is a step in the right direction. Case 2 is also in the process of determining if the assistance of an outside company would be beneficial. The collaborative efforts

among the administration, staff members, and faculty members to retain students is much more pervasive at Case 1.

Conclusions

The organization of an institution's retention program does not seem to be as important as does the competency and dedication of those who are involved with its implementation. Because of the varying demographics of each student population, the processes leading toward student success may vary. What seems to affect whether a retention program is successful or not relies more on the focus of individuals and institutions on student success and student achievement and a willingness of those involved to stay the course if reflection and the assessment data warrants it.

Student affairs programs need to collaborate with and enhance each institution's academic goals, thereby attending to all of a student's needs. "The art of successful institutional retention is to balance these varying needs in a coordinated, carefully timed program of action," according to Tinto (1993, p. 153). When the student affairs and academic affairs departments work together, they appear to create a synergy that is greater than the sum of its parts. "Policies, programs, and practices must be aligned with student academic preparation and needs as well as with institutional resources and personnel in ways that complement the institutional mission, values, and culture," Kuh et al. (2005, p. 297) said.

This alignment requires collaboration and communication among those who monitor and assess the effectiveness of institutional initiatives and who evaluate new proposals to determine if they will complement or enhance those programs and processes already in place. Institutional efforts that are complementary and coordinated seem to

produce the best effects. When these efforts are combined with a clear and pervasive mission to create opportunities for the success of all students and a constant drive to improve, then an increase in retention and graduation rates would seem to be inevitable.

As stated in Chapter I, increasing the body of knowledge surrounding individual retention programs will help colleges and universities determine their own effectiveness in a number of ways. It is important that individual colleges and universities identify the practices that lead to greater student retention so that changes can be made in institutional retention programs. Schools must evaluate their programs according to practices that are shown to best promote student persistence. A study of internal assessments may also lead to improved results on measures of external accountability that may be implemented.

Further dialogue on the subject of changing institutional practices, policies, and procedures concerning student persistence and success may help institutions improve their retention efforts by implementing new policies relating to student retention or by expanding upon research-based student retention strategies that have already been put into place. These strategies may serve as an internal accountability system for institutions.

Reviewing internal systems of accountability for student retention program components that currently have few to no external means of accountability may lead to the development of a broader-based, standardized system of evaluation of the common retention practices within institutional communities. This may help institutions meet the goals and expectations of state and/or national agency demands for greater graduation rates.

Limitations

As suggested in chapter three, there are specific limitations that could affect the reporting and analysis of the data from this study. Among the limitations is the relationship the researcher has with one of the institutions, unintended assumptions of the researcher due to her own beliefs, and the short duration of the study. Another limitation is that there are many factors contributing to a student's decision to leave college. These factors may relate to pre-admission variables, or they may relate to post-admission variables. This study only dealt with post-admission variables, so it is possible that the anecdotal evidence in this investigation could be triangulated with quantitative student data such as student surveys to suggest more meaningful implications. Finally, it must be acknowledged that although college student retention is a national problem, this study is not generalized to other institutions as it only sought to inform the retention programs and practices of two demographically different colleges in Arkansas.

This study was done on the retention programs of one public university and one private university in the state of Arkansas. The research was intended to present an in-depth understanding on the topic of how two different institutions of higher learning attempt to improve their student retention and graduation rates by making changes in institutional practice, thereby building on the existing knowledge base of other research in this area. As others review the findings of this research, they can decide if replicating the methodology with other institutions will add breadth to these findings, as well as earlier findings of other researchers.

Implications

It is hoped that the findings of this study will expand the knowledge base regarding how colleges and universities can change their policies, programs, and practices to effectively improve college student retention and, as a result, improve student graduation rates. Staff members of two universities in Arkansas who are instrumental in implementing their institutions' retention programs were used in focus group and individual interviews to gather information regarding the beliefs and practices of their respective universities in the effort to retain students until they have earned a degree. This research acknowledges that administrative leadership and collaboration is vital to increasing the retention rates among college students and replicating exemplary practices.

