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# Those Who Quit: A Study of Student Retention At Two-Year Community and For-Profit Colleges

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THOSE WHO QUIT: A STUDY OF STUDENT RETENTION AT  
TWO-YEAR COMMUNITY AND FOR-PROFIT COLLEGES

BY

ROBERT L. WOODS

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
(Education)  
in Seton Hall University  
2016

Doctoral Committee:

Rong Chen, PhD, Chair  
Martin Finkelstein, PhD  
Dorothy Minkus-McKenna, PhD  
Elaine Walker, PhD

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SETON HALL UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SERVICES  
OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

APPROVAL FOR SUCCESSFUL DEFENSE

**Robert Woods** has successfully defended and made the required modifications to the text of the doctoral dissertation for the **Ph.D.** during this **Spring Semester 2016**.

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The mentor and any other committee members who wish to review revisions will sign and date this document only when revisions have been completed. Please return this form to the Office of Graduate Studies, where it will be placed in the candidate's file and submit a copy with your final dissertation to be bound as page number two.

DEDICATION

To my daughter  
Madison Leigh Woods,  
Who taught me how to get up each day with a  
Renewed purpose and determination to move forward.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

No assignment of this magnitude could ever be completed without the help, patience, and guidance of those who truly understand and appreciate the process. I now give thanks to my doctoral advisory committee chair, Dr. Rong Chen for her unending advice and skilled insights into the completion of this work. I also give thanks to committee member's Dr. Dorothy Minkus-McKenna, Dr. Elain Walker, and Dr. Martin Finkelstein. To all of you, I truly appreciate your support, time, and guidance throughout this journey. Thank you.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

“The highest education is that which does not merely give us information but makes our life in harmony with all existence.”  
(Rabindranath Tagore)

Since the mid-to-late nineteenth century, two-year community and for-profit institutions of higher learning have played a determinant role in America’s system of higher education. Because of these institutions large numbers of underrepresented students now had access to the college experience. By allowing a college experience not to be exclusively for the elites of society, two-year institutions were hailed as America’s missing link to accessible and affordable education. Today they remain the chief source of degree-granting programs that emphasize skill development, and immediate access into the labor market. Students attending these colleges enjoy relatively low tuition, open admission policies, vast course offerings, and convenient campus locations.

But two-year institutions have not always been viewed as major contributors to higher education. Initially they were designed to act as “stepping stones” to the more traditional and/or elite colleges. Students lacking certain academic skills were thought to better succeed if they took special remedial courses at some other institution before applying to a four-year college for study. This nineteenth-century philosophy grew in support because elite and four-year colleges did not want to change their curriculum and/or image to accommodate academically under-prepared students. Noticeably, it was also during this time period that America itself was vastly becoming known as the “melting pot” of nations because of the large influx of immigrants flowing in. Two-year colleges catered to the needs of these new and under-prepared students by offering special training and faster access into the labor market.

Of the existing 4,084 colleges and universities located throughout the United States today, two-year institutions now number more than 1,721 in total. Community colleges alone, administer to 44 percent (11 million) of America's total college population (Strauss, 2013). For-profits, on the other hand, currently enroll 3.3 million students. These millions of enrolled students share one common goal...to be successful. Like the elites, they too understand that a quality education yields a high rate of return for them, their families, learning institutions, and for society.

We all benefit from the higher tax revenues, the lower demands on social support programs, the lower rates of incarceration, and the greater levels of civic participation of college-educated adults. Increasingly, the higher education system has come to be seen as not only a provider of social and economic opportunity, but also a critical element in the national quest for equity of opportunity across socioeconomic, gender, and racial/ethnic groups. (Anderson & Hearn, 1992).

Overall, 45 percent of students enrolled in higher education are enrolled in two-year colleges. Researchers acknowledge that 21 percent is a sizable increase because it also illustrates the steady growth of two-year colleges from the years 2003 to 2011 (Bailey, Jeong & Cho, 2010). More important, this increase in the number of participants in higher education means that more people will contribute to the betterment of our society. They have an opportunity to better their circumstances by gaining needed confidence to embrace change, get higher degrees, establish newer goals, and sharpen their personal attributes. William Bowen, in his book, *Invest in Learning* (1977) agrees, and notes that, "the obtainment of higher levels of education generates an elevation in an individual's emotional and moral development, his/her family life,

increased citizenship, consumer, leisure, and health benefits in terms of neighborhood effects and growth in the national economy for society.” Research does support the concept that having any form of education beyond high school is a prerequisite to financial security, employment, and a better lifestyle. The conscious and healthier life styles that college graduates live often translates into a reduction of public and governmental spending.

However, there are still many concerns that *not* having a college education drastically contributes to the unequal distribution of the nation’s wealth, human conditions, and social advancements. For this reason, state and local governments often support two-year colleges for injecting newer students into the stream of higher education and the workforce. The literature indicates that in the year 2008, 68 percent of college degree holders who occupied a full or half-time job, had health insurance coverage. Only 50 percent of high school graduates had this benefit (College Entrance Examination Board, 2010). The government would actually spend between \$800 and \$2,000 per year *less* on social programs such as unemployment compensation, Medicare and Medicaid, food-stamp programs, welfare, and the like...if more people were college educated.

But of the two colleges, for-profits are perhaps the most misunderstood, and considered known competitors of two-year community colleges. In the majority of instances, they both enroll the same demographics of students. And although some major differences between the two will be touched upon in the Problem Statement and later in Chapter 5 of this study, it is helpful to understand that for-profits are primarily a “business” that prepare their students for immediate job placement in the workforce. They are colleges that are privately owned, and publicly traded. Unlike community colleges, their capital to operate does not come directly from the states in which they are located, but rather from tuitions paid by the students they enroll.

There are nearly 3,000 such colleges in the U.S. The students for-profits attract are “nontraditional.” They did not enroll just after high school. Many earned a general education diploma (GED), or did not graduate from high school. For-profit college students principally enroll because they want accelerated programs and immediate access to the workforce. Students are older, have low incomes, have families, and work responsibilities. Essentially, for-profit colleges view their students as “customers,” and therefore do not necessarily focus on the students campus life. Overall, the success of their students and programs is measured via retention, completion, and job placement rates.

#### Problem Statement

Given the individual and societal benefits of a college degree, it is not surprising that student retention has been the primary goal for two-year community and for-profit colleges since their existence. Retention is a long-standing problem at these institutions, and of particular importance to state accreditation agencies and state regulating officers in higher education. And, since degrees granted from two-year community and for-profit colleges are a known prerequisite to personal success, it can thus be assumed that the same degrees earned and enjoyed by students completing four-year institutions...can be equally earned and enjoyed by students completing community and for-profit colleges. Yet none of these benefits are available to two-year college students if he or she drops out of the program before completion. This is often the mishap at two-year institutions. For example, the National Center for Education Statistics in 2011, noted that the “graduation rate was 20 percent at public 2-year institutions, 51 percent at private nonprofit 2-year institutions, and 62 percent at private for-profit 2-year institutions.” Concern over retention rates at two-year colleges also prompted a U.S. Senate investigation. The

investigators found that of those students who enrolled in 2008-09, 64 percent of them had dropped out by mid-2010 (OC Watchdog, 2012). These numbers are alarming, and two-year college officials are seeking strategies that better address the institution and students they serve. At a massive conference held by the American Association of Community Colleges in Seattle, strategies of how to help community college students succeed academically dominated the talks. Much of the conversations centered around how best to accomplish the challenge that President Obama had given them....that of “producing five million more graduates from the two-year institutions over the next decade” (*Chronicle of Higher Education, 2014*). Other themes of the conference centered on how best to prepare those same students for the global workforce. A central speaker at the same conference, Martha J. Kanter, United States’ under secretary of education, also noted that “the relatively low number of Americans who complete a college degree, compared with other countries, is a national tragedy,” (*Chronicle of Higher Education, 2014*). Hence, in many ways these are the best of times...and the worst of times for two-year community colleges. When the economy is bad and employment rates are low, discouraged workers look to sharpen and learn new skills at affordable community colleges. This movement benefits the enrollment numbers for two-year colleges, but does little else if the retention of these students is not evident. With the government’s recent focus on these college to improve their retention rates and academic quality, community college officials clearly understand that if they are not able to “prove” their worth as a consistent, viable, and resourceful institution they may eventually lose the needed taxpayer resources. Identifying sounder retention models will help them keep their students enrolled until program completion. A retention model of this nature would show community and for-profit colleges their strong points, their weaknesses, and where they need to improve their current methods of retaining their first-year students. Research

indicates that more colleges need to focus more of their retention efforts on first-year students. The persistence and/or retention of first-year students into their second year of study is critical to retention efforts at two-year colleges. As is the norm in two-year community and for-profit colleges, many widely use freshman seminars to indoctrinate their first-year students into academic campus life. But Tinto differs with this approach. “The answer,” he notes, “lies not in the freshman seminar itself or in the many dedicated and talented faculty and staff who teach those seminars, but in the integration of the freshman seminar and the important concepts that underlie it into the very fabric of the first year” (Tinto, 2012).

Overall, the retention efforts at two-year for-profit colleges are similar to those of community colleges chiefly because they basically attract the same genre of students. Both institutions greatly benefit from vast numbers of students utilizing their GI Bill to fund their education. A total of 270,666 students used the benefits of the GI Bill in 2009-10 (Gonzalez, 2010). A better support system, lower cost, and geographical convenience were among the primary reasons given as to why they enrolled. As noted earlier, for-profits do graduate more students, attract more lower-income students, and educate 12 percent of the postsecondary population, but they are still under government scrutiny for their vast attrition rates, and for “half of the federal-loan defaults” (Blumenstyk, Richards, 2011). Given that for-profits overall now educate close to 7 percent of our nearly 19 million degree-granting institutions in America each fall, it is understandable why they are concerned about their low retention rates. Like community colleges, they seek better retention models that will isolate their retention effort’s strengths, weaknesses, and areas needing improvement. The needs are urgent because the success of for-profit colleges is measured by retention rates, career placement, and employer satisfaction.

College officials observe that many traditional and non-traditional students attending two-year colleges are somewhat under-prepared when they initially enroll. That being said, first-year traditional and non-traditional students entering two-year colleges come with a different set of backgrounds: social, economic, and academic factors that are somewhat different from most students attending four-year institutions. And although these factors will be examined later, they are known to influence a student's decision to persist into their second year of college. It then becomes increasingly important that two-year community and for-profit institutions of higher education redouble their efforts to obtain higher retention rates. Additionally, the student retention problem currently confronting two-year community and for-profit colleges in America could further influence the way wealth and social well-being is distributed in this country. Park (1966) suggested, for example, that the larger the dispersion of schooling among the labor force, the greater the income inequality. He also found that the dispersion of educational attainment has a much stronger disequalizing effect on income equality than previous studies have suggested. As a result, greater attention is now being focused on the benefits of higher education. Sharing this same concern, Russo (2001), proclaimed:

An unprepared and unskilled workforce will lower economic productivity; decreased tax revenue including funds to support the Social Security program; result in more unemployment; increase the need for public assistance for welfare and health care; and too often; foster crime (p.4).

Trying to understand why students leave college campuses and how to best keep them there is an age-old concern for administrators of higher education. Admittedly, students' demographics change; their expectations change, technology changes, and frameworks that were once deemed workable for student success, no longer work for students entering college in a different time and era. The discovery of a sound-proof framework which guarantees student



completion has prompted Educators to study student retention and/or persistence in the United States since the 1800s (Thelin, 2004).

Formal research studies on the subject began in 1926 (Braxton, 2000), and the 1970s noted a boom in the publications of research studies on retention that has continued well into the present (Spady (1970), Astin (1993), Tinto (1975, 1993), Pascarella (1985), and Braxton, Hirschy & McClendon (2004). Earlier researchers of retention heavily note the importance of a student's high school grade point average (GPA), his/her Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), or American College Testing (ACT) test scores to best predict if students will persist and graduate from their initial college (Astin, 1993). As a result, institutions requiring such test scores were assumed to be legally accredited, serious, and selective in their admission of students. "In fact, institutions with the most rigorous admissions selectivity have exhibited the highest persistence or retention rates" (Tinto, 1993). In the same time period, institutions that did not practice such rigid admission policies via exam scores, were often deemed to be a non-accredited and/or not-so-qualified institution. Two-year community and for-profit colleges fall into this category. Students enrolled in these institutions are more often assumed to be somewhat academically challenged, not ready for college, considered college risks, and are often from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Colleges who enrolled these students are generally noted to utilize an open enrollment policy. A college's open enrollment policy is somehow indicative of low student selectivity criteria, and generally means that the only requirement for enrollment is proof of graduation from high school, or admittance with minimal GPA requirements. No SAT or ACT score was required. Although some traditional students also adhere to the above, non-traditional students almost certainly do, and often attend a two-year public community college, or a two-year for-profit college. They generally fit into this category. But given the important

role that both are now deemed to play in the educating of America's college population, this researcher wanted to know the genre of conversations being held within academia to address the retention concerns of these institutions. Research has established that although both institutions provide postsecondary educational opportunities, they differ greatly in any number of other facets.

Utilizing certain factors and/or variables known to affect student retention at institutions of higher learning, this study intends to analyze, compare, and note how these varying factors may, or may not, influence each institution's ability to improve their student retention rates. It is believed that by better examining the underlying objectives and/or make-up of these institutions, a better conversation might be initiated which provides meaningful guidelines to confront student retention problems. And although two-year community colleges and two-year for-profit colleges have similar missions, there still exist a host of notable distinctions that make them unique and not identical. Thus, researchers studying student retention at these institutions might better serve them if they were to research the two under separate magnifying glasses.

Additional distinctions between two-year community and for-profit colleges can also be found in the racial make-up of the students they serve. For example, a total of 62 percent of students attending community colleges were white and out of 366 students attending two-year for profit colleges, only 50 percent were white. Twelve percent of African Americans attended community colleges and 22 percent at for-profits. Hispanic students accounted for 16 percent of the student population at community and 21 percent at for-profits. Hence, a greater number of ethnic minority students attended for-profit colleges, and fewer attended community colleges.

However, another fundamental difference between community and for-profit colleges can be found in the size and location of their campuses, their cost, types of programs offered, and how they are governed. Community colleges are governed by appointed trustees, for-profits are corporations that are privately owned. Yet, because for-profits are privately owned and controlled by stock holders, the curriculums offered at their schools are generally developed within corporate headquarters and delivered to the teaching faculty most qualified to teach the subject. The teaching faculty at community colleges have somewhat of a “say” in the courses they implement...and teach.

Other than student advocacy groups – local, state, and federal policymakers have shifted their concerns to the low persistent and completion rates at two-year institutions. Referring to the community college, President Walter Bumphum of the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) notes that accountability and student success is a must: “We were founded on the premise of being open-access institutions, but recently there’s been a pivot to focus more on student success. There’s a focus not just on having them transfer [to four-year schools], but on getting them into the workforce” (Koebler, 2012).

The call that education officials be held more accountable has sparked a newer interest in scholarly research on the topic (Berge & Braxton, 1998; Berger & Lyon, 2005; Braxton, 2000; Braxton, 2009; Friedman & Mandel, 2009). The now urgent feat of preparing our nation’s students to compete globally is yet another reason that our institutions retain as many students as possible. Thus, the type of research most needed to solve the problem of retention in America is that which focuses more on the solution, rather than the problem. This active approach will

increase our understanding of the gaps we still face in patterns of participation in *all* sectors of postsecondary education.

There is great need to research for possible retention solutions at two-year community and for-profit colleges. Although Powell (2009) agrees with Tinto (2006-07) that, “student retention is one of the most widely studied areas in higher education (para.8),” he also notes that very little of the existing research has catered itself to the needs of two-year community and for-profit colleges. Two-year community and for-profit colleges are in dire need of preventive programs or theoretical retention models that increase their retention rates. Given the disproportionate amount of literature and researched theories that explain why students drop-out of traditional four-year colleges, it becomes alarming as to why so little literature has addressed the retention plights of these two public and private sectors. Both institutions provide postsecondary educational opportunities for students; both educate huge percentages of our college-going population – and like traditional four-year institutions – both are consistently trying to improve the retention and/or persistent rates of their students. This study aims to add to the literature by creating a student persistence model utilizing data surrounding the factors and/or variables particular to underrepresented populations of students who attend two-year colleges. It is hoped that by investigating the overall influences of these students’ demographic background, academic factors, and financial factors, meaningful dialogue might then be initiated that will enhance the persistence rates at these institutions of higher learning.

Research indicates that previous traditional models on student retention and/or persistence have not targeted the specific groups used for this particular study. The models have not been accurate and are not the best to use when studying the persistence rates of non-traditional

students (Attinasi, 1989; Good & Lucas, 2001; Loo & Rolison, 1986; Paulson & St. John, 2002). Over half of Hispanic students, and about 40 percent of Black, Native American, and multiracial students choose to attend a community college or a for-profit college. The demographic, psychographic, social, and cultural pre-college experiences invariably differ for the non-traditional students when compared to the middle-class students for whom previous retention models were developed (Paulsen & St. John, 2002). It is primarily because of this group's unique traits, needs, and diversity that they are often termed "non-trationals." Non-traditional students are usually older, have families, and work full or part-time jobs. Some may come from non-English-speaking families, have a lower socio-economic background, be academically unprepared, or have special learning needs that require special accommodations. Unlike "traditional" students, "non-traditional" students have different expectations of the college, and the programs that serve them. And although many traditional institutions of higher education are having difficulties in recognizing and meeting the needs of this advancing group of students, for-profit and community colleges have recognized their needs, catered their curriculum to meet their needs, and are aggressively encouraging these "non-traditional" students to pursue their college ambitions in their institutions (Chung, 2008; Osequera & Malagon, 2011).

Community colleges successfully educate 44 percent of America's undergraduates (7.3 million) students in higher education. Furthermore, "between 1998-99 and 2008-09, enrollment at for-profit schools increased by 236 percent, while growth at other colleges and universities totaled about 20 percent" (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Likewise, the Department of Education notes that during the academic years of 2000 to 2006 there was a 10 percent growth in Community Colleges in the U.S. Another study completed by the National Center for Education Statistics of the 2006-07 academic school year reported that during this time period "6.2 million

students were enrolled in the country's 1,045 community colleges, equaling 35 percent of all postsecondary pupils that year" (Moltz, 2008). In chapter two – the literature review – more emphasis will be placed upon the uniqueness and attributes of both institutions, but for now, it is helpful to learn that the significant boost in student enrollment at these institutions has caused many officials in higher education to scrutinize more carefully the contributions community and for-profit colleges make in educating our youth. Other than preparing students for the workforce, and prepping them for a role in traditional four-year institution, college administrators are now understanding that these colleges provide meaningful contributions to the good of society as a whole.

A review of the literature indicates that there is an urgent need for additional research catering specifically to two-year community and for-profit institutions, and the traditional and non-traditional students they serve. Smart and Hamm (1993) concluded that there was "a virtual void of research on the effectiveness of two-year institutions" (p. 40). However, without a retention model that fosters the types of conversations that many officials of higher education are *not* having – the retention rates at these institutions may be lessened – and not improved.

There is little doubt that both community and for-profit institutions fill a necessary void in America's system of higher education by enrolling large numbers of students who might not otherwise have an opportunity to participate in the college experience. Often viewed as "stepping-stones" for students who may not be academically prepared to initially enter traditional four-year institutions, two-year colleges are now considered viable vehicles for those wishing to become college graduates, earn higher incomes, and occupy full-time jobs. But like most all traditional institutions of higher education, two-year colleges are also confronted with difficulties

in graduating their students. For both, substantial student enrollments and retention success mandate the financial backings for their institutions. And, given that community colleges do fare somewhat better in their retention efforts than for-profit colleges, improving their graduation rates still remains a major challenge for them. Both colleges do however, share similar missions and recruit from the same population groups. Both understand the urgency and need to graduate more of their students. And, both are cognizant of the fact that there is a lack of research studies and/or literature that suggest how they might best go about improving the persistence rates of their students.

As was mentioned earlier, community colleges and for-profit colleges have similar missions, and recruit from the same traditional and non-traditional student population. However, the two institutions are not exact copies or kinsmen to one another. They have different institutional missions, different sources of financing, and different governance structures. These differences influence greatly how each defines, and approaches the student retention issues on their campuses. Community colleges, for example, essentially respond to the community and public needs in which they are located. They were established to serve *all* who have a desire to receive a postsecondary education (AACCC, 2006; Gleazer, 1980). Essentially, the college itself does not choose the programs they offer, but rather adopts the programs needed by the community. For this reason, community colleges most offer programs that lead to a certificate and/or an associate degree.

As noted earlier, there are many similarities and non-similarities between two-year community and for-profit colleges, but both agree that they desire strongly to retain their students. But what is the concern – or better yet – what is the conversation(s) that school

officials, parents, and administrators are having with their students to enable both types of colleges to do this? In later chapters, this researcher will attempt to add to the literature by exploring the conversations and addressing current retention practices at two-year community, and for-profit two-year institutions.

Prior to any one retention model being devised that would perhaps assist school officials at both institutions, a more in-depth comparison of the two is necessary. Each has a unique set of differences and/or factors that affect student persistence rates on their campuses. Therefore, if the student retention problems at two-year community and for-profit colleges are to be adequately addressed, it is important to examine student retention in these institutions separately, and then note whether differences exist between the two.

### Overview of this Study

Too, studies are lacking that give adequate consideration of how the lack of finances, family background, skills, prior schooling, motivation, and institutional satisfaction affect both public and for-profit students and their ability to persist towards completion of a college degree. If community colleges and for-profit institutions are to continue making their contribution(s) to society, there is a need to better understand their institutional make-up and the traditional and non-traditional students they serve. Furthermore, if these colleges are to continue acting as “stepping stones” to students who might not otherwise attend college, enter the workforce, and/or eventually enroll in traditional four-year institutions, more studies are needed that specifically focus on *their* students’ demographics and *their* college experience. To that end, studies of this nature are central to discovering the important factors that contribute to traditional



and non-traditional student program completion in the two-year community and for-profit college sector.

### Research Questions

This study proposes to fill the void in our understanding of two-year community colleges and for-profit institutions – and the students they aim to graduate. By examining the student experiences in both types of institutions, this work aims to examine what characteristics and/or factors are most related to student retention and/or persistence at the end of their first year. The author of this study will not only study the determinants of retention rates, but also seek to add to the literature by establishing a retention model that better emphasizes those factors, and/or characteristics deemed particular to the needs of two-year colleges and the students they serve.

To achieve this end, I propose the following research questions to guide this inquiry:

1. What are the background, psychological, financial, social, academic and parental characteristics of students who attend two-year community colleges?
2. What are the background, psychological, financial, social, academic and parental characteristics of students who attend two-year for-profit colleges?
3. How are these various characteristics related to the retention of these students by the end of their first-year of college in two-year community or for-profit colleges, respectively?
4. Are there any differences in the relationships across the two types of institutions? If so, how?

The conceptual framework central to this study will be that of Tinto's student integration theory, and Bean and Metzner's (1985) nontraditional student attrition model. The two theories were chosen for this study because when combined, they focus on student retention at traditional institutions of higher education, and nontraditional students at career colleges and community

colleges. Firstly, the Tinto model represents a longitudinal approach to the dropout problem and also emphasizes that an institution's organizational structure, and the state of its students' sociological, psychological, interactional and economic status are major contributors to the dropout decision. *Tinto's student integration theory* is of particular use to this study of for-profit institutions because this study examines factors that most contribute to student dropouts in their first year of a four-year institution. And although we do not know the degree to which Tinto's model can be adopted for examining student retention at two-year institutions, we do know that the model can serve as a framework, and as a pivotal point for additional exploration of retention rates at public and for-profits. Given that there are limited amounts of literature on retention at two-year colleges, theories, models, and other studies relating to them will also be explored to fill gaps in the literature and add to the cohesiveness of this vital problem of keeping students enrolled, and persisting into their second year of study.

Bean and Mezner's 1985 study of nontraditional students attending four-year institutions is meaningful to this study because of its specific use of factors associated with a student's endogenous and exogenous zones to predict their intent to persist in college. Many of these factors are not associated with traditional college students, but are associated with non-traditional ones. The literature clearly indicates that the rise in non-traditional student enrollments merits a conceptual model of retention that will enable institutions to better meet the needs of non-traditional students attending community and for-profit institutions of higher learning. Non-traditional students are more affected by their external environment than are traditional students. Social integration variables, for example, are associated more with traditional college students. Bean and Mezner recognized that previous research on student retention addressed only the issues that traditional four-year students dealt with. "The chief difference between the attrition

process of traditional and nontraditional students is that nontraditional students are more affected by the external environment than by the social integration variables affecting traditional student attrition (Thomson Reuters, 2013).

There are studies on community colleges worth noting. In 1990 Daniels did a longitudinal retention study on first-year students at Brookdale Community College. The study concluded that students whose major intent was to simply graduate from Brookdale upon their entrance, had higher retention rates than those students whose overall intent was to merely transfer to another school. A year later, Brooks-Leonard's 1991 study found that factors associated with a student's initial GPA, enrollment status (full or part-time), age, and if the student worked while attending college, were relevant predictors of the student's intent to persist. The study also noted that first-time students whose sole intent was to take specific courses only, had lower retention rates. Voorhee's 1987 study on the same issue, revealed that students' gender, initial purpose at the time of enrolling, and their determination to return after their first-year of community college were significant factors relating to student persistence. Additionally, in a retention study at Niagara County Community College, Feldman (1993) noted that high school GPAs (Grade Point Average), age, enrollment status (full/part-time), and ethnicity were key indicators of student persistence. "Based on a logistic regression model to select predictors of retention, she concluded that the lower the high school GPA, the greater the chance the student will drop out." That the aforementioned researchers tested the validity of identifiable *external* factors to predict student persistence is relevant to this study because it coincides with the author's belief that too few retention studies have emphasized the external factors associated with a student's intent to persist in their studies. These, and a few other existing retention studies on U.S. community

colleges will be utilized as guides throughout this study for added insight into what is known, and not known, about retention efforts at these two-year institutions.

In chapter two of this study both the exogenous factors (background and defining variables) and the endogenous factors (psychological and defining variables) associated with student persistence are better explored to determine if they directly, or indirectly influence the persistence rates of non-traditional students attending two-year community and for-profit institutions. It is also noted that because of their extended focus, Bean and Metzner's use of exogenous and endogenous factors will be fused into concepts of Tinto's model of retention in order to gain a more-in-depth understanding of retention issues currently confronting two-year community and for-profit colleges.

### Significance of the Study

To better comprehend the significance of this study on retention rates at community and for-profit colleges, an acute awareness of the negative consequences retention has on institutions and the students they serve is first warranted. For students who have dropped out of college, attrition may represent personal loss, self-accusation, failure, and alienation from higher education. For institutions, the failure(s) translate into lost revenue and negative publicity. Although community colleges and for-profit institutions are financed differently, the issue of lost revenue is of particular concern for both colleges.

