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Producing a College Graduate Using Retention, Progression, and Graduation (RPG) Initiatives: A University Systems' Approach

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PRODUCING A COLLEGE GRADUATE USING

RETENTION, PROGRESSION, AND GRADUATION (RPG) INITIATIVES:

A UNIVERSITY SYSTEMS' APPROACH

by

DEBORAH N. KITTRELL-MIKELL

(Under the Direction of Teri Denlea Melton)

ABSTRACT

Complete College Georgia (CCG) is an initiative that has the University System of

Georgia institutions strategizing ways to develop plans that will increase the number of

college graduates by the year 2020. Governor Nathan Deal has indicated that graduation

rates need to increase from 42% to 60% within the next 7 years. With the anticipation of

approximately 20% more students graduating to meet the 250,000 target, a closer look is

needed at how an additional 50,000 graduates can be produced to make this goal a reality.

To fulfill this goal, there needs to be an increase of approximately 7,143 graduates each

year for the next few years. This means approximately a 3% increase in students

graduating each year. Under the paradigm of retention, progression, and graduation

(RPG) and CCG, this descriptive research study used a questionnaire to collect data from

academic advisors regarding how they plan to approach the mandate in an effort to

support Governor Deal's plan to increase the graduation rate in the state of Georgia. The

findings of the study indicate that both faculty and professional academic advisors

support that there are two key elements which are strong factors in obtaining RPG. One is

when students come to college academically prepared to do college work and the other is

having an intrinsic motivation to learn. Collectively, advisors recommend a stronger high

school curriculum that will produce scholarly students. Equally divided were results on

funding, revealing 50% colleges from the state should be based on enrollment while the

other 50% indicate funding should be based on the number of graduates an institution has

per term (performance-base). Finally, this study gave academic advisors a voice. The

disconnect between policy makers and implementers of the policies is palpable.

Academic advisors are valuable and significant in fulfilling the RPG and CCG initiatives.

INDEX WORDS: Academics, Retention, Progression, Graduation, Complete College
America, Complete College Georgia, Postsecondary education, College education,
Academic advisement, College graduates

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my late father Loucious Timmons and my mother Wyomia Kittrell-Timmons. Neither of my parents finished high school, but they did an extraordinary job raising a daughter with an intrinsic motivation to learn and a strong thirst for knowledge. This doctoral degree is my fifth diploma; therefore, I have been blessed with enough to share. I dedicate a degree to each parent because I know if they had an easier life and had been given the chance, both would have seized the opportunity to pursue an education and earned a degree. God bless you mom and dad. I love you.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Many factors determine why a student pursues formal education at the postsecondary level. One motivator often presented in various media venues is a strong positive correlation between having a degree and earning higher wages. Other motivators include the influence of parents, the learning of required job knowledge or skill, or a sheer intrinsic desire to learn. According to the White House's website, Higher Education (2014), experts are predicting that even base level jobs may demand their workers to have more than a high school diploma. Therefore, many young adults and non-traditional learners recognize the economic and social value attached with attending and completing a postsecondary education. This educational goal could be met through enrollment at a technical institute, community college, or a university depending on the occupation or career they are seeking.

Consequently, postsecondary enrollment is on the rise. According to the 2012 U.S. Census Bureau, college enrollment has been steadily climbing. From 1990 to 2009, enrollment in two-year colleges increased 43% while four-year institutions experienced a 50% increase in enrollment. In support of this educational and economic trend, the leaders of our country embrace and encourage higher education for the populace in order to ensure that the United States will be able to be productive on a national level and compete on a global scale. For example, President Barak Obama has shown strong support of higher education. During a joint session in Congress, he expressed that he wants the United States to have the highest number of college-educated adults in the world (Obama, 2012).

Former President Obama has challenged every American to make a commitment to complete at least one year of higher education or some type of postsecondary training. Furthermore, he has set an educational goal for the United States of America, "By 2020, America would once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world" (Obama, 2009, p. 6). The data compiled from the U.S. Department of Education (see Appendix A) reported how countries ranked in producing young adult college graduates. The table shows that Korea, Japan, and Canada are the top three countries that have a high percentage of their overall populace graduating with postsecondary education. Compared to all the other countries listed, the United States of America ranks 12th in the world on this issue. "The United States, once a world leader in the proportion of young adults holding a college degree, now fall behind 14 other developed nations, including Korea, Ireland, Australia, and Canada" Complete College Georgia (CCG) (CCG, 2012, p. 5). Also, according to Complete College Georgia, Korea has reached 63% rate of students completing college while Canada and Japan are at 56%.

Writers of the Complete College America (CCA) in 2012 acknowledged that undergraduate enrollment more than doubled between 1970 and 2009 while the number of students who actually *completed* college had remained the same. In other words, attending college is one positive move, but the more important step is to actually complete the program of study and graduate from college. The goals of this research are to give academic advisors an opportunity to acknowledge that the purpose of academic advising has always rested in helping students to complete college and give advisors a voice to respond to the Governor's 20% mandate to increase the graduation rate. Still, there has been discussion as to whether state funding of institutions should be enrollment

or performance-base; increased number of students enrolling in college or increased number of students graduating from college. The most important aspect of pursuing a college education should take precedence over mere enrollment numbers and be the greater concern to relevant education agencies and leaders.

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2012), the percentage of students completing certificates or an associate degree at two-year institutions within the time allotted was at 29.9% based on the cohort of 2007. While at four-year institutions, the percentage of students completing a bachelor's degree within five years after they begin college was 53.9%. The U.S. Department of Education also reported that there was a 58.3% rate of students completing a four-year degree in six years or longer. These percentages can create an obstacle in trying to meet the goal of increasing the graduation rate from 42% to 60%. In other words, only a little over a quarter of the students who are in two-year programs are graduating within the time projected. For the bachelor's degree, a little over half of the students are completing programs in four to five years. To reach a goal of 60%, the time it takes to complete a degree will make a significant difference because 2020 is drawing close. Nevertheless, under the paradigm of retention, progression, and graduation (RPG) and CCG, this study used a questionnaire to collect quantitative data from academic advisors regarding how they plan to approach the mandate in an effort to support Governor Deal's plan to increase the graduation rate in the state of Georgia. The academic advisors could be classified as professional full-time advisors, faculty advisors who teach classes and have been assigned a group of students to advise, administrators who serve in leadership roles and have a group of students who report to them for academic advising, etc.

Yet another fact that the U.S. Department of Education (2013) provided is that in 2013 the U.S. ranked 12th in the world in college attainment rates, in 2014 the U.S. sank further by ranking 14th in the world (DOE 2017). Intriguingly, it was only 20 years ago that the U.S. led the world in the percentage of students who earned degrees in higher education. Former President Obama (2009) acknowledge concerns regarding Americans and their pursuit of higher education by stating:

> Right now, three-quarters of the fastest-growing occupations require more
> than a high school diploma. And yet, just over half of our citizens have
> that level of education. We have one of the highest high school dropout
> rates of any industrialized nation. And half of the students who begin
> college never finish. (p. 5)

Another challenge in completing a degree and graduating from college is the astronomical cost of college and how to fund it. Financing college is becoming more and more of a challenge for most students because of the recent recession and economic downfall. Duncan (2011), former U.S. Secretary of Education asked that the audience look ahead, think creatively with more determination "about how to contain the spiraling costs of college and reduce the burden of student debt on our nation's students" (p. 1). In a February meeting, Duncan (2013) contested the thoughts and action of an immediate March 1, 2013, sequestration on education. He discussed how reducing funding, cutting grants, increasing work-study programs, and cutting payments that would be made to contractors that administer financial aid and various programs. He purported that education is the last place that should sustain budget cut. As Duncan (2013) stated:

[T]he Nation continues to climb out of the recent recession and to prepare

all of its citizens to meet the challenges created by global economic

competiveness in the 21st century. Indeed, I can assure you that our

economic competitors are increasing, not decreasing, their investments in

education, and we can ill afford to fall behind as a consequence of the

indiscriminate, across-the-board cuts that would be required to

sequestration. (p. 1)

Additionally, research conducted in 2012 by the national nonprofit organization

CCA indicated that "in the next ten years 60% of all new jobs will require some type of

college education," (p. 5) and it poses the question of which states will be ready or which

ones will adequately prepare their students for these new educational realities in the job

market. In fact, CCA provided an outline by state that showed the percentage of college-

aged students who earned a college degree (see Appendix B). CCA calculated the

percentages of the states with the highest and the lowest percentages of college graduates.

The research they conducted showed Massachusetts and North Dakota as the only two

states that were graduating students (ages 25-34) in the 50th percentile. Only 3%

separates North Dakota and Massachusetts, however. Conversely, CCA reported that

Arkansas, Louisiana, Nevada, New Mexico, and West Virginia were five states lagging

behind by only producing college graduates in the 20th percentile.

According to CCA, the state of Georgia, along with 25 other states are producing

college graduates in the 30th to 39th percentile. Georgia, is graduating more students

than eight other states, namely Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Kentucky, Mississippi,

Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Texas, however, Georgia is tied with Idaho, South Carolina, and Wyoming with only 34%. Only 13 other states have higher rates.

Moreover, there are a total of 18 states producing college graduates at the 40th percentile and the states that are ranked high in this category are Minnesota and New York at 48%, Connecticut, Iowa, New Hampshire, and New Jersey have 46%, Maryland has 45%, Nebraska, South Dakota, and Vermont have 44%; Illinois, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island have 43%; Virginia has 42%, Colorado, Hawaii, and Kansas have 41% while Wisconsin has 40%. Optimistically, CCA challenges each state to take action now to meet the demands that are anticipated in the job market. Therefore, the governing body of each state needs to provide a foundation or develop some type of strategic plan to increase the college graduation rate within the next 3 years.

Although the demand to graduate students from some postsecondary institutions is the focus, Georgia was named one of ten states that would receive funding from CCA to make this possible. "Georgia was given one million from the Complete College America initiative to help find a solution to the problem. Governor Nathan Deal, who announced the grants, says it's an issue worth pursuing" (Hall, 2013, p.3). Recently, Governor Deal (2011) presented an exigent initiative that will affect all university system public, private, and technical colleges in the state of Georgia. CCG was first initiated in August of 2011 and it necessitates college presidents and other administrators to "identify strategies for the state's public and private colleges to add an additional 250,000 college graduates" by the year 2020 (Deal, 2012, p. 1).

The University System Board of Regents' goal to increase college completion for 30 institutions also outlines a plan that initiates a new agreement with the Technical

College System of Georgia (TCSG). The board is interested in developing more of a collaborative relationship with them to give students more flexibility to transition from one system to the next and successfully earn degrees (BOR System Supplement, 2011).

Academic Advising and RPG

All colleges in higher education offer some type of academic advising for their students; however, academic advising is defined differently and can be so comprehensive that it is part of an institutions' mission statement. The National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) established theory-based core values that were designed as a foundation for any institution to adequately characterize and define academic advising specifically for their institution. Officials and leaders in the NACADA organization believe there is not "one definition" of academic advising that encompasses the entire field and that is why the highly respected organization established the core values so that individual institutions can construct a definition that is relevant and appropriate for their local campus (NACADA). Smith and Gordon (2008) defined academic advising as:

> one of the most important services that college campus offer. It is concerned with the basic reason your student is in college-not only to earn a degree but to become an educated person, a lifelong learner, and a contributing member of the workforce. (p. 6)

The University of Michigan - Dearborn (2002) believed that:

> academic advising is a process of information exchange that empowers students to realize their maximum educational potential. The advising process is student-centered and will result in the student gaining a clearer understanding of

himself/herself, and the experience of higher education. (as qtd. in NACADA, 2003)

Dr. Papp (2006), who served as Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic & Fiscal Affairs for the University System of Georgia Board of Regents, identified that one of the goals of RPG was to investigate and understand why the University System retention, progression, and graduation rates were not higher; therefore, he wanted to increase and develop programs that would enhance the University System's RPG rates. Dr. Papp's concept of wanting to develop and increase the RPG rates are very similar to the goals of academic advising as outlined by Gordon, Habley, and Grites (2008):

As long as retention and graduation rates remain primary measures of institutional success and often the resultant funding, primarily in the state institutions, academic advising will need to demonstrate its direct effect on these measures. Legislators and policy-makers need to know that good academic advising results in increased retention and graduation rates. (p. 463)

Georgia Challenges

CCG has each of the 30 Georgia university system institutions of higher education strategizing ways to develop plans that will increase the number of college graduates by the year 2020. The Governor has indicated that graduation rates need to increase from 42% to 60% within the next three years (Deal, 2012). With the anticipation of approximately 20% more students graduating to meet the number of 250,000 postsecondary students graduating goal, a closer look at the current rate is going to make a significant difference in predicting the future of how many students are needed to reach

the goal. Generally speaking, if the goal is 250,000 graduates by the year 2020, that means that an additional 50,000 graduates are needed to fulfill this goal and there should be an increase of approximately 7,143 across the state each year for the next three years. The 7,143 enrollment increase represents approximately a 3% increase each year and to date Georgia Southern University and East Georgia State College are able to meet the goal.

Governor Deal's goal of increasing college graduates is a very positive and optimistic initiative for the state of Georgia, but reality will be vital in determining if the goal is achievable. Academic advisors have daily contact with students about the issues they face with enrolling, financing, staying, and graduating from college. They hear the stories, struggles, and challenges students face while in college. Fully understanding the Governor's goal and adopting the initiative could have a significant impact or change the perspective of how advisors advise students; especially the types of conversations they may have with students. Generally academic advisors have very candid and personal conversations about college courses, sequences, major, grades, academic standing (good, warning, probation, exclusion, etc.) retention, progression, and graduation. However, if the student explains that finance is an obstacle and as a result he or she cannot stay in college, and will be unable to progress to graduation then approach and dynamics of the advising session would change. In addition to recommending the student to seek the assistance of a financial aid counselor, the academic advisor would need to focus on seeking resources that are available to help the student meet the financial expenses of attending college.

The ambitions, objectives, and purposes of RPG and those of academic advising are definitely parallel, which can give academic advisors an advantage in being valuable critics and resources of what retention, progression, and graduation should look like to an institution. Better yet, one approach to trying to raise awareness and seek opportunities for solutions to meeting the overall goals of RPG could be to explore what academic advising really means and how having a strong academic advising program can help to increase the retention and graduation rates at any institution of higher education. The very core of advising involves engaging students, building relationships, and connecting students to the institution so they feel a sense of belonging and ownership of their program. However, through the lens of an academic advisor, working to increase retention and graduation rates could be interpreted as an increase in job responsibilities without an increase in wages.

Statement of the Problem and Purpose Statement

RPG initiatives were designed to promote system-level awareness and serve as a catalyst for educational change by increasing the number of students who attend college, and then retaining them, helping them to progress through college, and increasing the percentage of students who graduate from postsecondary institutions. When the initiatives are examined closely, it shows that the goals of RPG parallel the overall goals and outcomes of academic advisement. In other words, academic advisors have been applying these same principles of retention, progression, and graduation in the advising process for years. Now that administrators, faculty, and leaders at higher education institutions have been charged with the duties of addressing and resolving student retention issues, much attention and resources have been established to find viable

solutions to not only retain and to help progress, but also help the students who are enrolled to graduate from college. With the United States economy still trying to recover, this quandary poses an even greater challenge in the state of Georgia.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate USG institutions' academic advisor's perceptions' regarding CCG initiatives to increase the graduation rate by 20% for the state of Georgia in 2020. Additionally, this researcher explored the characteristics participants believe serve as barriers students face in trying to complete college, and what attributes are in place that may contribute to an increase in graduation rates.

Research Questions

Based on the responses provided by academic advisors, this study sought answers to the following research questions.

R_1:   Which factors influence the retention rate of college students?

R_2:   What are the perceived integral processes to increasing the retention, progression, and graduation rates?

R_3:   What differences exist in the process of advising students since Governor Deal's initiative to increase graduation rates?

R_4:   What difference exists among advisors' perceptions in accomplishing the CCG Initiative goals?

R_5:   What do participants suggest to increase the graduation rate of students?

R_6:   What perspectives do the participants have of performance-base funding (as opposed to enrollment-base funding) and its impact on graduation rates?

Significance of the Study

Seeking a higher education can be overwhelming because of the multitude of issues that students can face in staying in school, progressing through programs, and graduating. Through the results of this research, advisors will be able to identify the positive attributes they already practice and believe contribute to increasing RPG. Likewise, they will be able to identify the issues they face in increasing RPG also.

The data from this study will be important to the Governor's Office, the University System of Georgia Board members, college administrators, faculty, and academic advisors as they develop strategic plans, programs, and policies to assist in increasing the graduation rate of postsecondary students in the state of Georgia.

The Governor's Office and/or the policy makers as well as the University System of Georgia Board of Regents members will benefit from the results of this study by learning how the educational stakeholders plan to support the 20% increase that is expected in the graduation rate by the year 2020. Likewise, the results of this study will help institutional administrators to better understand the dynamics of creating a collegial environment that introduces and supports graduation early as opposed to focusing solely on enrollment. There should be a shift in the historical paradigm of increasing enrollment as opposed to increasing the number of students who graduate.

Academic advisors will benefit from this study in two ways: (a) if the majority of the participants identify ways other university of system institutions support Governor Deal's goal of increasing the graduation rate by 2020, then they will be more likely to adopt and implement advising techniques that will support the initiatives and move forward with the desire of carrying out the goal; and, (b) if the national research supports

that other states and university systems of higher education have executed methods in which to increase the graduation rate, the academic advisors are highly likely to promote the goal, so that the state of Georgia does not fall behind.

Definitions

The following are key terms used in this study.

Advanced Placement is a program that offers college-level curriculum and examinations to high school students. Students can receive college credit by obtaining a high score on the examinations. The various courses and examinations are audited by the College Board to ascertain its satisfaction with the AP curriculum.

Banded tuition is a measure that would ensure taking 15 credit hours per semester would cost no more than taking 12 credit hours (CCA, 2014).

Bridge program is an agreement outlined between two institutions and two specific programs of similar content. Students are permitted to use some of their initial credits toward the completion of another program at the partner institution. However, in higher education, Bridge programs often refer to programs that are designed to serve as an opportunity for students who do not meet the admission criteria of the institution to be admitted provisionally and take classes that will get them on the academic level that is needed for them to be successful as a regular admitted student. An example would be the *Eagle Incentive Program* (EIP) Program at Georgia Southern University, where students are accepted provisionally in the summer term. East Georgia State College has a *Jump Start Program* that begins in the summer with various perks, such as $20.00 application fee waived. Every student has his or her own faculty mentor and they are also

provisionally accepted. Another summer bridge program is called *From*

Outreach to Collegiate Success which is offered by Dalton State College. These

programs are available at USG institutions.

DegreeWorks is a web-based program that provides easy access for advisors and students

to track courses completed and plan for those still needed in preparation for

registration and graduation.

Grandfather clause refers to a legislative provision that permits an exemption based on

upon a preexisting condition. Such a clause might allow an individual, who has

been in continuous practice in a particular profession for a specific period, to

circumvent certain licensing requirements.

Intrusive academic advising is action-orientated to involve and motivate students to seek

help when needed. An advisor can use good qualities of prescriptive advising,

such as expertise, awareness of student needs, structured programs and of

developmental advising, which encompasses a relationship to a student's total

needs and/or, intrusive advising, which is a direct response to identified academic

crisis with a specific program of action. It is a process of identifying a student's

at-crisis points and giving him or her the message such as "You have this

problem; here is a help-service" (Earl 1987 p. 2).

Retention, Progression, and Graduation (RPG) a comprehensive

RPG plan for the USG (University System of Georgia), develop indicators of

program intensity, pervasiveness, and quality for all institutional RPG activity,

and define a resource allocation process or model designed to move resources to

where they have the most impact. In their deliberations, this team considered the

recommendations of the Task Force on Graduation Rates and built upon them (Board of Regents, 2007).

<div align="center">Limitations, Delimitations, and Assumptions</div>

As with all studies, there are several limitations that may be involved in this study. Identified below are two elements where the researcher has no control:

1. Of the 30 USG institutions, the researcher must rely on a representative from the institutions to identify the academic advisors and other personnel at their institution who carry out advising responsibilities, such as administrators, faculty, and other professional staff to receive an electronic copy of the survey.

2. There are questions on the survey that are taken directly from Governor Deal's to charge to institutions to develop strategies to increase enrollment and, ultimately, graduation rates as identified in CCG. Some of the advisors might not be aware of the significance of CCG. If the academic advisors who participate in the survey are completely unaware of CCG and the need to increase enrollment by 2020, then it may have an adverse bearing on the quality of answers provided.

Delimitations are several elements that the researcher can control. Those as follows:

1. Of the 30 institutions in the University System of Georgia, Georgia Southern University and East Georgia State College (EGSC) were selected to use as examples because the researcher has been employed at both institutions and believes that they would be excellent choices because of the history of partnership between the two schools. Geographically, the two schools involved in this study

are approximately 45 minutes apart and they have had a partnership where the students at East Georgia State College which was a two-year college, would have a smooth transition to Georgia Southern University (Research/Doctoral University). EGSC is considered a feeder school to GSU; however, the relationship may change in the future as EGSC offered its' first four-year bachelorette degree in Biology fall 2012 and anticipate offering more four-year degree programs.

2. The study is delimited to identifying factors, variables, or initiatives that provide an answer as to whether Governor Deal's plan of Complete College Georgia will be successful in meeting the goal of increasing the graduation rate from 43% to 60% by 2020. When administering the questionnaire, the researcher will include all 30 USG institutions of higher education and will look for similarities based on their classification such as commonalities from the Research Universities, Comprehensive Universities, State Universities, and State Colleges.

3. The final delimitation is that the researcher elected to focus on obtaining the perceptions of academic advisors specifically because she has over twenty years of experience in the field of academic advising and believes that academic advisors contribute greatly to RPG.

The following assumption was made based on the likelihood that the limiting factors may affect the outcome of the study.

1. When the participants see Governor Nathan Deal's plan for increasing the graduation rate, they will answer the questions based solely on the facts of CCG and not on any other controversial political decisions that has been made by him

or his administration. Participants may associate Governor Nathan Deal's name and political power with controversial issues such as rejecting Obamacare (health care) or House Bill 859, which was written to increase the safety of students on college campuses, and if approved would legalize firearms on all of the public campuses in the state of Georgia. (Andres, 2016)

Chapter Summary

Higher education institutions and systems are under the microscope not only to improve enrollment but also to increase graduation rates among its students. Governing boards are supporting the notion that all institutions of higher education should have a direct correlation between increased enrollment and increased graduation rates. Factors such as personal income, college preparation, family educational level, and the timing when a student begins college could have a profound effect on their matriculation through college and of course graduation. A Board of Regents, University System of Georgia Task Force was charged with the responsibility to target the students who were unsatisfactorily meeting program requirements, examine why they were deficient, and make recommendations for change.

The University System of Georgia Board of Regents initiated RPG in 2005 to address the concern of the number of students who were accepted to college, but not graduating from college. RPG Initiatives were developed and implemented to raise awareness, gain understanding, and find viable solutions to helping students graduate from college on time. In doing their part, institutions of higher education should be able to provide transparent plans that demonstrate that students can graduate in the amount of

time indicated for a two-or four-year degree. Class offerings, sequencing prerequisites,

co-requisites are pivotal when designing an effective and attainable college program.

CCA set the standards by informing states of the growing need for college

graduates in the next 10 years and challenged states to look closely at higher education

programs. Governor Deal has challenged all university system presidents to devise a plan

to increase the graduation rate by 20% in addition to the current number of students that

are graduating. He expects an overall increase to reflect 7,143 new graduates each year

to reach the goal of 250,000 graduates by the year 2020. Complete College Georgia plan

is the answer to Governor Deal's request for all colleges, universities, and institutions in

the state of Georgia to carefully find a solution to, and address the issues of enrollment,

retention, and graduation.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this chapter, the researcher presents a closer look at variables that contribute to satisfying Complete College Georgia and two University System of Georgia's schools. Also, an in-depth examination of what Retention, Progression, and Graduation (RPG) means along with the implications, actions, reactions, and protocols of these challenging initiatives. RPG are also viewed in this chapter as a positive construct with Complete College America as well as a way for the state of Georgia to increase the graduation rates through Complete College Georgia.

RPG provides clarity and a logical flow of how students' progress. From freshman to sophomore, a student has accomplished 25% toward completion; from sophomore to junior another 25% has been accomplished; from junior to senior is 25%; and the last accomplishment is from senior to college graduate, which is the last 25%. Moreover, the three initiatives are examined separately in the order in which they were developed: retention is explored first; progression is next, followed with graduation. Academics have a major role in the retention and progression initiatives and are listed as a subtitle under both initiatives. Academic advising is another subtitle that is instrumental in the retention effort. Student achievement, curriculum changes, social and economic status significantly affect the progression rate of students who are listed in the second initiative. Graduation is the final initiative and it represents the compilation of all that a student has done to earn a degree from a college. Producing college graduates and graduation success are subtopics and ultimate goals of the final initiative.

Figure 1. *The Meaning of RPG*

Retention
Academics
Academic Advising

RETENTION

25%

GRADUATION

50%

Progression
Academic
Student Achievement
Curriculum
Changes
Social & Economic Status

PROGRESSION

25%

Graduation
Producing College Graduates
Obtaining Graduation Success
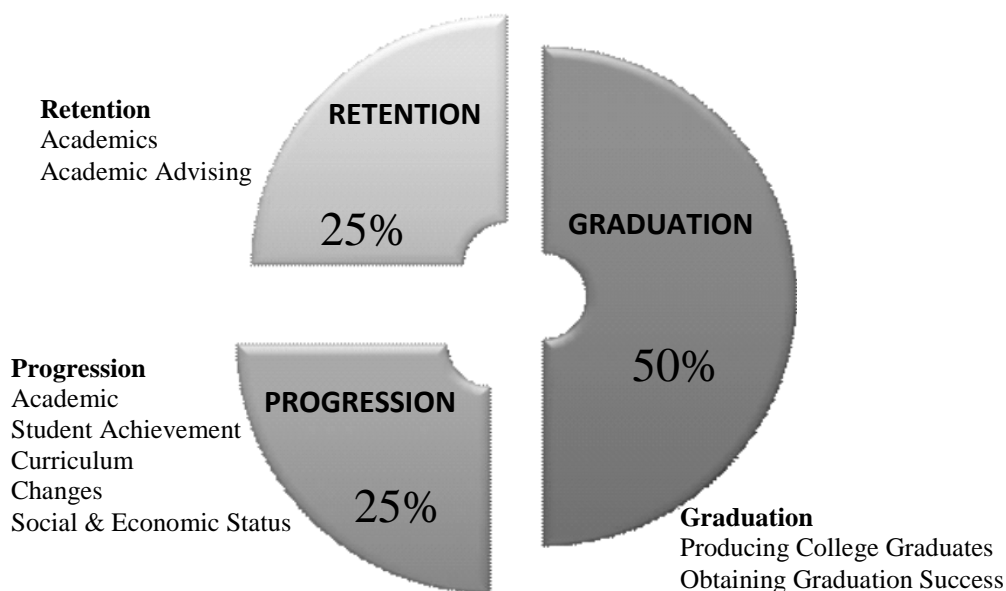
Figure 1 demonstrates how RPG is broken into parts and topics that have a direct effect on becoming a college graduate. Retention and Progression each represent 25% and totals half of the equation needed to reach graduation. Once a student has accomplished half (retention and progression), then that student needs 50% more support from the institution to progress through Graduation.

