

Understanding How Students from Rural Culture Make Meaning of Campus

Recreation Engagement

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ABSTRACT

Research indicates that students are more likely to persist when they are involved in extracurricular programs such as campus recreation. Because institutional funding is predicated upon graduation rates, ascertaining persistence impact of these programs is crucial. The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain an understanding of the persistence needs of students from rural backgrounds relative to their engagement in campus recreation within the framework of Astin's Input-Environment-Outcomes model. Data were collected from nine students at a residential, agricultural State College in the southeastern United States. Results indicated 1) participants (7/9) became involved immediately in campus recreation; 2) all participants were aware of wellness benefits derived; 3) participants (8/9) perceived that campus recreation involvement positively influenced persistence by complementing their academic responsibilities; and 4) participants (8/9) believed their rural background provided extra motivation to persist. Results can be used to assist administrators making intentional extracurricular investment decisions.

Keywords: involvement theory, mindset, momentum year, wellness

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Researchers have demonstrated that students persist at institutions where they engage in campus recreation (Kampf & Teske, 2013; Windschitl, 2008). One outcome of such research is a trend indicating institutions of higher education are increasing their investment in campus recreation programs and facilities (National Intramural and Recreational Sports Association [NIRSA], 2016). To attain the level of participation that may result in increased persistence, administrators must understand that the racial and ethnic composition of the college student body is becoming more diverse (Bransberger & Michelau, 2016), and the participation preferences of these students is important to understand (Harper & Quaye, 2015; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2010; National Intramural and Recreational Sports Association, 2018a). This study was designed to gain an understanding of the needs of college students from rural backgrounds as they relate to engagement in campus recreational activities, and to identify the perceptions of these students regarding the role that engagement played in their college persistence.

The significant investment of students' time, energy, and money into their college experience warrants understanding the value of the extracurricular experiences in which they engage (Astin, 1993; National Survey of Student Engagement, 2019). Extracurricular programs include athletics, Greek life, performing arts, as well as clubs and organizations which do not involve a grade (Bartkus, Nemelka, Nemelka, &

Gardner, 2012). Student-centered extracurricular programs, such as those found within campus recreation, create student connectedness benefits for the institution (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2014) by fostering student development (Dugan, Turman, & Torrez, 2015).

National Focus on Student Persistence in Higher Education

Higher education officials in the United States anticipate a skills gap imbalance in 2025, between job needs and a qualified workforce (Complete College Georgia, 2017). In 2025, an estimated 16.4 million additional Americans will need to earn postsecondary credentials to meet workforce demands (Lumina Foundation for Education, 2017). Raising college completion rates requires an understanding that the longer students are in school, the less likely they are to persist (Complete College America [CCA], 2018).

Colleges are recommended to look for cost effective ways to improve accessibility, lifelong learning, essential skills development, partnerships, and adaptability to meet the needs of educational demands of students by 2025 (Denley & Dorman, 2018; Selingo, 2017). The historical vision of a degree in higher education should be changed because of the digital revolution (Selingo, 2017). Anticipating a higher education system geared toward empowering students and meeting their 2025 workforce demands, as well as addressing the needs of communities and the global society, is recommended and will need to be integrated into both academic and student affairs infrastructure (Denley & Dorman, 2018; Selingo, 2017).

Retaining students is also more cost effective than recruiting new ones (Raisman, 2009). Identifying clear pathways to student success is a goal of higher education

professionals in the United States (Complete College America, 2018; Complete College Georgia, 2017; Gateways to Completion, 2017). Retention efforts of an experimental capacity need to be more intentional (Selingo, 2015). The following strategies, presented as part of CCA (2018), are believed to be keys for student success: math pathways, co-requisite support, academic map with proactive advising, system promoting flexibility, and momentum year, and 15 to Finish. The 15 to Finish program is an attempt to decrease loan debt by encouraging students to register for at least 15 hours per semester (Williams, 2014). In states such as Georgia, CCA persistence goals have been aligned through a statewide focus of student success to aggressively address the growing dilemma (Complete College Georgia, 2017; Gateways to Completion, 2017). Both the University System and Technical College System of Georgia are tailoring CCA persistence goals accordingly (Complete College Georgia, 2017).

Although the fundamental framework to increase persistence has been designed, discussion continues, relative to exactly what college graduates should know and what skills they should know how to do upon graduating (Meacham, 2013). Research supports the need for college graduates to acquire skills which will contribute to their community (Foreman & Retallick, 2016). In addition, the student academic mindset is believed to contribute to persistence (Duckworth & Yeager, 2015). For example, students should feel connected to their institution and have grit and perseverance (Denley, 2018b; Duckworth & Yeager, 2015). Investing in activities geared toward enhancing student success is a strategy strong-performing institutions practice (Kuh et al., 2010).

Campus Recreation and Holistic Wellness

Collegiate recreation consists of the facilities, services, personnel, programming, and equipment which offer engagement opportunities via fitness, recreation, and sport competition on the college campus (National Intramural and Recreational Sports Association, 2018a). Overall, an increased awareness exists regarding the importance of institutions providing physical activity opportunities complementing the traditional physical education classroom (Johnson, Turner, & Metzler, 2017). Adopting an active lifestyle saves an estimated of \$2,500 per person per year (American Heart Association, 2016). This savings equates to nearly \$28 billion annually in the United States (Ding et al., 2016).

Holistic student wellness has become a priority by many institutions around the country (National Intramural and Recreational Sports Association, 2018b). The dimensions of wellness (National Intramural and Recreational Sports Association, 2018b) include physical, social, intellectual, psychological, occupational, spiritual, environmental, and financial. Campus recreation has the opportunity to play an important role on campus in collaborating with campus departments in areas such as Counseling Services, Human Resources, Residence Life, Dining, and programming for students, faculty, and staff (Brown, 2017; Edwards, Bowles, Harrington, Hawkes, Roberts, Watts, & Wise, 2017). Bringing these campus partners together to promote a wellness mindset and serve the wellness needs of our students should go a long way towards combating and preventing the root causes of many illnesses and diseases (Brown, 2017; Edwards et al., 2017; Hartman, Evans, Barcelona, & Brookover, 2018).

Individually, campus recreation is positioned to promote health and positivity in students through the promotion of physical activity (Ratey & Hagerman, 2008).

Impact on College Persistence

Campus recreation contributes to persistence on college campuses (Henchy, 2011; Misener, 2018). Research indicates (Kampf & Teske, 2013; Windschitl, 2008) that students will be more likely to remain in college and attain a higher grade point average (GPA) through semester participation in campus recreation activities. Students have also noted campus recreation sports satisfaction as an important factor associated with remaining in school and continuing their education (Howard, 2017; Trimble, 2010).

An ideal zone of participation exists in campus recreation where persistence benefits are maximized (Forrester, 2014). Although Astin's (1984) *Theory of Involvement* suggested the amount of time involved in an activity is important, he cautioned that intentional programs should be made available to students, with an understanding that time and energy is a limited resource. After all, being over-involved and too much participation may reduce student institutional connectedness (Boes, 1998; Gayles & Baker, 2015; McGrath, 2015; Zacherman & Foubert, 2014). Some researchers have suggested very heavy users, such as students who participate greater than 96 times per semester, had lower GPAs (Bradshaw & Ehling, 2017). Gayles and Baker (2015) discussed the challenge college students have balancing academic responsibilities and social pressures.

Students from Rural Cultures

Edington and Koehler (1987) expounded that rural students are typically not recognized as representative of a diverse population and stated that students from rural

culture are “the children of Black sharecroppers, Appalachian mountaineers, Hispanic migrants, reservation Native Americans, Kansas wheat farmers, relocated urbanities...” (p. 2). Rural culture is a system of meaning in which students make sense of both the world and themselves (Maltzan, 2006). Johnson, Showalter, Klein, and Lester (2014) suggested an importance in understanding the intricate context of rurality and responding to the challenges students from rural culture face. The needs of people from rural communities in an expanding urbanized society is important to understand (Brown & Shafft, 2011).

Students from a rural culture may respond to campus engagement experiences differently than college students from other backgrounds. Several researchers found that youth from rural backgrounds may face barriers to participation in physical activity, including: limited opportunities, poverty, affordability, physical proximity, human capital, urban and local policies, and transportation (Campagna, Rehman, Nordqvist, Murphy, Ness, Porter, Rasmussen, & Thompson, 2002; Hertz & Farrigan, 2016; Edwards, Theriault, Shores, & Melton, 2014; Moore, Jilcott, Shores, Evenson, Brownson, & Novick, 2010; Yousefian, Ziller, Swartz, & Hartley, 2009).

Understanding rural complexities in context relative to extracurricular programming found in campus recreation is important (Johnson et al., 2014). Strategies to improve inclusive recreation programming has been recently explained (Hoang, Cardinal, & Newhart, 2016) and opportunities to positively impact student retention and success illuminated (Misener, 2018).

Statement of the Problem

Although research has indicated the positive impact of campus recreation on

persistence, a gap exists in the literature regarding rural students' participation in campus recreation programs and the perceived benefit of their participation. Patton, Renn, Guido, and Quaye (2016) stressed the importance of providing a supportive environment for all students. Sturts (2015) recommended that further research be conducted exploring equity, diversity, and inclusion relative to recreational sports programming. This study explored the backgrounds, preferences, and campus recreation experiences of rural students in an effort to impart insight into campus recreation programming decisions that attract rural students and positively impact their persistence.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the needs of college students from rural backgrounds as they relate to engagement in campus recreational activities, and to identify rural students' perceptions of the role that engagement played in their college persistence. This qualitative study consisted of two primary research goals: (1) to understand the lived campus recreation experiences of college students from rural backgrounds at a residential State College in the southeastern United States, and (2) to understand how student perceptions of campus recreation engagement impacted their overall college experience and influenced their persistence.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

Research Question 1. How do college students from rural backgrounds experience campus recreation?

Research Question 2. How do students from rural cultures perceive the role of engagement in campus recreation as it relates to their persistence in college?

Definition of Terms

Certain terms in this study may have meanings specific to collegiate campus recreation and students from rural culture. For this study, the following definitions were used.

Co-Curricular. Activities that are required of a student to meet a requirement of the curriculum, outside of normal allotted classroom time (Bartkus et al., 2012).

Extracurricular. Activities that will directly or indirectly relate to the curriculum or major of a student (Bartkus et al., 2012).

First-Generation College Student. A student entering college without a parent or guardian having earned a baccalaureate degree (Engle & Tinto, 2018; Pike & Kuh, 2005).

Frequent Involvement. Participating in campus recreation between 17 and 32 times per semester (Bradshaw & Ehling, 2017).

Mindset. The belief in the extent to which inner qualities such as intelligence, personality, and certain moral character can influence decision making (Dweck, 2006)

Physical Activity. Any body movement that works muscle and requires energy beyond rest such as walking, jogging, dancing, swimming, gardening, and yoga (National Institutes of Health, 2016).

Rural. The U.S. Census Bureau (2010) designated the abstract term rural to define any population not in an urban area, therefore areas with a population of less than 2,500.

Social Capital. Privileged knowledge, information, and resources acquired via assorted social networks (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Ternezini, 2004)

Student Engagement. The comprehensive investment by students and their institutions of time, effort and other relevant resources intended to optimize the student experience through improved student learning outcomes, subsequently improving institutional performance and reputation (Trowler, 2013).

Upstream Approach. An approach to health through which programming attention is focused on promoting fit and well lifestyles which will lead to improved physical and mental health and reduce the need for counseling services and medicinal fixes often applied when there is a well-being deficit (Brown, 2017; Edwards et al., 2017).

Urban Area. The U.S. Census Bureau (2010) designated the term urban area, also known as urbanized area, to include populations of 50,000 or more.

Urban Cluster. The U.S. Census Bureau (2010) designated the term urban cluster to include populations of between 2,500 and 50,000.

Urban-rural Divide. Differences in people from rural and urban areas as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau (2016).

Significance of the Study

Persistence is a necessary reality for college completion. Data indicate that students who are involved in extracurricular engagement are more likely to connect with the institution and be retained (Forrester, 2014; Georgia Southern University Office of Strategic Research and Analysis, 2016; Kampf & Teske, 2013; Kuh et al., 2010; National Survey of Student Engagement, 2014; Windschitl, 2008). This qualitative study has important implications for professional practice in that findings may illuminate factors impacting the academic persistence of students from rural

backgrounds. According to Selingo (2015), a leading international higher education authority, “More than 40% of American students who begin at four-year colleges don’t earn a degree in six years” (p. 8). Because funding within many state college systems is predicated upon institutional progression and graduation rate performance (National Conference of State Legislators, 2015), institutions need to identify the most effective retention practices (Kuh, 2003; Tinto, 2010).

Although there are longstanding theories to indicate that students who engage in extracurricular programming develop a connectedness to the institution (Astin, 1984, 1999; Tinto, 1975, 1993), limited data exist on the programming that would increase persistence for those from diverse backgrounds, such as rural students (Koricich, 2014). Cultural relevancy is an important consideration in determining meaningful and accessible student college programming (Kezar, Walpole, & Perna, 2015). This study is significant because it explores the gap in existing research regarding persistence as it relates to students from rural backgrounds and extracurricular programming involvement such as campus recreation.

Participation in extracurricular programming offered by institutions, such as campus recreation, has been shown to increase persistence (Georgia Southern University Office of Strategic Research and Analysis, 2016; Kampf & Teske, 2013). Although strong-performing institutions have been identified (Kuh et al., 2010), an on-going validation of program investment supported via an empirical understanding of student culture is critical (Collins, 2009; Selingo, 2015). The results from this study could assist administrators making extracurricular programming decisions at their institutions.

Organization of the Study

This document is divided into five chapters. In Chapter 1, an introduction to the problem and rationale for the study is provided along with the significance and research questions. Chapter 2 consists of a literature review centered around key topics the conceptual framework of the study is grounded relative to student development theory, persistence, students from rural culture, extracurricular programming and persistence, physical activity, wellness, and campus recreation. Chapter 3 introduces the methodology, including data collection and analysis procedures. Chapter 4 presents the findings of this research including student profiles. Chapter 5 provides a journal-ready manuscript which includes an abstract, introductory chapter, a partial literature review, methods, findings, discussion and conclusion including practical implications for higher education professionals working with this population, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter II

LITERATURE REVIEW

During this study the term rural is defined as a population not in an urban area, therefore with less than 2,500 (The U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Although research has been conducted in higher education on underrepresented populations, little research has been conducted on students from rural backgrounds (Koricich, 2014). Christiaens (2015) posited, “College students of rural upbringings are an often-overlooked demographic in higher education” (p. 41). Results from this study addressed a gap in the research relative to the relationship between the extracurricular engagement of students from rural backgrounds and their persistence. The focus of the research was on college students from rural backgrounds at a residential State College in the southeastern United States.