Community colleges are publicly funded, and for-profit (proprietary) institutions depend entirely upon tuition payments as their source of operating capital. As college and university budgets are consistently lessened, accountability and efficiency are highly emphasized in

institutional planning and resource allocation. “Since tuition and fees represent a significant portion of the revenue stream in the institutional budget, most in higher education have accepted the fact that it is in their best interest to exercise whatever influence they have to the fullest extent on student retention” (Seidman, 2005). Given the importance of retention to both students and institutions, additional research is needed that focuses on the underlying causes of poor retention rates at community, or for-profit institutions.

This study has important implications for future research. The research project, for example, is largely based upon the significant fact that most of the information we have about postsecondary student retention is based on researched findings conducted in the traditional college environment (Brenneman, Pusser, & Turner, 2006). And although constant monitoring of enrolled and departed students is a chief function of any institutional research office, there is little institutional research literature that illustrates the constant monitoring of retention problems within the community and for-profit college and university sector (Metz, 2004-05; Zamani-Gallaher, 2004). Little is known, for example, about the degree to which previously established variables and/or factors such as age, gender, race, education of parents; socio-economic status, enrollment as a full or part-time student, if students commute, if they are employed, the status of their GPA; or how varying college majors, impact non-traditional students’ intent to persist in both institutions of higher learning.

Additional research on the key retention factors that students at two-year community and for-profit four-year institutions face, is much needed. This study aims to explore these factors and make note of how they may relate to the student’s first year of persistence. Academic performance and the ability of students to pay are also key elements to be explored in this study.

It is hoped that the aforementioned elements will play a major role in determining why a large number of students leave and/or dropout of this study's institutions after their first semester.

Lastly, this study is also purposed to determine student retention at community and for-profit institutions based on their personal attributes and precollege experiences. Education policy-makers can use the findings and recommendations from this study to identify effective programs and strategies designed to support student retention and success. Because research in this arena is limited, results may provide both scholars and practitioners a clearer understanding of the student variables associated with retention at these rather unique institutions.

#### Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter 1 of this dissertation presented an introduction and overview to the problem of student retention at two-year community, and for-profit institutions of higher learning. In Chapter 2 the literature review is presented and relevant research related to the characteristics and uniqueness of these two institutions is offered. Additionally, their existing retention practices are explored, and the conceptual framework, methodology, and research questions of the study are discussed. Chapter 3 offers the research design, and describes the participants, analytic procedures, and data that will guide the study's research questions. Chapter 4 discusses the findings resulting from the literature review, and Chapter 5 gives the conclusion and suggestions for both future research and practices in the realm of student retention in community, and for-profit institutions of higher learning.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

As already noted, additional studies are needed to provide newer models and/or frameworks to better address the retention efforts at two-year community and proprietary institutions. In chapter two a brief overview of the community college is presented, another is presented for for-profit colleges. The overviews are followed by an examination of specific issues each institution faces when trying to successfully graduate their very diverse – but in many instances – different student populations. This chapter will also note recent research on college student retention at two-year community and for-profit colleges; review the theories/models utilized in this line of research; and propose a research model deemed to be appropriate and useful for addressing the student retention issues at both two-year institutions of higher learning.

#### Definition of Retention

In reviewing the literature for this study there were at least two terms used interchangeably, and that without proper clarification, could lead the readers of this document to varying conclusions. The two terms that appeared ambiguous throughout the literature were: retention, and persistence. To clarify, retention is an organizational phenomenon because college and universities *retain* students. Considered a major component of a college's organization format, most institutions already have in place a structured method and/or program to retain the students they initially enroll. However, the program is easier to write down, but much harder to actualize into positive results. Institutional retention rates, and the percentage of students who actually graduate from their academic program, are often presented as measures of the institutions' worth,

quality, and focus (Reason, 2009). Persistence, on the other hand, does not result from the actions of the institution, but is instead an individual phenomenon because it is the students themselves who *persist* to a goal. Students have many reasons and/or goals for attending college, and be it a two-year or four-year college, the goal of actually graduating may (or may not) be one of them. This concept is often overlooked, but does introduce another important distinction between the two terms. Because individual students define their own goals, a student may successfully persist without being retained to graduation (Reason, 2009). For the purpose of this study however, the term *retention* will be used to describe continuous enrollment in the institution, and although the literature review will cover studies that examine both retention and persistence for a broader-scoped review, the term *retention* will be used to exemplify the plight of two-year community and for-profit colleges to keep their students enrolled.

The distinct number of goals *within* retention also complicates the issue. Because students can drop out at any point in their studies, it becomes crucial that colleges have “ready-to-implement” intervention programs to immediately halt the situation. This is often not the case. For this reason, some institutions have utilized the academic semester-calendar as a means of knowing when to best intervene and address the student’s drop-out decision. Although retention-to-graduation is the preferable goal for institutions of higher education, researchers study retention of students for varying lengths (Reason, 2009). Studies of within-year retention explore what effects student retention has from one semester to the next in a given year; studies of between-year retention examine the predictors of student retention from one year to the next (e.g., from first to second year). Even if an institution’s goal is to fully graduate the students – certainly a desired goal of any institution – there are still some variables that will affect the date



and time that the student graduates. Most institutions report four-, five-, and six-year graduation rates (Reason, 2009).

### Historical Overview of the Two-Year Community Institutions and Retention

Previously considered mere stepping stones to traditional four-year institutions, today's community colleges have evolved into meaningful contributors to America's workforce, and system of higher education. Generally, community colleges are considered to be "any institution accredited to award the Associate of Arts or the Associate of Science as its highest degree (Cohen & Brawer, 1989, p.4-5). But also referred to as "junior colleges," "two-year colleges," "city colleges," "people's colleges," "technical colleges," and "opportunity colleges" (Cohen & Brawer, 2003, p.4), community colleges across the nation are complex institutions that have seemingly earned a steadfast niche in the way America has chosen to educate its population.

Generally, the demographics of public community colleges differ from those of for-profits, and other institutions. They are state-funded colleges that provide education opportunities for many minorities from low income families, and generally are first generation college-goers. But since its origin, the varying terminology used to identify the *community* college has become a bit "blurry" and confusing. Some terms used as a reference to this institution are misleading and do not clearly define the magnitude of their role or, what their overall mission is.

The most commonly used terms to name community colleges are: a *two-year college*, *junior college*, or a *technical college*. These terms warrant clarification because they are extensively used and each often defines a different college mission, curriculum and/or type of degree awarded. The term "two-year college" is the most popular of reference names and is the most

accurate when referring to community colleges as we know them today. Simply stated, *two-year college* alludes to colleges that only award a two-year degree to students completing their academic program. Variations of the two-year degrees often are the Associate of Arts; Associate of Science, Associate of General Studies; Associate of Applied Arts, and the Associate of Applied Science degree. All degrees awarded at two-year community colleges basically fall under the academic headings of general and liberal education, career and vocational education, and adult and continuing education.

When the term “junior college” is used to refer to community college, it is in reference to an institution “whose primary mission is to provide only a general and liberal education leading to transfer and completion of the baccalaureate degree” (*Community Colleges, 2013*). Junior colleges are often viewed as “prep” colleges that endow certain students with basic skills and/or applications that will insure their continued academic success in the attainment of four-year degrees at traditional institutions of higher learning. Junior colleges also provide applied science and adult and continuing education programs as well.

Technical colleges and technical institutes are the most problematic and confusing because they refer only to “those institutions awarding no higher than a two-year degree or diploma in a vocational, technical, or career field. Technical colleges often offer degrees in applied sciences and in adult and continuing education. Also, there are technical institutes with curriculums that extend to the baccalaureate, master’s and doctorate (i.e., Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute), but these are not community colleges.” (*Community Colleges, 2013*). It is also noted that for-profit or proprietary two-year institutions often refer to themselves as technical colleges, technical institutes, or community colleges. In effect, the

generic labeling of community colleges has now come to signify all colleges that award degrees no higher than two-years.

Two-year community colleges are now considered to be large and diverse enterprises that act as educational extensions of the statewide communities in which they serve, and are located. Within their communities, the most publicized concept of them is that they are purposed to provide an accessible, and speedy education to and for *all* who desire one, and who live in the community in which the college is located. “Whatever form the community college takes, its purpose is educational service to the entire community” (President’s Commission on Higher Education, 1947, p.67).

Much of the community college’s success is due in part to its high student enrollment rates. In 2009, for example, a record seven million students were attending community college. “At the close of the twentieth century, two-year colleges enrolled 5,743,000 students, 96 percent of whom attended public community colleges. Nearly 40 percent of all undergraduate students attended community and junior college” (*Community Colleges, 2013*). That community colleges have high enrollments, however, has not gone unnoticed by government and administrative officials of higher education interested in student retention. Of late, the two offices have heavily scrutinized the make-up of community institutions, and discovered a wanting to better comprehend why the retention and graduation rates are so low at these institutions. And, because they are the largest lone area of postsecondary education, many researchers and foundations are also wanting community colleges to graduate and award more degrees to students. This urgency to do so is spurred on by the labor market’s increasing demands for applicants to have some form of postsecondary education, or education at the

subbaccalaureate before job placement. “The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that 6 of the top 10 fastest-growing occupations between 2004 and 2014 will require a subbaccalaureate credential” (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2007 as cited in Horn & Li, 2009). Subbaccalaureates are generally earned at a community college.

Two-year community colleges are not taken aback by the inquiry of government and school officials into their institution...they too, have long-since wanted to better comprehend and improve their student retention problems. According to the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), about 22 percent of all community college students earn their degree or certificate within a three-year period. Perhaps, in order to gain a more in-depth understanding as to why so few students successfully graduate from today’s community college, a closer look at the history and original purpose(s) of the institution is warranted.

Named in honor of Justin Morrill, a legislator and representative of Vermont, the Morrill Land Grant Acts of 1862 and 1890 symbolized the beginning of public community colleges in the United States. These colleges provided greater access to higher education to a student population who might not have otherwise had access. Considered a bridge to higher education, the Morrill Act of 1862 allocated – by formula – a portion of federal lands to create public institutions of higher education in the United States. The second Morrill Act of 1890 somewhat amended the first Act by helping to inspired similar...but separate, institutions of higher learning for minority students (Rudolph, 1990). Many community colleges at this time were specifically designed for certain racial and ethnic groups and women. Academic curriculums needed to change and include more humanities instruction, and because newer immigrants were now being educated, English as a second language instruction had to be increased three-fold. Furthermore,

“the suffrage movement and women’s educational expectations augmented enrollment as well. Overall, community colleges were, and still remain pivotal to the development of remedial and developmental programs and services that better equip students to succeed in college, the workforce and/or career advancement. In 1920 less than 4 percent of the American population (238,000 students) went to college. By the end of the 1920s, 12 percent of high school graduates were attending college (*Community Colleges, 2013*).

“Many of the first two-year colleges were primarily or exclusively technical institutes. Lewis Institute, established in 1896, and Bradley Polytechnic Institute (now Bradley University), established in 1897, were founded with the guiding influence of William Rainey Harper. Frederick Pratt converted the Pratt Institute, a vocational high school, into a two-year curriculum for adults age thirty or so (Ratcliff 1986, p. 16). In 1891 the Detroit Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) consolidated the evening and day classes it offered adults with the professional curriculums of the Detroit College of Pharmacy to form the Detroit Institute of Technology. Chartered in 1909, it provided collegiate instruction in mechanical, technical, industrial, professional, and semiprofessional fields, and in the literary and musical arts. The vocational education movement of the late nineteenth century; the emphasis on technical education during the years of the Great Depression and World War II; the career education initiatives of the 1970s and 1980s; and contemporary workforce development programs of states and the federal government have insured that vocational, technical, pre-professional, and para-professional programs are mainstays of the community college.” (*Community Colleges, 2013*).

Because government and school officials held fast to the belief that a stronger economy could only be achieved via a skilled workforce, Joliet Junior College was erected in 1901 as the nation's first community college aimed at strengthening America's economy. With an initial enrollment of only six-students... today Joliet Junior College educates more than 35,000 students in credit and noncredit courses (Joliet Junior College, 2012). The college was a joint-collaboration of J. Stanley Brown – a superintendent of Joliet Township High School – and William Rainey Harper, who at the time was president of the University of Chicago. The two formed the college in lieu of an experimental postgraduate high school program.

A second mission of Joliet was to serve as a “bridge-builder” that would better allow students living in its community to have better access to its college doors and perhaps transfer to traditional colleges offering baccalaureate degrees. Today – 100 years later – the community college system is comprised of approximately 1,600 institutions and is considered a key element of higher education in America (Coley, 2000). In *The American Community College*, Cohen and Brawer (2003,) cited three primary reasons for the rise and development of junior college, “a ballooning high school population which led to greater demand for further education, a growing need for a trained workforce, and a means to enhance local community prestige.” In essence, it was felt that no single and/or traditional college could conceivably educate *all* walks of people in any one given state. And likewise, no single college campus could provide complete statewide access and service to all groups of people. As a result of this realization, hundreds of community colleges have sprung up across the United States as successful institutions of higher learning. “Pedersen (2000) concluded that junior colleges became popular solutions to provide communities a way to secure their own higher education institution, to enhance the prestige of

the local community, and to keep teenagers close to home and away from the temptations of the large universities” (Krajewski, 2015).

Overall, the success of community colleges can be likened to the success of the Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890. Both are considered to be major milestones in America’s system of higher education, and the reasons more people are able to attend college. Essentially, what these acts did was to establish access to higher education in the United States that previously did not exist. Since many U.S. colleges were established before a secondary education system existed, community colleges filled voids that were purposed to better prepare students for academic success in traditional post-secondary education. In the United States many colleges and universities were established before a system of secondary education was developed. Harvard, America’s first college, was founded much earlier than college preparatory programs and/or institutions existed. “Land-grant colleges and universities were established many years prior to the provision of secondary education in rural areas – in their first years, more than half of their students enrolled in precollegiate studies (*Community Colleges, 2013*).” Thus, many under-represented college students like women, American Indians, African Americans, immigrants, or the disabled at the time had no secondary education programs to prepare them for collegiate level studies. Admittance administrators at early colleges like Harvard, had no access to students’ pre-college records and had no predictors that they would be an academic success in their schools. They were thus required to admit students solely on their merit and not on secondary diplomas or exit exams. This solitary system of admittance excluded many non-traditional students wanting access to a traditional four-year college education

As previously noted, between 1900 and 1920, U.S. community colleges experienced an enrollment “boom” that greatly challenged their ability to meet the needs of a larger number of diverse students. To adequately accommodate them meant that they had to implement major changes in their institution’s mission, academic curriculum, institutional venues, and teaching staff. Because students attending community colleges are normally accepted on a first-come-first-serves basis, they are not “rejected” because of their prior academic schooling. This open admissions policy is deeply embedded within the colleges’ mission statements, and their obligation to provide an educational opportunity to all. And although the students they enroll may not be fully prepared for college level work, or matriculation to the next level of study...the college still admits them.

In 1980 the abilities of U.S. community colleges to accommodate an even larger number of diverse students was again put to the test. This period noted that a newer wave of immigrants had appeared that seemed more determined, more diverse, and in many instances, less academically prepared than their predecessors. All came with high hopes of fulfilling their “American Dream” via a college education. Yet many had little or no prior education, spoke little or no English, were unemployed, and had no pre-college education. Research noted that almost one-third of every new entering class during this period was made up of prime working age students between the ages of 25 and 49 with a high school diploma or less, and English speaking skills (Mendoza, 2009).

To juxtapose their entrepreneurial nature of seeking newer resources to accommodate their growing student demand, community colleges increasingly served the states in which they were located by contributing more to the workforce development. “Calls for a ‘new’ vocationalism – tied to a new information and global economy – arose in the late 1980s and intensified into the



21<sup>st</sup> century as policy makers continually publicized political slogans such as ‘economic competition,’ ‘globalization,’ a ‘new economy,’ ‘high-tech’ jobs, and ‘economic development’ (Grubb, Lazerson, 2004). Hence, community college had now taken on a newer and more active role of adhering to the workforce of our nation.

To meet the immediate needs of incoming immigrants, community colleges implemented a wide range of newer courses and programs to accommodate them. “Community colleges expanded the scope of higher-education offerings by adding to the curriculum practical and pragmatic courses of study that meet the educational needs of an advanced, complex, and technological society. The federal government has encouraged this expansion through incentives to colleges that serve such groups as displaced homemakers, students with disabilities, those needing adult basic education, and the unemployed seeking job retraining. Programs targeted for these students have broadened the curriculum, subsidized enrollment growth, and provided access to college for those who otherwise could not afford it, thereby widening the demographic profile of students served. The demand for higher education has risen as the value of a high school education has declined in the marketplace of jobs and careers”(The Junior College, 2013).

Today, community colleges continue to prepare skilled workers for America’s workforce. The highest degree awarded to students who attend, is a two-year degree (i.e., Associate of Arts, Associate of Science, Associate of General Studies, Associate of Applied Arts, Associate of Applied Science). “Generally, public community colleges are comprehensive institutions that provide: (a) general and liberal education, (b) career and vocational education, and (c) adult and continuing education” (Community Colleges, 2012). They can be public, private, proprietary, or erected for a specific purpose. Public two-year colleges represent the majority of community

colleges and can be established by states, counties, municipalities, school districts, universities, and religious denominations. They can also be specific to any race and/or ethnic group, for women, for business, art, and/or military training.

As was previously mentioned, two-year community colleges and two-year for-profit colleges share the problem of not graduating the majority of their students. And because they also contend for the same student client, it is often assumed that the two institutions have identical politics, goals, and missions. They do not. They have noticeable differences – for example in – the services they provide, the way they are financed, who/how they serve their clients, how they are accredited, where they are located, and how they address their retention issues. We have noted the origin and purpose of community colleges and discovered many of the dimensions that make them a unique contributor to America’s system of higher education.

#### Historical Overview of For-Profit Institutions and Student Retention

As for-profit institutions (also referred to as career schools) begin to gain more and more popularity in higher education, research indicates that their distinguished differences from traditional institutions will somewhat diminish, or become less noticeable (Eatman, 2008). “The differences will not disappear completely, but there is reason to speculate that both types of institutions will borrow from each other those concepts that allow our society’s higher education system to evolve most productively. If for-profit institutions are to continue to successfully provide a much needed service to a significant segment of our society there needs to be a better understanding of their history and the students they serve” (Eatman, 2008).

History reveals that the beginnings of for-profit education in America date back to the mid-seventeenth century with the establishment of private and evening schools by Dutch settlers. The curriculum (theology, ancient languages, and philosophy) and organization of these schools were religion-based and principally governed by the “mother” churches of England. Male students (women were not allowed to educate themselves) who completed their studies at these colleges assumed the careers of clergy members who later taught others how to become clergymen. Early colonial colleges such as Harvard, William and Mary, and Yale, are examples of these institutions that were established under this formula.

As commerce between the colonies grew, there also grew a strong demand for instruction in disciplines important to employment such as farming, engineering, navigation, and accounting. These non-classical subjects were introduced because the colony colleges did not offer them (Ruch, 2001). And because colonial colleges of the 1800s did not offer these subjects, proprietary for-profit institutions stepped in to fill the void. For the next 150 years for-profit schools survived the Civil War, World War II, and the Vietnam War by providing veterans with the necessary training to compete within the workforce (Honick, 1995).

Today’s for-profit colleges and universities can credit their existence to the proprietary business institutions that sprang up during the nineteenth century. By 1890 these private institutions grew to an operational 250 in number, and with a total student enrollment of 81,000 (Kinsler, 2006). The Industrial Revolution shifted the country from a mainly agriculture society to a manufacturing one, and for-profit colleges during this era became instrumental in providing the necessary skills and training to this newer type of workforce in America. A 1873 U.S. Bureau of Education report stated, “The rapid growth of the schools and the large number of

pupils seeking the special training afforded by them sufficiently attest that they meet a want which is supplied by no other schools in an equal degree” (Kinser, 2006). Financially, the U.S. Department of Education (2013), reports that there are over 3,000 for-profit institutions now receiving Title IV federal aid from 2006 to 2010.

“For-profit degree-granting institutions range from small, local enterprise colleges to an increasing number of large higher education systems that are owned and operated by publicly traded for-profit corporations, many with multiple campuses in several states” (Foster, 2004).

Ruch describes proprietary institutions as:

...unique organizational blends of business enterprise and academic institution. At the classroom level they look and behave like traditional colleges, but as you move up the organizational hierarchy...they look, and feel more like businesses and less like academic institutions. (2001, p. 7).

Some of the best-known names in proprietary education have campuses across the United States and in other countries as well. “The Apollo Group’s University of Phoenix has 58 campuses and 102 ‘learning centers’ in at least 36 U.S. states, Puerto Rico, and Canada. These campuses enroll 116,000 students. Other national ‘brands’ include DeVry, with 21 campuses enrolling 47, 000 students and ITT, with 78 campuses in 28 states” (Strosnider, 1998; Roueche, Roueche & Johnson, 2002).

Generally, the student demographics of for-profits differ from those of not-for-profit institutions. One noticeable difference is that non-traditional students (rather than traditional students) attend for-profit colleges. They are older, and do so because they want an accelerated

learning program that will teach them only the necessary skills that lead to quick job placement. Therefore, accelerated programs are a major reason students choose to attend them (Kelly, 2001). In addition to an overall shorter program curriculum, for-profit colleges generally have shorter terms and frequent entry and exit options, allowing students to blend study with work and family responsibilities (Bailey et al., 2001; Rosenbaum et al., 2006). The shorter, flexible terms allow students who may have to stop out, as is common among nontraditional students, to return to school quicker without a long gap in studies (Rosenbaum et al.). Furthermore, because students are given a plan of study upon admission, often with a commitment to offer the courses necessary for timely graduation (Kinser, 2006b), they can organize their lives around predictable schedules, “rather than trying to fit ever-changing college course schedules into their already overburdened lives” (Rosenbaum et al., p. 227).

All the characteristics of for-profit colleges and the non-traditional students they serve are not completely explored in this review, but the review does realize that still more studies are needed on the topic. Bailey and Badway concur that, “proprietary schools are an increasingly significant feature of the postsecondary educational landscape in the United States, and it would behoove all with an interest in both two- and four-year collegiate education to understand them better, and to put aside many of the myths (both positive and negative) that obscure their true role in the educational system and in their students’ lives.”

That being said, student retention at for-profits continues to be a major problem. Critics note that when compared to non-profit’s graduation rates of 48 percent and 21 percent, for-profit institutions often boast of a 58 percent graduation rate for their students. Most, however, fail to acknowledge that included within this 58 percent rate, are the certificate and associate degree earning students...as well as four-year degree earners (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

Hence, four-year degree earners at for-profits are either not graduating from the institution in great numbers, or they are graduating later than expected.

Perhaps it is because for-profit institutions attract so many diverse students that their challenge to keep them has become more demanding. We have already noted that non-traditional students tend to favor for-profit institutions, yet like all students, they too face a range of challenges that often hamper their success to graduate. Most, for example, are the first in their family to attend college have been out of school for longer periods; are going to school while holding down a necessary job; have time-management issues; and are having to balance family obligations with their school assignments. Hence, the for-profit institution encounters a number of “different” circumstances when trying to keep their students academically engaged, and physically enrolled in their classrooms. Knowingly, many of the existing retention programs and/or models that might instruct for-profits on how best to overcome their retention challenges are primarily prescribed for private, and/or public colleges, whose focus is on identifying students who are “at risk” academically. First year for-profit students do not necessarily “drop out” because of academic issues, but generally drop-out because they face any or all of the aforementioned variables and/or issues that hamper their success to graduate. These variables are found in disproportionately high numbers of students attending for-profit institutions, and may contribute significantly to their decision to drop out of college.

Providing an understanding of what previous research has been able to determine about undergraduate retention, and applying those findings to what little is known about for-profit institutions, is a major objective of this study. To accomplish this endeavor, scholarly sources such as peer-review journals, articles, studies, dissertations, and published books will be used to examine existing literature on student retention, and that of for-profit institutions of higher

learning. From the literature, the review hopes to reexamine the strengths and weaknesses of previous conceptual frameworks, previous methodologies, studies, research, and applicable student variables that have consistently been emphasized to theorize and/or sculpt retention issues in higher education. Finally, an additional framework is suggested that will hopefully add to the literature, and encourage more research on for profit institutions and the students they serve. It should be noted that the literature in this chapter was selected based on its relationship to the focus of the study. And moreover, the retention model offered by Vincent Tinto acts as the driver and/or springboard to the framework of the study. But in keeping with the intent of this study – and to compare the effectiveness of retention efforts at both institutions – an equal overview of the two-year community college is also warranted.

#### Competition at Community and For-Profit Colleges

A review of the histories of both the community, and the for-profit college has noted that they do not operate under the same mission statements, and they have taken different paths to their now-standing greatness (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Clowes, 1995). They do however, continue to play the same vital role of preparing and providing opportunities for a host of underrepresented students to experience a college education. Yet, because both share similar missions of supplying students with the necessary academic tools to enter and compete in the workforce, “they find themselves increasingly competing for the same students and/or clients. As a result, recruiting offices at community colleges are continuously seeing for-profit colleges as ‘legitimate’ competitors... and vice-versa” (Cohen & Brawer, 2003).

“In an interview appearing in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Neal Raisman, president of Onondaga Community College (New York), stated, ‘There are already too many schools

competing for too few students, and the growth of proprietary schools will only make competition for students worse' (Montell, April 2, 1999, ¶ 9). Another article in the same journal, and written by Peter Schmidt, noted how public colleges are trying to gain more:

...leeway to set up programs quickly to serve local economic needs... In today's rapidly changing economy and with increased competition among private and proprietary colleges, 'being responsive and being nimble' is the key to a public college's success. (Schmidt, August 1, 2001, ¶ 10).

Most notably however, is how the two colleges vie for their student and/or clients. The American Association of Community College (AACC), for example, surveyed that community colleges observed a spending of less than 3 percent of their revenues on advertising and recruiting (Moltz, 2010). For-profit colleges, on the other hand, spend an average of 31% on advertising and recruiting. This is primarily so because for-profits have a more direct financial incentive than do community colleges. Whereas community colleges adhere more to their centered mission of serving the community – and are funded primarily by that community – there is a consistent norm and moderate growth in the number of students they attract. Monies at for-profit institutions basically comes from the *number* of students they enroll via the tuition they pay. And because they are not as community oriented, they can offer more on-line classes to attract other demographics of students. Farnsworth (2006) speculates that “Private markets thrive where public markets fail” (p. B18). Others speculate that community college administrators can learn from the administrators of for-profit college by becoming more aware of how they market their product and/or institution.