Many factors influence whether the students of a college decide to stay at that institution until the completion of a degree. Since the literature strongly suggested that it is possible for institutions of higher learning to increase the number of students who attain degree completion by changing their institutional environments, it was important to see if any universities in Arkansas had attempted to do this and if it had been successful. This study focused on two institutions of higher learning, which are making a determined effort to increase the retention and graduation rates of their students.

In order to understand how the universities promote an institutional climate that is engaging and conducive to student satisfaction and success, it is crucial to identify the institutional demographics that might be barriers to student retention at both universities, as such barriers may hamper retention efforts. In the process of this study, successful retention strategies were identified that will support other school leaders in their efforts to build a successful retention program at their school. The university demographics

described in this study can be shared with colleagues and policy makers to promote improvements in other colleges and universities.

The fundamental elements that are important to a successful retention program were researched to add to the body of knowledge regarding the factors that should be included when building such a program. This study attempted to create a framework based upon best practices as found in the research for institutions to follow in reaching their goals of implementing a successful retention program.

Tinto (1999) suggested that there was now a need for research into institutional retention programs to see what practices might lead to successful program implementation that continues over time, and this study sought to meet this need. Studying two demographically different institutions allows other colleges and universities to modify and adjust their retention programs to better meet the needs of their students.

One practical application of this study was identifying the training and support institutional administrators, staff, and faculty need when attempting to develop a successful retention program. Leadership capacities such as a broad-based vision for student success, knowledgeable and skillful participation in the retention process, and established norms of collaboration among all stakeholders must be expanded in order to move an institution from the comfort of the status quo into a professional community that focuses student success. Other applications of this study pertained to identifying the need to use multiple sources of data to determine weaknesses in present institutional policies and practices and understanding the need to assess the overall program parts to determine what is working to retain students and what is not.

The research findings of this study provided additional information regarding how university leaders implement various portions of the best practices framework to meet the needs of their particular institution's student population with the ultimate goal of increasing the retention and graduation rates of all of their students. In the future, other researchers may build on this information to further help additional institutions of higher learning increase the available information concerning the factors that can positively affect the retention rates of undergraduate students. Important questions for future research might include the following: What funding is needed to support the student retention efforts of an institution, and where is that funding best spent? What is the correlation between retention efforts put in place by an institution and the retention and graduation rates of its students? Can the impact of institutional policies, practices, procedures, and programs on student retention be quantified, and, if so, how? Are the results of this current study replicated in other geographic and demographic areas?

Unexpected Results

Although it was expected that the two universities that participated in this study would have different means to deal with the problem of student retention, it was surprising that both had already incorporated some of the best practices stated in this study and that many of the efforts put in place by one university were replicated at the other. Sometimes these implementations were not necessarily due as much to a research-based push for improvement as to a sincere intuitional desire to enhance student success.

I found that the importance of the student retention program at these two universities was directly related to the leadership at the institutions. While one university had a strong student retention program that was part of all the departments of the

institution, the other did not have an organized, all-pervasive plan yet. I attributed this to the fact that one of the universities has had a recent change in its president, and the other has a president who had been a major force behind the student retention effort for more than 11 years.

It is also important to note that both of the universities have been relatively successful in retaining and graduating their students. This appears to be because Tinto (1993) said, “Effective retention programs are committed to the students they serve. They put student welfare ahead of other institutional goals” (p. 146). The fact that both universities have been successful, I believe, is because both of these institutions are truly committed to serving their students even though the ways in which they serve these students may vary.

It was also a surprise that, despite the differences in the student demographics of the two universities, they both employed some of the same techniques to increase their retention rates such as early warning systems involving faculty members and encouraging students to volunteer in the community. Both universities have centralized their student success offices. Both have recently spent a large amount of money on technology. However, at Case 1, the least used teaching methods included volunteer/service experiences, team-based learning, and peer learning whereas Case 2 excelled in using volunteer/service learning experiences and team-based learning.

This study only describes the retention programs of the two universities from the views of those who are involved with its implementation. It is important to also know how the students themselves feel about the services and other parts of the retention program. The use of a freshmen inventory by both universities will help expand new

knowledge bases. It will also increase the knowledge base of the university to discuss retention program ideas with a private consultant.