In this study, data on the extracurricular engagement of students from rural backgrounds with campus recreation programming was gathered. Framing of the study occurred within the context of all extracurricular involvement opportunities with an understanding that it is important for administrators to listen to their student customers in order to gain an understanding of how best to improve the educational experience (Harper and Quayle, 2015). The researcher felt that the structure of a qualitative study would best present an opportunity to capture rich, descriptive data from the perspective of the student-participant (Merriam and Associates, 2002). A basic interpretive qualitative study will, “seek to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, the

perspectives and worldviews of the people involved, or a combination of these” (Merriam & Associates, 2002, p.6), and has guided the crafting of this study.

This literature review begins by introducing the conceptual framework for which this study is grounded. It then introduces other theories of student development pertinent to this research. Persistence efforts in higher education are then highlighted including momentum year and concepts which may contribute to student resilience such as mindset and grit. Rural culture is then explored and framed for this study including the socioeconomic challenges of students from rural backgrounds, the importance of institutions understanding rural culture complexities, and challenges first-generation college students face. Next, the academic benefit resulting from engagement at appropriate levels of student engagement programs is discussed. Finally, the importance of physical activity and other dimensions of wellness are elaborated upon including various modes in which physical activity are provided, including campus recreation.

Conceptual Framework

Alexander Astin (1984) stated that student involvement is the quantity and quality of mental and physical energy students invest in their collegiate experience. He stressed the following five assumptions of his *Theory of Involvement*, suggesting the importance of recognizing student behavior, rather than student thinking or feeling.

1. Student involvement must have energy invested, both psychosocial and physical.
2. Student involvement must be continuous and will occur along a continuum based upon degree of energy invested.

3. Student involvement will have both qualitative and quantitative characteristics.
4. Student development is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of involvement.
5. Student effectiveness in the classroom directly correlates to student involvement.

Astin (1999) inferred from longitudinal data on student persistence that the more involved students are, the better they will perform in college and the more they will develop. Astin (1984) cautioned that intentional programs should be made available to students, with an understanding that time and energy is a limited resource.

Astin's (1993) input-environment-outcomes (I-E-O) model highlighted the conceptual importance of understanding student development. The characteristics of this developmental model can be broken down into inputs, environment, and outcomes (Astin, 1993). The first element of this model, inputs, addressed the characteristics students bring with them upon entering college. The second element of this model, environment, delved into the impact of students' exposure to educational environment including the programs, experiences, people and policies which they interact. The third element of Astin's I-E-O model, outcomes, aimed to assess post-experience, student qualities and characteristics with which students persist (Astin, 1993). The overall objective of this model is to measure the extent of students' development based upon their college environmental experiences (Astin, 1993). Figure 1 illustrates a visual conceptualization of the framework specific to this research.

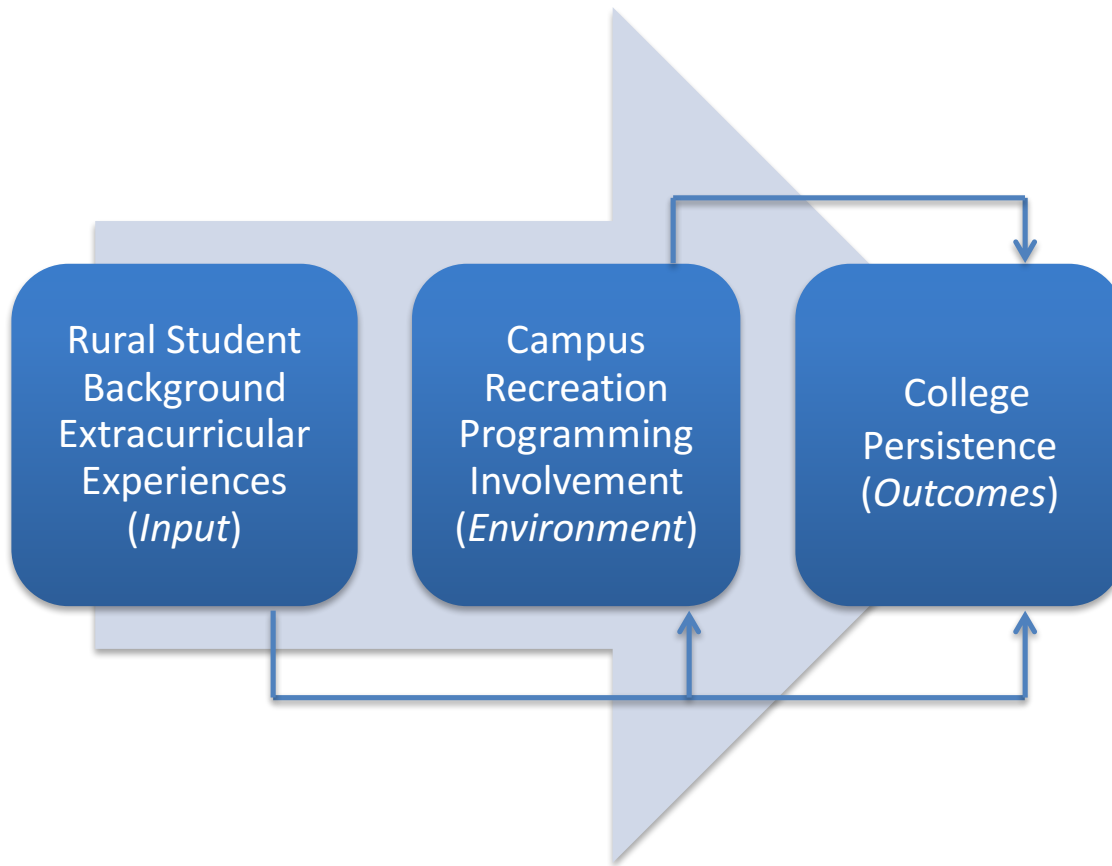


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the dissertation Understanding How Students from Rural Backgrounds Make Meaning of Campus Recreation Engagement by Students from Rural Culture based on Astin’s I-E-O Model (Astin & Antonio, 2012).

Positive correlations between student involvement and academic success in more current research continues (Kuh et al., 2010). Kuh et al. (2010) explored 20 colleges over 5 years to gain insight into the institutional policies and practices which foster student success in college. The method Kuh et al. (2010) utilized was a qualitative case study to illuminate the policies, programs, and practices utilized by the 20 colleges in this study. Kuh et al. (2010) was informed by previous postsecondary research which had identified conditions of educational effectiveness and practice (Astin, 1984, 1985, 1993; Bruffee, 1993; Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Educational Commission of the States, 1995; Ewell, 1997; Goodsell, Maher, & Tinto, 1992; Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1991;

Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 1991; McKeachie, Pintrich, Lin, & Smith, 1986; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005; Pike, 1993; Sorcinelli, 1991; Study Group on the Conditions of Excellence in American Higher Education, 1984). The 20 institutions studied were identified among 700 institutions as performing well in the areas of student engagement and graduation based upon scores from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) between 2000 and 2002. Kuh et al. (2010) recommended the following actions for institutions to implement in order to best facilitate student success: 1) involve everyone at the institution, 2) feature student success in the college's purpose and mission, 3) focus on talent development, 4) pursue an institutional culture of positive restlessness, 5) invest in student engagement, 6) promote diversity, 7) recruit and reward key individuals, 8) encourage cross-functional collaboration including the community, 9) inform students what student success looks like early on, 10) reculture student success.

Student Development

Taylor and Haynes (2008) recommended institutions intentionally incorporate elements of *Student Development Theory* to promote student learning. In their study, Taylor and Haynes (2008) applied the Learning Partnerships Model (LPM) created by Baxter Magolda (2001) to inform both the curriculum and co-curriculum of an institution's honor's program. The LPM promotes student development through a balance of educational support and challenges "tailored to connect to learner's current meaning making structures" (Schuh, Jones, Harper, & Associates, 2011, p. 217). The flexibility of the LPM model allowed for Taylor and Haynes (2008) to construct a three-tiered framework fostering student self-authorship by identifying the degree of

intellectual, personal, and social maturity. The three tiers were designed to target students in various levels of adult development ranging from young adult development to advanced levels (Taylor & Haynes, 2008). Each tier identified student traits and progressed in developmental goals, learning outcomes, the expectations of faculty and staff and learning experiences (Taylor & Haynes, 2008). Students were encouraged to reflect upon their current tier and goals inherent of the subsequent tier (Taylor & Haynes, 2008). By creatively applying the LPM to intentionally foster student learning educational programs can be improved (Schuh et al., 2011).

Understanding certain elements of student development theory may also contribute to student persistence at the institution (Dugan et al., 2015; National Survey of Student Engagement, 2014). In fact, student development is thought to be one of the key areas that contribute to student persistence (Habley, Bloom, & Robbins, 2012). Student development theorists such as Robert Kegan, Marcia Baxter-Magolda, and Urie Bronfenbrenner may offer insight into such practical application specific to campus recreation.

How students from rural culture make meaning of their campus recreation experiences may relate to Robert Kegan's (1982) student development *Theory of the Evolution of Consciousness*. Kegan's theory states that the development of consciousness occurred through a sequential order of knowing where one organized experience as the mind becomes more complex (1982). These five orders of transformation (Kegan, 1982) are impulsive and egocentric, competition and compromise, importance of social acceptance, self-authoring mind, and transforming mind transcending importance of self and perceptions of others.

Assisting students to reach the highest order possible to manage stressful work and family environments is important (Kegan, 1994). Campus recreation may utilize Kegan's (1982, 1994) theory through providing cognitive, interpersonal and intrapersonal opportunities for students to immerse themselves and differentiate themselves while navigating through campus recreation programming and services. Such immersion and differentiation could produce a connectedness to the institution (Kegan, 1994).

Marcia Baxter Magolda expanded on Kegan's evolution of consciousness with her own *Theory of Self-Authorship* (2001). This theory focused on the extent internal and external influences impacted the epistemological development of students (2001). The four phases that comprise the developmental journey include allowing others to define oneself, dissatisfaction with oneself and an internal understanding that a new plan should be established, understanding that one can become the author of one's life and can create and defend one's own beliefs, and formulating an internal foundation belief system (Baxter Magolda, 2001). Development will occur along a continuum (Baxter Magolda, King, Perez, & Taylor, 2012) where students will shape their "beliefs, values, identity, and nature of social relations" (p. 13). Even though self-authorship has been applied in many diverse populations (Patton et al., 2016), rurality has yet to specifically investigated.

Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1994) *Ecological Theory* explored five socially inherent subsystems thought to contribute to and facilitate human development. The microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem all should be considered where growth appears (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The microsystem

Bronfenbrenner (1994) discussed may be most pertinent to student development within the campus recreation environment as this system “refers to the relationship between a developing person and the immediate environment” (p. 37). The microsystem of the recreational facilities inherent to campus recreation programs, equipment, and facilities which may contribute to student development, may be most applicable.

Persistence

Many state college systems tie funding with progression and graduation rates (National Conference of State Legislators, 2015). Retention rates take on greater importance as state disinvestment from higher education and performance-based funding affects services and facilities (Berman, 2016; Hiltonsmith & Draut, 2014; National Conference of State Legislators, 2015). Drawing from fall 2012 cohort data collected by the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center over a six year period, 58.3% of all students completed college (Shapiro, Dundar, Huie, Wakhungu, Bhimdiwali, & Wilson, 2018). These improved persistence findings indicate that institutions are becoming better at meeting student needs and academic goals (Shapiro et al., 2018).

Retention is significantly related to student involvement, integration, and connectedness to the institution (Astin, 1984; Comeaux, Snyder, Speer, & Taustine, 2014; Freeman, Anderson, & Jensen, 2007; McCubbin, 2003; Tinto, 2010). Programs should be student-centered, intentional, and focus on an institution’s culture (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2014). Selingo (2015) stated that the majority of college campuses approach retention efforts in an experimental capacity. From a customer and business perspective, Sinek (2009) recommended through the golden circle approach that all businesses understand the why, rather than the what and how, of

their products and services in order to gain customer buy-in. Kuh (2003) recommended all institutions study their data to determine the effectiveness of institutional practices.

Persistence and Rural High School Students

Research from The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2017) has shown that although students from rural culture graduate high school at similar rates to that of students attending suburban high schools and higher than students attending urban high schools, only 61% immediately enroll in college. When compared to 62% of urban students and 67% of suburban students who attend college right away (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2017), practitioners and policy makers may increase persistence numbers by identifying assistance for students from rural backgrounds to access the college opportunity. This large descriptive study of postsecondary enrollment, persistence and completion outcomes, representing approximately 40% of all high school students in the United States (The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2017), also pointed out that that 69% of students who attended low minority high schools, 70% of students who attended higher income schools, and 77% of students attending low poverty schools went on to college the first fall after high school graduation.

Data provided from National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2018) showed that upon arriving to college, 84% of students from rural high schools persist from their first to second year of college. This may trigger concern in practitioners and policy makers since the persistence percentage is lower for these students from rural high schools compared to peers from suburban, low minority, and higher income high schools who persist at rates of 87%, 88%, and 89% respectively (National Student

Clearinghouse Research Center, 2018). Six year college completion statistics continue this trend with 42% for students from rural high schools graduating, compared to 46% for students from suburban high schools, 48% for students from low minority high schools, 48% for students from higher income high schools, and 55% for students from low poverty high schools (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2018). Despite an understanding that campus recreation has a positive impact on college persistence, Beasley (2011) has stated that more qualitative studies are needed on students from rural cultures to ascertain the potential cultural influence on college persistence.

Momentum Year

A major component of the Complete College America (2018) program is intent to build momentum by identifying processes to help students navigate through their first 30 credits of college. The momentum generated during the first year of a college student is believed to have major implications on their persistence (Complete College America, 2018). Providing purposeful structure at the outset of the college journey will drive momentum (Complete College America, 2018).

Evidence-based research has shown that persistence is strongly hinged upon first year student success, retention and completion (Complete College America, 2018). Complete College America (2018) outlined this structure with the following first-year benchmarks: enrollment in 30 semester credit hours during the first year, completion of nine semester credit hours within an informed program of study to include math and English, access to assistance and direction to inform decision making, and incorporate the use of interest assessments as well as data from the labor market. Addressing many

of these elements, institutions will be better able to guide students in building velocity toward their goals (Complete College Georgia, 2017).

Mindset

The mindset of the college student has become an increasing focus (Brock & Hundley, 2017). Momentum year research has demonstrated that students will be more successful when they enter college with a productive academic mindset (Complete College America, 2018; Complete College Georgia, 2017). Mindset was a term originally made popular by Carol Dweck (2006), one of the world's leading researchers in motivation, referencing the extent to which inner qualities such as intelligence, personality, and certain moral character can influence decision making.