## Theoretical Frameworks and Student Retention

Theories of retention provide an explanation of why students leave college. Theoretical models of retention are derived from those theories, and often act as drivers that underscore the importance of the initial theory. Yet, although the models themselves are utilized to serve and identify worthy factors assumed to be related to the theory, they do *not* provide an explanation of why the factors act the way they do. An employable explanation as to why certain factors influence the drop-out decision of traditional and non-traditional students at two-year community and for-profit institutions is vital to this study.

Since 1970, the main theoretical vehicle for studying student retention has been via a sociological approach. Hence, a sociological approach will be used in this study of retention at two-year community and for-profit institutions. In the approach, researchers search for shared behavior patterns that distinguish groups of students who stay in college, from groups of students who leave college. After 1980 (Braxton, 2002), psychological and socio-psychological theories began to emerge that looked at the retention problem from a student's perspective.

### Tinto's Interactional Theory

As previously mentioned, of particular interest to this study is the social theory of Vincent Tinto. This theory is indicative of the framework used to study retention at community and for-profit institutions, and is worthy of investigation. Although Tinto's (1975) interactionalist theory of institutional and goal commitment also builds upon Durkheim's (1951) theory of suicide, it goes a step further in its attempts to more accurately pin-point the factors that affect a student's decision to stay or leave a college or university. Durkheim's study utilized four primary types of

suicides (altruistic, anomic, fatalistic, and egotistical); however, Tinto felt that only egotistical suicides were applicable to the study of student retention. He likened that when students are unable to integrate successfully into the college community or society, they commit a form of educational suicide. This form of suicide is a result of the institution and society not being able to properly influence the student's decision to leave the college (Tinto, 1993, p. 104). In other words, "Tinto's interactionist theory is a detailed, longitudinal model that is concerned with the quality of a student's academic and social interactions within a college or university. This is also known as a student's experience" (Tinto, 1975). His theory is of particular interest to the study of college student retention because it implies that institutions must take into account the academic and social values of students if they want students to persist, graduate, and adhere to the established academic and social frameworks of the institution. Tinto (1975) presupposes that "students enter college with diverse individual and family background characteristics and prior educational experience (e.g., gender, race, aptitude, motivation, primary and secondary school experience, cultural and social capital, etc.) that shape their initial commitment to get a college degree and their initial commitment to finish their degree at a particular college or university." He believed that every belief, every value, or every element of the student's history – before enrollment – will influence the student's degree of commitment to the institution, and the degree to which they will actively be involved in the institution's academic and social environments... and graduate. Moreover, a student's original commitment to an institution will evolve over time. Depending on the quality of the institution's scholarly and social interactions, his/her commitment might weaken, strengthen, be updated, or possibly be terminated.

Tinto's academic integration theme of 1975 used the term *structural* academic integration to exemplify that a student's academic success was determined by the degree to which the student

met the demands of the college he/she attended. But he did not stop there...he initiated yet another term, *normative* academic integration, to depict what occurs when students identify with the institution's cultural makeup and social environment (Tinto, 1975). Both forms of integration are necessary if the school's policies of retention are to be validated. When students are more connected with the institution's goal and academic framework their commitment to the institution and intent to graduate is that much more intense. Tinto (1975) does make note that each type of integration can be overshadowed by the other, and thus lead to the student dropping out of college. For example, it is possible that a student could better integrate into the institution's social environment, and integrate less into its academic environment. In this scenario, excessive social integration (or vice versa), can create a time management problem for the student, and contribute to the student's decision to drop out. He/she may devote less time to their studies (academically integrated), and devote more time to extra-curricular activities such as football, cheerleading, or fraternity involvement.

Academic scholars have noted many positives to Tinto's interactionist theory and have found it useful in understanding student retention. According to most, the strengths of his theory lie in his belief that the variables of a student's background are significant indicators of his/her intent to graduate (DesJardins, Ahlburg, & McCall, 1999; Wetzel, O'Toole, & Peterson, 1999; Leppel, 2001; Montmarquette, Mahseredjian, & Houle, 2001; Kerkvliet & Nowell, 2005). Others cite that in addition to the classroom experience, a student's external environment can influence his/her decision to depart (Bean & Eaton, 2000), the type of student he/she is can cause him/her to depart (Bean, 1985; Nora, 1987; Leppel, 2001), and the institution's framework (Pascarella, Duby, & Iverson, 1983; Feldman, 1993; Lau, 2003; Titus, 2004) can directly, or indirectly, influence his/her decision to leave college.

Nora (1987) “observed that a student’s initial commitment to an institution was considerably more important than academic and social integration among Chicano college students”; and Leppel (2001) felt that consideration of the student’s gender, and background characteristics were essential to his/her abilities to successfully integrate into the college environment. As a result of the above criticism, Tinto (1993) expanded his interactionist theory to include the more diverse variables of the student’s external environment, classroom experience, and the type of student and institution he/she attended to determine the student’s level of academic and social integration (or goal and institutional commitment).

Others elaborated upon Tinto’s model differently. Langbein and Snider (1999), for example, studied students attending American University to illustrate how course evaluations, when used as a variable to investigate retention, were accurate measurements of the classroom experience and were relative to student retention. Information(s) compiled from course evaluations determined the quality of instruction, class size, and institutional commitment, factors that could influence the level of a student’s academic and social integration. Montmarquette et al. (2001) “studied the relationship between the average number of students in first-year compulsory courses in a student’s program of study and retention. In addition to indicators of a student’s background characteristics and levels of academic and social integration, it is important to address the influence that a student’s external environment, e.g., peer, parental, and spousal pressures and criticisms and labor market and transfer opportunities, has on his or her tendency to remain enrolled in college” (Bean & Easton, 2000; Bean, 1985, 2005).

Finally, many continue to voice that the outcomes of Tinto’s academic and social integration model would be noticeably different if some of the variables within the model were

applicable to nontraditional students. As previously stated, a major fault in Tinto's model is that it originates upon data solely relatable to traditional age (18 to 24 years of age) students, and makes no reference to adults, or non-residential college students. Bean and Metzner (1985) do make this point. Furthermore, they propose that a student's external environment (factor) is more apparent in nontraditional students who commute, than it is for traditional students living on campus. Consistently, what the student brings to the college environment has considerable influence on his/her ability to successfully integrate into the academic or social environment of the institution. Bean and Metzner's 1985 theory is noteworthy to this study because it addresses factors that are analogous to nontraditional students who normally attend community and for-profit colleges.

#### Bean and Metzner's Model of Nontraditional Student Attrition (1985)

The principal characteristic of Bean and Metzner's (1982, 1985) model of retention is that it infers that a student's attitude, behavior, and intention to complete his/her academic endeavor are extremely relevant to his/her college experience. In their model the two note the use of four variables (background, organizational, environmental, attitudinal and outcome) and postulate that they directly, or indirectly influence a student's intent to drop out of college. Essentially, the perspectives added by Bean and Metzner (1985) to Tinto's theory are exogenous factors (Student Background Factors) – but more importantly – endogenous factors (psychological outcomes) to determine a student's intent to leave college. Endogenous factors, they note, are particularly applicable to the study of non-traditional students because they examine the “utility and practicality of getting a degree, student satisfaction with the educational experience, the student's commitment to the goal of completing, and the stress of attending college.” These perspectives

are worthy to this study, and will be incorporated into Tinto's model to create a retention model deemed applicable to the retention needs of two-year community and for-profit institutions.

Given that, Tinto's models – like Spady (1970), and Pascarella (1980) – “focused on the integration of the traditional college student into the academic and social environment of an institution.” Bean and Metzner's model focused on nontraditional students (normally attending community and/or for-profits colleges) and implied that these students do not experience “integration” the same way. Additionally, Bean notes, that nontraditional students undergo a greater “environmental press” (Bean & Metzner, 1985, p. 489) which “includes less interaction in the college environment with peers or faculty member members and less interaction through extracurricular activities and the use of campus services... and much greater interaction with the noncollegiate, external environment” (Bean & Metzner, 1985, pp. 489-490). Accordingly, for a nontraditional student, the environmental factors have more of an impact on their decision to “drop-out” than do the academic factors associated with their academic pursuit. This is one concept this study embraces. A second concept embraced by this study is the notion that institutions should monitor more a student's “intent” to leave college. The more a college knows about students (endogenous and exogenous factors), the better able they are to meet their needs. This insight, they note “is the biggest predictor of them dropping out” (Bean & Metzner, 1985, p. 527). In “Dropout and Turnover; The synthesis and Test of a Causal model” (1980), Bean criticized the previous models of Spady (1970) and Tinto (1975) because “strict attention was not paid to either the recursiveness (directional causality) of the variables in the theoretical models, or to the discreteness of the variables” (Bean, 1980, p. 156). In essence, he felt that the previous models did little to illustrate the cause/effect relationship (path analysis) between the model's variables, and the variables themselves were not obvious and logically grouped.

Prior to Bean and Metzner's (1985) research on student retention, other works centered on traditional students attending traditional institutions of higher education. At the beginning of "A Conceptual Model of Nontraditional Undergraduate Student Attrition," Bean and Metzner argued that given the rise of the population of nontraditional students in higher education "little research has been devoted exclusively to these nontraditional students beyond a simple tabulation of the dropout rate" (p. 485). After examining some of the factors that have influenced the rise of nontraditional students in higher education, the article provided an "appropriately cumbersome definition of a nontraditional student" (p. 489):

A nontraditional student is older than 24, or does not live in a campus residence (e.g., is a commuter), or is a part-time student, or some combination of these three factors; is not greatly influenced by the social environment of the institution; and is chiefly concerned with the institution's academic offerings (especially courses, certifications, and degrees). (Bean & Metzner, 1985, p. 489).

Because they wanted the linking concepts of their retention theory to be obvious and logically, Bean and Metzner (1985) felt a need to concretely define the term "dropout." A "dropout" they noted as "any student who enrolls at an institution one semester but does not enroll the next semester and has not completed his or her formally declared program of study" (p. 489). As previously noted, Spady (1970, 1971), Tinto (1975), and Pascarella's (1980) studies on retention only utilized specific factors that targeted traditional students attending traditional institutions and their use of the term "dropout" was rather vaguely used. But Bean and Metzner (1985) felt the term has to be clarified in order to postulate a retention model that would add to the literature of a rapidly growing population of nontraditional students attending nontraditional colleges.

The majority of the above theories focused on how students saw themselves in an educational setting. But in the 1990s, researchers shifted their focus on retention from the student and his/her educational setting, and became interested in knowing to what degree economic, and cultural factors affect a student's decision to stay, or leave college. Researchers were intrigued to learn more about how the cultural factors of a certain subgroup of students, namely minority students, influenced their decision to leave college. This interest prompted researchers to start investigating the student retention issue via a more diverse perspective. This notion is perhaps what Bean and Metzner postulated, and the notion many researchers found lacking in Tinto's work. What follows is an examination of five major perspective and/or theories known to guide studies of student retention in higher education: sociological, interactional, psychological, economical, and organizational.

#### Student Retention from a Sociological Perspective

The interaction of various social influences on the retention or withdrawal of students from college is the thrust of the sociological perspective. In essence, this perspective postulates that the social influences of students' lives have considerable impact on their decision to leave college. Peer-groups, family background, economic status, type of college, race/ethnicity, and the support of significant others are crucial factors to consider when understanding retention from the sociological perspective (Braxton & Hirschy, 2005). Much of the literature written from this perspective has been extracted from the works of Durkheim's (1951) theory of suicide. He believed that the varying levels of a person's social integration directly impact his/her decision to commit suicide. True social integration, as perceived by Durkheim, required that an individual be completely assimilated into the rules and values of a society. He stipulates that



“two conditions must be met before an individual can be ‘successful’ within a particular social system: normative congruence, which occurs when an individual’s attitudes, interests, and personality dispositions are compatible with the attitudes and influences of the environment; and friendship support, which is obtained with the establishment of close relationships” (Spady, 1970). To live a balanced life, Durkheim believed that an individual had to be successfully integrated into his/her community or society. If a person does not fit, or contribute meaningfully to the society, and/or community of which he/or she is a part, than “egotistical suicide” or an eroding away of the self occurs. Braxton (2002), extended Durkheim’s suicide theory and likened the term “suicide” to that of students who “drop out” of college. To do this, Braxton emphasized the student’s value and belief system. Noting that all students entered college with a pre-set of morals, ethics, goals, and expectations of an experience, he expanded this concept to include the value and beliefs of the institution as well. Institutions of higher learning distinguish themselves from others by making known the values and beliefs that surround their institution. (e.g., Catholic, academic excellence, superior faculty, personalized education, etc.). If a student’s values and beliefs do not adhere to those of the institution, or when the student feels alone, or without support from other member of the campus community, that student then becomes a prime candidate to drop out (Braxton, 2002).

Braxton was not the only one to expand upon Durkheim’s theory of suicide. Bourdieu (1973, 1977) also postulated his theory using it. His interest in student retention inspired him to elongate the suicide theory also. In doing so he not only incorporated the social influences of a student’s environment, but he also included the social structure of the larger society that surrounds the student. The larger society, he observed, articulates the necessary culture, social relations, or protocol necessary to achieve success and upward mobility. Accordingly, an

individual's cultural capital is vital to the achievement of a higher status in society. Cultural capital, however, does not necessarily mean monetary gains, but also implies that the achievement of intellectual or educational status is also an accumulation of cultural capital. All are considered social reproductions of one's social assets, power, and status to upward mobility within a society (Bourdieu, 1986. 1986:47).

In their attempts to explain the injustices in America's system of education, and the unequal distribution of social status among its citizens (Lareau 1989; Mehan 1992; Persell, Catsambis, and Cookson 1992; McDonough 1994, DiMaggio and Mohr 1985), Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction continues to be elaborated upon by many interested in the development of higher education. However, of those interested, only the primary and secondary levels of education in America have explored Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction. Fewer have applied the theory to higher education (e.g., Lareau 1990; Mehan 1992), and none have applied it to for-profit institutions. Nonetheless, Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction is of interest to this study not only because it has come to define the way we view and understand forms of cultural capital in America, but when used as a framework to better understand the retention problem(s) in higher education, it offers valuable insights as to how certain know factors might directly, or indirectly, contribute to the retention issues currently threading our system of higher education.

The sooner a student becomes familiar with his/her social environment, the sooner he/she starts to accumulate cultural capital and upward mobility within a community or society (Bourdieu 1973). Bourdieu positioned this theory to reinforce his belief that other than an individual's economic resources, "at least two alternative forms of capital should be taken into consideration in the appraisal of an individual's social status: cultural capital, which is defined as

informal interpersonal skills, habits, manners, language, educational credentials, and style (Berger, 2000; Thomas, L., 2002); and social capital, which is used to signify the extent to which people have access to quality social networks, their levels of political and civic engagement, and membership associations” (Thomas, L., 2002).” Berger’s theories of cultural capital and social capital are meaningful to this study because both earmark a particular group of students who hold the belief that because of their lower socioeconomic levels culturally and socially, they could – or should – not expect to experience college the way students of upper classes experience it. Students from lower ranks of the socioeconomic levels should expect to feel limited in their college experience, and moreover, they should feel free to leave college if their first experiences are not satisfactory or successful (Berger, 2000).

Berger (2000) went on to adapt his theory of social and cultural reproduction to the discussion of college student retention. To accomplish this, he employed a number of tested hypotheses that principally supported his notion that the amount of social and cultural capital in a student’s life determined his/her persistence level to eventually graduate college. His first hypotheses presupposed that students with higher levels of cultural capital actually stayed, and graduated from their initial college. Secondly, higher levels of cultural capital are concrete indicators that students would stay at *all* types of educational institutions. And thirdly, “students with high levels of cultural capital are more likely to be retained at universities with high levels of cultural capital, and students with low levels of cultural capital are more likely to be retained at universities with low levels of cultural capital.” (Berger, 2000). Berger thus concluded that the amount of cultural capital a student has, plus the cultural capital the institution has, are both vital to the study of retention and noteworthy indicators of student success and higher graduation rates.

## Student Retention from a Psychological Perspective

Studying retention via a sociological perspective has not been the only method of investigating the question of why students leave college. Looking at the problem from a psychological viewpoint also has its merits. Bean and Eaton (2000) thought this, and chose to use an attitude-behavior theory to emphasize that the personal attributes and/or characteristics of students play an equally important role in their decision to stay, or drop out of college. Self-efficacy, or the positive/negative feeling students have about themselves, also plays a role in their decision to stay, or drop out of college. Students with strong personalities, for example, may have higher self-esteem, and a positive self-concept that enables them to better succeed in an academic or social environment. Those with low self-esteem harbor a personality that views their abilities to succeed as meager, doubtful, risky, and thus they are likely to waver, or give up on their quest to complete a college education. Likewise, students who are guided by their own internal support system of control have faith that they will get through the academic or social obstacles of integration into a college system. Students whose external environment controls them are the opposite; they lack an internal support system, or strong inner will to succeed. Instead, many may rely on external intervention to resolve the conflicts in their lives by concluding that it is fate – and fate alone - that ultimately intercedes and decides the outcome of the conflicts in their lives. As a consequence these students are more prone to leave college prematurely (Bean & Eaton, 2000).

Bean and Easton are not the only ones to view retention within a psychological framework. Dweck (2000) also postulated self-theories about student intelligence. His use of a psychological perspective detailed that the early learning experiences of students had a direct influence on how

they perceive and absorb new information(s). In his research, Dweck embellished that most college students held an *entity* view of their talents and ability. This view enabled them to believe that their level of intelligence (ability) was relatively fixed, and that there was little they themselves could do to increase or alter it. Students holding an entity view often think it impossible that they could, for example, achieve higher levels of success, a higher GPA, or that they could graduate college in a timely manner. In contrast, students with an *incremental* view of their abilities think positively. They believe that their level of intelligence can be expanded to absorb new information and learning experiences, and they believe that they can graduate college in a timely manner (Dweck, 2000).

According to Dweck, most students tend to hold either an entity view, or an incremental view of themselves before and during their college experience. It is possible, Dweck discovered, that students' views of their abilities can be altered by structuring early learning experiences in a new subject by starting with what students are good at. "Those who are led to believe their intelligence is a malleable quality begin to take on challenging learning tasks and begin to take advantage of the skill-improvement opportunities that come their way" (Dweck, p. 26). Dweck's deduction is both encouraging, and meaningful to many non-traditional students, or historically underserved students, who have doubts about their abilities to do college-level work and graduate from college (Kuh et al. 2005). This concept can be useful in helping both faculty and administrators to better understand the consequences of prematurely judging the talents and abilities of their students.

Expectancy theory, self-efficacy theory, and motivational theory suggest that students are predisposed to seek out certain kinds of activities during college (Kuh, 1999; Olsen et al., 1998).

Choosing the right extra-curricular activity such as drama, sports, or singing, for example, can have a direct effect on their performance inside and outside the classroom (Bandura, 1982; Dweck and Leggett, 1988). Rousseau's (1995) psychological contract theory maintains that students have preconceived beliefs and attitudes about how the roles of peers, faculty, and staff members should fit into their lives. Sometimes referred to as a psychological contract, this non-verbal agreement is invoked by both the institution, and the students, and predetermines how one is to respond to the other. These non-verbal agreements are never orally expressed by the student, but the institution usually makes known their expectations via its catalogues and other such materials as codes of conduct. When students sense that the psychological contract is violated, he/she withdraws their trust from the institution, peers, and faculty. It is believed that this withdrawing of trust eventually leads to early student departure. Generally speaking, the expectations that students bring with them to college often shapes their behavior and attitudes and beliefs while in college. Likewise, these same behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs affect their academic performance and/or social adjustment to college life (Howard, 2005; Kuh, 1999).

As mentioned, Tinto's model of Social and Academic Integration, and Bean and Metzner's 1985 model of Nontraditional Student Attrition, are the drivers for this study. Their research conclusions on student integration and the psychological effects of integrations, have been heretofore challenged, revised, and thus far viewed from a sociological, and psychological perspective. But others have more to say about retention. They contend that much of what we already know about it has yet to fully explore how the attitudes and behaviors of students affect their decisions. They note that aside from the many social or psychological concepts found within the topic, the variables within these concepts point yet to other perspectives associated with student retention.

Variables that influence retention rates include student satisfaction, academic aptitude, motivational state, personality attributes, and student-development theories (Braxton & Hirschy, 2005). For example, Astin's (1984) theory of involvement contends that the degree to which a student becomes involved in the academic and social environments of a college depends on the amount of psychological energy a student dedicates to the educational experience.

...five principles essential to Astin's theory are: 1) a student's level of involvement can be classified as general (interacting with the institution or its subsystems) or specific (studying for an exam), 2) a student's level of involvement can be measured on a continuous scale, 3) it is important for institutional researchers to study the variables that impinge upon the nature of a student's level of involvement, 4) a student's level of involvement has an effect on the quality of his or her educational experience and individual development, and 5) policies aimed at enhancing the student experience should be judged based on their ability to increase involvement (Astin, 1984).

More psychological theories that enable researchers, administrators, and policymakers to better understand the factors of student satisfaction, motivation, and engagement are still needed. Bean and Eaton (2000) and Bean (2005) also noted the use of four psychological theories to learn more about a student's decision to stay at or leave college: attitude behavior theory, coping behavioral theory, self-efficacy theory, and attribution theory.

Bandura's (1997) model of self-efficacy is utilized to explore how attitudinal, motivational, and behavioral components of academic and social integration influence a student's decision to graduate college (Bean & Eaton, 2000). A student represents the idea of self-efficacy when he or she is confident that they have the necessary abilities to complete a given task, or in this case,

formally educate themselves (Kahn & Nauta, 2001). There exists a direct correlation between self-efficacy and goal accomplishments in an educational setting that can be observed when a student progresses, for example, from freshmen studies, to sophomore studies and upward (Bandura, 1997). “Finally, in Weiner’s (1986) attribution theory, locus of control refers to an individual’s ability to provide an internal or external causal perspective for past experiences. An internal locus of control recognizes that personal attributes are responsible for a result, such as intelligence, and an external locus of control ascribes outcomes to factors beyond a person’s control, such as luck” (Bean & Eaton, 2000).

Other than viewing retention from a sociological and psychological perspective, Braxton and Hirschy (2005) also included an organizational perspective as a predictor of a student’s intent to drop out. An entailed view of an organizational perspective is presented later, but all three perspectives utilized by Braxton and Hirschy were used to expand (2005) Tinto’s model and add five newer factors and/or variables to his theory of social integration: psychosocial engagement, proactive social adjustment, communal potential, institutional integrity, and institutional commitment to the welfare of the students, were added because they addressed details about the student’s environment.

...in their theory of student departure from commuter colleges and universities, they dropped Tinto’s construct of social integration and added measures of the external environment and the internal campus environment. The internal campus environment is comprised of determinants related to academic communities and the institutional environment, such as learning communities, institutional integrity, and institutional commitment to student welfare (Braxton & Hirschy, 2005).



It was determined that all three perspectives, sociological, psychological, and organizational, were worthy of scholarly exploration if the retention problem(s) at most institutions of higher learning were to be accurately measured.

### Student Retention from a Financial Perspective

Another way of determining factors that influence a student's decision to leave college is to evaluate how much college costs, and the benefits of staying in college, weighed against the student's expectations of his/her immediate future. If, for example, students view that the cost of staying in school and becoming involved in the school's activities (studying abroad, internship programs, team sports, etc.) outweigh the financial investment, then they might stay. If the financial cost however, overshadows all of the aforementioned, then they will forgo the opportunity and drop out (Braxton 2003). Cost, when referred to here, includes tuition, fees, and lost income from lack of work. Benefits are considered to be anticipated future earnings, increased knowledge, newer skills, and the acquirement of a better life (Goldin, Katz, and Kuziemko, 2006). This concept is also understood in the human capital model (Becker, 1964), and stresses that institutions of higher education have an opportunity to initiate greater economic incentives to their students by making better known to them the personal and social benefits of the knowledge they sell, or as mentioned in chapter one, increased earnings, job security, better health, better families, and a more satisfying life.

The economics associated with a student's desire to educate him or herself can be overwhelming. According to Becker (1992), "economics is concerned with how individuals allocate scarce resources, such as income or time, in an attempt to maximize their welfare as they conceive it, regardless of their individual motivations such as whether they are self-interested or

altruistic.” Hence, researchers in higher education could better note the negative influences that the rising college cost has on students (Becker, 1965; Kerkvliet & Nowell, 2005), and their eventual expectations in the workforce, and note how these variables directly, or indirectly, affect their decision to stay or leave college (Ehrenberg & Sherman, 1987; Light, 1996). To support this notion, three economic advances have been found to be helpful in better understanding how the financial obligations of higher education influence a student’s decision to drop out. They are: the institutional economic theory, human-capital theory, and the price-response theory.

“The institutional economic theory is concerned with the linkage between different types of institutions, which are defined as manmade constraints that help to organize political, economic, and social interaction, and the production and transaction costs associated with different types of economic activities” (North, 1991). Because students are apt to view institutions as individual organizations with different political, economic and social foundations, it is important to emphasize that institutions are not organizations, but groups of organizations (e.g., institutions of higher education) with like foundations, measures, and departments that have been “institutionalized,” and shared over time (Laden, Milem, & Crowson, 2000). The same can be said about traditional institutions of higher learning, and non-traditional (for-profit) institutions.

### Organizational Perspectives and Student Retention

After having viewed the retention dilemma from a sociological and psychological perspective, it is now worth viewing it from an organizational one. Carefully constructed frameworks and practices that are deliberately designed to affect the academic performances of an institution’s student body can be referred to as its organizational perspective. The

institution's size, rank, resources, and faculty-to-student ratio, for example, can influence a student's decision to enroll, or drop out of that institution. Bean (1983) cited most the organizational perspective when he put forth his student attrition model. Essentially, his model declared that the past, present, and future beliefs of students shape their attitude about the college experience; this attitude shapes their behavior, and the behavior shapes their intentions. It is their exact intention(s), Bean notes, that frameworks their reasoning to respond a certain way to the conflict and/or decisions currently confronting them. "A student's beliefs are affected by experiences with the institutions, which then evolve into attitudes about the institution, which ultimately determine a student's sense of belonging or 'fit' with the institution" (Bean and Eaton, 2000)." From this exposure, students then become sensitive to the institution's policies and procedures in which they are being educated. Their belief system becomes validated, and they start to measure the policies and procedures of the institution against their own beliefs and purposes. Academic curriculum, campus environment, and the responsiveness of faculty and staff, influence their decision to stay or leave the college. Everyone, including the president, provost, dean, faculty, receptionist, and/or custodians, are considered contributors to the satisfaction, and social adjustment of students on their campuses (Berger and Braxton, 1998. They note that "both the positive, and/or negative perceptions students gather from a college environment are end results of the colleges' uniqueness; status, size, mission, (i.e., Carnegie classification), and location (urban, suburban, rural)."

