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Crystal L. Edenfield

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INSTITUTIONAL CONDITIONS THAT MATTER TO COMMUNITY COLLEGE
STUDENTS' SUCCESS: A MULTIPLE-CASE STUDY

by

CRYSTAL L. EDENFIELD

(Under the Direction of Juliann Sergi McBrayer)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative and explanatory study utilized a multiple-case study to better understand the impact of institutional conditions that contributed to continuing students' success at Georgia Highlands College (GHC) in terms of identifying and making progress toward or achieving educational goals from the student perspective. The researcher compared two locations at GHC in northwest Georgia, a nonresidential, limited-access state college within the University System of Georgia. This study was intended to ascertain students' perspectives regarding what they need from institutions to succeed. The researcher examined the roles of campus environment and institutional agents (faculty, staff, and administrators) to determine what matters to students' success at GHC. A cross-case analysis revealed similar findings at each location in that students identified three themes, which were institutional characteristics, environment conducive for learning, and meaningful interactions with institutional agents, as important to their success.

INDEX WORDS: Community college, Two-year college, Student success, Institutional conditions, Institutional characteristics, Institutional agents, Campus environment, Role of institutional agents, Faculty-student interactions

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by

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Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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STUDENTS' SUCCESS: A MULTIPLE-CASE STUDY

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DEDICATION

This document is dedicated to my daughter, Kennedy, to whom I found out about during my first semester of the program and had to leave overnight when she was only three-weeks-old to travel four-hours away for class. I get so emotional thinking about all of the sacrifices it took for me to get to this point. My wish is that you will discover your passions, follow your dreams, and have the chance to be whatever you want to be. Dream big baby girl.

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In honor of my grandmother, who was proud of me even in her last moments of consciousness. I know you are still here with us in many ways. I wish we could share this success together with a big piece of yellow cake with chocolate icing.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Over the last fifty years, higher education in the United States (U.S.) has improved access to postsecondary education, but large gaps still remain in terms of degree completion and higher education success measured by institutional retention, progression, and graduation rates (Engle & Tinto, 2008). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 59% of American undergraduate students pursuing a bachelor's degree graduate on time, or in six-years, and 28% of students pursuing an associate's degree graduate on time, or in three-years (2018). Bailey, Jaggars, and Jenkins (2015) noted America is in a college completion crisis, which continues to garner state and national attention calling for a fundamental redesign for all institutions, including two-year colleges.

For over 100 years, two-year colleges, sometimes known as technical colleges, junior colleges, or community colleges, have served as a point of access for over one third of the nation's postsecondary population. Two-year colleges enroll a disproportionate amount of students who are first-generation college students, who are from lower socio-economic backgrounds, who are academically underprepared, and who are from minority racial and ethnic groups (Bers & Schuetz, 2014). Although access is important, two-year colleges have weaknesses, such as offering too many choices for certificates and degrees, providing unclear paths toward graduation for students, and offering little guidance aligned with the student's end goal (Bailey et al., 2015). Bailey et al. acknowledged these weaknesses, noting how failing to monitor student progress may produce barriers to career advancement or a *dead-end* within developmental education.

Measuring college completion rates is a complex issue at the two-year college level. Historically, completion rates or graduation rates are calculated using first-time, full-time students' information. Using only these students' information excludes a large population of students enrolled at a two-year college, such as students who have transferred in from another institution, students who are enrolled part-time, and students who may have stopped going to college and have come back after some period of time. Still, the U.S. continues to fall behind other countries in terms of the proportion of adults holding postsecondary certificates and degrees. According to Humphreys (2012), the completion agenda was "rooted in the increasingly tight linkage between educational attainment and success in the global economy" (para. 2). Since the Great Recession of 2007-2009, 11.5 of the 11.6 million jobs have gone to individuals with education and training beyond a high school diploma (Howard, 2018). In response to the completion agenda, states have been charged with creating and implementing policies that guarantee improvements in degree completion rates (Evenbeck & Johnson, 2012). Since 2008, 41 states have set state-specific college completion agendas (Howard, 2018). Initiating such policies could result in students earning degrees and entering the workforce sooner, with less debt. Making improvements to policies related to completion is particularly important for students from underrepresented groups, who are often enrolled at two-year colleges (Evenbeck & Johnson, 2012).

Institutional leaders are challenged with limited resources to support these changes to policies and programs. The Great Recession generated large financial shortfalls, resulting in significant budget cuts to institutional services dedicated to help students enter, persist, progress, and complete programs of study. Two-year institutions have a history of being chronically underfunded (Trainor, 2015). In response, institutional leaders at four-year and two-year

institutions have been reviewing their practices and gathering groups of education stakeholders to design and implement changes in areas, such as academic advisement, developmental education, programs of study and curricula, student service delivery, and transferability of courses and articulation agreements (Public Agenda, 2012). According to Trainor (2015), two-year institutions have an innovative history of doing more with less. He said, “[These institutions] are well-positioned to redress many of higher education’s most pressing problems today, including heightened institutional inequality, skyrocketing student debt and waning undergraduate interest in subjects that do not promise financial rewards” (para. 16).

McClenney (2013) said, “Nothing like the student success and completion agenda has ever been observed in over a century of experience in this sector of higher education” (p. 7). As institutional leaders develop and fund student success initiatives, they need to be intentional, deliberate, and creative in their decision-making. However, too often, programs or practices are created without considering student perspectives because including students’ voices might complicate the decision-making process (Schwartz, Craig, Tzeciak, Little, & Diaz, 2008). As institutional leaders strive to improve their success and completion outcomes, keeping students’ perceptions and experiences at the center of reform plans can legitimize student success initiatives by improving the effectiveness and ensuring sustainability (Center for Community College Student Engagement [CCCSE], 2012). It is imperative that institutional leaders remain focused on improving the student experience when establishing and creating a student-centered culture and fostering change at their institutions. To do so, institutional leaders must provide avenues for the student voice to be heard and incorporated into the decision-making process. Administrators may have been out of the undergraduate classroom for a long time so they must

rely on the experiences of current students to learn about the internal and external factors modern-day students face when navigating their college experience.

Background

Two-year colleges enroll nearly half of the undergraduate students attending American higher education institutions (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2016). Historically, the higher education sector has focused on providing access to post-secondary educational opportunities for females, veterans, and underrepresented student groups, such as students with lower socioeconomic status, disabilities, first-generation status, or different ethnic or racial backgrounds (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014). Over the past 10 years, higher educational leaders have shifted their focus away from providing access to college and toward the idea of ensuring student success, traditionally defined by institutions as completion or graduation. In higher education, the terms *student success*, *completion*, and *graduation* are used interchangeably by practitioners and in the literature. A decade ago, these conversations about completion rates and the value of the college degree were non-existent (Howard, 2018).

Measuring student success by completion or graduation rates alone presents a problem for two-year institutions. Four-year college students typically have an educational goal of graduating with a bachelor's degree. However, two-year college students have different educational goals, compared to four-year college students (Bailey, 2016). For example, a two-year college student may seek to earn enough credits to transfer to a four-year institution, complete remediation courses, take continuing education courses, change careers, or graduate with an associate's degree. Often, leaders at two-year institutions not only help students reach their educational goals, but also help students identify their educational goals. However, leaders at two-year institutions may find it difficult to adopt a success-oriented mindset as this type of

institution was founded on the philosophy of simply providing access to higher education (Bailey, 2016).

The higher education sector has been charged with becoming more accountable, prompting a comprehensive assessment of internal processes by the stakeholders. The budget cuts of the Great Recession fostered a move toward data-driven decision-making within the higher education industry. Institutional effectiveness assessment has been a norm at four-year colleges and universities, but two-year colleges have fallen behind, possibly because there has never been an expectation for assessment. Callery (2012) noted that community college leaders' efforts to improve assessment were prompted by "heightened attention by stakeholders and constituents on the ability of higher education institutions to meet the new academic and vocational training needs of a technologically advanced and highly integrated global society" (p. 21).

Most of the student success, student retention, and student development literature have focused on four-year residential colleges and universities. Historically, leaders at two-year colleges have attempted to apply the findings of studies conducted at four-year institutions to address the needs of the two-year college student citing seminal works of Bean (1983), Tinto (1987), Astin (1997), Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) and Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, and Hayek, (2006). Some of the literature is applicable; however, researchers who have focused solely on two-year colleges have found two-year students have their own unique needs, characteristics, and barriers (Bahr, 2011; Bailey et al., 2015; Bers & Younger, 2014; Cohen et al., 2014; Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Over the past 30 years, among the student success literature, the numbers of studies focused on two-year colleges has grown. Four-year college students and institutions have different definitions of student success. This section will provide an overview of

the completion crisis, explore why institutional conditions matter, and present the history, mission, and purpose of the University System of Georgia's state college.

From Access to Success: An Overview of the Completion Crisis

Providing access. Modern-day public higher education reforms designed to increase access began with the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 (now known as the GI Bill) and continued with the Higher Education Act of 1965, which established the Pell Grant, a needs-based federal financial aid program (Bailey, 2016). Community colleges were designed to offer a flexible education delivered at convenient locations at a lower cost (Bailey, 2016). As such, most two-year colleges have an open-access or broad access admissions policy, admitting and enrolling students who would otherwise be denied postsecondary educational opportunities at a four-year colleges or universities (Schudde & Goldrick-Rab, 2015). During the 1960s the community college sector experienced its most impressive period of growth, sometimes opening a new institution each week. They embraced their diverse student body enrolling members of minority groups, working-class men and women, non-traditional adult students, and returning combat veterans (Trainor, 2015). Today, these institutions continue to support and accommodate a diverse student body, enrolling more African American, Latino/a, and immigrant students, as well as offering courses and support systems in a variety of formats (Trainor, 2015).

The completion reform agenda. In the midst of the Great Recession, President Obama set a goal that by 2020 America would have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world (Humphreys, 2012). Around that same time, the Lumina Foundation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to making opportunities for post-secondary learning available to all, established a similar goal known as Goal 2025, or the commitment to increasing the proportion of Americans with college credentials to 60% by the year 2025 (Howard, 2018). Historically,

institutions had focused on high enrollment numbers, but had not paid a lot of attention to graduate numbers. At that time, most higher education institutions operated with an enrollment-funding model, which related funding solely to volume of students served (Miller, 2016).

Institutions who used an enrollment-based funding model could have enrolled students in classes up until the census date, typically in October around a semester's midterm. These types of models provide little incentive for quality and may provide disincentives for timely student completion (Miller, 2016). During the Great Recession, higher education institutions experienced an increase in enrollment, while simultaneously facing substantial decreases to their operating budgets.

President Obama forced higher education institutions to be transparent about their graduation rates. His completion agenda was established to “collect more and better data about students’ educational progress toward degrees, to enact new policies that incentivize increased graduation rates and improve the efficiency of degree production, and to tie funding to increased completion rates” (Humphreys, 2012, para. 1). As a result of continued budget cuts to higher education funding, “the completion agenda has morphed into a more-completion-at-less-cost agenda” (Evenbeck & Johnson, 2012, para 4).

The crisis evolves. Almost a decade after President Obama’s original speech, the cost of going to college has never been higher, students are leaving with higher amounts of debt, while facing a weak labor market, and have been forced to move back in with their parents, and either work in low-paying service and retail jobs or go to graduate school resulting in more debt and being over-educated for the job market (Ruiz, 2016). In those 10 years, the percentage of Americans with some college has increased from 37.9% to 46.9% (Howard, 2018). The current situation students are facing has increased public skepticism suggesting the value of a college

degree simply is not what it used to be (Ruiz, 2016). In a recent survey, four out of 10 individuals felt as if a college degree was not a worthwhile investment (Howard, 2018). In 2017, the three-year graduation rate was 28% (NCES, 2018). This number is not a true reflection of all of the community college graduates, as completion rates are calculated using only first-time, full-time student information. Still, according to Bailey (2016), most students who begin at a community college do not earn a certificate or degree. Failing to complete educational goals can negatively affect students' potential for earnings, personal economic growth, and growth of the economy as a whole (Bailey, 2016). Since the Great Recession, 11.5 million of the 11.6 million jobs went to individuals with education and training beyond high school (Howard, 2018).

The college completion agenda has been in the forefront of American higher education for almost 10 years now, but has often been overshadowed by the student loan crisis, which involves \$1.4 trillion that student and parent borrowers owe in college student loans (Looney & Watson, 2018). Thirty-seven percent of the students who start college do not finish (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Many of these individuals are students of color, first-generation, or low-income, or a combination of all three. Students who borrow and drop out of college are more than likely not able to pay back their student loans, resulting in defaults on student loans. According to King (2016), the typical defaulter owes less than \$9,000. Although institutions have made progress with high-impact strategies, the student completion challenge deserves the same national attention as the debt totals. Completion efforts deserve support from national, state, and institutional stakeholders, as helping students succeed is a shared responsibility.

Why Institutional Conditions Matter

One of the most commonly cited works on student development and student retention is that of Tinto (2005), who posited that students are more likely to be successful in progressing toward graduation when they learn in educational settings that are committed to student success. Lei (2016) found a strong institutional commitment to student success goes well beyond a mission statement listed in catalogs and brochures. Institutional leaders must invest in the resources needed, hold high expectations for students, provide the appropriate academic, cultural, social, and financial support to students, and sponsor activities for involvement, all of which are designed to enhance student success (Tinto, 2005).

In the literature reviewed (Kuh et al., 2005; Kuh, et al., 2006; Lei, 2016; Tinto, 2005; Tinto, 2010), the phrases *institutional conditions* and *institutional characteristics* are used interchangeably. Institutional conditions play a vital role in students' success, as well as in institutional retention rates and graduation rates (Lei, 2016). Kuh et al. (2006) defined institutional conditions as the programs, practices, policies, and cultural properties of an institution. Lei (2016) identified a dozen institutional characteristics that could affect student satisfaction, engagement, and learning including campus climate or environment, campus size, library size, student population size, student-faculty ratio, institution type, course format, campus facilities, student support services, campus-sponsored student events and activities, student on-campus living, and student on-campus employment.

Past studies have indicated a strong relationship between student satisfaction and student success related to degree attainment (Kuh, et al., 2005; Kuh et al., 2006; Kezar & Maxey, 2014; Tinto, 2010). Tinto (2005) found that student satisfaction relates to the educational environment and thus, success is associated with educational environment and with institutional conditions.

Therefore, research is needed to explore these institutional conditions and student success further.

University System of Georgia's State College

In 1931, the state of Georgia created the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia (USG) to centralize public higher education under one governing and managing authority for the first time in the Georgia's history (USG, 2018). The governor appoints members to a seven-year voluntary term. Today, the Board of Regents (BOR) is comprised of 19 members; one member comes from each of the state's 14 congressional districts, and five members from the state-at-large (USG, 2018). The BOR elects a chancellor and this person serves as the chief executive officer and chief administrative officer of the USG (USG, 2018). The BOR oversees all of the public colleges and universities within the USG, the Georgia Archives, and the Georgia Public Library System (USG, 2018).

In 2012, in response to the Great Recession, the BOR announced a plan to consolidate eight public institutions (Fain, 2012). The system followed the lead of the Technical College System of Georgia administrators, who consolidated 15 technical colleges into seven to save an estimated \$6.5 million dollars a year (Fain, 2012). Since then, further consolidations within the USG have taken place, dropping the number of institutions within the USG from 36 to 26 (USG, 2018). As a result of these consolidations, the institutions within the system may have multiple campuses or sites. Providing the same student experience to students at multiple locations of one institution can be a challenge.

Ten state colleges operate within the USG (USG, 2018). Most of them at one point in history had *junior college* or *community college* in their names. The primary functions of state colleges are to serve local areas by providing access to associate's degrees and to offer a limited

number of bachelor's degree programs (USG, 2018). The baccalaureate programs offered at a state college are designed to serve the economic development needs of their region (USG, 2018).

The following characteristics have been identified as the core characteristics shared by the public state colleges in Georgia:

- a commitment to excellence and responsiveness within a scope of influence defined by the needs of a local area and by particularly outstanding programs or distinctive characteristics that have a magnet effect throughout the region or state;
- a commitment to a teaching/learning environment, both inside and outside the classroom, that sustains instructional excellence, functions to provide University System access for a diverse student body, and promotes high levels of student learning;
- a high quality general education program that supports a variety of well-chosen associate programs and prepares students for baccalaureate programs, learning support programs designed to insure access and opportunity for a diverse student body, and a limited number of certificate and other career programs to complement neighboring technical institute programs;
- a limited number of baccalaureate programs designed to meet the educational and economic development needs of the local area;
- a commitment to public service, continuing education, technical assistance, and economic development activities that address the needs, improve the quality of life, and raise the educational level within the state college's scope of influence; and
- a commitment to scholarship and creative work to enhance instructional effectiveness and to encourage faculty scholarly pursuits; and a responsibility to address local needs

through applied scholarship, especially in areas directly related to targeted baccalaureate degree programs (USG, 2018, para. 2).

The state colleges within the USG are primarily associate's degree-granting institutions that serve their communities by providing affordable and accessible higher educational opportunities via two-year colleges (also known as community or junior colleges). Based on the core characteristics of the state colleges, it is only appropriate to use the existing two-year college and community college studies when critically analyzing student success and institutional conditions.

In summary, two-year institutions and the students who attend these institutions have different needs, compared to four-year institutions and the students who attend four-year institutions. The higher education industry is facing a completion crisis and as a result two-year institutions are having to not only consider access but also student success when planning continuous improvements. Tinto (2005) found students were more likely to succeed in educational settings that are committed to student success. Institutional conditions, such as the campus environment and the institutional agents, can impact students' levels of satisfaction and engagement, as well as, students' retention and graduation rates and thus, further research in these areas are warranted.

Statement of the Problem

Community college students' educational goals, including changing careers, transferring to a four-year school, or earning an associate's degree, has a direct effect on students' ability to gain more opportunities to improve their personal and professional lives. For almost 10 years, improving college completion rates has been at the forefront for higher education reform. The challenge for institutional leaders has been to determine the best way to improve not only access,

but also students' success in terms of identifying and progressing toward the achievement of their educational goals. Leaders of local, state, regional, and national organizations have shown an interest in improving completion rates and overall student success by investing resources such as time and money into collecting data to inform reform efforts. Two-year colleges are no exception. It is essential that institutional leaders understand students' needs when considering programs, policies, and procedures to improve student success. To determine these needs, higher education leaders should not only ask questions of their students, but rather listen to the students regarding their perceptions of the role institutions should play in their success. This is especially important if an institution has multiple campuses or instructional sites in an effort to attain consistencies across campuses.

Although a vast amount of literature exists regarding student retention, student success, and high-impact practices at the four-year level, little empirical work exists regarding student success at the community college level. Most of the student success literature has focused on the attributes of students rather than on institutional conditions. Institutional leaders must know how campus conditions affect community college students' success. Further, institutional leaders should take responsibility for the attributes that can influence the institutional conditions leading to student success. Findings of this study could assist college leaders with promoting an environment wherein students are consulted and play an active role in shaping their own educational experiences. Students can be partners in creating innovative solutions and fostering change to improve learning and education attainment. Student success literature could benefit from more studies offering the student perspective regarding what institutions can do to increase student success. Student engagement is a critical component of student development, student retention, and student success; therefore, it is imperative for institutions to focus on ways to

shape the academic, cultural, and social offerings to encourage student success (Astin, 1984, 1993, 1997; Astin & Astin, 2000; Bean, 1983; Bean & Eaton, 2000; Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Kuh, 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1987, 1993, 2005, 2010).

This study sought to understand students' perspectives regarding what students need from institutions to succeed. Capturing and integrating student feedback within the development of student success initiatives is vital (American Federation of Teachers Higher Education, 2011; Kuh et al., 2005; Kuh et al., 2006; Public Agenda, 2012; Schwartz et al., 2008). For example, one reoccurring best practice was to design programs and practices that effectively address the needs of students. Faculty, staff, and administrators could benefit from clarifying the student perspective regarding ways in which institutional conditions at community colleges shape community college students' educational success. In this study, the researcher aimed to address the gap in the literature on institutional conditions that improve student success in relation to student attainment of educational goals at a community college by incorporating the voice of the student. The study's findings could add to the literature on student retention and student success at community colleges, and more specifically, at non-residential community colleges and colleges with multiple campuses.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative and explanatory study utilized a multiple-case study to better understand how institutional conditions contributed to continuing students' success at Georgia Highlands College (GHC) in terms of identifying and making progress toward or achieving educational goals from the student perspective. To accomplish this, the study examined the roles of the campus environment and institutional agents (faculty, staff, and

administrators) by conducting direct and participant observations, interviews with students, and a review of archival data, documents, and physical artifacts at two different locations of GHC. Six students from each location defined student success and shared how their personal experiences shaped their definition for success. The students noted how different institutional conditions contributed or could contribute to their success. The researcher examined the data to determine what institutional conditions mattered most to students' success.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the overarching question: What institutional conditions do community college students perceive as contributing to their student success in terms of identifying and making progress toward or achieving one's educational goals? The following sub-questions were utilized to address the overarching question:

1. What roles does the campus environment play in community college students' ability to achieve student success?
2. What roles do institutional agents (faculty, staff, and administrators) play in community college students' ability to achieve student success?
3. In terms of roles of campus environment and roles of institutional agents, what factors are more pertinent to community college students progressing towards achieving educational goals?

Significance of the Study

In this study, the researcher examined community college students' perceptions regarding what they need from an institution to succeed in terms of support from personnel, as well as from institutional conditions shaping the college environment. Many factors affect student success, such as pre-college experiences, personality traits and behaviors, satisfaction, and institutional

conditions. Much research exists regarding student success best practices at four-year colleges; however, few studies have focused on the community college student. Even fewer studies have focused on students attending a 100% commuter college or students attending an institution with multiple locations. To date, little research has provided guidance for how to address student needs from the perspectives of the students. Further, few studies have focused specifically on institutional conditions and student success.

This study may help higher educational leaders understand the students' views of the elements that both promote, as well as hinder student success. This study may also help institutional leaders take responsibility for the student success elements they can control. The results from this study are intended to increase the effectiveness of student success initiatives through the incorporation of student voice for feedback. The findings have the potential to eliminate barriers to student success within institutional control.

Additionally, this study may increase awareness about how structure, organization, programs, practices, teaching, and learning all increase student success. The findings may help higher education leaders of community colleges, colleges with multiple locations, and commuter colleges, listen to the voices of their student population and ultimately change campus culture by creating policies, programming, and procedures based on the reality of student needs and not just administrators' perceptions of student needs. Finally, the findings could be transferrable to other community colleges and to four-year colleges as they seek to improve their students' success.

Procedures

The researcher conducted a qualitative and explanatory study that utilized multiple-case study to better understand the impact of institutional conditions on student success in terms of identifying and making progress toward or achieving educational goals. This study took place at

the Floyd Campus and Cartersville Site of Georgia Highlands College (GHC). Semi-structured interviews were the primary form of data collection. In addition, the researcher collected data according to Yin's (2014) six sources of evidence for case studies: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observations, and physical artifacts. The researcher began the data analysis by reviewing documents associated with institutional conditions at the Floyd Campus and Cartersville Site. Documents included enrollment data, student demographic data, retention data, and graduation data for the Floyd Campus and Cartersville Site. Additionally, the researcher reviewed information including square footage, campus maps, and building maps (See Figures 5, 6, 9, and 10 for building lists and Appendix A for maps). Each year, GHC administers the Presently Attending Student Satisfaction Survey, also known as the PASS Survey. This survey measures students' level of satisfaction with various aspects of and interactions with the overall institution and individual locations. The researcher reviewed the historical survey results for the Floyd Campus and Cartersville Site. In addition to this survey, every three years the USG asks that two-year institutions administer the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE). These findings represented the entire institution as a whole and not each location (see Appendix B for the key findings reports for CCSSE data). Finally, the researcher reviewed documents related to prospective student messaging including welcome letters from the Campus Deans and reasons to attend GHC (see Appendix C and D to view these student messaging items).

During the first three weeks of the fall 2017 semester, direct and participant observations were conducted at Weeks of Welcome, a series of activities and events during the extended orientation period designed to promote involvement and interaction between new and current students within the college community setting. Facilities, furniture, artwork, and the campus

layout were observed. Finally, the researcher attended reaffirmation meetings with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools team, as well as Gateway to Completion synthesis meetings, and the Academic Success session at new student orientation, as a participant observer. See Appendix E for the observation protocol.

The researcher created an interview protocol using open-ended questions that focused students' perceptions of institutional conditions that affect their student success in terms of identifying and progressing toward or achieving educational goals (see Appendix F to view the protocol). The researcher aligned the existing literature regarding student success and institutional conditions with each interview question to develop a literature matrix, as well these interview questions were aligned with the proposed research questions (see Appendix G to view the matrix). Faculty, staff, and administrators were contacted and asked to recommend students as possible participants. Students needed to be of continuing status and engaged either in or out of the classroom. These engaged students could have high levels of academic performance, interaction in the classroom, or engagement with the curriculum. The engaged students could also be involved in a club or organization, participating in leadership opportunities, or attending activities and events on campus. A total of 12 students, six students from each location, answered questions in one-on-one, semi-structured interviews.

All of the data collected was reviewed for themes, categories, and subcategories through a process called coding. Data were reviewed for each individual location and then as a cross-case analysis, which is a process of summarizing, integrating, combining, and comparing the findings of different locations on a specific topic or research question (Cruzes, Dyba, Runeson, & Host, 2014). The researcher treated the Floyd Campus and Cartersville Site as two individual cases and then organized the data so that it was easily comparable. The findings were organized in relation

to the research questions and were compared to determine similarities and differences between the two sites in terms of the research questions.

Definitions of Key Terms

Key terms for this study are defined in the following section:

Barriers to student success – Barriers to success are circumstances or obstacles that prevent progress toward achieving an educational goal.

Commuter student – A commuter student is a student who does not live on campus in a residence hall.

Completion – Completion is the outcome of how many students within a cohort complete and/or graduate from an institution (Voight & Hundrieser, 2008).

High-impact practices – High-impact practices (HIPs) are programs and strategies used in and outside the classroom that have been found to make a notable difference in student engagement and teaching and learning; the impact depends on how the programs are implemented, how many students are reached, and how many practices students experience (CCSSE, 2012).

Institutional conditions – Institutional conditions are the policies, programs, practices, and cultural properties of any given institution (Kuh et al., 2006).

Non-residential, limited mission, state college – A non-residential, limited mission, state college is designed to be a highly flexible and dynamic institution, particularly responsive to workforce needs in its area; the primary function is to serve as the associate-level access institution in the local area and to offer a limited number of baccalaureate programs targeted to serve the economic development needs of its region (USG, 2018).

Persistence – Persistence is a student-level measure of success, calculated as the enrollment headcount of any cohort compared to its headcount on its initial official census date (Voigt & Hundrieser, 2008).

Retention – Retention is an institution-level measure of success, calculated as a measure of the rate at which students persist in their educational program at an institution, fall to fall (IPEDS, 2016).

Student success – Student success is the active progression toward or achievement of the students' educational goals.

Student success initiatives – Student success initiatives are the programs, practices, and policies designed and implemented to enhance student success and promote college completion.

Limitations, Delimitations, and Assumptions

Limitations of the research design included the choice of the multiple-case study method, which can typically be lengthy (Neale, Thapa, & Boyce, 2006). The population will be delimited to Georgia Highlands College (GHC) students at two of the six locations in northwest Georgia. Although GHC serves a diverse population of students with multiple locations in five different counties, the findings in this investigation may not be generalizable across populations and thus may be limited to the demographic constraints of the area. Students were recommended by institutional agents to participate in the study. One condition was recommended participants be engaged or involved, either in or out of the classroom, or both. Responses may be different than the general population who may not be as engaged. One assumption of this study was that students were open and honest in reporting their perceptions of institutional conditions that affect their success. Another assumption is that the literature on two-year and community colleges is

applicable for this associate's degree-dominant, limited bachelor's degree-awarding state college.

Chapter Summary and Organization of the Paper

Community college students face many barriers to student success, specifically at non-residential institutions. Across the nation, leaders at higher education institutions face similar challenges, including understanding the unique needs of the student population and creating policies, programs, practices, and cultures to meet students' needs and help students persist, and progress through to graduation. Too often leaders in higher education have made decisions based on their perceptions of students' needs rather than basing their decisions on what students believe they need. Leaders need to involve the students as active participants and use the students' voices in shaping the institutional conditions that affect their experience.

The purpose of this multiple-case study was to explore the institutional conditions that contributed to continuing students' success at Georgia Highlands College (GHC) from the student perspective. Through the case-study analysis, the researcher examined how the overall campus environment influenced students' success and what roles the interactions with faculty, staff, and administrators played in students' success. The results of this study may provide valuable insight for higher education leaders involved in making decisions that influence student success initiatives. With this study, the researcher not only aimed to guide leaders toward involving students in the student success conversation, but also hoped to turn student perceptions into actionable solutions for improving college completion rates. This study may contribute to the limited body of literature regarding student success and institutional conditions. In addition, the findings may add to the small body of works focusing on institutional conditions and student success at the community college level and at colleges with multiple campuses. The findings

could encourage intuitional leaders to pay more attention to their role, the influence they may have, and their responsibility for helping students succeed.

Chapter two includes a literature review that presents research on understanding the American community college, defining student success, reviewing factors contributing to student success, linking theory to practice, and conducting a deeper review of institutional conditions and student success. Chapter three describes the methodology, the research questions, and the research design. Chapter three continues with a description of the setting, the participants, and the role of the researcher. Chapter three concludes with data collection methods, data analyses, and trustworthiness. Chapter four provides a comprehensive description, participant profiles, and thematic findings for the Floyd Campus and Cartersville Site at GHC. Chapter four provides a response to the research questions for the Floyd Campus and Cartersville Site. Chapter four concludes with cross-case analysis of the findings from the Floyd Campus and Cartersville Site. Finally, Chapter five provides a summary of the study and an analysis and discussion of the findings as they relate to the literature. Chapter five concludes with implications for practice, recommendations for future research, conclusions, reflections, dissemination of findings, and an impact statement.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Educational attainment is not a direct route, but a “wide path with twists, turns, detours, roundabouts, and the occasional dead end” (Kuh et al., 2006, p. 7). Educators, policymakers, and other stakeholders have long debated what constitutes student success (Harrell & Holcroft, 2012). It is important to note no single blueprint exists for student success. Many institutional best practices contribute to student success; however, what works at one institution may not work at another institution. Likewise, practices applicable for a four-year college student may not be applicable for a two-year college student. To improve retention, progression, and graduation rates, institutional leaders must be committed to designing policy and practices that address the barriers students face.

Most of the student success, student retention, and student development literature has focused on four-year residential colleges and universities. Some of the literature is applicable; however, researchers who have focused solely on two-year colleges have found two-year students have unique needs, characteristics, and barriers (Bailey et al., 2015; Bahr, 2011; Bers & Younger, 2014; Cohen et al., 2014). One of the ways literature about four-year institutions is not applicable to the two-year college is the fact that graduation or completion may not be students’ end goal. Instead, students’ educational goal could be earning enough credit hours to transfer. Other students may enroll at a two-year college as a means of academic remediation. Some students need help changing careers, support continuing their education, or assistance in obtaining associate’s degrees. Educational leaders should be aware of the needs of their students, as understanding what students need from their colleges to succeed is critical to helping them be successful. Researchers (Kuh et al., 2005; Tinto, 2005; Kuh, et al. 2006; Tinto, 2010) have noted

the creation of effective environments for student success, yet the perceptions of students regarding what they need to succeed are rarely considered.

This chapter covers the literature regarding American community college, including factors contributing to student success, the theoretical perspectives, and institutional conditions that matter to student success. The researcher used ProQuest, GALILEO, DISCOVER@GeorgiaSouthern, the GIL Universal Catalog, the Digital Commons, and Google Scholar as resources and search engines to aid in the research process. The following key words and phrases were used in the search process: *student success, community college, community college success, student perceptions, institutional conditions, institutional characteristics, campus environment, college climate, college culture, faculty-student interactions, completion agenda, institutions with multiple campuses, and institutional factors*. A search for *community college student success* in Discover @ Georgia Southern resulted in 533,051 journal articles written from 1998 to 2018, compared with 71,049 journal articles written between 1968-1998. However, more two-year college success-related studies are needed.

The American Community College

For over 100 years, U.S. two-year colleges have been known as technical colleges, junior colleges, or community colleges. Cohen et al. (2014) defined a U.S. community college as “any not-for-profit institution, regionally accredited to award the associate in arts or the associate in science as its highest degree” (p. 5). Community colleges have offered curricular functions such as developmental education, integrative education, transfer credits, liberal arts and occupational education (Cohen et al., 2014). The number of two-year institutions grew from 20 in 1909 to 678 in 1960. Today, the number of institutions has almost doubled. Enrollment at community colleges has increased from just over 500,000 students in the 1960s to around 7.5 million

students in 2016 (AACC, 2016). That means nearly half of the undergraduate students in the United States are enrolled at a community college (AACC, 2016). Recent growth can be attributed to the 2007-2009 economic recession and improved access to a quality education closer to home at affordable prices. Community colleges are in a unique position, serving as a first point of entry for some students and as a last resort for other students (Hornak & Garza-Mitchell, 2016).

Characteristics of Community College Students

According to Cohen et al. (2014), two words characterized the community college student body: number and variety. Wyner (2014) noted that community colleges are either highly urban with a large minority population, rural with mostly White population, or a combination of both. Compared to four-year institutions, community colleges enroll more learners who are adults (also known as nontraditional), commuters (not living on campus), and first-generation students (the first person in one's immediate family to attend or graduate from college). Community college students typically need developmental, remedial, or learning support classes. Everett (2015) posited that public community colleges provide the best option for first-generation students' access and success. Community college students have a wide-range of family backgrounds, often termed *demographics*, implying inherited factors play a role in student success, rather than student's position in the stratification system (Goldrick-Rab, 2010). Community colleges have higher percentages of low-income, part-time, academically underprepared, nontraditional, and minority students. Researchers (Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Cohen et al., 2014; Goldrick-Rab, 2010) have found these students can be at risk for attrition before even stepping foot on a college campus.

According to Bahr (2011),

Community college students pursue credential or not, come and go from the institutions from term to term, attend part-time or full-time, declare a major late or not at all, modify their academic objectives, enroll in any courses in any program of study if they meet the prerequisites, and participate in tutoring or advising programs, or not. (p. 3)

This wide variation in the expectations and the participation levels of students who attend community colleges can be misleading in educators' efforts to assess success (Bailey, Jenkins, & Leinbach, 2005).

A College Completion Crisis

Between 1970 and 2009, undergraduate enrollment at American higher education institutions doubled, but graduation rates stayed the same (Complete College America [CCA], 2018). Historically, colleges had been funded with an enrollment-funding model and received money from their state's based on the volume of students enrolled. In the early 2000s America began to enter a period of general economic decline. As a result, states began to cut their institutions' budgets dramatically. By 2007, the nation was dealing with the Great Recession and as a result of the economic downturn and higher unemployment rates, colleges experienced a drive in enrollment (Fain, 2014b). According to Fain, community colleges and for-profit institutions had the largest recession-driven increases in enrollment. As the economy began to improve, students may have left school to return to the workforce, resulting in lower completion rates (Fain, 2014b). In 2009, in response to America being ranked 12th place worldwide in the percentage of young adults with at least an associate's degree, President Barack Obama announced his daunting goal to lead the world in college completion by 2020 (Field, 2015). President Obama's completion agenda stemmed from a desire to strengthen the middle class and expand the economy attributing low completion rates to economic decline.

CCA had this to say about the completion crisis:

There are many barriers to student success including low credit enrollment, poorly designed and delivered remedial education, overwhelming and unclear choices, and a system out of touch with the needs of students who must often balance work and family with their coursework. The result is a system of higher education that costs too much, takes too long, and graduates too few. (2018, para. 1)

A Response to the Completion Crisis

In response to this so-called college completion crisis, President Obama's completion agenda led to the creation of the CCA initiative in 2009. At the same time, the Lumina Foundation created Goal 2025. Since then, institutions have been slowly making progress toward increasing their graduation rates. College completion should be an institution's top priority (The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education [NCPPE] and The Southern Regional Education Board [SREB], 2010). Students should not only complete college, but graduate equipped with skills to succeed in the next phase of life (Wyner, 2014). However, according to McClenney (2013), nothing short of an institutional transformation is required to overcome the completion crisis at any given institution. Leaders at community colleges face a challenge as community colleges were designed to provide access, not necessarily student success (Bailey et al., 2015). Community colleges need to evolve to meet the demands of the 21st century economy (Wyner, 2014). Researchers have indicated more leaders at colleges and universities are redesigning academic programs and support services to "create more clearly structured and educationally coherent program pathways to student end goals, with built-in progress monitoring, feedback and support at each step along the way" (Jenkins, 2014, p.1).

Over the last decade, the weaknesses such as high cost of tuition, high levels of student debt, low graduation rates, the inability to find a job, and the declining value of a college degree have gained local, regional, and national attention resulting in higher education leaders and other stakeholders recognizing America's college completion crisis. The college completion crisis has garnered the attention of public and private organizations, leading to the development of local, state, and national initiatives. For example, in addition to CCA, other efforts include Achieving the Dream (a completion initiative specifically for two-year institutions), Beyond Financial Aid (an initiative designed to address the needs of students with lower socio-economic statuses), Complete College Georgia [CCG] (an extension of CCA specifically for the students in the state of Georgia), the Momentum Year (an extension of Complete College Georgia, targeting USG institutions, that is focused on purposeful choice, academic mindset, and program maps) and Gateways to Completion (an initiative focused on improving the passing grades of first-year courses that have traditionally higher DWF rates). These initiatives have tended to focus on serving traditionally underserved populations and overcoming barriers to success. However, racial, socioeconomic, and gender diversity have often been blamed for poor institutional outcomes (Goldrick-Rab, 2010).