The researcher believes that the model and structure of advisement, the advisor load, and other responsibilities (serving on a committee or teaching orientation classes) expected of the advisor are all major factors that would determine if the academic advisors would participate. Therefore, the time the questionnaire is submitted to the advisors (at the 30 USG institutions) can serve as a strong variable in predicting the return rate. During peak advisement times advisors can see over 20 students and receive 20 to 30 emails a day, which can be extremely overwhelming when trying to address and

resolve issues that their advisees face while in college. Moreover, when students are failing classes, most academic advisors are responsible for developing interventions to help them be more successful and an effort that takes even more time.

There has been much discussion about the advisor/advisee ratio at the local, regional, and national levels. Robbins (2015) noted Carlstrom (2013) in a NACADA 2011 National Survey of Academic Advising that 296 is the median case load of advisees per full-time professional academic advisor. "By institutional size, the median individual advisor caseloads are 233, 333, and 600 advisees for small, medium, and large institutions, respectively" (p.1); Robbins explained that there are other factors to consider when assigning advisees to advisors. With advisors and caseloads such variables such as institutional mission goals, politics, campus climate, additional responsibilities such as teaching first year seminars, holding workshops, serving on committees, and working on institutional events should be taken into consideration.

The State of Georgia

In the state of Georgia, there was a 6.7% increase from fall 2008 to fall 2009 in the University System of Georgia's (USG) enrollment. A fall 2011 enrollment set a record, according to the Board of Regents' November 2011 issue of the *System Supplement,* with an increase of 6,585 students or a 2.1% increase from last fall.

> Since fall 1998, enrollment in the USG has increased every year. The
> overall increase from fall 1998 to fall 2011 is almost 60% or 117,925
> students. The largest single percentage increase came in fall 2002 with a
> 7.1% jump over the previous fall. (BOR, 2011, p. 2)

Another report produced by the University System of Georgia that includes all degrees awarded by the 30 institutions over a five-year span (Fall 2011 through 2015) shows that the average number of Associate degrees that were awarded was 51,250 and the average number of Bachelor degrees awarded was 181,683.

Governor Nathan Deal, the elected Governor of Georgia, plans to take a critical look at how he can increase the numbers to meet the challenge for the changing job market. His plan is to increase the college graduation rate in the state of Georgia based on a report conducted by CCA. Of equal accountability are college administrators who are charged with duties to assure a transparent curriculum for students to navigate through college in order to graduate at the end of a two or four-year program. However, the focus of leadership in higher education has been more on an initiative to help students to matriculate, to have a smoother transition (especially if transferring from one local institution to another local institution) through college rather than on the final designation of graduating from college. For instance, colleges and universities in Georgia have cut budgets, and courses are offered less frequently due to an inadequate number of faculty or too few advanced or upper classmen students who are enrolled in these courses.

On the other hand, a different problem contributes to low graduation numbers because frequently the students themselves sabotage their progress because of academic or personal interruptions or mishaps. For example, if a student fails a couple of classes, this student could easily be put off track or out of sequence for the coursework in the program of study. A student may be able to make up the classes in summer school, but in some cases, the classes that are needed might be only taught once a year. If a student misses a course that is only offered once a year, this situation could definitely delay

student progression or even graduation up to a year or more. Situations such as these have become noticeable in recent years, where college and university leaders are now concerned with not only increasing enrollment but also in increasing the number of students who can graduate in a timely manner.

<div align="center">Complete College Georgia</div>

CCG was derived from the 2009 establishment of CCA where it has been reported that the undergraduate enrollment in the United States has more than doubled, but the completion rate has been the same over the last few decades (CC, 2012). CCA conducted a profile on each state to provide information that would help each state (in the United Sates) better understand where the problems of matriculating through college maybe. For example, the CCA report indicated that 37.1% of the students entering a two-year college in the state of Georgia needed remediation and only 57.1% of those students completed the remediation courses or program. Also, 18.1% of students entering a four-year institution needed remediation while only 51.8% actually completed the remediation courses or program. CCG reveals that too many freshmen entering college need remediation courses. Although not pursued in this project, the high remediation numbers could indicate an opportunity for high schools to offer more vigorous courses to strengthen the academic level of students prior to coming to college.

The CCA report also provided a breakdown of ethnicities and remediation. At two year institutions, the following needed remediation: 46.7% of African American, 41.0% of Hispanic, 30.0% of White, and 39.7% classified as "Other". At four-year institutions, 33.0% are African Americans, 20.6% are Hispanic, 13.7% are White, and 9.3% are classified as "Other". For some states, higher education records were not

adequately kept, but for the most part, CCA wanted to give states an opportunity to look closely at higher education, the ethical make-up of the students who need remediation and a statistical profile of the number of students entering college who need additional help.

Georgia Southern University

Presidents of the 30 institutions in the University System of Georgia had to provide an action plan explaining how they were going to address the need to retain, matriculate, and graduate students as mandated by Governor Deal and reported by CCA. Keel (2012), former President at Georgia Southern University, submitted a plan of action to Mr. Hank Huckaby, Chancellor of the University System of Georgia in the summer of 2012 outlining four goals. The first goal was to continue to be effective and have a strong first year program for freshmen. The president wanted to ensure that strategies were in place to retain the first year students and help them with progression. The second goal in the plan was to continue to assess strategies that would monitor and increase the retention rate of sophomores at Georgia Southern. President Keel reported that the retention rate for 2014 at Georgia Southern had increased from 64% to 69%. The third goal addressed factors that inhibit students' ability to successfully matriculate through the programs at Georgia Southern and to encourage students to not only enroll as full-time students, but also to take on a full load of classes to ensure a timely graduation. Another part of goal three was the university's commitment to make a conscious effort to promote summer term enrollment. Georgia Southern wanted to communicate to the students that if they drop a class or do not take a full load for a term during the regular academic year, then that same course could be taken in the summer term in an effort to stay on track for

graduation. The final goal submitted to the chancellor included three parts: (a) "to continuously evaluate programing to support student success; (b) to inventory all efforts made to promote student success and to monitor what is effective; and (c) to build a strong culture so that students feel a need to engage at different levels as well as through intentional deliver of in and out-of-class opportunities" (Keel, 2012, p. 1).

This report also outlined Georgia Southern University's accomplishment with making notable progress with RPG while "maintaining academic quality". Even more importantly, it provided concrete data that links enrollment increases with graduation rates.

East Georgia State College

Increased graduation rates and RPG are concerns at East Georgia as well: A Complete College Georgia plan of action was developed and later submitted to the chancellor on August 22, 2013. Dr. Robert Boehmer, President, and other leaders at East Georgia State College (EGSC) indicated that because historically EGSC has been a two-year access institution, students who transfer to a four-year institution are viewed as a "successful student outcome" as opposed to counting against the school as a student who did not graduate. East Georgia State College is unique in that it has served as a feeder college to Georgia Southern University. Meaning that if students did not meet all of the qualifications, especially the GPA requirements to get accepted into Georgia Southern University, they were encouraged to apply to East Georgia State College whose qualifications standards were lower than GSU. Once they were officially accepted into East Georgia, the students would take up to 30 credit hours of courses, with the intention of raising their GPA high enough to transfer to Georgia Southern. Although there is a

high transfer rate at EGSC, the leadership team identified that a couple of immediate goals are to make associate degrees available on the Statesboro campus and increase the number of baccalaureate degree programs for the Swainsboro campus. Another key initiative that was identified in the report is the establishment of an Academic Center for Excellence (ACE) that will have several mandates: to offer students an opportunity and location to have quiet study time, to provide rooms for groups to work on projects, to make available free tutoring (by professors and professional staff), and to provide students one-on-one academic advising, general information about majors, and basic career guidance.

Another goal listed in the report includes a desire to establish a partnership with the local high schools to assist students in coming to college academically prepared and enhance collaborative relationships with other institutions of higher education especially sister institutions in the university system of Georgia. There is also a plan to add a mandatory *Critical Thinking* course in area B of the core curriculum for EGSC students that will not only help them to learn, but also to think critically as a college student.

Retention, Progression, and Graduation (RPG)

In 2005, the administrators of Georgia's 30 public colleges and universities incorporated three *buzz words* that dominated the dialogue in meetings and throughout academia: Retention, Progression, and Graduation (RPG). The University System of Georgia Board of Regents originated this initiative and a committee was charged with the task of addressing the low percentage of students who were graduating from college. The university governing board discussed a variety of matters and wanted answers to many questions. One concern was related to the national graduation rates and why graduation

rates were so low despite the rise in enrollment in University System institutions. The national average graduation rate of institutions was approximately 54.3% while the University system of Georgia's graduation rate was 43.6%. Another issue was the length of time students were spending in college and according to the information presented in the meeting, the norm was to finish in four years but that norm had recently moved toward six years. In the meeting, Chancellor Meredith (2005) probed the members by asking,

> Whose responsibility is it? The responsibility that I'm talking about is for getting students graduated within the time period that we would like to see them all graduate (p. 50) . . .we must now take a greater responsibility in making sure students get a good start in college, that they progress nicely through college, they stay on track, and we can help them. So, we have a much greater responsibility, I believe, than we have fulfilled in the past in today's world to make sure every child finishes who comes to us and they finish within some reasonable period of time. We'd like to see them out in four years. (BOR, August, 2005, p. 51)

In a November 2005 Board of Regents' meeting, Dr. Hudson (2005) suggested that one of the primary goals of RPG was to identify groups of students who were at-risk and to determine what type of program interventions would get students back on track to graduate on time. In this same meeting, Dr. Hudson indicated that she strongly believed that students' "characteristics" affect RPG and she would focus on identifying those characteristics and finding solutions to help students to navigate successfully though college. She named factors that she believed could heavily influence a student's progress through college such as the parents' educational level, personal income, and timing of

entering college. She supported the notion that students who come to college immediately after high school and enroll as a traditional college student are more likely to graduate on time and matriculate through college successfully. On the other hand, the students who delay coming to college such as graduating from high school in the month of May and waiting a year to begin college are less likely to finish on time. As a matter of fact, she believed that these students may feel a need to join the workforce or they are not academically prepared to pursue a higher education. Therefore, these could be the students who struggle with the course work more than the traditional student. Her discussion extended further with her providing data on the negative effect of graduation rates when students who come to college, but are not well prepared academically for college. Dr. Hudson provided the committee members with data that showed as family income increases, so did the graduation rates. Moreover, the number of students who come from families where neither parent has a bachelor degree showed that the graduation rate was lower than the number of students who were from families where at least one parent had a degree. She further explained that her data proved that there is a positive correlation between income and graduation rates. In essence, she contended that the more money a family made, the more likely students would graduate from college.

The implementation of RPG in 2005 forced colleges within the University System of Georgia to absorb the responsibility of not only grooming students for success in college, but also for progressing through a program of study and helping students to see the final results - graduation. Being under the microscope, this new educational reality compelled postsecondary leaders to look closely at all programs whether it was a first year orientation course, program of study that students selected, academic advisement,

internship, or graduation requirements. The administration at Georgia Southern

University (GSU) took RPG seriously and decided to find one of the best sources on

campus that could have a tremendous and positive effect on understanding, fully

acknowledging and effectively implementing this new policy: Academic Advisors.

RPG was explained to a team of academic advisors at Georgia Southern

University as the key to retaining students and showing them how improving the

graduation rates is achievable. With RPG being such an important initiative, an academic

advisors' role was viewed differently than it was before. The administration realized that

this was a group of professionals who saw students from beginning (freshman) until the

end (senior) and although the students' professors would change, the contact and

relationship with an academic advisor was something that would remain the same or even

grow.

Based on a May 2007 report prepared by a University System of Georgia (USG)

RPG Task Force, the members supported the notion that RPG should not be simply

viewed nor treated as the creation of yet another student services program, but wanted it

to be more resourceful and practical approach to dealing with the RPG issues. Various

meetings lead to concrete recommendations and one of the strongest was the conclusion

of focusing on the campus culture and understanding the critical role of creating a

campus that has an environment that would successfully promote and foster student

learning. Strong leadership along with campus culture ignited this committee to further

develop a strategy to deal with the RPG issues. This new task force was able to ascertain

a foundation that would be applicable to almost any institution in the University System

of Georgia. They concluded that high expectations (in academics), promoting a sense of

belonging, and identifying a strong sense of purpose were three factors deemed as essential to improving RPG on USG's campuses. Although high expectations have always been the goal in pursuing a college education, the difference now would be a firm commitment pledged by faculty and staff, not to be confused with providing a less rigorous curriculum, holding a students' hand, or lowering one's academic requirements. This team of leaders believed that if a campus can convey these three important elements as a part of the culture of the campus, then developing a more effective way of delivering RPG would produce a positive correlation among retention, progression, and graduation. The following is a brief outline of these three RPG constructs.

1. This committee wanted to convey a message of a strong student support system that leads to and encourages full utilization of campus resources, cultivating a campus atmosphere that echoes a high level of genuine concern for the student, and a need to help students develop a "sense of personal responsibility" for their academic achievement.

2. The second factor was the "ability for an institution to engage students and promote a sense of belonging". The discussion of connecting students to the university/campus or making the students feel comfortable enough to fit in to the campus atmosphere is an undertaking that faculty and staff can also fully participate in by making sure student organizations embrace and welcome students, having academic round table discussions where students can learn to feel comfortable approaching faculty, and having meet and greets where new students can have an opportunity to get involved with campus life.

3.   The third factor is identifying a strong sense of purpose. The committee

explained this by stressing the need to have a "shared belief system" with a

common sense of purpose with the focus on student learning. The

understanding that the faculty, staff, other administrators, and units such as

student affairs and academic affairs are all working collaboratively to fulfill the

mission of the university.

<p style="text-align: center;">The First Initiative: Retention</p>

The three RPG constructs: creating strong student support system, promoting a

sense of belonging to all students, and having an institution mission that focuses on

student learning is what the committee members believe should be a major part of the

campus culture. When putting RGP under the microscope, and dissecting this critical

initiative the researcher meticulously looked at each word for relevance to advisement.

Retention is the first word used to describe this important initiative and is defined by the

on-line dictionary Merriam-Webster (2014) as "the act of keeping someone or

something"; "the ability to keep something" (p. 1). The word retention has a negative

connotation in the secondary school system because when someone says a student has

been retained in the K -12 educational systems, it indicates that the student failed that

grade and must repeat the same grade. So, if a student was retained in the fifth grade the

student must repeat the fifth grade. However, in higher education, the word *retention*

means that a student maintains their enrollment and can progress from one year to the

next. This is such an important concept in the higher education system because retention

is the number one process that leads to graduation.

In developing the original *Retention, Progression, and Graduation* (RPG)

initiative, the University System of Georgia (USG) indicated in the minutes of the May

2007 meeting that a University System Task Force Committee was established in

February 2004 and charged with the responsibility of increasing the retention,

progression, and graduation rates of students who were and would be enrolled in the

University System of Georgia colleges and universities. One of the duties for the

committee members was to develop a five-year plan that would bring the University

System of Georgia to the national average in graduation rates. The minutes also

indicated that in 2005-06 all institutions in the University System of Georgia had

submitted a report where they had analyzed their RPG rates, evaluated enrollment in their

institutions' existing programs, and set targets for how the institutions planned to

demonstrate improvement in their RPG rates. It is also recorded in these minutes that in

November 2006, a University System Team for improving Retention and Graduation

Rates was appointed and charged with three tasks: (a) creating a comprehensive RPG

plan for the USG; (b) developing indicators of program intensity, pervasiveness, and

quality for all institutional RPG activity; and (c) defining a resource allocation process or

model designed to move resources to where they would have the most impact.

There are 30 institutions in the University System of Georgia and these May 2007

minutes also specified some of the challenges this committee would have in devising

goals that would address the retention and graduation rates on the 30 diverse campuses.

In identifying the diversity among the campuses, the recorded minutes included the

following: "The USG institutions differ widely in size, mission, resources, history, and

student characteristics. The academic preparation, maturity, economic background,

goals, and family support of students also vary dramatically" (BOR May 2007 p. 3).

Although this committee was charged with the responsibility of developing a five-year

plan that would bring the USG colleges and universities to the national average in

graduation rates, they also acknowledged the challenges they would have to find common

goals in creating the five-year plan that will be applicable for the 30 institutions in the

state of Georgia.

Of the three words in RPG initiative (retention, progression, and graduation),

retention is the first word in the combination because it lends itself in many ways as the

key that not only explains what the committee members were charged to carry out, but

also represents a strong indicator that the University System of Georgia college

administrators needed to find a way to help students to stay in college. Moreover,

retention has become very widespread and, a prominent word in higher education.

Habley, Bloom, and Robbins (2012) defined retention as a student who remains in

continuous full-time enrollment from the point of matriculation to the completion of a

degree. Ahuna, Tinnesz, and VanZile-Tamsen (2011) explained that one of the biggest

challenges that institutions of higher education are facing today is retaining students so

that they can graduate. Their belief supported one of the reasons why RPG exists today

and why specifically in Georgia an RPG Task Force was created to examine this

interesting yet challenging and immense issue in higher education.

In many cases, the administrators at institutions looked at the students' data to see

what types of personal characteristics can be attributed to why students are leaving

college and why retention is considered a challenge to them. Studies have been

conducted on issues students have with financing college, lack of motivation, strenuous

curriculum, no support system, and being underprepared for college. Furthermore, Tinto (1993) reminded his readers that not all entering students who come to college possess the level of commitment that is needed to stay in college. Some of students simply are unable (or unwilling) to commit themselves to the task of college completion and provide the level of effort that is required to complete a degree program. Conversely, Habley, Bloom, and Robbins (2012) reported that the results of four *What Works in Student Retention* (WWISR) surveys conducted by the American College Testing (ACT) indicated that postsecondary educators believed institutional characteristics are not as responsible for student attrition as are student characteristics. Institutional characteristics such as high ratings on proving quality instruction, having simulated classroom sessions, faculty who demonstrate positive attitudes, institutions offering a relevant curriculum, and students having access to academic support for courses taken at some institutions can contribute to whether or not a student remains in college. The survey revealed [and Habley, Bloom, and Robbins (2012) believed] that student characteristics such as whether students are academically prepared for college, if they know what they are interested in majoring in and want to pursue as a career, came to college with better study skills, and had reliable financial resources would in essence stay in college and graduate.

Although student characteristics maybe considered a variable that contributes to students not staying in college, many departments and entities within the college environment are examining their normal procedures and looking closely at ways they can contribute to maintaining a stronger retention rate. For example, most institutions have made academic advisement mandatory to ensure that students make contact with a representative of the institution that will assist them with any concerns they may have

about college ranging from academics to personal issues. In most cases, college leaders are assigning students to a professional academic advisor that generally will help with academic issues, make referrals to other departments, and find ways to help connect students with the institution. Having a mentor or connection with a faculty member is just as significant and can positively contribute to student retention rates. Simmons (2013) conducted a qualitative study to examine factors of persistence for two African American undergraduate male students attending the University of Memphis that is a predominately White institution. Four themes emerged as a result of analyzing the data: college preparedness, high aspirations and goals, social connections and relationships, and growth through student organizational commitment had a central role to play in persistence with the participants in this study. Furthermore, some of the implications of the study indicated that the participants credited their personal backgrounds, social relations, and the components of their higher education institution as factors in their persistence. The findings led to conclusions such as pre-college and background factors that were perceived as important to college persistence. Developing relationships with minority faculty was strong in the "social connections and relationships" theme. Therefore, Simmons (2013) results demonstrated that involvement with faculty could have a tremendously positive impact on retention rates.

Academics

Over the course of 20 years that this researcher has been employed in higher education, the researcher has witnessed how academics affect the retention rate of students in a variety of ways. First, when deans or other administrators neglect to offer courses at the times (semester or times of the day) when students really need them, this

can cause students to stop attending a term or consider enrolling in another institution as a transient student. Second, retention of students at institutions may become at risk where little academic intervention is available for students. Not offering tutoring and academic support can affect the success rate of students passing classes. Third, when professors delay in providing students with adequate and timely feedback as an indication of how they are academically performing in class, it can blur students' judgment in terms of not knowing whether to seek an academic intervention or not. Furthermore, failing or earning low grades can have a direct effect on whether a student is allowed to remain in college; therefore, the retention of a student is at stake. When students receive grades on assignments in a timely manner, they are able to personally ascertain how they are doing in the classroom, especially when they compare the grades they have earned with the other grade opportunities that are remaining on the class syllabus. Receiving grades in a timely manner gives students a clearer indication of whether they will do well in the class or not. Tinto (2012) purported:

> an environment rich in assessment of students' performance and in feedback of information about student performance to students, faculty, and staff is another important condition for student success. Students are more likely to succeed in settings that enable all parties-students, faculty, and staff to adjust their behaviors to better promote student success. (p. 54)

Another mechanism that has been put into place at most institutions and falls into the topic of how academics impacts retention is the distribution of mid-term grades. Distributing grades early in the semester that reflect how students are doing in their

classes can enhance retention in higher education. Historically, students' academic performance was nebulous, especially for freshmen, until late in the semester. When it was time to decide whether to withdraw from a particular class, students were unable to make an informed decision because they had not received enough feedback from their professors. Further, receiving grades early in the semester can prevent a situation where a student fails a class because all the grades came in the last half of the semester. Now, most college leaders require faculty to provide a grade or some indication of how students are academically performing in the class rather early in the semester so students can ascertain what to do next. For example, some professors can give a "U" as a grade indicating Unsatisfactory or an "S" meaning Satisfactory. Tinto (2012) asserted that for early warning grades to be effective, colleges must use a system where the grades are reported as close to the beginning of the semester as possible. He further explained that if early classroom struggles are not addressed immediately, they could add up and undermine student learning and persistence across the campus. Tinto (2012) simplified his academic call by stating, "early warning is especially important in courses considered foundational to student academic skills because failure in those courses tends to undermine success in the courses that follow" (p. 59).

Furthermore, administrative leaders in higher education realized that retention is an enormous undertaking that can make a major difference in the number of students who not only stay, but also progress and graduate from college or university. Likewise, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) believed that academic achievement during a student's first year of enrollment in college might be a particularly powerful influence on subsequent retention and degree completion. The students' perception of how much

support they are receiving in college can determine whether they are retained. The

interaction with faculty and the learning that occurs in the classroom gives students a

sense of whether they feel comfortable with the level of instruction and how they are

being academically challenged.

In addition to implementing the mid-term grades of how students are performing

in college, Tinto (2012) believed that the classroom is the key to increase retention and

graduation rates at institutions of higher education. He supported the notion that

institutions must focus on improving success in the classroom by changing the way

classes are structured and taught. He defended his theory by also stressing that successful

changes in the classroom should occur in the first year because students from low income

backgrounds and first generation students are more likely to stay in college when they

have positive learning experiences right from their first opportunities in the classroom

and on campus. For example, some of the institutions in the University System of

Georgia offer a bridge program in the summer for students who are admitted with lower

academic standards than regularly admitted students. The professors that are recruited to

teach these students are meticulously handpicked because of their strong desire to help

students learn. They are the professors that are well liked among the student body, and

most importantly, they all demonstrate enthusiasm to teach. In other words, they love

what they do. The students who committed to the bridge program generally perform very

well academically over the summer and some may earn C's, but the majority would earn

A's and B's. Historically, the researcher has observed that the retention rate for one of

the bridge programs at a USG institution has been approximately 95% to 97% in the

summer to return in the fall. However, when these students are mainstreamed with other

students into the fall term, they struggle academically. In working closely with these students, this researcher has seen where many of the students experience a decrease in their GPA. In this case, Tinto's theory of putting focus on improving success in the classroom has a strong correlation with retention proves to be true.

During the summer months, some institutions offer bridge programs to give first generation or at risk students an opportunity to have a smooth and successful transition from high school to college. Georgia Southern University's program is called *Eagle Incentive Program* (EIP) and East Georgia State College's program is called *Jump Start*. Generally, the program is a very structured bridge program and administrators select professors who are patient, approachable, willing to go above and beyond to assure lessons are well taught, learning outcomes are identified, and met. These types of programs help students who come to college academically unprepared to have a better transition and build success. Nonetheless, if college leaders and administrators would encourage all faculty to improve academic success in the classroom in a regular academic term, students who are in bridge programs maybe just as successful in the fall and spring terms. Yet, when students are struggling in a class, the college administrators should find timely and effective intervention strategies to help students to be successful so that they will view the struggle more as a challenge that can be overcome with the tenacity to learn utilizing academic assistance. If the administrators at the institution fail to offer the types of services in a timely manner, it sends a series of mixed messages to the students resulting in students who might not feel connected to the institution, or they may think the leaders of the institution do not assist in promoting academic success. Likewise, students may feel that the human component of attending the college is missing. They

may feel as though they are just a number and not really viewed as a person who is important to the institution. In this case, the institution is at risk of not retaining the students.

Academic Advisement

The researcher of this study has been actively involved in academic advising for two decades and has observed how academic advising was historically viewed as a mere optional service for students at some of the University System of Georgia institutions. In some cases, before RPG, academic advising was regarded as a service to help navigate students through the academic side of college life. Nevertheless, within the last10 years and because of RPG, it has been transformed into one of the most valuable and beneficial services an institution in the USG could offer students.

Similarly, Table 1 shows a direct association between the RPG initiatives and the overall meaning or goals of academic advising. In other words, RPG has historically been a part of the outcomes of the advising process. For example, before an advisor begins working with students, that academic advisor has several meetings with university officials (faculty, department chair, or dean) to determine that the programs are designed for a smooth matriculation in order to graduate on time. Throughout the academic advising process, advisors ask questions that probe students to think and make informed decisions about their interests, career path, and even courses. Furthermore, the academic advisor would present a program of study that is accomplishable in two or four years as the students' progress toward graduation. The concept of showing students where they are and how they can reach the end of their program of study demonstrates the similarity of RPG and the goals of academic advising. Both concepts focus on retaining the

students, creating a means to process smoothly, and demonstrating how the end result

(graduation) is attainable.

Table 1. *RPG and Advising Outcomes*

Goals of RPG parallel learning outcomes for Academic Advisement	
RPG	**Academic Advisement**
Retention	"Effective retention programs have come to understand that academic advising is at the very core of successful institutional efforts to educate and retain students". (Tinto, 1993)
Progression	"Good advising should link a student's academic capabilities with his or her choice of courses and major, access to learning resources, and belief that the academic pathway a student is traveling will lead to employment after college." (Bean, 2005)
Graduation	"…. comprehensive academic advising for all students from their first step on our campus to their last step across the stage at graduation…." (Nutt, 2013)

Academic advising is recognized as a scholarly field in academia and throughout

higher education. Hagan and Jordan (2008) emphasized that in recent years academic

advising has gained recognition as a field of scholarly inquiry and is taking its rightful

place in the history of scholarly inquiry.