The inner makings of an institution's organization and behavioral structures provide useful insights as to how the institution contributes to the decision of a student to leave its premises. (Berger and Braxton, 1998).

...Tinto (1986) points to such structural properties of organizations as bureaucratic structure, institutional size, faculty-student ratios, and institutional resources and goals as organizational characteristics that might affect college student departure decisions. Other such characteristics include admissions selectivity and control. Empirical work using such structural characteristics of organizations and their effects on social integration and college student departure are necessary for the revision of theories using the organizational perspective on retention.

College personnel contributing most to a student's social integration into a college setting have already been mentioned. Collectively, they represent the presidential and administrative styles of the college and are responsible for creating a campus atmosphere that allows students a sense of security and success (Berger and Braxton, 1998). Astin and Scherrei (1980) note however, that the presidential and administrative styles of a college are crucial to the success of its retention efforts. The "style" of the institution gives the student his/her first impression of the institution; it also gives them their first glimpse of how they might fit in, succeed, or fail at the institution. Presidential and administrative styles of a college can influence a student's decision to drop out (Astin and Scherrei, 1980). However, every college or university does not have the same style. "The four models of organizational functioning that represent ideal types of colleges and universities – bureaucratic, collegial, political, and anarchical – described by Birnbaum (1988) – may also be hypothesized to foster or impede social integration and student departure decisions." Furthermore, research supports the idea that the outcomes of these models can differ according to the types of students subjected to them (Berger, 2000). Traditional college students, for example, may perform better under one organizational model than non-traditional students. Additionally, how much allowance is given the student in each model of organization is yet

another matter to consider. If students feel that the model encourages them to communicate with the administration, or they feel a sense of fairness in its rules and regulations, they will feel socially integrated into the college and stay. If they do not feel this way about the organization's model, they may feel the need to leave (Braxton and Brier, 1989; Berger and Braxton, 1998).

### Model of Student Retention

As mentioned, the retention model used to frame this study is that of Vincent Tinto, Bean, and B. Metzner. Tinto's interactional model, and Bean and Metzner's nontraditional student retention models have had the greatest influence on retention studies, and have been the inspiration for nearly all research on the topic. And although many note that Tinto's model addresses only the retention issues at traditional colleges and universities, his model still has merit for studies in retention at for-profit and community institutions. For example, Tinto's model and/or theory postulate that students enter college with three main commonalities: family attributes, individual attributes, and precollege schooling. The same can be said about students entering for-profit and community colleges, but because for-profit students often come from low socio-economic backgrounds, the degree of differences found within the family attributes that Tinto speaks of, can have a greater impact on a student's decision to leave college. There are still other entities in his model that are not exactly applicable to non-traditional students attending for-profits. For those entities, the Bean and Metzner model is referred to. However, it is because of these applicable, and non-applicable entities that both models of student retention were chosen to frame this study. Their theories/models outline the problem of retention at community and for-profit institutions, and do provide a theoretical framework that can support background information(s) and influencing factors that affect a student's decision to leave these

colleges. This background information and these factors can be used to framework the study of retention for any group of students...including those who attend for-profits and community institutions. These influencing factors will now be discussed.

### Factors that Affect College Student Retention

The retention issues at most public and/or private institutions of higher learning are addressed by researchers via the following perspectives: sociological, psychological, interactional, economic, or organizational perspectives. Better known as theoretical frameworks, scholars use these perspectives to explain the process of a student's social integration into an institution, commitment to the institution, and why they leave the institution (Braxton, 2002). From these empirical studies, or frameworks, a number of social scientists have identified certain variables that are known to be direct links to a student's decision to drop out of college. For this study, they include the student's background, pre-college experience, age, gender, ethnicity, level of parents education, and GPA. They include the student's environmental factors, personal finances, and their outside engagement. A student's parental income, type of financial aid received, and the number of hours he/she works all come under the heading of financial factors. Under the heading of psychological factors the variables of utility, student satisfaction, and goal commitment are located. And finally, the academic factors considered for this study are those of advisement, academic integration, and social integration. Although all variables found within the literature are not applicable to the research questions poised in this study, they were found to be consistent within the literature, and can be somewhat applicable to non-traditional and traditional students attending four-year institutions of higher learning. The factors used to predict two-year community and for-profit institutions will be examined separately in order to

understand whether there may be any differences between students at these two types of institutions.

### Defining the Characteristics and/or Factors

#### *Gender*

More women enroll and complete college, but men and women experience college differently (Astin 1975, Gosman et al. 1983, Magolda 1990). The gender of college students can determine to some degree how they integrate, persist, or graduate with little or no difficulties. “Females generally, and certainly those from specific ethnic groups, are more likely than males are to face external pressures with constraints to their educational participation” (Chacon, Cohen, and Stover 1983). It is not the academic challenges that cause most females to leave college, but rather the external forces that hinder their complete absorption into the academic environment (Alexander and Eckland 1974, Pascarella and Terenzini 1983). “Tinto (1993) suggests that the implication one draws from such findings is that women’s departure, like that of minorities generally, differs from that of men’s in a number of ways which extend beyond the boundaries of the college.”

#### *Age*

Age is not normally a factor that is included in the research on retention, but some researchers have included this variable because they found that it was indeed linked to early student departure. Older students, for example, interact less with members of the college because they have far more external demands and pressures placed upon them (Boshier 1973, Cross 1981, Garrison 1985). They are more likely to be married, have children, commute to campus,

or have a full/part-time job. Many attend college in addition to doing other things. Because their commitment to the college is influenced by so many outside demands, their commitment and goal of college completion is weak. This weakness becomes instrumental in their ability to focus, and eventually complete their degree programs (Tinto, 1993).

### *Race/Ethnicity*

Because of the social differences students bring to the college environment, their race and ethnicity become important variables in retention studies. “Studies of retention among students of different race and social class have focused almost entirely on black students (e.g., Tracey and Sedlacek 1987, Nettles 1988) and Hispanic students” (e.g., Padilla and Pavel 1986, Nora 1987, 1990, Attinasi 1989).” Overall, studies of this nature give substance to the notion that black, Hispanic, and white students, are products of their environment, culture, and race. That being said, they enter the college environment with different expectations, social skills, and levels of academic preparedness.

### *Level of Parent’s Education*

Parents with higher levels of education and income can directly and indirectly affect students’ decision to drop out of college (Astin, 1993; Astin & Oseguera, 2003; Mow & Nettles, 1990; Oseguera, 2004). Knowledge is the key, and students whose parents did not go to college have fewer resources or educational tools than students whose parents did go to college. (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1998). “Recently, Horn & Nunez (2000) reported that parents who have not attended college were less likely to discuss college with their children.” Additionally, many children from lower socio-economic backgrounds lack resources, networks, and access to



information that might familiarize them with the social and educational benefits of college (Gandara, 2001). In general, a parent's level of education has been shown to influence a child's chance to attend college, and ultimately, his/her graduating from college.

### *Pre-College Experience and High School GPA*

A student's pre-existing attributes and characteristics (background) are found to be significant indicators of his/her chances of graduating colleg. (Astin, 1993; 2001; Tinto, 1993; Terenzini, Lorang, & Pascarella, 1991). "Variables such as high school grades, gender, ethnicity, parental control, education level, standardized test scores, and even age were consistently found to be the strongest predictors of degree attainment for undergraduates" (Astin & Oseguera, 2003; Titus, 2003).

Many college officials believe that high schools are principally responsible for a student's academic lack of preparation for college (Orfield, Losen, Wald, & Swanson, 2004). Breland et al. (2002) determined that among others, a high school student's GPA, SAT, ACT, and level of coursework were essential predictors of how well they would perform during their first year of college. "Given that seventy-five percent of students usually drop out of college during their first two years, and 57 percent of students leave their first college without graduating (Tinto, 1993)," it is not alarming that the attributes and characteristics students bring with them to college greatly determine their first-year grades. First-year grades of freshmen students are significantly linked with retention (Gifford, Briceno-Perriott, & Mianzo, 2006; Reason, 2003).

### *Traditional and/or Non-Traditional Enrollment Patterns*

When, and where students decide to enroll in college affect retention rates. It matters, for example, if the student starts immediately after high school, or several years after high school. Be the college's location a rural one, or an urban one, it matters where they attend college. And, it matters if students quit college, and then return to college (stop out). The literature indicates that any time students delay their educational pursuit, for whatever reason, the likelihood that they will persist and complete their degree is considerably lessened (Adelman, 2006). Delayed entries are considered to be one of the seven major risk factors to an institution's retention rates (Berkner, Cuccaro-Alamini, and McCormick 1996; Carroll 1989; Horn and Premo 1995; McCormick and Horn, 1996).

When students interrupt enrollment patterns they reduce their chance of attaining a college degree, and hurt the institution's retention rates. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005, p. 381) note that:

...“Stopping-out” not only increases time-to-degree, but also reduces the likelihood of degree completion, whether an associate or baccalaureate degree (Carroll, 1989; Ganderton & Santos, 1995). Even transferring from one four-year institution to another reduces the odds of degree completion. Among students beginning at a four-year college or university, those who do not transfer are significantly more likely to earn their bachelor's degrees in five years than are “horizontal” transfers who move to another four-year school (McCormick, 1997b).”

### *Socio-Economic Status*

Astin (1972) reasons that a family's financial difficulty can have direct links and causes to their children's decision to stay, or leave college. Cabrera and his associates (1990), give extra support to this concept and note that when a family's socioeconomic status is used as a variables to study retention, it definitely relates to a student's early departure. And others studying the problem feel it is necessary to include a student's family income, and the level of parental education to fully comprehend how one's socio-economic status affects his/her decision to drop-out of college.

Still, not all researchers agree that there is a relation between a student's socio-economic status and his ultimate decision to leave college. Pascarella, Smart, and Ethington (1986) believe that it is not, and Dowd (2004) in a national study that examined second-year students' persistence against that of their family income, determined that family income was not a factor in the students' decision to re-enroll in college. To that end, researchers of retention remain divided as to whether or not a student's socio-economic status affects his/her decision to leave college prematurely.

### *Academic Major*

“Students who select a major tailored to a specific profession, such as business, health, engineering, or education, have persistence rates [i.e. achieve a bachelor's degree] higher than those students with other majors,” according to research by Maura J. Dunn. She also notes that if academic majors are selected by students because of their potential earnings, they not only run the risk of finding the classes boring, but may discover that the major does not pair with their

natural skills or talent. This will perhaps discourage the student, or take him/her longer to complete the degree. Dunn also agrees with the findings of others when she highlights that ideally, students should select a major before they enroll in college. To not have selected one puts the student at a greater risk of dropping out (Career Vision, 2010).

In accordance with the above, Bean and Metzner's (1985) frameworks explore the direct or indirect influences of student environmental variables such as finances, hours of employment, outside encouragement, family responsibilities and the opportunity to transfer to other institutions, as likely variables to influence their decision to leave college. Bean went on to suggest that a student dropping out of college is analogous to employee turnover in the workplace. In other words, people leave jobs in much the same way students leave college. Utilizing the work of Price (1977), he incorporated four variables: "(1) drop out (dependent variable), (2) satisfaction and institutional commitment (intervening variables), (3) organizational determinants, and (4) background variables." Organizational factors like routinization, communication, commitment to goals, and institutional quality had positive effects on an employee's decision to leave the job, or a student's decision to leave the college.

The above literature is mostly reflective of the frameworks and models utilized to study retention at traditional institutions. It is necessary to examine these frameworks, and understand how institutions of higher learning have used them to address their retention problem. However, with the large presence of nontraditional students on campuses, it is becoming increasingly important for educators to learn about practices that also promote their success. This section shifts to address the research, and research deficiencies, on community and for-profit institution, and their students. However, if a more accurate understanding of the retention problem at these

institutions is to be gathered, many of the student variables used to construct the aforementioned frameworks and models need to be re addressed and/or modified. This understanding is now followed by an examination of those student factors and/or variables said to be linked to non-traditional students attending for-profits. The section also offers a closer look at the more recent studies addressing retention at both institutions, provides a summary of the studies, and a conceptual retention model based on the literature review and for this study.

### *Academic Integration*

The variable of academic integration comes under the heading of a student's college experience. This variable plays a deciding role in a student's decision to stay, or leave college before his/her second year of college. Academic integration is important to investigate as a cause of student departure because it is used to measure a student's satisfaction with the quality of instruction, faculty, course curriculum, and the quality of advisement offered by the institution.

### *Social Integration*

Social integration, on the other hand, is the tool most used to measure a student's involvement with campus life. This meaningful variable is indicative of the amount of time a student interacts with other students via sports, and other college extra-curriculum activities. It also measures the amount of time spent with faculty, advisement, and college personnel. Bean and Metzner (1985) defined this variable as "the extent and quality of students' interaction with the social system of the college environment" (p. 507).

### *Financial Factors*

How a student pays for his/her college experience is well supported by the literature on student retention. The amounts rewarded to students via the three types of financial aid (grants, loans, and work study) are known influence a student's attendance, study habits, and academic major. And, because for-profits are generally more expensive than public institutions of higher learning, this variable is mandatory when trying to discover reasons why students depart from college. "Grant aid included federal, state, and institutional funding; scholarships included federal, state, institutional, and private funding; loans included federal and private funding; and work study included federal, state, and institutional funding" (Cianoutsos, 2011).

### *Utility, Satisfaction, Goal Commitment*

Utility, satisfaction, and goal commitment are examined in this study because students enrolling in two-year community and for-profit colleges do not necessarily anticipate the same outcome(s) from their college experience. And although all – utility, satisfaction, goal commitment – have indirect impacts on retention at two-year institutions of higher learning, the degree of their influence is not yet known. Research notes that utility refers to how students view usefulness of their education, or how it might advance their career(s) or personal growth. Bean and Metzner claim that utility had a "negative association with a nontraditional student's attrition (Lenning & Hanson, 1977)."

### *Satisfaction*

The variable of satisfaction indicates the level to which a student feels comfortable with his/her role of a college student. It signifies whether students are bored with their college experience, or whether they are enjoying their college courses and college experience.

### *Goal Commitment*

Goal commitment as a variable measures the degree of personal importance a student attributes to his/her educational process and involvement in it. “In Pascarella and Chapman (1983), goal commitment in community college students had a large, positive impact on student retention.” “Students who attend two-year colleges tend to have lower aspirations and bachelor degree completion rates than students who attend four-year institutions” (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Dougerty, 1987).

## Methodology

Noticeably, the study of student retention has been on the agenda of America’s educational institutions since the formation of colonial colleges. Scholars have, and continue to put forth their best efforts to pattern theoretical frameworks identifying factors that directly, or indirectly, attribute to student departure. Historically, research methods used to identify such factors attributing to student departure were via direct and/or indirect (empirical) investigation. However, the system of higher education is an evolutionary one. The diversity of their student body plus current social conditions, require newer ways of researching educational institutions and the students they serve. In the next section, this study aims to examine the methodological issues associated with student departure via previous studies, data, and statistical methods.

## Data

Data foremost used to study student persistence and departure at two-year community and for-profit colleges has chiefly come from the studying of single institutions instead of like institutions (Berger & Milem, 1999; Cabrera, Nora, & Castaneda, 1992; Cabrera, Nora, & Castaneda, 1993; DesJardins, Ahlburg & McCall, 1999; Tinto, 1997). And although institutional studies are increasing on two-year colleges, they are still rather limited in scope because each institution will examine factors that are unique to their student body and culture. For example, Ritchie (1996) was the second doctoral dissertation to study retention at two-year for-profit institutions. He created his own retention model “to determine how effective selected background characteristics, commitment, integration, and satisfaction factors are in predicting (p. 10-11) if students at ITT Technical Institute in Colorado, persisted in their college studies, or if they dropped out.” Data collected for the study was primarily institutional in reference. However, because Ritchie’s research relied on institutional data that was applicable to only a small group of students, and not given to all students, it became difficult to assume that his findings would apply to all, or most of nontraditional students attending for-profit institutions. Other researchers face similar problems when studying retention at a specific campus...their findings normally do not apply to all like campuses outside of their demographic makeup. So that a retention study’s finds may be applicable to a broader range of students and colleges, more and more scholars have embarked upon the use of data at the national level to conclude their research (Cabrera, Stampen, & Hansen, 1990; Dowd, 2004; Ishitani & DesJardins, 2003; Leppel, 2002).



## Statistical Methods

Earlier statistical methods employed by researchers studying student retention appear somewhat primitive when compared to how far they have advanced over the years. The need for better methods and/or frameworks to detail why students stay or leave college was in part due to the urgent desire of college administrators to better address the challenges they face of retaining a more diverse, traditional, and non-traditional student body. By observing patterns in students' demographic characteristics, earlier researchers utilized descriptive research as their primary investigative tool to support their thesis on student retention. As time progressed, linear regression became the favored method of achieving the same goal (e.g., Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980). Linear regression organizes data via a straight line that dissects statistical points on a graph. This statistical method, however, often fails to properly diagnose the dual possibilities of a given study's outcome variable, or in this instance...student persistence (Cabrera et al., 1990; St. John, Cabrera, Nora, & Asker, 2000).

Subsequent to descriptive research and linear regression...logistic regression was the next statistical method most employed by previous researchers to study student persistence. Linear regression is advantageous to a study when the study's dichotomous and/or dependent variable (i.e., student persistence) has independent variables that are continuous. "As Cabrera et al. (1990) suggested, logistic regression analysis not only captures the probabilistic distribution embedded in dichotomized distributions, but also avoids violating the assumptions of homoscedasticity and functional specification" (Becker & Nelder, 1978; Weiler, 1987).

But one of the most recent statistical methods used to study college student persistence is the event history method. This statistical method allows researchers to add the element of a "time line" to any statistical study that has a specific preexisting historical ending point. The analytical

study of student departure, for example, necessitates the event history method because a students' decision to stay or leave college is cause and effect; it happens over a given time (varying) period. Normally, students do not enroll and suddenly decide to drop out on the second day. During the time they devote to their college experience they may be influenced by one and/or any of the factors noted in this study's model. Hence, their decision to drop out is a longitudinal one. Chiefly, the event history method is most suited for analyzing data that includes factors which are cross-sectional. Factors like financial aid or tuition for example, are time-varying factor, not consistent, and require a more longitudinal research method. The event history method effectively measures a study's independent variable at different points and times.

### Summary and Critique of the Literature

This chapter has reviewed the theoretical frameworks and methodologies applied within the literature surrounding retention issues at traditional and for-profit institutions. By noting the major factors and/or variables used to analyze and collect data for the studies found within the literature, a more accurate examination of the literature's *strengths, weaknesses, and perspectives is now warranted.*

### Theoretical Framework

Be it via a psychological, sociological, organizational, economical, or economical departure theory...the studies of student retention at colleges and universities across the U.S. have not been consistent enough in their findings to adequately framework a concrete method of keeping students enrolled on college campuses. And although each departure theory does provide more understandings into the retention issue...they still do not fully answer the question

of why large numbers of students, from all walks of life, fail to graduate from the college they initially enrolled in.

For example, psychological theories tend to focus on the student's "mindset," personality, or character attributes (self-concepts, confidence, and will power), and posit these attributes to be mostly responsible for influencing their decision to stay or leave a college. Yet critics note that while strong personality traits (self-efficacy) can cause a student to persevere through college when confronted with academic or social challenges, the psychological theory does not account for all students in all academic or social situations. Tinto (1992) notes that "a major fault with psychological perspectives is that they do not fully elaborate upon why personality and character attributes appear to influence student departure in some situations but not in others." His observation can be likened to other researchers in this study who note the difference of for-profit institutions and the different personalities, situations, and characteristics they encounter among their students. The same may be said for students attending community institutions of higher learning.

In retrospect, a student's race, ethnicity, family, economic status, and peer groups are most often the variables used to frame sociological theories. This theory adheres to the belief that it is the external forces of a student's background that most influence his/her decision to drop out of college. The social theory has fallacies because it fails to make note of the individual's internal strengths and/or self-endowed attributes to be meaningful contributors to their drop-out decision. Moreover, sociological theories do little to acknowledge the organizational make-up of the institution, and their impact on the students' decision to stay, or leave college.

The organizational perspective does embody certain factors, that when measured correctly, lend themselves greatly to our understanding of college retention. However, “a major weakness in the organizational perspective is that it inadequately explains why different patterns of student departure arise among different types of students with institutions (Tinto, 1992).” Additionally, the organizational perspective does not examine how the student’s interactions with other students, faculty members, or institutional administrators might influence a student’s decision to drop out. And, because the perspective fails to include data and/or factors that contribute to non-traditional students and their decision to leave for-profit and community institutions, conclusions surrounding the organizational perspective may not be totally applicable to all institution types.

Perhaps of all the theories, the economic theory on student retention has evolved the most. Normally used to explain how the type of financial aid a college student receives affects his/her decision to stay or leave, this perspective of viewing retention has recently undergone some dramatic changes. Fueled mainly by government and state decisions to shift the burden of financing public higher education from the taxpayer to the student, the process of privatization (Heller, 2006,; Priest & St. John, 2006), has changed the dynamics of the ways students view the economics of financing their education. For example, grants and scholarships were once thought to be the best ways to pay for a college education, but on the federal level, student loans are fast becoming the norm, and replacing educational grants (Hearn & Holdsworth, 2004) as the primary means of funding. More and more students, from all economic backgrounds, are now challenged to discover newer ways to pay for their college experience. Both traditional and non-traditional student may now have to consider full or part-time employment to help finance their goal. The decision to do so, may thus introduce a number of newer variables into their intent to graduate that previously did not exist.

## Research

Most researchers who have completed studies on this topic have, for the most part, focused solely on the organizational, psychological, sociological, and economical frameworks to support their findings on traditional institutions of higher education. The literature notes that each of the above frameworks have their limitations, and do not take into account the factors' influence on a students' final decision to leave college. And, relatively few have applied those factors to the unique situations associated with traditional and non-traditional students attending two-year institutions. For this reason, it is helpful to summarize some major findings of this literature review and sum up what we know – and what we do not know – about student retention in two-year institutions. What we do know from the literature is that the factors found in the study's framework of gender, ethnicity, parental education, type of financial aid, high school GPA, age, and emotional support are meaningful predictors of a student's intent to persist to his/her second year of study. We also know from the literature that a student's goal, commitment, satisfaction with the academic environment, social and academic integration into the college are also meaningful predictors of his/her intent to persist into their second year. What we do not know from the literature, however, is to what degree these same factors influence the decisions of traditional and non-traditional students attending two-year community, and for-profit colleges.

For-profits and community colleges comprise a huge portion of students enrolled in higher education. That being the case, the previous contributions to the literature and studies on student retention are deemed immeasurable. Without the foundation laid by these studies, there would be no possibility of “offshoot” studies such as this one. As is the case for all scientific endeavors, “knowing what we know and what we don't know” is the starting point for this

research endeavor (Eatman, 2008). The same type of behavioral questions asked by higher education research pioneers such as Tinto, Bean, and Metzner, are incorporated in this research project to better determine the key factors most involved in predicting the dropout patterns of students attending community and proprietary institutions. In determining the principal factors that best predict the retention patterns of students at both institutions, the following research question were formulated:

1. What are the background psychological, financial, social, and academic characteristics of students who attend two-year community colleges?
2. What are the background, psychological, financial, social, and academic characteristics of students who attend two-year for-profit colleges?
3. How are these various characteristics related to the retention of these students by the end of their first-year of college in two-year community or for-profit colleges, respectively?
4. Are there any differences in the relationships across the two types of institutions? If so, how?

### Proposed Framework

While there is much work to be done, the amount of literature concerning college retention is plentiful, and illustrates the deep conviction researchers have to solve the dilemma of student departures in higher education. But the literature also indicates that many of the theoretical approaches (e.g. sociological, economical, organizational, psychological and integrative) researchers used to address the dilemma are somewhat faulty, or deficient. Many are deficient because they chiefly concentrated on individual or single sets of variables that characterized the circumstances of traditional students at public institutions of higher learning. The research revealed that the reasons nontraditional students enter college, and the expectation they have

from the institution differ, and greatly influences their decision to persist. That said, newer variables/factors need to be incorporated into current study models so that they might provide a better understanding of the departure rationale at other types of institutions like for-profits, or community colleges. Tierney (1992), for example, suggested that different theoretical models, rather than those that are based upon one or two theories alone, should be combined and utilized. For example,

...In the late 1980s a number of studies were conducted to test the propositions embedded in both the integration (Tinto, 1975) and attrition models (Bean & Metzner, (1985). After reviewing this early research, Grayson and Grayson (2003) concluded that less than 50% of the variance in attrition was explained by either model. For example, one study at a large urban, mostly commuter institution demonstrated that only 44 percent of the variance could be explained by the Bean and Metzner attrition model and, even less, 38 percent by Tinto's integration model (Cabrera et al., 1992b). Based on results from this study, Cabrera et al. recommended research that combined predictor variables from both models to create an integrated model of student persistence.

Hence, portions of the Tinto and Bean models are two such models that are being combined to better address the research questions of this study. Isolating particular characteristics of students attending a community, or for-profit college becomes vital to any retention framework that even slightly hints at their decision to drop out. Models that incorporate factors kindred to these institutions and their students are most warranted.

This study proposes to include the following variables and/or factors for understanding student retention in two-year community and for-profit institutions: gender, race/ethnicity,

socio-economic status, parents' education, parental income, age of student, high school GPA, degree expectations, type of financial aid received, academic and social integration, and, educational/commitment goals, academic advisement, and institution satisfaction. A student's decision to leave college can be affected by a combination of one, two, or all of the above factors.