Although community colleges have improved data-driven decision making to create innovative programs for educating and engaging the underprepared and traditionally underserved student, these programs have had a limited scope, contributing to small steps toward student success rather than fostering widespread improvement (CCCSE, 2012). The nation is almost a decade into the completion reform agenda, and little improvement has appeared. In fact, a lack of clarity regarding the goals of community colleges means administrators have lacked the effective assessment practices needed to determine if goals are being attained (Wyner, 2014).

Challenges for Engaging Community College Students

A number of researchers have found that student success relates to student engagement (Astin, 1993; Kuh, 2003, 2008; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 2005). Student engagement can be defined as “the time and energy students devote to educationally sound activities inside and outside of the classroom, and the policies and practices that institutions use to induce students to take part in these activities” (Kuh, 2003, p. 25). Many factors contribute to the lack of student engagement at the community college level. Most community college students have other commitments outside of pursuing their post-secondary education, such as working or taking care of dependents. Many community college students enroll only part-time (Gonzalez, 2009; Provasnik & Planty, 2008) or commute (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Part-time students are less-engaged and more likely to drop-out of college (Gonzalez, 2009). Lack of community college student engagement needs to be addressed at the institutional level, as well as within the student culture, by providing a holistic student experience (Nguyen, 2011).

Students are not the only ones who are at an institution part-time; two-thirds of community colleges faculty are part-time or adjunct instructors (Provasnik & Planty, 2008). Eagan and Jaeger (2009) stated the dependence on part-time faculty may save the colleges money, but the savings come at the expense of student success. Like part-time students, part-time faculty members are less likely to be engaged (Schmidt, 2008). Studies have shown part-time faculty have less time for students, are not connected to the campus culture, and are not aware of information about campus resources and support systems (Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Deil-Amen, 2011; Schuster, 2003; Umbach, 2007). According to Kezar and Maxey (2014), who wrote about the challenges part-time instructors face when making connections via meaningful and substantial interactions:

Part-time instructors often lack office space where they can meet with students to provide support or feedback. When they are able to hold office hours, they are often not paid for that time. They may lack school-issued email addresses that help to facilitate communication with students. Additionally, they are often excluded from the broader life of their campuses and departments, and may not be invited or encouraged to participate in activities or to serve as advisors for individual students or student groups. (p. 34)

Community college students may need more direction navigating the college community. In a recent survey, Booth et al. (2013) found students wanted help connecting success in college to their life goals. In addition, students wanted help developing a plan from enrollment to goal achievement, and they wanted counselors and faculty to play an active role in their plan (Booth et al., 2013). Booth et al. posited students need help in the forms of tools or resources and human connections; however, many students in the study did understand the value and importance of engaging with the campus community. These findings provide an opportunity for institutional leaders to promote student engagement in and out of the classroom as a component of student success.

Defining Student Success

Educators have proposed many definitions for student success. It is critical to have a shared understanding at the institutional level of how student success is to be defined. Defining student success is the critical first step toward promoting it (Cueso, 2007). Institutional leaders should consider not only what constitutes success, but also the specific types of educational processes that contribute to or increase the likelihood of student success, as well as how student success can be realized, measured, and assessed (Cuseo, 2007).

Kuh et al. (2006) defined student success as “academic achievement, engagement in educationally purposeful activities, satisfaction, acquisition of desired knowledge, skills, and competencies, persistence, attainment of educational objectives, and post-college performance” (p. 7). Other definitions have included elements of student achievement such as grades, credit hours, and progressing toward a degree (Kuh et al., 2006). Some researchers have included the extent to which students are satisfied with their experience and feel comfortable with their environment (Astin, 1993). Tinto (1993) included the extent to which students have socially integrated into their campus environments. In addition, other definitions have included postcollege achievements, such as graduate school admission test scores, graduate school enrollment and completion rates, discipline-specific examinations, and post-college employment and income (Kuh et al., 2006).

Broadly, student success can be defined as “the achievement of the student’s own, often developing, educational goals” (AFTHE, 2011, p. 4). “The truest definition of student success is determined by the goals and personal situation of each individual student. For this reason, no single comprehensive statement or simple set of metrics can offer a complete and meaningful picture of the many ways in which our students succeed every year at all of our colleges” (Harrell & Holcroft, 2012, para.8). Kuh (2014) noted early college indicators of persistence and success included goal realization, psycho-social fit, credit hours completed, academic and social support, and involvement in the certain kinds of activities. For this study, the researcher has combined the student success definitions provided by AFTHE (2011) and Harrell and Holcroft (2012) to define student success for two-year college students as “the active progression toward or achievement of the students’ educational goals.”

Factors Contributing to Student Success

There is a myriad of conditions that can contribute to students' ability to succeed at the community college level. According to Stelnicki, Nordstokee, and Saklofske (2015), few researchers have asked students to describe the factors that contribute to their own student success. Although students should assume responsibility for their own success, institutional leaders have an obligation to understand and examine their role in the students' experiences and successes (Shumaker & Wood, 2016). The assumption is that institutional leaders will seek to understand the needs of their students and use that data to drive decision-making about student success initiatives.

In previous literature, researchers have identified many factors that can contribute to student success; the researcher grouped these factors into the following categories: precollege experiences, students' personality traits, behaviors, and levels of satisfaction, and institutional conditions (Kuh et al., 2005; Kuh et al., 2006; McClenney, 2013; Nasr & Jackson-Harris, 2016; Tinto, 2005; Tovar, 2006). Most of the studies that focused on community college success have tended to concentrate on factors such as first-generation status, socioeconomic status, and prior academic achievement among underserved student populations. Underserved student populations include African American, Latino, or Hispanic students; veterans; students majoring in a STEM fields; students attending only online; and students majoring in the healthcare field (Crisp, 2010; Fong et al., 2016; Keller, 2017; Nasr & Jackson-Harris, 2016; Overath, Zhang, & Hatherill, 2016; Vega, Moore, & Miranda, 2015; Wladis, Conway, & Hachey, 2015).

Precollege Experiences

Precollege experiences are the factors that occur as a student prepares for success in college. Research has shown that factors, such as academic preparedness, family background,

enrollment choices, and financial aid affect persistence toward graduation (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Although high schools may promote early college awareness, researchers have found gaps between curricular standards required to graduate from high school and expectations of students upon college entry (Hirsch & Savitz-Romer, 2007; NCPPHE & SREB, 2010). College success results from the experiences students have before they enroll in college as much as from the experiences students have during college (Engle & Tinto, 2008).

Background and characteristics. Events that have taken place in a students' lives may play an important part in determining what transpires within their college experiences. Braxton, Hirshy, and McClendon (2004) found the only determining factors of community college persistence were entering student characteristics such as high school grade-point-average (GPA) and standardized test scores. Variables associated with students' backgrounds and characteristics (e.g. age, gender, race and ethnicity, family education background, socioeconomic status, academic, financial and family support) have previously been investigated as predictors of academic success (Horton, 2015; Kuh et al., 2006; Nelson, Misra, Sype, & Mackie, 2016). In addition, community college students may enter college with cultural disadvantages that influence college retention and graduation (Martin, Galentino, & Townsend, 2014). For example, in a recent study focused on the perceptions of African American males at community colleges, almost all the participants stated that student success was not associated with academic performance, but with overcoming challenges stemming from the intersections of race, class, and gender in an academic environment (Emerson, 2016).

Hlinka (2017) found that the primary factor encouraging students to persist toward graduating or transferring to a four-year college was their own family's values regarding education. Family can push students to enroll in and graduate from college (Hlinka, 2017). But

Hlinka acknowledged family obligations can hinder students from completing a college degree. A secondary factor affecting college completion was overcoming the pull of family obligations (Hlinka, 2017). In addition, first-generation students face a new challenge identified as family achievement guilt – “specific feelings of guilt regarding one’s academic success compared to the success of family members” (Covarrubias, Romero, & Trivelli, 2015, p. 2032). As a result of these feelings, students feel like they must minimize their academic achievements when they are with their immediate and extended family (Covarrubias et al., 2015). Golrick-Rab (2010) observed that students’ characteristics have correlated with students’ success, but simply identifying characteristics did not explain the relationships or show what to do about it. In addition, Showers and Kinsman (2017) studied students with learning disabilities and college success, and they found that family background contributed to student success through student attributes.

Academic preparedness. Only about 32% of public high school students leave high school college-ready (Green & Forster, 2003). According to Horton (2015), the term *college-ready* describes students who have graduated from high school, completed courses that colleges require for the acquisition of academic skills, and demonstrated basic literacy skills. However, even if students have good high school grades, they may not be prepared for the rigor of college classes (NCPPE & SREB, 2010). In fact, recent studies have shown a lack of connection between students’ perceptions of college readiness and actual preparedness (CCSSE, 2016; NCPPE & SREB, 2010). Precollege preparedness positively influences college success (NCPPE & SREB, 2010). Unfortunately, students at community colleges are less prepared for college and more likely to need remedial coursework (Cohen et al., 2014). For example, Hlinka

(2017) found that students at a rural Appalachian community college struggled to master college coursework.

Researchers have concluded that both cognitive and non-cognitive factors can contribute to college success. These factors include high school GPA, standardized test scores, academic self-confidence, academic-related skills, academic intensity in high school, educational aspirations, and participation in precollege encouragement programs can contribute to college success (CCSSE, 2005; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Horton, 2015; Kuh et al., 2006; Lotkowski, Robbins & Noeth, 2004). Further, students who do not complete high school but graduate with a general education diploma (GED) are at risk when attending college (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Students that lack readiness for college are at risk of failing courses and dropping out of college (Horton, 2015). Students often inherit the cultural capital of their parents and families. Martin et al. (2014) reviewed how cultural capital can contribute to persistence and completion through cultural and racial self-identification and supportive families. Most community college students face shortcomings from lack of educational resources in terms of cultural capital and college retention. When examining common characteristics and behaviors of successful community college students, Martin et al. (2014) found students could overcome the disadvantages related to cultural capital and academic preparedness with a well-defined college plan.

Enrollment choices. According to Nelson et al. (2016), 75% of college students in the U.S. have reported having to juggle work, family, school, and commuting to class. This work-life-education balance affects students' decision to enroll in college. Wood, Harrison, and Jones (2016) studied the perceptions of Black males and found employment was a barrier to academic success. Students specifically acknowledged having a hard time adjusting to work and class schedules, which often caused fatigue and stress on relationships at work, at school, and at home

(Wood et al., 2016). Some other factors that may threaten persistence and graduation include not entering college directly after high school, attending college part-time, taking care of dependents, and working more than 30 hours a week while attending college (CCSSE, 2005; Horton, 2015; Kuh et al., 2006; Nelson et al., 2016). It is common for community college students to have delayed enrollment, enroll only in nine credit hours, have small children at home, and hold one or more jobs while attending college (CCSSE, 2005; Horton, 2015; Kuh et al., 2006; Nelson et al., 2016). Crosta (2014) studied the relationship between community college students' enrollment patterns and college success, defined as degree completion or transfer. The study showed a positive association between enrollment in consecutive terms and earning a college degree, as well as a positive association between full-time enrollment and the likelihood of transfer (Crosta, 2014).

Other variables involved with enrollment choices include a general awareness of the college process, persistence, enrollment patterns, and attendance at multiple colleges (Crosta, 2014). Students may attend a community college because they performed poorly at a previous four-year institution. In fact, community college students often have transfer credit from multiple institutions. Research has shown students who are commuters are at risk because they may have more demands on their time and fewer opportunities to commit to their studies and to their college (Jacoby, 2015; Nelson et al., 2016; Tinto, 1987).

Students' Personality Traits, Behaviors, and Satisfaction

Although student learning is a priority for colleges and universities, sometimes meeting this goal is outside an institution's control. Tinto (2016) found students are less likely to persist without motivation and effort, regardless of institutional leaders' actions. "Motivation, engagement, and voice are the trifecta of student-centered learning. Without motivation, there is

no *push* to learn; without engagement there is no *way* to learn; and without voice, there is no *authenticity* in the learning” (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012, p. 33). Students must be self-advocates and do their part and take responsibility for their own learning (Felten et al., 2016). Dudley, Liu, Hao, and Stallard (2015) found students often admit to putting forth little effort in their courses, but express high expectations regarding the class, challenging work, and high standards from faculty.

Psychosocial factors and noncognitive factors such as self-efficacy, grit, mindset, motivation, self-regulated learning, leadership, and resiliency have gained much attention from higher education researchers (Bazelais, Lemay, & Doleck, 2016; Duckworth, 2013; Fong et al., 2016). Fong et al. (2016) found a positive relationship between community college persistence and two psychosocial factors self-perceptions and motivation. Tinto (2016) cited self-efficacy, sense of belonging, and perceived value of the curriculum as experiences that shape student motivation. Students cited being focused as most important to their own success (Booth et al., 2013).

Horton (2015) compiled a list of 20 critical at-risk behaviors that impact college success and divided them into four major categories including perseverance, academic mindset, learning strategies, and social skills. Some at-risk student behaviors include procrastination, fear of failure, financial constraints, lack of clear direction or goals, lack of challenges, memorization instead of thought, failure to be a team-player, and lack of a support system (Horton, 2015). Booth et al. (2013) found the most common reasons students cited for missing class were the need to take care of family and the need to work.

Stelnicki et al. (2015) sought to clarify how students describe personal characteristics and external factors that may help or hinder their college success. The researchers found students

cited future orientation (determination, focus, future financial security), persistence (hard work, dedication, effort), and strong executive function skills (time-management, planning, preparation) as themes that helped students reach their goals (Stelnicki et al., 2015). Martin et al. (2014) sought to provide a description and clarification of the characteristics of successful community college students and found that successful graduates share four common traits including clear goals, strong motivation, the ability to manage external demands, and self-empowerment.

In a recent student-perspective study of the California Community College System, Booth et al. (2013) found five key themes that summarized the factors students perceived they needed to succeed. According to students, colleges should foster students' motivation, teach students how to succeed in the postsecondary environment, structure support to ensure success is addressed, provide comprehensive support to historically underserved students to prevent the equity gap from growing, and encourage faculty to take the lead in supporting student achievement (Booth et al., 2014). Cox and Ebbers (2010) found the influence of friends and family, challenges with balancing obligations, and positive and negative aspects of the learning environment influenced participants' determination to persist towards college completion.

Flynn and MacLeod (2015) studied the relationship between happiness and academic success, in addition to five other life factors (financial security, familial support, living environment, self-image, and social relations). They used the Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale (Huebner, Laughlin, Ash, & Gilman, 1998) to measure happiness and the six factors. Although Flynn and MacLeod (2015) found a positive relationship between academic success and happiness, they also found that 14.1% of students were not quite happy or very

unhappy. Institutional leaders could focus on the future happiness of these students (Flynn & MacLeod, 2015).

Institutional Conditions

Institutions play an essential role in influencing student learning by creating and maintaining environments that challenge and support all students to learn (Felten et al., 2016). Kuh et al. (2006) defined institutional conditions as policies, programs, practices, and cultural properties of a college or university. Tinto (2010) sought to identify institutional conditions for student retention and called for a model of institutional action. Tinto's main question was *What is known about the nature of institutional environments that promote student retention and institutional completion?* Tinto attempted to answer this question from an institutional perspective and found certain categories of institutional actions effectively promoted student success including expectations, support, feedback, and involvement. Lei (2016) identified institutional characteristics that may influence the students' educational experience include campus climate, campus size, library size, student population, student-faculty ratio, institution type, course format, facilities, support services, events and activities, on-campus living, and on-campus employment. For this study, the researcher combined the works of Kuh et al. (2006), Lei (2016), and Tinto (2010) to create a definition for institutional conditions as campus environment and institutional agents (faculty, staff, and administrators).

Kuh et al. (2006) claimed institutional leaders must not only know institutional conditions related to success, but also understand how to create conditions related to success. Researchers at Ruffalo Noel Levitz (2016), a higher education consulting firm, asked over 192,000 community college students to rank a list of factors that might contribute to student enrollment. The students identified cost, financial aid, and academic reputation as the top three

factors, followed by geographic setting, personalized attention prior to enrollment, campus appearance, size of institution, recommendation from family/friends, and the opportunity to play sports (Ruffalo Noel Levitz, 2016). In addition, over 90,000 students from four-year public colleges ranked the items in the exact same order (Ruffalo Noel Levitz, 2016).

Like student engagement, retention, and success literature, most of the studies regarding the relationship between students and institutional agents are focused on the four-year college students' experiences. A lot of the existing works are centered on the interactions between faculty and students. Kezar and Maxey (2014) found interactions between faculty and students to improve both learning and the student experience. There are many benefits to faculty-student interactions such as increased persistence and completion rates, better grades and standardized test scores, and the development of leadership, critical thinking, sense of worth, career and graduate school aspiration, and self-confidence (Kezar & Maxey, 2014). At a four-year institution, a student may be more likely to interact with faculty members, but at a community college employees take on many roles and students will interact with faculty, staff, and administrators. Dowd, Pak, and Bensimon (2013) explored the successful transition from community college to selective-four-year colleges and graduate schools. They found that faculty, staff, and administrators played an important role in student success by providing educational resources and support. Institutional agents helped students realize their full potential, improve their academic self-confidence, and improve their self-efficacy (Dowd et al., 2013). Quality faculty-student interactions can have positive impacts on "students' aspirations, promote student engagement and a passion for learning, increase motivation to learn, boost academic self-confidence, and provide validation for students" (Kezar & Maxey, 2014, p. 32).

Booth et al. (2013) reported five key themes in student perspectives research: (a) colleges need to foster students' motivation, (b) colleges must teach students how to succeed in the postsecondary environment, (c) colleges need to structure support to ensure all six success factors (directed, focused, nurtured, engaged, connected, and valued) are addressed, (d) colleges need to provide comprehensive support to historically underserved students to prevent the equity gap from growing, and (e) everyone has a role to play in supporting student achievement, but faculty must take the lead. Booth et al. found students emphasized the need for someone to care about the students and their success. Students said faculty specifically could make students feel cared about by "making sure they understand the course material, making them feel that it is important that they do well, and ensuring they have an opportunity to participate in class discussions" (Booth et al., 2013, p. 21).

Linking Theory to Practice

Sustaining student success initiatives depends on cross-campus collaboration between the president, provost, deans, faculty, staff, and students (Kuh et al., 2005). Harrill, Lawton, and Fabianke (2015) noted the importance of aligning and integrating student success strategies to maximize time, effort, and resources, thereby eliminating duplicated work, demonstrating how initiatives work together, and reducing initiative fatigue. Students' opinions matter regarding how the learning environment is established. Students' expertise and knowledge from their own experiences can renew the relevance and authenticity of student success initiatives. It is critical for institutional leaders to listen to student needs, learn about student successes, and understand how student success occurs (Kuh et al., 2005). Students can offer the insight needed to advance institutional progress and achievement (Booth et al., 2013). There are a few student development

and student success-related theories and models that focus on how the college environment affects the student's development.

Theoretical Perspectives Related to Student Success

The literature on student development, student retention, and student involvement at traditional four-year colleges is extensive. Much of the literature about student success has focused on the traditional four-year, residential college or university. At the heart of the literature is researchers' desire to know why students leave or stay (Voigt & Hundrieser, 2008). Although commonalities appear among the success characteristics of four-year and two-year college students, community college students have unique needs and face challenges not yet addressed by much of the existing research on student success characteristics. What works at four-year institutions may not be relevant for improving completion rates at two-year institutions; leaders at community colleges should consider this possibility when implementing success initiatives (Bers & Younger, 2014).

Many recent studies have focused on community college success than ever before (CCCSE, 2014; Hlinka, 2017; Ozaki, 2016; Tovar, 2015); however, the authors of these studies have attempted to apply success theories relevant to four-year students to the community college population. Hatch and Bohlig (2016) recognized the need for a common framework and consistent terminology to describe student success. Gillett-Karam (2016) posited student development theories guiding scholarly practitioners are irrelevant, outdated, and fail to support the needs of today's demographically diverse community college students.

Some of the most commonly cited success-related theories and models include but are not limited to Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) work on interactionalist theory, integration theory, and model of departure, Bean's (1983) student attrition model, Chickering and Reisser's (1993)

seven vectors of identity, Holland's (1966, 1973, 1985, 1997) person-environment theory, Bean and Eaton's (2000) attitude-behavior theory, Astin's (1984, 1993, 1997) theory of student involvement and input-environment-outputs model. Much of the literature on student success comes from national reports and works published by national organizations. Other important success-related works include *Student Success in College: Creating Conditions that Matter* (Kuh et al., 2005) and the *2004 ACT Report*, which was based on years of data collection and reporting of college retention and degree completion rates (Voigt & Hundrieser, 2008).

For years, community college leaders have attempted to apply the same theoretical perspectives from four-year institutions to their student bodies. A growing body of literature has indicated that student success is much more complex at the community college level (CCCSE, 2014; Hlinka, 2017; Ozaki, 2016; Tovar, 2015). Community colleges have a history of difficulty measuring student completion rates because graduation rates often do not reflect the number of students who transfer and go on to complete at a four-year institution. In addition, community college students have a unique set of challenges that differ from the challenges of traditional four-year, residential college students.

Theoretical Perspectives Related to Institutional Conditions

As previously mentioned, a commonly cited student success perspective is Bean's (1983) student attrition model. Bean (1983) suggested that students' beliefs shape their attitudes, the attitudes shape their behaviors, and their behaviors signal their intent. In terms of institutional conditions, students' beliefs are influenced by experiences with the institution, and those beliefs evolve into attitudes about the institution (Bean, 1983). The attitudes contribute to students' sense of belonging or fit within the institution, which determines whether students will stay and persist toward college completion or leave a specific institution for another (Bean, 1983).

Another determining factor of persistence and progression or departure is the students' perceptions of fairness of institutional policies and responsiveness of faculty and staff (Bean, 1983).

Tinto's (1987) model of student departure is one of the most widely cited works related to student development, student retention, and student success. Tinto (as cited in Long, 2012) has consistently argued that students leave institutions before they earn degrees because of the nature and quality of their institution interactions. Both students and colleges have unique individual characteristics. If these characteristics conflict without resolution, then the student may not return to the college. Tinto (1987) claimed students depart because of three reasons noted as academic problems, failure to integrate academically, culturally, and socially, or a low level of institutional commitment. Tinto (as cited in Long, 2012) recommended that institutions provide intentional opportunities for academic, cultural, and social activities, interactions with faculty and peers, and support from student affairs professionals.

Astin (1997) proposed a theory of student involvement in which students are more successful when they are involved in academic and social experiences. Astin (as cited in Long, 2012) described involved students as actively participating in student organizations, spending time on campus outside of the classroom, interacting with faculty outside of the classroom, and devoting considerable amounts of time to studying. Astin (1997) believed that opportunities for involvement must be easily accessible. Faculty, staff, and administrators must be available; extracurricular activities and class assignments must be related to student goals and lives; and resources and support must be accessible. Applying Astin's (1997) theory to institutional condition simplifies faculty, staff, and administrators should make academic work relatable,

connect programs to students' interests and characteristics that students value, and flex to accommodate external demands (especially important for the community college student body).

A Deeper Review of Institutional Conditions and Student Success

Tinto (2010) suggested that institutions should move away from a focus on student retention theory toward a focus on actions that interpret the theories and establish guidelines for institutional action that supports student success. Although some researchers have discussed the relationship between institutional factors and student success, the majority of the literature has focused on the attributes of students not institutional conditions. In recent years, few studies have specifically addressed the role of institutional conditions and student success. Fewer studies have focused on institutional conditions from the student perspective. For example, Kuh et al. (2006) provided a seminal work regarding what matters to student success and one section focused on institutional conditions; in this section, the authors asked what institutional conditions were associated with student success and identified four categories including structural and organizational characteristics, programs and practices, teaching and learning approaches, and student-centered campus cultures, all described below.

Structural and Organizational Characteristics

Kuh et al. (2006) identified structural and organizational characteristics as “size, sector, control, mission, residential character, student-faculty ratio, endowment, and structural diversity” (p. 52). Berger (as cited in Kuh et al., 2006) defined organizational structure of an institution as “the patterns and processes of behaviors exhibited by administrators on campus” (p. 55). Berger (2002) found that when college leaders turned their attention toward external aspects instead of internal aspects, students' learning decreased. Berger (2002) defined student learning as student perceptions of academic ability, educational gains, and GPA.

A mission for success. Kuh et al. (2005) wrote about the importance of having a living mission and lived educational philosophy. In a seminal work, Kuh et al. (2005) outlined the common characteristics of successful institutions within the Documenting Effective Educational Practice (DEEP) project. Every DEEP institution provided clearly articulated educational purposes and aspirations, as well as a philosophical understanding and guide for fulfilling those purposes and aspirations. Kuh et al. (2005) wrote that a mission establishes the tone and gives direction to all aspects of the institutional life. One DEEP institution, Evergreen State, emphasized that both faculty and students are learners (Kuh et al., 2005). The faculty lead by example and the students quickly adopt the mission as their own, committing to continuous, lifelong learning (Kuh et al., 2005).

Institutional attributes. Bailey, Calcagno, Jenkins, Leinbach, and Kienzl (2006) examined fixed institutional characteristics and graduation rates. They defined fixed institutional characteristics as type of college (urban, suburban, or rural), location, and type of two-year college (technical or associate's degree granting). Bailey et al. (2006) found rural colleges showed 4.0% higher graduation rates than did suburban colleges and urban colleges had 3.7% lower graduation rates, compared to suburban colleges. They also found that larger community colleges (population between 2,500 and 5,000 students) had lower completion and transfer rates. Kuh et al. (2006) indicated campus culture and practices matter more to student success than do institutional characteristics.

Campus culture and climate. According to the NCPPHE and SREB (2010), a culture reflects the character of an organization in terms of values, customs, traditions, and beliefs; these characteristics shape the behavior of faculty, staff, administrators, and students. College campus leaders should cultivate a culture that places students and learning at the center of institutional

decision-making (Felten et al., 2016). According to Tinto (2005), students are more likely to succeed if they attend school in an educational setting designed for student success. Institutions with strong cultures have attentive leadership and an intense focus on the individual student (NCPPE & SREB, 2010). Institutional leaders considering what matters most in a students' education should have sharply focused missions and carefully set priorities that guide long-term strategic goals, financial allocations, and institutional commitments (Felten et al., 2016; Kuh et al., 2005). Institutional leaders who are serious in their pursuit of student persistence have a responsibility for creating an environment supportive of student success. Institutional environments that support student success share six conditions including commitment, expectations, support, feedback, involvement, and learning (Tinto, 2005).

Campus climate consists of the attitudes, behaviors, and standards that employees and students hold regarding access, inclusion, and respect for the campus community is what makes up the campus climate (Rankin et al., 2016). Climate can promote or hinder education attainment and healthy student development (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Qualities of a healthy campus include honoring ideas, cooperating among campus constituents, collaborating, and practicing transparency (Rankin et al., 2016). Various groups of students can experience the campus climate in different ways (Rankin et al., 2016). For example, Edman and Brazil (2007) found minority groups sometimes have lower rates of student success because of a negative perceptions of campus climate. Institutions can change their climate by using inclusive language, responding to derogatory language, providing support, developing inclusive policies, increasing awareness of issues and concerns facing students, and responding appropriately to identify diversity-based incidents and biases (Rankin et al., 2016).

Bryant and Bodfish (2014) found a strong link between campus climate, satisfaction, and student success. Major findings from the climate and satisfaction portion of a recent study showed the importance of prioritizing student safety; exploring students' desires from their student experience; establishing activities and events to introduce students to campus culture; and fostering relationship building among faculty, staff, administrators, and students. In addition, students wanted to be acknowledged as individuals and wanted their individual needs to be considered (Ruffalo Noel Levitz, 2016). Further, the authors noted an opportunity for customer service training, recommending institutional leaders should work to eliminate *run around* issues on campus.

Diversity. As previously mentioned, community colleges enroll a diverse student body. According to Hurtado, Dey, Gurin, and Gurin (2003) and Pascarella (2001), the more diverse a student body, the greater the interaction among groups. The more positive the student relationships are, the more likely a student will make progress, devote time and effort to experiences in and out of the classroom, and experience greater satisfaction with the student experience (Hurtado et al., 2003; Pascarella, 2001). Cultural affinity has a strong influence on the success of student groups such as Latino/a students (Torres, 2006) and rural Appalachian students (Hlinka 2017). It is important for institutional leaders to acknowledge culture when encouraging support and commitment to educational attainment. A study focused on patterns of successful African American and Latino/a community college students identified three major themes contributed to their success to include relationships with faculty, family support, and campus engagement and support (Sandoval-Luero, Maes, & Klingsmith, 2014)

Campus facilities. College leaders have realized that academic prestige alone is not enough to recruit and retain students. Classrooms, laboratories, auditoriums, and other indoor

environments make up a college's facilities. The design of these facilities can have an impact on student learning and student success (Lei, 2016). Well-designed facilities can promote teamwork, increase interest in student learning, and encourage active participation (Niemeyer, 2003).

College administrators can invest in large libraries and book collections, modern computer labs, study rooms, recreation centers, fitness centers, and other resources as needed (Niemeyer, 2003).

Programs and Practices

After students enroll, the college has an obligation to help them persist, progress, and graduate (Tinto, 2012). Research has shown participation in programs and practices designed to enhance student success can help community college students access social networks; acquire social capital to increase information competency; and increase the likelihood of persistence, progression, and graduation (Dowd et al., 2013; Museus, 2010; Tovar, 2015). Tinto (2012) found students are more likely to succeed in an environment with clearly defined expectations, proper academic support, and strong social support. Further, faculty should assess students, give frequent feedback, and encourage students to become actively involved on campus (Tinto, 2012). Students want purposeful, intentional activities and services tailored to their needs and offered at a convenient time (Public Agenda, 2012). Institutions should provide up-to-date information about what students should do, when, and where. Minimizing deceptive, delaying, and confusing administrative hurdles, allows students to prioritize their education (Public Agenda, 2012).

According to NCPPE and SREB (2010), "when attentive leadership is combined with *intentional* institutional practices that promote degree completion, the result often is greater levels of student success" (p. 6). Similar to the large body of student success literature, the research on pedagogy and engagement within higher education is vast (Evans, Muijis, & Tomlinson, 2015). Researchers have employed many terms and phrases to describe effective

educational practice, including *high-impact strategies*, *promising practices*, *innovative pedagogy*, *active-learning strategies*, and *high-impact pedagogical strategies*. The term *high-impact* has been associated with learning opportunities that have led to student retention and successful completion (Evans et al., 2015). High-impact practices (HIPs) have been designed to enhance or improve student success, student engagement, and teaching and learning in the classroom. In reference to education, HIPs for primary, secondary, and post-secondary education appear in the literature. Researchers (Brownell & Swaner, 2009; Kuh, 2008) have also discovered differences in HIPs for traditional four-year colleges, universities, and for two-year colleges.

Wyner (2014) suggested exceptional community colleges should have four outcomes: completion, equity, learning, and labor market. Essential elements of HIPs include practices that suggests students invest a significant amount of time and effort on purposeful tasks; interact with substantively with faculty, staff, and students; experience diversity through contact with people who are different from themselves; receive frequent, timely, and constructive feedback about their performance; set high expectations; receive opportunities to see how what they are learning works in different settings; and receive periodic, structured opportunities to reflect, integrate learning, and practically apply material learned (Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Evans et al., 2015; Kuh & O'Donnell, 2013;). Institutional leaders who consider the element of HIPs when designing and implementing educational activities increase the chance of promoting positive impacts on student learning (Felten et al., 2016). Kuh (2014) suggested institutional leaders to not only adopt HIPs, but also determine outcomes such as observing and identifying the students who participate, noting how many HIPs these students participate in, and how well HIPs are implemented.

Kuh (2008) identified five high-impact activities for traditional, four-year institutions including first-year seminars, learning communities, service learning, undergraduate research, and capstone experiences. For a guide to applying HIPs at the two-year level, community college leaders can refer to the work performed by the CCCSE. From 2011 to 2014, CCCSE (2016) undertook a large-scale research and practice-improvement initiative focused on the HIP of community colleges. CCCSE researchers sought to gather knowledge about effective educational practices to determine what makes a practice effective and how to bring an effective practice to scale for widespread improvement (CCCSE, 2016). The researchers used surveys and focus groups to assess input from students, faculty, and college administrators and ultimately identified 13 promising HIPs for community colleges. The report divided the practices into three categories: planning for success, initiating success, and sustaining success (CCCSE, 2016). Hatch (2016) conceptualized grouping HIPs as activity systems, noting some of these strategies naturally fit together.

Planning for success. *Proper assessment and placement*, including placement test preparation, testing experiences, academic skills assessment, and proper course placement, has been identified as a HIP (CCCSE, 2014). When students are in the right classes from the beginning, they are more likely to succeed. *New student orientation* is another HIP that promotes planning for success. Orientations can be a single event or an extended experience. Orientations can help familiarize students with college resources, services, policies, and organizations (CCCSE, 2014). Highly effective orientation programs are a targeted strategy for guiding students through administrative tasks and building enthusiasm for college. Successful orientation programs help students gain the attitudes, knowledge, skills, and opportunities needed for a successful transition to the college

In addition, *academic goal setting and planning* is a critical part of planning for college success. Intrusive advising, career exploration, and goal setting are often best practices of colleges that support this practice (CCCSE, 2014). One example of academic planning was applied at Walla Walla Community College; the institution implemented a process called back-mapping in which students first consider a career choice and then look backward to determine the coursework required to achieve that career (Wyner, 2014). *Registering for classes* before the semester begins is another HIP. New students typically register for classes at orientation, but matriculated students may sometimes have to navigate that process on their own. Registering for all classes before the first day of class can have a positive impact on student success (CCCSE, 2014). For example, at Valencia College, leaders created a policy and program called Start Right, which prohibits students from registering for a course after the first day of class (Wyner, 2014).

Initiating success. *Accelerated or fast-track developmental education*, consisting of learning experiences designed to help student move through their learning support classes more quickly, has been identified as a HIP (CCCSE, 2014). According to Complete College Georgia (CCG, 2016), students who begin college requiring remediation are less likely to complete their degrees. At two-year colleges, 37% of students begin in learning-support classes, of those, 57% complete learning support, 17% make it through their gateway courses within two years, and only 7% graduate within three years (CCG, 2016). That is, 93% of students who begin in learning support do not graduate within three years (CCG, 2016). Corequisite remediation is one of the HIP strategies supporting assessment and placement.

To support students' timely degree completion, institutions have implemented *first-year experience (FYE) programs* (NCPPE & SREB, 2010). Freshman seminar, organized social activities, visits to cultural sites or events, attendance at lectures, common reading assignments,

and success workshops are examples of components of FYE programs (Bers & Younger, 2014; CCCSE, 2014). Barnes (2012) examined community college students' academic performance, retention, and persistence and found FYE program participants persisted at higher rates compared to those who did not participate in FYE.

Another HIP is the *student success courses*. There are four types of first-year seminars to include academic seminars, basic study skills seminars, extended orientation seminars, and pre-professional or discipline-linked seminars (Barefoot, 2000). The terms *first-year experiences*, *freshman seminars*, *student success courses*, and *orientation courses* may be used interchangeably (Hatch & Bohlig, 2016). Nguyen, Hays, and Wetstein (2010) investigated whether a student success course increased students' retention and persistence from first year to second year students. Data showed student participants enrolled in the student success course improved fall-to-fall retention rates for participants by almost 18% (Nguyen et al., 2010). Similar results have occurred Miami Dade College, where 75% of the students take a life-skills course. Many higher education leaders view learning communities as effective practices for improving college completion (NCPPE & SREB, 2010). To promote student success and student engagement, these communities have emphasized peer and student-faculty interaction (NCPPE & SREB, 2010). As well a student success course can be designed to teach the strategies and skills students need to navigate the college experience successfully (CCCSE, 2014).

Sustaining success. Much of the evidence supporting *class attendance* as a HIP is anecdotal. Brewer and Burgess (2005) acknowledged attending class requires motivation. Motivation plays a significant role in student success (Tinto, 2016). Many researchers in the 1990s found a significant correlation between class attendance and final grades (Davenport, 1990; Launius, 1997; Van-Bierkom, 1996). A systematic process known as *alert and*

intervention can be applied in which a faculty member alerts college administrators when students are struggling academically (CCCSE, 2014). When college leaders can identify struggling students early, they can intervene and develop a success plan. In addition, educators can use a tool known as *experiential learning beyond the classroom*, consisting of a hands-on experience that immerses students in an experience and encourages them to make connections and form relationships (CCCSE, 2014). Examples include internships, clinical assignments, and community-based projects (CCCSE, 2014). Further, *tutoring* can provide academic assistance in or out of the classroom. Tutoring centers provide peer tutors or professional/faculty tutors and tutoring can be conducted one-on-one, as a group, using technology, or even in the classroom (CCCSE, 2014).

Supplemental instruction (SI) is a type of support that involves regularly scheduled sessions to re-emphasize the material previously covered in class (CCCSE, 2014). Courses with high failure rates may benefit from some form of supplemental instruction (SI). Typically, students who have previously performed well in the course attend course lectures or class activities and then lead review sessions for small groups before the next class meeting. Research has shown participation in SI leads to better performance compared to the performance of those who do not participate (NCPPE & SREB, 2010). Finally, *structured group learning experiences* are activity systems and orientations, fast track developmental education, first-year experiences, student success courses, and learning communities are all examples of these experiences (CCCSE, 2014).

Teaching and Learning Approaches

Regarding teaching and learning at community colleges, the majority of the existing studies have been related to developmental or learning-support curricula. This focus has occurred

because one of the responsibilities of community college institutions is to teach the academically underprepared. Tinto (2010) acknowledged the importance of engaging pedagogical approaches to student learning. Examples of engaging pedagogies include active and collaborative learning, classroom-based problem solving, peer teaching, service-learning, and various forms of electronic technologies (Kuh et al., 2006). According to Bajak (2014), students attending classes with a lecture-and-learn delivery style are 1.5 times more likely to fail, compared to students in an active learning environment. Examples of active learning activities include using handheld clickers to answer questions or having students teach a concept to each other (Bajak, 2014). The goal is for students to spend less time being passive recipients of information and more time being active participants in the presentation of the material.