Moreover, Klepfer and Hull (2012) conducted a longitudinal study of over 9,000

high school students through their second year in college and discovered three factors

related to student success. One main finding was students who had taken high school

math through pre-calculus and calculus improved their likelihood of staying on track

toward pursuing a two or four-year degree. Another important factor was students who

took an Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) course had a

dramatic effect on persisting in college. The more AP/IB courses students took, the

higher the persistence rates were for students. Lastly, and the most noteworthy factor in

Klepfer and Hull's research findings was about academic advising. They discovered that

talking with an academic advisor *sometimes* or *often* significantly improved students' persistence rates as much as 53% while in college.

At some institutions, academic advising was a required duty of faculty, but later as academic advising became more of a specialized profession and more job responsibilities increased for faculty advisors, institutions hired professional staff to serve as academic advisors in an effort to assist students with successfully matriculating through college and relieve faculty of those types of job duties. Self (2008) explained:

> The presence of professional academic advisors on campuses has many
>
> benefits associated with promoting student academic and personal
>
> successes. Unlike faculty advisors who primary focus is on teaching or
>
> research, professional academic advisors are able to spend the majority of
>
> their time and availability meeting with students or participating in
>
> advising-related activities. (p. 269)

When Complete College America initiatives were transformed into the goals of Complete College Georgia, the initiatives the USG committee members addressed did not focus attention on the number of students enrolled in college, but the number of students who were not staying, progressing, and graduating from college. Now, the administrators at institutions in Georgia have taken a closer look at the outcome of being enrolled in college and realized that the enrollment rate far exceeded the graduation rates. The birth of the RPG initiatives forced administrators to look closely at retention, progression, and graduation as three separate entities through the use of a familiar, well established, and beneficial college service: Academic Advising.

In the University System of Georgia Campus Completion Plans, many institutions formed committees to outline how they planned to meet the RPG initiatives. Numerous institutions included academic advising as a means to address the RPG and CCG goals in their efforts to assist Georgia students to complete college. In the report submitted by Albany State University (2012), the committee members stressed that beginning in 2011, the Academic Advisement and Retention Center would provide year-round advisement services. In the Executive Summary from East Georgia State College (2012), it proclaimed that in fall 2012 an Academic Center for Excellence (ACE) would be established and would include a variety of academic services including tutoring, academic advisement, and diagnostic testing. In this same report, East Georgia State College went further and acknowledged "excellent academic advisement is a key factor in student success and for completing a degree in the shortest time possible" (p. 190). The administrators at Georgia Perimeter College (2012) reported that they would increase student success through intrusive academic advisement in an effort to increase the retention and graduation rates of first-time and full-time students. In addition to implementing an intrusive academic advising method, Georgia Perimeter College is requiring students to meet with an academic advisor at specific checkpoints such as completing 12, 24, 36, and 48 credit hours. In the Complete College Georgia Plans submitted by Georgia Southern University (2012), the committee members admitted that more communication and clarity about the advising and registration process was needed in the Student Disability Resource Center's (SDRC). Students had the opportunity to pre-register for their classes, but students were not taking advantage of the opportunity to register early and therefore most did not register on time. Also, the committee members

outlined the goal of reviewing all college advisement centers' early alert protocols for

freshmen students. The Complete College Georgia Plan that was submitted by Atlanta

Metropolitan State College (AMSC) (2012) indicated the administrators planned to

improve advisement graduation decisions of students by integrating "smart" advisement

technology such as Degreeworks. Later in the report, it reads that AMSC has

incorporated an intrusive program called Advisement Plus that enhanced their academic

advisement program by providing proactive outreach and engagement programming with

new freshman students as the primary target. The College of Coastal Georgia's Campus

Plan (2012) listed a goal to restructure academic advising to improve skill and impact of

the advising program. They planned to implement this by identifying problems and

opportunities for more advising intervention. Georgia State University's Completion

Plan (2012) outlined 16 strategies that the administrators believed would allow Georgia

State to address their challenges and reach their completion goals. One of the 16

strategies entailed redesigning their current system of academic advisement by

implementing a cutting-edge, web-based advising technology to identify when a student

has fallen off the graduation track. Georgia State's administrators supported that this

type of device and attention to advisement would reduce the average time that it takes

Georgia State students to complete their degrees. Obviously, from these reports,

academic advising has become a significant variable, a powerful tool, and a key to

unlocking the challenges of meeting RPG and Complete College Georgia initiatives.

  In a chapter titled, *Perspectives on the Future of Academic Advising,* written by

Grites, Gordon, and Habley (2008), the authors indicated that academic advising has

become recognized as a viable and necessary component of higher education that results

in the success of college students. In some cases, academic advisors can be viewed as the academic experts because to effectively answer students' questions, they must have concrete knowledge of the rules and regulations regarding various academic programs, GPA, the course requirements for the institution as well as the program of study, the ability to assist students with career exploration, schedule development, graduation clearances and many other processes deemed necessary by college leaders. Academic advisors are professionally trained to help students with academic issues, but also to make appropriate referrals when it is necessary. A prime example of this is if students were experiencing a personal problem, the student would need to be referred to the counseling center. In some cases, academic advisors will walk the students over to health services or a center where they can see a professional counselor. Leaders at institutions try to offer services that will help students to resolve issues whether it is related to college life or a personal issue that affects academics so that they can remain in school. Habley, Bloom, and Robbins (2012) agreed that although research suggests that academic advising only has an indirect impact on student retention, they strongly support that academic advising has long been an important component of the college experience in higher education. Habley, Bloom, and Robbins (2012) believed that there is a need to practice a high level of quality academic advising and this will better qualify academic advising as a variable that can positively contribute to student retention.

In addition, Rosenthal and Shinebarger (2010) reported the relevance of having peer mentors to work with students and help them navigate through the college process. They explained that students might perceive academic advising as a process that specifically deals with courses, schedule development, or registration issues. Also, that

some faculty or staff members may feel uncomfortable when the conversation leaves the academic realm and that is why having peer mentors can be a valuable asset to retaining students. The two researchers go even further and stressed that learning and academic success is not limited to mastery of courses or materials used in the classroom. They believe that learning independence and developing maturity and confidence while in college are also essential variables. Furthermore, peer mentors can maintain regular and ongoing contact with their mentorees throughout the semester and can provide more flexibility and accessibility than faculty members who advise students.

*Kuh (2008) indicated that students with two or more of the risk factors listed below are more likely to drop out of college than their peers.

- Being academically underprepared for college-level work

- Not entering college directly after high school

- Attending college part-time

- Being a single parent

- Caring for children at home

- Working more than thirty hours a week

- Being a first generation college student

Note: Based on research conducted by Choy (2001); Muraskin & Lee, with Wilner & Swail (2004); the State of Higher Education Executive Officers (2005); Swail with Redd & Perna (2003).

In the same study, Kuh (2008) accentuated that almost 50% of all first-time community college students are assessed as underprepared for the academic demands of college-level work. He argued that structured academic advising could help students to be successful in college. Kramer and Associates (as cited in Kuh, 2008) indicated that

when academic advising is integrated into academic support services and when it is

sensitive to the developmental needs of diverse students, advising is considered to be the

most effective in terms of promoting student growth, learning, and success. It is equally

clear that when students have meetings with an academic advisor, those meetings can

have a tremendous impact on how students perceive academics in terms of how they

understand, interpret, and make informed decisions about their courses that will help keep

them enrolled in college. In meeting the RPG initiatives and helping students to

complete college, Tinto (1993) believed that administrators at the institutions should

strongly consider the work of admissions officers when thinking of retention. When

admissions representatives recruit students and disseminate information about the

college, the admissions representatives should include counseling and advising as much

as it does recruiting.

<div align="center">The Second Initiative: Progression</div>

Progression is the second word identified in the RPG initiative and is defined by

the on-line dictionary Merriam-Webster (2014) as "the process of developing over a

period of time"; "a continuous and connected series of actions, events, etc." That same

definition and meaning is applicable to higher education and to the RPG Initiatives.

Habley, Bloom, and Robbins (2012) defined progression as "the percentage of full-time,

full-time, and degree-seeking students who reenroll and achieve a class standing

commensurate with the number of years they have attended" (p. 10). They further

explained that students who fail to progress or keep the pace with their cohort group are

at risk of dropping out of college. "Progression may be hindered by academic

performance or by injudicious course withdrawals" (p. 10) supported Habley, Bloom, and Robbins (2012).

Academics

Administrative leaders understand that progression happens over a period of time and not necessarily a long period of time, but as the latter part of Merriam Webster's definition indicated, it is a continuous and a connected series of actions. An example would be the way most college course work is designed. A student would take English 1101, *Composition I,* the first term enrolled and once that course had been satisfied, the student would register to take English 1102, *Composition II,* the second term of enrollment. The successful completion of these two course requirements not only helps a student to be able to read and write at a college level, but also serves as a prerequisite for the third English that is *World Literature 2111* or *World Literature 2112.* Tinto (2012) argued that the alignment of courses and more specifically, how the acquisition of knowledge and skills in one course is a necessity to be successful (in the course) in which it is linked is extremely important in shaping student retention. He further explained that courses are rarely aligned in content or pedagogy in ways that would promote successful completion of sequential courses.

> This lack of integration occurs not only within programs of study but, within developmental course sequences as well. It is still too often the case that students will successfully complete their developmental course sequence only to struggle and fail in the course to which the successful completion of that developmental sequence is a requirement. (Tinto, 2012, p. 103)

An example of the integration that Tinto referred to deals with the collaboration of faculty members. Integration can be addressed if faculty work closely with each other to assure that the material used for class (objectives or student learning outcomes) are in congruence with the professor teaching the next course. It should be the goal of the professors to connect and have clear expectations of what information is being taught and what types of projects are assigned. These types of conversations help with student progression because mastering a basic task before learning another can make the difference in determining the academic success of students.

Student Achievement

Progression is significant in the RPG initiatives and in higher education because it can serve as the next step in the process of completing a degree. In other words, college administrators must retain the student, by helping that student to progress from one classification to the next until the student is ready to graduate. However, when students decide to transfer from one institution to another and depending on if they are planning to transfer within the system versus transferring to a college that is outside of the system may cause a delay in progression. In many cases, basic courses like *English 1101/1102 Composition I and II*, *Math 1111 College Algebra*, and *Introduction to Psychology 1101* and *Sociology 1101* are generally accepted from one college to the next. Courses such as *Global Issues 1101*, *Intercultural Communication 1101* are required in the core for USG colleges, but more than likely will not be accepted, especially when transferring from private to public or state to state. Hence, if students transfer from within the university system, most systems have an agreement or some type of understanding that the curriculum may vary, but is acceptable, so progression may not be negatively affected.

The analysis of momentum point attainment is another way that transcripts are being applied to institutions. Leinbach and Jenkins (2008) elaborated that identifying momentum points enables the institution to breakdown the longitudinal process of student achievement into a series of concrete, intermediate steps, thereby allowing it to focus on the way different institutional actions should be timed and sequenced to move students to and beyond these points. They continued by explaining, "for many institutions, momentum points may include successful completion of development coursework, the timely declaration of a major, and the earning within particular time periods of a set number of credit hours" (p. 84).

One interpretation of breaking down the longitudinal process of student achievement can be demonstrated by using the way students are classified by credit hours earned. For example, if students are classified based on the number of hours they have accrued at the end of each term, there could be a list of student outcomes of what is expected. Based on the *Student Time Line* (see Table 2), from zero credit hours up to 29.99, students are required to complete an orientation course, identify a major, and can locate the Advisement and Tutorial Center. Developing a system of student outcomes of what is expected within a certain timeframe, can demonstrate that a student is progressing.

Table 2. *Student Time-Line*

Classification	Credit Hours	Accomplishments
Freshmen	0-29.99	Completed freshmen orientation course, can locate academic advisor, and have identified a major (can be undeclared).
Sophomore	30-59.99	Completed science sequence and all prerequisite major courses, and knowledgeable of study abroad opportunities.
Juniors	60-89.99	Taking courses related to major, involved in clubs related to major, have contact information about internships.
Seniors	90- or more	Knowledgeable of job fairs, resume and job preparation, and discuss completing clearance to graduate forms.

Tinto (2012) believed that higher education administrators should take a closer look at what courses students are accomplishing at the end of their semesters. He supported the notion that it is the administration's responsibility to analyze patterns of students' progress through the curriculum. For example, college administrators should note when different patterns of taking courses are affiliated with low or high student completion rates. Another aspect of this is to look at courses that have high failure or withdrawal rates. Administratively analyzing student course-taking to look for patterns that might alert the institution to require a prerequisite for a particular course (high failure rates) or offer a course more frequently as opposed to once a year.

When students withdraw from courses repeatedly, the process of receiving a "W" for a class can have a negative effect on progression in two ways. First of all, students fail to meet satisfactory academic progress (SAP) where they are required to complete or earn a passing grade in at least 67% of their courses (EGSC Catalog, 2014-15). SAP is enforced at most institutions of higher education. Second, most scholarships, grant or financial aid monies calculate a withdrawal from a class against the money used to

receive college credit hours. So, students can actually lose scholarship money when they withdraw from a class and do not receive a passing grade. SAP and miss use of scholarship funding by having repeated withdrawals can have a tremendous impact on delaying a student's graduation. Yet another decision that students make that can affect progressing toward their degree is when students elect to change their major. Sometimes a change of major is necessary if a student is targeting a specific program, but does not meet the GPA requirement and therefore will not qualify to apply. For example, students who are applying to nursing programs may have the GPA requirement, but lack the "A" or "B" grades that are required in their science and math courses. These types of situations can cause students to focus and take courses for a major (up to two years) only to apply and not be accepted. It is hoped that students understand they need to have a plan B in case their plan A is unsuccessful. So the question and issue becomes what program of study will the student pursue now that he or she does not qualify for nursing. Furthermore, the credit hours the student has taken for nursing may not fit in another program. If the student decided to stick with the allied health field perhaps there would not be a loss of courses, but if the student decides to change his or her major to business or education, progression toward a degree has been disturbed and credit hours are at risk of not being used and therefore may not count toward graduation. In this case, although the administrators were able to retain the student, progression is off and graduation is delayed.

Tinto (2012) noted that approximately 50% to 60% of college students change their major at least once and he supports that effective academic advising is not simply helping students to select a major, but is essential for students throughout their college

enrollment. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) supported that research consistently indicates that academic advising can play a role in students' decisions to persist and in their chances of graduating.

Curriculum Changes

In the 20 years this researcher has worked in higher education, another phenomenal issue that occurred periodically are departmental changes in a particular program. When department or division chairpersons make course changes in a program, the change that was made can have a negative effect on students' progression toward college completion. The term "grandfathered in" is very popular in higher education because it generally describes a situation where a change in the curriculum has occurred and a student who was on the old curriculum is given the option to switch to the new curriculum. This generally makes the student exempt from the new curriculum changes. The grandfather clause can become nebulous when students have missed semesters and return a year later. Sometimes college administrators are not sure whether these students should continue on the old curriculum because they were out a semester, but came in on the old catalog, or should they be subject to the new curriculum which could include meeting several more prerequisites to courses that they were previously not required to take. Finding the answers to these types of questions can be difficult for leaders at institutions of higher education. In actuality, faculty generally prefer that students "get on board" with the new program and take additional courses as needed for the major to be more informed and competitive in the major as well as the job market. In some cases, programs make curriculum changes due to accreditation standards. In other words, although college administrators began offering Economics 1101, *Principles of Economics*

as an optional course in the core curriculum, majors like Business, Nutritional & Food

Science, Sport Management, and Fashion Merchandising made it a mandatory course

because of the program of study obligation to the accrediting agency that are affiliated

with or because of the business minor that is built into the program of study.

Social and Economic Status

In the Joint Appropriations Presentations (USG meeting) held in January 2014,

Mr. Hank Huckabee, the Chancellor met with the members of the Board of Regents and

discussed how Georgia's economic status and budgetary issues affect students who are

attending college. In this particular meeting, the Chancellor reflected on some things that

had already been done in the university system to address a few of the social and

economic dynamics of earning a college degree. Moreover, he also identified and

articulated new initiatives that had emerged as a result of examining the institutions in

USG. His observation and results were presented to the committee members. In the

beginning of the meeting, there was some conversation that explained how state funds

were significantly reduced by more than a billion dollars while institutions in the

University System still experienced an enrollment increase of 9.4% Mr. Huckabee

emphasized:

> On every campus I visit, a student will share the challenges of staying in school
>
> with higher tuition and fees, which may be exacerbated by a job loss at home.
>
> Sadly, in many cases, a few dollars will make the difference as to whether that
>
> student stays in school. (USG, 2014, p. 1)

The meeting included what the chancellor and the university system officials have

done to help colleges in the university system and students enrolled in the system

function effectively to reach their goal(s). First of all, there was a limit on increasing the

tuition. Secondly, the Chancellor instructed the presidents of the USG schools not to

request fee increases on their campuses unless it was absolutely imperative. Although it

is a national concern, the third point that was presented was the financial debt and

problem of students trying to buy purchased textbooks for their classes. The minutes

described the fourth initiative as an assurance that the utilization of space on their

campuses was used wisely. In other words, new facilities should not be requested unless

there is a need and not because of a desire to have a new building or to beautify the

campus. The fifth point was what the Chancellor considered to be effective use of

money. He indicated that by moving funds out of the administration and reallocating

them for use in the classroom is one example and another one he provided was how there

were 35 institutions in the University System of Georgia when he became Chancellor and

now there are 31. The sixth initiative focused on economic development with the

understanding of raising the education attainment level of students to make the state of

Georgia economically competitive for the 21st century.

Tinto (2012) pointed out that generally students desire to stay in school, but due

to decisions or actions of the state, federal, or nongovernmental organizations that dictate

financial support, students might have to withdraw due to lack of financial support. In

addition, the financial climate that hovers over our economy may cause some students to

drop out of college. Financial aid can definitely be a hindrance in students progressing

through college, where Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) reported that financial aid was

evident as a progression factor among students enrolled in two or three year programs

and those from families with the lowest incomes.

Research supports - that at a four-year institution - the persistence rates between students who receive financial aid and those who were not was very small (Tinto, 1993). There is a strong correlation between progression and financial aid because having the money to attend college can determine whether a student can go or not. "The evidence accumulated over the past decade, especially over the last five years, indicates that financial aid does impact upon student persistence (Olivas 1986; Stampen & Cabrera 1986, 1988; Murdock 1987; Stampen & Fenske 1988; Nora 1990; St. John, Kirshstein, & Noell 1991)" (Tinto, 1993, p. 68). Concurrently, Tinto acknowledged that differences in students' college entrance test scores, socioeconomic status, and background can be considered as strong factors that can determine the overall rates of earning a four-year degree between Blacks, Hispanics, and Whites. Likewise, in Tinto's longitudinal model of departure from institutions of higher education, he demonstrated that "adjustment, difficulty, incongruence, isolation, finances, learning, and external obligations or commitments come to influence differing forms of student departure from campus" (Tinto, 1993, p. 112). Tinto (1993) explained three vital points about his longitudinal model that identifies social and economic effects on college completion. First, the model explored and explained why and how some students decided to leave college before earning a degree. Second, the model focused on the process that students used to reach the decision to withdraw from college. Third, his model was not necessarily used just as a descriptive model that identifies why students leave college, but one that explained "how interactions among different individuals within the academic and social systems of the institution and communities which comprise them lead individuals of different characteristics to withdraw from that institution prior to degree completion" (p. 113).

In meeting the RPG initiatives and helping students to complete college in two to four years, administrators must take several issues into account when writing a five-year plan to address progression in USG institutions. First of all, the sequencing of coursework in academics should be organized to help student's progress from one course to the next. Secondly, college administrators must make decisions about course acceptance, outcomes for students at various checkpoints, and determine a transparent curriculum that will help student's progress toward graduation. Finally, social economic status along with the old and familiar issue of how do students absorb the costs that are affiliated with attending college can effect progression and degree completion.

<center>The Final Initiative: Graduation</center>

Graduation is the third component in the RPG initiative. Of the three, graduation is the culmination, the hallmark, and the most visible outcome of the three. Graduation is where RPG satisfies CCG in the University System of Georgia. Merriam-Webster on-line dictionary (2014) defined graduation as "the act of receiving a diploma or degree from a school, college, or university"; a ceremony at which degrees or diplomas are given out". Retention is an extremely important part of a students' college experience because if administrators are unable to find ways to retain them at the institutional level, then reaching graduation is nearly impossible. Progression is also a key initiative because if students do not progress toward earning the degree, they will forever be lost in the world of academia by taking classes and following a plan that lacks structure and focus. Again, graduation for these students is highly unlikely.

Graduation is the goal because it marks the end of one phase and inspires the beginning of something new, whether it is a new job, promotion, higher wages for

earning a degree or graduate school. Most importantly for administrators at institutions of higher education, it represents completion and produces the final transformation from student to college graduate. Examining ways college administrators can effectively understand, interpret and implement RPG strategies on their campuses are one of the goals of RPG. The May 2007 minutes, of the meeting that the University System Task Force Committee had, the administrators at the 31 institutions needed to explore initiatives, develop goals, objectives and customize a plan that was applicable to their college in order to increase graduation rates and meet CCG.

Producing College Graduates

Governor Deal formed a Higher Education Funding Commission (2012) that consisted of high-ranking state officials such as the Georgia House of Representatives, Georgia Senate, University System of Georgia (USG) Board of Regents members, USG college presidents, and vice presidents. In that 2012 report, Governor Deal charged the members with examining ways to encourage colleges and universities in the USG to turn their efforts to completing college through the state's funding formula. The report reflected that under the USG current funding formulas, the systems received funding when a student enrolls in college and there was no measurement used to note student progression or determine college completion. It is also noted in this report that these types of funding formulas encourage institutions in the USG to enroll students with little effort or concentration on retention, progression, and graduation. Moreover, after seven meetings held from December 2011 until December 2012, the Higher Education Funding Commission made many suggestions, two of which pertained specifically to graduation. They recommended that the outcomes-based higher education funding formula should

reward student progression (such as the number of undergraduate students who reached

or passed 15, 30, 60, or 90 credit hours) reward awards conferred (such as GED

Diplomas, successful transfer out, certificates, associate's degrees, bachelor's degrees,

post-baccalaureate degrees) and outcomes (such as completion of a course that is

indicated by grades, A, B, C, D, Pass, and Satisfactory).

Also, the report acknowledged that Georgia was the first state in the country to

have a completion plan from every public institution of higher education in September

2012. Equally significant, the writers of the report concluded with the recommendation

of the members who served on the Higher Education Funding Commission for the

Governor to move from an enrollment driven formula to an outcome-based formula.

Therefore, RPG became even more significant as a mechanism to successfully navigate

students through the process of retention to progression, and graduation. College leaders

started viewing the overall big picture of RPG as it would pertain to performance-based

outcomes such as graduation as opposed to the previous goal of increasing enrollment.

Academic advisors have been proactively engaged in activities that are now recognized

as RPG. Nevertheless, administrative leaders charged academic advisors with the

responsibility to devise an advisement plan that would incorporate the RPG initiatives

into their advisement objectives. Academic advisors dissected the concept into parts that

would better explain how RPG would be viewed as an active process (see Figure 2),

when working with students.

Retention generally occurs in the first year, with the institution implementing the

goal of helping new students to have a successful and smooth transition from high school

to college. Retention continues in the sophomore year, but takes on a different meaning

of finding ways to connect the students to the university. Entities such as campus organizations (student or Greek clubs), sports (whether school team or intramurals), are sometimes used to help students have more of a balance with their academics. Moreover, connecting the student to the institution in some ways helps the student feel a sense of belonging and not feel homesick. The next pivotal step, as viewed through the lens of academic advisors is progression that occurs from the junior year to the senior year. The academic advisor's responsibility rested in generating conversation with students about taking major coursed, encouraging students to develop mentorship relationships with faculty, but most importantly presenting students with a transparent program of study that clearly outline a sequence of courses that will lead them to graduation.

Figure 2. *The Simplicity of RPG*
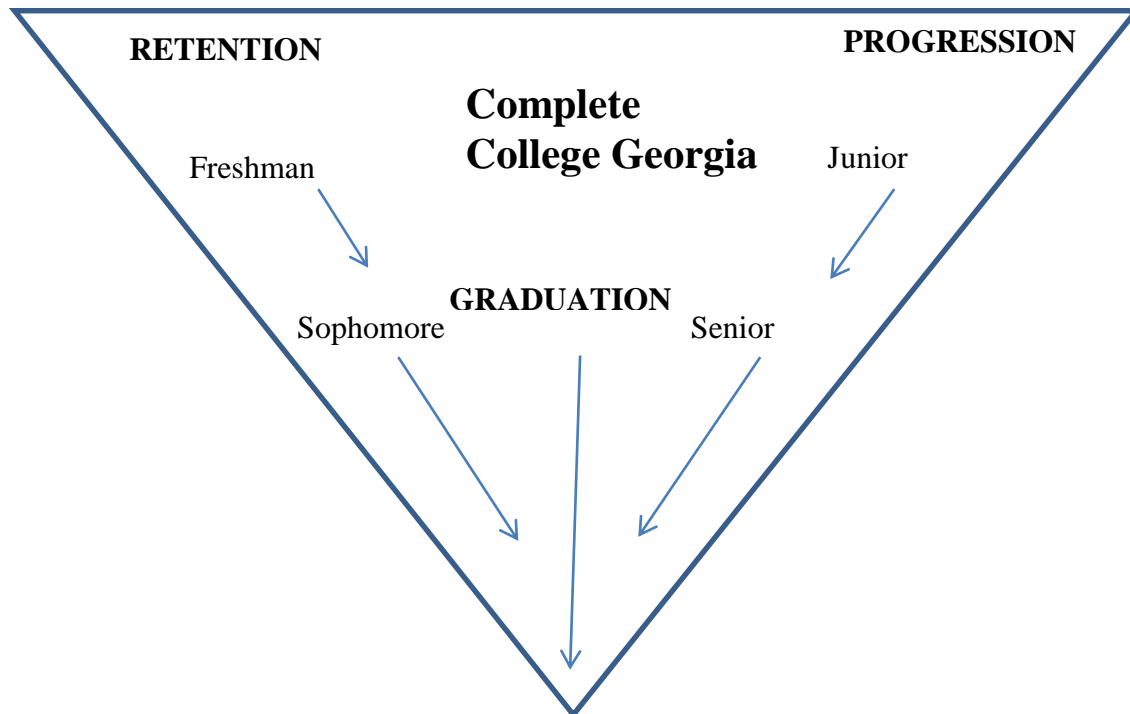
Tinto (2012) adamantly defended that if institutions want to improve retention, progression and graduation they should pursue a systematic approach. He ascertained four conditions that should occur at any institution that have identified the desire to increase retention and graduation rates: (1) students should experience high, yet clear expectations in college; (2) students should find needed academic and social support; (3) students' work should be assessed and provided with frequent feedback about their progress; and (4) they should be academically and socially involved in the life of the institution, especially in the classrooms. If any institution in higher education utilizes a systematic approach to RPG and employees the four conditions that the institution should experience an increase in retention and graduation rates. To make this a reality, he supports that these conditions take a full range of actions from administrators, faculty, and staff members.