Dweck, Walton, and Cohen (2014) studied results of a nationwide survey and interviews of approximately 500 students (Bridgeland, Difulio, & Morison, 2006) who had dropped out in high school which had found that 69% stated they were not motivated or inspired by school. Students ranged from ages 16 to 24 and had resided in cities, suburbs, small towns and rural areas (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Dweck et al. (2014) stressed the loss of potential in these drop outs and sought answers for questions on whether a solution could be found in school or the individual. According to Dweck et al. (2014) the academic mindset of students should be the focus and how non-cognitive, psychological qualities such as students' attitudes about education, their self-worth, and self-discipline influence learning and school. Collectively Dweck et al. (2014) refer to these non-cognitive factors as academic tenacity. Dweck et al. (2014) note the following examples of a student who is academically tenacious: view education as important and applicable, look to challenge themselves, stay engaged over the

duration of school, remain focused on their academic goals despite difficult intellectual or social situations, work hard and can sacrifice short-term gratification, and belong academically and interpersonally.

According to Dweck (2006), mindset can either be fixed or growth and how one internalizes their mindset will profoundly influence how one lives their life. A person with a fixed mindset views challenging situations with a situational response to avoid embarrassment or failure. whereas a person with a growth mindset views similar challenging situations with the intent to grow and develop (Brock & Hundley, 2017). Complete College Georgia (2017) stressed the importance of promoting an academic growth mindset to improve resilience when students face obstacles. Resiliency to challenges can best be developed by emphasizing the potential for a student to change rather than boosting self-esteem (Yeager & Dweck, 2012).

Grit

Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, and Kelly (2007) posited that high-achieving individuals exhibited a special trait known as grit. The non-cognitive trait grit is a combination of passion and perseverance (Duckworth, 2016). Duckworth and Quinn (2009) introduced the 8-question Short Grit Scale (Grit-S) in an attempt to validate as more efficient measure of grit than the 12-question Grit-O. As part of the Grit-S study, Duckworth and Quinn (2009) sought to 1) identify items for the Grit-S scale, 2) test the two-factor structure by applying confirmatory factor analysis, comparing scales and the Big Five Inventory personality dimensions (Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism), and examining predictive validity relative to career and education, 3) validated a version of the Grit-S, 4) measured 1-year

test-retest stability, and 5) tested predictive validity. Duckworth and Quinn (2009) research validated Grit-S as more efficient measurement of grit and recommended the scale as an economical measure of trait-level perseverance and passion for long-term goals. Ultimately, Duckworth and Quinn (2009) found that grittier competitors advanced further in the Scripps National Spelling Bee, and predicted West Point cadet retention by recognizing the importance of both Consistency of Interest and Persistence of Effort.

Even when no positive feedback exists, individuals possessing grit remain focused on their goals (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009). Grit transcends talent (Duckworth, 2016). Grit has been found to be a better predictor of West Point cadet retention than SAT score, rank in high school, or self-control (Duckworth et al., 2007)

Grit can be developed from the inside out by cultivating interests (Duckworth, 2016). Institutions can cultivate interests by providing extracurricular engagement which are both challenging and fun (Duckworth, 2016). Grit can also be developed from the outside in through others such as teachers, coaches, mentors, etc. (Duckworth, 2016). Creating a culture of grit where students conform to fit in can go a long way toward students reaching their potential (Duckworth, 2016). The desire for meaning and purpose in life has been found to contribute to grit (Von Culin, Tsukayama, & Duckworth, 2014).

Students from Rural Background

Harper and Quaye (2015) synthesized research by Kuh (2001) and Pascarella (2001) to emphasize that it is the responsibility of the institution to foster a supportive and encouraging learning environment. Harper and Quaye (2015) recommend college

campus leaders, “foster the conditions that enable diverse populations of students to be engaged” (p. 5). In an increasingly diverse world, campuses should foster an environment where students are exposed to varying perspectives and cultures (Harper & Quaye, 2015; Jayakumar, 2008). Cultural sensitivities should be examined (Crozier, Reay, Clayton, & Colliander, 2008; Jayakumar, 2008).

Cultural barriers for underrepresented populations need to be intentionally removed so students can connect to the institution (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011; Swail, 2004; Tinto, 2004). Demetriou and Schmitz-Sciborski (2011) revealed through an empirical study of fifty years of undergraduate retention, that by focusing on new aspects of successful student experiences, college officials may want to emulate best practices relative to student retention. Being sensitive to and focusing on programs for the neediest students on campus will benefit others at the same time (Swail, 2004).

Targeting hard-to-reach populations is important so all students feel valued (Howard, 2017). Aylesworth and Bloom (1976) suggested that institutions create programs and support groups for students from rural backgrounds to assist with their unique challenges and promote greater academic success and persistence. Dugan et al. (2015) recommended that campus professionals create intentionally inclusive environments to cultivate student participation.

Framing Rural Culture

The term rural has multidimensional application (Cromartie & Bucholtz, 2008; U.S. Department of Agriculture [USDA], 2016). Although Johnson et al. (2014) stated that during the 2010-2011 academic school year, approximately 9.8 million students, 20.4% of all public-school students in the United States, were students from rural areas;

the National Center for Education Statistics (2013) stated that during the same academic school year, 12 million students, 24% of all public-school students in the United States, attended rural schools (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2013). This rural data discrepancy relates to the underpinnings for what is being studied and the purpose of research (Cromartie & Bucholtz, 2008; Rosser & Gurrola, 2017; U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2016). For example, the National Center for Education Statistics, uses a classification system differentiating between rural areas located near urban areas and rural areas in remote locations (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2013). Ritchey (2008) further pointed out that rural areas located near urban centers have greater proximity to the educational, cultural, and economic opportunities than rural areas in remote locations.

Cromartie and Bucholtz (2008) underscored the multidimensional nature of defining rural, stating “The share of the U.S. population considered rural ranges from 17 to 49% depending on the definition used” (p. 1). Twenty-four definitions of the term rural are utilized by federal agencies (Cromartie & Bucholtz, 2008). Brown and Schafft (2011) even noted that existing research on rurality primarily utilized statistical data referencing rural areas as everything that is not urban. Although population areas between 2,500 and 50,000 inhabitants may be considered both rural and urban depending on the type and intent of research (Cromartie & Bucholtz, 2008), Cromartie and Bucholtz (2008) found common ground in always designating a population less than 2,500 as rural, and a population of 50,000 or more as urban (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010; U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2016).

Socioeconomic Challenges of Rurality

Minimal research has been conducted on the educational access of students from rural backgrounds (Koricich, 2014). However, Edwards et al. (2014) found in a qualitative study interviewing 30 expert informants in two rural counties in the southern United States, that students from rural backgrounds face socioeconomic challenges which non-rural students do not. From the study, an emergent theme exposed proximity to physical activity as a barrier to informal play as well as highlighting transportation challenges (Edwards et al., 2014). Edwards et al. (2014) also noted that although youth from rural areas had greater access to activities involving natural resources such as hunting and fishing, youth from rural areas had less access to various types of physical activity other than ball and field activities when compared to youth from urban areas. Human capital limits were also found to impact the sustainability of programs and initiatives (Edwards et al., 2014).

A rural-urban gap may also exist when it comes to educational achievement. According to the USDA Educational Research Services (USDA-ERS), although college completion amongst adults in rural areas grew 14% between 2000 and 2015, the proportion of adults in urban areas with bachelor degrees remained 14% higher (U.S. Department of Agriculture Educational Research Statistics, 2017). Fewer students from rural backgrounds persist and attain college degrees compared to students from urban backgrounds (Stone, 2014; U.S. Department of Agriculture Educational Research Statistics, 2017).

According to a Wall Street Journal analysis, rural areas of the United States are experiencing an accelerated decline in socioeconomic well-being often associated with

certain areas of metropolitan areas (Adamy & Overberg, 2017). The Economic Innovation Group Distressed Communities Index reflected that if a person resides in the inner city or a rural area that their community is most likely distressed (Croft, 2017; Economic Innovation Group, 2017). The Economic Innovation Group (2017) defined distressed areas where there are problems arising from the following factors: high school graduation, housing vacancies, employment, poverty, median income and job change. Southern states account for over half of those Americans living in distressed areas (Economic Innovation Group, 2017). An estimated 25.9% of the residents in Georgia live in communities considered distressed (Croft, 2017; Economic Innovation Group, 2017).

The potential for socioeconomic growth in rural areas of the country should be better understood. After all, 14% of the United States population resides on 72% of the land producing 90% of the food (Educational Advisory Board, 2017). Thiede, Greiman, Weiler, Beda, and Conroy (2017) identified that most new entrepreneurial jobs are created in rural areas. In fact, only 9.6% of rural citizens are employed in agriculture related occupations (Laughlin, 2016). Laughlin (2016) further pointed out that 22.3% of rural population in the United States work in health services and social assistance, 12.1% in manufacturing, and 10.9% in retail trade.

A study by Johnson et al. (2014) identified the importance of understanding the intricate context of rurality and to respond to the challenges confronting students from rural backgrounds. Johnson et al. (2014) gauged the rural education across the United States utilizing National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) data within a framework of 1) rural education importance, 2) diversity of students from rural areas

along with their families, 3) the socioeconomic challenges communities located in rural areas navigate, 4) policy impact relative to education inherent to rural schools, and 5) the educational outcomes of the rural school students. Results highlight the fact that enrollment in rural schools exceeds enrollment in non-rural schools (Johnson et al., 2014). Rural education is increasing in importance and becoming a more complex issue in education (Johnson et al., 2014).

Challenges students from rural culture face compared to their classmates from non-rural culture may include lower educational attainment of both students and parents, fewer college-education role models, reduced parent expectations, younger parents, less affordability, less social and cultural capital, less exposure to diversity, urban-informed policies and grant making, a strong attachment to family, and perceived opportunities based upon traditional gender norms (Edwards et al., 2014; Elliot, 1989, Felder, Mohr, Dietz, & Baker-Ward, 1994; Hu, 2003; Koricich, 2014; McDonough, Gildersleeve, & Jarsky, 2010; Rosser & Gurrola, 2017; Stone 2014). Barriers exist in recruiting rural students because students from rural areas may not return to their home after obtaining a degree (Educational Advisory Board, 2017). More educated workers can earn more money and have greater employment opportunities in urban areas (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2017). Institutions should continue to facilitate student success by investing in targeted programming (Kuh et al., 2010) to assist these efforts.

Edwards et al. (2014) highlighted an example of rural-urban disparity in a study of rural southern communities where 30 interviews were conducted identifying barriers to youth physical activity (Edwards et al., 2014). The importance of human capital in sustaining initiatives and leveraging resources was deemed important (Edwards et al.,

2014). Partnerships with community leaders and organizations were essential in allocating resources (Edwards et al., 2014). As youth get older and improve in a physical activity or sport, the human capital phenomenon accentuates as opportunities diminish and greater challenges surface (Edwards et al., 2014). Consequences of the challenges facing students from rural culture include attending more affordable, less selective, and public institutions closer in proximity (Bowen, Chingos, & McPherson, 2009; Gibbs, 1998; Mader, 2014; Rosser & Gurrola, 2017). Perceived barriers, such as physical distance increases transportation challenges and also reduces programming and services, limits available human capital, and increases social isolation (Edwards et al., 2014).

Rural Culture in Higher Education

Christiaens (2015) explored the relationship between rurality and student identity development theory in the transition to college. Christiaens (2015) illuminated through a case study the ways in which his own personal challenges in higher education as a student from rural culture influenced his social identity. Utilizing student identity development theory, Christiaens (2015) discovered that his rural upbringing became less important as he became more involved on campus and assumed student leadership positions. Christiaens (2015) reaffirmed “that rurality is deeply layered in structures and meaning (p. 46)”. Christiaens (2015) pointed out that there are gaps in the literature where influences from students’ environment and upbringing are often minimized.

Cultural relevancy is an important consideration in determining meaningful and accessible student college programming (Kezar et al, 2015). After all, strong-performing institutions promote student success by creating communities which are

supportive and inclusive (Kuh et al., 2010). Rural education is becoming an increasingly complex component of the educational system in the United States (Johnson et al., 2014).

College students identify strongly with their rural culture (Beasley, 2011; Maltzan, 2006; Stone, 2014). During a qualitative phenomenological study Stone (2014) investigated how 8 first-time, full-time students from rural backgrounds who had attended public high school in the northwestern United States made meaning of rurality and their first year social and academic college experiences. Stone (2014) concluded that a student's residence should be seen as a diversity characteristic to be considered by college officials when addressing their students' challenges and support needs since perception of self was strongly connected with rural upbringing. Stone (2014) pointed out that students from rural backgrounds relied upon their work ethic, determination, and responsibility to address the challenges of college life. Socially, students from rural backgrounds felt prepared to adjust to college and were open to new experiences attributed to their cultural upbringing (Stone, 2014). The concept of rurality is complex and more research is needed exploring the impact of college on students from rural culture whose worldview has been developed upon arriving at college (Stone, 2014).

Maltzan (2006) conducted a study with a qualitative hybrid methodology which employed elements of historical narrative and phenomenology within an ethnographic research design in order to explore the postsecondary pathways and the identity development processes of students from public schools in a rural county in the Midwest. Participants in the research all planned to enroll in college after high school graduation (Maltzan, 2006). Maltzan (2006) found that rurality is an overlooked identification

demographic in higher education. Data from the research suggested that increased involvement in both college and the students' rural communities may increase persistence (Maltzan, 2006).

In a qualitative ethnographic case study, Beasley (2011) examined the pathways and success of 16 rural, first-generation students at a community college in a rural county in the Appalachian Mountains. Beasley (2011) highlighted the following emergent themes which were found to cause internal struggles in the research participants: strong attachment to family and place, family pressures on student persistence, influence from family traditions, appeal to earn money right away and stay at home, impact of gender on opportunity, powerful association between rural community and institution.

Perhaps more than ever before, institutions must attract students from rural cultures (Complete College America, 2018; U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2018). The likelihood of students from rural areas attending college is only 85% as likely as their urban peers (Koricich, 2014). McDonough et al. (2010) highlighted the overall indifference of colleges to the needs of students from rural culture, stating “there is incongruence between life in rural areas...and its institutions of higher education” (p. 205).

Rurality and First-Generation College Students

Students from rural culture are more often first-generation college students compared to their urban and suburban peers (Byun, Irvin, & Meece, 2012). Students from rural culture experience both economic stress stemming from the hardship of attending college and the stress from parents not wanting their children to leave home

and community (Byun et al, 2012). Their parents tend to scrutinize the importance and value of a college degree (Tieken, 2016), and such scrutiny influences student persistence (McCulloh, 2016).

Research suggests approximately one-third of college students are first-generation with only 27% attaining a baccalaureate degree within four years (Whitley, Benson, & Wesaw, 2018). Low-income, first-generation students persisted at a rate of 11% (Engle & Tinto, 2018) with 60% of these students dropping out after their first year (Engle & Tinto, 2018). Engle and Tinto (2018) recommended the following strategies for increasing persistence of low-income, first-generation college students: 1) promote immediate engagement opportunities on campus, 2) simplify the transition to college, 3) increase opportunities in high school for students to take more rigorous curriculum in order to prepare them for college, 4) provide greater financial assistance in order to reduce burden placed on an often low-income population, 5) promote college reentry for adults in the workforce and a GED pathway for younger adults, and 6) increase clear long-term pathway to four-year college which is often a transfer route through the two-year sector due to practical and economic realities. It is also important to teach first-generation students the underlying rules and expectations contributing to success in college they may not have access to (Chatelain, 2018).