Relationship with institutional agents. Stakeholders have shared responsibility for educational quality and student success. The college environment should be designed to encourage and help faculty, staff, administrators, and students to foster connections between in-the-classroom and out-of-the-classroom learning, as well as to help students generate solutions and lead the change process (Felten et al., 2016; Harrill et al., 2015; Kuh et al., 2005; Sargeant, 2016). The environment should promote a partnership to progression, collaboration, and all-inclusive thinking (Sargeant, 2016). Students have indicated improved relationships with institutional agents as a key facilitator of student success (Nasr & Jackson-Harris, 2016). Relationships with peers, faculty, and staff should be central to learning and institutional leaders should create clear pathways to lead students to making these relationships (Felten et al., 2016; Tinto, 2005). Relationships with institutional agents can nurture both learning and belonging. Building these relationships should be encouraged, cultivated, celebrated, and rewarded (Felten et al., 2016; Lundberg, 2014).

Kezar and Maxey (2014) discussed the practices “proven to promote student success such as academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, and the existence of a supportive campus environment” (pp. 30-31). They added, “Yet, studies repeatedly show that faculty-student interactions on their own have an independent impact” (Kezar & Maxey, 2014, p. 31). Kezar and Maxey (2014) found that frequency and quality of faculty-student interaction mattered to positive outcomes stating “We know that the amount of time that students spend interacting with faculty, and the quality of these relationships, effectively decreases dropout rates” (p. 31). Positive faculty-student relationships can “contribute to students’ aspirations, promote student engagement, promote a passion for learning, increase motivation to learn, boost academic self-confidence, and provide validation for all students” (Kezar & Maxey, 2014, p. 32). Past studies about faculty-student interaction focused on the number of interactions but current studies have shifted and placed less attention on the frequency of the interactions and more attention on quality, depth, and purpose of the interaction (Kezar & Maxey, 2014; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). More meaningful interactions have resulted in positive impact on the students’ higher-order thinking, motivation, aspiration, persistence, and achievement (Cox, McIntosh, Terenzini, Reason, & Lutovsky Quaye, 2010).

Reliance on part-time faculty. Community colleges hire more part-time, adjunct faculty than four-year institutions (Fain, 2014a). At community colleges, part-time faculty teach more than half (53%) of the students (Fain, 2014a). Kezar and Maxey (2014) noted that part-time faculty may have fewer opportunities to engage with students in the ways that full-time faculty can. There are many working conditions that limit the frequency and quality of the interactions between part-time faculty and students which may be the lack of a proper office space, lack of

school-issued email addresses, exclusion from participating in activities and events, and not being able to serve as faculty advisors for individual students or student clubs and organizations.

Student-Centered Campus Cultures

Becoming student-centered at an institutional level involves employing placing an emphasis on providing optimal student experiences that increase student learning (Public Agenda, 2012). A student-centered focus requires a partnership between those institutional agents in the classroom and outside the classroom. As data-driven decision-making becomes the norm on community college campuses, assessing student learning outcomes is not only for the classroom. Every scholarly practitioner can ask how an activity, program, policy, or procedure will affect student learning (Kuh et al., 2006). A Public Agenda (2012) study found that past and current community college students desire to have support and guidance that is accurate, accessible, and tailored to the students' individual education needs and career goals. According to Achieving the Dream (2017), having a student-centered holistic approach keeps the focus on the students' success:

When students succeed in achieving their dreams the ripple effect radiates and grows.

Hopes are renewed and lives changed. Jobs are found and families secured. An educated workforce, prepared and confident, is poised to advance our national democracy and global competitiveness. (para. 1 & 2)

Chapter Summary

In summary, community college students face unique challenges when seeking educational attainment. Much of the literature focused on the success of four-year college students (Astin & Astin, 2000; Kuh et al., 2005; Kuh et al, 2006; Kuh, 2008; Tinto, 2005) thus, further research at the community college level is needed. Few success-related theories have

addressed the unique needs of community college students or commuter college students. The completion agenda at community colleges has continued to gain attention from various stakeholders. There is an urgency and focus on improving retention, progression, and graduation rates. Previous researchers have found qualities among community college students that place them at risk for not completing their educational goals (Bahr, 2011; Bailey et al., 2015; Bailey et al., 2006; Cohen et al., 2014). Overall, this literature review focused on the notion of student success as a broad concept encompassing many elements, including precollege experiences, students' beliefs and behaviors, and institutional conditions.

A gap in the literature existed regarding institutional conditions and student success, specifically, community college success. In addition, a gap in the literature emerged related to student perceptions of the effects of institutional conditions on their own student success. Another knowledge gap was the lack of existing studies, which focus on student interactions with not only faculty, but the staff and administrators at an institution, specifically community colleges. College leaders are beginning to recognize the importance of providing an active teaching and learning environment wherein both students and faculty can engage in teaching and learning. Students are less likely to be sitting, listening, and passively receiving information and instruction (Astin & Astin, 2000). HIPs in the community college environment have emerged as a means to promoting student success. A challenge remains as how to motivate community college leaders to be more student-centered and thus, this study is intended to inform institutional decision-makers in the attainment of student success by including the voice of the student.

Chapter three provides a description of the research design, the setting, and the participants. Chapter three also addresses the role of the researcher. Finally, the researcher describes the data collection and analysis procedures, as well as trustworthiness.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative and explanatory study utilized a multiple-case study to better understand how institutional conditions contributed to continuing students' success at Georgia Highlands College (GHC) in terms of identifying and making progress toward or achieving educational goals from the student perspective. This chapter covers the research design, setting, participants, role of the researcher, data collection, data analysis, and trustworthiness. This chapter closes with a chapter summary. This study was guided by the overarching question: What institutional conditions do community college students perceive as contributing to their student success in terms of identifying and making progress toward or achieving one's educational goals? The following sub-questions were utilized to address the overarching question:

1. What roles does the campus environment play in community college students' ability to achieve student success?
2. What roles do institutional agents (faculty, staff, and administrators) play in community college students' ability to achieve student success?
3. In terms of roles of campus environment and roles of institutional agents, what factors are more pertinent to community college students progressing towards achieving educational goals?

Research Design

The nature of this study was a qualitative and explanatory that utilized a multiple-case study. Much of the work on perceptions is qualitative in nature; therefore, a qualitative methodology is a logical approach to guide this study. According to Creswell (2017), qualitative

researchers use an inductive process to search for meaning and clarity in complex situations. Although, qualitative research is less about the *why* and more about expressing an open and developing design by using words like *what* or *how* at the beginning of research questions, an explanatory design does seek to explain how or why a condition came to be (Creswell, 2017; Yin, 2014). In the present study, the term *what* referred to the roles that institutional conditions play in students' progression toward achieving or achievement of their educational goals. Creswell (2017) identified nine common characteristics of qualitative research; qualitative research to include being conducted in a natural setting; using the researcher as the primary data collection instrument; involving using multiple methods; applying inductive and deductive reasoning; focusing on participants' perspectives, meanings, and subjective views; being situated within the context or setting of participants and sites; involving an emergent and evolving design; being reflective and interpretive; and presenting a holistic complex picture (p. 46).

Calcagno, Bailey, Jenkins, Kienzl, and Leinbach (2008) conducted a quantitative study seeking to determine the institutional characteristics that influence community college student success. In their recommendations for future studies they indicated researchers should undertake a qualitative approach to learning about "pedagogic strategies, successful guidance and academic counseling efforts, faculty culture, organizational characteristics" to go beyond the broad dataset that they measured (p. 644). Their recommendations further validated the need for a qualitative study evaluating the student perspective of institutional conditions that shape educational student success.

This study utilized a multiple-case study and according to Creswell (2014), case study research "explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources

of information” (p. 97). According to Yin (2014), defining a case study is a two-fold empirical process that includes an in-depth investigation of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-world context, recommended when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context may not be clear. The second part of the definition is that the case study method relies on multiple sources of evidence and benefits from prior theoretical development (Yin, 2014). Overall, a case study is an all-encompassing method that includes five components: case study’s questions, case study propositions, unit(s) of analysis, the logic linking the data to the propositions, and the criteria for interpreting the findings (Yin, 2014).

In addition, Yin (2014) identified three types of case study designs to include descriptive, explanatory, and exploratory. This case study employed an explanatory design “whose purpose is to explain how or why some condition came to be” (Yin, 2014, p. 238). According to Hancock and Algozzine (2017), explanatory case studies “seek to determine how events occur and which ones may influence particular outcomes” (p. 39). An explanatory, multiple-case study design was appropriate for this study because the research intended to conduct an in-depth analysis of the perceptions that community college students possess at two different locations of a multi-campus institution regarding the institutional conditions at their respective sites (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017). Students were asked to identify those conditions and how institutional conditions influence their success as they progress toward achieving educational goal attainment.

Prior researchers have found that student satisfaction affects student success in relation to retention, progression, and graduation rates (Tinto, 2005). Other studies have shown student satisfaction relates to the institution’s conditions (Kuh et al., 2006; Moore, Hossier, Ziskin, & Wakhungu, 2008; Tinto, 2010). For this study, the researcher proposed a new focus with the

intention of examining the premise that institutional conditions play a role in students' success from the perspective of the student.

The researcher employed a social constructivist worldview, as social constructivism is a theory used to explain how individuals seek to understand the world in which they live and work (Creswell, 2014). Creswell (2014) presented four basic tenets of social constructivism including understanding, multiple participant meanings, social and historical construction, and theory generation. The researcher relied on the participant's views as much as possible as the participants' meanings build over time through historical interactions and cultural norms (Creswell, 2017).

The researcher wanted to listen to participants' stories about their experiences with faculty, staff, administrators, and the environment. The goal was to identify the institutional conditions that have contributed to their student success. As an employee of the college, the researcher had direct access to the people involved. Further, the researcher has a special interest in this topic from working in an area related to student transition, retention, and success.

Setting: Georgia Highlands College

This study took place at Georgia Highlands College (GHC), a nonresidential, limited-access state college within the University System of Georgia (USG). As an institution offering primarily associate's degrees and select bachelor's degrees, GHC enrolled 6,003 students at six face-to-face locations and online in fall 2017. GHC currently offers classes in Rome, Cartersville, Marietta, Dallas, and Douglasville, Georgia. GHC is a nonresidential institution with no on-campus housing; thus, 100% of the face-to-face students are commuter students.

Mission and Strategic Plan

The mission of the college can be found on the college website, www.highlands.edu, and in many documents associated with planning, accreditation, assessment, and research. The mission reads: to provide access to excellent educational opportunities for intellectual, cultural and physical development of a diverse population through pre-baccalaureate associate degree transfer programs, career associate degree programs, and targeted baccalaureate degree programs that meet the economic development needs of the region. Wherever one finds the mission, there was also a purpose statement, philosophy, shared values, mission goals, and a vision statement. The shared values of access, student success, integrity, excellence, freedom of expression, inclusiveness, cooperation, passion, critical thinking, and collaboration appear throughout the mission, purpose, goals, and vision.

The college entered into a new three-year strategic planning cycle in 2016. The overarching theme of the plan was *Focused on Student Success* and the college chose five strategic directives to support the plan: 1) institutional health and stability, 2) enrollment management, 3) academic excellence, 4) diversity, and 5) community engagement (GHC, 2016). The Office of the President uses the strategic plan to analyze strategies, compare for best practices, provide administrators professional development, and hold administrators accountable.

Leadership

As a part of the USG, the college is governed by the BOR. The college is led by the President and his Executive Leadership Team. See Figure 1 for an image of the institutional organizational chart.

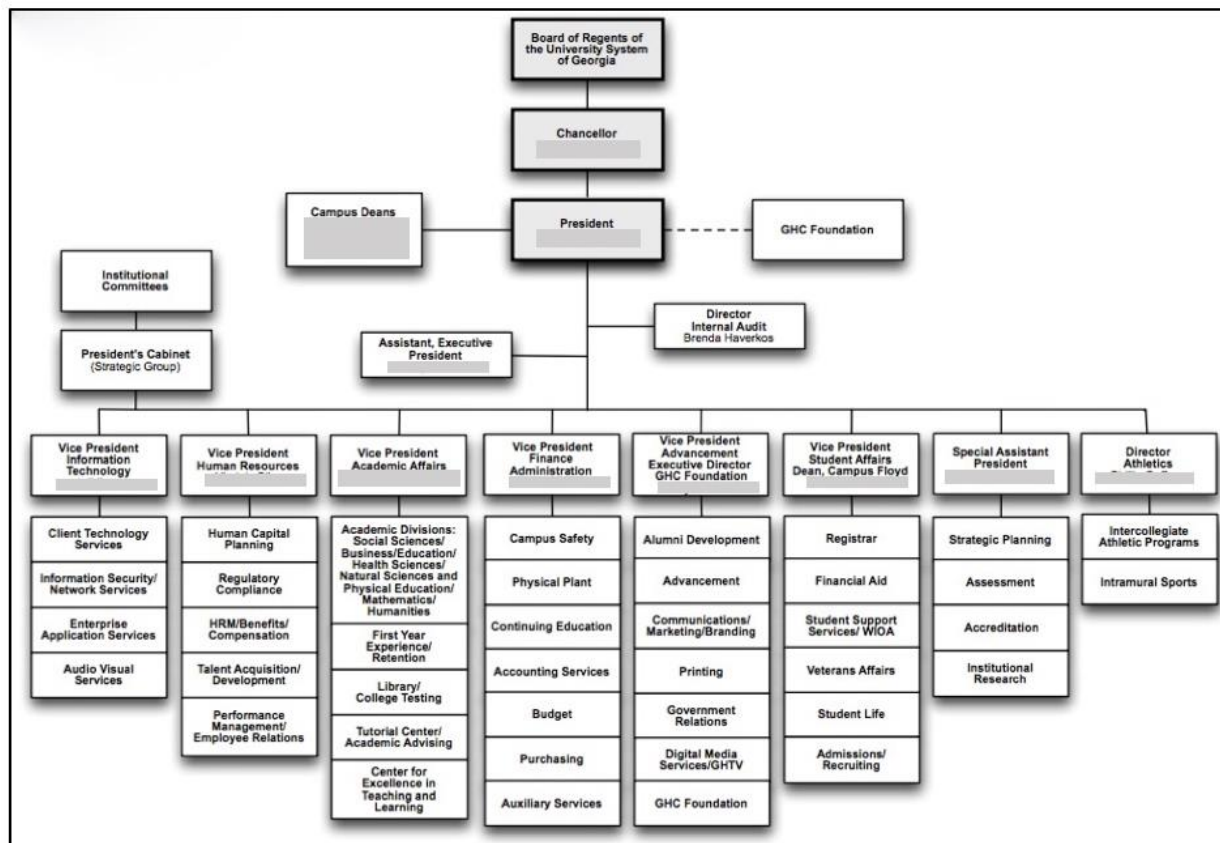


Figure 1. GHC Organizational Chart. Reprinted from *2016-2017 Fact Book*, by Georgia Highlands College. Adapted from https://sites.highlands.edu/paar/wp-content/uploads/sites/9/2017/10/Fact-Book-2016-2017-as-of-9_29_2017.pdf.

Administrative and Educational Units

In addition to the overall institutional mission, each administrative and educational unit has their own mission and goals. The administrative units include Accounting Services, Admissions, Athletics, Auxiliary Services, Budgets, Campus Safety, Financial Aid, Information Technology Services, New Student and Retention Programs, Offices of Campus Deans, Office of the President, Office of Planning, Assessment, Accreditation, and Research, Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Office of the Vice President for Advancement, Office of Vice President for Finance and Administration, Office of Vice President for Human Resources, Office

of Vice President for Information Technology, Office of Vice President for Student Affairs, Physical Plant, Public Relations and Marketing, Registrar, Student Life, and Student Support Services. The educational units are Academic Advising, Division of Health Sciences, Division of Humanities, Division of Mathematics, Division of Natural Science and Physical Education, Division of Social Sciences, Business, and Education, Library Services, Testing Services, and Tutorial Center.

Institutional Attributes

GHC was founded as Floyd Junior College in 1970. In 1987, the BOR removed *community* and *junior* from the names of two-year colleges across the state and Floyd Junior College became Floyd College. In 1994, Floyd College expanded and began offering classes at Heritage Hall in downtown Rome. Floyd College experimented with offering courses in several different northwest Georgia locations. In 2002, the college broke ground on the Cartersville Site, which opened in 2005. In 2004, the college began to explore changing its name to reflect the geographic span of its educational opportunities. On August 1, 2005, Floyd College became Georgia Highlands College (GHC). GHC began teaching in Marietta in 2005 and opened two instructional sites, one in Paulding County and one in Douglas County in August 2009. In 2011, the BOR approved the move from two-year institution to state college. The college began offering limited bachelor's degree programs in 2013.

In the fall 2017, GHC experienced record-breaking enrollment numbers surpassing 6,000 students across six instructional sites in five cities in northwest Georgia. GHC has the honor of being one of two colleges in the state of Georgia with *best value* and *best return on investment*. At GHC, students can graduate with an associate's degree for less than \$8,000. In 2017-2018 there were 6003 students and the GHC student body was made up of 62% females and 38%

males. Overall the student population is 64% White, 16% Black, 14% Hispanic, 3.6% multiracial, 1.6% Asian, less than 1% American Indian/Alaskan native, less than 1% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and less than 1% unknown. Almost 96% of the students are from Georgia. There are 47% of students enrolled full-time and 53% of students enrolled part-time (West, 2018a). In 2016-2017 the retention rate for first-time full-time students was 67%. The three-year graduation rate was 13.8% (West, 2018b).

Facilities

In reviewing the institutional *2016-2017 Fact Book*, the researcher learned that in 2016-2017, GHC operated on a total educational and general fund budget of \$44,511,843 (GHC, 2017a). The subtotal of the internal funds was \$16,983,338; the subtotal of the state appropriations was \$15,898,549; continuing education fees totaled \$196,640; and the sponsored operations total was \$11,433,316. The entire college consists of 22 buildings that total 578,304 in square footage for all locations. See Figure 2 for a table of GHC financial data. This does not include the teaching space GHC leases from Kennesaw State University Marietta Campus as space for the GHC Marietta Instructional Site.

Teaching and Learning

GHC employs 123 full-time faculty members and 162 part-time faculty members. Out of those 57.7% are female and 42.3% are male. The GHC faculty are 87% White, 8.1% Black, 4.1% Asian/Pacific Islander, less than 1% American Indian/Alaskan native, and 0% Hispanic. The student to faculty ratio is 21 to 1. GHC has a newly reorganized Honors Program, a Study Abroad Program, and Diversity Initiatives, which report to the Vice President of Academic Affairs.

| Sources of Funds | 2012-2013 | 2013-2014 | 2014-2015 | 2015-2016 | 2016-2017 |
|--|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Internal Revenue | | | | | |
| Student Tuition and Fees | \$12,892,855 | \$12,889,214 | \$13,165,983 | \$14,537,823 | \$15,031,713 |
| Indirect Cost Recoveries | \$17,985 | \$20,001 | \$15,955 | \$14,399 | \$15,605 |
| Sales and Services of: | | | | | |
| Educational Department | | | | | |
| Other Sources | \$336,028 | \$445,337 | \$452,850 | \$314,521 | \$408,633 |
| Technology Fees | \$633,090 | \$610,153 | \$614,829 | \$631,071 | \$638,484 |
| Capital Outlay | \$861,000 | \$480,542 | \$749,588 | \$679,733 | \$888,903 |
| Transfer from Auxiliary Enterprises | | | | | |
| Sub-Total Internal Revenue | \$14,740,958 | \$14,445,246 | \$14,999,205 | \$16,177,546 | \$16,983,338 |
| State Appropriations | \$13,435,434 | \$14,486,960 | \$14,754,501 | \$15,319,285 | \$15,898,549 |
| Stimulus Funds | | | | | |
| Sub-Total Educational & General | \$28,176,392 | \$28,932,206 | \$29,753,706 | \$31,496,831 | \$32,881,887 |
| Continuing Education Fees | \$111,426 | \$159,746 | \$98,656 | \$163,280 | \$196,640 |
| Sponsored Operations | \$10,896,380 | \$11,902,001 | \$11,350,495 | \$11,723,969 | \$11,433,316 |
| | | | | | |
| Total Educational & General | \$39,184,198 | \$40,993,953 | \$41,202,857 | \$43,384,080 | \$44,511,843 |

Figure 2. GHC Financial Data. Reprinted from *2016-2017 Fact Book* by Georgia Highlands College. Retrieved from https://sites.highlands.edu/paar/wp-content/uploads/sites/9/2017/10/Fact-Book-2016-2017-as-of-9_29_2017.pdf.

Services for Success

GHC offers students services for success both in and out of the classroom.

Over the last two years, the college has made some moves to reorganize staff and reallocate funds to make sure students' success was at the forefront. The college has several administrative and educational units that provide services to help students navigate the college experience and to encourage students' success. These units include the Academic Success Center (Advising, Early Warning, and Tutoring), the Library, New Student and Retention Programs (Orientation, First Year Experience, and Success Coach Program), Student Life (activities and events, clubs and organizations, intramural sports, and leadership opportunities), Student Support Services (Career, Counseling, Disability Support, and the GHC Food Pantry), and the Veterans Resource Centers.

An Engaged Student Body

In the Spring of 2017, GHC administered the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE). Out of 6013 students, 569 participated, which is equivalent to a 9% response rate. In the summer of 2017, the college received a Key Findings Report, which a portion of the report featured five items across all benchmarks on which the college scored the highest and five items on which the college scored the lowest. When compared to the 2017 CCSSE Cohort, GHC participants scored higher on items related to working with classmates outside of class, number of written papers completed, and participating in support for learners such as academic advising, career counseling, and tutoring. GHC participants scored lower on items related to active and collaborative learning and student effort, such as not participating in class discussions, coming to class underprepared, and not participating in writing or math skills labs. See Appendix D for the 2017 CCSSE Key Findings Summary.

Academic, cultural, and social activities. GHC has 44 student clubs and organizations; some are campus or site-specific, exclusive to students enrolled at a specific location, while others have members at each location and meet virtually or together throughout the semester. For a complete list of the clubs and organizations by location, see Appendix G.

Student leadership. GHC also offers opportunities for students to learn and explore their leadership skills through Student Government Association, the Charge Into Leadership conference, campus cohort groups called Emerging Leaders, and the President's Success Workshop Series.

Sports. GHC has intramural, club, and collegiate athletics. GHC has four athletic teams including baseball, softball, men's basketball, and women's basketball.

Participants

To recruit participants for the study, the researcher used purposeful sampling, a technique that is widely used in qualitative research (Palinkas, et al., 2016). Careful consideration was given to protect the student's privacy and pseudonyms were assigned. The researcher sought recommendations for students who were engaged, either inside or outside the classroom by emailing and speaking to faculty, staff, and administrators directly. The email asked for institutional agents to send the name and contact information of the recommended students to the researcher. If the contact information was not known, the researcher looked up the student's email in the Online Advising page in the institution's Enterprise Application System. The researcher first contacted the President's office to obtain a list of student representatives of the Committees of the College. The researcher was referred to the Director of Student Life. Next the researcher emailed the President and he suggested six names. He referred the researcher to the program for the Honors Night Ceremony to identify a list of students names. Next, the researcher contacted the Cartersville Site's Campus Dean and she gave the names of four students. In addition, she also suggested to try identifying orientation leaders, athletes, student government members, and federal work study employees. The names of several club faculty advisors were also provided, and she also suggested reaching out to the Student Life Coordinator, an athletic coach, and the professional advisors for additional student participants.

Students did not have to be the highest achieving students but could be regularly engaged in class assignments or discussions, as well as actively involved in participating in a club, organization, activities, or events. The study targeted continuing students, which is a student who has completed at least one semester of coursework at GHC. A population of continuing students is important because these students have been exposed to the campus and the institution for at

least 16 weeks. Students needed to have completed at least one semester of coursework at GHC and were enrolled on either the Floyd Campus or Cartersville Site for fall 2017. Students were traditional (under 24-years-old) and nontraditional (24-years-old and older).

Following the Campus Dean, the researcher contacted three faculty members, two faculty advisors for clubs and organizations, two professional advisors, a coach, and another staff member. Institutional agents referred a total of 65 student names. After duplicates were removed, 61 unique students remained. The researcher contacted the recommended students by email, text message, or in-person and used the same script to explain the study. The researcher also asked the students for recommendations of other students who may be possible participants. Initially, 29 students were contacted and invited to participate in the study, and 16 students agreed to participate. One of those was not eligible because he did not take classes at the Floyd Campus or Cartersville Site. Two students never followed through with setting up a time to meet. One student who participated in an interview that was registered for an equal number of classes at both the Floyd Campus and Cartersville Site so her responses were later omitted from the study. A total of 12 students, with six from each location, comprised final sample who participated in the interviews.

First-time freshmen, students currently enrolled in their first semester, and dual-enrollment students were excluded from this study because those student types had not had a chance to become familiar with the organization. Students enrolled in the majority of their classes at the Marietta, Douglasville, or Paulding locations, or online were excluded from this study because those locations have smaller levels of enrollment. Consent letters were used to inform the potential participants of the purpose and importance of the study, as well as the conditions of being a part of the study. Although students were recommended by GHC

employees, they were asked if they were willing to participate in the study on a voluntary basis and were informed that participation in the study posed no greater risks than those of everyday life. Prior to this study, the researcher had interacted with three participants on the Floyd Campus and one participant on the Cartersville Site. She only had an established relationship with one of the participants. Careful consideration was given to identify any participants that may have experienced a negative response during their participation in the study, as such, a recommendation to the counseling center would have been provided. However, no recommendations to the counseling center were made during this study.

Role of the Researcher

In a qualitative study, the role of the researcher must be considered; this is also known as reflexivity, in which the writer is conscious of the biases, values, and experiences that he or she brings to the study (Creswell, 2017). Qualitative research is about interpretation, which means the researcher's interpretation of the findings could have been influenced by personal experience and background (Creswell, 2017). The researcher has been employed in higher education for over 15 years, both as a student employee and as a higher education professional, in the areas of admissions recruitment, orientation, first-year experience, student success, and retention. Because of this experience, the researcher is familiar with various factors that influence student success such as pre-college experiences, student needs in and out of the classroom, and institutional conditions that may affect student success and thus, all efforts were aimed at eliminating research bias.

As an employee of GHC, the researcher has been a part of many conversations and meetings with students, faculty, staff, and administrators and has heard the honest impressions of those individuals regarding what students need and need to know and receive to succeed in and

out of the classroom. The researcher believes this knowledge and experience helped when collecting data from GHC because of the familiarity of the institution, the language and jargon, and the attitudes displayed by students, faculty, staff, and administrators, while avoiding any bias. In addition, the researcher has an understanding of the institutional agents and campus environment that make up the institutional conditions of GHC.

Data Collection

The researcher obtained permission to conduct this study from the Institutional Review Boards of both Georgia Southern University and Georgia Highlands College and followed protocol to recruit and work with the participants as well as collect the other pieces of evidence for this study. Yin (2014) identified six sources of evidence for doing case study research: 1) documentation, 2) archival records, 3) interviews, 4) direct observations, 5) participant observations, and 6) physical artifacts. Semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with the participants were the primary source of collecting data. The use of several data collection methods strengthened the study through a triangulation process consisting of using multiple sources of evidence to verify information and validate data (Creswell, 2017). The researcher stopped collecting data after data saturation occurred and no new themes were emerging after analysis of the data was completed.

Observations

Qualitative researchers often use observations to collect data. Conducting observations may involve watching a physical setting, participants, activities, interactions, conversations, as well as using the researcher's five senses (Creswell, 2017). The following is an abbreviated version of Creswell's (2017) steps for observing: "select a site; identify who or what to observe, when and for how long; assume the appropriate role as observer; design an observational

protocol; record aspects; be introduced, observe, and slowly withdraw (if appropriate); and prepare notes (p. 167).”

Direct observations. Some examples of direct observations include attending meetings, watching activities, and attending events (Yin, 2014). Observations can also be made during participant interviews. Strengths of direct observations include the real-time data collection covering the case’s full context (Yin, 2014). However, direct observations have weaknesses as the process is time consuming and costly, the researcher must be selective, and people may act differently while being observed (Yin, 2014).

For this study, the researcher made observations of the interactions between students and institutional conditions in public areas of the Floyd Campus and Cartersville Site, such as the Student Center, Game Room, Library, and Student Hubs (one-stop-shop) during the first weeks of the semester, also known as the Weeks of Welcome. The researcher made direct observations of each participant’s behaviors during the one-on-one interviews.

Participant observations. A major challenge with participant-observation is that the researcher becomes a participant and thus is no longer external to the case being studied (Yin, 2014). Strengths of participant-observations include the ability to gain insight into the interpersonal behaviors and motives of the participants and the organization (Yin, 2014). In addition to the weaknesses previously mentioned, a participant-observer may manipulate the events, which could result in bias (Yin, 2014).

As a part of this study, the researcher made observations as a participant observer by volunteering for staffing the help station the first weeks of school, recruiting students for the Success Coach Program, and being a part of the SACSCOC exit interview. In addition, participant observations were made at a variety of committee meetings.

Observational protocol. The researcher used an observational protocol to document information observed with both descriptive notes and reflective notes such as time of day, number of students, furniture layout, engagement and interaction of students, and artwork and posters on wall. This protocol helped the researcher to stay organized and reminds them to take notes (Creswell, 2017). See Appendix C for a sample observational protocol.

Document Review

Documentation. There are many types of documents that could be examined in a case study. Documentation can include letters, emails, diaries, agendas, announcements, and newspapers (Yin, 2014). Strengths of using documentation include the stability of the data (i.e., they can be reviewed multiple times), documents exist outside the case study, documents can be specific and detailed, and documents can cover a long span of time (Yin, 2014). Weaknesses of using documentation include the difficulty of accessing and retrieving documents and bias (Yin, 2014).

For this study, the researcher reviewed documents associated with institutional conditions at the Floyd Campus and Cartersville Site. The research relied on the *2016-2017 Fact Book* (GHC, 2017a) and the website to review enrollment data, student demographic data, retention data, and graduation data from both the Floyd Campus and Cartersville Site. Other data available reviewed in the *2016-2017 Fact Book* (GHC, 2017a) included financial data, physical plant data, campus facilities data, and campus safety data. The researcher made data requests from the Planning, Assessment, Accreditation and Research (PAAR) unit at GHC to better understand information that was not clear or not present in the *2016-2017 Fact Book* (GHC, 2017a). In addition, the researcher contacted Advising, Student Life, and Human Resources for additional

information that was not obtainable from PAAR. Finally, documents related to prospective student messaging were collected.

Archival records. Archival records can include public files such as U.S. census data or other data collected by the government. Budgets, personnel records, maps and charts, and survey data produced by others about the case's participants. The main strength of using archival records is that they are precise and quantifiable in nature. Weaknesses include difficult accessibility, because of privacy reasons, difficulty finding records, and bias (Yin, 2014).

For this study, the researcher analyzed past survey data from the GHC Presently Attending Student Satisfaction (PASS) survey to gather students' levels of satisfaction with GHC, and the resources and support systems in place. PASS survey data were available for both the Floyd Campus and Cartersville Site. The researcher also reviewed the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) survey data were examined to review levels of student engagement. These data were only available for GHC as a whole. Budget information, facilities information, and maps available in the *2016-2017 Fact Book* (GHC, 2017a) were also collected. Finally, the researcher examined past data the researcher collected and published while managing the Success Coach Program.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews included a mixture of structures and unstructured questions that were primarily open-ended (Merriam, 2009) and was the primary mode of data collection. Interviewing is an appropriate method because the researcher can collect student perceptions and past experiences that cannot be directly observed (Merriam, 2009). Exact wording or order of the questions asked may not matter (Merriam, 2009). Strengths of conducting interviews include the researcher having the ability to generate insightful data, as well as being able to target case study

topics. Weaknesses of conducting interviews include researcher bias occurring as the researcher asks questions and denotes bias if, participants answer questions inaccurately (Yin, 2014).

Interview protocol. According to Creswell (2017), an interview protocol is a guide with open-ended questions related to the research questions and subquestions. In this study, the researcher identified 13 open-ended questions (see Appendix F for the interview protocol) and aligned the interview questions with the research questions and the literature (see Appendix G for the matrix). The interview questions were used to collect participants' interpretations of student success based on the definition provided, as well as their perceptions of institutional conditions believed to contribute to their student success in relation to identifying and progressing toward or achieving specified educational goals.

Over a period of three weeks, the researcher used the interview protocol as a guide while conducting 12 individual interviews with six students from the Floyd Campus and six students from the Cartersville Site. The researcher went to the location of the participant's choice to conduct the interviews. At the Floyd Campus, all of the interviews took place in the researcher's office. At the Cartersville Site, the interviews took place in a private room in the Library, a private room in the Student Center, and a private area in the Veterans Resource Center. The interviews were one-on-one and were audio recorded. They lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. After each interview, the researcher submitted the audio file to Rev.com for transcription services. The researcher verified the transcripts and analyzed the data. The researcher stopped after interviewing 12 students because data saturation was met. Once all of the data had been collected and analyzed for themes, the researcher reached back out to the participants and shared the findings as participant input was sought. All feedback from the participants was incorporated into the data analysis.

Physical Artifacts

The final source of evidence for case study data collection is physical artifacts. Yin (2014) stated physical artifacts can sometimes be relevant in a case study. Examples include technological devices, tools or instruments, works of art, or other physical evidence related to a phenomenon (Yin, 2014). Strengths of using physical artifacts include gaining insight into cultural features or technical operations and case weaknesses include the selectivity and the availability of the artifacts (Yin, 2014).

For this study, the researcher studied art, photographs, and paint colors used to decorate the sites. The researcher also took note of the signage and flyers to advertise activities and events during Weeks of Welcome. The researcher also observed the physical conditions of common areas such as the Student Center, the Game Room, the Library, and the Hub were observed.

Data Analysis

Data analysis involves more than analyzing text and image data, it also involves organizing data, conducting read-throughs, coding and organizing themes, representing the data, and interpreting the data (Creswell, 2017). This inductive process begins with learning from the data rather than starting with preconceived notions about institutional conditions related to student success. To strengthen the validity of the study, the researcher obtained data through observations, document review, and a strong focus on semi-structured interviews.

The researcher used a data analysis technique called cross-case analysis, in which the researcher treated each site as a separate study and later synthesized and compared the data. First, the researcher continuously created and organized data files throughout the collection process at the Floyd Campus and Cartersville Site. Next, the researcher listened to the audio recordings of the interviews and sent them to Rev.com to be transcribed verbatim. Once the

transcripts were received, the researcher listened to the audio files while reading the transcripts and verified what was transcribed and referred back to the observation notes made during the interview to acknowledge body language and emotions. To explore the data, the researcher read through the transcripts several times, reviewed any notes that were made, and wrote about the data and the findings that emerged in the review process. The researcher reviewed important information learned from the review of documents, archival data, artifacts, and observations.

The next step in the data analysis process involved describing, classifying, and interpreting data into codes and themes (Creswell, 2017). The researcher described the case and setting at the Floyd Campus and Cartersville Site with as much detail as possible. The researcher looked for important information and grouped that information into categories, remaining open to any content that may seem relevant or important to the study. By assigning codes, the researcher began to create categories consisting of groups of codes. The researcher followed Creswell's (2009) suggestion to aim for 25 to 30 categories in the beginning and narrow those down to five or six themes related to the research questions. In the process, the researcher sought patterns and identified any content that did not fit with the rest of the findings. In addition, the identification of patterns, outliers or moments that did not fit with the other findings were addressed.

Once the data were coded, the researcher began interpreting the themes to clarify and explain why things were the way they were and presented the findings to address the research questions. Word tables were created as a way to easily organize and compare findings between the Floyd Campus and Cartersville Site. The researcher also referred to the literature review to connect the findings back to existing literature. Using narrative, tables, figures, and images, the researcher presented an in-depth picture of the student perceptions of the institutional conditions

at the Floyd Campus and Cartersville Site that influenced their student success regarding identifying and progressing toward the achievement of their educational goals (Creswell, 2017). Yin (2014) emphasized the importance of pressing for high-quality data analysis by attending to all the evidence, addressing all plausible rival interpretations, addressing the most significant aspect of the case study, and using the researcher's own prior, expert knowledge in the case study.

Trustworthiness

The researcher used several strategies to address external and internal validity concerns such as prolonged engagement, member check, rich, thick description, external audit, an interview protocol, triangulation, and a journal. Prolonged engagement takes place when the researcher stays at the research site for a prolonged period of time (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The researcher has over 16 years of experience working in higher education in both Student Affairs and Academic Affairs. The researcher also has seven years-experience working at the institution studied. Member checking takes place when the researcher solicits the participants' views of the credibility and accuracy of the findings and interpretations (Creswell & Miller, 2000). After the data was analyzed, the researcher sent a rough draft of the findings to the participants and asked for the students to confirm that the researcher correctly interpreted the content from the interviews with participants; all participant feedback was incorporated in the data findings.

The researcher used rich, thick description of the settings, situations, and people, which is another way to establish credibility (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The researcher described the interactions with the participants in as much detail as possible. In addition, the research identified a colleague, external to the study, to conduct an external audit, a process to examine the findings

and attest to their credibility (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The auditor examined the findings, interpretations, and conclusions supported by the data and determined that the data were trustworthy.

The researcher used an interview protocol and prior to conducting the interviews the interview protocols were pilot tested with the researcher's colleagues to obtain a level of validity with the protocol questions. Through interviews with student participants, the researcher was able to validate the roles the campus environment and institutional agents played in the students' success at GHC. When used in conjunction with the document analysis, the archival survey data, and the direct and participant observations during Weeks of Welcome and campus meetings, the researcher was able to compare the documents with the interview responses, in a process called triangulation. Triangulation is a validity procedure where researchers gather data from multiple sources to form themes or categories (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Throughout the entire process, the researcher kept a journal physically in a notebook and virtually via an Excel spreadsheet.