According to Collett (2013), the administrators at Long Beach Community College (LBCC) believed that improving college completion rates takes time and help from appropriate groups, agencies, and stakeholders. When Long Beach Community College administrators took a final look at the high number of pass rates, they were proud because it showed a 500% increase in the number of first-year college students who actually placed in college level English courses compared to the numbers they had the previous year. Students who placed into a college level math class without any remedial course work was double from what was reported the prior year. The administrators at Long Beach credit this increase to a six-year old partnership between the college and Long Beach Unified School District. According to the article as a part of the American Association of Community College (AACC) 21st Century initiatives, encouragement with

business partners, local community organizations, school systems, and baccalaureate

institutions are needed to establish clear pathways for three main goals: (a) to prepare

students for the challenge of college-level courses, (b) to guide students through a system

from enrollment to graduation, and (c) to help students achieve successful and sustainable

careers. Tinto's systematic approach where he identified four conditions differs greatly

from the recommendations that the administrators at Long Beach Community College

believe. Tinto's four conditions identify what students should experience and how the

institution should aid in getting students to that point, but LBCC's seems to address

measures or outline what the institution needs to do to experience higher RPG rates.

  Not necessarily increasing RPG, but in terms of predicting which students will

progress through college and who will graduate. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005)

supported that college grades may well be the single best predictors of student persistence

and degree completion. This could be why so many critics support students getting off to

a strong academic start by fully using the resources available on campus such as working

with peer leaders, faculty mentors, and academic advisors.

  According to Georgia Southern University's (2006-2015) Fact Books, in 2006

Georgia Southern awarded 2,131 Bachelor degrees; with 2,300 Bachelor degrees earned

in 2007; and yet another increase occurred in 2008 where 2,382 Bachelor degrees were

awarded to students. However, in 2009 Georgia Southern experienced a decrease with

2,378 degrees awarded. In 2010, there were 2,630 and in the year 2011, there were a

total of 2,698 Bachelor degrees awarded. If Georgia Southern wants to increase student

retention, progression, and graduation 20% by the year 2020, an approximate average of

528 "additional" degrees will be needed (see Table 3). At East Georgia State College,

107 Associate degrees were awarded in 2006; there were 98 awarded in 2007 while 93

Associate degrees awarded in 2008. In 2009, a total of 119 students received degrees

while in 2010 there was an increase and143 degrees were awarded. For the year 2011

there was a decrease and a total of 129 degrees awarded to students. For East Georgia

State College to experience a 20% increase, it would take approximately an average of 30

additional degrees per year for the next seven years to reach the goal the Governor has

established (see Table 4).

Table 3. *GSU Degrees Earned*

Georgia Southern University			
Fiscal Year	*Degrees Conferred	20% Increase Additional Degrees needed	Total number of Degrees needed per year
2006	2,131	426.20	2,557.00
2007	2,300	460.00	2,760.00
2008	2,382	476.40	2,858.40
2009	2,378	475.60	2,853.60
2010	2,630	526.00	3,156.00
2011	2,698	539.60	3,237.60
2012	2,788	557.60	3,365.60
2013	2,912	582.40	3,494.40
2014	2,973	594.60	3,567.60
2015	3,221	644.20	3,865.20
Average number of additional degrees needed per year **528.26**			

*undergraduate degrees

Table 4. *EGSC Degrees Earned*

East Georgia State College			
Fiscal Year	Associate Degrees Conferred	20% Increase Additional Degrees needed	Total number of Degrees needed per year
2006	107	21.40	128.40
2007	98	19.60	117.60
2008	93	18.60	111.60
2009	119	23.80	135.40
2010	143	28.60	171.60
2011	129	25.80	154.80
2012	164	32.80	196.80
2013	178	35.00	213.60
2014	211	42.20	253.20
2015	238	47.60	285.60
Average number of additional degrees needed per year		**29.54**	

Obtaining Graduation Success

Collett (2013) reported that President Kenneth Ender of Harper College in Illinois had experienced an increase in graduates and was more concerned with how the college would maintain the momentum overtime and especially to reach their goal by the year 2020. President Ender explained that they took action by becoming proactive and reached out to the students who only needed a few classes or credits remaining to complete their degree. Harper College in Illinois is not taking President Obama's challenge lightly. As of 2012, Harper College had awarded 4,487 degrees and certificates, which is the highest number of college completions in the history of the institution for two consecutive years. The motivation is driven and guided by a strategic plan to improve student success and completion rates by the year 2020. Harper College

is 2,866 credentials ahead of the annual goal that has been established. They also sought out students who had transfer credit and showed what courses were needed to apply towards obtaining their degree. The ultimate goal was to get the students back into classes and move them toward college completion. Dr. Robert Exley who is the President of Snead State Community College (SSCC) in Alabama started a public relations campaign that encouraged students to finish what they started. The graduation rate soared and their completion rate went up to 125%.

Wiggins (2011), who served as director of First Generation (FGS) College Students, recalled reading a student's essay for admission to her program that showed some of the challenges that first generation students must deal with when they decide to come to college. The student indicated how she felt inferior to her peers because she was both from a low-income family and was the first in her family to attend college. She wrote about how difficult it was to stay positive when she felt unprepared and felt as though her education was not comparable to those students who attend private and township schools. Additionally, she stressed the challenge of coming to college when she knew that her parents could lose their jobs or home and how she felt as if she was selfish in neglecting family responsibility to pursue a college education. Wiggins asserted that the goal of FGS is to support, retain, and increase the graduation rates of first generation and disabled students. The program has been deemed successful because the program is built to focus on the whole student that she considers as a holistic approach. The program begins as a mandatory summer experience for all of the participants and continues as a year round support system for the students. The types of services that are included are intrusive academic advisement, tutoring services for

academic subjects, one-on-one and group mentoring, peer instruction, financial aid advising, psychological counseling, arts exposure, and international travel experiences.

The overarching theme with all of these campus's success rates points out that improving retention, progression, and graduation rates is not accomplishable without others involved. It could be a need to build a partnership with the local school system or district to address the issue of better preparing students for college, gaining support from local businesses to buy into well thought out initiatives to create programs that will help students to be more successful. Most importantly, student success is more prevalent when everyone on campus is involved including all administrators, faculty, and staff in the conversations and overall goals and objectives of institutions of higher education.

CCA (2013) has been promoting ways in which students can graduate on time by disseminating information about what it should mean to be a full-time student. CCA created a *15 to Finish Campaign* and is encouraging every state in the United States to adopt the concept that students who are enrolled in college should be taking 15 credit hours a semester to graduate on time. As a matter of fact, CCA wanted other states to replicate the University of Hawaii's *15 to Finish* program because in addition to raising awareness about the advantage of really being a full-time student, the University of Hawaii system has seen an extraordinary increase in the number of students taking at least 15 credits per semester and has witnessed a 22% higher retention rate for incoming freshmen. CCA is also advising leaders in higher education to consider establishing a banded tuition rate. When institutions have a banded tuition rate, it ensures that tuition for students who are taking 15 credit hours a semester would cost no more than taking 12 credit hours. CCA's President Stan Jones explained, "When students start with just 12

hours a semester, they are already on the five-year plan" (p. 2). Mr. Jones purported that enrollment hours and graduating on time are the best ways to make college affordable. He stated, "earning a four-year degree in four years is a lot cheaper than earning one in five or six" (p. 2). Furthermore, Mr. Jones believed that if institutional leaders are serious about making higher education more affordable, they must make on-time graduation a top priority.

The University System of Georgia (USG) along with Georgia Perimeter College has been developing regional workshops and statewide conferences devoted to *15 to Finish* strategies. The primary purpose of the workshops is to introduce USG employees to the concept of *15 to Finish* and to discuss and share what efforts are made on their campuses about advisement, retention, progression, and graduation initiatives. (See *15 to Finish* flyer in appendix C.) The University System of Georgia has encouraged all institutions in the system to embrace and adopt the philosophy of students taking 15 credit hours per semester as the new normal amount for a full-time student as opposed to taking only 12 credit hours. Yet another incentive to graduate on time and increase the graduation rate is East Georgia State College's Program called *Get to Graduation in Two Years (g2)^2* (See flyer in appendix D.) The faculty and staff who have been identified to work with the students in the (g2)^2 program will actively assist those students through intrusive mentoring, proactive advisement, and degree planning. Upon completion of the program, participants will be exempt from paying the graduation fee and receive a medallion to wear at graduation with the cap and gown.

Chapter Summary

Retention, progression, and graduation (RPG) is an initiative that has not only

awakened higher education in the University System of Georgia, but has also challenged

the administrators to broaden their scope by looking at enrollment as well as graduation

rates. Research supports that college leaders need to implement strategies that will make

a stronger contribution to increase the graduation rates. Therefore, leaders in institutions

are revisiting objectives and goals that involve keeping students enrolled in college until

they graduate.

Retention is the first word in the initiative and conveys a profound, strong, and

lucid message of the need to help students while they are enrolled in college in an effort

to keep them. Characteristics of both students and the institution can impede upon

students' desire to stay enrolled. Furthermore, the way academics are presented to

students can have an effect on whether students are retained or decide to leave college.

When students receive early feedback on academic performance it helps them to ascertain

whether to withdraw or stay enrolled in a particular class and some critics believe that if

academics would structure classes differently, then it will promote academic success,

which will in essence retain students. Overall, collaboration with college administrators,

faculty, and staff can play a key role in identifying the barriers that exist in college

completion as well as devising strategic protocols in assisting students with removing the

institutional barriers to increase the retention and graduation rates of University System

of Georgia students.

Progression is the second word in the initiative and is just as significant as

retention because progression must occur in coursework and in classification, if students

are going to make it to graduation. Administrative leaders understand that progression happens over a period of time and not necessarily a long period of time. However, changing a major, non-acceptance in an application program (based on GPA), implementation of new departmental or program requirements can all have a tremendous impact on how students' progress and whether they progress without taking additional courses. Furthermore, having a transparent curriculum and the collaboration of two-year institutions working closely with four-year institutions to assure a smooth transfer of courses from one to the other are very important in the progression process.

A critical and final word in the initiative is graduation. Graduation is generally the ultimate goal and desire for every student who comes to college and now helping students to reach that goal has become an important entity to institutions. Various programs and strategic plans have been devised with the success of students in mind. A strong concentration and focus has been placed on academics to assure students are receiving the necessary assistance to help them to be successful in the classroom. Most institutions are requiring students to report to an academic advisor to address concerns whether it is about how to meet the challenge of taking college courses or how to get help with handling personal issues while enrolled in college. A plethora of initiatives have been developed by institutions' administrators to increase the retention and graduation rates of their students. First generation, low-income, and underprepared students are considered at-risk of not staying in college and considered least likely to make it to graduation. However, establishing goals that will focus on addressing RPG initiatives can change the nature of how students experience college and can make a significant change in the number of students that graduate from college.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter the researcher focused on research methodology particularly the

use of a descriptive study. Under the paradigm of retention, progression, and graduation

(RPG) and CCG, this study used a questionnaire to collect data from academic advisors

regarding how they approached the mandate in an effort to support Governor Deal's plan

to increase the graduation rate in the state of Georgia by the year 2020.   One main

purpose for the study was to analyze the advisor's perception of what impact, if any, the

Governor's mandate to increase the graduation rate has on how academic advisors advise

students. Another, purpose was to ascertain academic advisors' perceptions and

implications of performance-based funding from the state as opposed to enrollment-based

funding, and what type of impact that change would have on the graduation rate at each

of the advisor's respective institutions. This chapter consists of an introduction including

research questions and design, the research paradigm, population and sample,

instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis.

Research Questions and Design

According to Salkind (2008), a descriptive study involves the collection of data in

order to answer questions concerning the most current position of the population involved

in the study. Descriptive statistics are used to organize and describe the characteristics of

a collection of data. It provides the number of times something occurs and, with the

frequency of occurrences, a summarization can be formulated. By using descriptive

statistics, the researcher also reported the frequencies, percentages, averages, mean,

mode, and median of the variables. The researcher observed the characteristics of the

data for frequencies in advisors' perceptions of the CCG initiatives and their institution's

ability to increase graduation of 20% by the year 2020. Using descriptive statistics gave

the researcher an opportunity to seek occurrences, if any, based on the classifications of

the institutions, such as similarities in all the Research Universities, Comprehensive and

State Universities, and State Colleges. Even more significant, due to the diversity of the

advisement process, the data did not show any correlation within all of the classifications

of the institutions. However, what was revealed was similarity of the advisement

structure for Research and Comprehensive Universities; both employed more

professional advisors as opposed to faculty advising undergraduate students.   The

research questions in this study were as follows:

RQ$_1$: Which factors influence the retention rate of college students?

RQ$_2$: What is the perceived integral processes to increasing the retention, progression,

and graduation rates?

RQ$_3$: What differences exist in the process of advising students since Governor Deal's

initiative to increase graduation rates?

RQ$_4$: What difference exists among advisors' perceptions in accomplishing the CCG

Initiative goals?

RQ$_5$: What do participants suggest to increase the graduation rate of students?

RQ$_6$: What perspectives do the participants have of performance-base funding (as

opposed to enrollment-base funding) and its impact on graduation rates?

Research Paradigm

Under the paradigm of retention, progression and graduation, the researcher used a descriptive approach for this study. Salkind ((2008) explained that descriptive statistics are used not only to organize, but describe that characteristics of a collection of data. The descriptive approach was appropriate for this study because once the data was the collected, the researcher added the similar answers that were related to financial allocations, leadership concerns, unprepared students, etc. and divided by the number of responses, that provides the most common occurring variable and the mean. The questions were developed meticulously and precise open-ended questions for advisors to answer in order, to provide an opportunity to voice their opinions and as opposed to the restrictions of participating in questions on the Likert scale. For example, in responding to some of the open-ended questions, advisors had to list one main reason why their institution will reach or get close to the goal of increasing the graduation rate as well as list one main reason their institution will struggle. The response gave the researcher a chance to see the culture of advisement at their campus through the lens of that particular advisor.

Through this study, the researcher will to add results and findings to the body of knowledge in academia about academic advisors and their role in the Complete College Georgia (CCG) initiatives. In some cases, advisors can be considered underrepresented because, generally, administrators and leaders attend the meetings, and make decisions about how initiatives will be carried out at their institutions. However, academic advisors carry out the duties of working directly with the students and represent a critical element in the initiative to increase the graduation rate. Due to the nature of their role, advisors

work with the very core of what retention, progression, and graduation should look like at any institution of higher education. Tinto (1993) believed that effective retention programs have come to understand that academic advising is at the very core of successful institutional efforts to educate and retain students. The retention, progression, and graduation initiative (RPG) was implemented in 2005 to promote system level awareness and serve as a catalyst for educational change by increasing the number of students who attend college, stay in college, and graduate from college. RPG initiatives are a mirror reflection of the goals and outcomes of academic advisement.

In 2010, the state of Georgia ranked in the 34th percentile of students earning a college degree. As an incentive to increase the post-secondary graduation rate in the state of Georgia, Governor Deal received one million dollars from Complete College America (CCA). In August 2011, Governor Deal implemented CCG where he mandated all 30 University System Georgia college presidents and other higher education administrators to increase the graduation rate by 20%, which would add an additional 250,000 college graduates by the year 2020.

Kuh (2008) reported that guiding more students to prepare for and graduate from college has become a priority for institutional leaders: he broadly defined student success as representing academic achievement and other educationally purposeful activities. He supported the notion that "advisors are especially important because they are among the first people new students encounter and are the people with whom students often have frequent interaction throughout the first year" (p. 69).

Procedures

Population and Sample

Historically and professionally, the researcher is very fluent and knowledgeable of the duties carried out by academic advisors because of the 20 plus years of experience in the field. Understanding the nature of the profession and how demanding it can be, there was a genuine concern of how many advisors will actually find or have the time to complete the questionnaire. The researcher expected approximately 300 participants to complete the questionnaire within the timeframe. The number was derived by using the USG institution's enrollment to categorize them into one of three groups: small, mid-size, or large institutions. A fall 2015 enrollment of 2,000 to 10,999 places 20 USG institutions into the small category. Five of the USG institutions were placed in the midsize category due to a fall 2015 enrollment of 11,000 to 20,999. Lastly, another five USG institutions had a fall 2015 enrollment of 21,000 to 40,000 which placed them in the large category.

Table 5 (see appendix) identifies the 30 University System of Georgia institutions and how they are classified within the system. The four universities that are identified as Research Institutions are Augusta University, Georgia Institute of Technology, Georgia State University, and University of Georgia. The four Comprehensive Universities are Georgia Southern University, Kennesaw State University, University of West Georgia, and Valdosta State University. Albany State, Armstrong State, Clayton State, Columbus State, Fort Valley State, Georgia College State, Georgia Southwestern State, Middle Georgia State, Savannah State, and University of North Georgia State are the ten institutions classified as State Universities. The 12 State Colleges are Abraham Baldwin

Agricultural, Atlanta Metropolitan State, Bainbridge State, College of Coastal Georgia, Dalton State, Darton State, East Georgia State, Georgia Gwinnett, Georgia Highlands, Georgia Perimeter, Gordon State College, and South Georgia State College. Again, the Administrators' of these institutions have been given the autonomy to adopt and use the advising model that they believe fit the culture of their institution.

Table 6 (in appendix) demonstrates the fall 2015 enrollment per institution and the three categories in which they have been divided. There was no definitive number of persons who received the questionnaire because the number of persons who are involved in the advisement process vary per USG institution. In the realm of advisement, there has been much discussion about the advisor/advisee ratio at the local, regional, and national levels. According to National Academic Advising Association (NACADA), the average case load for individual advisors is 233 for small institutions, 333 for medium institutions, and 600 for large institutions. If the enrollment of each institution is taken into account and divided by the average respective advisor load, each institution should yield an expected number of advisors that represent each higher education institution. Next multiplying by the average response rate of 33% for on-line using an on-line survey, then the expected outcome was 291.58 for this study.

Robbins (2013) articulates that to have an adequate number of advisees per advisor, the institution needs to take various factors into account. In addition to the institutional size, whether it's a two or four-year college makes a difference as well. Other influences to take into consideration include an institutional mission goals, politics, campus climate, additional responsibilities such as teaching first year seminars, holding workshops, serving on committees, and working on institutional events should be taken

into consideration. The structure of advisement is different on the various USG

campuses, meaning, the institutions could be a centralized, decentralized advising model

or a combination of both. More importantly, institutions advisement models are diverse.

Some administrators in the USG institutions specifically use professional advisors to

conduct advisement of the students and have relinquished the faculty of all advisement

responsibilities. Consequently, institutions have assign students as advisees to faculty

and include advisement as a variable in their end of the year performance evaluation. For

example, Georgia State University is one of the research institutions that has hired all

professional advisors to assume the advisor duties and faculty members are not required

to advise students at the undergraduate level. However, East Georgia State College

follows a model where both faculty members and professional advisors advise students,

and advisement is a part of the evaluation process for the faculty, this has been referred to

as a *hybrid model*.

Instrumentation

Pattern (2007) defined instrument as the generic term for any type of

measurement device whether it is classified as a test, questionnaire, interview schedule,

or personality scale. Pattern further explained that an important issue that surfaces when

an instrument is developed is the validity of the questionnaire. "Researchers say that an

instrument is valid to the extent that it measures what it is designed to measure and

accurately performs that function(s) it is purported to perform" (p. 61). Table 8 (see

Appendix) is the instrument that was used for this study. It is a 17-item questionnaire

developed by the researcher to survey those persons in the USG institutions who

currently work in an advisement capacity. Glatthorn and Joyner (2005) believed that the

researcher should identify the subjects or the participants who will complete the questionnaire. "In most quantitative studies, you will need to provide such information as number, age, ethnic identity, and gender" (p. 192). In constructing the instrument the researcher reviewed various dissertations that used instruments in their study. Ideas of how to organized questions were taken from Gornto (2005) dissertation titled, *"Perceptions of Georgia High School Guidance Counselors Concern Tech Prep"*.

The researcher used key constructs related to RPG and advisement to develop the instrument. These four constructs include: demographics, the contribution of advisement in higher education, historical implementation of RPG, and the request to raise the graduation rate under the new initiative of CCG.

As seen in Table 7 (in Appendix) in the Item Analysis, the questionnaire was comprised of four parts: Part one, which consists of questions one through five, specifically focused on the participants' personal and professional information. Part two, which included questions six and seven, related to the field of academic advising and proposal of RPG. Part three had questions eight through 13, which pertain to advisors' perceptions of meeting the goal of CCG. The final questions, 14 through 16,were specifically related to the advisor's opinion of funding for institutions in the University System of Georgia.

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

When using an assessment instrument, it should have validity and it should be reliable. When an instrument or questionnaire has validity, it is considered valid because it has the evidence to prove that it measures what it is supposed to measure (Sullivan, 2011). Although there are assessment instruments, surveys and tests with various types

of validity, the researcher used a questionnaire to probe whether academic advisors

support the Governor's new initiatives which involve a goal to increase the graduation

rate at their respective institutions.

Considering the different meanings of validity, the researcher realized a small

portion of all three of the traditional forms of validity can be applicable for this research

project. For example, criterion validity provides results that correlate to other results.

Construct validity is based on some underlying construct or idea behind a test (Salkind,

2008); it also examines whether items measure hypothetical constructs or concepts

(Creswell, 2009). Moreover, content validity is used when the researcher wants to know

whether a sample of items accurately reflect an entire universe of items pertaining to a

specific topic (Salkind, 2008). Using content validity in this study, the researcher was

able to ascertain whether academic advisors support the Governor's initiative of having a

significant increase in the graduation rate at their respective institutions. The researcher

used familiar content to form questions that relate to the academic advisors' daily routine,

with the intention to successfully measure that content. Nevertheless, of these three

forms, content validity is the most effective for this project because it is used to indicate

whether the items on the questionnaire measure the content they are intended to measure.

"Consistent" or "dependable" results are the words Sullivan (2011) used to define

reliability. Sullivan asserted that when conducting research, reliability refers to whether

an instrument provides the same results each time it is used with the same subjects in the

same type of setting. Mora (2011) further explained that reliability is concerned with the

"consistency of our measurement, that's the degree to which the questions used in a

survey elicit the same type of information each time they are used under the same conditions" (p. 2).

The researcher has been employed at Georgia Southern University and East Georgia State College in an academic advisor capacity; therefore, both institutions were used for a pilot study. To establish the concept of validity, the researcher submitted an electronic copy of instrument to ten academic advisors on both campuses with the understanding of obtaining feedback and suggestions of instrument. Over half (12) of the questionnaires were returned with recommendations and the researcher modified the instrument accordingly. Next, the researcher sent the instrument to another set of ten advisors to East Georgia State College's sister institution, Augusta University to obtain the data to analyze the concept of reliability. The academic advisors completed the questionnaire and provided feedback of the instrument and data collected as a pilot study was tested for internal reliability.

Data Collection

This study employed a descriptive design to collect and analyze data after approval by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Georgia Southern University. Next the researcher asked the 30 members of the Regents Administrative Committee on Advising (RACAD) to provide names and email addresses of the persons on their campuses whose job responsibilities involve academic advising. Once the researcher received the names and email addresses of the persons, that group was identified as the population sample. After the researcher identified the contact or representative for the 30 University System institutions, a link to the questionnaire was sent to those representatives. Some sent it directly to the advisors on their campuses. Some sent the

researcher the names and email addresses of the advisors, while others directed the researcher to their campus Institutional Review Board (IRB) department to gain approval to conduct research on their campuses. The researcher's goal was to obtain at least 300 completed electronic questionnaires as a result of the meeting with the 30 representatives from the University System institutions. Of the 30 University System institutions the researcher was successful in obtaining academic advisors from 27 of the institutions to participate in the study resulting in a sample size of 312.

The researcher used online survey software Qualtrics Survey Software to create a hyperlink that contained the Likert-scaled 18 question survey. Once the participants clicked on the hyperlink, a cover letter explained the purpose, process, and procedure of the study. An inform consent form was also included in the email. All responses were anonymous in that the researcher knew how many advisors participated per institution but was not able to associate a participant's name with responses.

The IRB at Georgia Southern University granted the researcher approval to proceed with the study in March of 2016. After contacting the representatives from the USG schools, the researcher began sending out the link to electronic questionnaire in April of 2016. All participants or representatives received a reminder email after approximately two weeks had expired. Some of the institutions would not allow the researcher to conduct a study on their campus without completing an application to the IRB at their institution; this request, of course, prolonged the time and required the researcher to wait until the members of the IRB met to make a decision as to whether the request could be granted. Therefore, the questionnaire was administered from April to July of 2016. The researcher put closure on the process toward the middle of July.

Data Analysis

Primary analysis focused on descriptive statistics. By utilizing descriptive statistics, the researcher used percentages, average and mean scores to calculate the results. The data from this study were tabulated using Qualtrics Survey Software. The data obtained from the open-ended questions were analyzed through content analysis to look for common themes and patterns from participants' narratives. The researcher typed and organized the advisors' responses to the open-ended questions and selected to put the comments that best described and represented the advisors' campus cultural and perception of advisement (or situation) through the lens of advisor. Content analysis is viewed as a way of describing and interpreting the data by coding textual material (Creswell, 2006); therefore, advisors' stories and parallel responses to the open-ended questions will be grouped together and labeled with a theme that effectively described the content.

Chapter Summary

The design for this study was to add to the findings and results to the body of knowledge in academia of CCG from an academic advisors' perspective. The purpose of this descriptive study was to ascertain academic advisors' perception of CCG initiatives such as increasing the graduation rate at their respective USG institution by the year 2020, supporting performance-based funding as opposed to enrollment-based, and other issues that are being discussed in higher education. Student advisors in all 30 institutions in the USG were included in the distribution of the questionnaire with the goal of obtaining a sample of 300.

CHAPTER IV

REPORT OF DATA AND DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

The purpose of conducting this research had two meanings, first the researcher wanted to ascertain the opinions of academic advisors regarding the Governor's higher education initiatives. Responding to the questionnaire gave academic advisors a voice about the advising process at their respective institutions and served as an opportunity to identify what aspects of advising are going well and what they believe needs to be addressed or challenged. Secondly, the findings in this research determined how academic advisors support the most recent Complete College Georgia (CCG) initiatives. More specifically, the purpose addressed in this study was how academic advisors approach Governor Deal's mandate in an effort to support Governor Deal's plan to increase the graduation rate at 20% by 2020. There are 30 University System institutions of higher education in the University System of Georgia (USG) and the researcher was successful in obtaining academic advisors from 27 of the institutions to participate in the study resulting in a sample size of 312.

Findings

Description of the Participants

In Part I, the demographics section contains questions two and five. Question two asks the participants to select the University System institution where they are employed while question five asks them to identify their gender. When the questions were analyzed, it showed that the highest number of participants were from the researcher's institution (see Table 8 in Appendix): East Georgia State College where the researcher

received approximately 16% of the respondents. Georgia Southern University, the

researcher's former institution, had approximately 11% and Kennesaw State University

had 10%. No participants were from the University of West Georgia and the College of

Coast Georgia, as no one was surveyed because the Institution Review Board (IRB)

required an unbelievable and extensive amount of criteria in order to conduct research on

their campuses. Nevertheless, participants from 27 of the 30 USG institutions responded.