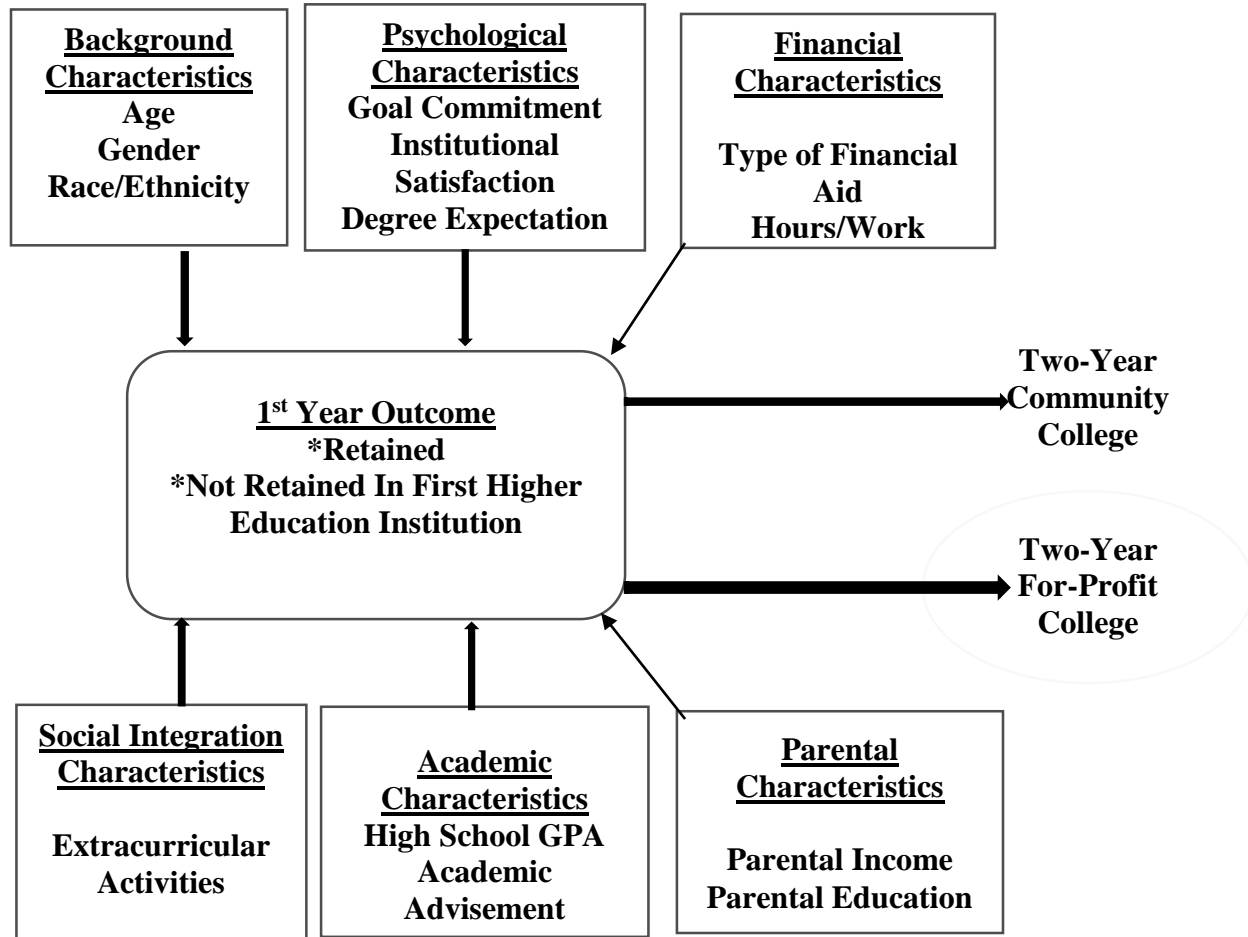
As mentioned earlier, recent research into student attrition rates have identified that the majority of students in higher education are now non-traditional. Non-traditional students are older, work full or part-time, may have children, commute, and prefer an education that will “cut to the chase” and quickly prepare them for a career or enhance their current job. The proposed model for this study synthesizes and extends the Tinto (1975) model to include Bean and Metzner's (1985) nontraditional student model mentioned earlier. It incorporates more of the psychological outcomes of a college experience, and adds greater insight into the student's background, pre-college experience, race/ethnicity, education of parents, gender, socio-economic status, age, and college expectations.

Inspired by the aforementioned literature and the above research questions, below is the study's proposed model. It postulates that four sets of multifaceted factors found in a traditional, and non-traditional first-year student's background: environment, financial situation, academic standing, and psychological being are major determinants in his/her decision to stay or drop out of college. The chosen factors and/or variables are known derivatives of some variables found in the Tinto, Bean, and Metzner model of student retention.

Figure 1: Proposed Research Model of characteristics affecting first-year student retention at two-year colleges.



Research Model:




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### Limitations of the Literature

When addressing the differences within institution types, Fulcomer (2003) highlights that the persistence rates are different for private and public institutions. For example, “based on ACT data bachelor degree completion rates have averaged 39.6 percent over the past 24 years at public institutions, and 56.7 percent for private colleges” (ACT, 2006). The limited studies on small, private colleges do seem to affirm embraced retention models; however, there is not an explanation for the discrepancy in retention rates between cohorts at private and public

institutions. Further, Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) call for single-institution data on student retention as does Kuh (2007), who calls for individual institution examination.

Berger and Braxton (1998) further the discussion of limitations in the literature on retention by confirming that the aforementioned theories and/or models are primarily based on four-year public institutions, yet the difference in retention rates among institution type (namely, private and public) is so significant that the theories should be examined within the context of the private, liberal arts institution as a distinct case. This suggests that there is a knowledge gap in the research literature.

A key difficulty in the retention literature is the lack of specificity in language and definitions. This is the crux of the debate in the retention literature. Moreover, a significant amount of disagreement centers upon the Student Integration Model. Since the model has been critiqued as theoretically-based, rather than empirically-driven (Braxton, 2000; Braxton et al., 1997; Cabrera et al., 1992), scholars have investigated the gaps in the model. Thus, a good portion of the literature has been dedicated to critiquing or expanding upon the Student Integration Model, giving particular attention to factors associated with academic and social integration.

A feature common to the Tinto and Bean models is that persistence studies should be longitudinal (Napoli & Wortman, 1996). Their models assume a long-term association between the student and the institution (generally for the duration of the first or freshman year as a minimum), where changes in student characteristics that occur during student interaction with the institutional environment influence the decision whether or not to persist. “It is suggested that research designs which precisely follow the established models in this regard may in fact

impose limitations regarding research applications investigating the earlier critical points occurring in attrition” (Wylie, 2004).

In Chapter 3, each cluster of factors identified in the literature will be examined via the proposed dissertation research. The purpose of the study is designed to understand how various factors predict the persistence behavior among undergraduate students during their first year of attending a community, or for-profit post-secondary institution. The research design, data collection procedures, instruments, and treatment of data will be discussed in Chapter 3.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHOD AND PROCEDURES

Chapter 3 describes the method and research design employed for this retention study of students attending two-year community and for-profit-post secondary institutions. It underscores the study's attempt to better understand how a given set of circumstances (factors) could directly, or indirectly, influence the decision of first-year students to persist into their sophomore year of college. Via the utilization of a secondary analysis of quantitative data collected from the Beginning Postsecondary Survey (BPS) by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the goal of this chapter is to investigate the research questions previously outlined in chapter 2. As noted in Figure 1, the research questions formulated to guide this study and its conceptual model are:

#### Research Questions

1. What are the background psychological, financial, social, academic, and parental characteristics of students who attend two-year community colleges?
2. What are the background, psychological, financial, social, academic, and parental characteristics of students who attend two-year for-profit colleges?
3. How are these various characteristics related to the retention of these students by the end of their first-year of college in two-year community or for-profit colleges, respectively?
4. Are there any differences in the relationships across the two types of institutions? If so, how?

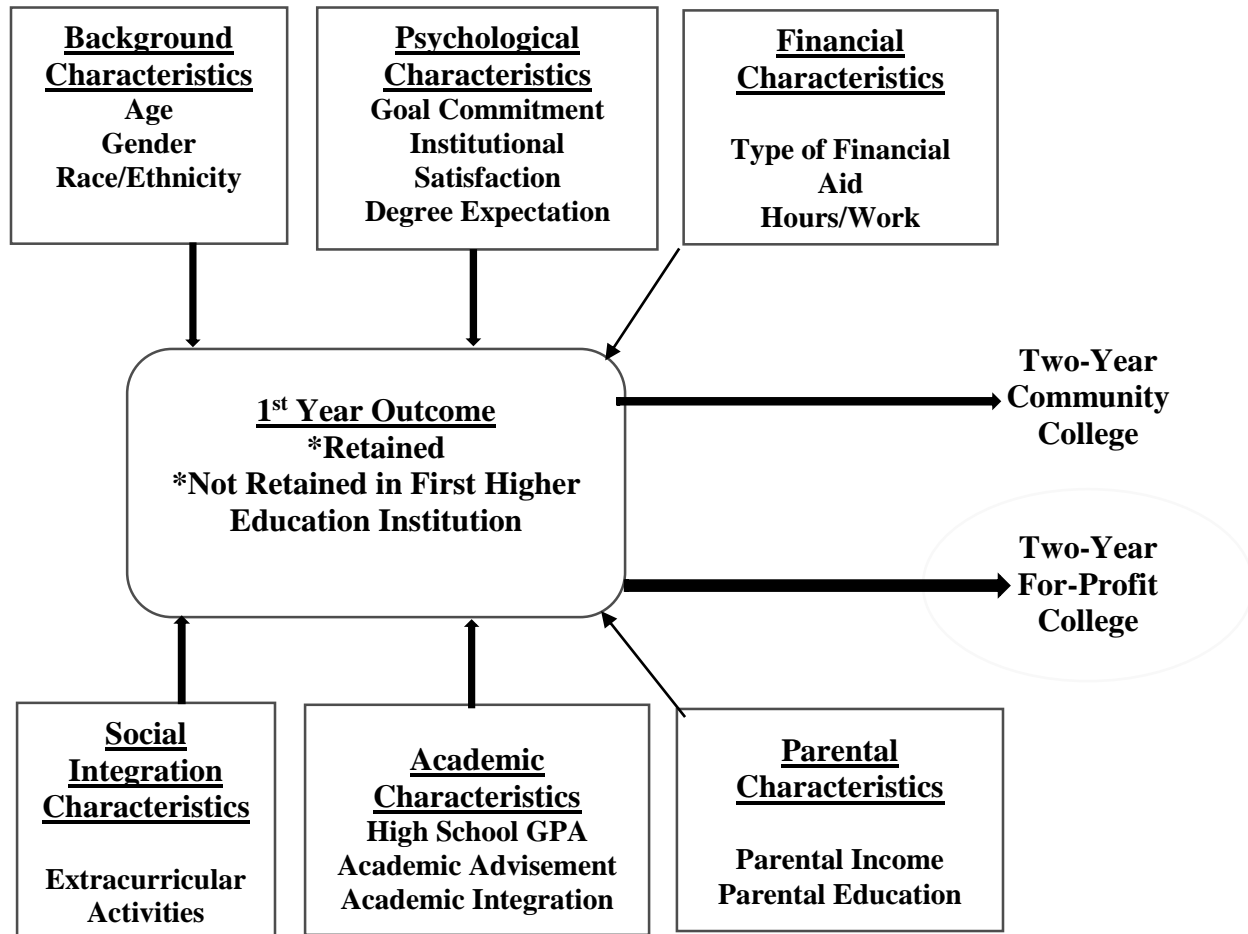
The purpose of this study is to understand student retention in two-year institutions by testing the study's conceptual model to note if any – or none – of its characteristics influence a student's decision to leave college. The model is integrated. It embodies portions of frameworks extracted from Tinto's Traditional Student Model, and the Bean and Metzner's

Nontraditional Student Model. Why these two models have been somewhat combined for this study is significant. The author feels that a melding of the two frameworks is necessary so that the study's outcome will not be biased. For example, if one were to accurately interpret those factors and/or characteristics known to affect student retention at "traditional" two-year community colleges, those findings would then not be accurate if one tried to apply the results to student retention at "non-traditional" two-year for-profit colleges. Students attending traditional colleges are not "all traditional" as Tinto postulates. And although some factors and/or variables used in his model might be applicable to almost any student wanting to enroll and earn a college degree, said factors may do little to address the needs and concerns of "nontraditional" students also wanting to earn a college degree, at traditional institutions. Bean and Metzner fill this void somewhat with their nontraditional Student Model. For this reason, factors from both models are being used to test the conceptual model presented in this study. That being said, the aforementioned model and/or framework prescribed for this study also illustrates the relationships of those factors, and is purposed to examine how and which of them most contribute to students' intention to persist into their second year of study. Moreover, the model provides a foundation for the study and is being utilized as "a basic set of beliefs that guide the study's action" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 99). The model adds additional meaning to the study's research questions; allows the researcher to take a closer look at the relationship(s) between the factors and/or variables presented; and serves as "a means by which to articulate patterns of hypothesized relationships among those factors and/or variables" (Maruyama, 1998, p. 6).

Chapter 3 will also identify the participants of the study; data collection procedures; specification of factors; data analysis; and limitations of this study to measure the graduation

dates and rates of students attending two-year community and for-profit colleges. The chapter concludes with a summary that discusses the relevance of the aforementioned data to the study's research questions, and their relationship(s) to the study's research model...as is viewed below:

Research Model:



The essential constructs and/or research factors found in the above model – and those to be compared with characteristics found in the BPS Longitudinal Study – are the students’:

- Background characteristics (age, gender, race/ethnicity);

- Psychological and attitudinal characteristics (utility – how students plan to use the degree, institution satisfaction);
- Financial characteristics (type of financial aid, and hours/work employment);
- Social integration characteristic (extracurricular activities);
- Academic characteristics (GPA/major, academic integration and advisement);
- Parental education and income characteristics (level of parents’ education and yearly income);

Given that students attending two-year community and two-year for-profit colleges enroll because they are generally seeking vocational and technical training for quick entry into the workforce, officials at two-year institutions are consistently striving to graduate their students. But as noted earlier, there is a lack of research that addresses their retention efforts and thus many continue to experiment with retention via a “trial” and “error” process. It is meaningful, however, that the little research surrounding these two types of two-year institutions, suggests that both colleges essentially serve the same clients. Granted, there are differences in their graduation rates and tuition costs, but basically both colleges’ attract the same demographics of students. Some research, for example, indicates that community colleges graduate more of their students than do for-profit college. Others differ in their opinions... “Two-year for-profit schools out-performed two-year community colleges on the graduation measure. Two-year public colleges in California graduated 25.3 percent of students after three years; while two-year, for-profits graduated 65 percent” (Shackford, 2012). Yet most will agree that there is a major difference in the costs attached to pursuing a degree at the two types of colleges. “Tuition and fees at for-profit colleges averaged \$15,130 in the 2013-14 academic year, compared with \$3,264 at two-year public colleges for in-state students” (Snider, 2014).

That being said, the data and research obtained for this study are partially being driven by four formulated hypotheses about the subject of student retention at two-year community, and for-profit institutions:

According to Harvard economists, Deming, Goldin, and Katz, “for-profits disproportionately attract minority, older, independent and disadvantaged students.” They also claim that the most important environmental factors (e.g., finances, family responsibilities, and number of hours worked while in school) are likely to differ for subgroups such as minorities, academically under-prepared students, and those who are non-traditional college students. Community colleges, on the other hand, hinge upon the belief system that their role is to “educate” students, while for-profits-role is to “train” students. Differences do exist between the two colleges, but given that both colleges virtually attract the same makeup of students, the hypothesis formed for this study is not to highlight the differences in either college, but to examine such differences influence, or do not influence, the persistence rates of their first-year students into their second-year of study.

#### Data Source and Sample

This quantitative study is retrieving its data from a secondary source known as the Beginning Postsecondary Survey (BPS:04/09) by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES: 2013). And, because how students and parents pay for their educational experience is vital to any retention study, the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS:09), is also being used as a database. This data comes from students during their first year of study and is derived from student interviews, institutional records, federal financial aid applications, and federal student loan and Pell Grant records (NCES, 2011). Both sets of collected data will be used to



examine the persistence rates of first-year students attending two-year community colleges, and first-year students attending two-year for-profit colleges.

As noted, this study utilizes Tinto's traditional student model, and the Bean and Metzner nontraditional student model to learn how both traditional and nontraditional student retention is influenced by their personal background, environment, finances, psychological outcome, and academic experience, and if they do have an influence ...does the influence cause a student to complete his/her first year of college, or drop out? The study observes however, that the ultimate goal of some students attending these two types of colleges may not be to always complete their degree. Some, for example, enter with the intent of only "brushing-up," or acquiring new skills for immediate job advancements. Others enter for "prep" work only, and opt to transfer to other types of institutions shortly thereafter. For this reason, the study focuses only on first-time students who matriculate from the fall semester of their freshmen year, to the fall semester of their sophomore year.

As mentioned, data for this study is derived from the Beginning Postsecondary Survey (BPS), which is a national educational database, and consists of surveys conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Essentially, the BPS survey is a longitudinal study that traditionally follows a cohort of students who are enrolling in postsecondary education for the first time.

...The study collects data on student persistence in, and completion of, postsecondary education programs; their transition to employment, demographic characteristics, and changes over time in their goals, marital status, income, and debt, among other indicators. BPS tracks students' paths through postsecondary education and helps answer questions of policy

interest, such as why students leave school, how financial aid influences persistence and completion, and what percentages of students complete various degree programs (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013).

This study required, and is utilizing, findings from the 2004-09 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS:04/09). This information was collected over a period of 6 years and describes the enrollment and employment experiences of a sample of undergraduates who began their postsecondary education for the first time in the 2003-04 academic year.

The BPS:04/09 is BPS's most recent cohort and consists of students who were "initially surveyed at the end of their first academic year (2003-04) and then received invitations to participate in follow-up surveys at the end of their third (2005-06) and sixth (2008-09) years after entry in to postsecondary education. This most recent BPS:04/09 dataset contains information on nearly 18,644 students and has the most student participants than previous cohorts. Prior cohorts examined via BPS include the BPS:90/94 which surveyed around 8,000 students, and the BPS:96/2001 survey had around 12,000 students in its cohort (NCES, 2011). It is customary that participating BPS students also complete the National Postsecondary Student Aid Survey (NPSAS), which also indicates how students pay for their college experience.

BPS "collects data related to persistence in and completion of postsecondary education programs; relationships between work and education; and the effect of postsecondary education on the lives of individuals" (Thurgood, et al., 2003, p. 178). BPS data includes all types of institutions except for "students attending U.S. Service Academies, institutions that offer only correspondence courses, or institutions that enroll only their own employees" (p. 163).

First-time community and for-profit students must first become a part of the base year NPSAS sample. NPSAS surveys were “a nationally representative sample of students in post-secondary education” (Riccobono, et al., 1997, Section 1, p. 1) and included students from “all types and levels of institutions including public and private not-for-profit and for-profit institutions” (Riccobono, et al., 1997, p. 1-1). First-time freshmen students participating in the NPSAS survey are eligible to be included in the BPS database. The NPSAS:04 data is useful to this study because it examine how students and their family are most likely to pay for their college education experience. “The number of sampled institutions was 1,670, of which 1,630 were confirmed eligible to participate. Of the 1,630 eligible institutions, 1,360 (84 percent) provided student enrollment lists” (NCES, 2011). This data was then carefully reviewed to discard any students who were not actually first-time freshmen students.

The BPS:04/09 dataset is the most recent from the National Center for Education Statistics, and is being used for this study to identify the persistence rates of students at two-year institutions. However, because this study’s intent is to identify the persistence efforts/results at *both* institutions, the total sample size used by BPS was divided to illustrate that a total of 4,652 first-time students were enrolled in two-year community colleges, and a total of 366 students were enrolled in for-profit colleges. These numbers accounted for *all* beginning students who enrolled in the 2004 school year at either a two-year community college, or a two-year for-profit college. Other than the 2004 data from BPS being the most recent, the researcher chose to use this particular dataset because it specifically targeted first-year traditional and nontraditional students at two-year institutions. Most databases target four-year traditional institutions. Furthermore, the secondary BPS dataset included, and best identified the study’s six-background factors thought by Tinto, Bean, Metzner, and the researcher, to be prevalent to a student’s

decision to persist, or not persist, into their second year of college. The BPS longitudinal dataset of student persistence was found most applicable to this study. This study intends to utilize the data from the Beginning Postsecondary Survey to examine the six groups of independent factors located in the study's model. Afterwards, the researcher will determine to what degree some, or all of the factors, have on students' decisions to leave the institution during or after their first year of study. The finding will be dissected via descriptive analysis for interpretation.

### Data Analysis

This is a quantitative study utilizing secondary data collected from the 2004/09 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study. According to Green (2003) "secondary (pre-existing) data is collecting and possibly processing data by people other than the researcher in question." Good & Hardin (2003) note that, "the advantages of using the pre-existing data collection method are: (a) it saves time that would otherwise be spent collecting data, (b) provides a larger database (usually) than what would be possible to collect on one's own." It should however be mentioned that secondary data does have its drawbacks, and/or disadvantages. Researchers who utilize secondary data cannot not readily check the data for accuracy, and they cannot question those who originally participated in the survey...the data's reliability can be questioned.

The units of analysis for this study utilize findings from the 2004/09 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS:04/09), which collected information over a period of 6 years from first-time male and female students who enrolled as freshmen in a two-year community or for-profit college during the academic school year.

As was alluded to in Chapter 2, the model grafted for this study is somewhat complex in that it attempts to combine factors from two existing retention models (Tinto, Bean and Metzner). Tinto's model was the first to address the retention issue, and others – like Bean & Metzner – formulated their model from his. Previously, however, it was noted that a primary fault in Tinto's model was to be found in the unexplained relationships between his background factors (goal commitment, institutional commitment) and their defining factors (prior qualifications, family attributes, academic and social integration, for example). The relationship between the two sets of factors used in Tinto's model were deemed applicable to traditional students, but not to nontraditional students. Nontraditional students attend both types of institutions.

Contrarily, Bean and Metzner note that it is the defining variables (not the background factors) that chiefly distinguish traditional students from nontraditional students. They also note that a nontraditional student has one or more of the following attributes: “older than 24, or does not live in a campus residence (e.g., is a commuter), or is a part-time student, or some combination of these three factors” (p. 489). “The Background Factors create the problem”, they note. “Whereas the Defining Factors (age, enrollment status, and residence) actually helped limit the interpretation of a traditional or a nontraditional student, the Background Factors do not provide such a clear understanding. The factors of educational goals, high school performance, ethnicity, and gender do not provide a clear definition or delineation of the term “background.” The four background variables influence how “nontraditional students interact with institution” (p. 493). According to Bean and Metzner, it is precisely this last statement that prompted him and Metzner to modify Tinto's retention model. It is also for this reason that the author of this study will not examine all the background and defining factors mentioned in the works of these

three researchers, but will instead select applicable factors from both works that are deemed most significant to answering the research questions of this study.

The researcher of this study is attempting to better understand and/or identify the persistence patterns of first-time students attending two-year community colleges, and those attending two-year for-profit colleges. An inspection of their first-year college experience might prove most implicative in explaining their pattern of persistence, and college outcome. Research has revealed that a student's background characteristics, and the characteristics that define their background, are predictable indicators of their intent to persist. This study will utilize BPS data to compare like background and defining factors of students attending two-year community colleges, with those of students attending two-year for-profit colleges. The following groups of factors have thus been chosen to compare the two institutions via BPS data: background factors (gender, age, race), psychological factors (goal commitment, institution satisfaction, degree expectation), financial factors (type of financial aid, work/employment), social integration (extracurricular activities), academic factors (high school GPA, academic advisement and integration), parental factors (parents income and education).

It is hopeful that this study's interpretation of the BPS data might better benefit two-year college administrators, areas of recruitment, accrediting agencies, financial aid offices, and overall retention rates for community and for-profit institutions. Determining how the factors are aligned measured, analyzed, and referenced to the research questions is crucial to the study's outcome. As mentioned, the six groups of relevant factors to this study are listed under the main headings of the research model. To determine their significance to the dependent variable (first-

year retention), the statistical method utilized will be that of logistic regression. But first it is necessary to explain the outcome, background and/or research variables being used in this study.

### Research Characteristics and/or Factors

The outcome factor and/or variable for this study is dichotomous in nature. The outcome variable is indicative of students who dropped out of two-year colleges before completing their first year, and those students who did not dropout. The variables for students who dropped out during their first year, and did not persist to their second year of study were coded as 1. Students who did persist into their second year of study were coded as 0. These outcome variables are a direct derivative from the series of variable found in the fourteen independent research variables previously mentioned in the study's model, and which are later described in more detail. All are believed however, to influence or not influence, student persistence into their second year of college. It is the aim of this study to discover if they do, or do not influence first-year retention at community and for-profit colleges. Again, the variables under investigation are presented in the study's model, and are grouped under six broad categories for discussion: background factors, psychological factors, financial factors, social factors, academic factors, and parental factors. Academic factors also include a student's academic integration, and social integration in his/her college experience. The fourteen independent variables isolated under the six broad categories are now discussed.

## Student Background Characteristics and/or Factors

### *Age*

Age, as is used in this study, is a continuous variable, and is non-linear because it measures three age groups. These varying age-groups have been recoded to facilitate a more accurate interpretation of the age differences. Age as a variable is known to have a relationship with student departure. In determining whether age influences the retention rates of students attending two-year colleges, the variable and/or factor will be coded as 1= yes, and 0 = no. The age groups for this study have been recoded as thus:

- Students aged 19 and below =1, all students *not* younger than 19 = 0
- Students aged 20 through 29 = 1, all students *older* than 29 = 0
- Students aged 30 through 39 = 1, all students *older* than 39 = 0
- Students aged 40 through 49 = 1, all students *older* than 49 = 0
- Students aged 50 through 79 = 1, all else = 0

### *Gender*

In this study, gender is noted as a nominal and or categorical variable to depict if students are either male or female. Because gender is a dichotomous variable (male/female), male students are the reference criterion and will be coded as:

- 1 = Male student, 0 = not a male student.

### *Race and Ethnicity*

Race/Ethnicity – measures students’ race and ethnicity, and is therefore being used in this story as a categorical variable with its reference criterion being that of:



- RaceWhite = 1, else = 0
- RaceBlack =1, else = 0
- RaceHispanic = 1, else = 0
- RaceOther,Asian,Pacific Islander = 1, else = 0
- Educational goals – is observed as a dichotomous variable being used as a categorical indicator that is based on the 2004 student interview or the type of program reported by the institution attended. If the student was working on an applied associate’s degree in occupational or technical programs (generally terminal degrees) the variable was coded as 0=no. If the student was working on an academic associate’s degree in general education or in preparation for transfer to a 4-year institutions the code given the variable was 1=yes.
- Parental education is categorical in this study and depicts the highest level of education either student’s parents has. If either parent has a college degrees it will be coded as 0=no, and 1=yes.
- High school GPA – is used as a categorical variable for this study depicting the grade point average for students when they graduated high school. It will be coded as follows: High GPA (more than 3.24) will be coded as 0=no, and 1=yes. This variable will be compared to students with average (2.25-3.24). Low GPA (Less than 2.25) will be coded as 0=no, and 1=yes. It will be compared to students with average (2.23-3.24) GPA.

*Environment Factors*

- Finances – represent a set of continuous variables that examine the student’s ability to pay for his/her education.
- Family responsibility – is a variable that reports any and all stress points a student may have due to family obligations and/or number of children... if the student is a parent.
- Outside encouragement – as a variable which reveals the extent of encouragement a student requires to remain at a college. The encouragement generally comes from the influential persons in the student’s life who are not employed by the college. Nontraditional students, for example, have reference groups that are generally outside of the college (e.g., peers, friends, family, and employers).