Chapter Summary

In summary, in this qualitative and explanatory multiple-case study, the researcher recruited continuing students from the Floyd Campus and Cartersville Site, at GHC, both located in northwest Georgia. The researcher collected data through documentation, archival records, semi-structured interviews, direct observations, participant observations, and physical artifacts. The information gathered was organized, thoroughly read, and coded for categories and themes. The data collected were analyzed to answer the identified research questions to clarify students' definitions of success; examine the role of the campus environment; and examine the role of institutional agents; and examine student success in relation to the achievement of students'

educational goals. The findings were examined in the context of the literature review to make connections between the study findings and the literature contained within prior research.

Chapter four will report the data by providing a comprehensive description and participant profiles for the participants of each location. The thematic findings and response to the research questions will be presented. Finally, the chapter will conclude with providing a cross-case analysis to identify similarities and dissimilarities of the Floyd Campus and Cartersville Site.

CHAPTER 4

REPORT OF DATA AND DATA ANALYSIS

The purpose of this qualitative and explanatory study utilized a multiple-case study to better understand how institutional conditions contributed to continuing students' success at Georgia Highlands College (GHC) in terms of identifying and making progress toward or achieving educational goals from the student perspective. The setting of the study was two locations of one multi-campus institution, GHC. The findings from the data collection and analysis will be highlighted in this chapter.

This study was guided by the overarching question: What institutional conditions do community college students perceive as contributing to their student success in terms of identifying and making progress toward or achieving one's educational goals? The following sub-questions were utilized to address the overarching question:

1. What roles does the campus environment play in community college students' ability to achieve student success?
2. What roles do institutional agents (faculty, staff, and administrators) play in community college students' ability to achieve student success?
3. In terms of roles of campus environment and roles of institutional agents, what factors are more pertinent to community college students progressing towards achieving educational goals?

This chapter presents the concepts that emerged from the data collected and analyzed through documentation, archival records, semi-structured interviews, direct observations, participant observations, and physical artifacts. Kuh et al.'s (2006) and Tinto's (2010) work on institutional conditions and Lei's (2016) work on institutional characteristics contributed to the

overarching theoretical framework that informed the study. This chapter presents comprehensive description, participant profiles, thematic findings, and responses to the research questions for the Floyd Campus and Cartersville Site. The chapter concludes with a cross-case analysis, which synthesizes and compares the findings for both the Floyd Campus and Cartersville Site.

Floyd Campus: Comprehensive Description

There are a few factors that make the Floyd Campus unique to the other locations of GHC. The first would be that it is the original campus and older than any other location. The Floyd Campus opened in 1968 and was founded in 1970 as Floyd Junior College. It is considered the main campus. The Floyd Campus is located in a community that is known for being a medical hub consisting of Floyd Medical Center, Redmond Regional Medical Center, and Harbin Clinic. The Floyd Campus has a long history of educating the healthcare workforce in northwest Georgia.

A second factor which makes the Floyd Campus unique is the land, as the campus consists of 233 acres. There is a beautiful lake with a two-mile trail around it. There are wetlands, park benches, and facilities available to the community for renting. The nature and potential for recreational activities at the Floyd Campus attracts members from the community, as well as faculty, staff, and students. At times, the local high schools use the campus to host cross-country meets, tennis matches, and basketball tournaments.

Another element that is unique to the Floyd Campus is that all of the members of the President's Executive Leadership Team are housed there. The McCorkle Building is also known as the Administrative Building because that is where all of the Vice Presidents have their offices. There is no one individual dedicated only to the role of Campus Dean. The person that serves as Campus Dean for the Floyd Campus has a dual role as Vice President of Student Affairs. Finally,

another way that the Floyd Campus is unique is that the buildings and layout are set up in a way that integrates Student Life's academic, cultural, and social activities into the everyday lives of students. In order to walk between the three major academic buildings, students are situated to walk through common spaces like the Student Center, the Cafeteria, which is near the Bookstore, the vending machines, and the Game Room. A final point of uniqueness is that the Floyd Campus is the home of the men's and women's basketball teams.

Mission and Strategic Plan

Each campus and instructional site strives to uphold the mission of the institution which is to provide access to excellent educational opportunities for intellectual, cultural, and physical development of a diverse population, seeking to meet the economic development needs of the region through pre-baccalaureate associate degree transfer programs, career associate degree programs, and targeted baccalaureate degree programs. There are no location-specific missions. Likewise, each location supports the institutional strategic plan. Therefore, the Floyd Campus upholds the mission, values, goals, and strategic plan of the entire institution. The Floyd Campus has operational plans in which the Campus Dean is responsible for creating and assessing and these operational plans are linked back to the strategic plan.

Leadership

While the institution as a whole is led by the president, the Floyd Campus is seen as the main campus. Again, the Floyd Campus houses all of the administrative offices. Although the President and the Vice Presidents may have additional working space at other locations, the President and all of the Vice President's offices are located at the Floyd Campus. Because all of the other locations have Campus Deans/Site Directors, the Vice President of Student Affairs acts as both the Vice President and the Campus Dean. According to the operational plans listed in the

Annual Report of Institutional Effectiveness for 2016-2017, the Office of Campus Deans exists to be the voice for their location's students, faculty, staff, and community. It is collaborative in nature and facilitates operations between the campuses of GHC and other participating institutions (GHC, 2017b). Figure 3 and 4 illustrate the organizational charts for the Campus Dean, who is also the Vice President of Student Affairs. In Appendix E there is a Welcome Letter from the Campus Dean, which appears on the Floyd Campus page on the college's website.

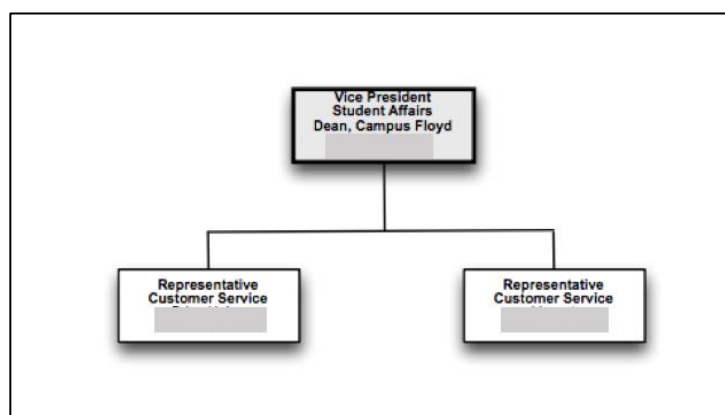


Figure 3. Campus Dean Direct Reports, Floyd Campus. Adapted from *Georgia Highlands College website*.

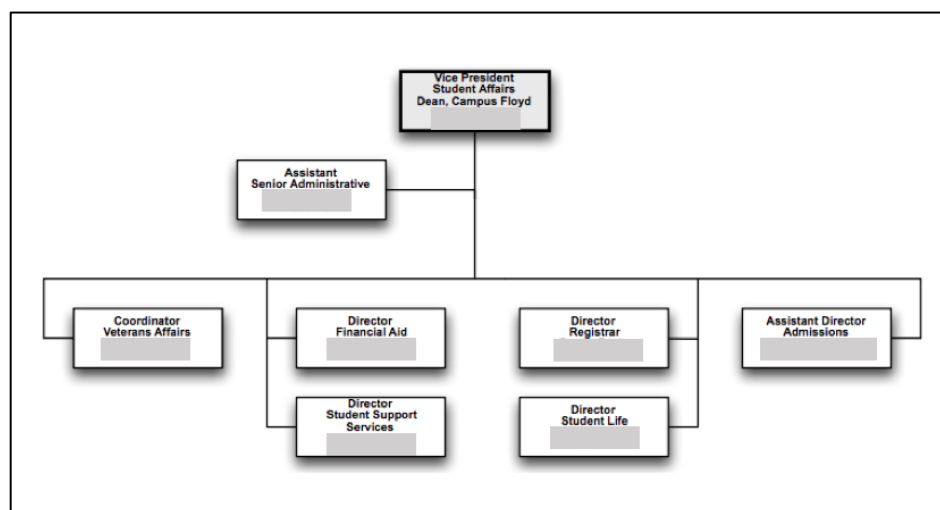


Figure 4. Direct Reports to the Vice President for Student Affairs, Floyd Campus. Adapted from *Georgia Highlands College website*.

Institutional Attributes

In fall 2017, the enrollment at the Floyd Campus was 1084. The gender breakdown was 62% students identified as female and 38% students identified as male. The self-declared racial and ethnic background of students included 68% White, 11% Black, 17% Hispanic, 3% multiracial, less than 1% Asian, no American Indian/Alaskan natives, no Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islanders, and less than 1% students who did not report. The average age at the Floyd Campus is 20-years-old. The Floyd Campus retained 554 students, or 51.6%, from fall 2016 to fall 2017. The Floyd Campus graduated 96 students between fall 2016 and summer 2017, which represented 13.8% of the total number of graduates (Langston, 2018; West, 2018b).

Facilities

The *2016-2017 Fact Book* documented that the Floyd Campus has 15 buildings (GHC, 2017a). However, the researcher observed less than 15 buildings. In addition, some of the buildings that are listed in the *2016-2017 Fact Book* are actually parts of other buildings. For example, a main academic building on the Floyd Campus is the McCorkle Building, which also houses the Administrative Annex, Pullen Annex, and the Solarium, all of which are listed separately on the facilities table found in the *2016-2017 Fact Book* (GHC, 2017a). The majority of the buildings were built in the 1970s. The newest building, Lakeview Building and Auditorium is almost 20 years old (GHC, 2017a). See Figure 5 for a list of buildings, Figure 6 for a map of campus, and Appendix A for maps of individual buildings.

| Building code | Building letter | Building name | Date built or acquisitioned | Gross sq. feet |
|---------------|-----------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------|
| 1 | A | Administration Building | 1970 | 18,646 |
| 2 | W | Walraven Building | 1970 | 57,523 |
| 3 | L | Library | 1975 | 28,509 |
| 4 | D | Old P.E. | 1970 | 12,200 |
| 5 | E | Maintenance | 1970 | 7,713 |
| 6 | F | Pullen Annex | 1974 | 34,457 |
| 7 | G | Physical Plant Warehouse and Garage | 1974 | 6,215 |
| 8 | D | Gym and PE classrooms | 1980 | 29,511 |
| 33 | I | Lakeview Building and Auditorium | 1999 | 27,166 |
| 11 | AA | Administrative Annex | 1991 | 13,418 |
| 12 | S | Solarium | 1994 | 1,920 |
| 17 | Q | Greenhouse | 1973 | 576 |
| 34 | N/A | RESA Building | | 12,578 |
| 27 | Z | Astronomy Classroom | 1997 | 1,733 |
| 28 | Z | Telescope Lab | 1997 | 448 |
| | | Total | | 252,613 |

Figure 5. Building List, Floyd Campus. Reprinted from 2016-2017 Fact Book by Georgia Highlands College. Retrieved from https://sites.highlands.edu/paar/wp-content/uploads/sites/9/2017/10/Fact-Book-2016-2017-as-of-9_29_2017.pdf.

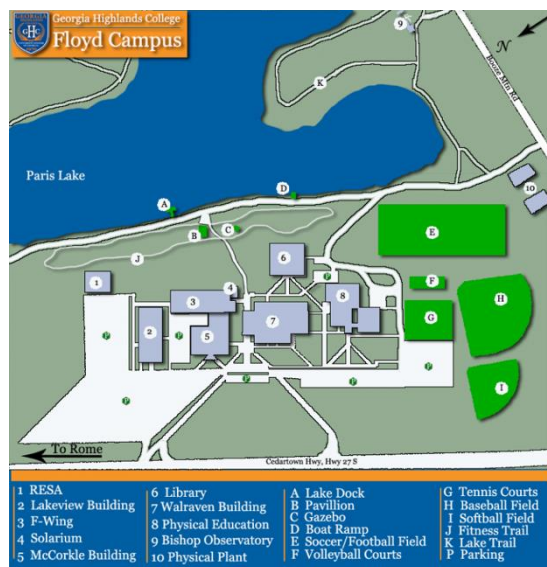


Figure 6. Map, Floyd Campus. Reprinted from Georgia Highlands College website. Retrieved from <https://www.highlands.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/floyd-campus.png>.

Teaching and Learning

There are 200 employees at the Floyd Campus excluding student employees and non-paid affiliates. Of those, 105 are full-time and 22 are part-time staff. There are 34 full-time faculty

members and four librarians. In addition, there are 35 part-time faculty on the Floyd Campus. These faculty members taught 24,155 total credits hours at the Floyd Campus in the 2016-2017 academic year.

Services for Success

The Floyd Campus provides many services to help students succeed by offering free services including academic advising and planning, career aptitude tests, major exploration, mentor programs, and tutoring. These services are managed by college units and departments, as well as program managers. The next section provides a description of the resources and support systems offered at the Floyd Campus.

Academic Success Center. The Academic Success Center is a department, which reports to Academic Affairs that includes three different areas: Advising, Early Warning, and Tutoring. The Director of Academic Success manages the efforts of the Academic Success Center. While Advising and Tutoring are actual educational units with mission statements, goals, staff, and office space, Early Warning is a program focused on intervention with students who may be at risk of withdrawing from or failing courses. Advising has a mission “to help students explore and determine the best educational options to achieve their personal and professional goals, whether within the core curriculum, transfer degree programs, or career degree programs” (GHC, 2017b, p. 23). GHC operates with a hybrid advising model that consists of professional advisors and faculty advisors, but there are no assigned advisors or mandatory advising meetings. This advising model will change with the newly approved *Quality Education Plan (QEP): Quest for Success*, which will be piloted summer 2018. This model assigns students to a professional advisor in term one and a faculty advisor in term two.

The Floyd Campus has four professional advising team members including the Director of Academic Success, a senior advisor who also acts as the online advisor, a professional advisor, and the advising administrative assistant. The most popular time for advising is during a program called Early Bird Advising (EBA). During this time period, students are encouraged to make an appointment and meet with either a professional advisor or faculty advisor. An incentive to participating in EBA is early registration. The typical advising experience has focused on course selection and not academic planning, goal setting, or meaningful interactions between the student and the advisor and the forthcoming QEP hopes to address those challenges.

Tutoring has a mission “to enhance the education received by students enrolled in classes by guiding students to improve their academic skills, thereby helping them succeed in their chosen college curriculum” (GHC, 2017b, p. 27). The Floyd Campus has a Tutorial Center located in the Library, which is staffed by full-time tutors and student workers. The Director of Academic Success oversees Tutoring. The Tutorial Center provides services such as, one-on-one tutoring sessions, information and practice for standardized tests, opportunities for group study, assistance with software and technology used in GHC classes, workshops in special areas of study, web-based study materials, guidance in how to research, and information regarding information literacy (GHC, 2017b). In the 2016-2017 academic year, there were 3,274 visits to the Floyd Tutorial Center (GHC, 2017a).

First Year Experience (FYE). The First Year Experience has attempted to evolve over the last decade, but has never really had a permanent place at the college. It has moved from the Math Department, to the Division of Humanities, and now lives in the New Student and Retention Programs unit. Over the years, FYE has primarily consisted of a student success course for students taking learning support or remedial coursework. Under the direction of the

Program Manager for New Student and Retention Programs, FYE has recently taken over new student orientation, as well as overseeing the redesign of the college success course. Other components of New Student and Retention Programs that are related to FYE include the Success Coach Program, success workshops, and online resources which promote the success of students each year at GHC. A Common Theme, a topic the college chooses as the theme for academic, cultural, and social activities, is a collaborative effort between New Student and Retention Programs with Student Life and Academic Affairs. In 2017-2018 the theme was China and the theme for 2018-2019 will be Wellness. There was not a theme in 2016-2017.

Georgia Highlands African-American and Minority Male Excellence (GHAME)

Initiative. GHAME is a part of a statewide African-American Male Initiative (AAMI) to increase the recruitment and retention of African American male and Latino male students. The goal of GHAME is to increase the graduation rates of these men. GHAME offers resources and support for students by providing academic advising, financial aid awareness, study skills, life skills, and mentoring. The students targeted by GHAME are encouraged to join Brother 2 Brother, a campus organization that is an extension of GHAME that encourages, supports, and mentors its members. The Director of GHAME and faculty advisor for Brother 2 Brother is also the Dean of Humanities.

The Library. The GHC Libraries are an educational unit that reports to Academic Affairs. The Libraries “provide access to resources in all formats in order to meet the curricular and intellectual needs of the Georgia Highlands College community” (GHC, 2017b, p. 26). The Library at the Floyd Campus has six employees including the Interim Dean of Libraries and Testing, an Assistant Librarian for Technical Services, two Assistant Librarians for Public Service, a Library Cataloging Assistant, and an Administrative Assistant to the Dean of Libraries

and Testing. At the Floyd Library, students have access to books, online resources, group and private study rooms, quiet study areas, conference rooms equipped with technology, and a computer lab. In 2016-2017, there were 47,218 visits to the Floyd Library last year (GHC, 2017a).

Student Life. The mission of Student Life is “to develop the Georgia Highlands College student body through a series of co-curricular activities that promote experiential learning, wellness, leadership, volunteerism, and an appreciation of the arts” (GHC, 2017b, p. 21). Student Life reports to Student Affairs and provides academic, cultural, and social activities and events for students. In addition, they oversee many leadership opportunities, clubs and organizations, as well as intramural sports. At the Floyd Campus, Student Life has two employees, the Director of Student Life and a student worker. Out of the 44 clubs and organizations on all campuses, the Floyd Campus has active members in 34 of them. See Appendix H for a list of clubs and organizations.

On its website, Student Life highlights three opportunities for leadership at the institution: Student Government Association (SGA), Emerging Leaders, and the Charge Into Leadership Conference. According to the Director of Student Life, the Floyd Campus averaged six participants at each SGA meeting. In 2016-2017, 33 students completed the Emerging Leaders program and 10 of these students were from the Floyd Campus. In 2016-2017, seven Floyd students attended the Charge Into Leadership Conference.

In addition, another leadership opportunity that is unique to the Floyd Campus is the Editor of the Six Mile Post, the college newspaper. Further leadership opportunities include the Editor, Assistant Editor, and Art Editor for the Old Red Kimono, an annual literary magazine at GHC. Although the magazine features art, photography, poetry, and stories from all GHC

students, it is required that people in leadership meetings meet at the Floyd Campus and as a result, those positions are typically filled with students attending the Floyd Campus.

Student Support Services. Student Support Services reports to Student Affairs and includes Career Services, Counseling, and Disability Support. This department also oversees the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) program. The mission of Student Support Services is “to provide reasonable programs and services to enrolled students, including supportive counseling, career exploration, and disability support that allow students to meet the demands of college life, as independently as possible” (GHC, 2017b, p. 21). The Director of Student Support Services, who also serves as a counselor, a Disability Specialist, and the WIOA Coordinator are each located at the Floyd Campus.

The *2016-2017 Fact Book* has a section that reports out to the college community information related to Student Support Services. According to this document, 42 Floyd students were documented as receiving disability support services; 483 Floyd students received personal counseling; 1378 Floyd students were influenced by on campus outreach; 47 student participated in WIA; and there were 451 visits to the Floyd food pantry (GHC, 2017a).

Veterans Services. Veterans Services is committed to helping active duty, disabled veterans, and eligible dependents navigate applying for, paying for, and succeeding in college. At the Floyd Campus, the Veterans Resource Center (VRC) is a space dedicated to the success of veteran students with support resources such as a computer, a printing station, a lounge area with a microwave and television, and textbook lending library. The VRC is staffed by a student veteran employee.

Historical Student Satisfaction Data

Each year, GHC administers the Presently Attending Satisfaction Survey (PASS) to the entire student body. Results are made available to the appropriate units and departments. In the fall 2016, of the 1078 total students, 101 students from the Floyd Campus completed the survey for a 9% response rate. In some situations, the PASS survey results contributed to the assessment of college departments and units. The Floyd students' PASS survey results include general information about the Floyd Campus and the various resources and support services provided at GHC.

The top three reasons students self-reported attending GHC was the convenient location (71%), the cost (74%), and quality of education (25%). When asked if students were satisfied with operations of the front desk on this campus, 67% strongly agreed or agreed. When asked if students were satisfied with the level of customer service and the quality of services provided, 71% strongly agreed or agreed. When asked if students were satisfied with quality of teaching and learning, 78% strongly agreed or agreed. When asked if students felt safe on campus, 82% strongly agreed or agreed. Finally, 86% strongly agreed or agreed that it is important that GHC welcomes people with differences (GHC, 2017a).

According to the PASS survey responses related to advising, 85% of the respondents were easily able to locate a professional or faculty advisor. Email and in-person were the most popular methods of contacting an advisor. The most common discussion with an advisor was course scheduling, identifying the obstacles and strategies for overcoming them, and developing an academic plan. The top responses for advising resources included a face-to-face meeting and participating in Early Bird Advising, a program that promotes early advising and class planning with an incentive of early registration. Out of the respondents on the PASS Survey, 92% rated

their advising experience as positive. The most common responses for not taking advantage of advising services was not needing an advisor, not having the time, and not being required to meet with an advisor.

According to the PASS survey responses related to tutoring, 37% of the Floyd respondents reported visiting the Tutorial Center in person and 81% of those strongly agreed or agreed that the tutor(s) who worked with the student were knowledgeable. In addition, 84% reported that their tutor(s) were friendly and helpful. Finally, 84% strongly agreed or agreed that their overall experience at the Tutorial Center was satisfactory.

When asked how many times students go to the library, 21% answered once a week and 78% of these students strongly agreed or agreed that the library is adequate for their needs. Common responses in an open-ended section about improvements included the need for non-Apple computers and more computers. According to the PASS survey responses related to student life, 25% of respondents said that being involved in clubs and activities outside the classroom has added value to the college experience and 68% said that they do not participate.

Floyd Campus: Participant Profiles

This section provides an overview of the six participants' background and characteristics, their definition of student success, the life experiences that have shaped their definition of student success, and their student experience at GHC so far. Within this section the researcher shares a summary of the data collected through semi-structured in-person interviews conducted with each participant. These profiles provide insight into the pre-college experiences of participants, as well as how students define student success. All of the individual interviews with the Floyd students took place in the researcher's office at the Floyd Campus while students were in between classes. See Table 1 for a list of participant demographics for the Floyd Campus.

Table 1

Participant Demographics for the Floyd Campus

| Pseudonym | Age | Gender | Race/Ethnicity | Enrollment Status | Program of Study |
|--------------|-----|--------|------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|
| Rebecca | 19 | Female | Indian | Full-time | Business Administration |
| Santiago | 23 | Male | Hispanic | Full-time | General Studies |
| Colgate | 29 | Female | White | Part-time | Dental Hygiene |
| Opal | 19 | Female | Asian | Full-time | Sociology |
| Harry Potter | 20 | Female | White | Full-time | Business Administration |
| Big Al | 26 | Male | African American | Part-time | Physical Education |

Rebecca

Rebecca is a 19-year-old Indian female. She attends classes full-time and has a 3.25 grade point average (GPA); her major is Business Administration. Rebecca was shy at first during the interview, but still comfortable with the researcher. Rebecca was a student in the researcher's 10-week college success course a few semesters before the interview took place. Although the researcher and Rebecca knew each other, they did not have a deep relationship.

Rebecca is actively involved in the Photography Club and learned about that organization at Club Round Up, an event created to promote clubs and organizations at the Floyd Campus. This event takes place during the Weeks of Welcome, a series of activities and events planned for the first three weeks of the semester designed to introduce students to the campus, ease the transition to college life, foster community, and promote fun. She has attended a few Green Highlands meetings, a student organization created to "promote sustainable lifestyles among the members of the college community and the surrounding areas" (GHC, 2017c). She attributes making friends on campus to these two organizations. She has considered taking

pictures for the student newspaper, the *Six Mile Post*, but feels as if her schedule is too packed to do so.

Rebecca indicated that success was defined as academic achievement and balancing stress. She said it is hard “passing all classes while not completely stressing a lot about it.” Rebecca spoke about how high school prepared her for her college experience. She felt as if college is both easy and difficult. She attributes her definition of success to herself, her parents, and what she learned in elementary and secondary school. Rebecca feels students are responsible for the academic-related skills such as studying, doing your homework, and doing your own work. She admitted that her first semester she did not purchase the textbook for her English class at first, and she was lost and had a difficult time catching up once she bought the book two weeks later.

Santiago

Santiago is a 23-year-old Hispanic male who is a general studies student. He attends full-time and has a 3.02 GPA. He is a former high school and college athlete and used to play soccer for Shorter University. Santiago admitted that while attending Shorter he just focused on playing soccer and his grades suffered. He dropped out of college to work. When he decided to go back to college he started at GHC and “felt uncomfortable” because it was his perception he was the oldest student in the room. He “felt weird” being out of a routine going to college. Since he has gotten his “education back on track” he has had a great experience at GHC. Santiago is involved in many organizations in the community but has little involvement within the college, outside of the classroom. He has participated in a few activities with Student Life in the Student Center and in the Game Room.

Santiago said that success is individualized and situational. For him, success is academic achievement. Although he has above a 3.0 GPA, he said, “I just need to raise my GPA a little bit higher and I’d feel comfortable with saying I’m a successful student.” Placing athletics in front of academics and dropping out of college were two pivotal experiences that shaped his definition for success. He shared that although he was intelligent in high school, he did not apply himself because education never piqued his interest. Dropping out and working part-time helped him realize he did not want to work odd jobs for the rest of his life. He now has “higher ambitions” and “bigger dreams.” Mindset, motivation, future orientation, and maturity are present in the interview with Santiago as elements that helped him be a more serious student. Santiago said that when it comes to responsibility, maturity matters. It is important for students to take “that hard look in the mirror, [and ask] is this really what I want?” Santiago had recently completed reading *The Alchemist* and referred to the book many times throughout the interview when talking about his new mindset for approaching his education and life experiences.

Colgate

Colgate is a non-traditional, White female who is 29-years-old. She is a Dental Hygiene major. She is attending part-time and has a 3.73 GPA. Up until this semester she was attending classes full-time to give herself a chance to experience college. Her experience with the college has been good but she anticipates classes being more difficult when she gets into the Dental Hygiene program. Colgate was very involved outside the classroom when she was a full-time student and is trying to stay as involved as she can as a part-time student. She is an active member of the Gaming Club, Animation Club, and Green Highlands, all student organizations on campus. She also writes for the campus newspaper, *Six Mile Post*, is active in Student

Government Association, and a member of Psi Beta, a national honor society for students enrolled at two-year colleges and interested in Psychology.

Colgate defined success as “transitioning into a career post-college experience.” Colgate did not go to college right after high school; she went straight into the workforce. Because of this experience, she believed that she has “a better understanding of what’s expected after you exit college.” The reason the Colgate came to college is that she realized, “You can only go so far without further education.” Colgate was adamant about students being 100% responsible for their own success. She also placed an importance on being self-sufficient and being able to do academic-related tasks such as looking up one’s classes, registering, and navigating the college website.

Opal

The researcher knew Opal from her work with new student orientation, however she did not have an established rapport or relationship with the student. Opal is a 19-year-old Asian female who is majoring in Sociology. She attends full-time and has a 3.77 GPA. She is an Orientation Leader, a student who assists with the new student orientation experience and is trained with connecting new students with the campus community. Opal has also participated in the Summer Field Course in Wyoming, a program that started in 1997. When asked about her college experience so far, Opal shared this:

It’s been good. I decided when I came to college I want to make sure I tried all the activities that were offered, so when I’m free and there’s a speaker or some kind of event going on, I always try to make it, even if I’m done with classes and could go home. That always makes it more fun because it’s just something that you never saw in high school, and that gets you comfortable with possibly walking into a room with strangers and

having to sit down and be there, you have a common reason to interact and it won't be a class and it'll be like an interesting performer and you can talk about it.

Opal's definition of student success was related to academic skills. She said, "show up to class on time and take notes". She expanded her definition by sharing a story about how she had just come from a class where students were packing up early and not listening to everything the instructor has to say. She implied successful students should stay seated and listen to everything said in the classroom. Opal attributes her definition for success to her mother. She shared:

My mother always wanted me to make good grades throughout my life, so for example if I came home with a B on my report card, she'd be like, that's good but I know you can make all A's. So that kind of mentality, I started expecting to make A's, I would always work for an A... most of the time I'd be disappointed and say, I should have studied harder when I had the opportunity... if I felt like I had worked to my max, then I would have been happy with a B.

Opal said that coming to college was the first time she had ever seen and met someone that looked like her. Opal believed that students should study outside the classroom. She recognized the importance of textbooks although she admits to not always buying and reading them.

Harry Potter

Harry Potter was the only participant that the researcher had an established rapport and relationship with prior to the interview, although this study has deepened the relationship with this student. Harry Potter is a 20-year-old White female who is a Business Administration major. She attends full-time and has a 3.77 GPA. Harry Potter is from the local area and was disappointed about coming to college with so many people from her high school. She started

GHC during the summer semester after her high school graduation and has not taken a break.

She admitted she was not very involved outside the classroom during her first year at GHC. Then she got a job as a student Orientation Leader. Since then, she has become more comfortable with herself, with others, and with the college community. She is not afraid or intimidated any longer. Because of her orientation experience, she has been more involved this academic year.

Harry Potter was very candid and open to discuss successes and challenges she had experience in high school and in college. To Harry Potter, success meant “whether you passed or failed you tried your best. If you know you tried your best, then to me that’s successful, ‘cause you don’t need to impress others, you need to just, impress yourself.” Harry Potter is going to college to honor her deceased brother. She has used her mother’s life experiences and honoring her brother’s legacy as inspiration, sharing:

My mom went to college when she was young, she had two kids, a special needs kid and a regular kid, and so, I said if she can do it, I can do it with nothing going on. And then my brother was special needs, he died, and he didn’t get to go to college, so I thought, you know, I don’t wanna not go just ‘cause I don’t want to, he couldn’t, he didn’t get to go ‘cause he couldn’t go.

Later Harry Potter discussed how when she was younger if she would make below an A she would get in trouble by her father. She shared:

He’d yell at me or ground me or whatever he did. So I learned to make A’s and I learned how to study, but I could just figure out that stuff so easy... I’m glad he at least made me try because now I can study, I know how to study.

When the researcher and Harry Potter discussed the student’s role in succeeding, she shared that in high school students passed no matter what. But in college you have to do more

than just “show up and pass” or just turning in the homework. Students have to study. She said, “You have to put work into it.” Harry Potter then went onto share her learning strategies such as Quizlet flashcards, reading the entire assigned readings, and if one does not have time to read, she suggested going to SparkNotes, or reading a little bit, or finding a friend. But the point was doing something. She credits her success in the classroom to knowing how to try different study methods.

Big Al

Big Al is an African American male who is 26-years-old and a Physical Education major. He has a 1.6 GPA. He is from a small town and drives 45 minutes to the nearest GHC campus. Big Al was admittedly shy and quiet at first, but warmed up a few minutes into the interview when discussing his life experiences that developed his definition for student success. He has previous college credit from Georgia Northwestern Technical College and Snead State. He has earned a certificate from a technical college program but he did not like the job field it placed him in so he decided to pursue his associate’s degree. He shared that because the admissions office failed to inform him some of his application-related documents were missing, even after calling to check, he had to start in the Late Start Program, which is a program for students who miss the traditional admissions application deadline where classes are accelerated or offered online for shorter periods of time. He had to enroll in online classes his first semester because there were no face-to-face classes available. This was detrimental to his academic success. After his first semester at GHC, he was put on academic probation and as a requirement had to see an intervention team which referred him to Brother 2 Brother, a student organization that works with the GHAME Initiative and provides encouragement, support, and mentorship to promote

retention and graduation to African American male students. He has since become actively involved with the organization and taken on leadership roles.

When defining success, Big Al shared that success meant “I guess you’re willing to try and do something for the greater good. Not just for yourself but for everybody who you’re involved with... just try and make a difference in the world. Or just in my community at least.” Later on in the conversation, Big Al shared a desire to have a better life, not working an hourly job, getting out of a small town, and making money. Big Al was motivated by proving others wrong. When he was in kindergarten he was told he had a learning disability and that he would not make it past a middle school level of education. All of the men in his life had dropped out in middle and high school. Overcoming his learning disability, graduating from high school and then with a college certificate, and being the first African American male in his family with a postsecondary education made him feel as if he had “broken a barrier.” Big Al says if students want to succeed “they have to want it.” He placed an emphasis on being in the classroom, wanting to learn, a better life, and to get out of the comfort of a small town.

Floyd Campus: Thematic Findings

During the case study, especially throughout the student interviews, there were three clear, overarching themes that emerged as ideal institutional conditions that contribute to the Floyd Campus students’ success. These themes included: 1) institutional characteristics, 2) environment conducive for learning, and 3) meaningful interactions with institutional agents.

The first theme to come out of the participant interviews was *institutional characteristics*, which encompassed elements such as smaller campus, affordability, smaller class size, closer to home, diverse student body of students and employees, and quality education. When participants mentioned institutional characteristics they aligned these fixed characteristics with feeling

comfortable and giving them access to interacting with faculty, staff, and administrators. These themes were confirmed through documentation and physical artifacts. The second theme of *environment conducive for learning* encompassed elements such as access to institutional agents, active learning strategies, resources and support systems in place, an engaged student body, preparation for the next step, and cultural experiences. These themes were confirmed through documentation, direct observations, and participant observations. The third theme that emerged from participant interviews was *meaningful interactions with institutional agents* and included stages of a relationship with faculty, staff, and administrators such as as a resource, as support system, and as an advocate. This theme was confirmed through archival data, documentation, and participant observations. The table below illustrates these themes and the sub-categories.

Table 2

Thematic Findings for the Floyd Campus

| Theme | Sub-category |
|---|--|
| Institutional Characteristics | Smaller campus Affordability Smaller class size Closer to home Diverse body of students and employees Quality education |
| Environment Conducive for Learning | Access to institutional agents Active learning strategies Resources and support systems in place An engaged student body Preparation for the next step |
| Meaningful Interactions with Institutional Agents | As a resource As a support system As an advocate |

Other Thematic Findings

Although the researcher sought to investigate institutional conditions that matter to community college student success, two other themes not related to the institutional conditions emerged from the interviews. These themes were consistent with themes found in success-related literature. One theme was the pre-college experiences that students mentioned in their interviews such as family background, academic preparedness, and enrollment choices in relation to their success as students. Being first-generation, Latino/a, African American, Indian, Chinese, veteran, non-traditional, former dual-enrolled, former high school athlete, former college athlete, and transfer status, all influenced to success. Having academic, family, and/or financial support contributed to success. Enrolling in college part-time, or full-time right after high school, stopping out, and dropping out all influenced to the individual's journey.

Another theme that emerged from the interviews unrelated to institutional conditions was the behaviors and personality traits students needed to be successful; the researcher divided this theme into two subcategories including academic-related actions and non-cognitive factors appeared during the conversations. The participants cited many academic-related actions such as coming to class on time, taking good notes, sitting in the front of the class, not interrupting class, effective studying, and asking questions or for help. Some of the non-cognitive factors appearing in the interviews were intrinsic/extrinsic motivation, mindset, self-efficacy, sense of belonging, and academic self-confidence.

Floyd Campus: Response to Research Questions

RQ 1: What roles does campus environment play in students' ability to achieve success?

As a part of the interviews, students were asked to reflect upon how institutional characteristics such as the type (two-year, four-year, public, private), size (population and campus), and residential status (residential or nonresidential) of an institution could influence student success in terms of the achievement of their educational goals. When sharing their perceptions and stories about how these attributes contribute to their own success and the success of others, two major themes emerged. These themes were *institutional characteristics* and the *environment conducive for learning*.

Institutional Characteristics

One of the first themes to emerge from the interviews with the participants was that of institutional characteristics. All of the participants mentioned characteristics of their ideal college experience and conditions they need in order to be successful. These institutional characteristics are key for a student to fit in, feel comfortable, be familiar with college and the campus, have a sense of belonging, all of which can influence levels of academic confidence and ultimately student success in terms of the achievement of their educational goals. The following subcategories of *institutional characteristics* surfaced in the interviews: smaller campus, affordability, smaller class size, closer to home, diverse body of students and employees, and quality of education. This theme was confirmed using the marketing messages students received about why they should attend GHC (see Appendix D for these messages). Other evidence to support this theme was the physical artifacts of the buildings, the classroom set-up, and the campus layout.

Smaller campus. The subcategory smaller campus was used to describe the size of the land on campus, the proximity of buildings, if you can walk to class, and how long it takes to walk across campus. In their own words, five out of the six participants (Rebecca, Santiago,

Opal, Harry Potter, Big Al) mentioned a smaller campus as an aspect that is important to their student success using words and phrases such as, “comfortable”, “less stressful”, “small town feel”, and “easier” when talking about navigating the campus. When discussing a small campus Rebecca said, “I think a two-year college, especially here, since it’s not too big, they can just get to interact more with the students. That helps the student to focus more on the subject, if that makes sense.” Although Rebecca spoke mostly about the benefits of attending a smaller campus, such as being “easier” to go from building to building, comfortable because she’s “used to a smaller campus” and “nice”, she did say she felt lost in certain buildings because everything looked the same.

Santiago also spoke about GHC being “comfortable” and more specifically he enjoyed the fact that, “You walk to class. You can take your time, there’s not a rush.” He did note that he has lived in Rome his entire life and that he associates GHC with a small town. Other participants cited small town feel as a positive condition, but Santiago did not see this small town feeling as a good thing. Opal, Harry Potter, and Big Al all spoke about the benefits of the closeness of the buildings on campus such as “allows students to take more classes” (Opal), “you’re not as stressed out to get to class, you can walk there” (Harry Potter), and could impact motivation to attend class (Big Al).

The only person (Colgate) that did not mention attending a smaller campus as a benefit spoke about students having to travel from site to site within the institution to get the classes that students need. She said:

The only problem is if you have to travel two days a week to Marietta or Douglasville, you’re getting the raw end of the stick. It’s making sure that classes are available on every campus, which isn’t exactly easy to do.

Affordability. The subcategory of affordability encompassed the cost of tuition, fees, books, room, and board. All six participants mentioned some type of affordability when discussing ideal institutional conditions using words and phrases such as, “cheaper”, “affordable”, and “keeps price lower”. The participants discussed the importance of keeping the cost of college low, but they were also aware of the additional expenses that are associated with commuting to and from campus.