Recommendations

Potential for Practice/Policy

Effective retention programs are, first, committed to the education of all students. Few, if any, institutions would argue against having a strong, retention-centric mission that emphasizes student academic and social success. Having a mission and living a mission are different. Living a mission is “what happens when a college delivers the curriculum, organizes human talent, and allocates resources in a manner that enables it to realize its aspirations” (Kuh et al., 2005, p. 267). This means a change in culture. Kuh et al. (2005) said that this is the most important factor and that institutional culture must be carefully changed and managed. To increase student retention, institutional decisions must revolve around student satisfaction and student success (Tinto, 1993; Pascarelli & Terenzini, 2005). These two things must be a priority, and they must be funded.

However, providing funding and other resources is not enough. Institutions must make sure the retention programs that are in place are being used by large numbers of students, especially those who are at risk of dropping out of college, and that they are high quality and complementary of the other academic and social programs that are offered. Student success should be the culture of institution, not just another part of it (Kuh et al., 2005). If students are academically and socially engaged, they will be successful in college and more likely to persist until graduation.

Successful retention programs turn challenges into opportunities. Tinto (1993) said that institutions should ask the question, “What is the educational problem for which

the institution is the proposed solution?" (p. 154). For example, an increase in minority and/or international students at an institution should lead to the development of a program to address the specific needs of those students. A change in the learning styles of students should lead to a change in the curriculum.

Engaging pedagogies that emphasize rigorous, real-world applications and service learning experiences on and off campus should be the norm rather than the exception. This reflects a change in pedagogy from teacher-centered to learning-centered (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Academic excellence should be expected and rewarded, and safety nets should be in place for those students who struggle both academically and socially. Opportunities for the development of student talent and leadership qualities should be available for all students, not just a few high achievers, and it should be an integral part of the curriculum in all departments.

Scaffolding student learning with tutors and the accessibility of faculty members is important to student success. Providing social and academic peer guidance (like the use of RAs in dormitories and peer tutors and mentors in and out of the classroom) can increase student engagement and a feeling of institutional belonging. Just providing these services is not enough, however. The research suggested that it is the quality, not the number of these services that is important (Kuh et al., 2005). Arranging for and supporting non-classroom interactions between faculty members and students also supports authentic relationships that enhance individual student performance (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

It is important that student success be a major part of any institution's educational mission and purpose. This includes translating this mission into a common language that

is understood by all stakeholders, staying focused of the goal of student success, and continuously reflecting on retention results (Kuh et al., 2005). Less effective programs should be discontinued in favor of those that produce retention results, but these decisions can only be made after appropriate assessments are done. Investments should be made in programs and activities that contribute to student success and achievement, and all decisions should be measured against these goals.

Standards should be high for everyone but attainable with sufficient scaffolding for students and professional development for faculty and staff members. High-quality student support services are important, and those in charge of student services should be competent, dedicated to student success, and willing to collaborate with others who have a part in student retention and graduation (Kuh et al., 2005). Incoming freshmen and transfer students need to have an idea of expectations and what services are available if they struggle academically or socially. Academic and student affairs departments should work closely together to determine what student success looks like and how to achieve it. It is notable that both of the universities studied here have made efforts to consolidate their academic and student affairs departments and have centralized their offices into one area on campus.

Student/faculty interactions need to be encouraged, especially in the areas of research and volunteerism. These interactions should take place both inside and outside of the classroom. Both of the studied universities use at least one of these areas to their advantage.

Peer interaction is also tremendously important for student engagement and success. Universities should strive to find ways to create communities of students within

their own cohort and between upperclassmen and underclassmen in both formal and informal academic and social settings. Student/faculty and student/student activities help beginning students through the difficult transition from home to college. Institutions can promote interaction by mindfully creating gathering spaces that enhance engagement on campus.

Finally, assessment must become second nature at universities. There can never be a feeling of complacency. All stakeholders within a university should be involved with a constant and consistent drive toward more meaningful and productive ways to increase student persistence and success. Institutional practices, procedures, and programs that pertain to student retention must be research-based and must evolve as the data changes. The funding of those practices, procedures, and programs should be guided by the collection and assessment of multiple forms of data.