Of the four types of institutions (see Figure 3 USG Percentage of Participants) in

the University System of Georgia, there are significantly more state colleges; therefore,

that may explain why 44% of the responses came from those who are employed in one of

the 12 state colleges. Advisors from comprehensive universities represent 23%, state

universities represent 20%, and 14% represents the participants from the four research

universities.

Figure 3. *USG Percentage of Participants*
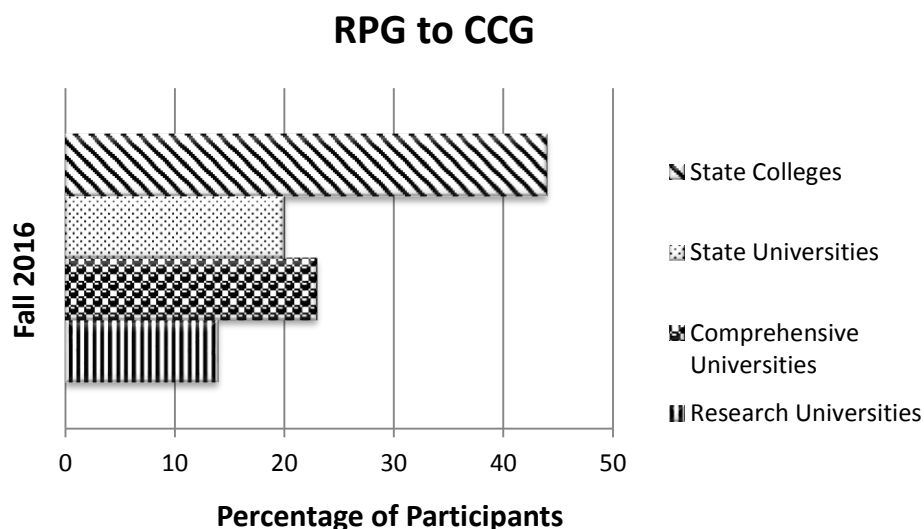
The 30 University System institutions consists of four Research Universities, four

Comprehensive Universities, ten State Universities and 12 State College. Of the 312

respondents, the average of the advisors who participated, based on the type of institution reflects 38% for Comprehensive Universities (see Figure 4 USG Average of Participants), 25% for Research Universities, 24% for State Colleges, and 13% for State Universities.

Figure 4. *USG Average of Participants*
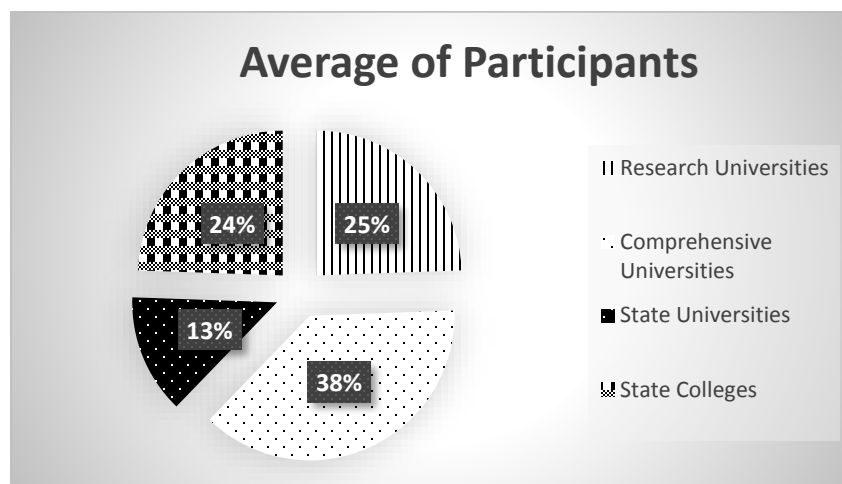
Question five on the survey asks participants to identify his/her gender (see Figure 5 in Appendix and Table 9 Participants' Gender) which resulted in the following: Of the 312 participants, 66% (n=200) self-identified as female, 27% (n=82) self-identified as male and 6% (n=19) preferred not to respond.

Table 9. *Participants Gender*

Select your Gender	% of Participants	Count
Male	27.24%	82
Female	66.45%	200
Transgender	0.00%	0
Prefer not to answer	6.31%	19
Total	**100.00%**	**301***

*11 participants elected not to respond to this question

The final section of Part I is under the topic of Academic Advisement as a Profession, which contains questions one and six. According to the participants who completed the questionnaire and based on Figure 6 Job Classification, 44% of the participants categorized themselves predominately as academic advisors while approximately 29% of the respondents were considered faculty, approximately 9.0% were administrative, approximately 8% are directors or coordinators, approximately 6% were staff employees or students and approximately 5% classified themselves as other.

Figure 6. *Job Classification*
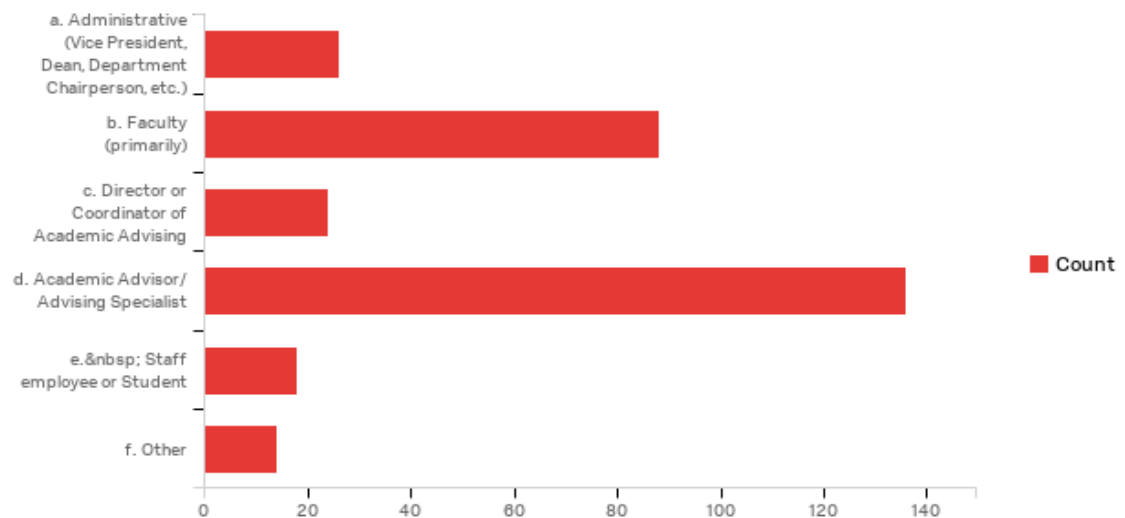
Of the 312 respondents to this question (99%), the mean represents the average years that the academic advisors (see Table 11 Duration of Time in the Appendix) have advised is nine years and three months. Therefore, the advisors that participated are not necessary new to the advising profession. The majority of the academic advisors have advised at least five years.

Questions three, four and seven are also under the topic of Academic Advisement as a Profession. The questions involved gaining information about what type of advisors does the institution use, explaining the structure of advisement and identifying the number of students' advisors are responsible for advising. The answers academic advisors gave to question 3 (see Figure 7 and Table 12 Type of Advisors in Appendix) identified that 55% (n=168) of the participants have a mixture of both professional and faculty advisors on their campuses, primarily professional advisors only are estimated at 14% (n=44), primarily faculty advisors are listed at 10% (n=31), all professional advisors are 9% (n=28), administrators, faculty and professional advisors are listed as 8% (n=23) for all faculty the participants listed 4% (n=11).

Table 13. *Advisement Structure*

Advisement Structure
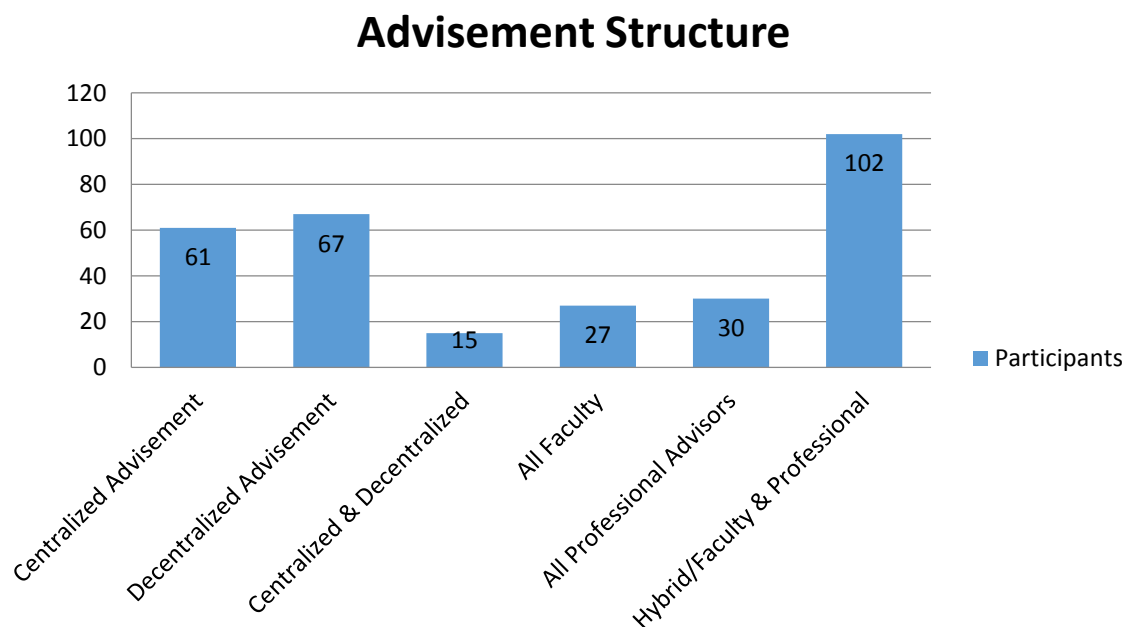
There were a total of 302 (97%; 10 participants did not comment) responses from academic advisors about the type of advisement structure at their institutions (See Table 13 Advisement Structure). Of the 302 participants 38% (n=102) of the advisors indicated that their campus uses a hybrid advisement structure, where both professional and faculty are involved in the advisement process. Question four was an open-ended question and advisors were able to express themselves by writing comments. The overall theme that emerged from the advisors' responses was that their administrators were moving more toward a centralized advisement structure, although most are currently using a decentralized advising model. Approximately 5% of the advisors' expressed the lack of structure, they are unsure what type of model or structure their campus is using, and how

unorganized advisement really is on their campuses. Question 4: What advising

structure does your institution employ? Comments from …Explain, if necessary.

- *"Complete Chaos. No, seriously though, each college does things slightly differently, and the Provost is currently attempting a restructuring to bring centralized advising within each college (but not university wide) under professional advisors."*

- *"There is no structure-whomever show at the door and at whatever time."*

- *"Professional advisement only for learning support students. Faculty are "supposed" to advise all other students. "*

As Table 13 Advisement Structure and comments from question four suggest, the

organization of academic advising models vary significantly across the 30 University

System of Georgia institutions. The usage of faculty, professional advisors, other staff

(residential hall and peer advisors) changes per campus. Understanding what model is

more effective can be a difficulty, lengthy and time-consuming process. Furthermore,

some structures/organization or the lack thereof of advisement on campuses can be

confusing and rather frustrating.

Table 14. *Total Advisees*

The number of students you are responsible for advising total	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Count
Estimation of FY16/17	0.00	6000.0	288.7	617.6	381533.3	312

Of the 312 respondents, the average number of advisees they have (see Table 14

Total Advisees) for an academic year was approximately 289 students.

Part II

Academic Advising and RPG

Part II contains the questions that were specifically related to academic advising

and retention, progression, and graduation (RPG). The two questions that probed

advisors were to rank the elements that contribute to the retention rate of college students.

Secondly, the advisors could list what they believed are key elements to increasing RPG.

Figure 8. *Retention Rates*
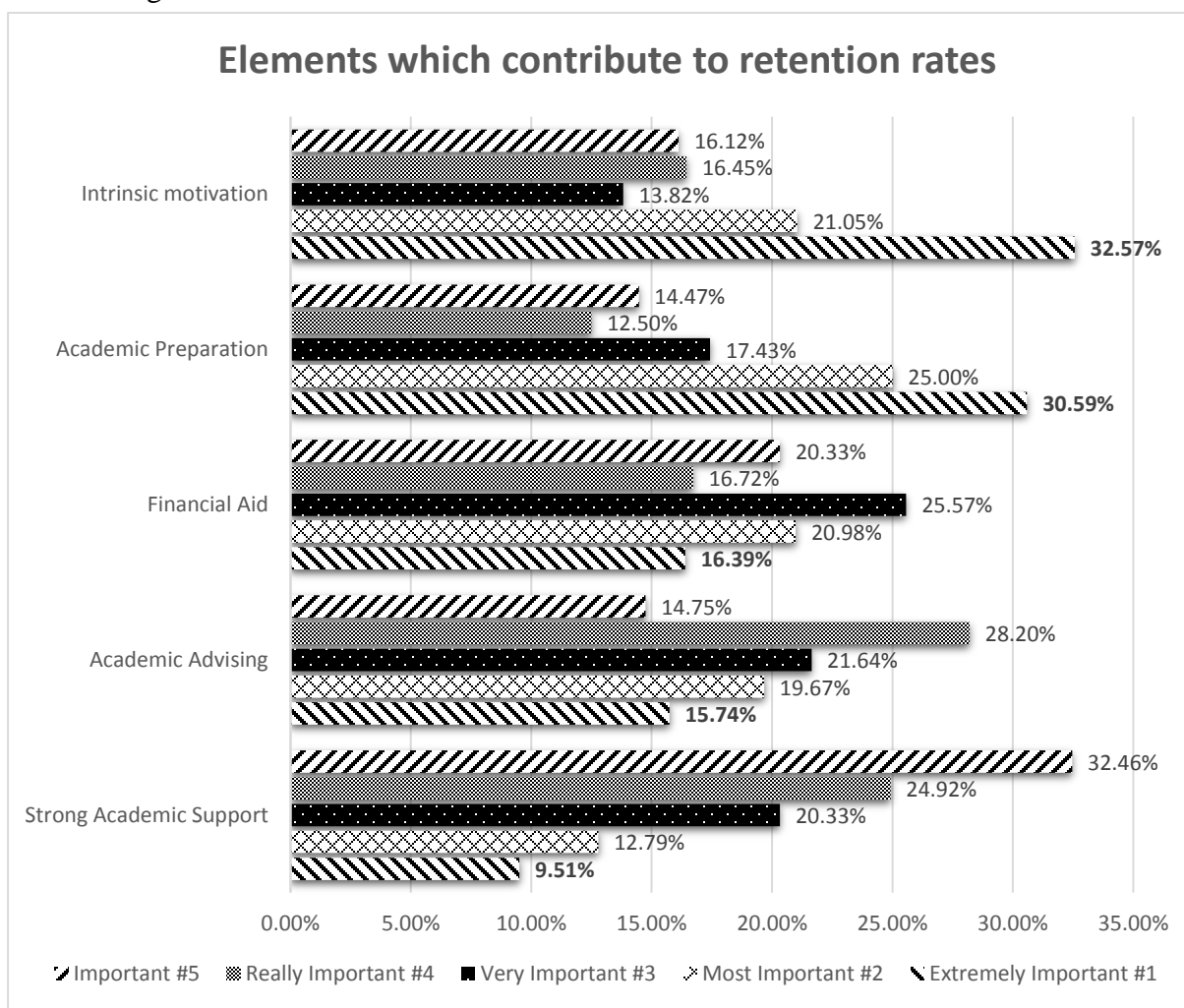
Interpretation for Question 8 (see Figure 8 and Table 15 Retention Rates in Appendix): 10% (n=29) of the participants ranked Strong academic support (tutoring and study sessions) as number one, extremely important; 13% (n=39) ranked it as number two most important; 20% (n=62) ranked it as number three very important; 25% (n=76) was ranked as number four really important and 32% (n=99) ranked it as number five, important.

Sixteen percent (n=48) of the participants ranked Academic advising (building relationship with faculty/staff) as number one; 20% (n=60) ranked it as number two; 22% (n=66) of the participants ranked it as number three; 28% (n=86) ranked it as number four; and 15% (n=45) ranked it as number five. 16% (n=50) of the participants ranked Financial aid (financing college) as number one; 21% (n=64) ranked it as number two; 26% (n=78) ranked it as number three; 17% (n=51) ranked it as number four; and 20% (n=62) ranked as number five. 31% (n=93) of the participants ranked Academic preparation (prepared for college) as number one; 25% (n=76) ranked it as number two; 17% (n=53) ranked it as number three; 16% (n=38) ranked it as number four; and 14% (n=44) ranked it as number five. 33% (n=99) of the participants ranked Intrinsic motivation (come to complete college) as number one; 21% (n=64) ranked it as number two; 14% (n=42) ranked it as number three; 16% (n=50) ranked it as number four; and 16% (n=49) ranked it as number five.

Figure 9. Increasing RPG

Keys to Increasing RPG

BUILD A STRONGER PROGRAM WITH THE GOAL OF COMPLETING COLLEGE
- 9.06%
- 18.12%
- 25.84%
- 23.49%
- 23.49%

CONNECT STUDENTS TO THE INSTITUTION
- 42.76%
- 25.59%
- 16.84%
- 10.77%
- 4.04%

IMPROVE HIGH SCHOOL CURRICULUM
- 13.76%
- 12.42%
- 10.07%
- 17.45%
- 46.31%

COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS TO IMPROVE STUDENT SUCCESS
- 12.46%
- 17.17%
- 29.63%
- 25.93%
- 14.81%

INCREASE THE AMOUNT OF FINANCIAL AID
- 20.88%
- 24.58%
- 18.52%
- 23.91%
- 12.12%

0.00% 5.00% 10.00% 15.00% 20.00% 25.00% 30.00% 35.00% 40.00% 45.00% 50.00%

Important #5   Really Important #4   Very Important #3   Most Important #2   Extremely Important #1

According to Figure 9 and Table 16 Increasing RPG (in Appendix), 12% (n=36) of the participants ranked Increasing financial aid (reducing the costs of attending college) as number one, extremely important; 24% (n=24) ranked it as number two, most important; 19% (n=55) ranked it as number three, very important; 25% (73) ranked it as number four, very important; and 21% (n=62) ranked it as number five, important. Fifteen percent (n=44) of the participants ranked Administrators' collaborative efforts (to improve success in the classroom) ranked as number one; 26% (n=77) ranked it as number two; 30% (n=88) ranked it as number three; 17% (n=51) ranked it as number four; and 12% (n=37) ranked it as number five.

Forty-six percent (n=138) ranked Improve high school curriculum as number one; 17% (n=52) ranked it as number two; 10% (n=30) ranked it as number three; 12% (n=37) ranked it as number four; and 14% (n=41) ranked it as number five. Four percent (n=12) of the participants ranked connecting students to the institution as number one; 11% (n=32) ranked it as number two; 17% (n=50) ranked it as number three; 26% (n=76) ranked it as number four; and 43% (n=127) ranked it as number five. Twenty-three percent (n=70) of the participants ranked stronger academic advising program as number one; also 23% (n=70) ranked it as number two; 26% (n=77) ranked it as number three; 18% (n=54) ranked it as number three; and 9% (n=27) ranked it as number five.

<div align="center">**Part III**</div>

Advisors and CCG Goals

Part III of the questionnaire title is Advisor's Perception of Meeting the CCG Goal and questions 10, 13 and 15 were used to ascertain their thoughts about who absorbs the responsibilities for increasing the graduation rate, whether they believe it is possible and how do they believe it could be carried out or not carried out. Question 10 reads as follows:

> By the year 2020, Complete College America (CCA) has projected that 60% of all new jobs in the United States will require some type of college education. As a part of the Complete College Georgia (CCG) initiative, Governor Deal has requested an increase of 20% in the graduation rate of USG institutions. What is the general likelihood of your institution accomplishing this goal?

Table 17. *Increasing Graduation Rates*

As a part of the Complete College Georgia (CCG) initiative, Governor Deal has requested an increase of 20% in the graduation rate of University System of Georgia Institutions.	% of Participants	Count
a. Very likely	15.61%	47
b. Likely	33.55%	101
c. Unsure	32.23%	97
d. Highly unlikely	5.98%	18
e. Unlikely	12.62%	38
Total	**100%**	**301***

*11 advisors did not respond

In reporting the results of this question, note that there is only a little over 1% difference (see Figure 10 Graduation Rates and Table 17 Increasing Graduation Rates) in those who selected that it is *likely* for their institution to meet the goal and the advisors who chose *unsure* (n=97) whether their institution can meet the increase in graduation. Nevertheless, 34% (n=101) believe that it is likely that the graduation rates will increase.

Figure 10. *Graduation Rates*
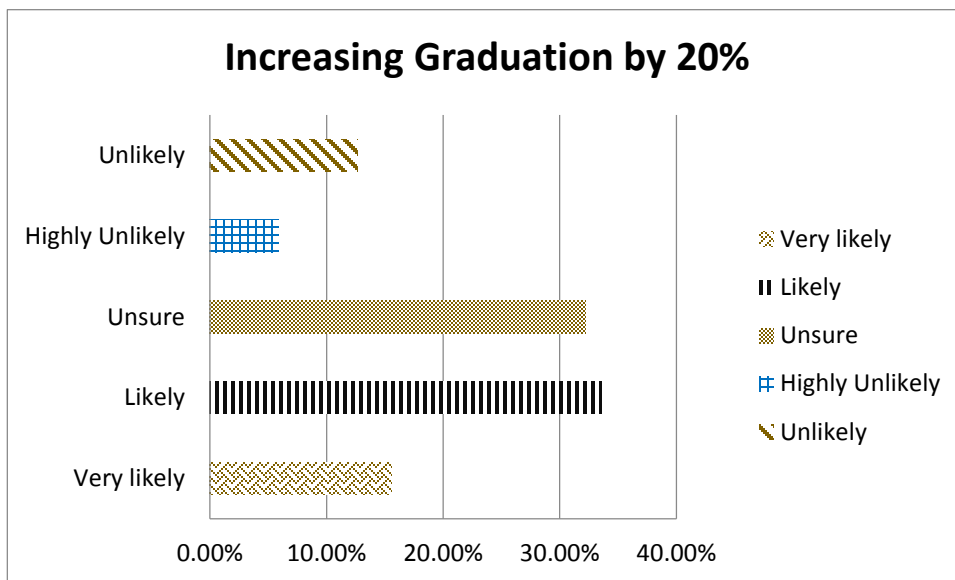
Question 13 of the survey gave advisors an opportunity to identify who they

believe would absorb the responsibilities of increasing graduation rates at their respective

institution. Generally academic advisors get assigned any new duties and responsibilities

when initiatives that involve retention, progression, or graduation are implemented.

Surprisingly, 55% (n=159) of academic advisors (see Figure 11 and Table 18 RPG/CCG

Job Responsibilities) believe that the job responsibilities of RPG and CCG will be

implemented by those who are in leadership, administration, faculty, professional

advisors and staff.

Table 18. *RPG/CCG Job Responsibilities*

Who has received the RPG/CCG responsibilities?	% of Participants	Count
a. The Presidents and Vice Presidents	10.65%	31
b. Directors and Coordinators	12.03%	35
c. Faculty who teach	6.19%	18
d. Academic advisors (Faculty /Staff)	16.49%	48
e. All of the above	54.64%	159
Total	**100.00%**	**291***

*number of advisors responded to question

Question 15 of the survey and the final question for this particular section reads: If you could make two changes at your institution to increase the graduation rate, what would you do? Overall, the answer that the 312 participants provided were categorized into two topics: Groups of people in higher education and student affairs representing the services aspects of higher education. Under the umbrella of higher education groups comments from the participants related to academic advisors, faculty, administrators, and students. Under the umbrella of student affairs comments related to financial aid, support services (such as advisement, tutoring, registration, etc.), academics and academic intervention. The researcher categorized every comment and tallied the responses for a total for that specific topic. When many advisors shared the same thought, the researcher recognized the similar thoughts as a theme.

Academic Advisors

There were approximately 40 responses that related to academic advisors' themes emerging from the participants' comments. Many of the participants indicated that the two changes they would make to increase the graduation rate at their institution would

begin with increasing the pay for academic advisors and establishing a tiered salary

system so that advisors would have some type of incentive to keep their jobs with the

flexibility to move up with higher pay. They believe that having a tiered system will

prevent the large turnover rate for the profession. Some expressed concerns about the

advisee load of having 300 to 400 students to advise in a particular semester. A couple of

comments that really stood out are:

- *"Give advisors more Banner access (for example, articulation of transfer course work when credits are articulated incorrectly, apply core classes when classes are not applied correctly)."*

- *"Advisors are trusted to provide students with curriculum information and provide graduation audits, but we are not trusted enough to know when a course is articulated incorrectly even when departmental approval is given, it still must go through the Registrar's office."*

Faculty

The participants had approximately 43 responses about faculty and several themes

emerged from the data. First, there seems to be a need to hire more faculty and increase

the interaction between students and the faculty. Many of the advisors believe that more

classes should be offered for students to have, which will involve hiring more faculty to

teach the classes. Since the majority of the advisors believe building relationships with

students are so important, they think that faculty members need to create different ways

they interact with students other than in the classroom. They want faculty more involved

even if it means holding study sessions and getting to know their students a little more

personally. Advisors believe this type of interaction helps with retention and progression.

Secondly, some of the participants believe that faculty should be released from the

burden of advisement and focus specifically on teaching. Historically, faculty were the

only individuals in higher education who advised students for classes. When the academic advising process became complex with idiosyncrasies, such as understanding scores for placing students in different levels of learning support classes, knowing the specifics in the catalog when students are placed on academic probation, developing an academic intervention plan, etc. This type of knowledge is generally not related to the faculty field of study and trying to do the tasks of an academic advisor can become tedious and laborious. The final theme that emerged is the need to have faculty that are diverse (low ability, non-traditional, first year students) and competent with working with all types of students. Advisors believe that faculty need to vary their teaching style to reach more students. Some of the access institutions (who serve first generation students and students of low economic status) accept students who dropped out of high school and earned a GED (General Education Diploma), and received tutoring to pass the entrance test for college. These students come to college significantly underprepared for a rigorous academic semester of college and do not generally learn well without the faculty spending time explaining material multiple times. Two direct comments are:

- *"I would have classes available to first year with first year students with faculty that is motivated and captivating. Many of the faculty focus on the student they want instead of the students we have."*

- *Require faculty advisors to more consistently engage with students' progress and expectations, beyond simply reviewing scheduling plans."*

Administrators

In terms of making two changes at the participants' institution to increase the graduation rate, administrators received close to 60 comments, where advisors shared the same or similar thoughts and ideas; therefore, the researcher recognized the similar thoughts from the data as an emerging theme. The data reveals that many advisors are

concerned about how the administrators (VP's, deans, directors, etc.,) at their institution neglect to keep them informed of program, curriculum and catalog changes that directly affect the advising process. They believe communication between all units, especially with professional and faculty advisors need to be improved. The advisors' comments suggest that there needs to be a creation of a first year college or first year experience program to assist with nurturing this group and adding to the retention rates. The final theme that emerged from similar responses involves making the core more common among majors so that there is less pressure to choose a program of study right away. There were some advisors who made unique responses that were addressed for administrators and the Governor:

- *"Hire better faculty. It's the most important thing a university or college does. All other good things flow from this first step. Without it, we're doomed to failure."*

- *"The changes really need to be made in the Governor's office, putting more money into education, not just at the level of buildings but at the level of student financial support and program support."*

- *"Administrators (department chairs, deans, etc.) need to understand the correlation between the number of students they have versus how many seats/sections/time of day are being offered to their students. Often time students get held back because of course rotations or because there aren't enough seats."*

Students

The participants provided 45 comments and two distinct themes emerged from the responses. One relates to how academically underprepared students are coming to college and the other relates to student lack of motivation to attend college. A majority of the advisors support the notion that accepting students who are underprepared for college contributes to lower retention and graduation rates. Some advisors believed that

institutions should actually decrease the number of students who are admitted to the

learning support program. Hence, advisors believed the graduation rate would increase if

students were more enthused to attend college:

- *"Sometimes, it's not the professor or advisors, but the students themselves not being motivated to be successful."*

- *"Students must be better prepared and motivated for college."*

- *"The really low performers are not going to be successful no matter how many resources you apply, mostly because they are not motivated to be in college. Most of the low performers can do the work, if they choose to."*

Support Services

  Financial Aid. The participants made 38 responses about financial aid and the

most overwhelming themes that emerged were the strong support and empathy for the

amount of funds it takes students to complete college. Therefore, advisors provided

suggestions they believe would help ease the pain of leaving college in so much debt.