Opal discussed not having dorms and not having the requirement of living on campus keeps the cost lower. But she did note that she thought private schools may be able to offer more scholarship opportunities and alternatives to the state and federal aid offered at public colleges. Colgate spoke mostly about the price of textbooks and buying them even if a class does not use them. She would prefer the instructor use free books like the open stacks or open educational resources and supplement the content if needed. Harry Potter spoke about affordable textbooks, as well, more specifically the supplemental codes, “I know a lot of people that can’t afford it, and they just have to drop. And they can’t do the classes they want to because they can’t afford it.” Santiago thinks that the college’s responsibility in the success of their students is and will always be keeping the tuition low.

Smaller class size. Five out of the six participants (Rebecca, Santiago, Colgate, Harry Potter, Big Al) mentioned smaller class size as a condition ideal for student success. When participants spoke about the size of the classroom or the smaller population of the campus, they most commonly related smaller class size to access and relationships with institutional agents. Participants used phrases such as “not too big”, “more access to the instructor”, and “less worry” when describing their preference for a smaller class size. Santiago said, “There’s more one-on-one time...I’ve just been one-on-one and it’s comfortable.” Colgate felt as if “You have more

access to your instructors... You have extra one-on-one time that you're not going to get in a four-year college, where the teacher has 100 students." Harry Potter shared "If it's smaller you get relationships with your professors, they know your name, they know your face, they'll remember you, you can make friends with everybody in the classroom, and you ...it's easier."

Closer to home. The subcategory of closer to home encompassed the ability to live at home, serving the students in your region, freedom, and distance and time it takes to commute. Five out of the six participants mentioned the importance of still being able to live at home while earning their college degree. Rebecca thought that living on campus had no impact on how engaged she was with the campus, both in and out of the classroom. She said, "I do participate in student activities, which is actually nice, but it's also nice to go back home and have that environment too." She talked about how not having to live on campus saves money but emphasized the importance of being able to stay at home.

The participants shared the experiences of their friends living on college campuses and not being able to make it to class on time or at all. Both Santiago and Big Al spoke about how commuting adds to the responsibility of a student and lists tasks like managing time, knowing when to leave the house, having to worry about traffic when commuting.

Harry Potter spoke more about the transition of leaving for college. She shared:

Four-year colleges around here are pretty far away... so you'll be away from your family, you're away from your friends, you have to figure out how to live on your own, wash your own clothes, you know live without your mom. And I think that makes it more stressful because then you have to figure out life while figuring out college.

When Colgate spoke about a college that is closer to home, she said, "You're better able to deal with the students for your community versus trucking students from out of state and

you're able to actually reach out to who you'll basically be fueling workers for." In addition, Colgate and Harry Potter discussed the negatives of the freedom associated with living away from home such as, "partying and the other side of the college atmosphere that people don't like to talk about as much" (Colgate) and Harry Potter shared:

You'll have more chance to go party and have fun and do stuff when, if you're not there, if you're home or you have your own house, whatever, you are motivated to be calm and do your homework and then get it done then go out and have fun.

Diverse body of students and employees. Four students spoke about diversity in relations to race and ethnicity, age, religion, political beliefs, respect for different people, and feeling safe on campus. Rebecca spoke about feeling safe as a minority student at GHC. She shared, "There are some places that just because of the skin color, they discriminate you and all. Here there are people from all over the place, different cultures, different religions. They respect that." Santiago spoke about GHC being a melting pot of ages having everyone from "fresh out of high school to the older generation." He is a transfer student and did say that he felt his previous institution he met so many interesting and diverse people. He felt that the climate at GHC was "southern" and went onto explain:

Just individuals who live in a small town, mom and pop store is all they've known. That's all they see. Fortunately, I've met individuals from different parts of the world, so I'm not small-townish, even though I grew up in a small town... I think that's the one negative of a small college. The stigma of whatever that region is.

Opal shared, "When I was looking for schools in high school, colleges to go to, I wanted it to be diverse because my high school was not very diverse... So that's definitely what I look for in excellent education." She added that she has a desire to learn more languages and wishes

that the college had a more diverse language selection to choose from. Opal is a Chinese adoptee. She had this to say:

As for people who look like me, not really. There actually was a girl here, she graduated and she was a Chinese adoptee and so that was kind of interesting. I never seen any other adoptees close to my age in this region and she hasn't moved here, out of state, she actually lived here and I'm like where were you all my life. She's graduated, recently in my history class, I walked in and there was the only Asian I think he was half Japanese, I saw him at orientation and I was like ah I'll never see him again. He was in my history class, so I was like wow that's really interesting. So I definitely see a rise in that, more opportunities here than at my high school.

Harry Potter also spoke about the lack of diversity at her high school:

Where I went to school we didn't have that. We were like 98% white, and there would be like two or three black people in the whole school and two or three Muslims and that, I mean that was it. There was nobody else so it's not that people were discriminatory it just wasn't... you just weren't exposed to anything like that. So coming here is I think it's neat. Oh, we have a girl from Italy here, I think that's cool. We have different Hispanic people... there was a guy from Africa, I think. I think just all that's cool.

In addition to race and ethnicities, Harry Potter also spoke about the climate during the last presidential election. She felt as if she witnessed students discriminating against each other based on their political affiliation and their presidential vote.

Quality education. The subcategory quality education encompassed aspects such as transferrable programs, trained instructors, and real world knowledge. Five out of the six participants (Santiago, Colgate, Opal, Harry Potter, Big Al) spoke about quality education as

important to their success as students. Santiago was surprised by how many credentialed employees GHC has stating, “The other day I noticed, I was just baffled by how many doctors we have on campus... highly intelligent people on campus. Georgia Highlands is a credible, qualified university.” Colgate felt as if she was actually “getting a better education” at GHC than other public or private four-year institutions. She also thought it was important to educate and train students for future jobs.

When discussing the education students receive at GHC, Opal saw value in the fact that students see results faster at a two-year institution because they are rewarded with a degree in a shorter period of time. She shared:

I think if you start out at a four-year school, there’s a little bit of depression almost exasperation when you’ve graduated high school, it was four years, and you’re like I’m finally done with that, and then you step into another school and it’s like now I have four more years of my life. So if you go to a two-year school and you in my case aim for an Associate’s degree, you’re only there at minimum two years or maybe less... So you just feel like everything moves so much faster and quicker.

Harry Potter spoke about a volunteer opportunity she had as an Orientation Leader working at the part-time faculty training and in-service. She appreciated the fact that GHC takes time to train the professors. Big Al spoke about the importance of practical knowledge “The value is that [GHC] want to try and give you that knowledge to use outside of school into the real world to help you get by. Not just to get by but to succeed.”

Environment Conducive for Learning

The second theme to emerge from the interviews with the participants was *environment conducive for learning*. All of the participants mentioned characteristics of their ideal learning

environment. This theme included the following subcategories: access to institutional agents, active learning strategies, services for success in place, an engaged student body, preparation for the next step, and a safe space. This theme was confirmed using documentation from new student orientation, direct and participant observations at on-campus committee meetings for faculty and staff, and at activities and events for students during Weeks of Welcome. See Appendix I to view a document discussed at orientation.

Access to institutional agents. The subcategory *access to institutional agents* encompassed the ability to communicate with and receive a response from faculty, staff, and administrators through email, office hours, and in person meetings. All six students mentioned *access to institutional agents* using words and phrases such as, “you could freely talk with teachers”, “one-on-one time”, “access to instructors”, “access to extra help”, “doors are always open” and “personal relationship”.

Rebecca shared an experience with a good teacher and a positive classroom dynamic and how that experience “made me more confident to go and talk to other teachers and ask for help and all that stuff.” Harry Potter spoke about the differences in high school and college regarding the ability to approach institutional agents and form relationships with them. She said:

It’s different for me to walk up to a professor and talk to him or some teachers don’t even want to be called doctor where they’ll go by their first name. And that is just so weird because they would smite you (laughs) at high school if you did that. So it was a lot of getting used to, but I really like it. I feel I have more of a relationship, not just a professor-student-grade kind of situation.

The participants associate their access to professors with the size of the campus and classroom. Rebecca said:

Here, since it's a two-year college. They're so kind. The teachers are so kind. You can just email them and they'll respond to you. They'll direct you wherever you need to go.

Four-year college, I don't really know what it would work like.

Colgate also spoke about the perceived differences between two-year and four-year colleges about the access to institutional agents. She shared:

You have a little bit more hand-holding here than what you would at a four-year. You have more access to your instructors. You have more access to the tutorial centers or extra help. You have that extra one-on-one time that you're not going to get in a four-year college, where the teacher has 100 students.

Active learning strategies. Without knowing what the phrase active learning strategies means, five out of the six participants (Rebecca, Colgate, Opal, Harry Potter, Big Al) were able to identify innovative pedagogies and engaging behaviors that enhance a positive classroom dynamic. Opal teachers are not interesting when they say, "here's class, here's the subject, here's your homework, leave." When she has an instructor like that she said, "you sit there watching the clock a little harder than you do for the other ones." Harry Potter appreciates that one of her professors is happy, does not look exhausted or miserable, and is friendly. This particular professor was helpful and understanding. She shared:

When he'd be teaching, he would just be smiling, he'd be so excited, he'd think of a story and he'd get to talking about it. And we might go over a couple of minutes, but he just gets so excited to where he had to tell something or he would... he wouldn't just read off a PowerPoint. He had nice PowerPoints, but he knew the material. He didn't have to have a book in hand. He didn't have to constantly look at the power point, he just knew it. And you could tell he enjoyed it because he knew it. He didn't have to sit there and sit on a

stool and read it. He walked around, talked to people, looked around, let us openly talk.

We didn't have to raise our hand to talk. You know he was just comfortable having us all around talking to us, loved our opinion, didn't get mad at anybody for their opinion.

Harry Potter also identified the behaviors of instructors that were disengaging. These included, not bringing the material down to the student's level, making students feel as if they were not good enough, ignoring emails, and making students feel as if they were inferior.

Although Rebecca did not offer any extensive examples of active learning strategies, she did mention it as the one thing GHC could do to improve student success. She said:

I guess some classes do this, but some classes the professors can be more interactive with the students instead of just doing the lecture. Instead of just giving the lesson, they could just give some other experiences and make it more relative to the students.

Resources and support systems in place. The subcategory *resources and support systems in place* encompassed other elements on campus, in addition to meaningful interactions, that are meant to provide information, assistance, guidance, and helpful. All six participants mentioned at least one resource or support system in place. Big Al said that the college's responsibility for a student's success is to "have all the resources available. Even if that means you pointing out that students should be like, 'Hey, I see you're having trouble with this.'" See Table 3 for a list of on-campus services for success named within the participant interviews.

An engaged student body. The subcategory *an engaged student body* encompassed student behaviors, participation in clubs and organization, participation in activities and events, participation in leadership development, and going to and supporting athletic teams. All six participants mentioned a characteristic of an engaged student body. Rebecca and Opal described student success as the students' responsibility with engaging behaviors such as, showing up for

class on time, doing your homework, studying, and taking notes. When talking about being an engaged student, Opal said:

I decided when I came to college I want to make sure I tried all the activities that were offered, so when I'm free and there's a speaker or some kind of event going on I always try to make it, even if I'm done with classes and could go home. That always makes it more fun because it's just something that you never saw in high school, and that gets you comfortable with possibly walking into a room with strangers and having to sit down and be there, you have a common reason to interact and it won't be a class and it'll be like an interesting performer and you can talk about it.

Table 3

| <i>Services Mentioned in the Participant Interviews for the Floyd Campus</i> | |
|--|--|
| Participant | Services |
| Rebecca | Tutoring |
| Santiago | Tutoring Advising |
| Colgate | Tutorial centers Food pantry |
| Opal | Career counseling Early Bird Advising |
| Harry Potter | Tutorial center |
| Big Al | Testing services Tutorial Center Library |

Harry Potter noted the importance of participating in academic, cultural, and social activities outside of class:

Even though college and academics is important there's still times like the eclipse party, the hot chocolate party, bamboo stuff, there's still other times where it's still academic, you're still learning. I don't know if you learn with hot chocolate, but you're with the same teachers, same students, but you're still having fun in the same environment. But it's a more relaxed environment at the same time.

Colgate was concerned that GHC does not have a lot of traditions to instill pride:

We don't really have too many traditions honestly. The only tradition we actually have is the Six Mile Post and a few other things, but they kind of go by the wayside. They just come and go as they please. I think that is because by the time you actually get somebody who's a second year, who is understanding and getting it, they're going.

She later added:

People aren't really breaking out from their comfort zones because they're only here for a little bit. That comes with being a community college too. Because they don't live here, they don't have to really go out and experience unless they want to.

See Table 4 for a count of clubs, organizations, activities, and events, which were named in the participant interviews at the Floyd Campus.

Preparation for the next step. Five out of six students (Santiago, Colgate, Opal, Harry Potter, Big Al) mentioned the subcategory *preparation for the next step* to describe the role the college plays in preparing students for the transition into the workforce or a four-year college experience. Participants used words or phrases such as, “fantastic first step” and “a stepping stone” (Santiago), “college light” (Colgate), and “get all your core classes out of the way” (Big Al). Harry Potter said, “I felt like it was a great way to start out because it's kind of... some classes have a high school feel so it's a great way to start out.”

Table 4

Quantity of Clubs, Organizations, Activities, and Events Mentioned by Floyd Participants

| Participant | Club, Organization, Activity, and/or Event |
|--------------|--|
| Rebecca | 3 |
| Santiago | 2 |
| Colgate | 6 |
| Opal | 2 |
| Harry Potter | 7 |
| Big Al | 2 |

When speaking about preparation for the next step, Opal shared:

I think most of the staff and professors at Highlands knows that most of the students aren't here for a Bachelor's program and are going to transfer out pretty quickly, so they're very encouraging of let me give you that stepping stone and help you.

She added:

It gives them a way to step into college without feeling the pressure of I'm away from home and I don't know what's going on. It gives them that, oh I have a grasp of my college life, I know what I need to do in order to make good grades and get through the day, and so once they do move away they can then focus on that little difference versus both of the college and I'm away from everything I know.

RQ 2: What roles do faculty, staff, and administrators play in a student's ability to achieve success?

In order to fully understand the roles faculty, staff, and administrators play in a student's ability to achieve success, it is important to acknowledge the institutional agents the students mentioned in their interviews. The following section describes the different types of people that students talked about in their interviews. In addition to the institutional agents, the participants also mentioned people outside the college who impacted their success as students.

People

Faculty. Throughout the interviews all of the participants mentioned faculty members, both generally and specifically in 21 unique times. Thirteen unique faculty members were identified by their name. Participants mentioned faculty members in generic terms eight unique times. Generic terms included "general teaching staff" (Santiago), "teachers" (Rebecca, Harry Potter), "professors" (Rebecca, Opal, Harry Potter), "instructors" (Colgate), and "a biology teacher" (Harry Potter).

Staff. Throughout the interviews four different participants (Santiago, Opal, Harry Potter, Big Al) mentioned staff members seven unique times. Four different staff members were mentioned by names. Three staff members were mentioned generically using phrases such as, "career counselor" (Opal), "advisors" (Opal), and "tutor" (Harry Potter). Two participants (Rebecca, Big Al) also mentioned "everybody" and "everyone" when discussing people who have impacted their levels of success.

Administrators. Throughout the interviews three different participants (Santiago, Harry Potter, Big Al) mentioned administrators by name five unique times. Administrators mentioned

included the President, the Vice President for Academic Affairs, the Vice President for Student Affairs/Campus Dean, and an Academic Dean.

Peers. All of the students mentioned peers in some form using words or phrases such as, “friends” (Rebecca, Santiago, Opal), “students” (all), “fellow orientation leaders” (Opal, Harry Potter), and “fellow Brother 2 Brother members” (Big Al).

Other people outside of the college. The participants also mentioned other people in addition to the institutional agents. These people included family members of faculty and administrators, family members, teachers at former institutions, psychologists, advisors at former institutions, and administrators and teachers at the high-school level.

Meaningful Interactions with Institutional Agents

Institutional agent is a phrase used to describe the institution’s faculty, staff, and administrators. The faculty, staff, and administrators play many roles in a student’s ability to achieve success. During the interviews the participants described many different types of interactions with the institutional agents. The interactions were positive, negative, meaningful, and meaningless. The theme *meaningful interactions with institutional agents* emerged describing the positive roles these individuals play in a student’s success. The three subcategories of meaningful interactions were as a resource, as a support system, and as an advocate. With every positive and meaningful interaction between students and institutional agents, the trust increases, and the relationship can move from resource to support system to advocate. Figure 7 illustrates a model the researcher created to illustrate the hierarchy of meaningful interactions. This theme was confirmed with archival data from the PASS Survey and the Success Coach Program, observations on campus and at orientation, and with documentation from orientation (see Appendix I for the top 10 list discussed at orientation).

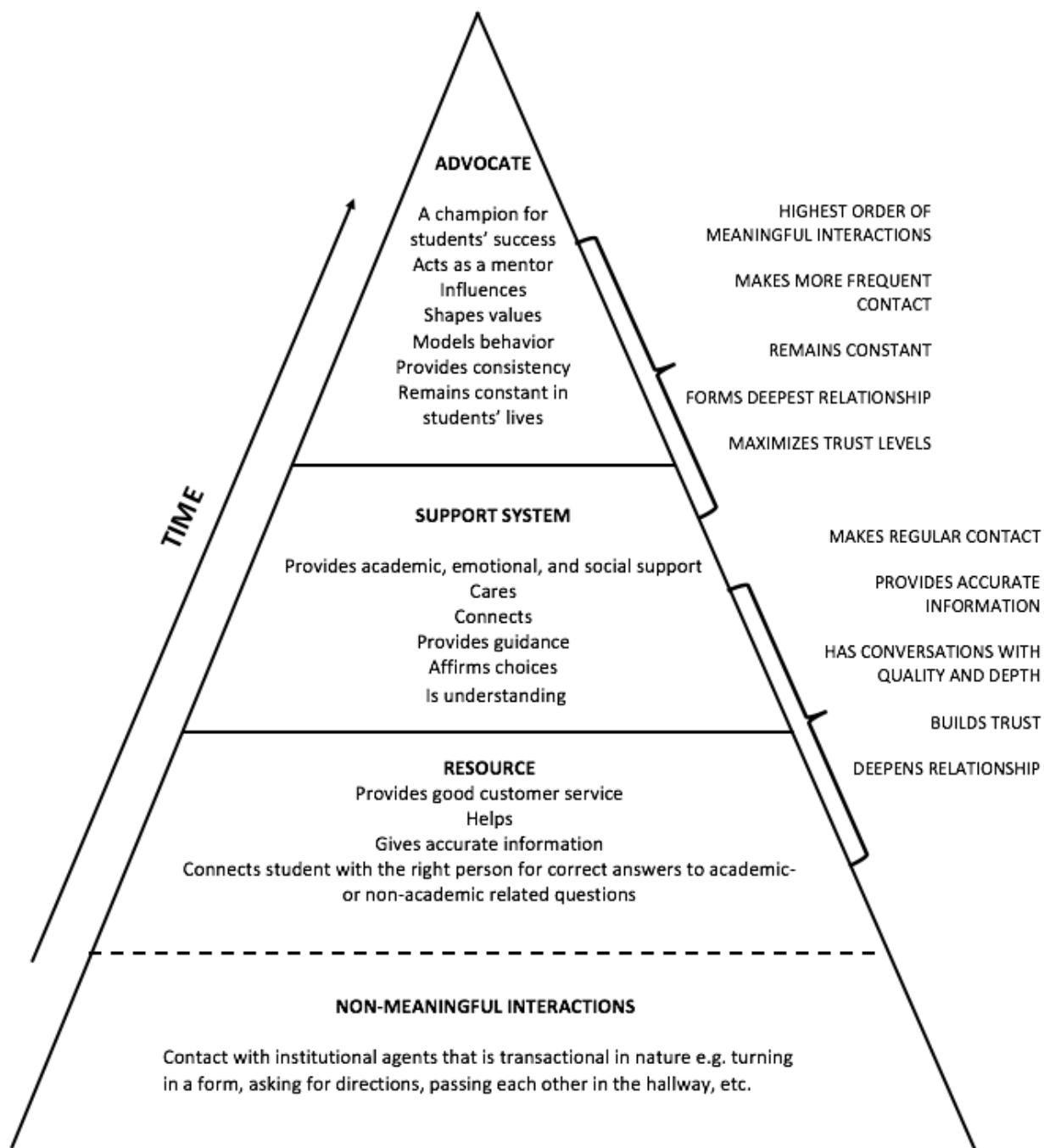


Figure 7. Hierarchy of Meaningful Interactions. A model created by C. L. Edenfield, 2018. Copyright [2018] by Crystal L. Edenfield.

As a resource. The first subcategory of the meaningful interactions with institutional agents is *as a resource*. At this level, the students have moved from pragmatic interactions with faculty, staff, and/or administrations to an area where students feel comfortable to approach institutional agents, ask questions, or seek help. The participants mentioned 10 unique institutional agents that served in a resource. When describing this role, participants used words or phrases such as, “helpful”, “you just go talk to them”, and “approachable.” Rebecca shared, “Everybody in general. They are really helpful. You just go talk to them, they won’t be rude. They’re so nice, and they just help you out in anything you want.” Colgate explained “Dr. Emerald is very approachable and he just does not sit in his office, that he actually comes out on campus. That’s nice.” Big Al shared, “I like one of those teachers who will take time out of their busy schedule to help out a student.”

As a support system. In the interviews, students revealed the people that they went to for help and answers. But in some cases, students returned to those institutional agents and began to form a deeper relationship. At that time, students moved from interacting with institutional agents as a resource to interacting with institutional agents as a support system. In addition to having the characteristics of the resource, the support system provides academic, emotional, and/or social support. Different from a resource, the support system invests more time in making sure students feel as if they mattered, making a connection, providing guidance, affirming choices and decisions, as well as being a friend. In their own words, the participants mentioned 11 different individuals that served as a support system.

Opal shared:

Ms. Ruby always announces if there's any type of event on campus, she'll announce it to the class and she'll make sure we know the time. Sometimes if it relates to her class, she'll give extra credit to encourage us to go to it, so that was always nice.

When discussing the size of GHC's population, Santiago said:

There's more one-on-one time. I know Mr. Diamond outside of Highlands, I coached alongside his wife, wonderful family, I've had one to one talks with him, and not just him, but different members of the staff, Mr. Sapphire, Ms. Alexandrite, Dr. Emerald. I've just been one-on-one and it's comfortable... Really get to know them.

Harry Potter shared how she felt about administrators such as Dr. Jasmine and Dr. Amethyst knew her name, remembered her:

You know, you'd think they're more prim and proper kind of people. And they are, they're really put together nice, but they- they talk to you. They don't make you feel like, you're just a paying student, paying their salary. They make you feel like they care about you, they know you, they remember your name, they can be funny and crazy and heck they come to all the events. They don't always dress in a suit. Heck, Dr. Amethyst wears shorts... They make you feel like we're all equal.

Big Al said:

If we could have more teachers to be like, 'Hey, I see you ain't doing well. Let's see what kind of study habits you got going on. Let's see if we can change that' and stuff instead of just teachers who are just there just because they get paid. That's it.

He later added, "For teachers who try and get to know a student, it's just beyond amazing just because they really want to get to know you, who you are, what are your plans."

As an advocate. The participants mentioned four different individuals as unique advocates. Opal shared her interactions with a faculty member and how her experience in the classroom influenced a change in her major:

I want to compliment one teacher, Ms. Topaz. She's actually the one who made me decide I like Sociology. I really liked the way she would present an idea of society, so a norm, and then she would ask us why we'd do that... Force you to think of a question and why we did stuff certain things the way we do. I constantly now if I ever find myself in a weird situation I'll go over and over it and I'll think about what influenced me to do this or why did I react like that, then I keep going farther and farther back.

Harry Potter shared:

Mr. Onyx said he started out doing something different and couldn't pass the class and he felt so disappointed and everything, but in the disappointment, he found something else he liked and fell in love with it. And that spoke to me since that's since I couldn't do what I wanted to do [be a vet] I wanted to do it my whole life. When I got here and I tried so so hard, and I could not do it. And it made me feel better knowing somebody I look up to had the same thing happen. So it made me feel better... So he made me feel that confidence, like if a Doctor had a problem and did okay, I think I better be okay.

Big Al:

Coach Citrine he's an amazing person. He's hard on me but I get why he's hard. He was like, 'I just want to tell y'all this. I love y'all as if you were my sons.' I've never had a father figure in my life and stuff... He was talking and he was like, 'I just love y'all like y'all my sons. I stay hard on y'all. That's what I do to y'all. I want y'all to understand that whenever you leave here and you actually get to work and stuff and life hits you, life

is not going to care. That's why I'm so hard on you. I want y'all to be prepared for life.'... Without a doubt he has my back no matter what.

See Table 5 for a frequency count of relationships by type at the Floyd Campus.

Table 5

Counts of Meaningful Relationships with Institutional Agents at the Floyd Campus

| Participant | Resource | Support System | Advocate |
|--------------|----------|----------------|----------|
| Rebecca | 3 | 1 | 0 |
| Santiago | 1 | 4 | 0 |
| Colgate | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Opal | 3 | 1 | 1 |
| Harry Potter | 0 | 3 | 1 |
| Big Al | 1 | 2 | 2 |

RQ3: In terms of roles of campus environment and roles of institutional agents, what factors are more pertinent to community college students progressing towards achieving educational goals?

The factors most pertinent to personal success, in terms of campus environments and roles of institutional agents, were conditions that allowed for a low cost, quality education, with qualified instructors who are passionate about teaching and care about getting to know their students. Students at the Floyd Campus were the most successful in conditions, which promoted meaningful interactions between students and institutional agents. The participants in this study emphasized the size of the classroom as a primary factor contributing to the access to institutional agents. For the participants, smaller class size resulted in a greater chance of getting to know their instructors. It was not enough to have access to the instructors, although the

participants spoke positively about faculty when they were easy to approach, allowed questions, answered questions correctly, gave timely feedback, and promoted on campus activities and events. When a faculty, staff, or administrator cared, that mattered more.

Cartersville Site: Comprehensive Description

There are a few factors that make the Cartersville Site unique to all of the other locations of Georgia Highlands College (GHC). The first one is the growth that the site has experienced by population and building construction. Over the last five years, the Cartersville Site has continued to be the largest by student population. The geographic area around Cartersville has experience growth, as well. The Cartersville Site is minutes away from an exit of Interstate 75 and less than 10 miles away from the new Lakepoint Sporting Community, a “premier sports vacation destination” that is “the largest and most unique travel sports park in the Southeast” (LakePoint Sports, 2016). The Cartersville Site is in Bartow County. Bartow County continues to grow because of the spillover of population and economic development it receives from being in close proximity to Cobb County.

A second point of uniqueness is that the Cartersville Site recently broke ground on a new building set to open next year. The Cartersville Site opened its doors in 2005 with only one building, the Academic Building, on the 50 acres. In 2012, the Cartersville Site opened the Student Center. The campus has a more updated atmosphere from the other locations and one of the reasons being that the other locations were mostly originally constructed in the 1970s and 1980s and those academic buildings were given facelifts over the years. The Cartersville Site has been new from the ground up and was also designed to have a wilderness lodge feel. There are large fireplaces accessible to students in both buildings. There is unique architecture mixing woodwork and stone.

Another point that makes it unique from the Cartersville Campus is the Campus Dean role. This person is dedicated solely to the role of Campus Dean, overseeing daily operations and meeting the needs of students, faculty, and staff, as well as the community. A final component that makes the Cartersville site unique is the Hub, which is a one-stop-shop type office location that allows students to come to one location to receive help from customer service and various offices from Academic Success, Enrollment Management, Student Support Services, and the Business Office. There is also a computer lab and printer available for student use in the Hub area. A final point of uniqueness is that the Cartersville Site is the home base for the baseball and softball teams.

Mission and Strategic Plan

Each campus and instructional site strives to uphold the mission of the institution which is to provide access to excellent educational opportunities for intellectual, cultural, and physical development of a diverse population, seeking to meet the economic development needs of the region through pre-baccalaureate associate degree transfer programs, career associate degree programs, and targeted baccalaureate degree programs. There are no location-specific missions. Likewise, each location supports the institutional strategic plan. Therefore, the Cartersville Site upholds the mission, values, goals, and strategic plan of the entire institution. The Cartersville Site does have Operational Plans that are tied to the institution's Strategic Plan. The Cartersville Site's Campus Dean is responsible for creating and assessing the site-specific operational plans.

Leadership

The Cartersville Site has one individual that is solely responsible for acting as Campus Dean. As previously mentioned, the Campus Dean oversees the daily operations of the location. The Campus Dean engages in cross-campus collaboration and represents the needs of the

students, faculty, and staff of the location. The Campus Dean has both direct and indirect reports as illustrated in Figure 8. See Appendix E for a Letter from the Campus Dean.

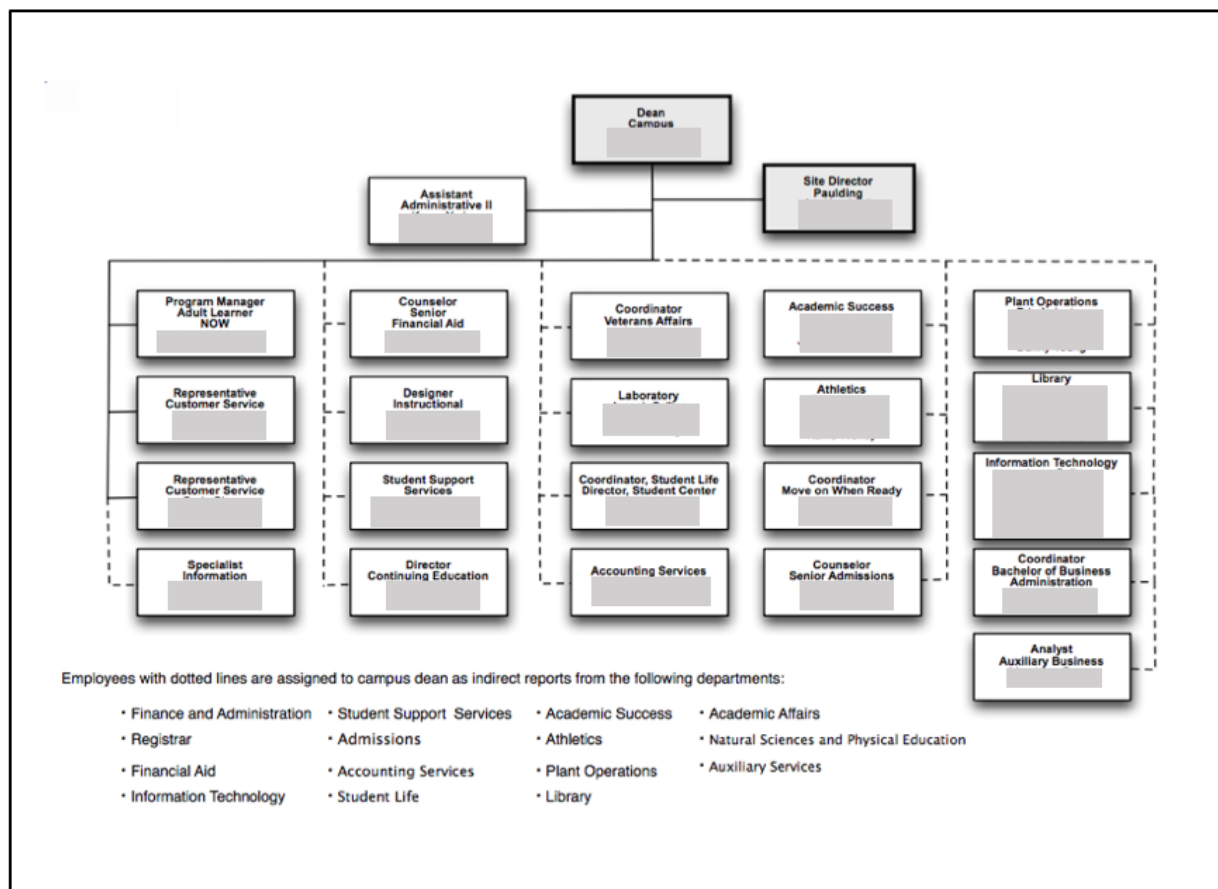


Figure 8. Organizational Chart at the Cartersville Site. Adapted from *Georgia Highlands College website*.

Institutional Attributes

In the fall semester of 2017 there were 1,834 students enrolled at the Cartersville Site (West, 2018a). That number made the Cartersville Site the largest by student population, although there had been a steady decline in enrollment at all locations. Of the 1,834 students, 10% were Black, 72% were White, less than 1% were American Indian/Alaskan Natives, 1% were Asian, less than 1% were Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islanders, 13% were Hispanics, and 3% students identified as multiracial. Less than 1% of students did not self-report their

race/ethnicity. The Cartersville Site had 56% females and 44% males during fall 2017 (West, 2018a). The average age of a Cartersville student is 27.4-years-old. The Cartersville Site has a retention rate of 50.2% (GHC, 2017a). From fall 2016 to spring 2017 there were 196 graduates from the Cartersville site, which represents 28% of the total number of GHC graduates (Langston, 2018; West 2018b).

Facilities

According to the *2016-2017 Fact Book*, the Cartersville Site has two buildings: the academic building and the student center. These two buildings collectively are 187,433 square feet. In the three-story Academic Building, students find classroom and lab space, the library, and many other resources such as the Hub (admissions, advising, the business office, counseling, disability support, dual-enrollment, financial aid, an information customer service desk, and an open computer lab available for student-use), the Career Center, the Clothes Closet, the GHC Food Pantry, the Tutorial Center, and the Veterans Resource Center. The Campus Dean's office is on the second floor of the Academic Building. In the Student Center there is ballroom meeting space, a café, the bookstore, a game room, and workout facilities complete with a weight and cardio room, two volleyball/basketball courts, and a suspended indoor track. There are several spots around campus for lounging and studying. An open green space separates the two buildings, which takes about five minutes to walk to and from. A third building, known as the Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math building, STEAM for short, is currently under construction and set to open in summer 2018. Figure 9 is an image from the *2016-2017 Fact Book* illustrating the building list at the Cartersville Site. Figure 10 is a map of the Cartersville Site.

| Building code | Building letter | Building name | Date built or acquired | Gross sq. feet |
|---------------|-----------------|--------------------------------|------------------------|----------------|
| 20 | N/A | Cartersville Academic Building | 2005 | 130,787 |
| 22 | N/A | Cartersville Student Center | 2012 | 56,646 |
| | | Total | | 187,433 |

Figure 9. Building List, Cartersville Site. Reprinted from *2016-2017 Fact Book*, by Georgia Highlands College. Retrieved from https://sites.highlands.edu/paar/wp-content/uploads/sites/9/2017/10/Fact-Book-2016-2017-as-of-9_29_2017.pdf.

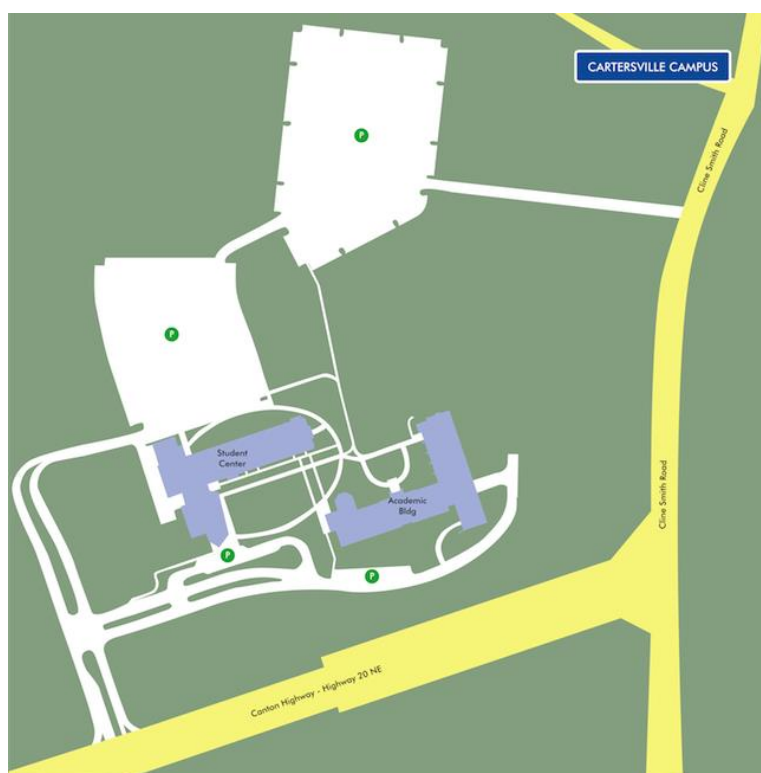


Figure 10. Map, Cartersville Site. Reprinted from *Georgia Highlands College website*. Retrieved from <https://www.highlands.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/cartersville-map.png>.

Teaching and Learning

There are 174 employees at the Cartersville Site excluding student employees and non-paid affiliates. Of those, 68 staff, 49 are full-time and 19 are part-time. There are 47 full-time faculty members plus four librarians. In addition, there are 55 part-time faculty at the Cartersville Site. These faculty members taught 41,171 total credit hours at the Cartersville Site.

Services for Success

The Cartersville Site provides many services to help students succeed by offering free services including academic advising and planning, career aptitude tests, major exploration, mentor programs, and tutoring. These services are managed by college units and departments, as well as program managers.

Academic Success Center. The Academic Success Center is a department, which reports to Academic Affairs that includes three different areas: Advising, Early Warning, and Tutoring. The Director of Academic Success manages the efforts of the Academic Success Center. While Advising and Tutoring are actual educational units with mission statements, goals, staff, and office space, Early Warning is a program focused on intervention with students who may be at risk. Advising has a mission “to help students explore and determine the best educational options to achieve their personal and professional goals, whether within the core curriculum, transfer degree programs, or career degree programs” (GHC, 2017b, p. 23).