The expectations of first-year college students are that experiences would mirror their rural culture; teachers would know their names and “closely knit communities of family, place, or spirit” (Maltzan, 2006, p. 206) would exist. Maltzan (2006) warned, “Rural students...are at a high risk for early withdrawal from college, yet this risk may easily go unrecognized or unaddressed in higher education in light of the privileged

racial identities they carry” (p. 214). Stone (2014) stated that upon entering college, students from rural backgrounds often felt shocked and lost in understanding the college environment, opportunities available, and the overall college community. Students observed an absence of community and felt unsettled in their environment (Stone, 2014). Schultz (2004) attributed a lack of experience with cultural diversity with first-generation college students from rural backgrounds and the feeling of disconnectedness with the college environment.

Research has demonstrated that first-generation college students engage less frequently and are not as likely to persist as their peers (Soria & Stebleton, 2012). Soria and Stebleton (2012) found that first-generation students, when compared to non-first-generation students, interacted less with faculty and participated less in class discussion; including asking fewer questions and bringing less academic content to class from other courses. First-generation students who are not engaged in college tend to be disconnected and feel isolated (Kim, 2009). These students tend to engage less in experiences believed to facilitate student success such as becoming involved in extracurricular activities (Engle & Tinto, 2018). At larger institutions this negative impact is magnified with less exposure to social capital (Kim, 2009). Ultimately it is important for institutions to define first-generation student, identify their first-generation college students early on, set a clear institutional vision mobilizing change across campus which includes both academic and student affairs, and build and sustain an engaged community (Whitley et al., 2018).

Extracurricular Programming and Persistence

According to Bartkus et al. (2012), extracurricular activities are activities that will directly or indirectly relate to the curriculum or major of a student. Activities that are required of a student to meet a requirement of the curriculum, outside of normal allotted classroom time would be considered co-curricular (Bartkus et al., 2012). A strong association is believed to exist between student academic achievement and student participation in both extra-curricular and co-curricular activities (Camp, 1990; Zackerman & Foubert, 2014). Misener (2018) found that even students who engaged in student activities as little as one to two times per semester were more likely to persist the next semester.

Zackerman and Foubert (2014) examined student engagement in campus activities and its relationship to academic performance. NSSE survey data was utilized from a random sample of 51,874 students (Zackerman & Foubert, 2014). Zackerman and Foubert (2014) found that students' GPA increased slightly when they participated in 1-10 hours of activities per week, neither increased nor decreased when they participated in 11-30 hours of activities per week, and decreased when they participated in greater than 30 hours of activities per week.

Forrester (2014) found that 75% of students were involved in campus recreation. Out of this usage, 79% of participants engaged in campus recreation facilities, programs, and services at least once a week, 56% participated twice a week, and 39% three or more times weekly. Almost 90% of students participated for at least 30 minutes per use (Forrester, 2014). An ideal balance of student participation should be encouraged (Zackerman & Foubert, 2014). Zackerman and Foubert (2014) urged student affairs

practitioners to communicate the dangers of overinvolvement and the importance of making intentional decisions and prioritizing time.

Despite the vast body of literature supporting the positive impact of college students engaging at their institutions (Astin, 1984, 1999; McCubbin, 2003; Tinto, 1975, 1993, 2004, 2010), Gayles and Baker (2015) warned of the challenge college students face in balancing academic responsibilities and social pressures. Gayles and Baker (2015) suggested that college programming requiring lengthy time commitment should be a concern to campus officials in that participation takes away from student institutional connectedness. McGrath (2015) even stated that students who are over-involved have an externally-defined identity. Zacherman and Foubert (2014) noted that an ideal student participation balance exists.

The existing body of research suggesting that student persistence is significantly related to student involvement, integration, and connectedness to the institution (Astin, 1984; Comeaux et al., 2014; Freeman et al., 2007; McCubbin, 2003; Tinto, 2010) is comprehensive. Tinto (1993) has stated over many years that integration of students on campus is important both formally and informally. Campus recreation offers both types of integration through providing programs to promote intramural and club sports, outdoor-recreation, and recreation center services and programming offering greater self-paced fitness opportunities (Zhang, DeMichele, & Connaughton, 2004). Participation in campus recreation programs, facilities, and services is believed to enhance student learning through lifelong skills, wellness, fitness and workplace functionality (Keeling, 2006). Prior studies had established a relationship between

participation and the student's ability to adjust to job demands, teamwork, recognizing problems and solving them, and understanding graphic information (Smith, 1988-89).

Physical Activity

Approximately two-thirds of all adults in the United States are considered overweight and approximately one-third are considered obese (Ogden, Carroll, Kit, & Flegal, 2012). An estimated 37.9% of college students are considered either overweight or obese (American College Health Association, 2016). Overweight and obesity are contributing risk factors for such serious medical conditions as atherosclerosis, high blood pressure, elevated blood cholesterol levels, cancer, heart disease, diabetes and sleep disorders (National Institutes of Health, 2015).

The American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) guidelines stated that a minimum of 75 cumulative minutes of vigorous aerobic activity or 150 minutes of moderate intensity activity per week should be performed (American College of Sports Medicine, 2017). The American College of Sports Medicine (2017) added that additional health gains may be received by performing cardiovascular activity beyond this minimum recommendation. The American College of Sports Medicine (2017) also recommended moderate or high intensity physical activity from strength training of all major muscle groups be performed at least two days per week.

Physical activity opportunities can be offered via a myriad of structured and unstructured formats (Johnson & Turner, 2016). Both structured and unstructured physical activity have been shown to offer benefits for college students (Cressy, 2011; Evans, Hartman, & Anderson, 2013; Henchy, 2011; McClymont, 2013; Melnyk, Kelly, Jacobson, Arcoleo & Shaibi, 2014; Sturtis & Ross, 2013). Physical activity offers

physiological benefits for students by decreasing stress, depression, and anxiety while improving mood and cognition (Bray & Born, 2004; Cressy, 2011; Ratey & Hagerman, 2008).

Structured

Structured physical activity in the form of leisure skills classes as dance, fitness, intramural sports, club sports, intercollegiate athletics, outdoor recreation, hobbies, and life skills classes (Evans et al., 2013) may be offered on college campuses for college credit or in an extracurricular capacity. Overall, structured physical activity classes have been found to contribute to a warmer campus environment where students may enjoy meeting others who share common interests (Evans et al., 2013). Studies have demonstrated that student participation in such classes resulted in increased retention (Melnyk et al., 2014). The benefits of leisure skills programming include building life-long skill development, improving mental and physical health while fostering a greater sense of community, developing self-esteem, and instilling cross-disciplinary skill development (Evans et al., 2013).

College students also benefited academically from prescribed, structured physical fitness (Bradshaw, 2016). In a quantitative longitudinal study employing a Causal-comparative methodology of 400 students taking pre-college developmental classes at a Mid-Atlantic community college and enrolled in pre-college classes, Bradshaw (2016) examined the effects of the SPARK Program to examine effects on academic performance. The Spark Program is a cardiovascular program developed by Lawler and Ratey (Ratey & Hagerman, 2008) which had been found academic performance in classes improved as physical fitness improved in K-12 students.

Not only has physical activity been found to have an academic benefit on students but physical activity also reduces the risk of many adverse health outcomes (Office of Disease Prevention and Health Outcomes, 2017). Despite the plethora of benefits physical fitness has been associated with, the roll of structured physical education classes on the college campus has been diminished due to sentiment that it does not belong as part of the core baccalaureate degree requirement (Issues, 2009). Physical education courses, as a required offering of the college curricula, have declined over the past 80 years (Cardinal, 2016). Cardinal, Sorensen, & Cardinal (2012) found that in 2010 over 60% of four-year institutions in the United States did not have a physical education requirement to earn a baccalaureate degree, versus only 3% not having the requirement in the early 20th century

Johnson et al. (2017) suggested it may be important to adapt to the changing landscape of physical activity and acknowledge that institutions and physical educators view physical education differently. Changing the name physical education to physical activity education, as recommended by Johnson et al. (2017), has the opportunity to bring together professional proponents who support physical education and those supporting physical activity. This name change has the potential be become a catalyst in promoting physical activity content, the lifetime mission of physical activity, and the components and processes utilized to teach, learn, and apply physical activity (Johnson et al, 2017).

Regardless of the formal name for the physical education field, it would seem beneficial for students to identify the opportunities on a college campus to learn and engage in physical fitness. Campus recreation facilities play an important role in

facilitating much needed physical activity on college campuses (Cressy, 2011; Ogden et al., 2012; Shaikh, Patterson, Lanning, Umstattd Meyer, & Patterson, 2018). Campus recreation may also provide opportunities to meet the needs of the student customer as well as break down barriers to physical activity participation (Stewart & Webster, 2018). Addressing the needs of college students relative to access, equity and inclusion can create a campus recreation environment where students are engaged, feel welcome and happier, and more likely to persist and succeed (Delgado & Vorhees, 2018).

Unstructured

Unstructured, self-paced physical activity includes free weights, nautilus equipment, swimming, flexibility stations, and free play areas. Free play areas may also find students participating in basketball, volleyball, racquetball, badminton, soccer, frisbee golf, pickleball, ping-pong and other activities. Outdoor recreation activities such as ropes courses and rock walls can also be popular. Forrester (2014) highlighted the most popular offerings of unstructured physical activity include cardiovascular training, weight lifting, and open recreation activities such as basketball, volleyball, and soccer.

Caldwell and Witt (2011) found benefits from unstructured leisure and recreation activity included increased development of autonomy and self-determination, intrinsic motivation and goal setting, initiative, achievement, competence, identity, morals, and social skills. Unstructured, self-paced fitness choices may attract the busier student (Kuh, Gonyea, & Palmer, 2001), and may be more attractive to students who lack the interest to participate in structured campus recreation activities (Delgado & Vorhees, 2018). Time demands of structured physical activity offerings such as intercollegiate

athletics have actually been found to reduce student connectedness to the institution (Gayles & Baker, 2015). Unstructured campus recreation areas on campus have increased in popularity (Cressy, 2011).

Campus Recreation

Campus recreation programs, facilities, and services avail a myriad of physical activity opportunities. Campus recreation includes the institutional programs, equipment, facilities, and services available for student utilization associated with cardiovascular training, weight training, open recreation, group fitness, aquatics, intramural sports, racket sports, outdoor recreation, wellness classes, club sports, safety classes, personal training, and fitness testing (Forrester, 2014). Campus recreation programs, facilities, and services avail a myriad of physical activity opportunities.

Campus recreation and may be the ideal forum for which campuses should promote physical activity (Metzler, 2014) and other wellness benefits (Brown, 2017; Edwards et al., 2017). Henchy (2011) affirmed that students engaging in campus recreation experienced improved health and fitness, well-being, academic performance, and social life. Students indicated campus recreation having a positive impact on them meeting new people, relieving stress, engaging in physical fitness, managing weight and having fun (Forrester, 2014).

Forrester (2014) had analyzed and interpreted over 33,500 survey responses from college students from 38 different institutions across the United States as part research commissioned during the 2013 National Intramural and Recreational Sports Association (NIRSA) and National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) Assessment and Knowledge Consortium. Forrester (2014) reported that 75% of students

stated that campus recreation activities and programming positively influenced their desire to stay healthy and in shape. Findings illuminated the fact that 64% of students participating in campus recreation programs felt they had learned skills that could be taken with them and would be beneficial after college (Forrester, 2014). The study further noted that 98% of students felt that maintaining a healthy lifestyle would be important to them after graduation (Forrester, 2014). Additional benefits from participation in campus recreation activities and programming include an increase in soft skills such as time management, respect for others, academic performance, sense of belonging, and the ability to multi-task and develop friendships (Forrester, 2014).

Organized intramural and club sports have been shown to have a positive impact on student persistence (McClymont, 2013; Sturtis & Ross, 2013). In fact, students participating in intramural sports were more likely to persist than their non-participating peers (Forrester, McAllister-Kenny, & Locker, 2018). Students connected more with campus recreation intramural and club sports because they were dependent upon each other rather than the sport itself (Warner, Dixon, & Chalip, 2012). Intramural and club sport levels of participation on college campuses across the United States exceeded those of other college-sponsored student engagement offerings (Dugan et al., 2015). In fact, 41% of all students participated in either intramural or club sports (Dugan et al., 2015).

Outdoor recreation programming offers unique fitness and health benefits (Pashley, 2015). According to The Outdoor Foundation (2015), approximately 50% of Americans participate in outdoor recreation. Outdoor recreation has the opportunity to develop skills through group collaboration, which will carry forward to employability

and success in college (Cooley, Burns, & Cumming, 2015). Boettcher and Gansemer-Topf (2015) suggested that leadership develops in outdoor recreation programs when communication and teamwork are needed to accomplish a task. Godbey (2009) stated that contributions to physical and emotional wellness are particularly beneficial when outdoor activities are incorporated into one's lifestyle.

Campus Recreation and Persistence

Research indicated (Georgia Southern University Office of Strategic Research and Analysis, 2016; Kampf & Teske, 2013; Windschitl, 2008) students are more likely to persist in college when visiting the campus recreation center. Windschitl (2008) conducted a quantitative study at a comprehensive university in the Midwest to determine if the number of campus recreation visits could predict retention rate of 2,137 first-year new entering freshmen. Windschitl (2008) determined that students who visited campus recreation facilities had improved retention rates and higher GPA's.

Students with a higher GPA and positive health indices are more likely to utilize a campus recreation facility (Brock, Wallace-Carr, & Todd, 2014). Research supports the relationship of campus recreation involvement to Astin's *Student Involvement Theory* (Forrester, 2015; Kampf, Haines, & Gambino, 2018; Kampf & Teske, 2013). Researchers have underscored the positive impact campus recreation has on persistence (Bradshaw & Ehling, 2017; Danbert et al., 2014; Forrester, 2014, 2015; Georgia Southern University Office of Strategic Research and Analysis, 2016; Kampf et al, 2018; Kampf & Teske, 2013; McClymont, 2013; Sturtis & Ross, 2013; Windschitl, 2008). Survey data provided by NIRSA emphasized that student engagement in campus recreation increases the connection of students to the institution (Cressy, 2011;

Forrester, 2014; Henchy, 2011). Barnes and Larcus (2015) added that students who participate in recreational sports would develop skills that will not only translate to academic success, but also carry over to success beyond academia.

Campus Recreation and Wellness

Campus recreation is positioned to integrate wellness across curricular, cocurricular and extracurricular departments such as Counseling Services, Human Resources, Residence Life, Dining, and programming for students, faculty, and staff to accentuate wellness from the “upstream approach” (Brown, 2017; Edwards et al., 2017; Mahatmya, Thurston, & Lynch, 2018; Moses, Bradley, & O’Callaghan, 2016). Mahatmya et al. (2018) investigated the well-being impact of experiential learning courses on 76 college students at a large, mid-Atlantic public university utilizing a repeated-measures quantitative design. Students may experience an increase in the well-being elements social connectedness, resilience, mindfulness, and emotional reappraisal. (Mahatmya et al., 2018) Mahatmya et al. (2018) recommended institutions integrate these well-being practices, along with academic content, into student success interventions adopting holistic strengths-based positive psychology allowing daily development.