Future Research Considerations

As Tinto (2006) stated, “What is needed and what is not yet available is a model of institutional action that provides guidelines for the development of effective policies and programs that institutions can reasonably employ to enhance the persistence of all their students” (p. 6). Researchers may want to further the effort to find such a best practices model by studying what other institutions are presently doing and determine which actions actually work to retain students. This can only be done if individuals or universities begin to analyze which retention programs, policies, and procedures are effective and which are not. Universities may want to create their own case studies to better understand the social and academic needs of their students. A more detailed checklist similar to the one used in this research with categories like beginning,

emerging, proficient, and advanced might be used as an assessment instrument for universities when evaluating their own retention programs.

Other areas that researchers could explore include doing case studies of 2-year and/or minority colleges to determine what those institutions are doing to meet the needs of their students. Researchers might also want to compare the retention practices of 2-year and/or minority colleges to the retention practices of more conventional institutions. Another area of research might be a comparison of the retention programs and policies of large universities to those of smaller universities.

REFERENCES

- ACT (2006). *Frequently asked questions*. Retrieved from <http://www.actstudent.org/faq/faq.html>
- ACT Assessment. (2006). Retrieved from <http://www.act.org/aap/ACT>
- Arkansas Department of Higher Education. (2012). *Comprehensive Arkansas higher education annual report*. Retrieved from www.adhe.edu
- Astin, A. (1993). *What matters in college? Four critical years revisited*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Bean, J., & Eaton, S. (2000). Why students leave: Insights from research. In D. Hossler, J. Bean, & Associates, *The Strategic Management of College Enrollments* (147-169). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Beebe, M. (2011). State of the state address. Retrieved from <http://governor.arkansas.gov>
- Bloomberg, L. D., & Volpe, M. F. (2008). *Completing your qualitative dissertation: A road map from beginning to end* (1st Ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publication Inc.
- Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (2007). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theories and methods* (5th Ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Bradburn, E. (2002). *Short-term enrollment in postsecondary education: student background and institutional differences in reasons for early departure, 1996–98*. (NCES 2003153). Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

- Carey, K. (2004). *A matter of degrees: Improving graduation rates in four-year colleges and universities*. Retrieved from <http://www.edtrust.org/sites/edtrust.org/files/publications/files/highered.pdf>
- Chronicle of Higher Education (2013). *College completion microsite*. Retrieved from www.collegecompletion.chronicle.com
- Covey, S. R. (1989). *7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (1st Ed.). New York, NY: Press.
- Creswell, J. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd Ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publication Inc.
- Graybeal, S. (2007). *A study of first time full-time freshmen's attributes and their associations with fall-to-fall retention rates at a two-year public community college*. (Doctoral dissertation, 2007). East Tennessee State University, Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis. Retrieved from dc.etsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3399&context=etd
- Johnson, B., & Christensen, L. (2008). *Educational research quantitative, qualitative, & mixed approaches* (3rd Ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publication Inc.
- Krueger, R., & Casey, M. A. (2009). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research* (4th Ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publication Inc.
- Kuh, G., Kinzie, J., Schuh, J., Whitt, E. & Associates. (2005). *Student success in college: Creating conditions that matter*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Leppel, K. (2002). Similarities and differences in the college persistence of men and women. *The Review of Higher Education*, 25, 433-450.
- Marx, G. (2006). *Sixteen trends: Their profound impact on our future*. Alexandria, VA: Educational Research Service.

- National Center for Education Statistics. (2012a). *Institute of education sciences college navigator*. Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator>
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2012b). *Institute of education sciences digest of education statistics*. Retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d12/tables/dt12_009.asp
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2013). *Institute of education sciences college navigator*. Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator>
- Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2010). *Education at a glance. ODCD Indicators, table A3.2*. Retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2012/2012026/tables/table_23.asp
- Parsad, B., & Lewis, L. (2003). *Remedial education at degree-granting postsecondary institutions in Fall 2000* (NCES 2004–010). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Pascarella, E., & Terenzini, P. (1978). The relation of students' pre-college characteristic and freshman year experience to voluntary attrition. *Research in Higher Education, 9*, 347-366.
- Pascarella, E. & Terenzini, P. (2005). *How college affects students: A third decade of research*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Piccardi, J. (2005). *Principals' perceptions of factors affecting teacher collaboration in elementary schools*. Providence, RI: Johnson & Wales University.
- Seidman, A. (2012). Taking action: a retention model and for student success. In A. Seidman (Ed.), *College student retention: Formula for student success*. (2nd Ed.) (pp.267-283). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