GHC has a hybrid advising model that utilizes both professional advisors and faculty advisors; there are no assigned advisors or mandatory advising. The Cartersville Site has three professional advising team members including a Senior Advisor, a Professional Advisor, who serves as the learning support advising liaison, as well as one additional Professional Advisor. The most popular time for advising is during a program called Early Bird Advising (EBA). During this time period, students are encouraged to make an appointment and meet with either a professional advisor or faculty advisor. An incentive to participating in EBA is early registration. The typical advising experience has focused on course selection and not academic planning, goal setting, or meaningful interactions between the student and the advisor. That will change with the

newly approved *Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP): Quest for Success*, which pilots summer 2018 in an effort to address those challenges.

Tutoring has a mission “to enhance the education received by students enrolled in classes by guiding students to improve their academic skills, thereby helping them succeed in their chosen college curriculum” (GHC, 2017b, p. 27). The Cartersville Site has a Tutorial Center located in the Academic Building, which is staffed by an Assistant Director of Tutoring, full-time tutors and student workers. The Tutorial Center provides services such as, one-on-one tutoring sessions, information and practice for standardized tests, opportunities for group study, assistance with software and technology used in GHC classes, workshops in special areas of study, web-based study materials, guidance in how to research, and information regarding information literacy (GHC, 2017b). The *2016-2017 Fact Book* reported 4,057 visits to the Cartersville Tutorial Center (GHC, 2017a).

First Year Experience (FYE). The First Year Experience has attempted to evolve over the last decade, but has never really had a permanent place at the college. It has moved from the Math Department, to the Division of Humanities, and now lives in the New Student and Retention Programs unit. New Student and Retention Programs reports to Academic Affairs. There is a one employee based at the Floyd Campus, who travels to the other locations.

Over the years, FYE has primarily consisted of a student success course for students taking learning support or remedial coursework. This course is primarily taught by part-time faculty or staff instructors. Under the direction of the Program Manager for New Student and Retention Programs, FYE has recently taken over new student orientation, as well as overseeing the redesign of the college success course. Other components of New Student and Retention Programs that are related to FYE include the Success Coach Program, success workshops, and

online resources which promote the success of students each year at GHC. A Common Theme, a topic the college chooses as the theme for academic, cultural, and social activities, is a collaborative effort between New Student and Retention Programs with Student Life and Academic Affairs. In 2017-2018 the theme was China and the theme for 2018-2019 will be wellness.

Georgia Highlands African-American and Minority Male Excellence (GHAME)

Initiative. GHAME is a part of a statewide African-American Male Initiative (AAMI) to increase the recruitment and retention of African American male and Latino male students. The goal of GHAME is to increase the graduation rates of these men. GHAME offers resources and support for students by providing academic advising, financial aid awareness, study skills, life skills, and mentoring. The students targeted by GHAME are encouraged to join Brother 2 Brother, a campus organization that is an extension of GHAME that encourages, supports, and mentors its members. The Director of GHAME and faculty advisor for Brother 2 Brother is also the Dean of Humanities.

The Library. The GHC Libraries are an educational unit that reports to Academic Affairs. The Libraries “provide access to resources in all formats in order to meet the curricular and intellectual needs of the Georgia Highlands College community” (GHC, 2017b, p. 26). The library at the Cartersville Site has five full-time and two part-time employees including a Librarian and Testing Coordinator, three Assistant Librarians for Public Service, and two Part-time Librarians. In the Cartersville Library, students have access to books, online resources, group and private study rooms, quiet study areas, conference rooms equipped with technology, and a computer lab. In 2016-2017, there were 103,192 visits to the Cartersville Library last year (GHC, 2017a).

NOW (Nights, Online, and Weekends) Adult Learning Program. The Cartersville Site is where the NOW and Adult Learning Program Manager is located. NOW is a program with flexible scheduling and courses that incorporate best practices for adult learners. Courses can be taught in accelerated eight week formats, as either hybrid or online, and during the day in the evening.

Student Life. The mission of student life is “to develop the Georgia Highlands College student body through a series of co-curricular activities that promote experiential learning, wellness, leadership, volunteerism, and an appreciation of the arts” (GHC, 2017b, p. 21). Student life reports to Student Affairs and provides academic, cultural, and social activities and events for students. In addition, they oversee many leadership opportunities, clubs and organizations, as well as intramural sports. The Cartersville Site has a Student Life Coordinator, who also serves as the Director of the Student Center at the Cartersville Site. Out of the 44 clubs and organizations on all campuses, the Cartersville Site has active members in 26 of them (see Appendix H for a list of clubs and organizations).

A total of 33 students completed the Emerging Leaders program and 10 of those were from the Cartersville Site. Of the 47 total students who were registered for the Charge Into Leadership Conference, which took place at the Cartersville Site, 14 students participated. A leadership opportunity unique to the Cartersville Site was the GHC President's Student Success Workshop. In the Fall of 2017, the President's Office began hosting a four-part success workshop series and he piloted the workshops at the Cartersville and Douglasville Sites. Ten students participated in the Cartersville workshops.

Student Support Services. Student Support Services reports to Student Affairs and includes Career Services, Counseling, and Disability Support. This department also oversees the

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) program. The mission of Student Support Services is “to provide reasonable programs and services to enrolled students, including supportive counseling, career exploration, and disability support that allow students to meet the demands of college life, as independently as possible” (GHC, 2017b, p. 21). There is one Counselor and one Disability Specialist located at the Cartersville Site.

Services unique to the Cartersville Site include the College and Career Center, which provides resources for students’ next steps and the Clothes Closet, which provides business attire for students in need of outfits for job interviews. The Cartersville Site has a GHC Food Pantry and a school garden and greenhouse, which grew and donated over 260 pounds of produce to the Charger Food Pantry summer 2017 (Rome News Tribune, 2017). The *2016-2017 Fact Book* has a section that reports out to the college community information related to Student Support Services (GHC, 2017a). According to this document (GHC, 2017a), 128 Cartersville students were documented as receiving disability support services; 442 Cartersville students received personal counseling; 2133 Cartersville students were impacted by on campus outreach; 6 student participated in WIA; and there were 66 visits to the Cartersville food pantry in the 2016-2017 academic year.

Veterans Services. Veterans Services is committed to helping active duty, disabled veterans, and eligible dependents navigate applying for, paying for, and succeeding in college. At the Cartersville Site, the Veterans Resource Center (VRC) is a space dedicated to the success of veteran students with support resources such as includes a computer, a printing station, a lounge area with a microwave and television, and textbook lending library. At the Cartersville Site, Veterans Services is staffed by the Veterans Affairs Coordinator and a team of veteran student workers.

Historical Student Satisfaction Data

Each year, GHC administers the Presently Attending Satisfaction Survey (PASS) to the entire student body. The results are given to the appropriate units and departments. In the spring 2016, of the total 1913 students, 146 students from the Cartersville Site completed the survey for an 8% response rate. In some situations, the PASS survey resulted in contributions to the assessment of College departments and units.

The top three reasons students self-reported attending GHC was the convenient location (75%), the cost (74%), and the quality of education (31%). When asked if students were satisfied with operations of the front office on this campus, 82% answered either strongly agreed or agreed. When asked if students were satisfied with the level of customer service and the quality of services provided, 85% answered strongly agreed or agreed. When asked if students were satisfied with the quality of teaching and learning, 87% answered either strongly agreed or agreed. When asked if students felt safe on campus, 83% strongly agreed or agreed. Finally, 90% strongly agreed or agreed that it is important that GHC welcomes people with differences.

According to the PASS survey in regards to answers about advising, 83% of the Cartersville respondents were easily able to locate a professional or faculty advisor. Email and in-person were the most popular methods of contacting an advisor. The most common things discussed with an advisor was course scheduling for at least two semesters and the development of an academic plan. The top responses for advising resources that were used included a face-to-face meeting and participating in Early Bird Advising, a program that promotes early advising and class planning with an incentive of early registration. Out of the respondents on the PASS Survey, 92% rated their advising experience as positive. The most common response for not taking advantage of advising services was not needing an advisor and not having the time.

On the PASS survey, 40% of the Cartersville respondents reported visiting the Tutorial Center in person and 86% of those strongly agreed or agreed that the tutor(s) who worked with the student were knowledgeable. In addition, 90% reported that their tutor(s) were friendly and helpful. Finally, 86% strongly agreed or agreed that their overall experience at the Tutorial Center was satisfactory.

Students are asked several questions about the library on the PASS survey. When asked how many times students go to the library, 38% answered once a week. Of these responses, 86% strongly agreed or agreed that the library is adequate for my needs. Common responses in an open-ended section about improvements included the need for longer hours, more study rooms, more computers, more up to date materials, and more secure outlets. On the PASS survey, students were asked if being involved in clubs and activities outside the classroom has added value to the college experience, 23% said yes and 73% answered that they do not participate.

Cartersville Site: Participant Profiles

This section provides an overview of the six participants background and characteristics, their definition of student success, the life experiences that have shaped their definition of student success, and their student experience at GHC so far. Within this section the researcher shares a summary of the data collected through semi-structured in-person interviews conducted with each participant. These profiles will provide insight into the pre-college experiences of participants, as well as how students define student success. The interviews with these participants took place at various locations on the Cartersville Site including study rooms in the library, vacant ballrooms in the student center, and a space in the Veterans Resource Center. See Table 6 for the participant demographics from the Cartersville Site.

Table 6

Participant Demographics from the Cartersville Site

| Pseudonym | Age | Gender | Race/Ethnicity | Enrollment Status | Program of Study |
|------------|-----|--------|------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|
| Morgan | 25 | Female | Hispanic | Full-time | Psychology |
| Scooby Doo | 19 | Female | Hispanic | Part-time | Journalism |
| Gates | 21 | Male | African American | Full-time | Business Administration |
| Banneker | 20 | Male | African American | Part-time | Mathematics |
| Talon | 31 | Male | White | Full-time | General Studies |
| Ulta | 22 | Female | White | Full-time | Business Administration |

Morgan

The interview with Morgan took place in a study room in the Library at the Cartersville Site during a time where she was already on campus. Morgan was quiet at first, but opened up soon after the interview started. Morgan is a 25-year old, Hispanic, female student who is married and has a four-year old. She was in the Marine Corps for four years and is a federal work study employee in the Veterans Resource Center at the Cartersville Site. Since Morgan was in the military, she has moved around a lot. When she and her husband made the move to Georgia, she was nervous and apprehensive because of how the Deep South has been perceived in the media. Morgan used words like great, enjoy, and helpful to describe her student experience, both in and out of the classroom. She is a psychology major. In addition to balancing being a student, a wife, and a mother, Morgan works another part-time job and likes to play soccer. She is a member of the Student Veterans Association, the Cru Club, a Christian organization on the Cartersville Campus, and the Psychology Club. She also spends time volunteering for the Career

Closet and the GHC Food Pantry. She has transfer credit from Hawaii Pacific University, a private college. She said this about Student Veterans Association and the Veterans Center as one of the things that has helped her most. She said, “It’s kinda hard sometimes to communicate what other people who have not gone through the same stuff that you have, and just knowing that we have a support group there has been pretty, like... (laugh, and trails off).”

Morgan feels as if success is not only about grades but retaining and practically applying the information learned. When asked how she defined student success, she shared this:

Sometimes it’s not about the grades that you get, but about if you’re actually retaining the knowledge... Um, because I’ve seen that a lot of people have gotten good grades, but then once the semester’s done, it’s like they [their brain just empties]. Um, so I would determine student success for somebody who could actually hold an intellectual conversation and talk about what they just learned.

When sharing how life experiences shaped her definition for success she emphasized the “difference” in being a non-traditional student entering college after going into the military. She had this to say:

Stepping out of school and going into the military um, life is much different. And then coming back to school and having classes with 18 or sometimes Move On When Ready kids. Um, I will tell you that it’s a lot different. Some of the students sometimes look like they’re just coming to school because they... that’s what they have to do rather because they want to do it.

Morgan believes that it is not up to the faculty to have students succeed, it’s up to the student. It’s not only about the work students put into classroom learning, but the work that’s put in outside of the classroom, as well. She said, “It’s whether you want to succeed or not... every

single student is responsible for his or her own success...it's how much time and effort you put into those studying hours that reflect your grades.”

Scooby Doo

The researcher met Scooby Doo in the Student Center outside the bookstore on the Cartersville Site. It was not until they met up with each other that they realized they had met before, but just did not know each other's name. Together, they walked around the Student Center to find a room, which was private and not being used. Scooby Doo had just purchased some snacks from the bookstore and asked if it was okay if she ate during the interview process. The researcher and Scooby Doo went into an empty ballroom in the Student Center and sat beside each other at a round table. There was a comedic moment when neither the researcher nor the student could figure out how to turn the lights on. The room had windows so the researcher asked if the student wanted to stay in the room or find another location for the interviews to take place. The student was fine with the location and we proceeded with the interview.

Scooby Doo was very talkative and at ease with the researcher. This student is a 19-year-old, Hispanic female, who attends college part-time and is a Journalism major. She has prior dual-enrollment college credit from Chattahoochee Technical College and GHC. She started GHC as a dual-enrollment student. She stated she was from a small community and that she chose to stay at GHC after graduating from high school because she enjoyed the small community feel. Scooby Doo is involved in many campus clubs and organizations. She holds a student worker position in Student Life and as an Orientation Leader, a well-trained student leader, who helps with new student orientation.

Scooby Doo associated success with academic achievement and the principle of balance. Success is also future-orientated. Scooby Doo said this when defining success:

Being successful would be able to keep up your grades. Um, if you're working, you know, keeping in mind that they are a priority and where you want to be in the future, and so success would entail not just grades, but also how you manage, um, the stress level of work, studying, and keeping your GPA up. What else would be successful? And still having time to, uh, you know, talk with your peers and being a part of the community... in high school everything was given... you didn't have to study as much as now... so that success changed from keeping up my grades, but, as well as actually studying, now.

When Scooby Doo spoke about the life experiences that shaped her definition for success, she credited the impact of being a high school athlete and the influence that her coaches had on her motivation and mindset. She also spoke about how not being an athlete in college allows her an opportunity to focus more on her grades:

I still remember the perseverance, like the coaches teach you. They teach you, 'Hey, if you think you can do this, actually you can actually go higher than that... Athletics really did shape me a lot... it wasn't just my friends, it was my coaches that, uh, had a lot to do with what success would mean to me and where I wanted to be.

In the first part of the interview, Scooby Doo discussed the importance of how much college and succeeding means to a student.

How much it interests you, if you're just a student who tries to go to college because that's the norm, and, you know, you feel like that's what you have to do, it's fine, you'll find your way eventually, but it's so much better if you actually try your first semester and you're not just swimming around the crowd, not really applying yourself kind of deal.

Later on, Scooby Doo stated that the student's responsibility is to be a self-advocate by asking a lot of questions by saying, "The way that they can take hold of their success is if they don't know something, ask, and if that person doesn't know, they'll help you figure out where it is that you need to be going to at least have the answer."

Gates

The researcher and Gates agreed to meet outside the Library at the Cartersville Site when the student was on campus and in between classes. After the researcher introduced herself to the student, the two went into the Library and used one of vacant study rooms. The window in the room overlooked the construction taking place on campus. The room was warm so the researcher and the student agreed to crack the door. The student was quiet and nervous at first. After the first two questions, he began to warm up to the researcher.

Gates is an African American male who is 21-years-old. He is a full-time student majoring in Business Administration. His ultimate career goal is to have his real estate's license and be a real estate agent. He is unsure if he wants to go onto get his bachelors or stop with his associates. He attends full-time and has a 2.61 GPA. He is a member of an organization called Brother 2 Brother, which is a part of the African American Male Initiative (AAMI). Brother 2 Brother helps minority males navigate college and reach their educational goals.

Gates defined success as academic achievement and skills-orientated. He said, "Being successful is going to class every day, actually paying attention, being on time, and actually keeping up with your grades." Gates spoke more about how the desire to be successful changed his life versus how his background, characteristics, and experiences influenced the way he defined success. Striving for success has changed his life for the better. Because of his goal to be successful, he tries to make better choices and decisions. He is influenced by friends and

mentors, but acknowledged that mentors have influenced him in a more positive way than friends. Gates spoke about the importance of being a self-advocate. The student's responsibility is to ask for help:

If they're not asking for help then basically just being by yourself that's your own choice but if you're not asking for help then what are you doing, you're just going to sit there and like well "I'll think of this on my own though, you're going to need help so if you don't get that help then you're just out of luck.

Banneker

The researcher and Banneker agreed to meet outside of the bookstore in the Student Center at the Cartersville Site. After brief introductions, the two made their way to the ballroom in the Student Center. We chose the table closest to the door and sat down beside each other. This time the lights were on in the room. Banneker is an African American male, who is 20-years-old. He is attending part-time. His declared major is Mathematics but he self-reported being in the 2+2 program for pre-engineering and cyber security. He holds a 3.81 GPA and is in Brother 2 Brother.

Banneker defined student success as "balancing your schedule". He placed an importance on allocating enough time for classwork, interacting with others, and participating in different organizations. Banneker discussed perseverance and mindset, as well as the influence of others during the discussion about life experiences and student success. He shared this:

I'd say basically just going through hard classes and going through times when I feel like I was really overwhelmed, but I still managed to be successful during that period of time. Those experiences, whenever I'm going through another hard class or another hard semester, I recall those times and they help me get through... Definitely, I had a really

strong support team in my family and my peers and things of that nature, but I also had a push from within me to just be successful. I think that's definitely been influenced by people around me. Definitely there's always that drive to just be as best I can be, be successful.

Banneker discussed the importance of being organized, being disciplined, and helping others. He said it was important to actually writing down assignments and not trying to memorize all of the assignments. Earlier in the interview, Banneker shared that when he encounters students who "might not share the same vigor" towards their education, their success, he tried to influence them in the best way possible and be a mentor to them.

Talon

The researcher met the student in the Veterans Resource Center and chose to sit in an isolated corner of the room. The interview process was not as easy. The student answered the questions but did not elaborate even when probing questions. Talon is a non-traditional student with prior college credit from Northwest Community College of Wyoming. He is a veteran and a federal student worker in the Veterans Resource Center. He is 31-years-old White male, and is majoring in General Studies. He is attending full-time and has a 2.06 GPA. He is uncertain as to what he wants to get a degree in but mentioned possibly going into the field of psychology. He has a desire to transfer after finishing his associates degree but is unsure where he wants to go after finishing at GHC.

Talon cites an individual's' background and characteristics, as well as student motivation in his definition of student success. He said success is "how you're raised, how you're brought up, and how much you want to drive yourself to complete your task and stuff."

Talon stated that being a part of a community like the Boy Scouts, high school and college wrestling, and then the military taught him leadership skills, social skills, and non-cognitive skills, such as self-motivation and how to motivate others. When asked in what ways students should be responsible for their own success, Talon said, “You just gotta do it.” He also placed an importance on age and maturity and the generational characteristics of the younger students stating that the younger students do not take a lot of responsibility for their own success but “with the right leadership you can get them up to speed... you can get them out of the habit once you let them go on their own, but it probably comes with maturity and age.”

Ulta

The researcher met the student in the Student Center. They went into the ballroom. The student was very open and talkative. Ulta is a 22-year-old White female. She attends full-time as a Business major and is on track to graduate in December. She has applied to transfer to Kennesaw State University after graduation. Ulta works almost 40 hours a week at a local grocery store. She currently lives with friends, but is getting ready to move back in with her mother. She describes her experience as one where she “got myself messed up” but “finally, I got it together.” Ulta is a first-generation college student. She is also a first-generation high school graduate. She cited her background, lack of academic preparedness, and lack of positive interactions with faculty as staff as reasons for her rough start to her educational journey at GHC.

Ulta defined student success as academic achievement, class attendance, and organization. When asked what getting a bachelor’s degree would mean to her, she shared:

Like, everything. It’s what I want so bad. It would just mean being able to not work at Publix, not work in retail anymore. Just doing better for myself, being able to move out of Cartersville. Being able to afford something on my own for once.

Ulta shared two important life experiences that have shaped her definition for success and desire to have a college degree: 1) growing up poor and 2) being a first-generation high school graduate. No one in her family had ever been to college and she felt as if her high school didn't prepare her for college either. Because she felt as if no one cared about her, she exhibited at-risk behaviors such as leaving early, not attending class, and not taking notes. Ulta had little direction as to how to declare a major or what a major even was. She thought she would figure it out along the way but ended up changing majors three times. Lack of college readiness, support, and motivation contributed to low levels of motivation and self-efficacy. After failing classes, she decided to take a semester off to work. During this time, she left home and moved in with friends. After a few months of working in retail she realized working odd jobs was not what she wanted. She came back to college and was a "completely different student." Although the times were tough, she felt as if she had to persevere through hard times to get a stronger academic mindset. Ulta listed academic behaviors that are contributing to her success, such as being on time for class, sitting in the front, taking good notes, and asking questions. Ulta stated that the student's responsibility has to do with academic-related actions such as class attendance, studying, and note-taking skills. She mentioned students should not rely on anyone else and vow to really be there every day. Ulta also discussed the importance of being a self-advocate by sharing, "If you don't understand something, don't be scared to ask a question."

Cartersville Site: Thematic Findings

During the case study, especially throughout the interviewing process, there were three clear, overarching themes that emerged as ideal institutional conditions that matter to the Cartersville Site students' success. These themes include: 1) institutional characteristics, 2) environment conducive for learning, and 3) meaningful interactions with institutional agents.

The interviews revealed the first theme of *institutional characteristics* discusses characteristics ideal for the college experience, also known as fit. The subcategories of this theme include: a smaller campus, affordable tuition, smaller class size, closer to home, a diverse population of students and institutional agents, a quality education, and other physical characteristics. These characteristics were confirmed through documentation. The second theme of *environment conducive for learning* discussed the elements that are favorable for student learning and success, both in and out of the classroom. Subcategories of this theme included factors from access to institutional agents to active learning strategies and an engaged student body to cultural experiences. These themes were confirmed through documentation, physical artifacts, direct and participant observations. The final theme *meaningful interactions with institutional agents* described the positive interactions between students, faculty, staff, and administrators as a resource, a support system, and an advocate. These themes were confirmed through archival data, participant observations, and documentation. Table 7 illustrates the thematic findings for the Cartersville Site.

Other Thematic Findings

Although the purpose of this study was to investigate institutional conditions that matter to community college student success, two other themes not related to the institutional conditions emerged from the interviews. These themes were consistent with themes found in success-related literature. One theme was the pre-college experiences that students mentioned in their interviews such as family background, academic preparedness, and enrollment choices in relation to their success as students. Being first-generation, Latino/a, African American, veteran, non-traditional, former dual-enrolled, former high school athlete, former college athlete, and transfer status, all mattered to success. Having academic, family, and/or financial support mattered to success.

Enrolling in college part-time, or full-time right after high school, stopping out, and dropping out all mattered to the individual's journey.

Table 7

Thematic Findings for the Cartersville Site

| Theme | Sub-Category |
|---|--|
| Institutional Characteristics | Smaller campus Affordable tuition Smaller class size Closer to home Diverse body of students and employees Quality education Other physical characteristics |
| Environment Conducive for Learning | Access to institutional agents Active learning strategies Resources and support systems in place An engaged student body Preparation for the next step Cultural experiences A safe space |
| Meaningful interactions with institutional agents | As a resource As a support system As an advocate |

Another theme that emerged from the interviews unrelated to institutional conditions was the behaviors and personality traits students needed to be successful; the researcher divided this theme into two subcategories including academic-related actions and non-cognitive factors appeared during the conversations. The participants cited many academic-related actions such as coming to class on time, taking good notes, sitting in the front of the class, not interrupting class, effective studying, and asking questions or for help. Some of the non-cognitive factors appearing in the interviews were intrinsic/extrinsic motivation, mindset, self-efficacy, sense of belonging, and academic self-confidence.

Cartersville Site: Response to Research Questions

RQ1: What role does campus environment play in students' ability to achieve success?

As a part of the interviews, students were asked to reflect upon how institutional characteristics such as the type (two-year, four-year, public, private), size (population and campus), and residential status (residential or nonresidential) of an institution could impact student success in terms of the achievement of their educational goal. When sharing their perceptions and stories about how these attributes can impact their own success and the success of others, two major themes emerged. These themes are *institutional characteristics* and the *environment conducive for learning*. These themes were confirmed using other data collected from documentation, archival data, physical artifacts, direct and participant observations.

Institutional Characteristics

One of the first themes to emerge from the interviews with the participants was that of institutional characteristics. All of the participants mentioned characteristics of their ideal college experience and conditions they need in order to be successful. These institutional characteristics are key for a student to fit in, feel comfortable, be familiar with college and the campus, and have a sense of belonging, all of which can impact levels of academic confidence and ultimately student success in terms of the achievement of their educational goals. The following subcategories of *institutional characteristics* surfaced in the interviews: smaller campus, affordable tuition, smaller class size, closer to home, diverse body of students and employees, quality of education, and other physical characteristics. This theme was confirmed using the marketing messages students received about why they should attend GHC (see Appendix D for these messages).

Smaller campus. When the participants spoke about the conditions at GHC which make them successful, they most commonly referred to the distance between buildings, the small community feel, and that smaller campus increases the chances of having meaningful interactions with other students, as well as faculty, staff, and administrators. All six participants mentioned something about a smaller campus. Students used words like *not as overwhelming*, *a huge benefit*, and *comfortable* when describing why they preferred a smaller school or a two-year institution compared to a larger four-year institution.

Morgan shared:

When I got out of the military I had in mind that I was going to go to a university rather than a college. And just got to the campus and looking around, I was just... My mind was blown how big the campus was and how big the classes were, and that's not what I was used to.

All of the students spoke about the convenience of being able to park and take a short walk to be at the Academic Building for their classes. Three students (Morgan, Scooby Doo, Banneker) specifically mentioned enjoying having all of their classes in one building. Four of the students (Morgan, Gates, Banneker, Ulta) mentioned parking being an issue as a result of the ongoing construction of a new building at the Cartersville Site.

Scooby Doo shared:

[I] love not having to run from one class to another. You know, I can casually stroll to my class, and I could even stop to talk to a friend, or a student I've met, uh, on the opposite side of campus.

When discussing classes being in one building and student activities and recreation being in another building, Scooby Doo added:

I know that I associate with academics and studying in the libraries over there. (points to academic building) And if I want to de-wind, I don't want to do it in the same building where I feel like, 'Hey, my class is right there.' Or having to keep it down for the other classes that are going on. Um, so I do enjoy it being a separate entity.

Banneker shared:

I guess if buildings are really far away, I suppose maybe students are going to not be as motivated to want to go to a class, let's say it's all the way on the other side of campus or something, but the way GHC is set up is the buildings are pretty close together, and in terms of parking, the parking is kind of tight, but it's just the way it is. A good institution with a lot of students it's going to happen.

Scooby Doo, Gates, and Ulta mentioned being nervous about transferring to a four-year college because of the size of campus and larger population of students and how that may impact their relationships with institutional agents, as well as peers. Ulta nervously shared, "I had a friend tell me that it took her an hour just to park and then actually walk there [to class]."

Affordable tuition. All participants but Morgan mentioned cost in their interviews when discussing the differences in types of institutions. Although Morgan did discuss not having to work about paying for college or financial aid because she was a veteran. Student participants used words and phrases like *cheaper*, *less debt*, and *less burdensome financial cost* when describing a two-year education or their educational experience at Georgia Highlands. Students felt as if the quality of the education they were receiving at GHC is just a good, if not better, than other institutions where the costs are higher. One student (Talon) did hope to expect that the higher the cost of a college education, the higher quality of teachers teaching. Although he thought the quality of education received at GHC was great.

Banneker:

But also, I mean, the financial cost of it's also less burdensome than just going straight into a four-year university, because if you go to a two-year university, you won't have to take out as much loans. That means less student debt.

Ulta said, "I came here through because I heard it was cheaper. And I live 10 minutes away. So it was definitely close."

Gates shared:

And cheap, really cheaper. But it's actually your choice of what you want to do if you want to go to a two year, save money, or go to a four-year and be in debt but you're getting the same education basically.

Smaller class size. The subcategory *smaller class* size encompasses the size of the classroom and how many students are in class. Four out of the six participants mentioned smaller class sizes being ideal for the college experience. They associate smaller class sizes with a comfortable feeling, gaining more knowledge, and a greater chance of mattering. Talon said a smaller class size forces people to be comfortable with being uncomfortable and not be a part of a clique. Ulta prefers the smaller classrooms because of the similarities to high school were comforting.

Closer to home. Another subcategory of institutional characteristics is *closer to home*, which encompassed phrases such as, preferring to live at home, being convenient, and the enjoying a short commute time. By living at home while going to college students are able to prepare to be treated like an adult (Morgan), not be distracted by freedoms in a negative way (Scooby Doo), and live as close as 10 minutes away (Ulta).

The other three students spoke about the downside of not being able to live on campus

Commuting “takes a toll on the gas money” (Gates) but doesn’t feel as if he is missing out on anything; “Sense of disconnect” by not living on campus (Banneker) but as long as you get involved on campus (he’s involved in Brother 2 Brother) replaces the connection, gives a sense of direction, sense of commitment, good people to be around, and positive influence.

Talon is a non-traditional student. By not living on campus, traditional students are “not getting that full aspect of quite being on your own” and “getting out on your own, and seeing who you truly are, and what you truly can do” is the only thing that students may miss out on by commuting to college. Ulta “wow, that would be kind of cool, to have that college experience... literally wake up on campus and they go to class”

Diverse body of students and employees. All of the students mentioned the importance of a diverse body of students and employees. Five out of the six participants found that *diversity* was the most important word in the college mission statement. All students were asked questions about the mission statement, the college culture, and the college climate. Five out of the six participants spoke positively about diversity. One student (Talon) spoke about cultural and racial divide amongst Hispanics, blacks, and whites. He referred to this divide as a “southern thing.”

When discussing diversity at the Cartersville Site, Scooby Doo shared:

Because as a student growing up around a lot of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds... it really does stand out, because you’re acknowledging that you understand that there’s going to be a lot of different people with different mentalities, different mindsets come through and to point it out, it’s like, ‘I got you’, you know?

She later added, “There doesn’t see, to be a person I’ve talked to that is shocked by the fact that I’m Mexican.”

Banneker spoke about importance of learning from people’s differences. He said:

It's an institution where you like a lot of people come together and they get to benefit off the learning from each other. We get to learn from each other, learn from teachers. And... I really like meeting different people from different backgrounds and things of that nature.

Quality education. Five out of six participants mentioned a quality education. In their own words, these participants used phrases such as transferable programs, intellectual culture, and qualified instructors. When discussing the mission statement and the college's responsibility for the success of their students, the students mentioned their expectations for a quality education and good quality instructors. Both Talon and Ulta said what they expect the most is the college to have good quality professors.

Other physical characteristics. The subcategory *other physical characteristics* was a catch-all for other codes associated with physical characteristics of Cartersville Site such as, parking, breezeways, and bleachers. Participants discussed issues with parking but attributed those issues to the recent construction. They did acknowledge parking troubles were better at the Cartersville Site than what they have heard of at four-year colleges and universities. When asked about the one thing that would improve the experience, students gave suggestions such as improve parking, add a breezeway to cover the sidewalk between buildings, and add more bleachers in the gym to increase space for people to sit and watch intramural basketball games. Students also discussed adequate space to study and learn.

Environment Conducive for Learning

The second theme to emerge from the interviews with the participants was *an environment conducive for learning*. All of the participants mentioned characteristics of their ideal learning environment. This theme included the following subcategories: access to

institutional agents, active learning strategies, services for success in place, an engaged student body, preparation for the next step, and a safe space. This theme was confirmed using documentation from new student orientation and direct and participant observations at on-campus committee meetings for faculty and staff and at activities and events for students during Weeks of Welcome. See Appendix I to view a document discussed at orientation.

Access institutional agents. This subcategory is described by the availability and the approachability of the institutional agents. Students desire one-on-one time, both in and out of the classroom to discuss academic- and non-academic-related concerns. All students mentioned the importance of having access to faculty, staff, and administrators. When participants spoke about access they mentioned office hours, small student-teacher ratios, open-door policies, and feeling like they are not bothering someone when asking for help.

Scooby Doo appreciated the fact that she can talk to any faculty, staff, and administrators at the Cartersville Site and is scared that she will not be as close to the faculty and staff once she transfers to the four-year level. She said, “All the faculty, especially the staff and administrators, some of the administrators that I have met are just like that, ‘if you need anything, my door’s always open.’”

Access to agents is important to Gates because he wants to be known and stand out. To him, standing out is a way to “show them you really want to graduate and you really want to succeed in this college life.” He said, “At a smaller school I feel like you’re going to stand out because everyone would know you and the faculty would know you.” Both Talon and Ulta emphasized the ability to be one-on-one with instructors as an asset.

Active learning strategies. Without calling them active learning strategies, students could easily differentiate between dynamic classroom and an engaged instructor who uses

innovative pedagogy to enhance student learning. Four out of six students listed elements such as making class exciting, engaging the classroom, having high expectations, using models to help visualize material, relate course content to students' lives, and changing the tone in instructor's voice.

When speaking about an engaging instructor, Morgan shared:

Professor Pansy makes every class exciting and you just want to go to it. Um, and she just really approaches you to get engaged in what she's saying and um, and it's almost to the point that you just don't want to disappoint her... Like, she expects a lot from you.

Scooby Doo spoke about making connections in a creative way. She said:

Making that connection with models in the class where students understand... Like, Ms. Aster would bring models, actual plant models and other things that she would allow us to interact with while she was teaching... if the professor understands that you need... not just hear it and see a word written on the board, but actually tie it to something, like give new meaning to it. If they can do that, then I think they're a great professor.

Ulta spoke about having both good and bad teachers:

I have had bad teachers... that don't really, they don't stand up or walk around, they just kinda make it really monotone. And it's so hard to understand... I've had a few teachers where I feel like they've definitely, their teaching styles hindered my grade.

She continued, "Ms. Hydrangea is the definition of a great teaching style. She writes on the board, and then she relates it to our generation and stuff... Taking the time to get to know us, really. She does that."

Services for success in place. Although students recognize their role and responsibility in their own success, all six students identified the college role as providing resources and

support systems that promote student success. Students acknowledge that at first they are hesitant to ask for help because they want to do it all on their own. The experience of Morgan was similar to other students. She said, “I don’t like to ask for help, I can do it myself. When I started going to tutoring, it made a night and day difference.” Below are the actual resources and support systems that appeared within participants’ interviews. See Table 8 for a list of on-campus resources and support systems mentioned within participants’ responses during the interviews.

Table 8

Services Mentioned by Participants from the Cartersville Site

| Participant | Services |
|-------------|---|
| Morgan | Tutoring Veterans Affairs Early Bird Advising Lending Clothes Closet GHC Food Pantry Counseling Library “outreach” |
| Scooby Doo | Dual Enrollment Student Jobs Tutoring Early Bird Advising “the college is just there for a resource” Job events |
| Gates | Tutoring Scholarships |
| Banneker | Scholarships Tutoring Advising |
| Talon | Veterans Affairs |
| Ulta | Advising Tutoring |

An engaged student body. The subcategory *an engaged student body* encompassed participant behaviors such as engaged in learning, being active in the college community, getting

involved in a club or organization and the importance of a community, both prior to college and now. In addition to the student behaviors, they spoke about the college's responsibility to offer opportunities for students to expand academically, culturally, socially, and as a leader. Below is a table of clubs, organizations, activities, and events that participants mentioned in their interviews. See Table 9 for a count of the clubs, organizations, activities and events named in the interviews.

Table 9

| <i>Count of Clubs, Organizations, Activities, and Events Mentioned by Cartersville Participants</i> | |
|---|---|
| Participant | Club, Organization, Activity, and Event |
| Morgan | 3 |
| Scooby Doo | 7 |
| Gates | 2 |
| Banneker | 6 |
| Talon | 0 |
| Ulta | 0 |

Preparation for the next step. Preparation for the next step encompassed elements such as, preparation, transition, adaption, getting core classes out of the way, and helps with the adjustment. In their own words, all six participants mentioned *preparation for the next step*. Morgan stated that two-year college, “prepares you in the way that you are treated like an adult, but you haven’t yet left home.” Scooby Doo is from a small community and felt as if it is more beneficial for people from a small town to go to a two-year college “so you can learn to adapt and transition into it.” Banneker believed that attending a two-year college “helps students get more acquainted with being in the college environment, so it’s kind of like a smaller step.”

A safe space. The subcategory *a safe space* encompassed elements such as a physical safe space in which students can study, are respected, be welcomed, and share opinions. In their own words, four out of the six participants (Morgan, Scooby Doo, Gates, Banneker) mentioned this subcategory. When discussing a safe space, Morgan said:

Because it's not only about coming to the class, it's also about is there a place at the school that I can sit down and it could be quiet or can I do my work here and I won't be disturbed?

Banneker really enjoyed that GHC sets students up for success by providing a welcoming environment “just giving an environment to really learn”.

RQ2: What roles do institutional agents play in students' ability to achieve success?

In order to fully understand the roles faculty, staff, and administrators play in a student's ability to achieve success, it is important to acknowledge the institutional agents the students mentioned in their interviews. The following section describes the different types of people that students talked about in their interviews. In addition to the institutional agents, the participants also mentioned people outside the college who impacted their success as students.

People

Faculty. Throughout the participant interviews, 16 unique faculty members were mentioned. Faculty encompassed specific individual's names, by discipline, or just general terms like teachers and professors. Morgan, Scooby Doo, Gates, and Ulta mentioned specific names when discussing people at GHC who have strengthened their success. Talon referenced instructors by discipline such as “two really good English teachers”.

Staff. Throughout the participant interviews, staff members were mentioned nine unique times. Out of those nine times, six were mentioned by name by Morgan, Scooby Doo, and Ulta.

Student participants also made references to generic staff-related terms such as “officials/employees” (Scooby Doo), “my advisors” (Banneker), “admissions” (Scooby Doo), and “every staff” (Morgan).

Administrators. Students mentioned two individuals who are in administrative roles. One was the Campus Dean (Scooby Doo). The other was a dean of an academic division, who also serves as an advisor to an organization on campus (Gates, Banneker).