Forrester (2015) stated the importance of communicating the benefits of campus recreation activities, facilities, programs, and services to key stakeholders at the institution on every level. Utilizing results provided by 38 different institutions of higher education across the United States as part of the NASPA Assessment and Knowledge Consortium, Forrester analyzed data provided by 33,522 students who completed questionnaires addressing the Recreation and Wellness Benchmark

instrument (Forrester, 2015). Health and wellness benefits revealed from the Forrester (2015) study included feelings of wellbeing and reduction of stress while the top identified learning outcomes were respect for others and getting along with diverse groups of individuals as well as time management skill development. Collectively, the findings suggest campus recreation activities, facilities, programs, and services contribute to the quality of student life and positively impact persistence (Forrester, 2015).

Campus recreation has the opportunity to promote a campus culture increasing well-being in order to facilitate a shared campus vision of well-being (Mahatmya et al., 2018). For example, campus recreation can provide an environment where students can work through differences and develop positive interpersonal relationships (Vlondon, 2015). Overall, campus recreation programming, services, and facilities have been found to provide students with increased well-being and overall satisfaction to their college experience (Hoffman, 2016).

With an increase of student mental health problems on college campuses it has become important that all college administrators, faculty and staff take responsibility (Kitzrow, 2003). On average the demand by students for institutional counseling services increased five times faster than average enrollment between 2009 and 2015 with suicidal ideation increasing nearly 10% (Center for Collegiate Mental Health, 2017). Psychological well-being has been shown to be positively associated with student engagement, persistence, and college performance (Moses et al., 2016).

In a quantitative study conducted by Moses et al. (2016) of 206 Australian, public-university college students, the self-care practices of mindful acceptance, social

support seeking, sleep hygiene, and food habits were measured utilizing online questionnaire. It was found that well-being could be predicted and that unhealthy self-care practices may trigger mental health problems (Moses et al., 2016). Moses et al. (2016) concluded that students are unlikely to give their best if self-care habits are not addressed.

Studies have also found a positive correlation between student retention and campus recreation facility utilization (Danbert et al., 2014; Georgia Southern University Office of Strategic Research and Analysis, 2016; Kampf & Teske, 2013). In a study conducted by Danbert et al. (2014) of 4,843 first-time freshmen at a large Mid-western university, a causal relationship in one-year retention to recreational center membership was found and a significant increase in two-year retention identified. Results obtained from census data of 3,809 first-time, full time students at a large residential college also illuminated such a positive correlation (Kampf & Teske, 2013). Results indicated those students utilizing the student recreation facility more than 10 times were more likely they were to be retained (Kampf & Teske, 2013).

Besides the positive impact of student recreation facility usage on persistence, research also exists demonstrating a positive impact of student recreation center usage on GPA (Danbert et al., 2014; Georgia Southern University Office of Strategic Research and Analysis, 2016; Kampf & Teske, 2013; Sanderson, 2017). Georgia Southern University Office of Strategic Research and Analysis (2016) data applied the 10 visits per semester minimum in labeling students as participating, and confirmed in annual reporting the positive impact of recreation center visits on GPA. Kampf and Teske (2013) also identified a moderate correlation with student recreation center usage and GPA. Danbert

et al. (2014) found cumulative GPA to be .13 points higher in students who had purchased fitness center memberships versus student nonmembers. Sanderson (2017) found that GPA will increase .06 for every hour participation increase in campus recreation physical activity.

Research also exists suggesting that a campus recreation facility can both enhance retention and GPA, but also increase recruitment (Forrester, 2014; Kampf et al., 2018). Kampf et al. (2018) conducted a study where they attained GPA and campus recreation facility use data from card swipes at three colleges. Questions were also asked questions relative to the perceived importance of campus recreation facility factoring into their decision to attend and remain enrolled at the college (Kampf et al., 2018). Results indicated some level of importance with campus recreation facility usage and student decisions to both attend the institution and remain enrolled (Kampf et al., 2018). Forrester (2014) pointed out that 68% of students stated that campus recreation facilities, and 62% of students stated that campus recreation programs, impacted their decision on where to attend college.

Research has indicated that positive habits of well-being established during college years serves as a foundation for lifelong wellness (Baldwin, Towler, Oliver, & Datta, 2017). Baldwin et al. (2017) investigated 126 students attending a liberal arts college in the southeastern United States as well as 85 students at a research university utilizing a survey examining wellness factors derived from Hettler's model of holistic wellness. Hettler's (1984) model of holistic wellness included the six dimensions physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual and occupational. Baldwin et al. (2017) found

level of self-esteem predicted physical well-being, and level of perceived stress predicted social well-being.

National Intramural and Recreational Sports Association

The National Intramural and Recreational Sports Association (NIRSA, 2018a) is a leading professional organization in higher education, which promotes recreation, wellness, and sport through generating and disseminating knowledge to its members. Mull, Forrester, and Barnes (2013) credited NIRSA as the national organization that “professionalized the existence and meaning of recreational sport” (p. 14). NIRSA (2018a) established a vision to be the premier international leadership association in collegiate recreation. The foundational belief of the organization is that “college recreation is a significant and powerful key to inspiring wellness in local, regional, and global communities” (National Intramural and Recreational Sports Association, 2018a). The following six strategic values guide the organization: 1) equity, diversity, and inclusion, 2) global perspective, 3) health and well-being, 4) leadership, 5) service, 6) sustainable communities. NIRSA (2018a) highlighted programming as the core purpose for professionals in collegiate recreation to develop and implement appropriately on college campuses.

Summary

This chapter provided a review of the relevant research. This literature review has offered a foundation for understanding the conceptual framework for which the study is grounded relative to student development theory, persistence emphasis in higher education including momentum year focus and academic mindset, exploration into college students from rural backgrounds, the connection between extracurricular

offerings and student persistence, the benefits and modes of physical activity offerings, and the benefits of campus recreation engagement and programming. Such benefits included data highlighting increased GPAs and retention rates of students who participated in campus recreation (Georgia Southern University Office of Strategic Research and Analysis, 2016). After all, a large percentage of students engage in campus recreation (Forrester, 2014).

Although the literature contains many studies highlighting the benefits found in campus recreation programming, facilities and services, little research exists relative to the role campus recreation plays in the perceptions of persistence for students from rural culture. Even though rurality as a population has limited researched, a rural-urban achievement gap has been established. Student connectedness to the institution remains important for institutions to retain and graduate (Astin, 1993; Kuh et al., 2010; Tinto 2010).

The findings of this study are intended to build upon existing knowledge and literature. In Chapter 3, the methods and data analysis procedures utilized to collect and analyze the qualitative data gained from students from rural culture relative to their experiences participating in campus recreation and their perceptions of this engagement on their persistence will be presented. The results and the interpretation of the findings of this research are presented in Chapter 4, followed by a Chapter 5 journal-ready manuscript which includes an abstract, introductory chapter, a partial literature review, methods, findings, discussion and conclusion including practical implications for higher education professionals working with this population, limitations, and recommendations for future research. Although institutions of higher education are investing in campus

recreation in an attempt to attract and retain college students (National Intramural and Recreational Sports Association, 2016), this study sought to contribute to a gap in existing research regarding persistence and certain underrepresented populations such as students from rural backgrounds (Educational Advisory Board, 2017; Koricich, 2014).

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

Clear pathways for students completing college have been identified in anticipation of an additional 16.4 million American graduates by 2025 (Lumina Foundation for Education, 2017). While extracurricular engagement opportunities such as campus recreation have played an important role in complementing student college success (Astin, 1984; Tinto, 1975), the needs of students from an expanding minority group, students from rural backgrounds, is worth exploring. The purpose of this basic interpretive qualitative study was to better understand the needs of college students from rural backgrounds and the influences of extracurricular campus recreation engagement on persistence. In this chapter, the researcher provides an overview of the methodology of the study structured to achieve this purpose. A description of the research design begins the section, followed by the research questions and site details. This section will continue with the procedures of data collection, followed by data processing information and data analysis strategies. The section concludes by discussing how validity and trustworthiness were ensured.

Research Design

This study followed a basic interpretive design approach. Merriam and Associates (2002) stated that a basic interpretive study allows for an understanding of how the participant makes meaning of their experience. This basic interpretive methodology allowed the experience of campus recreation to surface through the lens of

the participants because the design focused on how participants interpreted their experiences, construct their worlds, and made meaning (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In hopes of understanding campus recreation programming and services that students from rural backgrounds perceive as important to their college persistence, the researcher served as the instrument for which an inductive strategy was employed to identify common themes in these data (Merriam & Associates, 2002).

Research Questions

The following two research questions guided this study:

1. How do college students from rural backgrounds experience campus recreation?
2. How do students from rural cultures perceive the role of engagement in campus recreation as it relates to their persistence in college?

Setting

The research site for this investigation was a historical, residential, and agricultural State College located in the southeastern United States. Data from both fall 2017 and spring 2018 were utilized to select participants for this study. Over half of all students were enrolled in bachelor degree programs. The average age of all students was 21.2 years. The average term institutional GPA was 2.85.

Fall 2017 data indicated the institution had 3,394 students, of which 1,253 lived on campus, 53.6% were female and 46.4% male. Student classification for fall 2017 enrollment was 196 Dual Enrollment, 1,307 Freshman, 905 Sophomore, 560 Junior, and 413 Senior. The percentage breakdown by self-declared race/ethnicity was 82.6% White, 7.8% African American, 7.4% Hispanic/Latino, .9% Asian, and .3% American Indian or Alaska Native.

Demographics identified 695 students, 20.5% of the campus population, as having a rural background. Out of these 695 students, 243 lived on campus. These students had a 2.7 term institutional GPA.

Campus wellness center statistics provided that a total of 1,283 students utilized the facility during fall 2017. Of these students, 256 students were identified from a rural background and represented 7.5% of the entire student body, and 20% of wellness center users with 47 utilizing the wellness center 15 times or more. These students had a 2.91 term institutional GPA.

Data Collection

This section describes the method of study, starting with approval and consent procedures to conduct the research, followed by explanation of the population and sampling procedures utilized. The sample, data collection procedures and treatment of these data are also covered.

Approval to Conduct the Study

Prior to the initiation of the study, full Institutional Review Board approval was attained. This study adhered to the guidelines involving human subjects and was compliant with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Code of Federal Regulations, 45 CFR § 46.102(2009) (see Appendix A for approval and Appendix B for letter of cooperation).

Consent to Participate in Study

Prior to beginning the interview process, the researcher verified that each participant was at least 18 years of age. At the start of the interview, the researcher read the interview consent script to the participants and asked if they were still willing to

participate (see Appendix C for consent statement). The script included details of the purpose of the study as well as an elaboration of the research procedures, risks, benefits, and assurance of confidentiality. Their participation in the interview was deemed as consent to participation.

Sampling Procedure

Selection of a sample for this research was important so that the researcher could generalize to the population as much as possible (Creswell, 2009). Purposeful sampling was used for this study to “achieve representativeness or typicality of the settings, individuals, or activities selected” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 98). Students were selected deliberately because their experiences would provide rich information to address the research questions and goals of this study (Maxwell, 2013). Participants selected for interviewing included nine traditional college students who had attended the institution for at least one semester, were from rural backgrounds, and had participated in campus recreation activities a minimum of 15 times.

Institutional data reports were generated by the Registrar at the research institution and reports were run by the researcher. The researcher held professional responsibility to generate campus recreation reports, such as frequency reports to keep up with semester attendance, for the institution. A log of students utilizing campus recreation facilities was maintained. During fall 2017, 1,283 students who utilized these facilities. Out of this total number, 256 students were determined to be from rural backgrounds, but only 47 students were from rural backgrounds and had participated in campus recreation at least 15 times during fall semester 2017. During spring semester 2018 1,239 students utilized these facilities. Out of this total number, 293 students were

determined to be from rural backgrounds, but only 69 students were from rural backgrounds and had participated in campus recreation at least 15 times during spring semester 2018. Rural backgrounds were determined after cross-checking student's permanent residence city and state against a list of rural cities cited by U.S. Census Bureau data (Florida Demographics by Cubit, 2010; Georgia Demographics by Cubit, 2010; South Carolina Demographics by Cubit, 2010).

Participant Selection

Students from rural backgrounds who met the selection criteria were invited to participate in this study. Invitations were delivered to these students by hand or via email (see Appendix D for invitation to participate), and interviews were set up on a first-come first-serve basis until saturation of data had been reached (Van Manen, 2016).

Student Interviews

The goal of the interviews was to obtain data from the participants representing the essence of their experience from their subjective perspective (Seidman, 2013). The researcher engaged participants during the interviews, paying close attention to the context of their lived experience (Seidman, 2013). Semi-structured individual interviews were coordinated with nine traditional aged college students, ranging in age from 20-21, on the campus where the researcher worked. Due to the possibility that students may not return to complete three separate 30 minute interviews, one 90 minute interview session was conducted with each participant following the Seidman (2013) interview protocol. All interview questions were designed to address the research questions and obtain data from the participants representing the essence of their experience from their subjective perspective (Seidman, 2013). A list of guiding

questions (see Appendix E) was oriented toward addressing the three aspects of Astin's (1993) I-E-O model. Questions 1-6 explored pre-college background participant information to contextualize their rurality and high school extracurricular engagement. Questions 7-19 were guiding questions relative to the participant campus recreation and extracurricular experiences during college as well as any rurality influences. Questions 20-24 attempted to ascertain the perceived impact campus recreation participation had on their college persistence as well as any rurality impact. This interview process allowed exploration of key areas in depth, but also allowed the flexibility to pursue a topic which comes up in greater detail (Ary, Jacobs, Sorenson, & Walker, 2014).

Data Processing and Analysis

All interviews were recorded with *Rev Voice* application recorder from iPhone and a backup Sony IC Recorder. Data were transcribed utilizing *Rev Voice Recorder* application and paid transcription service. Information collected was kept confidential. The participant's name did not appear on any documents where information was recorded. Forms were coded with a pseudonym of the participant's choosing. The investigator kept a separate master list with names of participants and corresponding pseudonyms in a locked safe owned by him. All audio recordings and master list of participants and corresponding pseudonyms were destroyed once interview data had been transcribed. Transcribed data and notes for this study were to be stored in a locked safe owned by the researcher for three years and then be shredded or destroyed.

Analysis of data was informed by the research design and ultimately yielded rich descriptions of participants making meaning of their interpreted experiences (Merriam, 2009). Following the guidance of Ravitch and Riggan (2017), the researcher looked at

the nuances of language, expression, and participation because the interaction of students within the environment of campus recreation is important.