Other advisors provided concerns about students getting approved for financial aid and

not attending classes and the enormous overload of work put on the financial aid

department.

- *"I would make the first two years of college significantly affordable. The first two years would be practically free."*

- *"We need to help students navigate the financial aspect of college better and we need to make sure we retain them from semester to semester by forging better relationships with advisors."*

- *"The changes really need to be made in the Governor's office, putting more money into education, not just at the level of building but at the level of students."*

Admission /Advisement /Tutoring /Registration. The participants made 68 responses regarding some type of support services specially admission standards, advisement structure, tutorial and remedial services and/or the registration process. Of the comments the advisors made, 25% indicated there should be an increase in admission standards or raise admission requirements in an effort to recruit quality and academically prepared students and this will help to increase the graduation rates at their institutions. The promotion of centralized advisement, an increase the tutorial staff, and mandating better study habits rated as approximately 15% of the advisors' remarks. Unique comments included:

- *"I would require them to see first-hand the benefits of a college diploma as opposed to someone without a degree trying to work in the same field that the student is interested in studying. I would try to instill some sort of incentive for personal responsibility and work ethic, so as to motivate the students to continue forward in earning their degree and make them feel that their hard work is not going unnoticed. "*

- *"If there was a way to increase the amount of advising sessions or amount of contact with each student to help in developing a relationship and being able to be proactive rather than reactive when indicators of poor academic progress are occurring, that would be helpful…however, that would also require more time, or new solutions to group advise more often so that we can increase the amount of one-on-one time we have for students…or it would require a decreased advising load. More programing offered through the advising center to connect with the students."*

Academics and Academic Intervention. There were 35 responses regarding academics and academic intervention and 30% (n=11) of the advisors support the notion that the core curriculum needs to be revised to satisfy requirements at all USG institutions. Transparency should exist in programs especially in offering courses more frequently instead of once a year. Approximately 15% of academic advisors expressed

concern about a need for preparatory courses for students who are weak in academics.

Relevant comments include:

- *Treat academic like big-time athletics: Imagine the outrage around the state if Coach Nick Saban (University of Alabama) were told he had to letter more players; that he had to nurture and retain players who couldn't compete at the intercollegiate level; that if a student has dream of playing Quarterback for Alabama, it's the coach responsibility to make it happen, even if the kid can't play a lick…that's what you are asking college faculty to do.* (paraphrased)

- *"Until real pressure is put on K-12 to turn out a better product, all initiatives to boost college graduation can only succeed if we continue to water down the degree."*

- *I would love to see student child care available on campus."*

Still under Part III of the questionnaire, the subtopic titled, Advisor's Perception of Meeting the CCG Goal is where questions 11, 12, and 14 are listed. Question 11 reads: Regardless of your response in item 8, please briefly list one main reason you believe your institution will reach or get close to this goal and one main reason you believe your institution will struggle to reach this goal. Academic advisors were very open and provided approximately 217 responses to why they believe their institution will reach or get close to meeting the mandatory 20% increase in the graduation rate by the year 2020. Of the 217 responses 21% (n=46) of those pertained specifically to crediting advisors (both faculty and professional) or advisement centers for having a direct impact on maintaining a high graduation rate. However, in approximately 50% (n=108) of the responses, advisors believe their institution will reach this goal due to collaborative campus efforts, new incentives or practices and/or the implementation of programs.

In their responses, programs such as, $(g2)^2$ which is *Get to Graduation in Two Years*; 4Y4U which is *Four Years For You*; 15 to Finish which encourages students to

take 15 or more hours a semester to complete college and graduate on time; Reverse

Transfer, etc. where students who earn 30 hours transfer to another institution, but

forward credits to the former institution to graduate. These programs were developed to

demonstrate transparency of programs, and provided an easier understandable road map

from the beginning of college through graduation. Unique comments from the section

include: (Question: List one main reason your institution will reach or get close to having

a 20% increase in the graduation rate).

- *"We have strong leaders and academic advisors who work well with our students.
  We establish great relationships with our students and want to see them succeed.
  My main focus as well as the other advisors, is to see them from beginning to the
  end. My favorite part is filling out the graduation applications with students. Just
  to see the smile on their faces—that right there is what will make us reach our
  goal."*

- *"We have strong leadership at the top with a very active and involved president."*

The second part of question 11 asks for the advisors to identify one main reason

they believe their institution will struggle to reach this goal (of 20% increase in

graduation rate by the year 2020). Academic advisors provided approximately 182

responses and of those 6% (n≈11) believe that the curriculum and leadership at their

institution will cause their institution to struggle meeting the graduation mandate. The

advisors' comments revealed that 38% of them believe that, at their institution, admission

standards are too low and students are inadequately prepared for college level work.

Furthermore, 19% of advisors believe the struggle rests in the financial aspects of higher

education, whether it be not enough funding for the institution or students just do not

have the funds to pay for college. Some unique comments that express why the advisors

believe there will be a struggle were:

- *"We continue to water down the curriculum and lower standards so that more students will get an increasingly worthless piece of paper. By 2050, 60% of all new jobs will require a Master's Degree--- because most baccalaureate degrees will be worthless."*

- *"We will struggle because I don't see any results of trying to improve academic success here. Meaning, we have a committee working on it, but nobody ever asks the advisors (people who work with students' day in and day out) their opinions."*

- *"One main reason we may struggle to reach this goal—which is the logical flaw of most K-12 and College policy discussions—is that we are NOT in control of our students and the decisions that they make. Students are not mindless balls of clay that can be shaped any way we desire…they are people with their own issues, motivations, and decision-making capabilities. We can't control them, and we shouldn't try. We know some will drop out, flunk out, or just leave due to circumstances beyond their control. We know that odds are against some from the start based on their academic backgrounds or unrealistic expectations of college life. We know some will leave because they never develop the maturity of college-level study skills they need to succeed. But we don't/can't/won't pre-select those who have a 95% chance of success with us to make our graduation rates look good. We will serve and grow everyone who walks through the doors, even those—perhaps, especially those –who don't finish with us."*

Question 12 reads: Being cognizant and aware of the Governor's CCG initiative (to increase the graduation rate), by the year 2020; how does this impact the way you plan to advise students? Please briefly describe two approaches your institution has changed or will change in academic advising as it relates to Complete College Georgia. Advisors provided approximately 239 responses to this question and the comments varied from institutions starting to use data or predictive analytics in advising to obtaining new software such as EAB-Student Success Collaborative to assist in the advising process to no change at all.

Approximately 25% (n=60) advisors believe that that current advisement process is effective and students are responding well. Nevertheless, two common themes emerged from academic advisors' comments. Approximately 50% (n=120) believe

that as a result of the recent attention on graduation, new programs and incentives to

graduate have been a change in the way they advise students while, approximately

20% says the Governor's initiatives have had no impact in the way that they advise

their advisees and the remaining answers varied and totaled less than 20%. Academic

advisors who provided unique reactions to how does this impact the way they plan to

advise students include:

- *"Our institution is in the process of "tightening academic advising" by decreasing advisor caseloads and increasing the frequency of contact and interaction between advisors and their students. More advisors are being hired across the university, and an "exploratory center" is being developed where undeclared student will be able to meet with an advisor by meta-major so they may explore similar majors in different fields."*

- *"WARNING AND DANGER!!! I fear that CCG strongly pressures faculty to create grade inflation by either reducing the course requirements below normal standards within the academy or my giving easy grades (extra credit or whatever it takes to increase their success rate). One change that our institution is considering is to create an FYE program which includes a mandatory extended orientation where the processional advisors will play a major role."*

- *"Regardless of the Governor's initiative, my goal is to help students graduate. That's not going to change. I will encourage students to create realistic goals. I will also encourage students to take advantage of the resources available to them on campus (counseling, career center, tutoring, math lab, etc.)."*

- *"I help my students by ignoring the Governor and his mandates as much as I can."*

Question 14 reads: What influence or difference can an academic advisor make

in accomplishing the CCG initiative to increase the graduation rates? (In a couple of

sentences). Academic advisors provided 250 responses and again, the responses varied

from advisors believing that they should provide full support for students to help assure

success to some advisors thinking that failure is a characteristic that is totally controlled

by the students. Of all of the replies, 48% (n=120) indicated the importance of

establishing a relationship with the students and helping them to make a connection to the

institution. Another influence that was identified by 46% (n=115) of the advisors'

comments related to the degree completion and helping students to set graduation as their

goal by providing clear program expectations. A small percentage of the comments

referred to students' inability to academically perform on a college level. Some of the

feedback from question 14 includes:

- *"I think advisors can help influence CCG by establishing strong relationships with students, creating 2,3,4 year plans each semester for how close they are to graduation, being able to reach our students effectively, then communicating with them efficiently."*

- *"Academic advising can only do so much. What is really needed is a curriculum that recognizers the sad reality that far too many college students are woefully underprepared. Daycare would help. Adequate state funding would help. An understanding of poverty and the special needs of the children of poverty would help. Counselors to provide some EMOTIONAL solace would help."*

- *"In our area, we view academic advising as the oil that keeps the administration, faculty, and students motivated towards graduation."*

Part IV

Advisors on System Funding Institutions

The final section of the questionnaire is Part IV which provides advisors an

opportunity to voice their opinion on System Funding Institutions. This topic consists of

questions 16, 17 and 18. Question 16 reads: To reach the 20% increase in graduation by

the year 2020, what would you say your institution needs to accomplish the goal outlined

by Governor Deal? Academic advisors were asked to limit their responses to two

sentences and as a result, there were 203 responses to this question. Of the participants,

25% (n=51) supported that in order to reach a 20% increase in the graduation rate, the

solution is related to funding; whether it involves giving students more money for financial aid, providing the institution with more funding on which to operate or hire more faculty, advisors or staff. Of the advisors' responses, 15% (n=30) believed that the graduation rate could increase 20% by the year 2020, if their institution would raise the admission standards or accept students who are academically prepared for college. Thirteen percent listed that the enhancement or academic advisement or making advising a major focus will definitely result in a 20% increase in the graduation rate at their institution. Twelve percent of the advisors indicated that if their institutions' enrollment increased and if the resources at the institution offered increased, then they will experience a graduation increase. Ten percent of the advisors believed that it is the leadership that is prohibiting an increase in the graduation rate, such as lack of consistency with courses and rules from the Board of Regents and not enough buy-in from the administration or faculty to take increasing the graduation rate seriously and a small percentage of the advisors replied to the question by saying they have no idea what to do to increase the increase the graduation rate. Interesting comments include:

- *"Vote out Governor Deal, and reduce the power of the Board of Regents. Let the institutions decide for themselves which policies best meet the needs of their student bodies."*

- *"Improve communication. Find the magic bullet to give students the ability to better pull themselves up by their bootstraps and keep on plugging along."*

- *"The Governor and his cronies need to listen to the proles who toil in the groves of academe."*

Question 17 reads: There has been discussion of a shift in the funding of Georgia public colleges and universities institutions. The amount of funding that institutions received will be shifted from receiving funds for enrollment to performance-base. In other words,

institutions will receive state funds based on the number of students who graduate, not how many are enrolled. How likely is it that this change will help institutions increase the graduation rate?

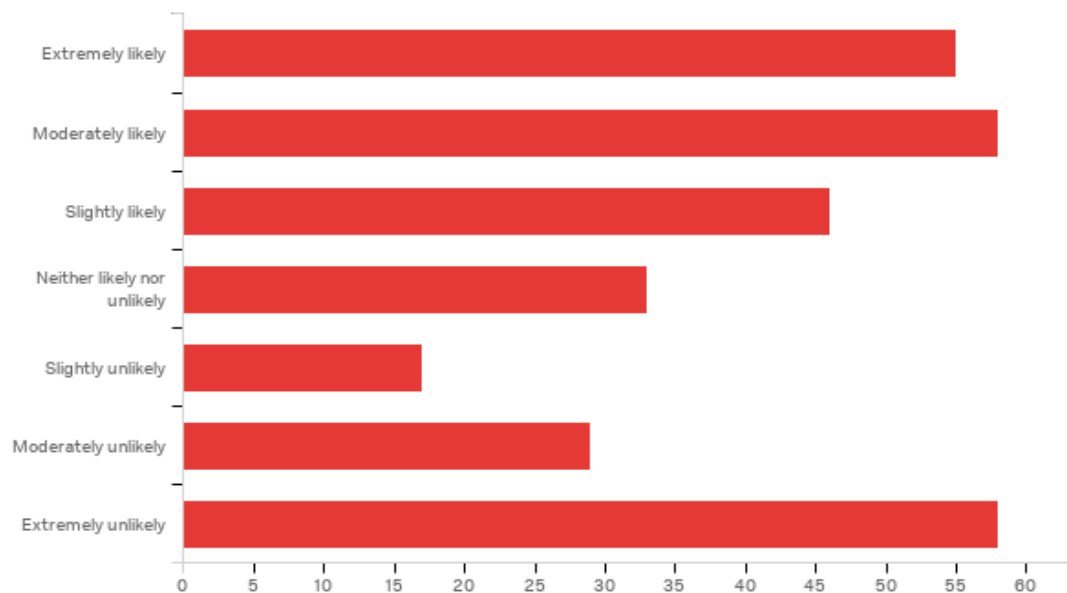Table 19. *Enrollment vs Performance Base Funding*

Institutions will receive state funds based on the number of students who graduate, not how many are enrolled. How likely is it that this change will help institutions increase the graduation rate?	Percentage	Count
Extremely likely	18.58%	55
Moderately likely	19.59%	58
Slightly likely	15.54%	46
Neither likely nor unlikely	11.15%	33
Slightly unlikely	5.74%	17
Moderately unlikely	9.80%	29
Extremely unlikely	19.59%	58
Total	**100.00%**	**296***

*16 participants elected not to answer this question

Apparently question 17 merits discussion because the answer is split (see Figure 11 and Table 19 Enrollment vs Performance-Base Funding. Twenty percent (n=58) of academic advisors believe that it is moderately likely if institutions receive state funds based on the number of student who graduate as opposed to the enrollment rate it would increase the graduate rate at their institutions and 20% (n=58) believe that it is extremely unlikely that it will have an increase on the graduate rate. Interestingly, the difference in extremely likely and moderately likely is only three academic advisors. The total of all of

the likely(s) (extremely, moderately, and slightly total 159 while the total of the unlikely

(slightly, moderately, extremely) total 104. Thirty-three academic advisors selected

neither likely nor unlikely.

Figure 12. *Enrollment vs Performance Base Funding*

Question 18 refers directly to question 17, by probing advisors to explain why or why not

they believe performance-based state funding would be better than enrollment-base.

Some of the unique responses of the advisors who answered why the support

performance-based funding include:

- *"I believe these changes would allow colleges to see that it's not about enrollment rates, but about success rates. I think too much emphasis is on pushing everyone through the system and providing a disadvantage to the students."*

- *"This will force institutions to admit a higher caliber of student who will be most likely to graduate."*

- *"I feel that we place so much emphasis on our enrollment numbers that we are willing to accept students who are not academically prepared to meet the rigor we expect of them in their classes. Either lower the standards in the classroom, or increase the standards for admissions. Personally, I would rather see the*

standards in admissions rose, which will only happen if we shift this focus from enrollment to graduation."

The following comments are from academic advisors who answered why they do not support performance-based funding:

- *"Administrators and faculty aren't stupid: If funding comes from passing out diplomas, then worthless pieces of sheepskin will be passed out in abundance."*

- *"This is bullshit! Institutions will just be passing people to get $. That's not teaching. It's just padding numbers. It's TERRIBLE!"*

- *"Can you say grade inflation? The same ideas have been tried in No Child Left Behind and more recently Race to Top, which also seems to suffer from a serious case of geographical disorientation (The race is really to the bottom)."*

There were 238 replies to question 18 and of the responses, an overwhelmingly 61% (n=145)of the advisors wrote comments explaining why they do "not" support their institution receiving state funds based on performance outcomes as opposed to enrollment. While 22% (n=52) of the advisors' responses support or see the benefit of performance-base funding at their institution.

Chapter Summary

The results from the questionnaire indicated that of the 30 USG institutions, the researcher was able to obtain the opinion of 312 academic advisors from 27 of the institutions. The questionnaire addressed the overarching question of how academic advisors plan to approach the Governor's mandate to increase the graduation rate by 20% and the researcher analyzed the data from the questionnaire to ascertain academic advisors' feedback to the initiatives and especially to the graduation rate increase. The instrument contained 18 questions that consisted of Parts I through IV.

Of the participants over 16% (n=48) are classified as academic advisors in their job titles; however, directors, coordinators, faculty, deans, vice presidents and others who

have advisement duties participated in the survey as well. The data shows that more

females than males participated in the study and the most common type of advisement

structure is the hybrid, which indicates that both faculty and professional advisors are

involved in the advisement process on their campuses. The average number of advisees

an advisor has is approximately 300 per semester. Data show that academic advisors

believed students must have intrinsic motivation to come to college with the desire to

want to learn and complete college. In determining the keys to retention, progression and

graduation, advisors ranked the need to improve high school curriculum (so that students

are better prepared for college) as an extremely important element in being successful in

college. Another key advisors' view as important is the need for the institution to build a

stronger program with the goal of providing necessary resources for students to complete

college.

For one of the open-ended questions, the data reflects that academic advisors

believe that it is likely at their respective institution to experience a 20% graduation rate

increase by the year 2020; however, there was a 1% difference in the number of advisors

who selected unsure that their institution would be able to satisfy the mandate as dictated

by the Governor's office. Although advisement is considered an integral part of higher

education, the data shows that advisors believed that the responsibilities of RPG and

CCGshould be distributed among everyone involved in higher education. Academic

advisors acknowledged the importance and gave credit to the field of academic advising

(for both professional and faculty); however, in terms of identifying one main reason why

their campuses will reach the 20% increase in graduation rates, the advisors believed it

will be due to collaborative campus efforts and new incentives or programs that promote

student success and college completion. On the contrary, the data reveal that advisors

believe their campuses will struggle meeting the goal of a graduation increase because

admission standards are too low and students who are coming to college are inadequately

prepared for college. Although the Governor has established mandates to increase the

graduation rate for institutions in the University System of Georgia, the data reveals that

20% of academic advisors believe that the Governor's initiatives have had no impact on

the way they advise their students because they believed the concern of graduating more

students coincides and parallel the goals of academic advising. They supported and

embraced that the recent awareness on graduation, incentives to graduate on time and

new programs, have changed advisement as a hold because it has put more attention on

the institution to address issues that may prohibit or delay the retention, progression, or

graduation process.

Moreover, the data reveals that advisors believed that the solution to increase the

graduation rate is related to funding, whether it involves giving students more money to

help finance their college education or providing the institution with more funding on

which to operate or hire more faculty, advisors or support staff. Intriguingly, the results

are split in half with some advisors supporting that it is moderately likely that institutions

should receive state funds based on the students who graduate as opposed to the number

of students who enroll in college. Interestingly, the exact same number of advisors

selected that it is extremely unlikely that institutions should receive state funds for

performance-based as opposed to enrollment-based.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter provides an overview of this research project as the researcher wants to put emphasis on Retention, Progression, Graduation (RPG) and Complete College Georgia (CCG) from an academic advisor's perspective. Although Governor Deal had mandated a 20% increase in graduation rates at the 30 University System of Georgia institutions, the primary responsibility to carry this out lies with the leadership at the Board of Regents and the administrators at the institutions. Therefore, Complete College Georgia encompasses the essence of how a university system can construct, embrace, and mandate initiatives, and assign the task and responsibilities to others without getting the opinion or buy-in from those who will be responsible for the work. Both faculty and professional academic advisors who work directly with students carry out duties that subscribe to student success and who generally cultivate and foster the developmental progression of college students with the hopes of producing a college graduate. RPG and CCG initiatives are equivalent to the goals of academic advising.

The researcher knows that academic advisors generally have a limited voice in establishing policy or procedures in higher education; however, they are expected to carry out tasks and responsibilities whether they fully understand or support the need for change. It would be advantageous for the institution to include advisors in the conversations and decision making process, especially when it pertains to retaining students or increasing the graduation rate. Moreover, the ambitions, objectives, and purposes of RPG and those of academic advising are parallel, which can give academic advisors an advantage in being valuable critics and resources of what RPG and CCG

should look like to an institution. This is one reason why the researcher believes advisors should have been a part of establishing initiatives that will have a direct impact on increasing the progression and graduation of students. Since academic advisors work directly with students, they are aware of the issues, challenges, and obstacles that students face in terms of matriculating through college and graduating. Had the Governor met with, or even surveyed, academic advisors in the USG to get their opinion as to what it would take for graduation rates to increase, then his assessment and approach may be different. The quintessence of this research project is to give academic advisors a voice and an opportunity to react to the CCG initiatives.

Summary of the Study

Although one purpose for the study was to analyze data that represents the academic advisors' discernment of what impact, if any, the Governor's mandate to increase the graduation rate has had on how academic advisors advise students. Another, purpose was to ascertain academic advisors' perception and implications of performance-based funding from the state as opposed to enrollment-based funding, and what type of impact that change would have on the graduation rate at their respective institutions. The researcher analyzed, calculated, and assessed the characteristics of the data for frequencies in advisors' responses of the CCG initiatives and their opinions of whether their institution has the ability to increase graduation rates by 20% by the year 2020. The researcher administered a descriptive survey that contained 18 questions--six of which were open-ended. The survey was disseminated to academic advisors employed in one of the 30 University of Georgia institutions of higher education.

The researcher used a descriptive approach, and developed meticulous and precise open-ended questions for advisors to answer in order to provide an opportunity to voice their opinions as opposed to participating in a Likert scale. For example, in responding to some of the open-ended questions, advisors had to describe the advisement structure, explain why they believed their institution would and perhaps would not meet the Governor's mandate to increase graduation rate. They had to explain how their advising approach may change as a result of Complete College Georgia and what influence or difference can an academic advisor make in accomplishing the CCG initiative to increase the graduation rates. However, by having advisors respond to the open-ended questions, the researcher was able to accurately comprehend and almost see their institution through the lens of the advisor. The academic advisors openly expressed thoughts of policies and procedures, feelings of helping students to connect to their institutions, and issues they face in higher education that might prevent the graduation rate from increasing.

Research Questions

Throughout this study the researcher's primary intent was to address the overarching question of how academic advisors plan to approach the Governor's mandate to increase the graduation rate by 20% at their respective institutions in the next few years. The types of responses from the advisors who participated in the study provided an overall picture of what RPG, CCG, and the advising culture is like at their institution.

RQ$_1$: What factors influence the retention rate of college students?

RQ$_2$: What is the perceived integral processes to increasing the retention, progression, and graduation rates?

RQ$_3$:   What differences exist in the process of advising students since Governor Deal's

initiative to increase graduation rates?

RQ$_4$:   What differences exists among advisors' perceptions in accomplishing the CCG

Initiative goals?

RQ$_5$:   What do participants suggest to increase the graduation rate of students?

RQ$_6$:   What perspectives do the participants have of performance-based funding (as

opposed to enrollment-base funding) and its impact on graduation rates?

Analysis of Findings

Analysis of the research findings will be presented in order of the research

questions.

Contributions to Retention

 Research question 1 asked: Which elements most contribute to the retention rate of

college students? According to the advisors' responses, the two main elements that

contribute to the retention rate at any institution are academic preparation and intrinsic

motivation, which are both elements that academic advisors ranked high. The advisors

selected "coming to college academically prepared" and ranked it in the 50th percentile.

Also, advisors believed that "having an intrinsic motivation to learn" is important and

ranked it in the 50th percentile as well. Furthermore, in the open-ended question where

advisors had an opportunity to write responses that explained why they believed their

institution will struggle meeting the graduation mandate, over 80 comments

(approximately 40%) of the advisors revealed that their institution's admission standards

were too low, meaning students were academically unprepared for college level work. In

essence, advisors believe students should come to college academically prepared to learn

and study, and this might require raising academic standards for admission so they attract a more qualified student.

Also, advisors know that students who come to college with the intrinsic motivation to learn will generally stay and complete college. The academic advisors' responses could be a direct reflection or criticism of the K-12 school system's curriculum or inability to adequately prepare students to do college level work upon graduation from the P-12 system. Yet another hypothesis that can be derived from the comments is that the students who are in college now are a product of former President Bush's *"No Child Left Behind Act"* of 2001. Under the umbrella of that initiative, educators and leaders in the K-12 school system "felt" pressured to push students forward to meet a graduation mandate or to feed into the *"No Child Left Behind Act"*. Therefore, based on the advisors' answers, the researcher concluded that academic preparation and intrinsic motivation are two elements that are critically related to the retention rate at their institutions.

Processes to Increase Retention

Research question 2 asked: What are the perceived integral processes to increasing the retention, progression, and graduation rates? In a Likert scale that ranked responses from extremely important to important (highest to not as high), approximately 46% (n=138) of the advisors ranked improve high school curriculum, and approximately 43% (n=127) ranked the importance of connecting students to the university as the two highest ranking variables (extremely important). Other variables, such as having transparent programs where classes are mapped out and offered the semesters that have been identified make it easier for students to understand and obtain the goal of completing college. Creating

collaborative relationships within the institution, and among administrators, faculty, staff

and units such as academic affairs and student affairs ranked as really important

elements. Surprisingly, yet understandably, the participants' responses to research

question one (Which elements most contribute to the retention rate of college students?)

is a direct correlation to their reaction to research question two (What are the perceived

integral processes to increasing the retention, progression, and graduation rates?). In

research question one, approximately 50% of the advisors identified the two main

elements that contributed to the retention rates, which are academic preparation and

intrinsic motivation. In other words, students who are inadequately prepared for college

and lack intrinsic motivation to learn will not stay in college. Research question two

shows that advisors believe that high schools need to improve the curriculum. In other

words, students who are not getting the knowledge from their high school curriculum and

teaching, then they will be inadequately prepared for college. The results of the answers

in questions one and two are synonymous and they connect. Over half of the advisors

that participated in the survey believe the high school curriculum needs to improve so

that students can come to college more academically prepared.