Peers. At times, participants referred to the importance of the support or influence of other students 10 times. Participants referred to their peers using words like “peers” (Morgan), “friends” (Gates), “former B2B president” (Banneker), “fellow B2B members” (Banneker), “fellow veterans” (Morgan, Scooby Doo), “kids” (Talon), and “dual-enrolled students” (Scooby Doo).

Other people outside of the college. Although the questions asked during the interviews were geared toward people at GHC who had strengthened or weakened a student’s success, several participants mentioned other individuals who have shaped their path for achieving their educational goals. These people included: coaches (Scooby Doo), mentors (Scooby Doo, Gates, Banneker), and members of family (Morgan, Gates, Banneker, Ulta).

Meaningful Interactions with Institutional Agents

Institutional agent is a phrase used to describe the institution’s faculty, staff, and administrators. The faculty, staff, and administrators play many roles in a student’s ability to achieve success. During the interviews the participants described many different types of interactions with the institutional agents. The interactions were positive, negative, meaningful, and meaningless. The theme *meaningful interactions with institutional agents* emerged describing the positive roles these individuals play in a student’s success. The three

subcategories of meaningful interactions were as a resource, as a support system, and as an advocate. With every positive and meaningful interaction between students and institutional agents, the trust increases, and the relationship can move from resource to support system to advocate. Figure 11 is a model the researcher created to illustrate the hierarchy of meaningful interactions. This theme was confirmed with archival data from the PASS Survey and the Success Coach Program, observations on campus and at orientation, and with documentation from orientation (see Appendix I for the top 10 list discussed at orientation).

As a resource. The first subcategory of the meaningful interactions with institutional agents is *as a resource*. At this level, the students have moved from pragmatic interactions with faculty, staff, and/or administrations to an area where students feel comfortable to approach institutional agents, ask questions, or seek help. During the interviews, students referred to institutional agents as having the answers to their academic-related and non-academic-related questions. If the agent did not have the answers, he or she knew who to refer students to get answers. Students expressed importance for institutional agents to recognize when they are wrong and correct their mistakes. Five out of the six participants identified institutional agents as a resource. One student expressed concern of not having access to institutional agents when she transfers to a four-year institution next semester (Ulta). When talking about institutional agents as a resource, Gates said, “At GHC, you can talk to anybody. Anybody.” Ulta shared, “Like after class, if I have a question, it’s easy to just go up to them.” Scooby Doo felt as if being able to approach anyone on campus with a problem and getting help reduces the stress that students experience.

As a support system. In the interviews, students revealed the people that they went to for help and answers. But in some cases, students returned to those institutional agents and began to

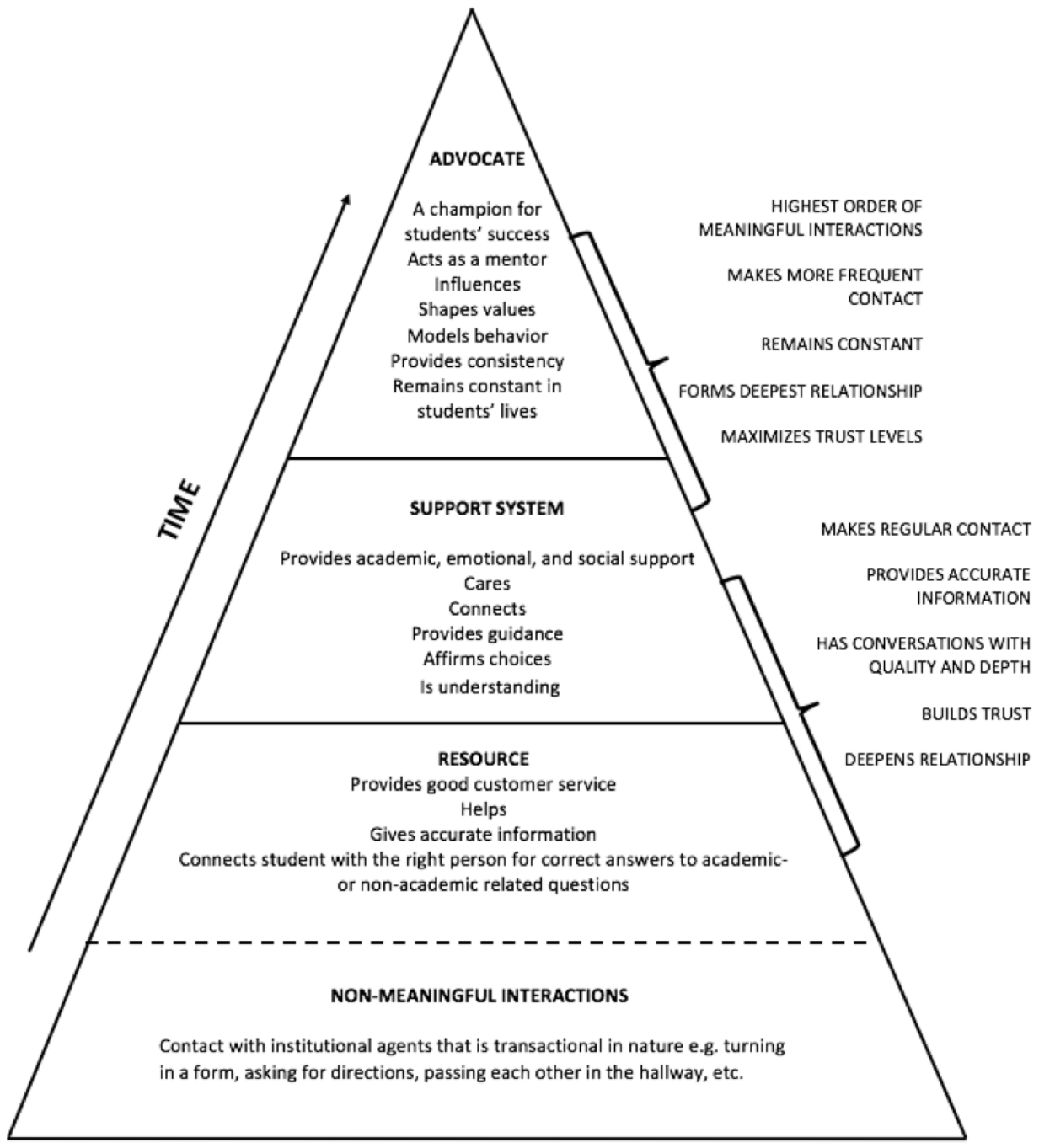


Figure 11. Hierarchy of Meaningful Interactions. A model created by C. L. Edenfield, 2018. Copyright [2018] by Crystal L. Edenfield.

form a deeper relationship. At that time, students moved from interacting with institutional agents as a resource to interacting with institutional agents as a support system. In addition to having the characteristics of the resource, the support system provides academic, emotional, and/or social support. Different from a resource, the support system invests more time in making sure students feel as if they mattered, making a connection, providing guidance, affirming choices and decisions, as well as being a friend. All six participants were able to identify institutional agents and characteristics of a support system. Five of those participants identified the institutional agent by name (Morgan, Scooby Doo, Gates, Banneker, Talon), while one participant spoke more generally about their support system (Talon).

When discussing the ability to ask for help and be on a first name basis with an institutional agent, Morgan shared, “It just feels that they truly care. And it’s just like you’re not another student and they’re getting a paycheck. Um, they have made that connection, have definitely steered me in the right direction.”

Scooby Doo said:

I really do appreciate Mrs. Daisy, you know, despite her being busy she’ll sit down and talk to you, you know, even though you’re just a student. So, to me that was a big deal, because she’s the dean, and, you know, if you have anything she lets you know, ‘Hey, if you do need anything, I am here.’

When discussing the importance that you know your professor and they know you,

Banneker shared:

There’s this sense of connectivity you get, and it really just helps you feel more comfortable asking questions and learning. It really helps the learning environment, because if you’re just a number and you feel like you’re not really noticed, I guess, then

you don't matter, and you're not going to feel like you can make that extra leap to ask a question or something. But if you know the teacher, you're going to feel more comfortable.

When discussing how a professor approached her to ask why she had missed some assignments, Ulta said, "So that was really cool, I actually didn't even have to go up to him and give him my sob story. He just noticed. I just didn't think that he would care, really."

As an advocate. An advocate is the highest level of meaningful interactions between a student and an institutional agent. The advocate's role is to not only help and answer questions, provide academic, emotional, and/or social support but to be a role model, a mentor, a motivator, an influencer, and a value shaper. Consistency and constancy are also important to students in their meaningful interactions with the advocates. This institutional agent is a champion for the student's success. All but two students (Scooby Doo, Talon) were able to identify an advocate on campus. Scooby Doo had a strong support system at the Cartersville Site, but she also mentioned relying on the mentorship, motivation, and influence of her former high school coaches to help shape her values and help her persevere.

When discussing staying in touch with institutional agents after graduation, Morgan said, "That even once I'm gone, there are certain people that I could still reach out to keep pushing me." Banneker spoke about an advocate of his, "Dr. Sunflower helped me a lot. He's definitely encouraged me to participate in different activities, meet new people, step outside my boundaries and I think a lot of people need people like that to help push you."

When discussing a good professor, Talon shared:

For me I would say someone who expects you to do your best. They project it on you. Not quite sitting down and telling you how to do it. They expect you to do it. That motivates me to do well, because you know that reflects on me.

Ulta had this to say about her advocate:

So she's definitely helped me with all the school stuff. Because she could answer all my questions too. And not just that, she was like a friend. So she was really good to go to. Like I tell everyone, if you need help at school, go to Buttercup. She's definitely the most influential here.

See Table 10 for a count of resources, support systems, and advocates.

Table 10

Counts of Meaningful Relationships with Institutional Agents at the Cartersville Site

| Participant | Resource | Support System | Advocate |
|-------------|----------|----------------|----------|
| Morgan | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| Scooby Doo | 4 | 4 | 0 |
| Gates | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Banneker | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| Talon | 0 | 2 | 1 |
| Ulta | 1 | 2 | 1 |

RQ3: In terms of roles of campus environment and roles of institutional agents, what factors are more pertinent to community college students progressing towards achieving educational goals?

The factors most pertinent to personal success, in terms of roles of campus environments and institutional agents, were conditions promoting meaningful interactions between students

and institutional agents. Meaningful interactions are more than a greeting or a smile in the hallway. These interactions involve frequency and quality, as well as relationship building. When participants spoke about the institutional characteristics and the environment conducive for learning, they related those to themes to increasing the meaningful interactions with institutional agents.

Cross-Case Analysis: Comprehensive Description

In the comprehensive descriptions for each site, the researcher identified points of uniqueness and gathered data for the Site mission and strategic plan, the leadership, institutional attributes, facilities, teaching and learning, and resources and support systems. This section will provide a comparison of the data from both the Floyd Campus and Cartersville Site.

Points of Uniqueness

There seems to be a tension of which site is more deserving of the title of the main campus. The Floyd Campus is the original campus of the college, is recognized by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) as the main campus, and is larger by land and square footage. There are more employees and more administrators located at the Floyd Campus. There is also more land for recreational use by the community, which consists of a lake, pavilion and gazebo for rent, a two-mile trail around the lake, practice fields, and tennis courts. However, the Cartersville Site is larger by student population. SACS considers it an instructional site, instead of a campus. The Cartersville Site has newer facilities and is seeing more growth as an instructional site and more economic development in the community.

Mission and Strategic Plan

There are no differences in the information that is public regarding the mission and strategic plan for the Sites.

Leadership

Although administrators such as, the President, Vice Presidents, and Deans, are fluid and travel from location to location, the Floyd Campus is seen as the home location for most of the administrators. In regards to administration and leadership, an observed downfall is that the Floyd Campus does not have a person solely dedicated to the role of Campus Dean. The Campus Dean is responsible for directing the daily operations of a GHC Campus/Instructional Site. The Vice President for Student Affairs serves as the Campus Dean for the Floyd Campus and is responsible for the development, implementation, and management of the college's student affairs and enrollment management operations at all locations, as well as the day-to-day operations of the Floyd Campus. There are 10 employees that directly report to the person in this dual position. At the Cartersville Site, the Campus Dean has four direct reports but indirectly supervises all other employees that work at Cartersville Site. Most of those employees report directly to someone else (who may be at another location). Communication is critical.

Institutional Attributes

Over the past few years, enrollment has been the highest at the Cartersville Site. As previously mentioned, the Cartersville Site has the highest population of students. In fall 2017, the student body at the Floyd Campus was slightly more diverse than the Cartersville Site. The Floyd Campus has 6% more females than the Cartersville Site. The average age of students at the Floyd Campus is 20-years-old and the average age of students at the Cartersville Site is 27.4-years-old. The retention rate at the Floyd Campus (51.6%) is slightly higher than the Cartersville Site (50.2%). However, the percentage of total graduates is higher at the Cartersville Site (28%) than at the Floyd Campus (13.8%) (Langston, 2018; West, 2018).

Facilities

The buildings at the Floyd Campus are older than the Cartersville Site. Participants mentioned a comfort that comes along with classrooms, which remind them of high school. One participant from the Floyd Campus acknowledged recent renovations to make the campus look better such as fresh paint in the hallways and a new sound system in the Student Center (Opal). Rebecca spoke about how confusing the Walraven Building was because it looks the same and the room numbers are out of order. All participants at the Cartersville Site spoke about the excitement of the construction of the new building but the issues that the construction and recent growth has caused issues with parking.

The buildings at the Floyd Campus are laid out in a way that promotes student engagement by having the Student Center and other common areas in the main flow of traffic between buildings and in an area that students have to pass through in order to go to and from classes. As a result, more students are exposed to the academic, cultural, and social activities sponsored by Student Life. Students pass by the Bookstore, the Game Room, the Café, and use the dining area as a place to study, to gather with friends, and to eat.

At the Cartersville Site there is an Academic Building and a Student Center. The two buildings are a 10-minute walk away from each other. As a result, some students may never come to the Student Center. The researcher observed more students using the Cartersville Site's Library as a gathering area for both studying and socializing. The Hub is also centrally located in the Academic Building and gives students access to many resources and support systems in one place. Two of the participants from the Cartersville Site indicated they were more likely to participate in activities or events that are held in the Academic Building instead of coming over

to the Student Center. One participant mentioned not knowing about the activities and events that were offered.

When participants were asked to name something they would suggest as a change to promote student success, many of the suggestions were facilities-related. Individuals from the Floyd Campus mentioned having a hangtag parking decal instead of a sticker (Harry Potter) and adding dorms (Big Al) and individuals from the Cartersville Site mentioned adding a covered breezeway between the Academic Building and the Student Center (Gates), more bleachers on the sidelines of the basketball court (Gates), and having longer hours in the café (Ulta).

Teaching and Learning

Although the Cartersville Site has more students, with more faculty, and teaches more credit hours, the Floyd Campus has almost double the amount of staff to meet administrative and support needs of the campus. Both locations have more than 50% part-time faculty. The Floyd Campus has almost twice as many staff. The Cartersville Site taught 17,016 more credit hours.

Systems for Success

Both locations have the same departments that support student success except the Cartersville Site has a College and Career Center and an established greenhouse and garden in which the produce is donated back to the GHC Food Pantry. The Floyd Campus has a small garden, but the produce is available for employees and students to pick and take with them. The table below illustrates the number of visits to resources and services at each Site. There have been more than double the visits to the Library at the Cartersville Site. There have also been over 800 more visits to the Tutorial Center at the Cartersville Site. Both the Library and the Tutorial Center are in the Academic Building at the Cartersville Site. At the Floyd Campus, the Tutorial

Center is in the Library, which is a completely separate building than the buildings where classes are taught. See Table 11 for a comparison of the number of visits to services.

Table 11

A Comparison of Visits to Services

| Services | Floyd Campus | Cartersville Site |
|-----------------------------|--------------|-------------------|
| Disability Support Services | 42 | 128 |
| Personal Counseling | 483 | 442 |
| Campus Outreach | 1378 | 2133 |
| WIAO | 47 | 6 |
| GHC Food Pantry | 451 | 66 |
| Visits to Library | 47,218 | 103,192 |
| Visits to Tutorial Center | 3,274 | 4,057 |

The Floyd Campus has more active clubs and organizations than the Cartersville Site. The Cartersville Site has more students participating in Student Government Association. Triple the number of students participate in Emerging Leaders at the Floyd Campus than the Cartersville Site. In 2016-2017 academic year, the Charge Into Leadership conference took place at the Cartersville Site; there were 3 students from the Floyd Campus and 14 participants from the Cartersville Site. Fourteen students participated in the 2017 President's Success Workshop, which was not offered at the Floyd Campus.

Historical Satisfaction Data

About the same percentage of students completed the PASS Survey for the Floyd Campus (9%) and the Cartersville Site (8%). In terms of information gathered from the 2017 PASS Survey, there was little variance in each Site's top three reasons for attending GHC, which were convenient location, cost, and quality of education. When comparing the percentages that strongly agreed and agreed with statements listed on the PASS Survey, the Cartersville Site had higher percentages on six out of the eight statements. The Floyd Campus had a higher percentage

on one statement and the two had equal percentages on one statement. See Table 12 for a comparison of the PASS survey data.

Table 12

| <i>Comparison of Historical Satisfaction Data</i> | | |
|--|--------------|-------------------|
| Satisfaction | Floyd Campus | Cartersville Site |
| Completed the PASS Survey | 9% | 8% |
| Visited the library once a week | 21% | 38% |
| Library is adequate for my needs | 78% | 86% |
| Easily able to locate a professional or faculty advisor | 85% | 83% |
| Rated advising experience as positive | 92% | 92% |
| Respondents reported visiting the Tutorial Center in person | 37% | 40% |
| Strongly agreed or agreed that the tutor(s) were knowledgeable | 81% | 86% |
| Tutors were friendly and helpful | 84% | 90% |
| Overall experience at the Tutorial Center was satisfactory | 84% | 86% |

Cross-Case Analysis: Participants

Demographics

There were a total of 12 participants in this study; six students represented each location. The Floyd Campus had an African American, Asian, Hispanic, Indian and two White participants. The Cartersville Site had two African Americans, two Hispanics, and two White participants. The youngest participant at both locations is 19-years-old. The oldest participant at

the Floyd Campus is 29-years-old and at the Cartersville Site is 31-years-old. The average age at the Floyd Campus is 22.6-years-old and at the Cartersville Site is 23-years-old. The Floyd Campus had four females and two males participate. The Cartersville Site had three females and three males participate. The Floyd Campus had one nontraditional student without prior college credit, three traditional students, and two transfer students. The Cartersville Site had a former dual enrollment student, three traditional students, and two transfer students. At both locations, four students were enrolled full-time and two students were enrolled for the fall 2017 semester. The participants had varying academic pathways. At the Floyd Campus, highest participant GPA was a 3.77 and at the Cartersville Site is was a 3.81. The lowest participant GPA was 1.6 and at the Cartersville Site it was a 2.06. The average GPA for the Floyd Campus participants was 3.16 and 2.93 for the Cartersville Site. See Table 13 for a comparison of participant demographics.

Profiles

At the Floyd Campus, student success was defined as academic achievement by two participants, the other definitions were transitioning to post-college careers, academic-related skills, trying one's best, and doing something for the greater good by making a difference. At the Cartersville Site, three participants defined student success as being academic achievement. In addition to the academic achievement, two of those described the academic skills needed and one spoke about the future. Other definitions for student success included balance and family background and drive. The African American males at both locations spoke about the positive impact the being a part of the group Brother 2 Brother had on their college experience and their success as students. There were some differences in the ways that nontraditional students defined success and spoke about how their life experiences had shaped their definitions for success; the perception was that older students were more mature and took college more seriously.

Additionally, nontraditional students may have made mistakes in the past, which they have learned from and overcame. According to the nontraditional students, maturity and life experiences resulted in a greater drive to achieve their educational goals. See Table 14 for a comparison of the information listed in the participant profiles.

Table 13

Comparison of Participant Information

| Participant Information | Floyd Campus | Cartersville Site |
|-------------------------|---|---|
| Race and Ethnicity | 1 African American 1 Asian 1 Hispanic 1 Indian 2 White | 2 African American 2 Hispanic 2 White |
| Youngest Participant | 19-years-old | 19-years-old |
| Oldest Participant | 29-years-old | 31-years-old |
| Average Age | 22.6-years-old | 23-years-old |
| Gender | 4 females 2 males | 3 females 3 males |
| Applicant Type | 1 Nontraditional, no prior college credit 3 Traditional 2 Transfer | 1 Prior dual enrollment 3 Traditional 2 Transfer |
| Enrollment Status | 4 full-time 2 part-time | 4 full-time 2 part-time |
| Pathway | 2 Business Administration 1 Dental Hygiene 1 General Studies 1 Physical Education 1 Sociology | 2 Business Administration 1 General Studies 1 Mathematics 1 Journalism 1 Psychology |
| Highest Participant GPA | 3.77 | 3.81 |
| Lowest Participant GPA | 1.6 | 2.06 |
| Average Participant GPA | 3.16 | 2.93 |
| Receives Financial Aid | 4 out of 6 | All 6 |

Table 14

Comparison of Profile Information

| | Definition of student success | Life experiences that shaped student success | Student's responsibility for success |
|-------------------|--|---|--|
| Floyd Campus | Academic achievement and balancing stress | Herself, her parents, and elementary/secondary school influenced definition for success | Academic related skills: studying, doing homework, doing one's own work, buying books |
| | Academic achievement | Placed athletics in front of academics and dropped out of college; worked part-time; doesn't want odd jobs; mindset, motivation, future orientation, and maturity | Maturity Is this what I really want |
| | Transitioning into a career post-college experience | | Adamant about students being 100% responsible for their own success; self-sufficient |
| | Academic-related skills | | |
| | Passed or failed, tried your best | Workforce first, college as a non-traditional, realized she couldn't go further without education | Study outside the classroom; buy books |
| | Try and do something for the greater good; make a difference; have a better life and get out of a small town | Good grades were expected by parents | You have to do more than just show up and pass; you have to work hard |
| | | Honor brother and do it for mother; father punished her for bad grades | They have to want it; being in the classroom and wanting to learn, a better life, get out of a small town. Wanting it. |
| | | Motivated by proving others wrong; overcoming barriers | |
| Cartersville Site | Not only about good grades but retaining and practically applying information learned | Feels difference being non-traditional and a veteran | It's about the work students put into learning in and out of the classroom |

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| Academic achievement and future-oriented | High school athlete; influence coaches had on her motivation and mindset | How much does learning interest you? Better if you try; be a self-advocate; ask for help |
| Academic achievement and skills-oriented | The desire to be successful changed his life | Self-advocate; ask for help |
| Balancing your schedule | Perseverance and mindset; influence others | Organized, disciplined, helping others |
| Background and drive | Being a part of community taught leadership, social, and non-cognitive skills | Maturity; just do it |
| Academic achievement, class attendance, organization | Growing up poor and being first-generation | Academic-related actions: attendance, study, note-taking |

Cross-Case Analysis: Thematic Findings

After reviewing all of the data that was collected, the same three themes emerged from interviews with participants at both locations and were confirmed with other elements of data collected through documentation, archival data, physical artifacts, and direct and participant observations. These themes were *institutional characteristics*, *environment conducive for learning*, and *meaningful interactions with institutional agents*. There were several subcategories for each theme, which were the same but at times described differently. The similarities and dissimilarities of the thematic findings are described below.

Institutional Characteristics

Smaller campus. Five participants from the Floyd Campus and all six participants from the Cartersville Site described a smaller campus as an ideal condition for their college experience. A smaller campus contributed to being comfortable, being a part of a community,

and getting to know peers, as well as having access to institutional agents. Participants also spoke about the positives of having the buildings closer together, not having to walk more than 10- or 15-minutes to get to class, and the ease of being able to arrive, park, and walk to class. Participants were uneasy about making the transition to a four-year institution and had either heard from peers or witnessed from attending sports activities the difficulties with navigating larger campuses, buildings that were farther apart, finding parking at a larger school, and getting to know people.

Affordability. Six participants from the Floyd Campus and five participants from the Cartersville Site mentioned lower cost and the affordability of attending GHC. At the Floyd Campus, students spoke more about lower tuition and fees, financial aid, as well as the high costs of books and commuting to and from campus. Two participants (Colgate, Harry Potter) spoke positively about the use of free textbooks and other open educational resources instead of having to pay high prices for access codes and books needed for class.

At the Cartersville Site, one person (Gates) spoke about the high gas prices but all other participants discussed low costs of tuition and financial aid when talking about affordability and attending a two-year college. The associated attending a two-year college with less debt and less burdensome. Two participants were veterans and use the G.I. Bill to pay for classes and were not really as concerned with financial aid because it did not apply to them.

Smaller class size. Five participants from the Floyd Campus and four participants from the Cartersville Site preferred smaller class size as an ideal condition for their student success. Students connected smaller class size with getting to know their peers and their instructors. At the Floyd Campus, the participants did not feel as overwhelmed or intimidated to contribute to the discussion happening in a smaller classroom. At the Cartersville Site, participants felt as if

they had a greater chance of mattering. At both locations, many students felt as if a smaller class size resulted in more one-on-one attention from the instructor and a greater level of comfort.

Closer to home. When speaking about living on campus, most everyone believed that attending a nonresidential college was beneficial. The nontraditionally-aged students at both locations felt living at home was convenient to their lives. Students at the Floyd Campus emphasized living with parents or guardians. The participants from the Floyd Campus felt that living at home they could focus on the transition for going to college instead of taking on both a transition of living on their own and going to college at the same time. The traditionally aged students at the Cartersville Site spoke about choosing their campus of GHC because of the proximity to home not necessarily to stay with parents and ease the transition. Both locations mentioned a lower cost associated with living at home. Although all participants preferred not living on campus to ease the transition or save money, two participants (Opal, Big Al) at the Floyd Campus and one participant at the Cartersville Site (Banneker) acknowledged a benefit of living on campus by increasing opportunities to get involved. One participant (Big Al) from the Floyd Campus and one participant from the Cartersville Site (Gates) thought living on campus would save money because of commute length and high gas prices. Even still, everyone preferred to live off campus.

Diverse body of students and employees. Both locations mentioned diversity in different ways. When the Floyd Campus's participants spoke about diversity, they mentioned race and ethnicity, age, religion, political beliefs, respect for different people, and feelings safe on campus. Traditionally aged students from the Floyd Campus compared their experiences at college with those at high school. Participants from the Floyd Campus felt as if colleges exposed

them to peers and employees with a more diverse racial and ethnic background. One student from the Floyd Campus recognized that there were students of all ages and different generations.

When the Cartersville Site spoke about diversity, they not only mentioned race, ethnicity, and age, but they also recognized that the college has increased the racial and ethnic background of employees, as well as exposed students to and promoted other races and cultures with different clubs, organizations, activities, and events.

A few of the participants spoke about how accepted they felt at GHC. As an Asian student, Opal was shocked to see someone that looked like her. Morgan and Scooby Doo were surprised that no one discriminated against them for being Hispanic. One participant from each location (Santiago, Talon) mentioned how the culture at GHC was very Southern, and not in a good way.

Students were asked to read to college mission statement. Five out of the six participants from the Cartersville Site chose *diversity* as the most important word in that statement.

Quality education. Five participants from the Floyd Campus and from the Cartersville Site spoke about the importance of a quality education. These participants had an expectation that they would receive a quality education with transferrable programs, intellectual culture, and qualified instructors. Santiago was surprised that a two-year college had so employees with doctorate degrees. Students could tell the difference in a passionate teacher using innovative pedagogy to engage the classroom versus an instructor who spoke in a monotone voice and delivered a PowerPoint from behind a desk or podium. Harry Potter was impressed to learn that the college offers training for instructors. She was a volunteer at a part-time faculty in-service event, which was an onboarding experience and an introduction to high impact practices at the

college. Active learning strategies will be discussed as a subcategory of the next theme, *environment conducive for learning*.

Environment Conducive for Learning

Access to institutional agents. At the Floyd Campus and the Cartersville Site, all students mentioned having access to faculty, staff, and administrators as a critical component of their educational success. At the Floyd Campus, students were surprised that they could speak with the professions, receive one-on-one time, had access to extra help, and build relationships with the employees. The traditional aged students focused on the difference from their experiences in high school. They did not feel as if they could talk to their teachers or administrators at the high school level. It has taken some time to get used to that transition but they love being able to talk to employees at the college level.

At the Cartersville Site, participants spoke about office hours, small student-teacher ratios, and open-door policies of departments and administrators. They like the feeling of not bothering someone when asking for help. Students from both locations expressed angst about not having access to the institutional agents at the four-year level.

Active learning strategies. Five participants from the Floyd Campus and four participants from the Cartersville Site were either able to identify innovative pedagogies and engaging behaviors that enhance a positive classroom dynamic or identify the disengaging behaviors. Some of these strategies were as simple as having a welcoming classroom environment, looking presentable, and greeting class with a smile. Others shared how they preferred teachers who were passionate about the subjects they were teaching, professors that connected the material to the students' lives, and professors who presented course materials in a

variety of ways such as open discussion, using models, connecting concepts, providing timely feedback, and having fun.

Services for success in place. All six participants at both locations mentioned at least one resource or support system in place that they had taken advantage of to increase their student success. At the Floyd Campus, the most common resource used was tutoring. At the Cartersville Site, tutoring and advising were mentioned the most. The participants from the Floyd Campus mentioned 11 resources and support systems in their interviews. The participants from the Cartersville Site named 22 resources and support systems in their interviews.

An engaged student body. All six participants at both locations mentioned characteristics of an engaged student body, whether that was with academic behaviors to show a student was engaged in the classroom or participation in academic, cultural, and social events to show a student was engaged outside the classroom. Colgate was concerned that as a two-year college, the institution did not have a lot of traditions to engage the students. Opal spoke about the disappointment she had when she joined different organizations to meet new people only to find that the same few students were involved in multiple organizations. Ulta felt as if the college could improve in educating and creating awareness about what clubs, organizations, activities, and events there are. At the Floyd Campus, the participants mentioned 22 different clubs, organizations, activities, and events they had engaged in. At the Cartersville Site, four of the participants mentioned 18 different clubs, organizations, activities, and events they engaged in; however, two of the participants did not mention any.

Preparation for the next step. Five out of the six participants at the Floyd Campus described the two-year college responsibility for preparing students for the next step, whether that be going into the workforce or transferring to a four-year college. At the Cartersville Site, all

six students mentioned preparation for the next step. At the Floyd Campus, students used phrases such as, *first step*, *stepping stone*, *getting core classes out of the way*, and *a great start* to describe this preparation. At the Cartersville Site, students used phrases such as, *prepares you*, *get more acquainted*, and *smaller step*.

A safe space. Participants at the Floyd Campus did not mention a safe space for learning specifically except when they spoke about the diversity, inclusion, and respect of races, ethnicities, religions, political beliefs, and opinions. Four participants from the Cartersville Site discussed a physical, quiet space for learning, without distractions, where differences are embraced, and there is a welcoming environment for learning.

Meaningful Interactions with Institutional agents

As a resource. Five participants from both locations were able to identify a faculty, staff, or administrator who had served as a resource. When institutional agents act as resources for students they are responsive and helpful, with correct information or referrals to the appropriate places to find correct information. Participants from both locations felt as if they could approach anyone with a problem and receive help.

As a support system. In addition to providing information, an institutional agent acted as a support system by investing more time, caring, making a connection, providing guidance, and affirming choices. All six participants at the Cartersville Site were able to speak about an individual who served as a support system. Students emphasized the importance of feeling like they are not just another student or a reason for a paycheck.

As an advocate. The advocate role is the highest order of relationship between students and institutional agents. At the Floyd Campus, three participants (Opal, Harry Potter, Big Al) described an institutional agent who had been their advocate and championed for their success.

Opal interacted with a faculty member throughout the semester in class. The faculty member's passion for teaching a certain subject excited Opal and ultimately influenced her to change her major. The faculty member was there for the student not only in class but outside of class helping her with academic advisement and making a plan for the future. Harry Potter looked up to one faculty member as he shared his experience, struggles, and resilience from his own undergraduate college experience, which ultimately affirmed the student's choices and influenced her to keep moving forward toward achieving her educational goal. She views this faculty member as a mentor and a person that helped her overcome many obstacles and navigate her college experience. Big Al spoke about two advocates at the Floyd Campus. He is a member of Brother 2 Brother and has formed a mentor relationship with the advisor of the organization who is also an administrator on campus. His advocate helped him get back on track after not performing well academically. He was there for him, expressed care and concern, and consistently reaches out to the student. He also developed a father/son relationship with a faculty member who was also a coach of his intramural basketball team. This faculty member expressed care, concern, and love for him. He also pushed him and motivated him.

At the Cartersville Site, four participants identified seven advocates. Morgan said she has built relationships with institutional agents and knows that even after she leaves GHC, she could still reach out to her advocates to motivate her and push her toward achieving her academic goals. Gates and Banneker are also members of Brother 2 Brother and speak highly of the relationship they have built with the faculty advisor for the organization who is also an administrator. Talon spoke more generically about his advocate but mentioned how the good professors have high expectations for him, push him, influence him, and project success on him.

Ulta spoke about the relationship she has built with her advocate who has helped the student solve problems, gain academic confidence, and make positive changes in her academic life.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the findings and themes that emerged after data analysis was completed on the data collected from both the Floyd Campus and Cartersville Site at GHC. Research question one was directed at identifying the roles that the campus environment plays in students' ability to achieve success. The theme that emerged from the data at both locations was *institutional characteristics* and *environment conducive for learning*. Research question two was directed at identifying the roles that the institutional agents play in students' ability to achieve success. The themes that emerged from the data at both locations was *meaningful interactions with institutional agents*. The final research question was directed at identifying the roles of campus environment and roles of institutional agents that were more pertinent to community college students progressing towards achieving educational goals. Based on the data analysis, the most pertinent factors were conditions that allowed students to go to a college, close to home for a low price, and receive a quality education, taught by passionate teachers, in innovative ways. They preferred conditions that encouraged relationship building among students and institutional agents, as well as conditions that promoted meaningful interactions between students and institutional agents.

Chapter five will summarize the study and present a discussion of the findings. The researcher will discuss the implications on practice, and the recommendations for future research. Finally, chapter five will present conclusions, reflections, dissemination, and a chapter summary.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This qualitative and explanatory study utilized a multi-case study design intended to identify the institutional conditions that matter to community college students' success in terms of progressing toward the achievement of or achieving educational goals from the perspective of the student. The researcher collected various forms of data from two sites at Georgia Highlands College (GHC), which consisted of making direct and participant observations, reviewing documents, archival data, and artifacts, and interviewing six students from each location with the latter being the primary mode of data collection. Previous chapters described the literature used to inform the study, the design and methodology, as well as the findings of the research. The purpose of this chapter is to align literature and the research findings of this study on institutional conditions that matter to community college students' success in terms of progressing toward the achievement of or achieving educational goals. This chapter will present the summary, an analysis and discussion of the findings, conclusions, implications for practice, recommendations for future research, and the impact statement. This chapter closes with a chapter summary.

Discussion

The purpose of this qualitative and explanatory study utilized a multiple-case study to better understand the impact of institutional conditions that contributed to continuing students' success at Georgia Highlands College (GHC) in terms of identifying and making progress toward or achieving educational goals from the student perspective. This study was guided by the overarching question: What institutional conditions do community college students perceive as contributing to their student success in terms of identifying and making progress toward or

achieving one's educational goals? The following sub-questions were utilized to address the overarching question:

1. What roles does the campus environment play in community college students' ability to achieve student success?
2. What roles do institutional agents (faculty, staff, and administrators) play in community college students' ability to achieve student success?
3. In terms of roles of campus environment and roles of institutional agents, what factors are more pertinent to community college students progressing towards achieving educational goals?

Additionally, this study explored how community college students at one community college that is an associate's degree-dominant institution defined student success. This study also examined the students' experiences in shaping their definition for personal success. Prior research focused on institutional conditions at four-year institutions found that institutional conditions mattered to student success (Astin, 1997; Felton et al., 2016; Harill et al., 2015; Kuh et al., 2005; Kuh et al., 2006; Kuh, 2008; Lei, 2016; Neimeyer, 2003; Sargeant, 2016; Tinto, 2010) and thus, the findings from this study further supported this at two-year institutions.

With this study, the researcher not only aimed to guide higher education leaders toward involving students in the student success conversation, but also hoped to turn student perceptions into actionable solutions for improving college completion rates. Much of literature on student development, student retention, and student involvement has focused on the traditional four-year, residential college or university students' experience (Astin, 1997; Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Kuh, 2006; Tinto, 2005, 2010) and these findings allowed the researcher to contribute in this area to the literature by including two-year institutions. A growing body of research is attempting to

speak to the complexity of success at the community college level and this study sought to address the unique needs and challenges of community college students. Much of the existing research has attempted to apply success-related theories and models relevant to four-year institutions rather than to students in the community college population, which was the focus of this study.

To better understand the impact of institutional conditions on student success in terms of identifying and making progress toward or achieving educational goals, data were collected through documentation, archival records, semi-structured interviews, direct observations, participant observations, and physical artifacts. Semi-structured interviews were the primary form of data collection. Data for each individual site or campus at GHC were analyzed separately and then together in a cross-case analysis.

Analysis and Discussion of Findings

The findings described in Chapter 4 sought to answer one overarching research question and three sub-questions. Reviewing the data revealed the following themes were apparent in this study: *institutional characteristics, environment conducive for learning, and meaningful interactions with institutional agents*. The same themes were present in both the Floyd Campus and Cartersville Site at GHC.

Roles of Campus Environments

The campus environment at the Floyd Campus and Cartersville Site played a role in the students' ability to achieve success. The findings revealed two themes related to the campus environment were apparent in this study and were identified as *institutional characteristics* and *environment conducive for learning*. These themes are described below.