- Snyder, T. D. (2008). *Mini-digest of education statistics, 2007* (NCES 2008-023).
Washington DC: National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Educational Sciences.
- Southern Education Foundation. (2013). Closing the economic gap: Education in the Arkansas economy. From *Miles to go Arkansas update*. Atlanta, GA. Retrieved from www.southerneducation.org
- Southern Regional Education Board. (2007). Factbook on higher education. Retrieved from www.sreb.org
- Tinto, V. (1975). Dropout from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of recent research. *A Review of Educational Research*, 65, 89-125.
- Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition* (2nd Ed.). Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Tinto, V. (1999). Taking retention seriously: Rethinking the first year of college. *NACADA Journal*, 19, 5-9.
- Tinto, V. (2005). *Student success and the building of involving educational communities*. Paper presented at Seattle University. Seattle, WA: Retrieved from <http://www.mcli.dist.maricopa.edu/fsd/c2006/docs/promotingstudentsuccess.pdf>
- Tinto, V. (2006). Research and practice of student retention: What next? *Journal of College Student Retention*, 8, 1-10.
- United States Department of Education. (2011a). *College completion tool-kit*. Retrieved from <http://www.ed.gov/college-completion/governing-win>

- United States Department of Education. (2011b). *National Center for Education Statistics digest of education statistics: 2011*. Retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d11/ch_3.asp
- United States Department of Education. (2012). *National Center for Education Statistics—The condition of education 2011* (NCES 2012-045), Indicator 45. Washington DC: author.
- United States Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2012). *Employment projections: 2012-2022 Summary*. Retrieved from author website.
- United States Government Accountability Office (1990). *Case study evaluations* (Program Evaluation and Methodology Division). Washington DC: Government Printing Office.
- United States National Archives and Records Administration. (2003). *Our documents: A national initiative on American history, civics, and service*. Retrieved from www.ourdocuments.gov
- Wei, C. C., & Horn, L. (2002). *Persistence and attainment of beginning students with pell grants* (NCES 2002-169). Washington DC: United States Department of Education Office of Educational Research and Improvement. Retrieved from nces.ed.gov/das/epubs/pdf/2002169_es.pdf
- Whitehouse. (2009). *The American graduation initiative*. Retrieved from www.whitehouse.gov
- Whitehouse. (2012a). *Meeting the nation's 2020 goal: State targets for increasing the number and percentage of college graduates with degrees*. Retrieved from www.whitehouse.gov

Whitehouse. (2012b). *Support for higher ed.* Retrieved from www.whitehouse.gov

Yin, R. (2009). *Case study research design and methods* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage
Publication Inc.

APPENDICES

Appendix A



Status of Request for Exemption from IRB Review

(For Board Use Only)

Date: 8/1/13

Proposal Number: 2013-081

Title of Project: A Study of the Retention Programs at Two Different Institutions of Higher Learning In Arkansas

Principal Investigator(s) and Co-Investigator(s): Roxanne Woods Bradow

-
- Research exempted from IRB review.
- Research requires IRB review.
- More information is needed before a determination can be made. (See attachment.)
-

I have reviewed the proposal referenced above and have rendered the decision noted above. This study has been found to fall under the following exemption(s):

1 2 3 4 5 6

In the event that, after this exemption is granted, this research proposal is changed, it may require a review by the full IRB. In such case, a **Request for Amendment to Approved Research** form must be completed and submitted.

This exemption is granted for one year from the date of this letter. Renewals will need to be reviewed and granted before expiration.

The IRB reserves the right to observe, review and evaluate this study and its procedures during the course of the study.