All interviews were recorded with *Rev Voice* application recorder from iPhone. Data were transcribed utilizing *Rev Voice Recorder* application and paid transcription service. Information collected was kept confidential. The participant's name did not appear on any documents where information was recorded. Forms were coded with a pseudonym of the participant's choosing. The investigator kept a separate master list with names of participants and corresponding pseudonyms in locked safe owned by him. All audio recordings and master list of participants and corresponding pseudonyms were destroyed once interview data had been transcribed. Transcribed data and notes for this study were to be stored in a locked safe owned by the researcher for three years and then be shredded or destroyed.

To analyze these data, the researcher utilized data analysis strategies recommended by Creswell (2014). The raw data collected during the interviews were initially played back from the recordings, reviewed, transcribed, and read through line-by-line to gain a general sense of the overall meaning of the information obtained. Context, tone, impression of overall depth, and credibility of data were all taken into consideration. Reflection and memos aided in this process.

Specific coding steps as recommended by Tesch (1990) were followed, including selecting one interview at a time to consider the underlying meaning of each. Topics were categorized with the most descriptive wording. These codes were then matched to appropriate segments of text. Reduction strategies were employed when possible. The most descriptive wording for topics and created categories were then identified with

themes labeled and connected. Interrelating themes and descriptions were sought. Meaning was determined from the analysis of the interview data by interpreting broad meaning as applicable to the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A matrix was then created to visually analyze these data and to reflect categorical coding in relation to the research questions (Maxwell, 2013). This matrix allowed the researcher the ability to observe which participants matched and did not match certain themes and furnished a springboard for deeper analysis and revamped conclusions (Maxwell, 2013).

Validity

Qualitative validity is defined by Creswell (2014) as the process the researcher utilizes to ensure the accuracy of findings. Two types of threats to validity addressed in this study to ensure the accuracy of findings were bias and reactivity (Maxwell, 2013). To reduce the effects of researcher bias in these data, the researcher sought to identify details in these data which did not align with his biases. A list of these biases was self-identified during the course of the study. Any contrasting views with the research were discussed in the study.

Researcher-Interviewer

The researcher's subjectivity represented a major threat to the validity of this study. His experiential professional and personal knowledge needed to be transparent that researcher self-awareness did not overly influence participants. Examples include the researcher's professional role serving for five years as the administrator overseeing most campus extracurricular student engagement programs activities, including directly or indirectly supervising Greek Life, Campus Activities Board, the Student Government Association, Stallion Society Orientation Leaders, Welcome Week, and Inter Club

Council. The researcher also had approximately 19 years of experience serving in the administrative capacity overseeing campus recreation and athletics at the institution where these data were collected and was responsible for approving and guiding all clubs and organizations as they register events. While serving the institution in this capacity, the researcher also chaired the Student Activity Fee committee which prepared budget recommendations of the approximately 50 clubs and organizations offered to the institution's Dean of Students, and President's Cabinet.

The researcher did not let his personal positive student experiences in campus recreation during college influence the participants. The researcher had worked as a student for three years in campus recreation, supervising the Greek All-Sports trophy competitions amongst the 18 fraternity and sororities. He also served as the All-Sports Trophy Chair for his fraternity for four years and won intramural badminton, pickleball and table tennis multiple years. In addition, the researcher participated on the varsity tennis team four years and majored in Exercise Science.

Although experiential knowledge was viewed as a positive in that it facilitated development and exploration of open-ended questions, the researcher did not think he knew all the answers which could result in leading questions and foregone conclusions (Maxwell, 2013). Likewise, reactivity of student responses to interview questions was concerning. Understanding how the researcher could have influenced these data provided by the participants during interviews and subsequent validity inferences taken away from the interviews was important (Maxwell, 2013).

The researcher paid attention to the ethical considerations of the researcher-participant relationship (Maxwell, 2013), making sure all participants understood the

purpose of the study and that they would be asked to review the transcribed content of their interview to verify it reflected what they had said. The researcher anticipated no power differences with the research student-participants since another administrator served as the direct report of a few student-workers who participated in the study. The other administrator also handled all guidance, discipline, and participation to eliminate the fear of possible consequences from what was stated during the interview process.

A researcher identity memo (see Appendix F) was reflected upon prior to all interviews to expose biases or assumptions which could negatively impact the study (Maxwell, 2013). The researcher paid close attention to the biases and assumptions brought to the research. The researcher did not anticipate any stereotypes rising about certain students which could influence the study since minimal student-participant interaction occurred.

Beliefs and Biases

Owing to the overwhelmingly positive influences extracurricular activities in college have had on the researcher's life, he believes wholeheartedly in their value. The researcher identity memo (see Appendix F) explains in detail his experiences in physical fitness, campus recreation, intercollegiate athletics, student affairs, and rural culture. The researcher's assumptions were that the vast majority of on-campus extracurricular engagement opportunities provide a benefit for students far beyond the classroom. The researcher's belief is that there is something for everyone out there and some programs and organizations could provide greater benefits for students than others. Intentionally

leading students towards these multibeneficial extracurricular opportunities could set the table for student success.

The researcher recognized that a focus on inclusion is a critical component of higher education. In an increasingly diverse world, the researcher's belief is that a focus on multicultural education should be sharpened and accentuated. The researcher believes assessment and application of data to drive decisions will continue to be important as student persistence and recruitment likely tip the balance in high stakes higher education enrollment competition. Institutions which balance academic excellence and holistic student engagement will have an advantage.

The researcher further believes that physical fitness and wellness should be increasingly promoted in college. Research results could assist in better informed intentional decisions on allocation of funding toward resources (student-workers, lifeguards, professional staff, hours of operation, etc.), programs, equipment, and facilities. Data exist revealing how best to promote recreation programs, attract other students, and target development.

In the researcher's administrative role, he recognized that many data driven decisions are made in higher education, but not necessarily relative to student culture. Much of the higher education reports and research focuses on culture related to race such as Asian, Hispanic/Latino, African American, White, etc. For instance, the University System of Georgia Fall 2017 Enrollment Report breaks down race/ethnicity per school as well as providing system-wide data in this capacity. These data at the researcher's institution highlighted the following fall 2017 enrollment data: 82.6% White, 7.8% African American, 7.4% Hispanic/Latino, .9% Asian, and .3% American

Indian or Alaska Native. Spring 2018 enrollment data reflected 81.9% White, 8.2% African American, 7.4% Hispanic/Latino, 1.1% Asian, and .3% American Indian or Alaska Native.

Limited to no data exist on student culture when viewing enrollment reports. Rurality is a culture with important and socioeconomic underpinnings attached. After growing up in a metropolitan suburb and moving to the southeastern United States to work at a college whose largest major is agriculture, the researcher had learned to understand the value of agriculture. The researcher also recognized students from rural backgrounds frequently have grown up in agricultural areas. Understanding more about rurality should shed light on student needs and create further inquiry on urbanity and other cultural-related questions.

As a result of the researcher's experiences, he believes that extracurricular activities in college are critical for traditional-aged students having the greatest opportunity for success in college and in gathering experiences, which will help them in their careers. The researcher believes college officials should promote positive and holistic student experiences which connect students to the institution and result in student development and persistence along the way. As a consequence of a strong belief from both experience and education, the researcher will need to guard against exhibiting bias in research and monitor his subjectivity.

Reactivity

Reactivity is defined by Maxwell (2013) as researcher influence on the setting or participants. To prevent reactivity, unnecessary influence of the researcher on the participants or the setting, the researcher followed Maxwell's (2013) advice and

designed research questions in such a way that they minimize leading the participants. As suggested by Hammersley and Atkinson (1995), the researcher also paid close attention to how he may be influencing the research. Any identified influences were discussed in the study.

Trustworthiness

Key considerations of trustworthiness are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Guba, 1981). Credibility may be the most important since it relates so closely to internal validity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In order to contribute to trustworthiness, the researcher sought an interpretive meaning of findings which aligned with reality (Merriam & Associates, 2002). Credibility was pursued in this study through seeking an interpretive meaning of the findings which aligned with reality (Merriam & Associates, 2002). To promote accuracy of data collection and subsequent trustworthiness, triangulation, iterative questioning, peer debriefing, and member checking were employed (Shenton, 2004).

Similar to external validity, transferability took into consideration the possibility that findings in one situation could be applicable to another (Merriam, 1998). Transferability was explored in this study by considering the possibility that findings in one situation could be applicable to another (Merriam, 1998). Despite the small sample size in this study and contextual factors influencing research findings (Gomm, Hammersley, & Foster, 2000), detailed site information was provided. Rich contextual information about the college and the student-participants allow others to determine whether results will be transferable to their situation (Shenton, 2004).

Dependability contributes to a qualitative study's credibility by providing overlapping methods of data collection (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Dependability was addressed by providing overlapping methods of data collection (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Again, these data collection processes were reported in detail to provide others with enough information to repeat their research regardless of obtaining similar results (Shenton, 2004). A detailed description of the collected data and analysis process was provided to enable others to understand that if they followed the exact same methods, and used a similar population, they would likely reach similar findings (Shenton, 2004).

Similar to the concept of objectivity, confirmability maximized to the extent possible the researcher's pursuit of data reflecting the ideas and experiences of the subject (Shenton, 2004). Confirmability was maximized in this study by providing quotes from the student-participants as much as possible to reflect their ideas and experiences (Shenton, 2004). These quotes shaped the major themes which emerged from interviews. The transparency of detailed methodology provided an audit trail to support trustworthiness.

Summary

The study was conducted to better understand the needs of college students from rural backgrounds and the influences of extracurricular campus recreation engagement on their persistence. These data were collected through semi-structured interviews with students from rural backgrounds who had frequently participated in campus recreation. The results of the study were intended to bestow insight for administrators making extracurricular programming decisions at their institutions. The results and the interpretation of the findings of this research are presented in Chapter 4, followed by a

Chapter 5 provides a journal-ready manuscript which includes an abstract, introductory chapter, a partial literature review, methods, findings, discussion and conclusion including practical implications for higher education professionals working with this population, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter IV

RESULTS (FINDING)

The purpose of this study was to understand the needs of college students from rural backgrounds and the influences of extracurricular campus recreation engagement on their persistence. The first three chapters of this dissertation provided an introduction of the problem of campus recreational programming impact on rural student persistence, a review of the relevant research relative to students from rural backgrounds, engagement, physical activity, recreational sports, funding, and persistence, and the methodology used to collect and analyze these data for this study. This chapter will provide a review of the research questions, present participant profiles, and illuminate interview findings accentuated by common themes.

A qualitative basic interpretive design approach was utilized to collect data from semi-structured and open-ended interviews. Nine traditional college students from rural backgrounds who attended the institution and participated in campus recreation activities at least 15 times during fall semester 2017 or spring semester 2018 were selected for interviews. The data analysis process included listening to interviews, reviewing transcribed data line-by-line and creating memos after reflecting, coding, assigning themes with descriptions, identifying interrelationships, and interpreting meaning.

Gems and categories were identified with similar topics clustered together and compartmentalized into a matrix. Columns were then prepared with the most descriptive topics being categorized as major, unique, and miscellaneous. Themes from

categories were created, labeled, and connected based upon the conceptual framework. Interrelationships and deep connections were sought with overall interpretive meaning.

Research Questions

To accomplish the purpose of this research, the interview data were analyzed to answer the following research questions:

Research Question 1. How do college students from rural backgrounds experience campus recreation?

Research Question 2. How do students from rural cultures perceive the role of engagement in campus recreation as it relates to their persistence in college?

Data Analysis and Findings

Separate 90-minute interviews were conducted with each of nine participants focusing on addressing each of three areas of the conceptual framework established through Astin's I-E-O model; input, environment, and outcomes. The interview questions also addressed each of the two research questions. Participants were selected who had a permanent college address reflecting a rural demographic, and who had participated in campus recreation programs at least 15 times during the fall semester 2017 or the spring semester 2018. Table 1 provides a brief biographical profile for each participant including their pseudonym, age, major, undergraduate classification, specific campus recreation involvement and number of participations per semester in campus recreation wellness center.

Table 1

Research Participant Profile Table

Pseudonym	Age	Major	Class	Campus Recreation Involvement	Semester Participations
Kate	21	Writing and Communication	Senior	IM, OG, FCC, FCW, OR	15
Grace	21	Biology, Agricultural Engineering	Junior	IM, FCW	17
Jessica	20	Nursing	Junior	FCW	27
Max	20	Business and Economic Development	Sophomore	IM, FCC, FCW, OR	27
Rick	20	Agriculture, Crop and Soil Science	Junior	IM, FCW, OR	15
Bean	21	Agriculture, Crop and Soil Science	Senior	IM, FCW, OR	27
Stew	20	Biology	Junior	FCW	29
Lucy	20	Early Childhood Education	Sophomore	IM, FCW, OR	16
Audrey	20	Biology	Sophomore	IM, FCW, FCC, OR	15

Note. IM = intramural sports; FCC = fitness center cardiovascular; FCW = fitness center weight training; OG = open gym; OR = open recreation.

This information was captured during the first six input-seeking interview questions.

These questions provided background information of the student-participants as well as context of student extracurricular engagement and rural background influences prior to college.

Brief Profiles of the Participants

Kate. Kate is a 21-year-old graduating college Senior majoring in Writing and Communication. She feels her rural high school education ill-prepared her for college rigor when comparing observations of her urban peers. She says, “I would assume that their school systems were more prepared for college because most people that live in Atlanta go through high school and go to college. Where to as, not everybody in my county goes to college.” While reminiscing on her extracurricular experiences during high school she recalled, “you either worked at the barn or you went home.” She added the influence from her parents to engage extracurricularly, stating “they just wanted me to be involved in something outside of school and they always tried to preach that to us growing up.” Kate ended up participating on the varsity softball team in high school and Future Farmers of America (FFA). She fondly spoke about a strong sense of belonging to both of these groups and felt both forced her out of her shell of being quiet and shy while honing her leadership skills. She enjoyed traveling with these groups and recognized softball as a way her family could spend time together. She attributed an understanding of the value of money and opportunities afforded her peers from larger towns as she began college, stating “our FFA program was not as large and so, none of us went to a national convention. . . . when I got to college I learned, well, they all go to a national convention.” Kate also felt she did not have the opportunities others from larger towns had with softball, saying “we would do fundraisers for trips and fundraisers to go to state and to pay for our food to go to state and none of them had to do that. They were supported through it. . . . and when I got to college I was like, ‘I did all this work for this money, and they’re just given it’.” Kate was determined to get involved in

college and get a job and did not want her parents to support her anymore. Upon arriving at college, Kate pursued a student-worker referee position for Intramural Sports, joined a Greek organization, represented collegiate FFA, became a tutor, joined Phi Theta Kappa, was a member of the Bee Keepers Association, and served as an Ambassador for the institution.