*Financial Factors*

- Parental income – is a continuous variable which reveals independent and dependent student family income levels. It was derived by (1) calculating the z score of the existing CINCOM variable (parents’ income), and (2) by splitting the z score into three groups and categorizing them as low, middle, and high. For the analysis, the highest parental income was used as the reference group, meaning each group was compared to those students whose parents had the highest income. The parental income was not split into fourths (or quartiles), but instead thirds (low, middle, and high).
- Type of financial aid – is a continuous variable that is used in this study to indicate the type and amounts of financial aid students receive to pay for their college experiences. Independent students receiving financial aid will be coded

0=no, and 1=yes. Both will be referenced, and compared to types and amounts received by dependent students. Grants, loans, and scholarships for the current year will be measured by the amounts received.

- Hours and work employment – is a categorical variable that measures the type and amount of time students work during their first year of college. A dichotomous variable, this variable will also indicate if the student is employed by the college, or an outside employer. The variable will be coded 0 if the student is employed by the college, or 1 if the student is employed by an outside employer.

#### *Psychological and Attitude Factors*

- Utility – as a variable used in this study refers to how students view the usefulness of his/her educational experience and its relevance to their future employment, career, or personal growth. This variable will be coded 0 if it is not viewed as useful, and 1 if it is viewed as relevant.
- Attitude – as a variable, “attitudes are expected to be the best predictors of intent, and intent to leave is expected to be the best predictor of actual dropout” (p. 527). A continuous variable, attitudes are used by BPS to determine a student’s expected date of graduation. To obtain this variable BPS variable DGDTEXY 1 (Degree Expected date 2004-09) was used to have students respond to the interview question ...“When do you expect to receive your degree?” This variable will be coded 0=no if they did not expect degree by expected date, and 1=yes, if they did expect degree by expected date.

- Satisfaction – is a variable referenced in this study because it examines the degree to which student enjoy the responsibility of being a student. The variable pertained to if, or not the student was satisfied with class size, campus life, and quality of instruction. It measures if they were bored – or not bored – with their academic pursuit or campus climate. This variable will be coded 0=no if they are not satisfied, and 1=yes if they are satisfied. Both codes will be referenced and compared to students who were not satisfied.
- Goal commitment – goal commitment as a variable refers “to the amount of personal importance that a student ascribes to obtaining a college education” (Bean & Metzner, 1985, p. 524). In Pascarella and Chapman (1983), the commitment of goals for students attending community colleges had a larger impact on student retention than those attending for-profit colleges. The goal commitment factor will be coded as 0=no if they ascribe no importance to goal commitment, and 1=yes if they ascribe importance to goal commitment as a means of obtaining a college education.

### *Academic Factors*

- GPA – The Grade Point Average as a variable, is continuous and measures the mandated institution’s report on the student’s first year overall GPA. BPS codes this variable as SEGPAY1.
- Major – A student’s major is considered a categorical variable that is measured by the academic programs offered by the institution.

- Academic integration – In BPS, this is a numeric variable named ACAINX04 (labeled as academic integration). The variable is used to measure students’ participation in study groups; amount of contact with faculty, administrators and academic advisors; or talks with other academic officials outside of the classroom about their college experience and/or course availability. The academic integration factor is measured via a standardized Z-Score calculation.
- Social Integration measures the responses of students as to how often they attended social events held at or by the institutions. The variable asks the number of times students attended plays, lectures, concerts, activities with classmates, or...if they are members of any of the college’s athletic programs or club-like organizations. Like the academic integration factor above, the social integration factor is also measured via the calculation of a standardized Z-Score.
- Institutional characteristics is a categorical variable used in this study to determine the amount of control the for-profit, or community institution has. It is being coded 0 if the institution is for-profit or private, and 1 if the institution is a public, or community institution.

The independent factors for this study were carefully proposed to include only those factors deemed to influence the retention rates of first-year students attending two-year community and for-profit college. However, it is not without regard that some of the study’s independent variables used may identify instances of high inter-correlation between them. This common problem is also known as multicollinearity. Multicollinearity occurs when a high number of predictable and/or independent variables in a study have high correlations between them that could possibly influence or create an unreliable outcome of the data. High correlations are not a

good thing for the study. For example, in this study, the correlation of student's tuitions and fees are continuous variables (the digits continuously change) and have a high negative correlation when compared to the study's dichotomous variable of public institutions. Research indicates that the cost of attending a public institution is far less than that of attending a for-profit institution. Hence, to avoid the problem of multicollinearity, the tuition and fees variable are removed from the study.

Because the dependent variable in this retention study is dichotomous (student were retained, or not retained in their first higher education institution), the use of binary logistic regression as an analyzing tool for estimating what factors predict student persistence at the end of their first year is most appropriate. As a tool, it has the ability to coordinate relationships between independent factors that are categorical in nature, and define their relationships to the study's dependent variable (Hosmer & Lemeshow, 2000). Binary and/or dummy variables also indicates a student's membership into a specific group (i.e., age, gender, residence, race/ethnicity, parental education, high school GPA, etc.). For a retention study of this nature, age is a categorical variable that needs to be segmented into different age groups because it is not linear. One does not have to be of a certain age to be in his/her first year of study. Other than age, I have not tried to recode any other variable in the study's model because the model in and of itself was purposed, and extracted from the variables found in the Tinto, Bean, and Metzner retention model. This maneuver is in keeping with one of the objectives of this study, which is to somewhat integrate these known variables to see if some, or all, of them are applicable to retention efforts at community and for-profit two-year colleges.

Logistical regression was considered to be the most effective method for analyzing data for this study because the outcomes of its research questions, first-year retention, is dichotomous in nature.

In logistic regression, the researcher attempts to predict the probability that an observation belongs in a specific group (Wright, 1995). According to Wright (1995), “the validity of a logistic regression model is dependent upon meeting four basic criteria:

1. The criterion variable must be dichotomous,
2. The outcomes must be independent,
3. The model must contain all relevant variables and no irrelevant variables, and
4. The outcome categories must be mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive” (p.220).

#### Data Analysis – Missing Data

As in all research, conventional statistical methods used to obtain data will result in some form of missing data before it can be properly analyzed. Missing data in a study is often the result of targeted respondents’ failing, or inability to answer certain sets of items found in the survey. Or, the survey itself can mandate that respondents skip certain questions if they deem them not applicable. This retention study is no exception, and has missing data for some of the study’s variables. Before data analysis, missing data were removed using the list-wise deletion approach.

## Analytic Procedure

Descriptive statistics basically show what is or what is not evident in the data's sample, and is deemed useful to answering the study's first two research questions concerning the characteristics of non-traditional students attending community and for-profit colleges. Again, the factors and/or independent variables for this study are examined and noted when found to be major, and/or minor predictors to student persistence.

Data used to analyzed the study's first two research questions was mainly examined to note the characteristic differences – or not, of first year students attending a four-year for-profit institution of higher learning. In a quantitative retention study of this nature, the descriptive statistical method is most appropriate to best analyze the secondary data acquired for this study. This method is recommended when the researchers' goal is to describe, summarize, and classify numerical data. "Descriptive statistics help summarize and support assertions of fact" (Hinkle, Wiersma, Jurs, 2010). Descriptive statistical analysis, including frequencies, means, and cross-tabulations will be conducted to answer the study's research question. Results of the descriptive statistics can also be implemented to calculate the normal distribution of the data.

Research questions one and two, also require the data to provide a better understanding of how the institution's first-year persistence rate differs across its student subgroups. The use of cross tabulations and the statistical t-test are most suited for this purpose. Cross-tabulations (also known as cross-tabs) are best suited because they are primarily a quantitative research method and are meant to show the relationship between two or more factors. The type of financial aid a student receives, for example, could influence his/her college GPA or success. Cross-tabs allow the researcher to analyze and/or compare the results of one or more factors with



the results of another, or others. They better illustrate the relationship between factors and/or variables. Because the t-test also analyzes numerical data, it is being used in this study to better illustrate observed differences between the means of any two of the independent factors specified. Additionally, the type of question being asked will in some manner determine the statistical test needed. The significance levels of each factor are further determined by use of the statistical procedure – logistic regression.

Because the study's third and fourth research questions ask if the various factors relate to the persistence of first-year college student,; numbers, tables, charts, and graphs are necessary that require the use of frequency distributions to condense, code, cluster, or tally the frequency or value of reoccurring factors used to define the study's research model. "Frequency distribution is considered the foundation of descriptive statistics and is a prerequisite for various graphs used to display data and the basic statistics used to describe a data set, such as the mean, median, mode, variance, and standard deviation" (Methodology Manual, rev. 95). I will use frequency and frequency distribution as ways of counting the number of times these ten factors have appeared in the data, and to count the number of times they are found to relate to the study's dependent variable. For example, a student's gender, age, race/ethnicity, parental education, and financial aid type, might best be analyzed via the use of frequency and frequency distribution because the two statistically arrange the data into a more meaningful and comprehensive format. The mean will be used statistically to average and/or calculate the value of each factor and determine its significance to the research question. The chi-square test will also be used to determine frequency counts of the study's dependent variable.

When analyzing quantitative data it is first necessary to identify the level of measurement(s) the data is associated with via the categories of nominal (e.g., male-female, yes-

no), ordinal (e.g., not at all, somewhat often), or interval (e.g., GPA, number of years, or numerical ratings). Like nominal measurements, interval measurements can be analyzed via chi-square statistics and results found significant if they have levels of .05 or less ( $p \leq .05$ ).

Given that this study only collected data from first-time, first-quarter freshmen students to the beginning of their sophomore year to estimate what factors predict persistence at the end of their first year, the data obtained has two values or mutual categories (dichotomous variable). There are no “gray” areas in a dichotomous variable because the data in question has only one or two possible outcomes: black or white, either or, one thing, or the other. Also, the outcome of a dichotomous variable does not always need to be of numerical value. Oftentimes the researcher, for example, may seek only the number of successes versus the number of failures a student has had during a given semester, or if he/she passed or failed a course. The outcomes of dichotomous variables (binary response), are traditionally interpreted via logistic regression analysis. Logistic regression will accept quantitative, binary, or categorical predictors and code them in various ways that can predict the probability of student persistence, or not. Logistic regression analysis is the statistic that will be used to examine and/or predict student’s first-year persistence rate for this study. But the use of logistic regression analysis was not the only analytical technique considered to analyze the data for this study. The ordinary least squares (OLS) regression technique was also considered. However, this technique was abandoned with the realization that, although the OLS regression analysis is useful in understanding the relationship between the study’s dependent variable and one or more of its independent variables, the OLS is mostly used when the study’s variables and/or factors are continuous, repetitive, and able to provide a global trend/model of the data. The factors and/or variables needing to be analyzed in this study are not always continuous and “normal.” Pressed against

other standards, they may even be considered “non-traditional” in their makeup and in their normalcy. OLS regression works best with data patterns that are considered normal and consistent. For this reason, logistic regression analysis is best suited for this study.

Isolating specific characteristics and/or factors that increase, decrease, influence, or predict major outcomes of a study, are the primary attributes of logistic regressions. Mertler and Vannatta (2005) have much to say about the importance of these attributes when they note that, “logistic regression: (a) does not require the adherence to any assumptions about the distributions of predictor variables, (b) relies on a goodness of fit test as a means of assessing the fit of the model and (c) is sensitive to high correlations among predictor variables.” The two continue... “logistic regression is also based on probabilities, odds, and the logarithm of the odds” (Mertler & Vannatta, 2005). The odds in a study concern the ratio of the probability of an event, cause, or reaction.

Under prescribed circumstances, odds are defined as the ratio of the probability that an event will happen divided by the probability that it will not happen. Once these probabilities are isolated, logistic regression analysis can interpret them from three perspectives (Mertler & Vannatta, 2005).

...First, the model is evaluated using goodness-of-fit tests including the model chi-square test and the Hosmer and Lemeshow goodness of fit test. These tests determine whether the model predicted the outcome well based on predicted probabilities. The second component to interpret is a classification table for the dependent variables. In a perfect model, the overall percent of correctly classified respondents is 100% (Garson, 2008). And thirdly, the table of coefficients for variables included in the model is interpreted, and provides several variables statistics that indicate variable contribution to the model and/or research question.

Because the dependent variable in this retention study is dichotomous (student persistence), the use of binary logistic regression as an analyzing tool for estimating what factors predict student persistence at the end of their first year is most appropriate. As a tool, it has the ability to coordinate relationships between independent factors that are categorical in nature, and define their relationships to the study's dependent variable (Hosmer & Lemeshow, 2000). Hence, the second question of this study will use logistic regression to examine how, or if any of the aforementioned nine factors affect the likelihood of four-year for-profit students' persistence at the end of their first year.

### Summary

Chapter 3 discussed the method and procedures utilized to study the retention of nontraditional students at a community and for-profit post-secondary institution. The data was acquired to track and investigate first-quarter freshmen students whose intent it is to persist to their sophomore year of college. Apart from the problem and reasons for the study, this chapter also identified the study's participants, data collection procedures, and treatment of the data. In Chapter 4, the study will interpret the results from the BPS and NPSAS national data bank and answer the research questions.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

In Chapter 4 of this quantitative study the independent factors in the study's model are used to measure the dependent outcome variable (first-year persistence), and the research questions, are presented via descriptive statistics and binary logistic regression. The variables included in the model are either categorical or continuous. Descriptive measures of central tendency were used to understand the sample. Additionally, descriptive statistics including cross tabulations were completed to better differentiate between two-year public colleges, and two-year for-profit colleges. Afterwards, binary logistic regression was used to examine the relationship between the study's demographic inferential statistics, specifically academic, psychological, financial, social, and parental factors to better determine if they influenced students' at two-year institutions intent to persist, or not persist (dependent factor) into their second year of study. As previously noted, this study utilized the Beginning Postsecondary Students (BPS) Longitudinal Study data obtained from the 2004/09 BPS and NPSAS national data bank. The full BPS sample size includes 18,644 students. This study used a subset of students enrolled in either two-year public or two-year for-profit institutions.

The research questions that guided this study are again presented in this chapter. SPSS statistical software was used to examine the study's research questions, and the results were used to determine which (or all) of the factors influenced students' intent to persist, or *not* persist, into their second year of study at two-year community and for-profit institutions. Each factor was cleaned to eliminate missing cases. Afterwards, the factors were clustered to compose the study's model of including background factors, psychological factors, financial factors, social

factors, academic factors, and parental factors. And, because differences do exist between two-year community and for-profit colleges and the students they serve, each factor was “run” via SPSS and made specific to students attending two-year community colleges. This process was repeated to ensure that the same set of factors were also made specific to students attending two-year for-profit colleges. The findings and/or outputs from the results of each is representative of BPS’s data for both institutions. Hence, in accordance with the study’s research questions, the results noted in this chapter represent the collected data made applicable to first-time students attending two-year colleges. Each table references the college the data is meant to reference and is followed by a brief analysis of the data’s findings. Via logistic regression analyses, the third section examines the tabulations individually for those factors deemed significant to the study, and for both public and for-profit institutions. As noted earlier, all factors researched for this study are being used to identify those significant factors likely to influence a first-year student’s intent to persist into his/her second fall semester of study.

To better comprehend why these particular characteristics and/or factors were selected, and thought to influence first-year student retention, a review of the study’s research questions is helpful. This is what the researcher examined:

#### Research Questions

1. What are the background psychological, financial, social, academic, and parental characteristics of students who attend two-year community colleges?
2. What are the background, psychological, financial, social, academic, and parental characteristics of students who attend two-year for-profit colleges?
3. How are these various characteristics related to the retention of these students by the end of their first-year of college in two-year community or for-profit colleges, respectively?

4. Are there any differences in the relationships across the two types of institutions? If so, how?

Briefly, and as was noted in Chapter 2's literature review, the research questions surround the claim that two-year community colleges, and two-year for-profit colleges greatly serve America's system of educating its population. However, very few have researched the student retention problem at these institutions. And although both colleges may differ in their missions, entry requirements, strategies, and some curriculums... the students they educate are basically the same (traditional and nontraditional students). But the retention literature and/or research surrounding the colleges has primarily favored traditional students, attending traditional four-year institutions, and has been studied with a particular set of demographic variables that may, or may not, be applicable to students attending two-year community and for-profit colleges. That being said, this study notes that the most important environmental factors (e.g., finances, family responsibilities, and academic status, for example) are likely to differ for subgroups such as minorities, academically under-prepared students, and students whose parents have low and/or high incomes. To isolate exact factors that increase, decrease, influence, or predict major outcomes of this study, a logistic regression analysis is implemented and specified for each institution.

Prior to any researcher's drawing conclusions from the data he/she has collected, it is vital that correct statistical method(s) be employed to analyze the findings. In a study of this nature all known factors have to be examined because any one – or any combination of one – can influence the sample population's findings. For example, a student's age, gender, or income level can influence his/her attitude towards college, their readiness for college, or their intent to persist in college. Tables 1– 6 present descriptive statistics of the factors used in the model

examining student persistence at two-year public and private colleges. Tables 7 and 8 present the logistic regression results for the study’s model of student persistence at two-year public and for-profit colleges.

*Sample*

The sample for this study was drawn on the National Center for Education Statistics Beginning Postsecondary Students (BPS) 2004/09 study. This study examined only two-year institutions and yielded a weighted sample of 4,652 students in public schools and 366 students in for-profit schools. The data was weighted using an NCES adjusted weight calculation to account for any issues during sampling.

Descriptive Statistics Results

The following section presents descriptive statistics of all background, psychological, financial, social, academic, and parental factors included in the model. Results are presented for each of the study’s subsets, including two-year public and two-year for profit institutions.

*Background Factors (Age, Gender, Race/Ethnicity)*

**Table 1. Background Factors of First-time Beginning Students at Two-Year Colleges (2003-04)**

	<b>Public N</b>	<b>Public %</b>	<b>Profit N</b>	<b>Profit %</b>
Age Older than 18	4533	97.4%	362	99.2%
Gender Male	2146	46.1%	165	45.1%
Gender Female	2506	53.9%	201	54.1%
Race/ White	2893	62.2%	182	49.9%
Race/Black/African American	569	12.2%	81	22.3%
Race/Hispanic	741	15.9%	75	20.6%
Race/Other & Two or More	449	9.7%	27	7.3%



Demographic factors included in this study's BPS sample were analyzed using SPSS's descriptive statistics function. In Table 1 above, students' age, gender, race and/or ethnicity were examined. The table notes that out of 4,533 students attending two-year public colleges, 97 percent of them were older than 18 years of age. Out of 366 students in the study's for-profit colleges, 99 percent were older than 18 years of age. The examination of the gender factor at public colleges resulted in 46 percent of the students being male, and 54 percent female. Forty-five percent were male and 55 percent were female students at for-profit college. Race was the next important background factor to be examined in this retention study. A total of 62 percent of students attending two-year public colleges were white and out of 362 attending two-year for-profit colleges, 50 percent were white. 12 percent of Black/African Americans attend public colleges, and 22 percent attend for-profits. Hispanic students accounted for 16 percent of the student population at public colleges and 21 percent at for-profits. Students who listed their race as other, and two or more, totaled 10 percent of the student population at public colleges, and 7 percent at for-profit colleges.

*Psychological Factors (Institutional Satisfaction, Degree Expectation)*

**Table 2. Psychological Factors of First-time Beginning Students at Two-Year Colleges (2003-04)**

	<b>Public N</b>	<b>Public %</b>	<b>Profit N</b>	<b>Profit %</b>
Satisfied with Institution	3677	79.0%	247	67.5%
Expect Bachelors or Higher Degree	4033	86.7%	232	63.5%

Table 2's objective was to examine the numbers, and per cents of two-year college students who were satisfied, or not satisfied, with the institution they were currently enrolled in. The table's data revealed that 79 percent of the students attending 2-year public colleges were

satisfied with their institution compared to 68 percent at 2-year for-profit colleges who were also satisfied. Secondly, 87 percent of students attending public colleges did expect to persist into their second year of study and pursue a higher degree of education. Sixty-four percent of students attending for-profit colleges expected to do the same.

*Financial Factors (Type of Financial Aid, Work-Study)*

**Table 3. Financial Factors of First-time Beginning Students at Two-Year Colleges (2003-04)**

	<b>Public N</b>	<b>Public %</b>	<b>Profit N</b>	<b>Profit %</b>
<b>Financial Aid - Pell Grant</b>	<b>1184</b>	<b>25.4%</b>	<b>256</b>	<b>70.1%</b>
<b>Financial Aid - Subsidized Loan</b>	<b>384</b>	<b>8.3%</b>	<b>297</b>	<b>81.4%</b>
<b>Financial Aid - Unsubsidized Loan</b>	<b>346</b>	<b>7.4%</b>	<b>272</b>	<b>74.3%</b>
<b>Financial Aid – Work-Study</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>3.2%</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>3.2%</b>

Table 3 provides a statistical summary of the type(s) of financial aid assistance two-year community and for-profit college students utilized to finance their education. The types of aids offered students are listed in the first column. The second and fourth column note the number of college students receiving a specific type of financial aid from column one, and columns three and five refer to the percentage of students receiving the financial aid assistance again noted in column one. For example, at public colleges, one-quarter of the students (25 percent) finance their education via the Pell Grant, 8 percent via subsidized loans, 7 percent via unsubsidized loans, and only 3 percent of the students finance their college education with the help of the Work-Study program offered at their institution. At for-profit colleges 81 percent of the students received a subsidized loans to help with their college cost; 70 percent the Pell Grant, and 74 percent utilized the unsubsidized loan for the same purpose. For-profit students who took advantage of the school’s Work-Study program were equally compared to students attending

public colleges ( 3 percent), but the absolute number of students participating in the Work-Study program is only 12 in the for-profit student sample, so this study removed the Work-Study variable factor out of the two-year for-profit student sample analysis.

How students feel about and perceive their college experience influences greatly their initial commitment to the institution and their intent to persist. Yet there is no definite range or yardstick to accurately measure how they *feel* about their social interaction(s) with their college. The best a researcher can do is to estimate this percentage via the data’s *mean* score. The social and academic interaction factors are continuous factors and must be treated as such. For these factors (social and academic) the Z-Score was determined because it measured a score’s relationship to the mean group of scores. In other words, it’s standardizing the integration scores. The score identifies a “proxy” that allows the researcher to get as close as possible to how much students integrate into the social and academic college life. Examining the fourth factor of this retention study, Table 4 below illustrates the degree to which students are socially integrated into two-year public and for-profit colleges.

*Social Integration (Extracurricular Activities)*

**Table 4. Social Integration Index of First-time Beginning Students at Two-Year Colleges**

	<b>N</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
Social Integration Public	4652	-.74885	3.21696	-.339	.710
Social Integration For-Profit	366	-.74885	3.21696	-.459	.618

The Social Integration variable is being distributed to locate the number, mean, and Standard deviation of the level of student integration in both two-year public and two-year for-profit colleges. Table 4 indicates that the means standard deviation as it pertains to the social integration level at for-profit colleges is negatively higher than that of public colleges. The resulting tabulation indicates that students attending for-profit colleges participate more in school programs like clubs, sports, school outings, and social gatherings, but the results from their participation indicate a negative influence on their intent to persist into their second year of study.

*Academic Factors (High School GPA, Academic Integration)*

**Table 5. Academic Factors (GPA) of First-time Beginning Students at Two-Year College (2003-04)**

	Public N	Public %	Profit N	Profit %
High School GPA 3.0 or better	2470	53.1%	163	44.6%
High School GPA 2.0 – 2.9	1868	40.2%	168	45.9%
High School GPA 1.9 or less	314	6.8%	35	9.6%

When analyzing the output data of 4,652 students' high school grade point averages when they first entered two-year community colleges, Table 5 indicates that more than half of the students enter their freshman year with a grade point average of 3.0 or better (53 percent). Forty-two percent enter with a GPA of 2.0 – 2.9, and 7 percent enter community colleges with a GPA of 1.9 percent or less. The high school grade point averages (GPA) of students attending for-profit institutions for the first time were also attained from the BPS data base and were utilized as a precollege factor for this study. The descriptive data in Table 5 reveals that 45 percent of the students attending their first year of education at for-profit two-year colleges have a GPA of 3.0 or better. Forty-six percent of students have a GPA of 2.0 – 2.9, and 9.6% of first-year students attending for-profit colleges entered with a GPA of 1.9 or less.

**Table 6. Academic Integration Index of First-time Beginning Students at Two-Year Colleges (2003-04)**

<b>Deviation</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std.</b>
Academic Integration Public	4652	-1.34553	2.71312	-.155	.865
Academic Integration For-Profit	366	-1.34553	2.71312	-.150	.967

The academic integration factor noted above in Table 6 is meant to detect if students associated positively, or negatively, with the quality of their first semester academic achievements. Given that two-year community college students are 18 years or older, their external commitments and involvements greatly influence the amount of commitment they may have towards their classroom performances. The mean and standard deviation from the mean indicate that more students at two-year public colleges integrate academically with their school than do those at for-profit schools.

*Parental Education and Income Factors for Two-Year Public & For-Profit Colleges*

**Table 7. Parental Factors of First-time Beginning students at Two-Year College (2003-04)**

	Public N	Public %	Profit N	Profit %
Parent Educ. BA Degree or Beyond	1516	32.6	57	15.5%
Parent Educ. No Degree	3136	67.4	309	84.5%
Parent Income Low	1371	29.5	188	51.5%
Parent Income Mid	1416	30.4	93	25.4%
Parent Income High	1777	38.2	73	20.0%

In lieu of the study's goal to discover which characteristics or factors most contribute to student persistence, knowledge of their parents' education and income was thought to strengthen the study's model. In Table 7, more than half (67 percent) of the students attending two-year community colleges reported that their parents had little, or no degree higher than a bachelors. Students attending two-year for-profit institutions reported that only 16 percent of their parents had a BA degree or beyond. Eighty-four percent reported that their parent(s) had less than a BA degree or beyond. Thirty-three percent of students attending two-year public institution reported that their parents had a BA degree or beyond.

However, to better examine the student's parental income, Z-Scores were used to standardize their income data. Secondly, the Z-Scores were grouped by category as low, mid, or high. Out of 4,652 students responding to BPS's questionnaire on income, 1,777 or 38 percent reported that their parents had high incomes. Students at two-year for-profit colleges reported that 52 percent of their parents were in the low income bracket. Although the parental factors for two-year public and for-profit institutions were presumed to be significant to the outcome(s) of this study, they were not found to be so. That this factor was found *not* to be of significance is considered a limitation of the literature, and does not align with other socio-economic theories on student retention. For example, Astin (1972), reasons that the parental income factor has a direct link to college persistence because financial difficulties are a major cause for student departure. Cabrera and his associates (1990), feel that the inclusion of a student's parental income, and parental education, are both necessary factors to the studying of student retention.