Rebecca O. Weaver

ChairHarding University Institutional Review Board

Appendix B

Individual Interview Protocol

Name of Interviewee: _____

Date: _____ Time: _____ Location: _____

(start tape)

Preliminary Script: "This is (interviewer's name). Today is (day and date). It's (time), and I'm here in (location) with (interviewee name), the (title) of (institution). We'll be discussing the interviewee's institutional Student Retention Program."

So first I would like to ask you about what your university does to increase student retention so that students will stay until they graduate.

1. When did _____ first begin to address the need to retain its students until graduation?
2. What data were used to determine which retention problems would be addressed?
3. What areas did you choose to improve student retention?
4. Why were these areas chosen?
5. Who was responsible for choosing these targeted areas?
6. What retention program components have been implemented, especially those targeting at-risk students?
7. Who is responsible for the implementation of the retention program components?
8. What assessment systems, if any, have been put in place to determine the effectiveness of the implemented programs, processes, and services?
9. Who is responsible for the assessment of the program components?
10. Who is responsible for the success of the retention program components?

11. What changes have been or will be implemented to improve the programs?

Now I would like to ask you about your institution's educational philosophy.

1. What is the purpose and mission of your college?
2. How do you determine if your policies, programs, and practices are aligned with your institution's purpose and mission?
3. Who determines where money is needed and how it is spent?
4. How do the campus and the community collaborate to enhance retention?

I need to know how your institutional purpose and mission is reflected in the instruction of your students, so now I will ask some questions about your institution's pedagogical practices.

1. To what extent does your retention program focus on student learning?
2. In what ways do you develop student talent and leadership?
3. In what ways do you consider the retention of students when you are developing the institutional curriculum?
4. What kinds of opportunities are there for active and collaborative learning with peers and/or groups of peers?
5. What access to up-to-date technology and equipment is provided for students?
6. What kinds of opportunities for internships, experiential learning, and/or community service projects are available to students?

Now we're going to switch the conversation to the designing of institutional environments.

1. How are your institutional spaces used to enhance engagement between the school community members?

2. What opportunities do students have to interact with faculty and staff, especially outside of the classroom?
3. How do you make time for students to interact with faculty and staff, especially outside of the classroom?
4. What opportunities for out-of-class student/faculty interaction are made available?

Providing pathways to student success is important at a college. Let's talk about the ways that your university ensures the successfulness of its students.

1. What processes and programs do you have in place to support the academic and social challenges of your students, especially those who are at risk of dropping out?
2. What programs are in place to support the diversity of your students - minorities, international students, disabled students, and other identified groups?
3. What classes and or seminars are taught specifically to first year students to aid in the transition to college?
4. What other services such as academic advising and peer and/or staff mentoring are provided to all students?
5. What types of opportunities for peer support are provided?

Next I would like to ask you about your university's retention program improvement strategies.

1. What formal assessment systems are in place to evaluate the student programs and processes?
2. What forms of data do you use to assess the progress and success of your student retention programs and policies?

3. Who is in charge of analyzing the data?

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. As member of your university's student retention program, you are an integral part of the implementation of best practices at your school.

Appendix C

Focus Group Protocol

Hello, I am Roxanne Bradow. I am a doctoral student at Harding University doing a case study on the student retention program at your school.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this focus group. As member of your university's student retention program, you are an integral part of the implementation of best practices at your school. I want you to know that I am interested in the subject of college student retention because I am a high school principal, and I want my students to be prepared for college and to stay in college until they graduate.

First, there are no right or wrong answers. I am interested in understanding your perspectives about the student retention program at your university.

There are ___ people in this room, so it is to be expected that each of you will have different perspectives.

Second, I ask that you talk one at a time so that I can be sure to hear everyone's views and get them on tape. So when you say something, if you would, please say your name first so that the person transcribing the tape will know who is talking.

To get started, I'd like to gather some general information. Would each of you, beginning with the person on my left, tell your name and your role in your university's student retention program?

My goal during this interview is to understand the unique characteristics affecting your institution's retention rate and how you work to overcome or to enhance them. I want to understand how your institution responds to the need to increase the retention rate of your students, especially in regards to the retention of your first-year first time freshmen, and what you do to keep students in school until they graduate.

So first I would like to ask you about what your university does to increase student retention so that students will stay until they graduate.