Advisement Changes Related to CCG

The third research question asked: How has student advisement changed or not

changed as a result of the Governor's CCG initiative to increase the graduation rate, by

the year 2020; how does this impact the way you plan to advise students? Over 50% of

advisors responded by indicating that they favor and support the recent attention that has

been placed on graduation with new programs and incentives to graduate. Establishing

ways to promote completing college on time and offering incentives, such as waiving the

graduation fee, has made a positive impact on the way academic advisors advise students.

Advisors believed that when a student graduates, it is a representation of success as an

advisor. Witnessing this educational accomplishment is similar to the feeling of a

professor who observed and fostered a college student to become a college graduate. Of

all the academic advisors, 20% (n=48) of them indicated that the Governor's initiative

has had no impact on the way that they advise their students. As a matter of fact,

approximately 10% (n=24) of the advisors expressed that they are trying to ignore the

Governor's mandate and continue to advise the way they have always advised their

students. In the written responses, approximately 10% (n=24) of the faculty advisors

have indicated that the Governor is putting pressure on them to create grade inflation by

reducing the course requirements below normal standards or issuing easy grades in an

effort to increase the graduation rate. These advisors are concerned that this mandate

could result in or be similar to the *No Child Left Behind* initiative. As the researcher

noted the comments of both faculty and professional advisors, a breakdown of the

advisors' responses demonstrated openness about the topic and willingness to share their

professional opinion with-in the advising realm. Academic advisors' responses indicated

that they enjoy the positive attention and incentives the administration has given to the

students to not only come to college, but to complete college on time. Interestingly, 5%

of the professional advisors' reactions have been to rebel against the Governor by not

following any of his initiatives, but to continue advisement as they have known it.

Furthermore, 15% (n=36) of the faculty advisors accused the Governor of not showing

respect for the educational process; instead, simply wanting students to graduate with or

without an education.

Accomplishing CCG Initiatives

The fourth research question asked: What differences exists among advisors'

perceptions in accomplishing the CCG Initiative goals? The results of the research

showed that the average academic advisor who participated in the study has

approximately 288 students who they advise in a given semester and the average duration

the advisors have served in an advising role is approximately nine years and three

months. Two themes emerged from an open-ended question that probed advisors to

identify any influence and difference that an academic advisor makes in accomplishing

CCG goals. Approximately, 28% (n=67) of the written responses indicated the

importance of someone at the institution establishing a relationship with students and

helping them to connect to the institution will insure students will stay in college and will

more than likely complete college. Approximately 35% (n=83) of the written responses

referred to institutions addressing curriculum issues and having transparent program such

as maps that demonstrate to students the simplicity of degree completion. Of the

advisors' written comments 10% (n=24) support the notion that students are ultimately

responsible for their own actions, and that CCG goals will not be met if students are

unable to endure personal problems that can interfere with college, have an insufficient

desire to learn, and will not academically perform satisfactorily in college level courses.

Although the number of responses were close (120 and115 responses), the exploration of

this question implies that academic advisors believe that the humanistic component

(forming of a relationship) with academic advisors or someone at the institution makes

graduation more achievable and, in turn, aid in meeting CCG goals.

Changes to Increase RPG

Research question number five asked: What are the most recommended changes the participants suggest to increase the retention, progression and graduation rate of students? The top three variables that advisors believe will increase the graduation rate are related to financial allocations, administration/leadership approach, and academically prepared students. Multiple responses that the participants provided support that these variables are changes they promote and believe will increase the graduation rate at their institutions. Financial allocation involves hiring more professional academic advisors and increasing their salaries. Also, some mentioned reducing the advisee load to assure they do not feel rushed and adequate time is spent with each student guiding them toward graduation. By hiring more faculty who are passionate and enthusiastic about teaching students. Based on the written comments, 16% (n=38) of the academic advisors believe faculty can make a significant difference in the retention rates because they have more contact with students and have more flexibility with the teaching/learning experience students have. Also under the umbrella of financial allocations, advisors revealed that institutions need to reduce the costs of attendance for students, but increase the funds needed for additional math and science services, such as tutoring for students.

Secondly, in 10% (n=24) of the written responses, advisors maintained that there is somewhat of a disconnect in the leadership at some of the institutions. Advisors comments revealed that more students will graduate when units, departments, and divisions are collaboratively approaching goals. If Academic Affairs embraces a new initiative, Student Affairs should adopt that same goal, but it could be demonstrated using different activities. The written responses expressed by advisors show that 15% (n=36)

have a concern about the inevitable low achieving students' admittance into college. A combination of faculty and staff advisors think that accepting unprepared students is compromising the educational integrity of programs and of the institution. Acceptance of students who are ill-prepared for college, puts a tremendous amount of stress on the faculty to modify their level of instruction for a substantial number of students to pass. Also, it is difficult for academic advisors to advise students for more than 15 credit hours in an order to graduate on time. Advisors try to encourage them to enroll in at least 15 credit hours per semester without dropping or failing classes to keep the retention and progression rate at an adequate level, but most importantly to graduate on time. However, students who are not prepared struggle with too many credit hours are quickly willing to withdraw from classes and generally do not attend summer term as a term to maintain hours. Faculty has indicated that the Governor's office is wanting them to create transformation by taking an at-risk, inadequately prepared student, and produce a college graduate.

State Funding for Institutions

The sixth and final research question asked: What perspectives do the participants have of performance-based funding as opposed to enrollment-based funding and its impact on graduation rates? The results of this question shows that 58 (20%) of the advisors selected that it is moderately likely that the graduation rate will increase if state funding is performance-based funding as opposed to enrollment-based. Interestingly, 58 (20%) of the advisors also selected that it is extremely unlikely that the graduation rate will increase if state funding is performance-based.

An analysis of this question indicated that academic advisors are undecided, or better yet, split down middle about whether state funding should come from a performance or enrollment-base. Although question 17 had advisors make a decision about the type of funding they preferred, question 18 of the survey gave advisors the freedom to express why they prefer enrollment or performance-based funding. Therefore, to clarify any nebulousness, advisors were able to write-in responses that gave them a voice and opportunity to clarify. Again, half of the advisors (n=58) support that enrollment-base funding is the sole reason why so many inadequately prepared students are admitted to college. As indicated, advisors support that academic preparation is a key element to the retention and graduation rates. Contrary, the other half of the advisors (n=58) wrote comments where they indicated that performance-based funding heightens the awareness and puts the focus on graduation as soon as the students comes to college. The advisors who selected one of these two categories do believe and agree that the graduation rate will increase by the year 2020.

Discussion of Research Findings

In reviewing the literature, there were several findings from this study that are in align with the literature previously reviewed in Chapter II. One of the primary concerns and what actually initiated CCG was a report that was conducted by CCA indicating that 37.1% of the students entering a two-year college in the state of Georgia needed remediation, and only 57%.1 of those students completed the remediation courses or program. Also, 18.1% of those students entering a four-year institution needed remediation while only 51.8% completed the remediation courses or program. It was revealed that too many freshman entering college need remediation courses, which could

indicate an opportunity for high schools to offer more vigorous courses to strengthen the academic level of students prior to coming to college. Equally significant to this study, when identifying keys to increasing the graduation rate, 46% of the academic advisors ranked improve high school curriculum as the number one solution that would help increase the graduation rate at their institution. Yet, after conducting a survey about completing college, Habley, Bloom, and Robbins (2012) concluded that student with characteristics, such as being academically prepared for college, knowing what they are interested in studying, coming to college with better study skills, and had reliable financial resources, would, in essence, stay in college and graduate.

Tinto (1993) pointed out that not all students who come to college possess the level of commitment to complete college. Hudson, a member of Georgia Board of Regents (2005), believed that student characteristics affect RPG. She contended that parents' educational level, personal income, and timing of entering college heavily influence a students' progress through college. Again, these critics' findings that were used in the Literature Review are synonymous with the findings of the advisors who completed the questionnaire. The academic advisors believed that another main or key element contributing to students staying in college is having intrinsic motivation to learn and desire to complete college, which is very similar to what Tinto indicated in 1993. Even more significant, advisors identified that students who have their financial aid (in place) along with adequate academic preparation are more likely to stay and complete college. Additionally, Simmons (2013) findings led to the conclusion that developing relationships or involvement with faculty could have a tremendously positive impact on retention rates of students. Similarly, approximately 38% of the advisors believed that

establishing a relationship with faculty or staff can aid in institutions retaining students which will lead to higher graduation rates, both of, which speak to student engagement factors (see Kuh, et al.).

The overarching question that was addressed in this study is how academic advisors are approaching the mandate to increase the graduation rate of 20% by the year 2020. Some of the advisors indicated that they were not going to allow the Governor's initiatives affect how they advise students. This statement can be reviewed as a negative, but according to Table 1 *RPG and Advising Outcomes* (page 51), the goals of RPG (which are the same as CCG) are parallel to academic advising; therefore, even with refusing to implement or adopt the Governor's initiatives, these advisors are still on task. Forty percent (n=95) of the advisors embraced the new tactics, programs, and revisions to the curriculum because they helped promote completing college on time, which is a part of the Governor's overall plan for higher education. As to whether academic advisors are on board or if the Governor has buy-in to promote his initiatives to increase the graduation rate upon USG institutions, the answer the advisors provided is split down the middle. Approximately 50% of the advisors believed that their institution can or will implement his CCG initiative, while the other 50% are not confident that their institution will experience a 20% increase by the year 2020.

Conclusions of Findings

Based on the analysis from the results of this study indicate the following conclusions from faculty and professional academic advisors:

Conclusion 1: Having an intrinsic motivation to learn is one of the main elements that contribute to the retention rate and lead to graduation.

Impact Statement 1: The educational community can do a better job with psychologically preparing students for college at an early age. By helping them to appreciate and value education may instill a desire to want to learn as opposed to an obligation to go to college.

Conclusion 2: Focus needs to be placed on improving high schools' curriculum in an effort to produce students who are academically prepared for college.

Impact Statement 2:   A collaborative effort between high school principals and local colleges should be established help to make a smoother academic transition from high school to college. Administrators need to ensure that a high level of proficiency in basic fundamental concepts have been accomplished at the elementary and middle school years. In addition, students should receive a strong academic foundation, especially in English, Math, and Science.

Conclusion 3: Advisors support and embrace the recent focus that has been placed on the importance of graduation and all of the attention that Complete College Georgia (CCG) initiative is receiving on their campuses.

Impact Statement 3: Professional advisors' primary goal is to aid students in completing college; therefore, RPG and CCG efforts have been totally embraced by persons in the advising profession. Nevertheless, the Governor's approach of mandating an increase in graduation rates without trying to identify and address issues that prohibit students from graduation can be nebulous and send the wrong message. Had the Governor met with academic advisors (professional or faculty) and considered their opinions, he would have had a better idea how to approach a 20% increase in the

graduation rate by the year 2020.   Furthermore, he would have more buy-in from the advising community.

Conclusion 4: Someone from the institution needs to help connect students to the college through building a relationship, joining an organization, getting involved in sports, etc.

Impact Statement 4: Academic advisors, faculty, all persons in higher education, student affairs representative, etc. should approach all students with the aspiration of helping to retain them and moving them on toward completing college.

Conclusion 5: Having sufficient financial aid, strong leadership/administration, and academically prepared students are the ingredients to increase the graduation rate.

Impact Statement 5: Free tuition for the first two years of college will help with students who are experiencing financial aid issues. Administration in both entities need to establish concise academic goals for students to satisfy in high school prior to coming to college should help with the graduation rate in college.

Conclusion 6: Hire more faculty who are enthusiastic about their subject, passionate about teaching, and care about students.

Impact Statement 6: Faculty who are passionate about their subject, care about students and have the innate desire to help students to learn seem to have a higher success rate in the classroom then those who focus is specifically on their subject.

Conclusion 7: Professional academic advisors have approximately 288 advisees per semester.

Impact Statement 7: An academic advisor's goal is to have at least three or more contacts with their advisees per semester. If an advisor is assigned too many students per

semester; contact times are limited and, therefore, quality academic advisement is unlikely to occur which can result in miss-advisement, miscommunication, and delayed graduation.

Conclusion 8: Of the 312 participants, 55% of advisors indicated their institution uses an advising model of a mixture of professional and faculty advisors. Also referred to as a hybrid model.

Impact Statement 8: In a perfect world, faculty will always be a part of the advising process. The National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) supports that "Academic advising is teaching" and that is exactly what professors are hired to do.

Conclusion 9: Fifty percent of the advisors believe that funding from the state should be based on enrollment while the other 50% believe funding should be based on the number of graduates an institution has per term (performance-based).

Impact Statement 9: In this case, the beginning is just as significant as the end. Both enrollment and graduation are extremely significant to any institution of higher education. Enrollment is a necessity to maintain a healthy balance of incoming funds for any institution and the ability to graduate students in a timely manner is a direct reflection of an institution that has outstanding leadership, is well-organized, and honors a mission of exhibiting excellent student services.

Implications

The researcher has been involved in academic advising for over 23 years, and knows how significant and valuable an academic advisor's role is in assisting students in matriculating and graduating. Academic advisors generally have no voice in establishing policy or procedures in higher education; however, they are expected to carry out tasks

and responsibilities whether they fully understand or support the need for change. The Governor of Georgia should have allowed advisors to be a part of establishing Complete College Georgia (CCG) Initiatives because these decisions will have a direct impact on increasing the progression and graduation of students.

Conclusions that can be drawn from the participants in this study are as follows:

1. Both faculty and professional academic advisors want the administration to raise the admission standards so that a higher caliber of students can make application to their institution, which would in essence raise the retention and graduation rates.

2. Collaborative efforts should be made between superintendents of school systems and college administrators to discuss curriculum in both entities to assure college preparatory courses are preparing high school students for college level work.

3. When students identify a USG college to attend, there should be a program map or graduation plan accessible on the institutions website for every major (before students begin taking classes). Academic advisors have been providing academic guidance by clarifying what classes are needed for a major as well as initiating the graduation application for years. It should not have taken the Governor's initiatives to get the administrators to make a commitment to focusing more on college completion as opposed to college enrollment.

4. Had the Governor surveyed or probed to identify the top three reasons why students do not complete college and addressed those first, perhaps his approach to increasing the graduation rate may be different. Of the top three, I am sure that financial aid would rank very high, if not number one. In developing his CCG

plans there should have been a component that addresses helping students to fund college.

5. Institutions need to hire faculty who are willing to work collaboratively with the administration in achieving student success, have buy-in with the mission and vision of the institution, and have the willingness to serve as a mentor for students outside of the classroom in an effort to promote student success.

6. Administrators need to look closely at the number of advisees that advisors are assigned to assure students are not being treated as a number. Advising is very individualized and personable, so students should feel comfortable scheduling anywhere from three to four appointments per semester. Furthermore, if advising is synonymous to teaching, then professional advisors must fulfil advisor's learning outcomes with each student who is seen.

7. The University System of Georgia (USG) has not addressed or identified a specific advisement model for all of the university system institutions. They have not even identified a specific student development model by which to serve their students. The question is frequently visited in meetings and discussions about academic advising structure. It seems as if the higher the level of the institution, the more likely the institution is hiring professional advisors to assume most of the advising role. For example, the University of Georgia and Georgia State University (research institutions), and Georgia Southern University and Kennesaw State University (comprehensive universities) have moved to an advising model where the undergraduate students are advised by professional

advisors. State universities and colleges use a hybrid method, where both faculty and professional advisors are assigned students for advisement.

8. The state of Georgia should base funding of their public institutions on two variables: enrollment and performance (graduation).

Recommendations

Based on the findings from participants in this study, as well as the conclusions and implications identified in this study, the researcher has made the following recommendations.

1. If most of the USG institutions raise the admissions requirements, then there would be an insufficient number of students who would academically qualify to apply and attend college. The USG needs to identify several two-year institutions (access institutions) where students can get the remedial help that is needed to get them enrolled in college. For these types of students, a financial aid profile needs to be taken and, if they qualify, the first two years should be state-funded (tuition paid) as long as the student is making satisfactory academic progress.

2. All of the USG institutions should have a First Year Experience (FYE) program where first year students receive a smooth transition to college, continuous support while in the program, and exposure to all resources that will help them in have a valuable academic experience. The ultimate goal of FYE will be to retain them and connect them the institution.

3. University Vice Presidents and Deans need to examine advising models or structures of advisement that are most effective for various institutions, such

as research, comprehensive, state universities, and state colleges, and implement that model.

4. To adequately determine how or obtain the best approach to increase the graduation rate by the year 2020, the Governor should identify why students drop out of college in the first place; it could be financially related, personal barriers, or lack of understanding the importance of pursuing higher education. Academic advisors' primary goal is to guide students to take the courses needed to earn a degree; therefore, when students stop attending, in most cases, advisors have an idea.

5. The 20% increase in graduation rates that the Governor wants could come from targeting people who have manufacturing and industrial jobs to see how many of their workers have had to drop out of college to pursue employment. The Governor could offer some type of incentives and on-line classes to help them complete their college degree.

6. In terms of state funding, both enrollment and performance are extremely important variables in higher education. However, if two-year colleges receive state funding to cover tuition, there also needs to be funds available to hire enough full-time staff to test and tutor students in classes that have high failure rates, like English, Math, and Science.

7. The national advising organization equates advising with teaching (NACADA). If advisors are expected to develop advising outcomes for their students and assess those outcomes, then advisors should be paid as

professional academic advisors on the same pay scale that is comparable to their educational level.

Recommendations for Future Research

This research project covered a vast amount of information about the current issues that address increasing the graduation rate 20% by the year 2020. Many stakeholders were involved in the decision making process and academic advisors had little to no voice in the outcomes. This study has given those people a much-needed voice. The researcher has identified the following areas as topics that can be studied further:

1. Research needs to be conducted to develop a strategic plan to get the United States to regain its previous ranking as the number one country for producing students with college degrees. The funding could possibility come from the US Department of Education.

2. Conduct research on collaborative and successful relationships with colleges and school systems' college preparatory curriculum to determine whether students are academically ready for college level courses upon graduation.

3. The University System of Georgia has given academic advisors a voice, finally. The Regents Administrative Committee on Academic Advising (RACAD) was established in May 2015, and will make recommendations on initiatives, issues, or concerns related to academic advising. Future researcher should seek to determine the impact this committee will have/has on constructing and understanding policies that effect the direction of advising for institutions in the University System of Georgia.

4. A researcher needs to conduct a qualitative study of the impact the RACAD
    has had on advisors to determine if this committee is effectively representing
    them. The RACAD representative should be the voice that represents and
    addresses advising issues that are unresolved at the administration level in the
    school.

5. For the year 2020, research needs to be conducted to determine if Governor
    Deal's mandate to increase the graduation rate by 20% was met. A precise
    look at the enrollment and graduation rates of the University System Schools
    need to be examined. Also, a comprehensive qualitative study should be
    conducted with experienced academic advisors to identify any correlation
    between Governor Deal's initiatives and an increase or decline in the
    graduation rate.

6. Retention, Progression, and Graduation (RPG) and Complete College Georgia
    (CCG), from an academic advisor's perspective, should be replicated in other
    states and repeated in the state of Georgia to examine an academic advisors'
    role in the cultivation of fostering a college student and the goal of producing
    a college graduate.

7. Comparative studies should be conducted in other states to ascertain the
    perceptions of advisors' opinions of current initiatives mandated by policy
    makers.

8. The federal government needs to allocate more resources and monetary funds
    to initiatives designed to promote complete college.

Dissemination

The researcher will share the results and findings of this study with colleagues in higher education, and also with professionals who are affiliated with the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) and the distinctive members of the University System of Georgia who work directly with the development and goals of academic advisement. In a collegial setting, the researcher will present the process, results, and recommendations at local, regional and national conferences representing the voice of the academic advisors affiliated with the University System of Georgia.

Another population that may have an interest in the responses of the advisors is the superintendents and school administrators of the postsecondary schools as well as representatives in Governor Deal's office. The researcher will check to see if there is a way to submit the results directly to a website or a representative of CCG, other than the Governor's Office.

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APPENDIX A 2013 National College Completion Rates

United States Ranks 12th in the World
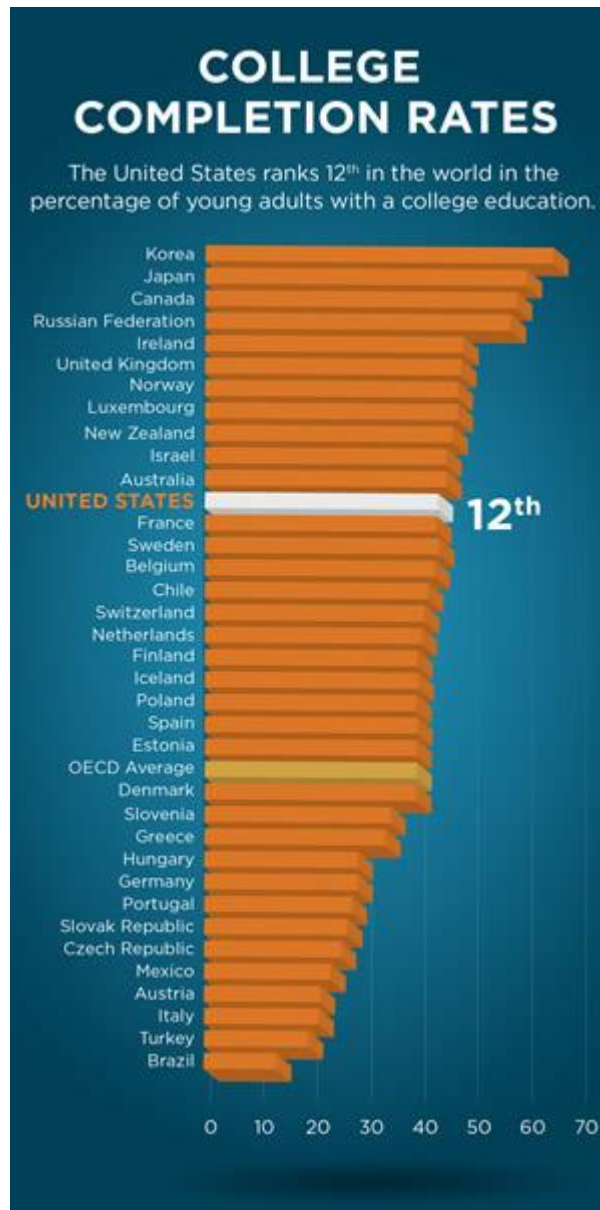
APPENDIX B Graduation Rates in the United States

Complete College Georgia (CCA) Earned College Degrees in USA

State	% Adults (ages 25-34)	State	% Adults (ages 25-34)	State	%Adults (ages 25-34)
Alabama	32%	Louisiana	28%	Ohio	36%
Alaska	30%	Maine	36%	Oklahoma	30%
Arizona	31%	Maryland	45%	Oregon	36%
Arkansas	26%	Massachusetts	53%	Pennsylvania	43%
California	36%	Michigan	36%	Rhode Island	43%
Colorado	41%	Minnesota	48%	South Carolina	34%
Connecticut	46%	Mississippi	32%	South Dakota	44%
Delaware	36%	Missouri	37%	Tennessee	31%
Florida	35%	Montana	36%	Texas	31%
Georgia	34%	Nebraska	44%	Utah	38%
Hawaii	41%	Nevada	28%	Vermont	44%
Idaho	34%	New Hampshire	46%	Virginia	42%
Illinois	43%	New Jersey	46%	Washington	39%
Indiana	36%	New Mexico	29%	West Virginia	28%
Iowa	46%	New York	48%	Wisconsin	40%
Kansas	41%	North Carolina	36%	Wyoming	34%
Kentucky	32%	North Dakota	50%		

Note: Statistics taken from Complete College America (CCA), 2012

Table 5. USG Institutions

*University System of Georgia Institutions of Higher Education			
Research Universities	**Comprehensive Universities**	**State Universities**	**State Colleges**
Augusta University	Georgia Southern University	Albany State University	Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College
Georgia Institute of Technology	Kennesaw State University	Armstrong State University	Atlanta Metropolitan State College
Georgia State University	University of West Georgia	Clayton State University	Bainbridge State College
University of Georgia	Valdosta State University	Columbus State University	College of Coastal Georgia
30 University System of Georgia institutions		Fort Valley State University	Dalton State College
		Georgia College & State University	Darton State College
		Georgia Southwestern State University	East Georgia State College
		Middle Georgia State University	Georgia Gwinnett College
		Savannah State University	Georgia Highlands College
		University of North Georgia	Georgia Perimeter College
			Gordon State College
			South Georgia State College

*Board of Regents Website as of November 2015

Table 6. USG Fall Enrollment

*30 University System of Georgia institutions					
Small Institutions 2,000 – 10,999	*Fall 2015 Enrollment*	**Mid-size Institutions 11,000 -20,999**	*Fall 2015 Enrollment*	**Large Institutions 21,000 -40,000**	*Fall 2015 Enrollment*
Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College	3,393	**Georgia Gwinnett College**	11,468	**Georgia Institute of Technology**	25,034
Albany State University	3,492	**Georgia Southern University**	20,466	**Georgia State University**	32,058
Armstrong State University	7,103	**University of North Georgia**	17,289	**Georgia Perimeter College**	21,088
Atlanta Metropolitan State College	3,129	**University of West Georgia**	12,834	**Kennesaw State University**	33,252
Augusta University	8,333	**Valdosta State University**	11,302	**University of Georgia**	36,130
Bainbridge State College	2,401				
Clayton State University	7,012				
College of Coastal Georgia	3,131				
Columbus State University	8,440				
Dalton State College	5,044				
Darton State College	5,471				
East Georgia State College	3,001				
Fort Valley State University	2,695				
Georgia College & State University	6,889				
Georgia Highlands College	5,746				
Georgia Southwestern State University	2,755				
Gordon State College	4,084				
Middle Georgia State University	7,676				
Savannah State University	4,800				
South Georgia State College	2,648				
1 Research **0 Comprehensive** **9 State Universities** **10 State Colleges** 20 Small Institutions		0 Research 3 Comprehensive 1 State University 1 State College 5 Mid-size Institutions		3 Research 1 Comprehensive 0 State University 1 State College **5 Large Institutions**	

*USG Fall 2015 Semester Enrollment Report Office of Research and Policy Analysis 10/30/2015