**Table 8. Retention Rate of First-time Beginning Students at Two-Year Colleges (2003-04)**

	Public N	Public %	Profit N	Profit %
Retained	1413	43.6%	307	84.0%
Not Retained in 1 <sup>st</sup> Year	3240	69.6%	59	16.1%

In Table 8 the numbers and percentages of students who were retained and not retained in two-year colleges during the academic year of 2003-04 are illustrated. As is in accordance with the literature, there are many reasons why for-profit colleges generally retain more of their students. We have noted that for-profit's are more centrally located, viewed as a business, offer more career-oriented majors, boast of immediate job placement, and more importantly, promise to graduate students faster via their accelerated learning programs. Community colleges adapt more to the needs of the community in which they find themselves. Yet, despite the above table's showing that the number of first-time students enrolled in community colleges are greater, this study revealed that 84 percent of first-year students attending for-profit colleges were retained. At community colleges less than half (43.6) that percentage were retained. It would thus appear that two-year for-profits are doing a better job of awarding more degrees to their students. However, higher percentages may not necessarily reflect the true number of students being retained within each certificate, associate's, or four-year degree program offered at the institution. It is important to note that community colleges are two-year institutions primarily awarding only one degree, the associate's degree. Hence, the first-time student number of 4,653 students above, represents the *whole* of community college first-year students intending to graduate with a certificate or associate's degree within the given time period. On the other hand, the 366 first-year students attending two-year for-profit colleges during the same time period, could be expecting to graduate with certificates, associate's, and/or four-year

degrees. This notation bears mentioning because the 84 percent seen above as their retaining rate, reflects *all* degree-seeking students during their first-year of study, even those in four-year programs. The 84 percent does not truly dissect the degree program the retaining students are in during the 2003-04 academic school year. It does, however, do so for first-year students attending two-year community colleges.

### Logistic Regression Results

**Table 9. Logistic Regression Result for the Model of Student Persistence (Two-Year Public Institutions)**

	Odds Ratio	Standard Error	Significance
Step 1 HighGPA	1.275	.127	.056
MidGPA	1.318	.129	.033*
RaceBlack	.894	.106	.292
RaceHispanic	1.249	.097	.022*
RaceOther	.806	.110	.049
Female	1.348	.066	.000***
Age_Over	.971	.209	.887
Academic Integration (Z-Score)	1.157	.041	.000***
Social Integration (Z-Score)	.990	.049	.844
InstitSatisfaction	1.025	.079	.759
PellGrant	1.540	.092	.000***
SubsidizedLoan	.792	.124	.060
UnsubsidizedLoan	.982	.128	.887
AspirationBachelorsBeyond	1.128	.094	.202
WorkStudy	.893	.185	.539
ParEdBABeyond	.923	.071	.252
ParIncome_Low	.832	.095	.187
ParIncome_Mid	.900	.080	.138

Note: Significance: P<.001 \*\*\*; P<0.01; \*\*; P<0.05 \*

In the logistic regression results of two-year public institutions, there were four factors found to influence the persistence rate of first-year students aiming to complete their first year of



college. Firstly, the RaceHispanic (.022) was shown to be of importance at two-year community colleges. Compared with Whites, Hispanics were found to have 24.9 percent higher odds of retaining at the end of the first year at two-year public institutions.

As was to be expected, and the literature supports this, the gender factor is also note worthy, and illustrates that females have a direct influence on the persistent rates of college students at two-year community colleges. Females were 34.8 percent more likely than males to persist in their studies (OR=1.34,p<001). Thirty-one and eight-tenths percent of the students had a MidGPA, which was the most common high school standing associated with first-semester students at community colleges (OR=1.34,p<001).

The academic integration factor at two-year community colleges is a continuous variable. Thus, the Z-Score revealed that for every one unit increase of academic integration there is a 16 percent increase in the odds of persistence (Exp(b)=1.157;p<.05). This factor was employed in this study for the purpose of knowing if students at community, or for-profit colleges actually interacted with their instructors, administrators, and/or advisors to better their performance in the college environment, and the classroom. That this factor is significant denotes that community college students do utilize the academic services offered by the institution.

Additionally, that the majority of students attending two-year public colleges financed their education via Pell Grants rather than subsidized and unsubsidized loans, was also found to be significant to this study. Table 3 notes that compared to those students who did *not* have Pell Grants to finance their education, students who were given a Pell Grant had 54 percent greater odds of persisting into their second year of study (OR=1.54,p<.001).

*Logistic Regression Results*

**Table 10. Logistic Regression Result for the Model of Student Persistence (Two-Year For-Profit Institutions)**

	Odds Ratio	Standard Error	Significance
Step 1 HighGPA	2.170	.554	.162
MidGPA	2.115	.539	.165
RaceBlack	.477	.481	.123
RaceHispanic	.7774	.451	.577
RaceOther	.207	.577	.006*
Female	1.121	.364	.754
Academic Integration (Z-Score)	1.094	.179	.617
Social Integration (Z-Score)	.433	.258	.001*
InstitSatisfaction	2.063	.365	.047
PellGrant	1.739	.522	.289
SubsidizedLoan	7.625	.526	.000***
UnsubsidizedLoan	1.322	.452	.537
AspirationBachelorsBeyond	.221	.427	.000***
WorkStudy	1.357	.930	.743
ParEdBABeyond	2.438	.628	.156
ParIncome_Low	.099	.688	.001*
ParIncome_Mid	.308	.689	.087

Note: Significance: P<.001 \*\*\*; P<0.01; \*\*; P<0.05 \*

Table 10 represents the logistic regression results for the study's independent factors assumed predictors of student retention at two-year for-profit institutions of higher learning in America. Out of the 12 original factors thought to be significant predictors to student persistence, only 5 actually were. The age factor (Age\_18Over) was removed from this for-profits regression results table because its percentage/number was very small. The result of the regression were used to assess the relationship(s) between the predicting factors and the odds of first-time students persisting into their second semester of study. Compared to White students, students identified

as other have only 20.7 percent of the odds of retention ( $OR=.433, p<001$ ) after their first year of study at for-profit colleges. Again, this factor was made up of three race/ethnicities: the American Indian Race, Asian, and Pacific-Islander. The three were combined and labeled “RaceOther” in Table 10 because individually, they too were small in number.

Regarding social integration, every one Z-Score increase in social integration, is related to a 57 percent decrease in the odds of persistence ( $Exp(B)=.43; p<.05$ ). Given that students at for-profit institutions better participate in sports, school activities, and join organizations in much greater numbers than do students at two-year community colleges, their doing so does not translate to equal amounts of time being devoted to their studies. This imbalance results in a negative relationship between a student being socially integrated into the school, and their devotions to academic success.

When the study’s research question asked if the type of financial aid a student received influenced his/her decision to drop out during the first year of study at for-profit colleges, the logistic regression tabulations resulted that at for-profits the type of financial aid a student was given *did* matter. That a for-profit student most received subsidized loans to finance their education was important to this study. Those who received subsidized loans had odds of retention that were 6 times higher than those who did not receive such loans ( $OR=7.625, p<001$ ).

This study also asked if students’ aspirations to attain a higher degree than the degree they were currently enrolled for would better evidence that they would persist into their second year of study. Here the *AspirationBachelorsBeyond* factor was used. This factor proved to be important to the study. It is indicative that students who do intend to achieve a degree beyond their associate’s degree generally offered at for-profit institutions tended to have about 78%

percent lower odds of retention. Also questioned in the study was the level of a student's parental income. Parental income of the students was deemed important because of its influence on the type and amount of financial aid allotted to the student. The result noted that students whose parents have higher incomes were 90 percent higher in the odds of retention (OR=.099,  $p<001$ ).

### Comparison of Regression Logistic Results for Both Two-Year Colleges

#### *Gender & Race Factor*

From the aforementioned Logistic Regression results, this study will now compare those significant factors found to be relevant to the research questions propositioned for two-year public and for-profit colleges. The gender and race of students were the only factors found to be significant within students' background factors at two-year public institutions. The logistic regression tabulations resulted it to be significant that females make up the majority of the student population at two-year community institutions. This factor was not significant at for-profit institutions. When asked which race (as was compared to the White race), best attended either institution, Hispanic students were found to attend two-year community colleges in greater numbers than any other race. When asked the same question for two-year for-profit colleges, the RaceOther factor (ethnic students who categorized themselves as Other and Two or More included American Indians, Asians, and Pacific Islanders) was found to be significant and noted that other than the White students, a greater number of ethnic minority students chose to attend for-profit colleges.

### *Financial Factor*

When examining the most popular type of financial aid students received at either institution, the distribution and effect of student aid are different across different student samples. The Pell Grant was the most widely distributed and used to finance students' education at community colleges, and was positively related to student persistence. At for-profit institutions, the subsidized loan was the most popular type of financial aid used and distributed, and was positively related to student persistence.

### *Aspiration of Bachelor's Degree & Beyond Factor*

When students were asked what level of degree (associate's, bachelor's, or higher) they expected to earn from their attending college, 86.7 percent at community colleges said they expected to receive a bachelor's degree or higher. At two-year for-profit colleges, 63.5 percent of the students attested to the same. The Logistic Regression results for this factor (.000) at for-profits was found to be significant to this study.

### *Academic and Social Integration*

As was hypothesized, the academic integration factor (students who interacted with their instructors, administrators, and/or advisors) was found significant to the retention efforts at two-year community colleges. The factor has a positive influence on students' intent to persist into their second year of study. That this factor was found significant to this study and others, indicates that when students become proactive in their academic pursuits they become better satisfied with their course loads and intellectual development. They are thus more likely to feel a sense of accomplishment with themselves, and with the institutions.

The academic integration factor was not significant for students attending two-year for-profit colleges. However at for-profit colleges, the social integration factor (students' participation in the school's academic and social program) was found to be significant. It was not significant at community colleges. That students are more academically integrated at community colleges is in direct accordance with most researched studies. Studies note that students who actively interact with faculty and advisors about their academic standings are more likely to become proactive in their college standings and persist in their studies. On the other hand, that the social integration factor was found significant for students at for-profits, is also in accordance with previous retention studies. Students who are socially involved with their institutions know more about the institutions, and are thus able to make better decisions about their college experience and environment.

#### *Parent Income Level*

Lastly, when students at for-profits were asked to disclose their parent's income level, 52 percent reported it as low. This factor was found significant to this study, and adheres to the researcher's belief that students whose parents earn greater incomes persist better in their studies, have more resources to pay for their schooling, and are less likely to work off campus. The reported 52 percent is noteworthy because it adds clarity to Chapter 2's literature. Students attending two-year for-profits are generally from low-income backgrounds, depend heavily on various forms of financial aid to finance their education, and are likely to graduate college with large amounts of college debt. Logistic regression results from this factor indicate that subsidized loans, which have low interest rates but must be repayed, are closely associated with low-income students.

Subsidized loans have low interest rates, and are generally allotted to students who report their parents' income as low.

Although logistic regression results did not find parents' income significant at public institutions, it did reveal that 38.2 percent of student's parents' had high incomes. Also, 25.4 percent of the same students received the Pell Grant as their primary means of financing their education. The latter was found to be significant to this study.

### Limitation of Study

A chief limitation to this study had much to do with the study's outcome. Because much of the literature and direction of the study focused on institutional retention, the study failed to differentiate between those students who transferred from their initial college during their first year of study, and those who simply dropped out of the higher education system altogether during that same time period. This limitation is equally applicable to community colleges, and for-profit colleges. The study also noted that more students attend two-year public colleges, than they do for-profit colleges. That fewer students attend for-profits added yet another limitation to the study with regards to the small sample size (366) made available to study first year persistence. This small sample size may have resulted in an unstable estimation of the study's results.

Having said that, other limitations to this study regarded the missing predictors, characteristics, and/or factors that were found significant to earlier retention studies, but not made available for this one. The sampling of 18,644 students responding to data gathered by 2004/09 BPS and NPSA's national data bank was predetermined, and did not include any data about the organizational and behavioral structures within two-year colleges. This is often the

problem encountered when using secondary data. According to Berger and Braxton (1998), an institution's organizational and behavioral structure provides valuable insight(s) as to how the institution contributes to a student's decision to leave college. Tinto (1986) also notes that the characteristics of an institution's bureaucratic structure, institutional size, faculty-student ratio, institutional resources, and goals affect college student departure decisions. The factors used in this study were particular to nontraditional students at two-year community and for-profit colleges. The missions of these colleges were discussed in Chapter 2's literature review, but it would have been extremely helpful to this researcher, had data been provided that measured the longitudinal effectiveness of existing persistence strategies currently being used at two-year institutions.

Other data surrounding two-year institutions not available via the BPS and NPSA data banks were the college's presidential and administrative style. Astin and Scherrei (1980) in an earlier study, noted that the presidential and administrative styles of a college are crucial to the success of retention efforts. The "style" of the institution gives the student his/her first impression of the institution, and it also gives them their first glimpse of how they might fit in, succeed, or fail at the institution. Had the researcher had access to organizational and behavioral structure of the college, as well as the presidential and administrative style of the college... the results of this study may have been different. Readers would have a better visual of how the makeup of an institution can affect a student's decision to persist, or not persist, into their second year of study at two-year institutions.



## CHAPTER SUMMARY

Although not all factors thought to be initially significant to the study of retention at two-year community and for-profit colleges were indeed valid, some were found to be significant.

Chapter 4 has provided us with a visual analyzation of the data/factors first conceived to answer the study's research questions. Just how those significant factors assist the study of student retention at community and for-profit institutions will now be talked about in Chapter 5. There, we will also discuss the limitations of the literature on this subject, and how future retention studies on two-year institutions might better target their research.

## CHAPTER 5

That traditional and non-traditional students attending two-year colleges are somewhat under-prepared when they initially enroll has been amply noted throughout this study. Reasons for their unpreparedness can run the gamut of not having enrolled into college just out of high school, having family obligations, or the need to work and support themselves. Students entering their first year of study at two-year colleges come with a different set of priorities, social, psychological, financial, academic needs and/or factors that often distinguish them from most students attending traditional four-year colleges. And although students attending four-year institutions may enter with the same set of factors, research notes that students attending two-year institutions are at a higher risk of not persisting into their second year of study. Previous research on two-year colleges have revealed far too little information on the persistence efforts and results at these institutions. For example, established factors such as age, gender, race, socio-economic status, extracurricular activities; GPA; parents' income; parents' education; if students commute; if they work; or if they themselves are parents, have been purposed for traditional four-year institutions. Virtually no information has been shared about how the same set of factors might impact traditional and nontraditional students' intent to persist at two-year institutions.

Throughout this study, the author has amply indicated just how similar two-year community college are to for-profit colleges. However, to fully gain an understanding of their importance in America's system of higher education, perhaps a compared view of the two's differences is again warranted. Chiefly speaking, for-profit colleges have a more entrepreneurial structure and are not as "binding" to the communities in which they are located. This freedom to respond to the

educational needs of their students – instead of the community – is perceived as an advantage for for-profits because it also allows them to better adhere to the growing needs of working adults, employers, and an ever-changing workforce. Hence, for-profits are more flexible in their course offerings, more convenient in their campus locations, and they offer more short term and faster program completions than do two-year community colleges. Moreover, because for-profits are essentially corporations, they also have better access to venture capital. This monetary access allows them to easily pay for new course designs, hire more personnel, embody newer technologies, and develop and institutionalize web-based systems of on-line education.

And although both colleges have an open admission policy, community colleges mostly admit and adhere to the communities in which they are located. They are thus state funded, and do not rely as much on student tuition as their chief source of income. They are not as free, however, to initiate newer technologies, or curriculums into their college format. Generally community colleges focus on long term goals for their students, and do not immediately adhere to the demands of employers, or an ever-changing workforce. Compared to for-profits, the associate's degree is the school's highest degree. For-profits offer certificates, associate's, and four-year degrees... within the same campus, and many are now offering master's degrees. Students attend as part-time students. More community college students attend as part-time students, and generally transfer into four-year institutions. The college is known to attract more students because the net tuition is lower than the tuition at for-profits. One of the chief differences between two-year community and for-profit colleges, however, is that because community colleges are obligated to enroll and provide academic support services for new students who are academically challenged, they have a better-functioning developmental education program.

Students are known to get the help they need to succeed. For-profits are not obligated to have such extended programs.

The similarities between the two colleges have been well noted throughout this study, and primarily for this reason this study attempted to examine the characteristics and/or factors relating to students attending either college, to determine to what degree they may, or may not, affect first-year persistence rates at the institutions. Given that 45 percent of students enrolled in America's higher education are enrolled in two-year colleges, it becomes increasingly important that two-year community and for-profit institutions redouble their efforts to obtain higher persistence rates and graduate more of their students. Hence, the main purpose of this study was to explore further the claims in the literature that the aforementioned factors influence, or do not influence, the persistence rates of first-year students attending two-year community and for-profit institutions of higher learning.

As noted earlier, theories of retention provide an explanation of why students leave college. Theoretical models of retention are derived from those theories, and often act as drivers and/or frameworks that underscore the importance of the initial theory. And, although the models themselves are utilized to serve and identify worthy factors assumed to be related to the theory, they do *not* provide an explanation of why the factors act the way they do (College Student Retention, 2011). Community and for-profit colleges also desire some form of explanation as to why certain factors act the way they do, and hinder persistence efforts at their institutions. Tinto's model of Social and Academic Integration, and Bean and Metzner's model of Nontraditional Student Attrition wanted explanations to the same problem. Their two models are the drivers that created the framework for this study. And although many note that Tinto's

model addresses only the retention issues at traditional four-year colleges and universities, his model still has merit for studies in retention at community and for-profit institutions. However, there are still other entities in his model that are not exactly applicable to that sector of non-traditional students attending two-year institutions. For those entities, the Bean and Metzner model was used. Portions of both theories were utilized to frame this study.

This was a quantitative study utilizing secondary data collected from the 2004/09 Beginning Postsecondary Student Longitudinal Study (BPS:04/09). The factors examined via BPS data were collected over a period of 6 years from first-time male and female students who enrolled as freshmen in a two-year community, or for-profit college during the academic school year. Afterwards, and to note the differences between community and for-profit colleges, descriptive statistics were used. A logistic regression analysis was then performed to examine the tabulations individually, for both institutions.

## CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter now presents a summary of the study and discusses findings, conclusions, and implications from the research. Recommendations for future studies on student persistence at two-year community and for-profit colleges are offered, and a final statement from the principal researcher concludes the study.

To better understand the persistence rates of first-year students at two-year community and for-profit colleges, all factors selected for the study's model were considered possible predictors of their intent to persist into their second year of study. Previous researchers of retention have included these factors, but almost none have used them to examine and/or compare student

persistence at public and for-profit institutions simultaneously. The predictors included in the analyses are students' gender, ethnicity, social and academic integration, type of financial aid (Pell Grants and subsidized loan), degree aspiration, parental income, and student GPA. It is worth noting that the specific significant factors that were tested and found to influence student persistence at community colleges or for-profit institutions are applicable to their types of institutions only. It is however, important to also compare students in the two institutions, and understand how they may relate to students' retention differently across these two types of institutions.

The first and second research questions to this study asked if there was a significant relationship between the background, psychological, financial, social, academic and parental attributes of first-year students attending two-year community and for-profit colleges and their ability to persist into their second year of study. As mentioned earlier, logistic regression analysis pinpointed the significant factors found to best address the research questions and are made applicable to the corresponding two-year institution. The first significant background factors to be discussed are students' gender and ethnicity. Other aforementioned and significant factors to the study will follow.

### *Gender*

There is much to be said about the gender factor. In nearly all studies on student retention, the gender factor is found to be a significant predictor. The gender of students directly influence their "attitude," or the amount of "value," they attach to a college degree. It is mainly this "attitude" that predicts if they will stay, or drop out. The descriptive to this factor revealed that at community colleges, 54 percent of the students that persisted into their second year of study, were females. The factor was found significant to the study and supports the literature that

female students outnumber males by a ratio of 154 to 100 in college student enrollment. In 1992, females first surpassed men in college enrollments and graduation rates. Since then, they have continued to graduate in higher numbers, and they have impacted the way college recruiters recruit. Females have a more positive view of education, and value it more. Not only are they attaining degrees that were once only available to men, but they are utilizing their degrees to make a difference in advanced fields of knowledge such as medicine, science, and education.

In the regression results of this study, women were 34.8 percent more likely to persist into their second year of study at public colleges than their male counterparts. Although this finding supports other studies that note higher drop-out rates for males (Hernandez, 2000, Hernandez & Lopez, 2007, Littleton, 2001, Swail, 2000, Swail et al., 2003), college administrators would do well to closer note that females are largely responsible for the bulk of their existing retention rates. Examining background elements of their success might prove useful when examining the same elements in regard to the success of male students. More efforts are needed by college practitioners to better close the gaps between female and male success. These same early interventions can also be applied to other females who are not persisting. The objective therefore for community colleges should be to better balance the female and male ratio of persistence... particularly with Black and Hispanic male students.

A word or two about Black and Hispanic male students, second only to Whites in numbers: These two ethnic groups are nearly always found on two-year college campuses. However, only 5 percent of Black and Hispanic men actually earn their degree within the prescribed time. Their failure to persist, or complete degrees has a rippling effect on college persistence rates. It lowers them, and causes the college to rely more heavily on the success of its female students.

Although the gender factor was not found to be significant at for-profit colleges, females did outnumber male students. Thus, I feel the same conclusion from the data can be drawn and said about both institutions... persistence rates would be higher if *both* genders were consistently monitored, and provided early intervention programs designed to encourage, identify, and address learning needs that impede success. It is the male student that is not being as monitored at two-year institutions. Research notes that upon entrance, most male students are not expected to do as well as their female counterparts. Perhaps this understanding can be attributed to many of them starting college under-prepared, not being college material, or fearing that they are not smart enough and will eventually live up to negative stereotypes attributed to Black and Hispanics males in a classroom. College admission officers and faculty are often guilty of exposing these stereotypes by sometimes focusing too much on the deficits of low income minority male students, rather than their assets. This is often caused by the lack of enough minority authority figures on most campuses. Oftentimes, special learning programs can actually hinder a student's growth. Such programs can erase a student's primary reason for coming to college, destroy his enthusiasm, and instill a sense of failure. Hence, dropping out may seem a logical step to the regaining of his feelings of self-worth.

Whatever the reason, the regression results indicate that while we value the success of female students, there is an urgent need to ensure the success of male students as well. I suggest that two-year college practitioners better evaluate their mentoring programs, or at best, establish one for this known group of male at risk students. College administrators and faculty need to re-assess their attitudes and/or knowledge to truly understand the beliefs they have about their way of educating non-traditional male and female students attending two-year community and for-profit colleges. Model programs at other institutions exist and are making a difference. I suggest



that two-year institutions research, and put into practice what others are doing, or have not done, to address their problem of student persistence. For example, the college's mentoring program should meet with the student bimonthly and have specific and tailored strategies that meet the needs of first-year nontraditional, at-risk male and female students. To determine if they are at-risk, many of the factors outlined in this study can help school officials. A student's high school GPA's, social and academic standing, and degree aspirations for example, can be used to determine if remedial courses, use of special tutoring programs, or advisement and/or selection of faculty are useful tools to develop their strengths and weaknesses in academic programs. Oftentimes, students are not be aware of their strengths, or the exact discipline they should embark upon.

Some researchers see the balancing of the female/male ratios on campuses differently. They blame the male students for the strong presence of females on college campuses. In their book, *The Rise of Women: The Growing Gender Gap in Education and What it Means for American Schools*, Bachman and DePrete (2013) say that male college students are *not* "putting in the effort and staying engaged" enough in school to be successful. They go on to note that perhaps colleges should raise their standards more for boys and change stereotypes that hammer themes like "good grades make good boys." That being said, if college officials desire to increase their overall student retention rates, they will have to focus on getting *both* genders to persist in their academic pursuit.

#### *Race/Ethnicity (Community College)*

The regression results for the Race/Ethnicity factor were used to determine which ethnicity influenced the college persistence rates. Compared to Whites, Hispanic students were found to most likely be retained. That Hispanics are more likely to be retained is implicative of their

growing numbers and suggests that meeting more of their needs should be a priority for community colleges. Earlier, it was noted that there was a lack of authority figures for minority students on campus, and the ratio of Hispanic students versus Hispanic faculty is even more lacking. Too, a great deal of research now surrounds the lack of relationships Hispanics experience with college faculty and officials. For most, this “lack of relationship” is exemplified in the degree of social and academic integration Hispanics experience on two-year community college campuses. There is a need to better address the background factors associated with this group of students. However, the regression results for this factor do indicate that Hispanic students are being retained better than Whites at community colleges. It can thus be concluded that community colleges are better serving this group of students.

The race/ethnicity of students at two-year colleges is a widely-used predictor of student persistence. Acknowledging the level of cultural differences is highly beneficial to learning communities, and intergroup dialogues aimed at addressing the academic and social needs of students. Such data is not only useful in determining student persistence rates, but also the degree of interaction each ethnicity has with their peer group, faculty, and college administrators. One of the most unique traits about two-year institutions is the racial diversity of their students.

Regression results note that at community colleges, students who identified themselves as being of the Hispanic race to BPS were significant to this study. Hispanics, at 16 percent, were found to be the second largest group currently attending the college. All racial groups thought to influence student enrollment and/or persistence rates were compared to Whites (the largest group at 62 percent). There are several reasons for this rapid increase in Hispanic participation on community college campuses. They are not only the fastest growing population in America, but overall, Hispanics make up the nation’s nearly 7 million community college students. From

14 percent in 2000, to 22 percent in 2013, Hispanic student enrollments continue to rise at public two-year institutions. Other reasons researchers suggest for their high enrollments are that community colleges cost less than for-profit and four-year institutions. The low cost entices many Hispanics to attend. Cost matters because, when compared to whites, Hispanic college students generally come from households with lower family incomes. For example, data from the Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan fact tank, notes that nearly half of dependent Hispanics enrolled in two or four-year colleges have family incomes below \$40,000 (2015). However, this researcher noted that the subculture of Hispanics enforced their desire and commitment to a college education. Other research concurs. According to another 2012 Pew Research Center survey, “61 percent of Hispanic adults said a college education is needed to belong to the middle class, 49 percent of blacks and 29 percent of whites shared this view.” Thus, it can be concluded that the growing number of first-time Hispanic students attending two-year community colleges does influence the college’s persistence rates.

However, that Hispanic students are a growing population at community colleges, does not necessarily equate to their graduating from them. According to the National Council of La Raza, compared to White and Black students, “they remain the most undereducated major segment of the U.S. population” (De La Rosa and Maw 1990). The literature notes that there are many ethnicities with varying cultures found within the Hispanic population. Thus, college practitioners may find it difficult to identify, and use the same retention strategies on all of them. Neither would they know much of the cultural differences that exist between each. For example, unless one has access to enrollment applications, few administrators and/or faculty members would know if a student is from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, El Salvador, Dominican Republic, or Colombia.