1. When did _____ first begin to address the need to retain its students until graduation?
2. What data were used to determine which retention problems would be addressed?
3. What areas did you choose to improve student retention?

4. Why were these areas chosen?
5. Who was responsible for choosing these targeted areas?
6. What retention program components have been implemented, especially those targeting at-risk students?
7. Who is responsible for the implementation of the retention program components?
8. What assessment systems, if any, have been put in place to determine the effectiveness of the implemented programs, processes, and services?
9. Who is responsible for the assessment of the program components?
10. Who is responsible for the success of the retention program components?
11. What changes have been or will be implemented to improve the programs?

Now I would like to ask you about your institution's educational philosophy.

1. What is the purpose and mission of your college?
2. How do you determine if your policies, programs, and practices are aligned with your institution's purpose and mission?
3. Who determines where money is needed and how it is spent?
4. How do the campus and the community collaborate to enhance retention?

I need to know how your institutional purpose and mission is reflected in the instruction of your students, so now I will ask some questions about your institution's pedagogical practices.

1. To what extent does your retention program focus on student learning?
2. In what ways do you develop student talent and leadership?
3. In what ways do you consider the retention of students when you are developing the institutional curriculum?

4. What kinds of opportunities are there for active and collaborative learning with peers and/or groups of peers?
5. What access to up-to-date technology and equipment is provided for students?
6. What kinds of opportunities for internships, experiential learning, and/or community service projects are available to students?

Now we're going to switch the conversation to the designing of institutional environments.

1. How are your institutional spaces used to enhance engagement between the school community members?
2. What opportunities do students have to interact with faculty and staff, especially outside of the classroom?
3. How do you make time for students to interact with faculty and staff, especially outside of the classroom?
4. What opportunities for out-of-class student/faculty interaction are made available?

Providing pathways to student success is important at a college. Let's talk about the ways that your university ensures the successfulness of its students.

1. What processes and programs do you have in place to support the academic and social challenges of your students, especially those who are at risk of dropping out?
2. What programs are in place to support the diversity of your students - minorities, international students, disabled students, and other identified groups?
3. What classes and or seminars are taught specifically to first year students to aid in the transition to college?

4. What other services such as academic advising and peer and/or staff mentoring are provided to all students?
5. What types of opportunities for peer support are provided?

Next, I would like to ask you about your university's retention program improvement strategies.

1. What formal assessment systems are in place to evaluate the student programs and processes?
2. What forms of data do you use to assess the progress and success of your student retention programs and policies?
3. Who is in charge of analyzing the data?

Thank you so much for your responses to my questions. I would like to end the interview with an opportunity for each of you to make any other statements or give me any other information that might help me give a true picture of your institution's student retention program. I wish to be as accurate in writing my case study as I can be.

APPENDIX D

Case Study Protocol

- A. Introduction to the case study and the purpose of the protocol
 - a. This study proposes that institutions that use best practices as part of their student retention programs and procedures will decrease their student attrition rates and retain more students until they graduate.
 - b. Descriptive case studies will be done on two demographically different universities to determine how the student retention programs of each compare to the best practices research in student retention and to each other.
 - c. The role of this protocol is to guide the case study investigator to maintain focus and thus increase reliability for this study. This is a standardized agenda for case study inquiry (Yin, 2009).

- B. Data Collection Procedures
 - a. Two universities will be visited. One is a private, 4-year university, and the other is a public, 4-year university. Both are in the state of Arkansas.
 - b. Data collection will include state and federal documents, university archival records, physical artifacts from each institution, individual interviews with the directors of the two programs, and focus group interviews of individuals from each institution who are directly involved in the planning, implementation, and assessment of the two programs.

C. Outline of Case Study Reports

- a. Two case study reports will be done – one for Case 1 and a second for Case 2.
- b. The reports will show the uses of best practices in retention research within each of the two universities as well as how the universities modify and adjust best practices to meet the needs of their students.
- c. The reports will state the outcome of the two retention programs to date.
- d. The reports will give the contexts and histories pertaining to the two university retention program practices.
- e. A chronology of events pertaining to the implementation and outcomes of the programs' practices at each site will be given along with a logic model for the program practices. The researcher will present the outcome and/or other data, refer to relevant documents, and list the persons interviewed.