Institutional characteristics. Participants described institutional characteristics that impact their own success. The descriptions of the fixed institutional characteristics such as type of college, size of campus, cost of attendance, size of classroom, residential status, and the design of the facilities were consistent with previous works (Bailey et al., 2006; Lei, 2016; Kuh et al., 2006). The findings from both locations were similar to the work of Gabovitch (2014) in that part-time students at community college preferred small classes and felt as if a smaller class size facilitated student engagement and sense of belonging. The findings from both locations were not exclusive to the part-time student participants; the full-time student participants shared their sentiments. Previous studies found that commuter students were at-risk of not being engaged or achieving their educational goals (Jacoby, 2015; Nelson et al., 2016). However, participants from the Floyd Campus and Cartersville Site preferred living at home and going to college close to home. They felt it was convenient and easier for the transition. Participants from both locations did not think that residential status impacted their ability to be involved in clubs, organizations, activities, or events. Although participants did see how students could benefit from living on campus by being more connected or not having the expense of commuting to and from the institution.

The findings at both the Floyd Campus and Cartersville Site are consistent with previous studies (Lei, 2016; Niemeyer, 2003), which was well-designed facilities can increase the interaction between students and their peers, the interaction with the institutional agents, and encourage active participation. At the Floyd Campus, the placement of the common areas such as the Student Center, the Café, the Game Room, the Bookstore, and the lounge area can promote participation in activities and events sponsored by Student Life and outreach programming provided by other resources and support systems on campus. At the Cartersville Site, the

placement of the Library and the Hub may have resulted in increased visits and use of the Library for studying and for socializing, as well as use of resources and support systems located in the Hub.

Environment conducive for learning. The findings revealed that students prefer a dynamic classroom with active, engaging, and innovative teaching methods. Students at both locations shared they felt as if they learned more when the instructor presented the material in a way that was relevant to students and connected to their lives. Astin (1997) developed the *Theory of Institutional Conditions*, which found students are more likely to learn when faculty, staff, and administrators are able to relate students' academic work to students' interests and help students connect what they are learning to the real world. This element was consistent with findings, which demonstrated that students are more likely to be engaged with material that had a personal connection in the classroom or their careers (Clark & Mayer, 2011; Gabovitch, 2014). Tinto (2010) also found that engaging pedagogical approaches are important to students' success. The participants in this study were able to describe the differences of a good teacher and a bad teacher and thus, this was consistent with the research of Tinto (2005, 2010).

Roles of Institutional Agents

Faculty, staff, and administrators at the Floyd Campus and Cartersville Site played a role in the students' ability to achieve student success. The findings revealed that there was one theme related to the role of institutional agents, which was *meaningful interactions with institutional agents*.

Meaningful interactions with institutional agents. Kuh (2006) concluded that student-faculty interactions positively impacted retention and graduation rates. These findings are consistent with previous research conducted by Kezar and Maxey (2014) and Pascarella and

Terenzini (2005) who found focused interactions with quality, depth, and purpose appear to have a greater impact on knowledge acquisition and skill development than more casual contacts. Participants from both locations spoke about dreading class with a professor who only reads from the PowerPoint, in a monotone voice, and just lectures without giving an opportunity for discussion. This finding was consistent with the work of Gabovitch (2014) who studied part-time community college students and found that faculty performance made the difference in being successful students and that faculty without strong teaching skills made learning more difficult than needed.

At both the Floyd Campus and Cartersville Site, students enjoyed having access to instructors and being able to spend one-on-one time with them. They also appreciated open-door policies and feeling as if they were not bothering an employee with a question. This was consistent with a previous study (Gabovitch, 2014), which found students appreciated one-on-one time with faculty in the classroom and outside the classroom during office hours.

Participants from the Floyd Campus and Cartersville Site were more successful when they felt like they mattered. In the present study, students felt important when institutional agents know their names, ask how they are, make a personal connection, are there for them, and help them navigate the college journey. Mattering is consistent with what Gabovitch (2014) found when students said they appreciated when faculty go the extra mile for students and that conveys a message that students are important.

Dowd et al. (2013) found faculty, staff, and administrators at a community college play an important role in the transition to their next step by providing resources and support. Students from both locations were concerned that there would not be the same relationship with institutional agents at the four-year-level as they had at the two-year-level. Past studies found

institutions have a responsibility to fostering connections with agents both in and out of the classroom (Felten et al., 2016; Harrill et al., 2015; Kuh et al., 2005; Sargent, 2016). If students are connected they feel more comfortable and are more likely show help-seeking behaviors (Wilson & Gore, 2013).

Participants from both locations shared their desire for the two-year college to prepare them for the next step in their education or their career. Felten (2016) and Tinto (2005) both found that institutions should have clear pathways for students to form relationships with other students, faculty, staff, and administrators. These improved relationships with institutional agents are the key facilitator of student success (Nasr, Jackson, & Harris, 2016).

Students can have many different levels of relationships with institutional agents. Some of these can be very transactional as in a student that is requesting and turning in an application for graduation. Kezar and Maxey (2014) found that frequency, quality, depth, and purpose of interactions can advance students' relationships with institutional agents from transactional to transformational. As a relationship becomes deeper, it can begin to influence students' interests (Kezar & Maxey, 2014). Students from both locations attributed their change of majors to relationships formed with instructors who were passionate about teaching and got the class excited about the curriculum. Participants attributed reasons for being engaged and involved to awareness and encouragement received from institutional agents and findings of this study revealed that when an institutional agent had this type of influence, they can serve as students' advocates for success.

The Most Pertinent Factors

The most pertinent factors regarding role of campus environment and role of institutional agents were being able to obtain a quality education that is close to home, for a low cost and

taught by qualified and engaged instructors, who are passionate and can get students excited about the subject they are teaching. When participants spoke about fixed institutional characteristics such as, smaller campus and smaller class size, they directly related those institutional characteristics to increasing the students' ability to interact with faculty, staff, and administrators. If a student feels an instructor cares about their success, this can increase student motivation and student success (Clark & Mayer, 2011). The most prominent finding in this study is that if students feel they are cared about, they will be more likely to progress toward achieving their educational goals. This is consistent with Cox et al. (2010), which noted more meaningful interactions positively impact students' higher-order thinking, motivation, aspiration, persistence, and achievement. It is also consistent with a *Gallup-Purdue Index Report* which studied 30,000 college graduates across the U.S. found feeling supported and having deep learning experiences meant every to long-term outcomes for college graduates. This report stated:

if graduates had a professor who cared about them as a person, made them excited about learning, and encouraged them to pursue their dreams, their odds of being engaged at work more than doubled, as did their odds of thriving in their well-being. And if graduates had an internship or job where they were able to apply what they were learning in the classroom, were actively involved in extracurricular activities and organizations, and worked on projects that took a semester or more to complete, their odds of being engaged at work doubled also. (Gallup Inc., 2014, p. 6)

The researcher highlighted the notion of just how important meaningful interactions were to the students' experience as Supiano (2018) wrote, "Ask satisfied graduates what they have carried on from college, and you'll probably hear about people. Long after they have forgotten much of the content learned in class, alumni maintain connections with friends, teachers, and if

they are lucky mentors” (para. 5). The connections between institutional agents and students cannot be mandated and must happen organically in order to be effective (Supiano, 2018). With the right college culture and structure in place, colleges can encourage relationship building by making time for students and institutional agents to interact (Supiano, 2018).

Implications for Practice

The results of this study have presented several implications for higher education practice. This study intended to turn student perceptions into actionable solutions. Higher education administrators could use the data collected from this multiple-case study to improve student success by cultivating relationships between institutional agents and students; thinking differently about teaching and learning; capitalizing on comfort and community but empowering students to grow and transition in a safe space; and exploring opportunities to ease the transition between the two-year college and their next step in the attainment of their educational or professional goals.

Cultivate Relationships Between Faculty, Staff, Administrators, and Students

Institutional leaders have a chance to create opportunities for students to meet other students, part-time and full-time faculty, staff, and administrators. These relationships can be introduced and fostered through various stages of the students’ educational journey. Students can meet faculty, staff, and administrators during the recruitment and selection process, orientation, and the first weeks of class. Programs and practices can be designed and implemented to cultivate these relationships. Institutions should be intentional about building time into the schedules that promotes positive interactions between students and institutional agents.

Think Differently About Teaching and Learning

Two-year institutions need to think differently about teaching and learning. Innovative teaching practices have long been researched at the four-year institutions. Studies are beginning to emerge in the two-year college sector. Institutions should train their full-time and part-time faculty to try and make connections between the curriculum, student interests, and the real world. Institutional leaders should support the use of high-impact practices, innovative pedagogies, and engaging teaching strategies.

Capitalize on Comfort and Community, but Empower Students to Grow and Transition in a Safe Space

Most of the participants mentioned the reason students chose attending a two-year college was because it felt comfortable and they liked the small community, which was familiar to them. Institutional leaders should work diligently to make sure their campus environment has a balance of comfort and community with empowerment to grow and transition after high school or other pre-college experiences and segue into the workforce or continue their education at a four-year college or university experience. All of the participants felt as if it was the college's responsibility to prepare them for the next step which means creating a safe space for learning, growing, and overcoming obstacles to continue to progress in their professional pathway.

Explore Opportunities for Easing the Transition to the Next Step

A final implication of this study is the need to create opportunities, programs, and practices that ease the transition to the next step in students' professional endeavors, whether that be the workforce or transferring to a four-year institution. There is a need for these opportunities because participants from both locations expressed anxiety and nervousness about moving onto the next step after they attained their two-year educational goals. Some of these emotions stem

from the uncertainty of going to an unfamiliar place, not knowing any peers, and not knowing any institutional agents. The two-year college can facilitate the transition by serving as a point of connection and fostering relationships with the next step.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the results of this study, the researcher has several recommendations for future research that would continue to inform this topic:

1. This study researched two locations of a multi-campus access institution within the USG. It would be valuable for further research to be conducted at other two-year colleges, other multi-campus institutions, as well as institutions outside of the USG.
2. This study focused on interviewing recommended students who were engaged inside and/or outside the classroom. The findings could be different if the student is not “engaged”. Because of this, the researcher recommends further research into students who may not be perceived as being engaged in and/or out of the classroom to ensure representation of all student populations.
3. This study took place at a non-residential, two-year institution. Being a 100% commuter college comes with its own challenges. It would be valuable for further research to be conducted at a residential two-year college, both within and outside the USG that was not 100% commuter.
4. Most of the work about interactions with institutional agents focused on the interaction with faculty only. The present study was unique because it focused on interactions with faculty, staff, and administrators at the two-year level. While that may be appropriate for a traditional four-year college experience to only focus on faculty-student interactions, it

could be beneficial to study the importance of interactions with not only faculty, but staff and administrators at the four-year level.

5. The researcher recommends comparing one of the smaller locations of GHC (Marietta, Paulding, or Douglasville) with one of the larger locations of GHC used in this study (Floyd or Cartersville). The opportunities for engagement and levels of engagement could be different. There may be unique needs for the smaller sites that differ from students' needs at the larger sites.
6. Enrollment in online courses continues to increase. The researcher recommends comparing the needs for fully online students with the needs of students attending face-to-face courses.
7. Lastly, the researcher recommends that a similar study to this one be conducted at all locations of a multi-campus institution. This would allow for the researcher to interview students from all locations of a single institution. Exploring the perceptions of students at all locations could paint a more holistic picture of student success at an institution.

Conclusions

This study was a multiple-case study of the institutional conditions that mattered to community college students' success at two different locations of a multi-campus access institution. In this study, the researcher ascertained that the campus environment and interactions with institutional agents played a role in students' success. Although the researcher investigated institutional conditions at two different sites, there was little variance in the responses and the findings of the data collected in that the findings indicated the same themes of *institutional characteristics, environment conducive for learning, and meaningful interactions with institutional agents* as being important to students' success. In conclusion, the cost, proximity to

home, quality of instruction, and teaching strategies all matter to students' success. The findings of this study concluded that the institutional conditions that matter most to community college students' success are quality relationships with depth and breadth. When students know the institution cares they are more likely to succeed.

Reflections

The researcher learned much in conducting this research and engaging in this research process. The researcher gained much knowledge about the institution under study and in which she is employed including information about the history and culture of the organization, the buildings and grounds layout of the campuses, services offered through institutional units and departments, as well as information about the students who attend GHC. She also learned about the impact the college has on the communities of northwest Georgia, an area where she was born, raised, and continues to live and work in as an adult. Through her own reflection, the researcher came to realize just how important the student interactions with faculty, student, and administrators are and will strive to have these connections and relationships be the foundation of programs and practices for her department, New Student and Retention Programs. The researcher also realized the importance of using active learning strategies in the classroom and outside the classroom with co-curricular and extracurricular experiences. She intends to take the findings from this study to engage her students and colleagues in dialogue and conversations in the hope of promoting innovative pedagogy, offering an engaged classroom, and building stronger relationships with faculty, staff, and administrators.

Dissemination of Findings

The researcher will share the findings of the study with her higher education colleagues and the executive leadership team at GHC. The goal is to use the findings from this study to

educate GHC faculty, staff, and administrators on who the students are and what the students need. There are several institutional groups who could benefit from receiving the findings. The researcher will share the findings with the institution's Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) in an effort to include the needs of the students when considering the development of new content for New Faculty Academy and other professional development workshops. The findings will also be disseminated by collaborating with the CETL Director to create presentations in which the CETL Director would represent the faculty development perspective and the researcher would represent the student development perspective.

The researcher will share the findings with the Academic Deans so they can see the importance of an engaging classroom and innovative pedagogy. The researcher will also share the findings with members of the institution's Gateways to Completion team. This group seeks to improve the drop, withdrawal, failure (DWF) rates in gateway courses by using high-impact practices and thinking differently about teaching. This group could benefit from the findings of this study by considering the needs the students have when redesigning the gateway courses. In addition to the Gateways to Completion team, the findings will be shared with the members of the institution's Momentum Year Initiative team. This initiative focuses on students making purposeful choice, faculty and students having a growth mindset, and redesigning the academic program maps. The findings from this study could help the team with the mindset aspect of the initiative in that students shared experiences, which strengthened and weakened their success at GHC. In addition, students spoke to strategies for overcoming barriers to success, as well as the roles the institutional conditions play in their own success and these findings will also be shared with key GHC constituents.

The researcher has plans to collaborate with her colleagues in Academic Affairs and in Student Affairs to develop academic, cultural, and social programming that will connect institutional agents with students and foster relationship-building through an emphasis on the importance of learning, both in and out of the classroom. The findings will be shared with the members of the QEP Action Team, as this group may want to incorporate the findings into the implementation of the Quest for Success. Another population that may have an interest in the findings is the USG personnel responsible for CCG and the Momentum Year Initiative, therefore the researcher will share the findings with these groups.

The researcher aims to publish articles in appropriate journals related to student development, student success, student engagement, high impact practices, and two-year colleges. The researcher will present the information at local, regional, and national conferences related to student success, community colleges, first-year students, transition, retention, and teaching and learning representing the voice of community college students affiliated with GHC.

Impact of the Study

This study intended to inform a problem of practice using students' perspectives regarding what students need from institutions to succeed in attaining their educational goals. The findings could help faculty, staff, and administrators clarify the student perspective regarding ways in which institutional conditions at community colleges shape community college students' educational success. In this study, the researcher aimed to address the gap in the literature on institutional conditions that improve student success in relation to student attainment of educational goals at a community college by incorporating the voice of the student. The study's findings will add to the literature on student retention and student success at

community colleges, and more specifically, at non-residential community colleges and colleges with multiple campuses.

Historically, the challenge for institutional leaders has been to determine the best way to improve not only access, but also students' success in terms of identifying and progressing toward the achievement of their educational goals and the findings from this study will have an inevitable impact on attaining student success at GHC. The finding for this study can help institutional leaders understand student needs when considering programs, policies, and procedures to improve student success. As well, this study can help guide leaders of local, state, regional, and national organizations to improve completion rates and overall student success by consulting with students and incorporating their voices into creating success initiatives.

Chapter Summary

This multiple-case study sought to gather information about institutional conditions and community college students' success. The researcher gathered data through documentation, participant observations, direct observations, reviewing archival data, artifacts, and conducting semi-structured interviews. The data collected reveals a myriad of factors of institutional conditions that impacted students' success. These factors were categorized into three themes: *institutional characteristics, an environment conducive for learning, and meaningful interactions with institutional agents.*

Most of the studies about student success focus on exploring the traditional college student's experience at a four-year institution. This study addresses gaps in the literature regarding the lack of studies that focus on two-year colleges, their institutional conditions, and interactions with institutional agents. When researching relationships with institutional agents, it is important to include not only faculty but expand to staff and administrators because employees

at two-year colleges wear multiple hats and as a result, students interact with faculty, students, and administrators on a regular basis. A vast amount of literature exists regarding student retention, student success, and high-impact practices at the four-year level, but little empirical work exists regarding student success at the community college level. The current study could help further the understanding of community college students' needs. In addition, this study could assist institutional leaders in taking responsibility for the attributes of the institution that they can influence. The findings of this study confirms students can be partners and have a voice in creating innovative solutions and fostering change to improve learning and education attainment. Student success literature could benefit from more studies offering the student perspective regarding what institutions can do to increase student success. Student engagement is a critical component of student development, student retention, and student success; therefore, it is imperative for institutions to focus on ways to shape the academic, cultural, and social offerings to encourage student success (Astin, 1984, 1993, 1997; Astin & Astin, 2000; Bean, 1983; Bean & Eaton, 2000; Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Kuh, 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1987, 1993, 2005, 2010).

It is the researcher's intention for this study to be used to inform decision-making about creating ideal conditions for students to learn, grow, and develop. By keeping the class-size low, the tuition affordable, and designing facilities to promote engagement and learning, institutions can foster an environment for students' success. In addition, students are the most successful when institutional agents make them feel as if they matter. Students can move through a hierarchy of connections from transactional experiences to having a resource, a support system, and the highest order of relationship, an advocate, who is an institutional champion for students' success.

The charge is for institutional leaders to use the findings of this study to develop a student-centered culture frames by high-impact practices to create an environment conducive for learning, both inside and outside the classroom and for the entire campus community. Institutional leaders should strive toward having a greater understanding of their students' needs to inform decision-making about policies, practices, and programs to support this student-centered culture. Institutional leaders should aim to provide faculty and staff the tools needed to better understand the value of this cultural change so they are confident in modeling the behaviors for supporting students' process for identifying and progressing toward the achievement of ones' educational goals. By creating these conditions, institutions should aim to increase the success rates of their students.

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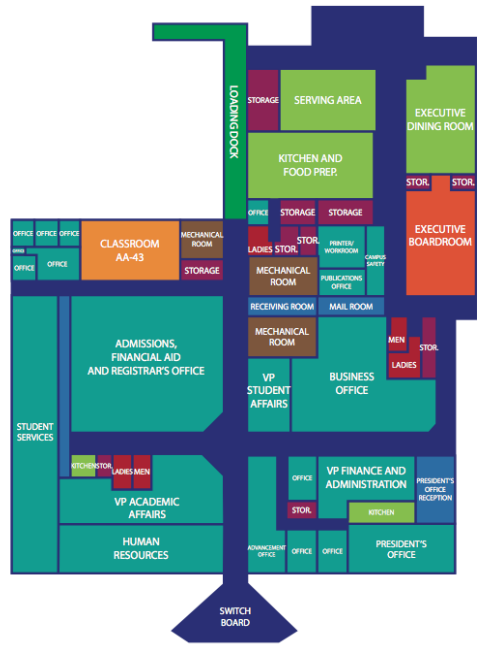
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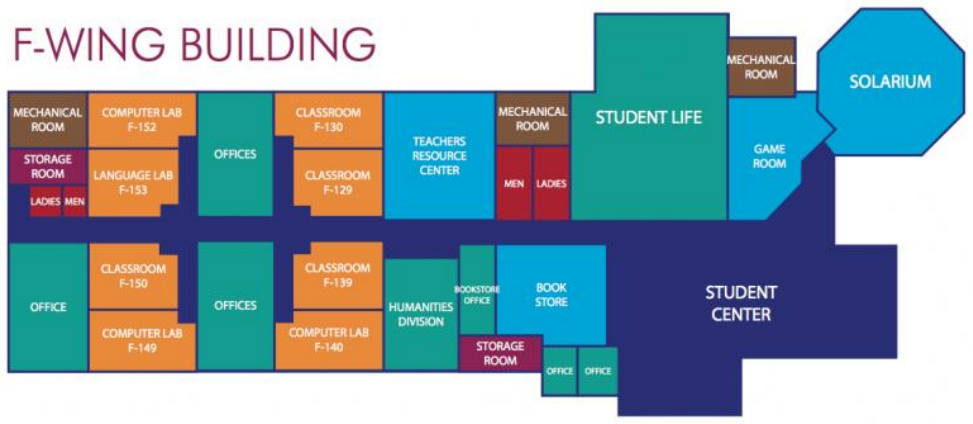
APPENDIX A

BUILDING MAPS, FLOYD CAMPUS

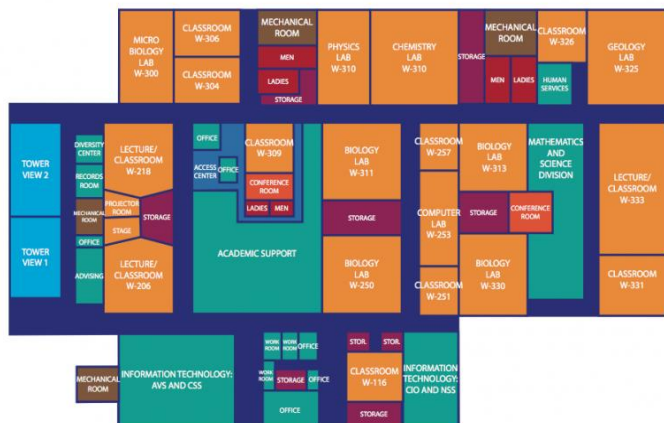
McCORKLE BUILDING



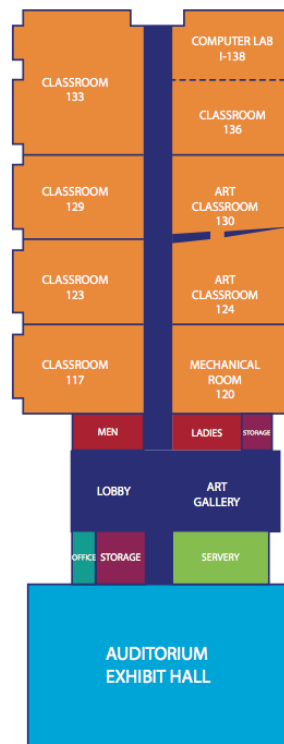
F-WING BUILDING



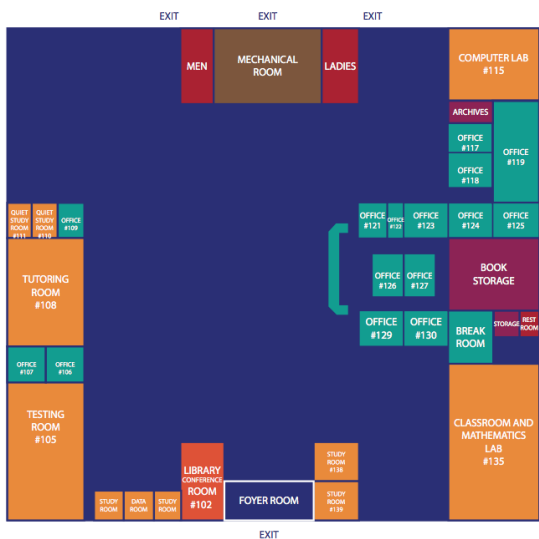
WALRAVEN BUILDING



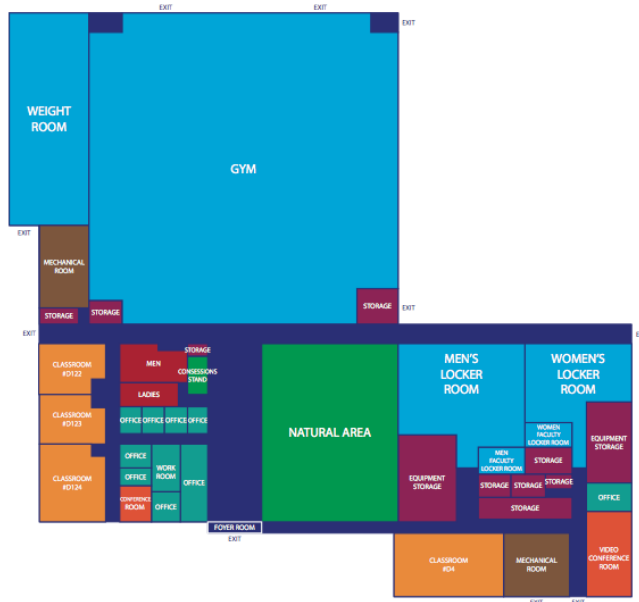
LAKEVIEW BUILDING



LIBRARY BUILDING



PHYSICAL EDUCATION BUILDING



APPENDIX B

CCSSE DATA



Aspects of Highest Student Engagement

Benchmark scores provide a manageable starting point for reviewing and understanding *CCSSE* data. One way to dig more deeply into the benchmark scores is to analyze those items that contribute to the overall benchmark score. This section features the five items across all benchmarks on which the college scored highest and the five items on which the college scored lowest relative to the 2017 *CCSSE* Cohort.

The items highlighted on pages 4 and 5 reflect the largest differences in mean scores between the institution and the 2017 *CCSSE* Cohort. While examining these data, keep in mind that the selected items may not be those that are most closely aligned with the college's goals; thus, it is important to review all institutional reports on the *CCSSE* online reporting system at www.ccsse.org.

Figure 3 displays the aggregated frequencies for the items on which the college performed most favorably relative to the 2017 *CCSSE* Cohort. For instance, 33.3% of Georgia Highlands College students, compared with 25.9% of other students in the cohort, responded *often* or *very often* on item 4g. It is important to note that some colleges' highest mean scores might be lower than the cohort mean.

Figure 3

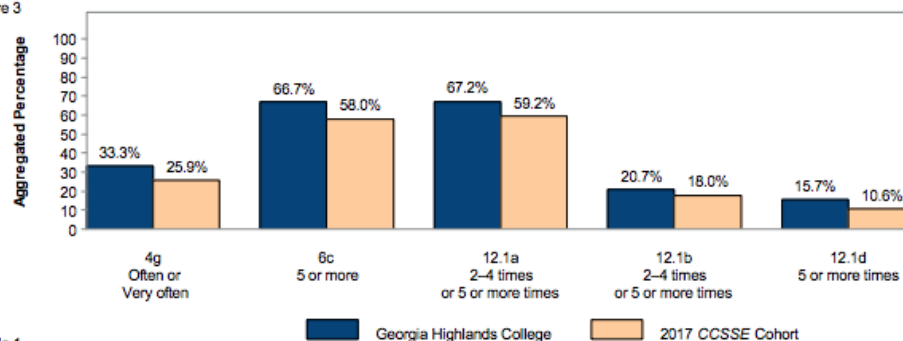


Table 1

| Benchmark | Item Number | Item |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|--|
| Active and Collaborative Learning | 4g | Worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments |
| Academic Challenge | 6c | Number of written papers or reports of any length |
| Support For Learners | 12.1a | Academic advising / planning |
| Support For Learners | 12.1b | Career counseling |
| Student Effort | 12.1d | Peer or other tutoring |

Notes:

For Item(s) 4 (except 4e), *often* and *very often* responses are combined.

For Item(s) 6, 5–10, 11–20, and *more than 20* responses are combined.

For Item(s) 12.1a and 12.1b, *2–4 times* and *5 or more times* responses are combined.

Aspects of Lowest Student Engagement

Figure 4 displays the aggregated frequencies for the items on which the college performed least favorably relative to the 2017 CCSSE Cohort. For instance, 61.2% of Georgia Highlands College students, compared with 66.2% of other students in the cohort, responded *often* or *very often* on item 4a. It is important to note that some colleges' lowest mean scores might be higher than the cohort mean.

Figure 4

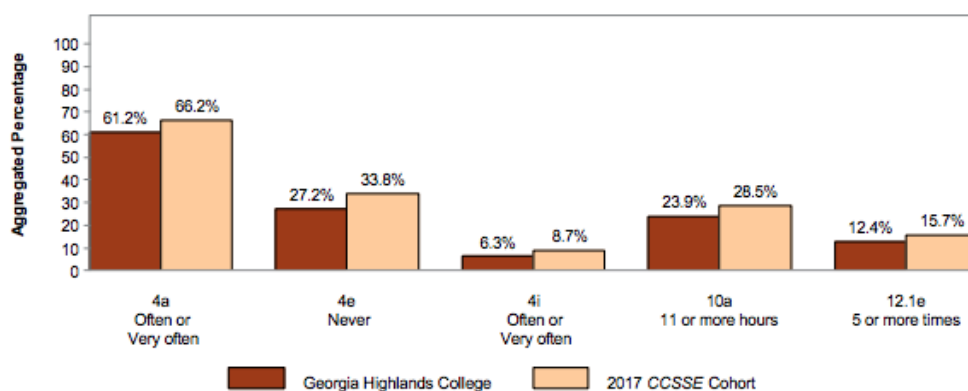


Table 2

| Benchmark | Item Number | Item |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|---|
| Active and Collaborative Learning | 4a | Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions |
| Student Effort | 4e | Come to class without completing readings or assignments |
| Active and Collaborative Learning | 4i | Participated in a community-based project (service-learning activity) as part of a regular course |
| Student Effort | 10a | Preparing for class (studying, reading, writing, rehearsing, doing homework, or other activities related to your program) |
| Student Effort | 12.1e | Skill labs (writing, math, etc.) |

Notes:

For Item(s) 4 (except 4e), *often* and *very often* responses are combined.

For Item 4e, responses have been reversed. The frequency displayed is the percentage of students who report *never* coming to class without completing readings or assignments.

For Item 10a, 11–20, 21–30, and *more than 30* responses are combined.

APPENDIX C

LETTERS FROM CAMPUS DEANS

Todd G. Jones, Ed.D.

tjones@highlands.edu | 706.295.6335

Hi and welcome to the Floyd Campus of Georgia Highlands College. For more than forty years Georgia Highlands College has been serving the residents of Floyd and surrounding counties. In May 2011 we became a limited-mission, four-year state college within the University System of Georgia and continue to offer more than 40 of the most popular program options including nursing, business, education and psychology to name just a few. Our tuition rates remain among the lowest in the country, and almost 80 percent of our students receive some form of financial assistance. Our focus and dedication remain on the success of our students. At GHC, your success is our success. To aid you in meeting your educational goals, we employ a caring faculty and staff, keep our class sizes small, offer flexible course schedules and provide private tutoring services. Please continue to review our website and learn more about what GHC has to offer. Better yet, to experience the real rhythm and flow of college life at GHC, schedule a private visit to our campus. We hope to see you soon.

Sincerely,



Dr. Todd G. Jones

Campus Dean & Vice President for Student Affairs



A Letter from the Campus Dean:



Leslie Johnson

ljohnson@highlands.edu | 678-872-8140

Welcome to Cartersville. We are delighted that you are taking the first step in exploring the numerous opportunities available at the Cartersville site. For over 40 years, Georgia Highlands College has provided a pathway for students entering the University System of Georgia and other four year institutions. Our tuition rates and fees remain one of the lowest in the country. In addition, our class sizes remain small, our schedule is flexible with both day and evening classes and our faculty are dedicated to teaching and learning. We

encourage you to come for a visit. Meet our faculty and staff and see firsthand the many services that Georgia Highlands offers to guide you in your academic endeavors and to put you on the road to a successful academic career.

Sincerely,

Leslie Johnson

Campus Dean

APPENDIX D

WHY ATTEND GHC?



[FUTURE STUDENTS](#) [CURRENT STUDENTS](#) [COMMUNITY / ALL](#)

[GHC Home](#) > [Why Attend GHC?](#)

Why Attend GHC?

Georgia Highlands College is a state college serving all of northwest Georgia. Our students choose Georgia Highlands College for a variety of reasons, but some of the strongest are:

- An affordable, high quality education
- Smaller class sizes than large universities
- Transferrable credits to other University System of Georgia or private institutions
- Engaged and involved faculty who work individually with students
- Free tutoring for students who need help
- Multiple sites with convenient locations
- Study-abroad programs
- A diverse array of student activities, clubs and organizations
- Many financial aid options and scholarships available
- An entry point to the USG



Whether you are a traditional or non-traditional student, excellence begins here. Let us help you every step of the way.

APPENDIX E
OBSERVATIONAL PROTOCOL

| Length of Activity: # minutes | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|
| <i>Descriptive Notes</i> | <i>Reflective Notes</i> |
| | |

APPENDIX F

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Tell me about yourself. Where do you currently attend classes?
2. How do you define student success?
3. In what ways have your life experiences shaped your definition for success?
4. The next few questions will address institutional characteristics and your success as a student. For this question, success is defined as active progression toward, or the achievement of your educational goals.
 - a. In what ways has attending a two-year college versus a four-year college impact your success?
 - b. In what ways has attending a public college versus a private college impact your success?
 - c. What role has the size of your campus GHC play in your success as a student?
 - d. What role has the size (population) of GHC play in your success as a student?
 - e. In what ways has attending a 100% commuter college impact your success?
5. Describe your student experience at GHC so far.
6. What specific people at GHC have strengthened your success in/out of the classroom?
Weakened your success?
7. What specific programs at GHC have strengthened your success in/out of the classroom?
Weakened your success?
8. What other things at GHC have strengthened your success in/out of the classroom?
Weakened your success?
9. In what ways are/should be students responsible for their own success?

10. In what ways are/should be colleges responsible for the success of their students?
11. Take some time to read over the GHC Mission Statement:

The mission of Georgia Highlands College, a state college of the University System of Georgia, is to provide access to excellent educational opportunities for the intellectual, cultural and physical development of a diverse population through pre-baccalaureate associate degree transfer programs, career associate degree programs, and targeted baccalaureate degree programs that meet the economic development needs of the region.

 - a. What are some words that stand out?
 - b. What does this mission mean to you?
12. A college campus has culture and a climate. A campus culture reflects the character, values, customs, traditions, and beliefs that shape the behavior of faculty, staff, administrators, and students. A campus climate is the attitudes, behaviors, and standards about access, inclusion, and respect for others.
 - a. Can you describe the culture at GHC? (Will repeat the definition if needed)
 - b. Can you describe the climate at GHC? (Will repeat the definition if needed)
13. In what ways is GHC committed to helping you succeed in the classroom?
14. In what ways is GHC committed to helping you succeed outside the classroom?
15. Give me a scenario of what you might say to the leaders at the college in regards to how the college could improve student success in and out of the classroom.

NOTE: Probing questions may be used throughout the interview(s) to gain a more comprehensive description of participants' experiences.

APPENDIX G

LITERATURE MATRIX

Research Questions & Interview Questions Item Grid

| Research Questions | Student Interview Questions | Research Literature |
|--|------------------------------------|--|
| 1: What role does the campus environment play in community college students' ability to achieve student success? | 1, 2, 3, 9 | Gabovitch, 2014; Kuh, 2006; Lei, 2016; Niemeyer, 2003 |
| 2: What roles do faculty, staff, and administrators play in community college students' ability to achieve student success? | 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15 | Astin, 1997; Dowd et al., 2013; Felten et al., 2016; Kezar & Maxey, 2014; Kuh et al., 2005; Kuh, 2006; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 2010 |
| 3: In terms of roles of campus environment and roles of institutional agents, what factors are more pertinent to the personal success of community college students progressing towards achieving educational goals? | 4, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 | Astin, 1997; Dowd et al., 2013; Felten et al., 2016; Gabovitch, 2014; Kezar & Maxey, 2014; Kuh et al., 2005; Kuh, 2006; Lei, 2016; Niemeyer, 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 2010 |

APPENDIX H

LIST OF CLUBS AND ORGANIZATIONS OFFERED AT THE FLOYD CAMPUS AND
CARTERSVILLE SITE

| Club/Organization | Floyd | Cartersville |
|---|--------------|---------------------|
| English Majors Association | X | X |
| Highlands Association of Nursing | X | |
| Human Services Club | X | |
| Student American Dental Hygienists' Association | X | |
| Student Professional Association of Georgia Educators | X | |
| American Association of University Women | | X |
| Active Minds | | X |
| Baptist Student Union | X | |
| Bass Fishing Club | X | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Brother 2 Brother | X | X |
| Boxing Club | | X |
| Capture Highlands | X | |
| Cheerleading Club | X | |
| College Conservatives | X | |
| Creative Writing | | X |
| Criminal Justice and Political Science Club | X | |
| CRU | | X |
| Cycling Club | | X |
| Equality Alliance | X | X |
| Fellowship of Christian Athletes | X | X |

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| Gaming Club | X | X |
| GH Dance Club | | X |
| GHC Running Club | X | X |
| Green Highlands | X | X |
| Hispanic Student Association | X | |
| Human Services Club | X | |
| InterVarsity Nurses Christian Fellowship | X | |
| La Mano | | |
| Psychology Club | | X |
| Sign and Speak | X | |
| Spanish Activities Club | | X |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Student Veterans of America | X | X |
| Students Without Borders | X | X |
| That Animation Club | X | |
| Woman to Woman | | |
| Writer's Collaborative | X | |
| Alpha Beta Gamma Business Honor Society | X | X |
| Phi Theta Kappa | X | X |
| Psi Beta Psychology Honor Society | X | X |
| Six Mile Post | X | X |
| Old Red Kimono | X | X |
| Emerging Leaders | X | X |

| | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| Highlands Interactive Productions | X | |
| Orientation Leaders | X | X |
| Student Government Association | X | X |

APPENDIX I
TIPS FOR SUCCESS



YOUR SUCCESS STARTS HERE

**TOP 10 THINGS TO KNOW
TO BE SUCCESSFUL AT GHC**

1. Attend class/be prepared
2. Learn how you learn (studying, taking tests, taking notes)
3. Manage your time
4. Understand differences between high school/college/work
5. Engage with assignments and class
6. Communicate with your professor
7. Check D2L and email regularly
8. Ask for help/learn about resources
9. Be a self-advocate
10. We care!

highlands.edu

GHC
GEORGIA HIGHLANDS COLLEGE