Having a complete knowledge and understanding of the Hispanic and/or Latino student's origins can be complicated. "The ratio of White non-Hispanic students to White non-Hispanic teachers is 17:1; for African Americans the ratio stands at 40:1. For Hispanics, however, the student-to-teacher ratio soars to 64:1" (Hodgkinson 1992). Given that the regression results illustrate that Hispanic students are persisting more than Whites at community colleges, I recommend that they continue to addressing the needs of this growing population. To ensure that Hispanics continue to persist in their academic programs, college administrators, staff, and faculty members should set higher expectations for Hispanic students by not always assuming that language, and academic unpreparedness are the primary barriers that impede their learning. The addition of more Hispanic speaking faculty, advisors, and recruiters for example, can challenge Hispanics to greater heights.

#### *Race/Ethnicity (For-Profits)*

When examining the racial make up of students at for-profit institutions, descriptive analysis in the study found that the number of students who reported themselves as being of other races/ethnicities (Asian, Other, or Pacific Islanders) totaled 7.3 percent of the first-year student population. Compared to White students, students identified as "Other" have only 20 percent of the odds of retention. Again, the odds of 20 percent also suggest that for-profit colleges need to be more attentive and aware of this growing race of students. Many students in this category do not see, or are instructed by, officials who look like them. As noted earlier, this researcher is concerned about the lack of diversity found on for-profit campuses. Much attention needs to be paid to the curriculum, overall campus climate, and classroom teaching practices if these students are to continue improving persistence rates at for-profits.

The literature also notes that nationwide, this group's presence on college campuses has increased six-fold, from 169,000 in 1976 to 1,118,000 in 2008 (The College Board, 2008). Likewise, much of what was said about Hispanics, can also be said about students who identified themselves as Other, Asians, or Pacific Islander for this study. My results indicate that there is a need for for-profit institutions to better understand the cultural and diverse needs of this fast growing group of non-traditional student as well. Regression results found this student population to influence the retention rates at for-profits. That being said, this group is still largely misunderstood. They, like Hispanics, are often victims of stereotypes and misunderstandings that hinder their social and academic integration into the college environment. The stereotype, for example, that all "Asians are good in math, artistically endowed, intelligent, and always succeed" is a major cause of why many school officials do not encourage tutoring, challenge more their language and writing skills, or do not do more to integrate them into the mainstream of campus life. This is largely due to the lack of available data on Asian and Pacific Islander students. There is much to be understood in the way we address the origins and culture of students on two-year college campuses. To refer to them all as "Asian," implies that they all share the same values, traditions, morals, and expectations. Doing so does not truly address their identity. It can lead to greater feelings of isolation. "Asian," as an ethnic group, also refers to students whose natural origin may be the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, Pakistan, Laos, Samoa, Burma, China, Japan, and so forth. Because few Asian or Pacific Islander students learn from faculty and administrators who look and sound like them, this error of judgement is often repeated.

This study has illustrated that the race/ethnicity of students found on community and for-profit college campuses does influence retention efforts. Pascarella and Terenzini, (2005) also

note that a student's culture can influence the amount of interaction they have with peers, faculty, and college administrators. Asians, Pacific Islanders, and other ethnic groups are making a difference in the programs and curriculums at two-year colleges. However, so that each group might better contribute to the retention efforts of the college, I suggest that each institution commit more to learning about the culture and origins of the students they aim to educate. Via first-year mentoring programs, culture awareness workshops, tutorial programs, compiling better data, and striving to overcome stereotypes associated with not fully knowing a particular ethnic group, are principle strategies to obtaining better persistence rates from this group of students. Both institutions can actively begin by recruiting a more diverse faculty, adding new instructors for more ESL (English as a Second Language) courses, remedial courses, and offering newer majors to better integrate the interest of this growing segment of students. Efforts to accommodate them will pay off for the school via increased enrollments, and better persistence rates among first-year college goers.

#### *Pell Grants (Community College)*

The descriptive results for the type of financial aid used most by students to finance their education at two-year community and for-profit colleges was specific. Students at either college used one, or a combination of, the Pell Grant, subsidized loan, unsubsidized loan, or Work-Study. Descriptive results for community colleges noted that the Pell Grant is the aid most awarded to students. More than a quarter of first-year community college goers (25.4 percent) receive the Pell Grant. Regression analysis for this factor resulted that 54 percent of students at community colleges received Pell Grants ranging from \$555.00 to \$5,550.00 per year. That Pell Grants are significant to students receiving financial aid at community colleges is in alignment with much of the literature surrounding nontraditional students attending two-year community

colleges. Foremost, the Pell Grant is primarily offered to first-time students from low-income families. Those who receive the Pell Grant generally have also been awarded the Perkins, or Stafford (subsidized and unsubsidized) loans to finance their education. Recipients are usually older, nontraditional, and their parents are less likely to have gone to college or have a bachelor's degree. For community colleges, the narrative Pell Grant receivers exemplify is that they are usually at-risk students that are thus more likely to leave college. That 54 percent of their students get Pell Grants should be a "red flag" for community colleges. Given that they are at-risk students, college officials should have an immediate plan for the first-time student who threatens their persistence and graduation rates. Since many of the factors known to influence student persistence at two-year colleges are evidenced in this study, the same preventive measures could be implemented for community colleges who first understand that Pell Grants are a "red flag" to student persistence, and can be a threat to their persistence and graduation rates. If however, more institutional grants and/or private scholarships were awarded to their students, persistence rates would improve. Research indicates that students receiving these types of aids do better, and graduate more.

The positive side of Pell Grants is that they do not need to be repayed. This benefits students by allowing them to not borrow as much to finance the whole of their education. The literature in Chapter 2 notes that Community colleges are far less expensive to attend than for-profit colleges, and first-year, full-time, community college student can expect to pay \$10,837 for one year of college (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The fear of finishing school with large amounts of debt has been shown to influence a student's decision to *not* persist in their studies. Financial factors are large predictors of dropout risks. The current administration agrees, and has outlined a proposal that would give two years of free college tuition to community college goers.

President Obama's plan would insure that the states pay for classes if a student maintains a GPA of 2.5 or higher. His plan, which is now before the U.S. Senate, was created because of the rising number of U.S. workers without college degrees. His plan of free college tuition for two-year community college is also being praised by college officials as an incentive for getting students to complete their degrees in a timely manner.

### *Subsidized Loans (For-Profits)*

At for-profit colleges, regression results found the major type of financial aid distributed was that of subsidized loans. Sixty-three percent of the students received this type of loan as the main source of paying for their education. Students have to repay subsidized loans. Given that the average cost of attending a two-year for-profit college costs a student \$13,858, the significance of this type of loan had dual implications. Firstly, and the literature supports this, for-profit students graduate with a substantially higher debt of student loans than do students attending public colleges. Some estimated the debt to be as high as \$31,000 for a two-year degree. To be more specific, students at for-profits pay more to attend, borrow more money, graduate with higher debt, come from low income families, have a greater need to work, and continue to be at-risk of not completing their degree. The results of this study indicate that the amount of subsidized loans granted to for-profit students is a predictor of their intent to persist. However, that they complete their degree with such high amounts of debt should be of concern to financial aid officials. And although many for-profits offer Work-Study programs designed to offset college expenses, students find the pay to be low, and thus surmise that they can earn more money off campus. It should be noted that the Work-Study factor was separately included within the regression analysis process for each institution to determine if it altered a student's intent to



persist. At either institution... it did not influence their intent to persist. For-profit institutions award fewer grants and scholarships to their students. I suggest that if they awarded more, better retention rates might evolve. I recommend that financial aid officers diversify the types of financial aid students at two-year colleges receive, and better inform students about other possibilities of paying for their education. Because stipulations for receiving Pell Grants, subsidized and unsubsidized loans primarily require that students come from low-income families, students are not necessarily aware of alternative means of paying for their education.

### *Social Integration*

Social integration at two-year for-profit colleges (how students interact with their peers, and faculty) was found to be a significant influence on student's intent to persist with their college experience. This finding is revealing in that it contradicts a number of other studies that claim that students at for-profits often do not persist in their studies because of outside commitments, social activities, jobs, and family problems. It therefore behooves college administrators at for-profit colleges to invest more time and resources in assuring that first semester college goers are purposefully acclimated to their new environment. Tinto (1975) implies in Chapter 2's literature that institutions must take into account the social values of students if they want students to persist, graduate, and adhere to the established academic and social frameworks of the institution. Tinto's model is basically referring to social integration and its applicability to traditional four-year institutions. However, Bean and Metzner (1985) in their nontraditional student attrition model specifically note that nontraditional students are moreso affected by their external environment than are traditional students. The social integration factors, they note, are associated with traditional college students.

There is no definite measure or yardstick to accurately determine how students *feel* about their social interaction(s) with their college. The best a researcher can do is to estimate this percentage via the data's *mean* score. The social and academic interaction factors are continuous factors and must be treated as such. Therefore, the Z-Score was determined for these two factors because it is a measurement of a score's relationship to the mean group of scores. In other words, it's standardizing the integration scores. The score identifies a "proxy" that allows the researcher to get as close as possible to how much students integrate into the social and academic college life. However, the researcher of this study would have liked to have known the exact degree, and type(s) of social and academic integration each student engaged in with the college. The secondary BPS data base did not provide such data. Such data would have allowed the researcher to determine the "quality of a student's academic and social interaction within the college."

### *Academic Integration*

Academic integration (faculty, advisement, and administrative concern for students' intellectual development) as a predictor, had a positive influence on students' intent to persist at two-year public colleges. Students who are academically integrated in their college program are 15.7 percent more likely to persist into the second year of study. The significance of this factor can conclude that first-year students attending community colleges were satisfied with the extent of their academic and/or intellectual development, and were more likely to persist into their second year of study than students who were not academically integrated. Tinto's interactionist theory, as outlined in Chapter 2, concurs with this significant finding. His theory concerns itself with a student's need to integrate him/herself academically into the college experience. It implies that institutions must take into account the academic values of students if

they want students to persist, graduate, and adhere to the established academic and social frameworks of the institutions. However, while community colleges did utilize students' high school GPAs and Pell Grants to aid their student retention efforts, the research did not reveal any factors and or programs currently being used by them to develop students' self-confidence, goal commitment, and social support services to identify at-risk students. This factor is chiefly used by many researchers to measure student satisfaction with the quality of instruction, course curriculum, faculty effectiveness, and the quality of advisement offered by the institution. College officials should not ignore the possible contributions of these factors to their retention efforts.

#### *Aspirations Beyond a Bachelor's Degree*

More than half (63.5 percent) of first-year students at for-profit colleges expect to graduate with a bachelor's degree or higher. The logistic regression analysis used to determine students' expected degrees from for-profit schools was found to be significant to this study, and is a predictor of their intent to persist into their second year of study. This factor's significance illustrates that over all, students are content with their choice of school, the programs they are majoring in, their intellectual development, and their academic experience at the college. It is also indicative that when institutions keep their programs relevant to student needs and successes, they feel a sense of academic accomplishment and a desire to continue their studies. The retention efforts of schools are better achieved when they value what is taking place in the classroom, or when faculty do their best to provide quality learning to the students. Students then feel more empowered, better equipped to confront next semester's course load, and eventually complete their program. A solid determination to acquire one's degree ensures self-confidence, persistence, self-growth, and an independent outlook towards the future.

However, much more needs to be said about the degree expectation factor. The BPS literature could not verify or pin point exactly how this factor influenced student persistence, but research notes that it is directly related to student satisfaction and goal commitment to the college. The significant outcome of this factor is also relevant to the level at which a student feels comfortable with his role as a student, and with his/her college environment. It also signifies if a student is bored, or is enjoying his/her learning environment. Hence that this factor notes that 63.5 percent of for-profit students expect a bachelor's degree or higher is a positive additive to the school's retention model. That the same factor is not significant at community colleges, however, is noteworthy and cause for alarm. If the environment at community colleges is one that does not allow students to feel comfortable with their role as a student, then other noted retention factors such as social and academic factors, could be seriously dependent on the degree expectation factor. Community colleges should examine more closely how the number, and types of degrees expected by their students affects other factors in their retention practices.

#### *Grade Point Average (GPA)*

The descriptive results for student GPAs resulted that 53 percent of first-year students at two-year community colleges had a high school GPA of 3.0 or better. The logistic regression results for this factor were found to be significant to this study (.033). Moreover, this finding supports Chapter 2's literature that a student's GPA is one of the strongest factors to predict degree attainment (Astin & Oseguera, 2003; Titus, 2003). It is thus concluded that at community colleges, most first-year students enrolled with mid-B or better grade point average. For the institution, this average signifies that they need not offer first-year students as many remedial or ESL courses. It can also be assumed that with such a GPA, first-time students have full command of basic reading, writing, and math skills. Many theories on student persistence

discuss the positive and/or negative influence of student's GPAs. Essentially they note that poor first-year academic performance can be blamed on a student's inferior high school GPA.

However, such theories are difficult – if not impossible – to prove. The GPA factor in this study is encouraging, and refutes to some degree, what other researchers have said about its influence on first-time student's academic preparedness, and open admission policies at two-year colleges.

However, 50 percent of students at two-year for-profit colleges had GPAs of 2.0 – 2.9. This finding was not found to be significant to this study. It can however, be indicative that first-time students enrolling in for-profit colleges might have more need of remedial courses, because they may not have entered with full command of basic reading, writing, and math skills. Such needs are known to prolong the attainment of degrees, and slow the persistent rates of students.

That academic failure and student persistence is associated with lower ability and inferior high school GPAs is not always the case. For example, there are two means of student departure...voluntary withdrawal, or academic dismissal. And, as has been noted in the literature, students attending two-year colleges are generally known to be commuters, somewhat under-prepared academically, have jobs, and/or family obligations. Hence, their voluntary withdrawal from college is not always necessarily related to their academic performance, but rather their outside commitments. This observance alone refutes theories that premise the relationship between voluntary withdrawal and academic dismissal as a major cause of student dropouts. "Voluntary dropout and past academic performance are often difficult to measure in terms of forecasting student persistence" (Tinto, 1993). Such is the case in this persistence study. That first-year students at two-year community colleges had a mid-GPA (2.0 - 2.9) is significant to this study and yields a direct benefit to the understanding of high-school GPAs, and how this factor acts as a predictor of at-risk students' intent to persist in their academic pursuit of

a college education. This significance is also consistent with the body of literature on student persistence.

### *Parental Income*

Fifty-two percent of students attending two-year for-profit colleges reported that their parents were in the low income bracket. The regression analysis found this factor significant. Parents who are financially able to finance and/or help students pay for their college experience are known to have a positive effect on their educational outcome. Understanding that for-profit students do not generally rely on their parents' income to finance their education is a major must to fully comprehend why some students leave school early. Money problems during their first semester is a major cause of student failure and often a key element in their decision to not persist in their studies. As noted earlier, students attending two-year for-profit colleges are generally nontraditional students who, in many instances have commitments outside of their school. The literature also notes that in many instances, these students do not only not receive financial help from their parents, but they may not receive emotional support either. Many are first-generation college goers. That the parental income factor in this study is significant, is not alarming to this researcher. Given that the majority of students at for-profit colleges reported their parents' income as low, below the poverty level, or under \$50,000, is in direct agreement with the literature of nontraditional students attending two-year institutions. This factor is however, relevant to this study because given that most students at for-profit institutions work and are largely responsible for securing their own grants, subsidized, or unsubsidized loans to finance their schooling, they generally do not look for their parents' help financially. But more importantly, the significance of this factor is noted because a student's family income is critical to how students view their worth, and the overall educational experience. Their parents' level of

income can work in their favor if the income level is high, or \$60,000 or more. Historically, students who are at-risk of dropping out of college generally come from low income families. Students whose parents have a high level of income benefit via other means of borrowing for their education without high interest rates and debt aftermaths.

Research notes that students who graduate from for-profit colleges generally have large debts upon completion. In 2012, for example, 90 percent of for-profit graduates had student loans of nearly \$40,000. This understanding on the part of the student is hindering. It can thus be noted that students at for-profit colleges whose parents are in the low income bracket, have a more difficult time of financing their college experience, have more debt upon completion, may need to work, and are more apt to *not* persist into their second year of study. Thus far we have learned from this study that how students finance their education is a key predictor of their intent to persist in their studies. Students of parents with high incomes are more likely to persist in their academic pursuits than students of parents with low incomes. Rich parents can spend more on their children's education. Yet, there is little a student can do about the level of their parents' income that he or she is born into. As noted previously, "low-income, minority, and first-generation students are especially likely to lack specific types of 'college knowledge.' They often do not understand the steps necessary to prepare for higher education which include knowing about how to finance a college education, to complete basic admissions procedures, and to make connections between career goals and educational requirements" (Vargas, 2004). Consequently, low income students attending two-year for-profit colleges start out at a disadvantage.

In Chapter 1 of this study I talked about the advantages of getting a college education. I talked about how attaining one could elevate an individual out of poverty, and better insure that he/she

becomes a meaningful contributor to himself, his family, and society. However it is a constant struggle to stop students of poverty from growing up to be in poverty. If education is thought to be the preventive cure for this, then we will need more help from the government, and college officials. If research verifies that students who are at risk of dropping out of school, are known to come from low-risk poor families, then this is where schools should start their investigation. The relationship between the parents' poverty level and the learning outcomes of their children, is warranted research.

#### CLOSING STATEMENT AND OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

Few studies have been conducted that compare first-year persistence rates at two-year community colleges with those of two-year for-profit colleges. Increased research has shown that two-year institutions are important to our education system and that 40 percent of students attend them. As was in the past, they no longer exist as "stepping stones" purposed to better prepare students for academic success in traditional post-secondary education. Neither are two-year colleges now considered to be solely "technical" or "trade" schools designed to prepare students for the workforce. They have evolved. Today, these colleges are not only seen as viable vehicles to a proper and more advanced form of education, but they are considered to be a part of the mainstream. They are now racially diverse, offer better programs, and provide an educational alternative to millions of students across America. But these institutions are not without problems. The majority of first-time students enrolling in them do not persist into their second-year of study, or graduate from them. It is for this reason that this researcher chose to study this problem.



Obtaining a college education is important to the many under-served students attending two-year colleges. But sometimes financial problems, family history, or academic limitations, push the “American Dream” farther and farther out of their sense of reality. Two-year colleges, for the most part, allow them to hold on, and eventually master their goal of being college educated. Two-year community and for-profit colleges are providing a college education for millions who might not otherwise qualify for one. However, these institutions are currently in a state of turmoil. Government and private corporations are concerned about their mission, and student graduation rates. They worry about the promises these schools make to students, but fail to deliver. They worry that two-year colleges are in it for the money, and not for the students. This study showed reasons for their concern, and offered solutions for addressing the concern. So that either college might improve its retention efforts, it becomes necessary that each fully understands the obstacles that confront their students, policies, and institution.

Traditional students generally do better academically than do nontraditional students. They are also most likely to persist into their second year of studies and attain their degree. In a research brief on promoting student success and faculty policy issues, Horn (1996) “determined that the most likely detriments to success are (a) delayed enrollment, (b) enrolled part time, (c) financial independent, and (d) having a GED or other certificate of completion.” Since two-year college students are mostly nontraditional students, it is highly likely that they possess all, or a combination of the above characteristics. Results from my study agree with Horn. Officials at two-year colleges would do well to understand that the make up of their students now differs from what most past studies note. Their products – or students – are now more diverse, speak different languages, have different skill sets, are not as academically prepared, and have different expectations from their college experience. To improve student persistence rates, colleges will

need to understand the background characteristics of each group of their students and make them applicable to their retention strategies. This study has identified six background factors that are major predictors of student persistence. However, and as the results of this study indicate making them applicable is easier said than done.

In this study, for example, more than 60 percent of the students surveyed in BPS's 2004-09 study sample were first-time students who, upon enrollment, fully intended to complete their college degree in a timely manner. Yet because they each embodied any number of the background factors examined in this study, they were unable to do so. This study demonstrated that there are many reasons why well-intentioned students fail to persist in their college studies. Be they enrolled in a two-year community college, or a two-year for-profit college, results from this study indicate that most were not academically prepared to enroll in either. That many first-time nontraditional students lack the necessary skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic (the basics), is a problem in our system of education. We expect our colleges to educate them, but we continue to use the same teaching and learning rubrics deemed applicable to traditional students in another time period. Even if, as President Obama has suggested, two years of free tuition were provided to all desiring a college education, a lack of preparedness would still be an issue to many students, and institutions. There are those who admonish that the fault of student unpreparedness lies within high school classrooms. They claim that it is the high school's function to get students mentally and academically prepared to do well in college. High school officials refute this claim, and hold to the notion that they *are* doing their job. Truthfully, the GPA factor results from this study indicate that most first-time students at community colleges did enroll with a 3.0 grade point average. At for-profits, they enroll with a 2.0 or better grade point average. And although studies note that high school GPAs are one of the most powerful

predictors of student persistence, passing GPAs do not necessarily ensure that the student is collegebound. It does not necessarily mean that the student is adequately proficient in the basic skills of reading, writing, arithmetic...and in many instances, the English language. Nor does it mean that a student can easily socially or academically integrate into college readiness. It is for this reasoning that the model created for this study, *Those Who Quit: A Study of Student Persistence at Two-Year Community and For-Profit Colleges*, considers a student's high school GPA to be a partial tool in determining student persistence. It is a background factor that is easily influenced by the model's surrounding factors.

Because both institutions have entry requirements that are far more relaxed than at more traditional institutions (no required entry exams), there needs to be an increase in college readiness programs not merely in high school, but also upon the entrance of first-year students in the college of their choice. Many administrators, faculty, and advisors take it for granted, for example, that incoming students have the necessary social or cultural capital required to maneuver successfully into the learning environments. But in reality, culturally diverse, or nontraditional students may not be able to navigate through the administrative challenges of properly registering, taking the right classes, gathering information, or managing conflicts or demands. This instance is especially exemplified by the social and academic integration factors used in the model. Both models of Tinto, Bean and Metzner theorized that this factor is a key ingredient to improving student retention. Tinto believes it more so with traditional students aged 18 to 24, while Bean and Metzner find them more applicable to nontraditional students older than 24. This is another reason why this researcher combined the theories. Bean and Metzner noted that nontraditional students undergo a greater "environmental press" (Bean & Metzner, 1985, p. 489) which "includes less interaction in the college environment with peers or

faculty members and less interaction through extracurricular activities and the use of campus services...and much greater interaction with the noncollegiate, external environment” (Bean & Metzner, 1985, pp. 489-490). Results found in this study noted that first-time students at community colleges were more academically integrated into the school, but less socially integrated. Students at for-profits, however, were more socially integrated into their school, and less academically integrated. If we are to fully utilize the study’s model to enhance persistence rates at two-year colleges, both the social and academic components of integration need to be incorporated into the college experience of students. We also need to remember that a student’s passing GPA does not necessarily guarantee that he/she will socially or academically integrate within the school.

The researcher understands that still more research is needed on the topic of student persistence at two-year community and for-profit colleges. However, a theme that kept recurring during the completion of this study was that female students outnumbered male students on campus, and persisted better to their second year of study. Certainly more studies are needed to explore this trend, but this study noted that the same factors that influenced the persistent rate for male students, also influenced females. Both could have had low persistence rates. Yet female students did better. A difference in their attitudes, and their expectations of a college degree were largely responsible for this difference. As was pointed out earlier, college officials would have better persistence rates if they focused more on getting the male student to persist in their studies. Because retention rates are not solely based on gender, female students are providing the numbers. By better examination of their programs geared at keeping males students enrolled in their schools, two-year colleges can add to the existing female numbers surrounding student persistence.

Two-year colleges are *not* adequately addressing the diverse needs of their students. Results from this study revealed that there are essentially four key findings that if properly addressed by administrators of for-profit institutions, can better aid their quest to improve student persistence rates at their schools. Because many of their students are first-generation college goers, their need to socially and academically integrate into the college environment is crucial to their college success. But the students themselves may not be aware of this need, and they certainly cannot create the situations and/or atmosphere for this need to be played out. College administrators and faculty must play a role in creating the conditions for this awareness to come to fruition. Special task forces need to be put in place that will help students instantly feel comfortable and accepted in new learning environments. Firstly, colleges must make student retention a priority that involves the *whole* school. Few schools have a task force specializing in longitudinal studies on retention.

The financial aid awarded in this study was basically of two types, the Pell Grants and subsidized loans. This factor proved a positive predictor of student persistence. Yet few colleges have task forces that allot the right financial aid to the right student, or to the needs of all students. Given that most aid awards are based on a family's income, other means of paying for education should be explored, made known, and offered to students. So few options of financing their education are now offered to them. Students at two-year institutions generally do not know the types of aid available to them. Research notes that in homes where parents have a college education or high income, other forms of grants, scholarships, and low-interest loans are explored, and later offered the student. In the reverse homes, college financial aid officers explore these options *for* the student. Consequently, too often lower income students are

continuously offered the same type of financial aid that is sometimes not enough, has them supplementing the balance with other loans, or has them needing to work off-campus.

As this study implies, the task force should be immediately attuned to the needs of incoming freshmen. Although all factors deemed significant were not found significant to this study, they are worthy of being examined for other groups of students attending other colleges. Most studies will agree that the student's background, psychological, financial, social, academic, and parental factors are crucial to any interpretation of retention success. The implementation and/or exploration of the factors in this study's model can be used to tailor programs to meet the precise and/or cultural demands of students. Most administrators and/or advisors are not as diverse as the student body, and most have had no formal professional development when it comes to promoting accurate success among a diverse student population. However, in light of what has been said, and in the contents of this study, I recommended that two-year institutions embrace the diversity of their traditional and nontraditional students to improve their retention rates. There are ways to do this. However, and as I mentioned before, two-year institutions must come to reason that their inability to make their campuses and classrooms diverse and "culture-friendly" is a key factor to achieving student success and student persistence.

## FUTURE RESEARCH

It is therefore my hope that future studies on student persistence at two-year colleges (community and for-profit) better investigate and apply this study's findings. The factors used to complete this study are applicable to most two-year institutions because they can easily be modified to the cultures and subcultures of the diverse student body they serve. More research is needed that will examine each of this study's factors, and uniquely apply them to the each

diverse student group found on two-year college campuses. This study, for example, concluded that the numbers of first-year Hispanic and Asian students enrolled on community and for-profit campuses are continuously increasing. However, this increase has yet to be reflected in the curriculum, faculty, administrators, social activities, textbooks, or institutional setup. That two-year colleges understand and address the background characteristics of the nontraditional students they educate is crucial to understanding the retention problems they currently face.

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