Grace. Grace is a 21-year-old college Junior majoring in Biology, Agricultural Engineering. She feels her extracurricular opportunities were limited in high school, so she focused on playing softball and on FFA. She recalled enjoying FFA, saying “I had fun . . . I got to meet new people and see about agriculture and participate in all of the competitions.” She pointed out that FFA was big, “because most people in my grade and all throughout high school were farmers’ kids and they all came from ag backgrounds. So, having something that they could all relate to in the classroom was really good.” Grace noted her enjoyment to become involved in activities early on in high school was a motivating influence, stating:

I have always been really active. I used to do dance and twirling and I rode horses and then I just played soccer, and then I found softball. And that’s what really clicked and I don’t know, it was fun, and I liked always being able to do better. You could never be the best, you always had to keep trying.

Grace mentioned that her mom encouraged her to become involved in something outside of the classroom or get a job. She said, “and softball just became a job so I had to be good at it.” She credited FFA with inspiring her of what she wanted to do professionally, and softball with teaching her discipline and developing her as a person. Grace came to college on a softball scholarship and currently is a student assistant coach. Besides immersing herself in college softball life as an extracurricular activity, Grace is a member of the Ag Business Club.

Jessica. Jessica is a 21-year-old college Junior majoring in Nursing. While in high school, she was actively involved in the choir and musicals and pursued available opportunities where she could push herself. Jessica recalled her motivating influences for becoming involved in music, stating:

I've always been really interested in music. And . . . when I moved to South Georgia, my choir director, was just, he was so passionate about it and he made it so fun. And, he gave us challenging music. And, then, once you start to learn music, you get more excited about it and you want to learn more music and see can I read this, can I not. What kind of rhythms can I read and all that. So, just being able to push myself and challenge myself, really kept me going.

She also participated with the Spanish Club and a future healthcare professional organization called HOSA. Jessica's fondest memories were of traveling with her high school choir to New York City and New Orleans. She recalled playing Carnegie Hall and fondly described traveling with her choir in New Orleans, "we just kind of had more freedom to explore on our own and it was a lot of fun." "I definitely gained, performance-wise, I gained a lot of experience performing. Because, I am pretty introverted, into myself. I am pretty shy. But, when you are on a stage and you are really passionate about it, it makes you come out of your shell and be more open." Jessica realized that resources were not as available or close in her rural area, commenting, "we were going to go to Ireland, but there was not enough students that wanted to go. So, it made the price for the people that were going, go way up. So, then we just did not go anywhere." Upon arriving at college, she already had a student lifeguard job in place. Her only extracurricular involvement is working out in the fitness center with her boyfriend.

Max. Max is a 21-year-old college Sophomore majoring in Business and Economic Development. He was raised moving around frequently since his mom was in

the military and has lived in both urban and rural environments. He remembers his extracurricular experiences during his high school years in a rural area as “having a good ole time with sports connecting friends, the community, and family.” He played football for his high school and frequently played baseball and basketball. He also lifted weights and utilized cardiovascular equipment. Max had anger issues growing up as a result of not knowing his father and felt sports played an important role in addressing his needs. He says about sports, “it helps me just control myself, because without control and you can not really do anything without controlling yourself, and you have to rely on yourself to be able to do certain things.” Max reflected fondly of his high school extracurricular involvement in sports, stating that it provided him with, not only friends, but a family of brothers and this was important because he was the only child. Max’s grandmother was a pastor and impacted him greatly through religion. “Why feel down, when you have God looking above you, and you have something better to look for in life?” Overall, Max says that people from rural culture tend to more polite, “we have more manners in the South.” Max indicated an appreciation for his rural background, recalling:

Being in the country and being with friends and family, you get closer. But, in a city, you are not as close, and I’ve seen that because I’ve been to both situations because I have family out there in New York that we barely hear from them. We speak, but we barely hear from them. We love them, but it’s no communication like that. But, when everyone’s closer in the country, like my grandmother . . . she is closer and everyone comes to her house because that is when they’re all around, and she’s just so laid back. This . . . just touches you. It’s everything is so better in the country.

Rick. Rick is a 20-year-old Junior majoring in Agriculture, Crop and Soil Science. He was a four-sport athlete having participated in varsity football, baseball, basketball and track. He was the quarterback of his football team and served as class president his senior year and vice president his sophomore and junior years of high

school. He also played gospel music in the praise band every Wednesday. His graduating class had 36 people. When describing his high school extracurricular experiences, he says they could be stressful but while looking back on it he loved it. He describes two of his most memorable experiences in high school as both playing in front of a large group of people; playing praise music at an event where many people were saved, and during the state football tournament when he described a negative experience where he felt he let his team down on a play that shifted the momentum and cost his school the game. However, Rick attributed football with being a major motivating influence which pushed him intrinsically on him during high school, recalling:

I felt like it set me apart from a lot of people. There were people that got to go soon as the bell rang after school. They went home, but they didn't have . . . my coach said it was a privilege to be on the football team. I got to say I did all this so me and my teammates tell all the stories about the gruesome stuff we got to go through, workouts and conditions. I feel like I was privileged to be on the team, and I feel like that . . . it just set me apart and be able to say that I did all that. I wasn't too lazy to do all that. I worked through it, and I was successful at it.

Overall, Rick felt he learned discipline and punctuality from playing sports as well as the skill to overcome adversity.

Bean. Bean is a 21-year-old Senior majoring in Agriculture, Crop and Soil Science. He participated in baseball throughout high school, wrestling up to his Junior year, and football his Freshman and Sophomore years. He was also a member of FFA and the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. He recalls his most memorable experience in high school as being with his friends on the baseball team while traveling, "probably playing cards in the back of the baseball bus. That was fun for me . . . I'd enjoy the bus ride more than the game and playing . . . cause I mean if I just went to school and then I

went straight home and worked on the farm all the time, I wouldn't know anybody.”

Bean eluded to peer acceptance fueling his motivation to participate in sports, stating:

Really if you didn't play sports, you were . . . it was like two totally different crowds. The cool crowd, and the not cool crowd. If you didn't play sports, you wasn't in the cool crowd. I mean . . . that's black and white right there, putting it simply.

Also, he reflected on his dad and his agriculture background as being influential, saying:

Working with my dad . . . we work until two in the morning sometimes we'll cut the truck lights on if we got something we need to be doing. Some nights I would stay in the batting cages after everybody was gone. I'd stay there for an hour or two in the dark, with the lights on, hitting or something.

Stew. Stew is a 20-year-old Junior majoring in Biology. He participated in high school varsity cross-country, the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC), the rifle team, and worked at Dairy Queen. He recalled his most memorable high school experiences surrounding running, noting “I really loved being physical, and just pushing my body as far as I can possibly push . . . that's what I've always liked is just beating myself, being better than I was last time. So, I may be in pain, or throwing up, or knocked on the ground but I'm better than I was last week and then I'm only going to continue to get better.” Stew described the ROTC as having a motivating influence on his high school extracurricular involvement, saying:

I just really liked ROTC because I always looked up to the military. And, I thought I would go into the military at a younger age. And, once I got in, I really liked the way the instructors treated us because they didn't treat us like other teachers. They treated us like adults. They put very high expectations on how we acted, the way we dressed because they wanted everyone to look at our program and know that we are the best. And, I really liked that aspect of it because I was being held to a higher standard.

Stew added he felt his leadership skills were developed from leading younger people and standing up to speak in front of others. Another motivating influence was his dad.

Stew recalls being inspired by his dad clearing land from a tornado that came through, saying “he’s walking with no shirt on, he is carrying the log on his shoulder, and I was like, ‘wow, he looks like Arnold Schwarzenegger in *Commando*’ . . . that’s gonna be me someday.”

Lucy. Lucy is a 20-year-old Sophomore majoring in Early Childhood Education. Lucy was attracted to the fun-based extracurricular activities in high school. She chose to become involved in the FCA and Y Club (service club promoting Christian values in the home, school and community). She recalled a turning point in her life from a negative experience in ninth grade basketball when it felt like the coach became too demanding, saying “everything is all or nothing, and was trying to be powerful, power-hungry, like he was in control.” Lucy stated that it was at that time she converted over to track where she felt more on her own and could compete against herself. Shotput and discus throw were her specialties. Lucy felt that varsity track and field had a diverse mix of people because of the variety of competitions in track and field events. Lucy described a coach of hers during high school who influenced her tremendously, saying:

I had one coach in track, he was the main . . . he did the field part of track, but he also did the hurdles, too, so that’s what got me into hurdles. He was always, ‘Go try this, go try that. You’re able to do this if you make yourself do it.’ He would just always push me toward something like, ‘You may not be good at it, but you can go try it and if you want to go try it at a track meet, go for it. If you’re not good at it, then that’s okay’.

Her brother also influenced her positively by encouraging her to try new things. She described her dad as providing a positive impact on her because of his willingness to speak to all kinds of people and genuinely wanting to know more about them. Lucy noted that because she grew up without many neighbors, it became important to meet

others at school and in extracurricular activities. In fact, Lucy said she lived on the same road as her aunt, two uncles, and grandparents.

Audrey. Audrey is a 20-year-old Sophomore majoring in Biology. She attended a private high school and primarily participated in varsity track, cross-country and soccer. She competed primarily in the track events for batons and four-by-four relay. She especially enjoyed track and soccer because she said that people relied on her, whereas cross-country was more of a personal challenge. Having others depend on her made her want to do even better. Overall, she self-proclaimed a love for being outside and running, saying “I feel more free”. Her family lived on a large area of land with a creek in the backyard and she grew to love the outside, particularly riding four-wheelers and climbing trees. She attributed this enjoyment of the outdoors to her parents who used to, “lock the doors behind us and made us stay outside until they felt it was time.” Audrey recalled a desire to gather extracurricular experiences while in high school which began with her parents demand for her and her sister to become involved extracurricularly, recalling:

I wanted to have some kind of background when it came to go to college. I know it asked about what you were involved in, so obviously I wanted to have a good resume you could say, and being involved in sports was a major key for me. Then the team itself, there’s the girls on the team, and the coach as well, the coach we called her She was amazing. I keep in touch with her now. She was a little hard, but in the best way possible I feel like.

The next section will address the theme uncovered while reviewing data from the first research question, ‘how do college students from rural background experience campus recreation?’.

The first research question was designed to address the *environment* component of Astin’s (1993) I-E-O model for college students from rural backgrounds in relation to

their interactions with the programs, equipment, and facilities found within campus recreation. Interview transcripts of nine participants were explored to illuminate common threads of description, feeling, practical application, or practice found within student responses. Interview questions 7 through 19 related to the participants' campus recreation experiences during college. Themes were organized to make meaning of recurrent data. These themes were subsequently cross-referenced with all participant responses and featured with student quotations exemplifying them.

How Campus Recreation is Experienced

The nine participants in this study were asked open-ended interview questions pertaining to their college campus recreation experiences as students from rural culture. These questions probed their first exposure to campus recreation programs, equipment, and facilities as well as degree of involvement. The questions were also designed to determine if their rural culture influenced their campus recreation experiences.

Extracurricular engagement in campus recreation was compared to other competing responsibilities as well. A determination of the importance of physical activity was ascertained as well as reasons these students became involved in campus recreation. Rural background was intertwined throughout questioning to gauge any difference in the way these participants experienced campus recreation compared to other students.

Two themes emerged from these students from rural backgrounds as they described their campus recreation engagement. First, students (7/9) from rural backgrounds engaged in various forms of campus recreation their first semester upon arriving at the institution. These students had a familiarity of their campus recreation involvement activities and comfort level which both contributed to their participation.

Exposure to campus recreation programs, equipment, and facilities through on-campus employment also contributed to engagement.

Immediate Involvement

Four of the students began engaging in campus recreation within the first few weeks upon arriving to campus. The gateway to increased campus recreation involvement for Audrey occurred while she explored the fitness center with a friend. She said, “My roommate and I would go work out a lot. They (intramural staff) had posted my freshman year, so I knew that y’all did intramurals, but I didn’t know which sports y’all did.” Rick heard about intramural competitions prior to arriving to campus through an older, former high school teammate who had attended the college. Rick said his participation happened immediately upon arriving to campus, stating “One of the first couple nights we were here, we went to the gym up there, the first night it opened and played pick-up basketball.” He further stated that he enjoyed getting involved in anything competitive and athletic, adding “I actually wound up playing more intramural sports than I’d planned on. I planned on just playing football, basketball, and baseball, or softball, but I wound up (also) playing volleyball.” Bean became involved in campus recreation through his fraternity participation during the Greek pledge period. He said, “Right after growth week . . . we gathered at the gym and played basketball as a fraternity, with our fraternity brothers, and we did (intramural) flag football and softball.” Bean added that once he went on the website to register for intramural events, he saw other sports in which he could become involved.

Three students became involved in campus recreation through their student employment in campus recreation. Kate began refereeing as a student-worker upon

arriving at the college. She said that as a referee she had the opportunity to meet a lot of students and they eventually began inviting her to play. She reluctantly agreed to play basketball, a sport she never played before, saying “it was the hardest experience of my life. I had never realized how much work went into playing basketball. It’s a whole new appreciation for the sport started for me then and I had so much fun.” Stew also began college as a student-worker in campus recreation. He said, “I was looking for a job, so I started reffing. So, that was kind of my first introduction into all the sports and stuff.” After Stew discovered the weight room was free on campus, he cancelled his gym membership in town and utilized the campus recreation facility. Jessica also began working in campus recreation. She was a lifeguard. However, because of a knee injury she had at the time, the extent of her campus recreation was rehabilitating in the weight room. This rehabilitation eventually became fitness training to which she became dedicated.

Two students were not exposed to campus recreation right away and didn’t get involved until their second semester. Lucy said, “I didn’t really do much of it my first semester, much of any intramural sports just because I was adjusting, and I didn’t really know who was a part of it and how to get involved with it.” Soon, friends she made invited her and it snowballed. As a varsity athlete, Grace was immersed in varsity softball her first semester arriving to the college. She utilized the gym, but it was for training with the team. She also began to recognize others having fun and playing, recalling “I just thought it was really cool that you didn’t really have to be on a team, but you could come out and play with other people.” Eventually, she began playing intramural dodgeball with her teammates and working out for herself.

Wellness Appreciation

Second, all student-participants (9/9) in this study continued to participate in campus recreation due to the perceived wellness benefits they received from various campus recreation facilities and programming. They were aware of the wellness benefits derived, such as reduced stress, increased physical strength, improved health, enhanced mental clarity, increased energy, leaner body composition, and management of anger. Although the students repeated the recognition of these wellness benefits throughout the interviews, the degree of energy invested was relative. Table 2 provides quotations that represent examples of participants' responses relative to constructed themes.

Table 2

Experiences of Students from Rural Backgrounds in Campus Recreation

Theme	Quotes
Immediate Involvement	<p>“We were just walking around we were like, I wonder what they have on campus. We got there, and we were like, oh, this is nice, and we started hooping and stuff, but after that . . . it opened up a new world for us.” (Max)</p> <p>“I was looking for a job, so I started reffing. So, that was kind of my first introduction into all the sports and stuff.” (Stew)</p>
Wellness Appreciation	<p>“I feel like I’m a better person every week because I put myself through so much that it really helps you feel like you can do anything.” (Stew)</p> <p>“It’s just really important to me to be fit and feel good about myself.” (Jessica)</p> <p>“Working out is not only likely to maintain my physical fitness, but to relieve stress.” (Kate)</p>

In its simplest form, physical activity benefits can be gained from utilizing campus recreation programs, facilities, and equipment in a low-to-moderate degree of physical exertion. Kate described such an approach, saying “Even if it’s not necessarily running, but going for a walk with my friends or walking to get a smoothie and just the outdoors and doing some activity, rather than sitting at my desk trying to type this paper.”