Table 7. Item Analysis

Research question(s)	Items in the questionnaire	Supporting Literature
Part I	**Demographics**	
2, 5	Identify institution in the University System of Georgia and gender	Glatthorn & Joyner
	Academic Advisement as a profession	
1, 6	My current job classification (title) as it pertains to academic advising and how long have you been involved in academic advising?	Hagan & Jordan
3, 4, 7	What type of advisors does your institution use, explain the structure and identify the number of students you are responsible for advising.	Glatthorn & Joyner
Part II	**Academic advising and RPG**	
8, 9	Identify and rank the elements that contributes to the retention rate of college students? What do you believe is the "key" to increasing RPG?	Pascarella & Terenzini; Kuh Papp, Hudson
Part III	**Advisors' perceptions of meeting the CCG goal**	
10, 13, 15	Governor Nathan Deal has requested an increase of 20% in the graduation rate of University System of Georgia Institutions. What is the likelihood of your institution accomplishing this goal? Because of the CCG Initiative, who do you believe have received many of the RPG responsibilities? If you could make two changes (at your institution) to increase the graduation rate of students, what would you do? Brief answers.	Deal Klepfer & Hull
11, 12, 14	Please briefly list one main reason you believe your institution will reach or get close to this goal and one main reason you believe your institution will struggle to reach this goal. Being cognizant and aware of the Governor's CCG initiative (to increase the graduation rate), by the year 2020; how does this impact the way you plan to advise students? Please briefly describe two approaches your institution has changed or will change in academic advising as it relates to Complete College Georgia. What type of difference, if any, do you believe academic advisors can make in accomplishing the CCG initiative (to increase the graduation rate) goal?	Deal Habley, Bloom, & Robbins
Part IV	**System Funding of Institutions**	
16, 17, 18	It is being considered that institutions will receive state funds based on the number of students who graduate, not how many are enrolled. Do you believe this is a progressive move? Why or why not? Do you think moving from enrollment-base to performance-base funding will encourage institutions to increase the graduation rate?	Tinto

Table 8. Participants' Institution

University System of Georgia Institution	% of Participants	Count
Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College	2.95%	9
Albany State University	0.66%	2
Armstrong State University	2.30%	7
Atlanta Metropolitan State College	0.33%	1
Augusta University	3.61%	11
Bainbridge State College	0.66%	2
Clayton State University	1.31%	4
College of Coastal Georgia	0.00%	0
Columbus State University	4.26%	13
Dalton State College	8.85%	27
Darton State College	3.28%	10
East Georgia State College	15.74%	48
Fort Valley State University	0.33%	1
Georgia College & State University	3.28%	10
Georgia Gwinnett College	1.31%	4
Georgia Highlands College	0.98%	3
Georgia Institute of Technology	0.98%	3
Georgia Perimeter College	0.98%	3
Georgia Southern University	10.82%	33
Georgia Southwestern State University	0.66%	2
Georgia State University	1.97%	6
Gordon State College	4.26%	13
Kennesaw State University	10.16%	31
Middle Georgia State College	4.59%	14
Savannah State University	1.64%	5
South Georgia State College	4.26%	13

University of Georgia	7.21%	22
University of North Georgia	0.98%	3
University of West Georgia	0.00%	0
Valdosta State University	1.64%	5
Total	**100%**	**305***

*7 participants did not identify their institution

Table 10. *Classification of Participants*

Job Classification	% of Participants	Count
a. Administrative (Vice President, Dean, Department Chairperson, etc.)	8.50%	26
b. Faculty (primarily)	28.76%	88
c. Director or Coordinator of Academic Advising	7.84%	24
d. Academic Advisor/ Advising Specialist	44.44%	136
e. Staff employee or Student	5.88%	18
f. Other	4.58%	14
Total	**100.00%**	**306***

*6 participants elected not to respond

Table 11. *Duration of Time*

How long in academic advising?	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Count
Years	0.00	0.00	9.02	9.99	99.80	310
Months	0.00	0.00	3.05	8.91	79.45	309*

*3 participants elected not to answer

Table 15. *Retention Rates*

Retention Rates	1 Most Important		2		3		4		5 Not as Important		Total	
Strong Academic support (Tutoring and study sessions offered by institution)	9.51%	29	12.79%	39	20.33%	62	24.92%	76	32.46%	99	**305**	
Academic Advising (Building a relationship w faculty/staff)	15.74%	48	19.67%	60	21.64%	66	28.20%	86	14.75%	45	**305**	
Financial Aid (Financing College)	16.39%	50	20.98%	64	25.57%	78	16.72%	51	20.33%	62	**305**	
Academic preparation (academically prepared for college)	30.59%	93	25.00%	76	17.43%	53	12.50%	38	14.47%	44	**304**	
Intrinsic motivation (come to complete college)	32.57%	99	21.05%	64	13.82%	42	16.45%	50	16.12%	49	**304**	

Table 16. *Increasing RPG*

Increasing RPG	1 Most Important		2		3		4		5 Not as Important		Total
Officials at the state level need to increase the amount of financial aid	12.12%	36	23.91%	71	18.52%	55	24.58%	73	20.88%	62	297
Administrators at the institutions need to work with faculty members by putting focus on improving success in classrooms.	14.8%	44	25.93%	77	29.63%	88	17.17%	51	12.46%	37	297
The high school curriculum needs to improve	46.31%	138	17.45%	52	10.07%	30	12.42%	37	13.76%	41	298
More emphasis should be placed on connecting students to sports, activities, etc.	4.04%	12	10.77%	32	16.84%	50	25.59%	76	42.76%	127	297
Administrators at the institutions need to build a strong(er) academic advising program.	23.49%	70	23.49%	70	25.84%	77	18.12%	54	9.06%	27	298

APPENDIX C   USG 15 to FINISH

UNIVERSITY SYSTEM OF GEORGIA

15 to FINISH GEORGIA

All **USG institutions** are invited to attend the below **Spring 2014** events focusing on the System's **15 to Finish Initiative.**

What is 15 to Finish?

Promoted by Complete College America, 15 to Finish is a proven advisement, retention, progression, and graduation initiative which encourages students to take 15 credits per semester to graduate faster and spend less money on the undergraduate collegiate experience.

To learn more about the USG's 15 to Finish Initiative, join other USG institutions at the following events taking place across the state.

Regional Meetings

Regional meetings will introduce the core principles of 15 to Finish and allow attendees to share what they are doing on their campus around advisement, retention, progression, and graduation initiatives and learn from others.

Georgia Southwestern State University	February 21	11am – 1pm
Middle Georgia State College	February 28	11am – 1pm
University of North Georgia	March 14	10am – Noon
Georgia State University	March 21	11am – 1pm

To register for a regional meeting, email **15tofinishgeorgia@gmail.com** with your name, title, institution, email, and phone and the meeting date and location. Institutions are not limited in the number of professionals they can register for the regional meeting. There is no registration fee and a meal will be provided at each meeting.

State Conference

All USG schools are encouraged to attend the 15 to Finish Initiative—Advisement and Retention Best Practices state conference taking place on Friday, April 18 from 9am – 4pm at Middle Georgia State College in Macon, GA. This conference will focus on the 15 to Finish Initiative and other Complete College Georgia advisement, retention, progression, and graduation programs.

To register for the state conference, visit the 15 to Finish website at www.15tofinishgeorgia.com and click on the events and registration tab. There is a $70 registration fee; however, the fee will be waived for the first 200 registrants.

For more information regarding the 15 to Finish Initiative and/or questions about regional meetings or the state conference, please call Elizabeth Thornton at **678-891-3981** or email **harriet.thornton@gpc.edu**

www.15tofinishgeorgia.com

Sponsored by:
University System of Georgia &
Georgia Perimeter College

Georgia Perimeter College

APPPENDIX D

EGSC Graduation in 2 Years

APPENDIX E GSU IRB Approval

| Georgia Southern University |
| Office of Research Services & Sponsored Programs |
| **Institutional Review Board (IRB)** |

Phone: 912-478-5465		Veazey Hall 3000
		PO Box 8005
Fax: 912-478-0719	IRB@GeorgiaSouthern.edu	Statesboro, GA 30460

To: Deborah Kittrell-Mikell

From: Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs
Administrative Support Office for Research Oversight Committees
(IACUC/IBC/IRB)

Approval Date: 03/22/2016

Subject: Status of Application for Approval to Utilize Human Subjects in Research

After a review of your proposed research project numbered **H16286** and titled **"The Cultivation of Fostering a College Student and the Goal of Producing a College Graduate using RPG Initiatives: A University Systems' Approach to Complete College"** it appears that your research involves activities that do not require full approval by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) according to federal guidelines.

According to the Code of Federal Regulations Title 45 Part 46, your research protocol is determined to be exempt from full review under the following exemption category(s):

B2   Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: (I) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (II) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Any alteration in the terms or conditions of your involvement may alter this approval. *Therefore, as authorized in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, I am pleased to notify you that your research, as submitted, is exempt from IRB approval. No further action or IRB oversight is required, as long as the project remains the same. If you alter the project, it is your responsibility to notify the IRB and acquire a new determination of exemption. Because this project was determined to be exempt from further IRB oversight, this project does not require an expiration date.*

Sincerely,

Eleanor Haynes

Eleanor Haynes
Compliance Officer

APPENDIX F Clayton State IRB Approval

CLAYTON STATE UNIVERSITY

Proposal #: IRB20160404001

Title of Study: The Cultivation of Fostering a College Student and the Goal of Producing a College Graduate using RPG Initiatives: A University Systems' Approach to Complete College (Ms. Deborah Kitrell-Mikell, Georgia Southern University – primary study location)
Review: Exempt
Completed By: Keith Miller
Date: April 19, 2016

Dear Ms. Kittrell-Mikell:

Your application for exempt status for the study entitled *The Cultivation of Fostering a College Student and the Goal of Producing a College Graduate using RPG Initiatives: A University Systems' Approach to Complete College* has been accepted. This study meets criteria for exemption under 45 CFR 46.101(b) Category 5 and Category 2. Since this study is exempt from 45 CFR 46, it is not subject to IRB monitoring. As long as this protocol remains unchanged, you do not need to take any additional IRB-related actions.

This determination is based upon the following documents:
1. Clayton State University IRB Application.pdf
2. Clayton State Investigator Agreement.pdf
3. D.Kittrell Mikell.pdf
4. H16286 - Kittrell-Mikell, D. Exempt Approval.pdf
5. Kittrell-Mikell Application.pdf

Any changes to your protocol that affect risk factors or other criteria pertinent to 45 CFR 46 for Expedited or Full Review may require you to conduct a new research determination and submit a new application for IRB review. Contact your IRB representative for IRB-related guidance if you plan to change your protocol.

Thank you and please feel free to contact your college IRB representative, or me at 678.466.4576 or at KeithMiller@clayton.edu, if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Keith E. Miller, PhD
IRB Chair
Clayton State University

APPPENDIX G   Valdosta State IRB Approval

VALDOSTA STATE

May 6, 2016

Deborah Kittrell-Mikell
Leadership, Technology, & Human Development
Georgia Southern University
P.O. Box 8131
Statesboro, GA 30460

Dear Ms. Kittrell-Mikell:

Thank you for contacting the Valdosta State University Institutional Review Board regarding recruitment of study participants for your proposed study, *"The Cultivation of Fostering a College Student and the Goal of Producing a College Graduate using RPG Initiative: A University Systems' Approach to Complete College."*

The VSU IRB grants you permission to recruit study participants on the VSU campus and through official VSU channels in accordance with the approved protocol.

If you modify the protocol in a manner that requires approval of the Georgia Southern University IRB, please provide the VSU IRB with a copy of your modification request and the GSU IRB's approval of that request. Likewise, if this research continues beyond twelve months and undergoes continuation review at GSU, please provide a copy of the continuation approval for the file at VSU.

We wish you success with this project.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth W. Olphie

Elizabeth W. Olphie
Interim IRB Administrator

cc: Lorraine Schmertzing, VSU IRB Chair
      Alicia Richard Roberson, Director of Centralized Advising

OFFICE *of* SPONSORED PROGRAMS & RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION (OSPRA)
PHONE 229.259.5045 • FAX 229.245.3853 • WEB www.valdosta.edu/ospra
ADDRESS 1500 N. Patterson St. • Valdosta, GA 31698 • LOCATION Third Floor • Psychology Building
A Regional University of the University System of Georgia and an Equal Opportunity Institution

APPENDIX H Armstrong State IRB Approval

Armstrong State University

Notice of IRB Approval

Name: Deborah Kittrell-Mikkell

Co-Investigators: Dr. Devon Jensen, Faculty Advisor

Academic Unit: Georgia Southern University, College of Education

Date: May 8, 2016

RE: # 1349   The Cultivation of Fostering a College Student and the Goal of Producing a College
Graduate using RPG Initiatives : University Systems' Approach to Complete College

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The above project has been reviewed and is approved by the IRB under the provisions of
Federal Regulations 45 CFR 46. This approval is based on the following conditions:

1. The materials you submitted to the IRB provide a complete and accurate account of how human
   subjects are involved in your project.

2. You will carry on your research strictly according to the procedures as described in the materials
   presented to the IRB.

3. You will report to the IRB any changes in procedures that may have a bearing on this approval
   and require another IRB review.

4. If any changes are made, you will submit the modified project for IRB review.

5. You will immediately report to the IRB any problem(s) that you encounter while using human
   subjects.

Signed _____
Donna Brooks, Chair IRB
Armstrong State University

cc:

APPENDIX I Darton State College IRB Approval

DARTON
COLLEGE

BUSINESS/SOCIAL SCIENCE DIVISION

April 22, 2016

Deborah Kittrell-Mikell
East Georgia State College
131 College Circle
Swainsboro, GA 30401

RE: Request to survey Darton State College Faculty and Staff in support of research
project *The Cultivation of Fostering a College Student and the Goal of Producing a
College Graduate using RPG Initiatives: A University Systems' Approach to Complete
College.*

Dear Ms. Kittrell-Mikell,

The Darton State College Institutional Review Board has reviewed your request to
survey Darton State College Faculty and Staff in support of your research project *The
Cultivation of Fostering a College Student and the Goal of Producing a College
Graduate using RPG Initiatives: A University Systems' Approach to Complete College.*

The Board has "approved" your request. You may move forward with your research on
our campus. You may access our faculty/staff directory at the link below. Note that all
full-time faculty advise students. In addition, the Division of Student Affairs section of
the directory will identify the full-time staff advisors.

http://employee.darton.edu/tech/email/directory.php

Should you have any questions feel free to contact me via irb@darton.edu or 229-317-
5803.

Sincerely,

Jason S. Goodner, EdD
IRB Chair

CC: Institutional Review Board
    Provost's Office

2400 GILLIONVILLE ROAD · ALBANY, GEORGIA 31707-3098 · TELEPHONE 229-317-7001 · FAX 229-317-6670
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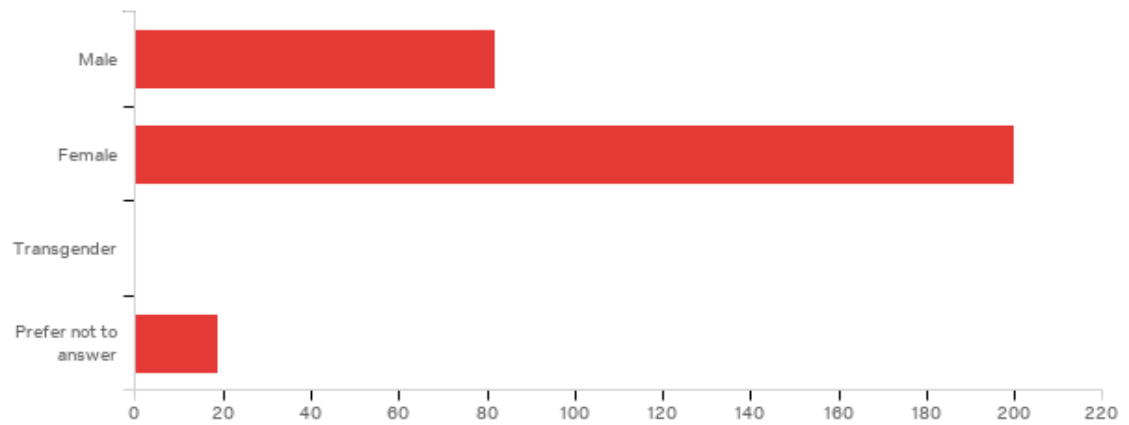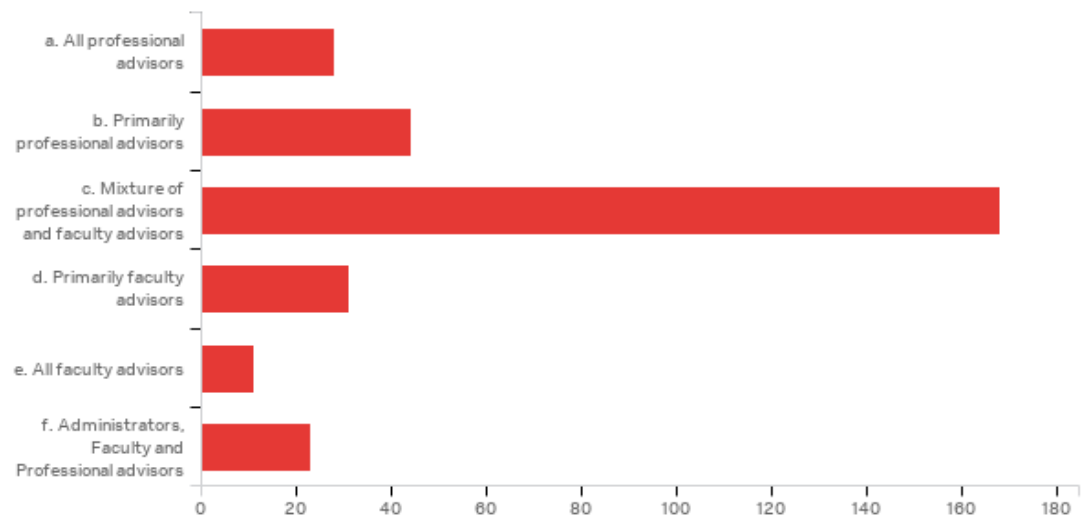
Figure 5. *Gender of Participants*

Figure 7. *Type of Advisors*

Table 12. *Type of Advisors*

What type of advisors does your institution use to administer academic advising to students?	% of Participants	Count
a. All professional advisors	9.18%	28
b. Primarily professional advisors	14.43%	44
c. Mixture of professional advisors and faculty advisors	55.08%	168
d. Primarily faculty advisors	10.16%	31
e. All faculty advisors	3.61%	11
f. Administrators, Faculty and Professional advisors	7.54%	23
Total	**100.00%**	**305***

*7 participants elected not to answer

Figure 11. *CCG Responsibilities*
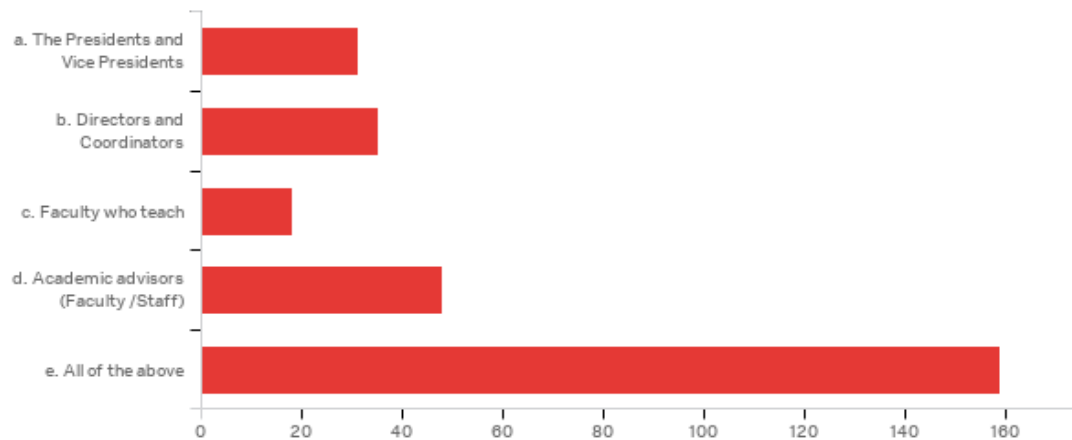
APPENDIX J   2014 National College Completion Rates

United States Ranks 14th in the World
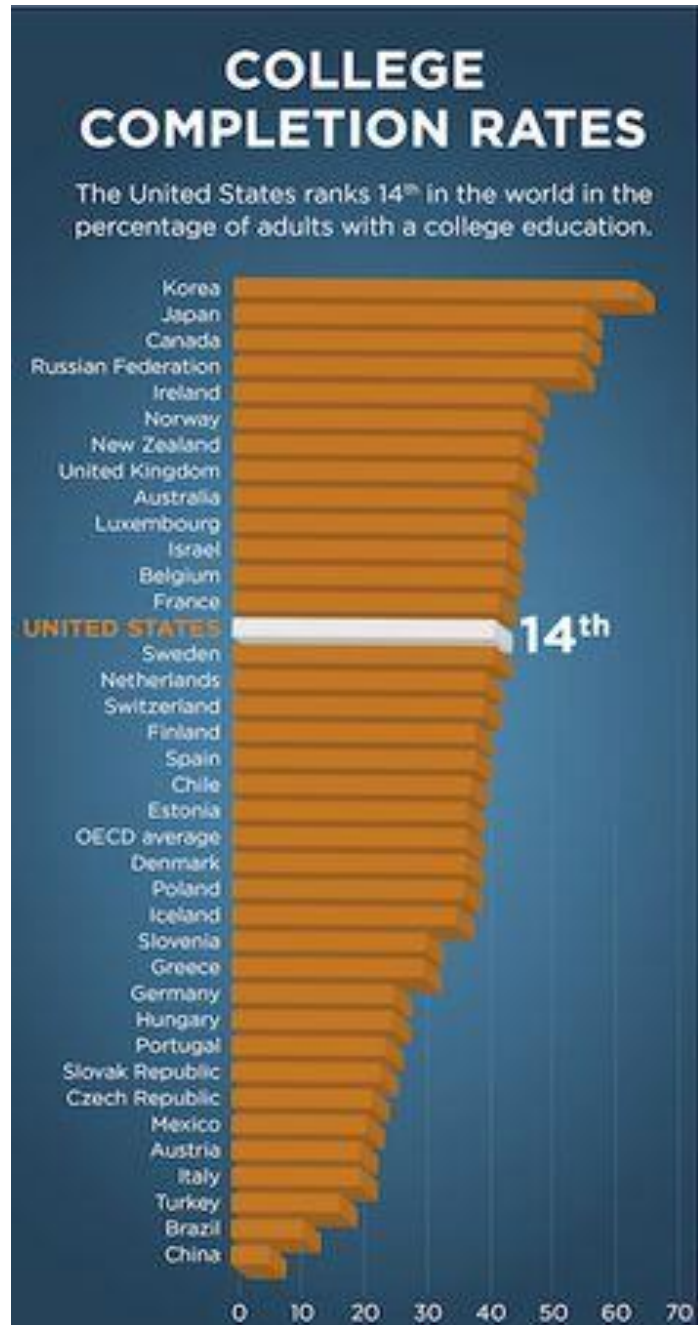
APPENDIX K   THE INSTRUMENT

The Instrument used for the study

From Retention, Progression & Graduation to Complete College Georgia

This questionnaire is anonymous

1. My current or primary job classification involves the responsibilities of academic advising and is officially classified as:
   a. Administrative (Vice President, Dean, Department Chairperson, etc.)
   b. Faculty (primarily)
   c. Director or Coordinator of Academic Advising
   d. Academic Advisor/ Advising Specialist
   e. Student or Staff employee
   f. Other

2. Select your University System of Georgia (USG) Institution.
      (Drop down box)

3. What type of advisors does your institution use to administer academic advising to students?

   a. All professional advisors
   b. Primarily professional advisors
   c. Mixture of professional advisors and faculty advisors
   d. Primarily faculty advisors
   e. All faculty advisors
   f. Administrators, Faculty and Professional advisors

4. What advising structure does your institution employ? (i.e. Centralized, Decentralized Professional advisors for first 30 hours, faculty advise on all 3 campuses) Explain, if necessary.

   _____

   _____

5. Please select your gender
   a. Female
   b. Male
   c. Transgender
   d. Prefer not to answer

6. How long have you been involved in academic advising (at the higher education level)?
   (Drop down box)

   Years ____Months____

7. The number of students you are responsible for advising total (or estimation):
Put in number_____(Drop down box)

8. Please rank in order of importance, with #1 being the **most** important and #5 being not as important, the elements which most contribute to the retention rate of college students?

_____Strong Academic support (Tutoring and study sessions offered by institution)
_____ Academic Advising (Building a relationship w faculty/staff)
_____ Financial Aid (Financing College)
_____ Academic preparation (academically prepared for college)
_____ Intrinsic motivation (come to complete college)

9. The implementation of the Retention, Progression, Graduation (RPG) initiative mandated administrators in Georgia public college and universities to direct more attention to retention, progression, and graduation of students. What do you believe is the "key" to increasing RPG? As with the previous question, please rank the fundamentals based on #1 as most important up to 5 not as important.

_____Officials at the state level need to increase the amount of financial aid students can receive or consider reducing the cost of attending college.
_____Administrators at the institutions need to work with faculty members by putting focus on improving success in classrooms.
_____The high school curriculum needs to improve so that students will come to college academically prepared.
_____More emphasis should be placed on connecting students to the institution through student clubs, sports, activities, etc.
_____Administrators at the institutions need to build a strong(er) academic advising program with the respective faculty/staff with the goal of helping students to completing college.

10. By the year 2020, Complete College America (CCA) has projected that 60% of all new jobs in the United States will require some type of college education. As a part of the Complete College Georgia (CCG) initiative, Governor Nathan Deal has requested an increase of 20% in the graduation rate of University System of Georgia Institutions. For example, if a college is graduating 100 students an academic year (50 in the fall and 50 in the spring), then that institution would need to have 20 additional graduates to meet this initiative. What is the general likelihood of your institution accomplishing this goal?
    a. Very likely
    b. Likely
    c. Unsure
    d. Highly unlikely
    e. Unlikely

11. Regardless of your response in item 8, please briefly list one main reason you believe your institution will reach or get close to this goal and one main reason you believe your institution will struggle to reach this goal.

    a. _____

    b. _____

12. Being cognizant and aware of the Governor's CCG initiative (to increase the graduation rate), by the year 2020; how does this impact the way you plan to advise students? Please briefly describe two approaches your institution has changed or will change in academic advising as it relates to Complete College Georgia.

    1. _____

    2. _____

13. As a result of the CCG Initiative, who has received many of the RPG/CCG responsibilities on
your campus?

    a.   The Presidents and Vice Presidents

    b. Directors and Coordinators

    c. Faculty who teach

    d. Academic Advisors (Faculty /Staff)

    e. All of the above

14. What influence or difference can an academic advisor make in accomplishing the CCG initiative to increase the graduation rates? (In a couple of sentences)

    _____

    _____

    _____

15. If you could make two changes (at your institution) to increase the graduation rate of students, what would you do? (2 sentences, please)

16. To reach the 20% increase in graduation (by the year 2020), what would you say your institution needs to accomplish the goal outlined by Governor Deal? (2 sentences, please)

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

17. There has been discussion of a shift in the funding of Georgia public colleges and universities institutions. The amount of funding that institutions received will be shifted from receiving funds for enrollment to performance-base. In other words, institutions

will receive state funds based on the number of students who graduate, not how many are enrolled. How likely is it that this change will help institutions increase the graduation rate?

f.   Very likely
g.   Likely
h.   Unsure
i.   Highly unlikely
j.   Unlikely

18. Why or why not? (2 sentences, please)