D. Case Study Questions

- a. Questions will cover the operation and innovativeness of the programs.
 - i. The study will describe the program in detail, including how personnel, monies, and technologies are used.
 - ii. The study will discuss the nature of the collaborative efforts within each student retention program, including community collaboration, that were necessary to the program.
 - iii. The study will show why the programs were begun and will determine how and why various procedures and practices were put in place.

- iv. The study will discover the planning process, how it worked, and who was involved. It will also discuss the original goals and target populations and areas for the program procedures and practices.
 - v. The study will state how and why the individual retention programs are innovative and appropriate for their specific student demographics and how the two program specifics compare to each other.
 - vi. The study will describe how the separate programs are supported, either through each university's regular budget and/or from funding from external sources.
- b. An evaluation will be done, comparing each with best practices (a within case analysis) and with each other (a cross-case analysis).
- i. The study will determine the designs for evaluating each program's practices and who is responsible for the evaluations.
 - ii. The study will show what part of the evaluation has been implemented.
 - iii. The study will reveal the outcome measures presently used and what outcomes have been identified to date.
 - iv. The study will identify and explore rival explanations that may have attributed to the outcomes of the programs.

(Yin, 2009)

APPENDIX E

Best Practices Analysis Checklist

| ANALYSIS CHECKLIST | | |
|---|---|----------|
| I. Living the Educational Philosophy | | |
| Present | Key Property | Evidence |
| | Clearly articulated purpose and mission among participants in the program | |
| | Coherent philosophy that is understood among participants in the program | |
| | Policies, programs, and practices are aligned. | |
| | Money is spent where it can make a difference toward retention. | |
| | There is collaboration between the campus and the community. | |
| II. Focusing on Student Learning | | |
| | A value is placed on rigorous and relevant student learning. | |
| | Engaging pedagogies that include productive group work and learning outside of the classroom. | |
| | There is an expectation of academic excellence. | |
| | There are ways in which academic efforts are rewarded. | |
| | There is an emphasis on intensive reading and writing in classes. | |
| | Student talent and leadership development is evident in programs and/or within classrooms. | |
| | Students are provided help with non-academic needs, other than student aid. | |
| | Opportunities for students to participate in research with faculty members are provided. | |
| | Active and collaborative learning opportunities with | |

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| | peers and groups of peers are available. | |
| | The institution provides access to up-to-date technology and equipment. | |
| | Opportunities for internships and experiential learning are available to students. | |
| | Students are offered opportunities to volunteer for and participate in community service projects. | |
| III. Designing environments to enhance institutional community | | |
| | Institutional spaces enhance engagement between the school community members. | |
| | Institutional spaces provide a “sense of place.” | |
| | Spaces enhance engagement. | |
| | Time is made for students to interact with faculty and staff, especially outside of the classroom. | |
| | Opportunities for out of-class student/faculty interaction are made available. | |
| IV. Providing pathways to student success | | |
| | There is a culture of high expectations shared among members of the institutional community. | |
| | Support for academic and social challenges is provided (i.e. early warning systems.) | |
| | The institution has formal orientation activities. | |
| | Student diversity is valued by the faculty and staff of the institution. | |
| | Safety nets are in place to scaffold students who are struggling academically. | |

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| | Programs are in place to support minorities, international students, disabled students, and other identified groups. | |
| | Classes and or seminars are taught specifically to first year students to aid in the transition to college. | |
| | Services such as academic advising and peer/staff mentoring are provided to all students. | |
| | Opportunities for peer support are provided by the institution. | |
| V. Driving toward continuous improvement | | |
| | Student success is shown to be a high priority. | |
| | There is an emphasis on innovation when developing the institutional curriculum. | |
| | Decisions are made after evaluating multiple forms of data. | |
| | Formal assessment systems are in place to evaluate programs and to drive institutional improvement. | |
| VI. Sharing responsibility for student retention | | |
| | The institution shows evidence of shared leadership in the development and implementation of the retention program. | |
| | The institution has a diverse faculty and staff. | |
| | There is a collaborative effort among the administration, staff members, and faculty to retain students. | |