Benefits to students participating in campus recreation at moderate-to-high degrees of physical exertion were positively reflected on by student-participants. Bean discussed the cardiovascular benefit of playing competitive intramurals, saying “Playing basketball and football is a lot of cardio for me. I guess that’s why it makes me feel physically fit.” Stew, who works out routinely in the weight room and competes in body building competitions said, “I feel like I’m a better person every week because I put myself through so much that it really helps you feel like you can do anything.” Jessica, who also works out intensely in the weight room, described working out as one of the most important priorities for her because of the physical health connection to mental health, saying “I’ve definitely gained more confidence . . . it really helped boost my esteem.”

Audrey addressed the appreciation for wellness benefits received during campus recreation participation, but also emphasized her enjoyment while participating. She said, “I never would have thought I would have such a good time. I died, and I sweat like a hippo, but I had a great time cutting up laughing. . . . I look at the intramural sports as one way to destress, let loose a little bit, and have fun.”

Overall, students from rural backgrounds gravitated toward various campus recreation programs, equipment, and facilities due to a comfort they had in the transition from high school. Many of these student-participants were involved in sports during high school and many discussed enjoying being outside. Campus recreation allowed these students to socialize in an environment in which they were familiar and had confidence. Campus recreation also provides a non-intimidating on-campus conduit to other campus recreation or on-campus activities. Campus recreation allowed these students an opportunity to showcase their developed skills from high school and continue engaging on a comfort-level continuum ranging from fun to competitive, structured to unstructured, individual to team, and indoor to outdoor.

These students from rural backgrounds recognized the wellness benefits derived from the physical activity gained from campus recreation participation. These wellness benefits impacted students from rural backgrounds and promoted the continuance of their engagement in campus recreation programs, equipment, and facilities throughout college. The next section will address the theme uncovered while reviewing data from the second research question, ‘how do students from rural cultures perceive the role of engagement in campus recreation as it relates to their persistence in college?’.

Perceptions of Campus Recreation Impact on Persistence

The second research question was designed to address the *outcomes* component of Astin’s (1993) I-E-O model for college students from rural backgrounds in relation to their interactions with the programs, equipment, and facilities found within campus recreation. Any impact from the student-participants’ experience within the campus recreation environment on persistence was explored. Interview questions 20 through 24

provided the student-participants an opportunity to elaborate upon the extent to which their campus recreation experiences influenced their persistence, as well as how this involvement and their background might impact their future.

Academic complement

One significant and recurring theme emerged from the student-participants from rural backgrounds as they related the role campus recreation played in their college persistence. This theme was that campus recreation complemented academic responsibilities. Students (8/9) from rural backgrounds perceived campus recreation as providing programs, equipment, and facilities which serve as a counterbalance to their academic responsibilities. These students didn't have to look far to identify an activity which was readily available to them on campus and would provide them with a readily available reason to get out of their room as well as add structure. Table 3 provides quotations that represent examples of participants' responses relative to constructed themes.

Table 3

Perceptions of the Role of Engagement on Persistence by Students from Rural Culture

Theme	Quotes
Academic Complement	<p>“I mean I definitely do have fun, but only if my stuff is done. Like I have to make sure that my priorities are right. If I don't have my homework or I haven't studied, I don't do anything that prohibits me from</p>

studying . . . because I feel like your
mental health is really important too. But
I feel like you can balance the both.”

(Grace)

“I think it definitely keeps me focused,
working out and stuff like that.” (Stew)

“Intramurals has definitely helped me
stay in school because it makes me look
forward to something. It helps be take
my mind off chemistry.” (Audrey)

Students spoke to the importance of campus recreation programs and services in rounding out their college experience by providing a physical and social outlet. Max stated:

Being physically active, it helps me out. It does a lot for me because not doing that . . . I’m going to just be in the room, and you don’t want to be that student that goes class straight to the room. Just gives you a lot of chances to meet everybody, do new things, try new things, and even see new things. If you stay in your room, you’re not going to get to experience, the college life that you actually want to live.

Grace said, “It makes me feel better because I know that I’m doing something, not just sitting around. Socializing’s always fun. You’re not just thinking about school the whole time. You can actually have fun and be free.” Jessica added that working out in the campus recreation fitness center was an integral part of her college regimen, saying “I’m pretty content with going to classes and just going through a routine right now.”

Kate also spoke to the importance of physical activity providing some inspiration to her

studies, saying “if I’m writing a paper and I get like a writer’s block, I go for a run and honestly while I’m running, I typically think about the whole paper, but I can come back and have so many more fresh ideas by going out and running.” She also viewed campus recreation as a reward for addressing academic deadlines and forced her to refine her time management skills, elaborating:

So my homework has got to be done by 6:30 if I want to play in the softball game or I know that I need to leave this meeting at 5:30, so that I can eat before I go and play in this or before I work out.

Grace also recognized the importance of time management and prioritization of academics with the enjoyment of engaging in physical activity to alleviate stress, stating:

I mean I definitely do have fun, but only if my stuff is done. Like I have to make sure that my priorities are right. If I don’t have my homework or I haven’t studied, I don’t do anything that prohibits me from studying . . . because I feel like your mental health is really important too. But I feel like you can balance the both.

Miscellaneous Gem

Although not directly related to the two primary research questions in this study, a miscellaneous theme emerged while transcribing and coding the *input* related questions relative to Astin’s (1993) I-E-O model. Interview questions 1 through 6 provided the student-participants from rural backgrounds an opportunity to explain the impact of extracurricular experiences and motivating influences prior to college.

Rural Background Input and Extra Motivation to Persist

Student-participants (8/9) spoke to a perceived edge they brought with them from their rural culture based upon wanting a better life for themselves and their families. This theme was not directly related to their campus recreation participation, but became apparent from analysis of these data provided from the *input* questions of the

conceptual framework. The participants provided comments which contained an embedded edge in the belief that their rural environment limited their options and dreams. This edge encouraged them to take advantage of college opportunities and the eventual degree college could provide them. Table 4 provides quotations that represent examples of participants' responses relative to constructed themes.

Table 4

Understanding How Students from Rural Culture Make Meaning of Campus Recreation
Miscellaneous Theme

Theme	Quotes
Extra Motivation	<p>“There’s really not that many of us that go off to college.” (Kate)</p> <p>“I have a . . . goal that’s very lofty that I just . . . I really wanna get my degree.” (Rick)</p>

Lucy spoke to the expanded opportunity college offers her, stating:

It just gives you the whole new opportunity. If you want to go a certain direction, it strengthens your opportunities that you’re able to make. To get a rural job up where I’m from, you start when you’re 18, I see how my dad and all them, they didn’t go to college . . . and you can only go so far without a college career, and I’ve seen that, and I’ve seen that in my brother. He went to college for a little while and then he stopped, and he is only getting so far in his career and someone like my uncle, he can only go so far in your life or in your lifetime without certain knowledge. So, you need to have a minimum to keep going, so in college it makes me want to finish.

Jessica views her degree as opening up doors for her to work and reside in a non-rural area, pointing out, “You would have opportunities that you wouldn’t have at home.”

Kate acknowledged that the concept of going to college was atypical in her rural town, saying “There’s really not that many of us that go off to college.” Stew stated that college provided a tremendous opportunity for him, noting:

Because I don’t want to be in that, poor farmers or live out in the sticks or with very bad housing . . . so, if I want to get that advancement then college is the easier route I take from here, to go and get a degree. And then, you can go and move on somewhere better. I think that being in a rural community does help because there’s not a lot of opportunities here and college can help you find better opportunities.

Summary

Although this study had only nine participants, data saturation was reached, and themes emerged (van Manen, 2016). Demographic data were collected during the input-related interview questions related to the extracurricular experiences of participants prior to college. This chapter presented the four emergent themes identified from the research questions of the study pertaining to the environment-related and outcomes-related interview questions. These findings revealed that students from rural backgrounds immediately began engaging in campus recreation. These students continued with their campus recreation involvement throughout college because of the wellness benefits provided. Participants also saw campus recreation as an extracurricular engagement option which provided balance with their academic responsibilities. As a result of their experiences growing up in a rural community, these students had an extra level of motivation to persist. Chapter 5 provides a journal-ready manuscript which includes an abstract, introductory chapter, a partial literature review, methods, findings, discussion and conclusion including practical implications for higher education professionals working with this population, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter V

JOURNAL READY ARTICLE

Abstract

Investment in Campus Recreation as an Academic Complement to Momentum Year.

Research indicates that students are more likely to persist when they are involved in extracurricular programs such as campus recreation. Because institutional funding is predicated upon graduation rates, ascertaining persistence impact of these programs is crucial. The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain an understanding of the persistence needs of students from rural backgrounds relative to their engagement in campus recreation within the framework of Astin's Input-Environment-Outcomes model. Data were collected from nine students at a residential, agricultural State College in the southeastern United States. Results indicated 1) participants (7/9) became involved immediately in campus recreation; 2) all participants were aware of wellness benefits derived; 3) participants (8/9) perceived that campus recreation involvement positively influenced persistence by complementing their academic responsibilities; and 4) participants (8/9) believed their rural background provided extra motivation to persist. Results can be used to assist administrators making intentional extracurricular investment decisions.

Keywords: involvement theory, mindset, persistence, wellness

Researchers have demonstrated that students persist at institutions providing campus recreation engagement opportunities (Kampf & Teske, 2013; Windschitl, 2008).

One outcome of such research is a trend indicating institutions of higher education are increasing their investment in campus recreation programs, equipment, and facilities (National Intramural and Recreational Sports Association [NIRSA], 2016). To attain the level of participation that may result in increased persistence, administrators must understand that the racial and ethnic composition of the college student body is becoming more diverse (Bransberger & Michelau, 2016), and the participation preferences of these students is important to understand (Kuh et al., 2010; National Intramural and Recreational Sports Association, 2018a).

Although research has been conducted in higher education on underrepresented populations, limited research exists on students from rural backgrounds in higher education (Koricich, 2014). Christiaens (2015) posited, “College students of rural upbringings are an often-overlooked demographic in higher education” (p. 41). Results from this study addressed a gap in the research relative to the relationship between the extracurricular engagement of students from rural backgrounds and student persistence. This study was designed to gain an understanding of the needs of college students from rural backgrounds in relation to engagement in campus recreational activities, and to identify the perceptions of these students regarding the role that engagement played in their college persistence.

Literature Review

The needs of people from rural communities in an expanding urbanized society are important to understand (Brown & Shafft, 2011). Rural culture is a system of meaning in which students make sense of both the world and themselves (Maltzan,

2006). Johnson et al. (2014) suggested an importance in understanding the intricate context of rurality and responding to the challenges students from rural culture face.

Minimal research has been conducted on the educational access of students from rural backgrounds (Koricich, 2014). However, Edwards et al. (2014) found in a qualitative study interviewing 30 expert informants in two rural counties in the southern United States, that students from rural backgrounds face socioeconomic challenges which non-rural students do not. From the study, an emergent theme exposed proximity to physical activity as a barrier to informal play as well as highlighting transportation challenges (Edwards et al., 2014). Human capital limits was also found to impact the sustainability of programs and initiatives (Edwards et al., 2014).

In another qualitative ethnographic case study, Beasley (2011) examined the pathways and success of 16 rural, first-generation students at a community college in a rural county in the Appalachian Mountains. Beasley (2011) highlighted the following emergent themes which were found to cause internal struggles in the research participants: strong attachment to family and place, family pressures on student persistence, influence from family traditions, appeal to earn money right away and stay at home, impact of gender on opportunity, powerful association between rural community and institution.

Perhaps more than ever before, institutions must attract students from rural cultures (Complete College America, 2018; U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2018). The likelihood of students from rural areas attending college is only 85% as likely as their urban peers (Koricich, 2014). Students from rural culture are also more often first-generation college students compared to their urban and suburban peers (Byun et al,

2012). Stone (2014) stated that upon entering college, students from rural backgrounds often felt shocked and lost in understanding the college environment, opportunities available, and the overall college community. Students observed an absence of community and felt unsettled in their environment (Stone, 2014).

Understanding rural complexities relative to extracurricular programming found in campus recreation is important (Johnson et al., 2014). McDonough, Gildersleeve, and Jarsky (2010) highlighted the overall indifference of colleges to the needs of students from rural culture, stating “There is incongruence between life in rural areas . . . and its institutions of higher education” (p. 205). Strategies to improve inclusive recreation programming has been recently explained (Hoang et al., 2016), and opportunities to positively impact student retention and success illuminated (Misener, 2018).

Cromartie and Bucholtz (2008) underscored the multidimensional nature of defining rural, stating “The share of the U.S. population considered rural ranges from 17 to 49% depending on the definition used.” Cromartie and Bucholtz (2008) identified a population less than 2,500 as rural, and a population of 50,000 or more as urban (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010; U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2016). This definition of rurality was used for this study.

Physical Activity and Wellness

Approximately two-thirds of adults in the United States are considered overweight and approximately one-third are considered obese (Ogden et al., 2012). An estimated 37.9% of college students are considered either overweight or obese (American College Health Association, 2016). Overweight and obesity are contributing

risk factors for such serious medical conditions as atherosclerosis, high blood pressure, elevated blood cholesterol levels, cancer, heart disease, diabetes and sleep disorders (National Institutes of Health, 2015).

In addition to the overweight and obesity dilemma, physical education courses as a required offering of the college curricula have declined over the past 80 years (Cardinal, 2016). In fact, over 60% of four-year institutions do not have a physical education requirement (Cardinal et al., 2012). An increased awareness has arisen for the importance of institutions providing physical activity experiences complementing the physical education classroom (Johnson et al., 2017). Campus recreation facilities play an important role in facilitating much needed physical activity on college campuses (Cressy, 2011; Ogden et al., 2012; Shaikh et al., 2018).

The American College of Sports Medicine guidelines stated that a minimum of 75 cumulative minutes of vigorous aerobic activity or 150 minutes of moderate intensity activity per week should be performed (American College of Sports Medicine, 2017). The American College of Sports Medicine (2017) added that additional health gains may be received by performing cardiovascular activity beyond this minimum recommendation. The American College of Sports Medicine (2017) also recommended moderate or high intensity physical activity from strength training of all major muscle groups be performed at least two days per week.

Students engaging in campus recreation experienced improved health and fitness, well-being, academic performance, and social life (Henchy, 2011). In a study by Forrester (2014), students indicated campus recreation having a positive impact on them meeting new people, relieving stress, engaging in physical fitness, managing weight and

having fun. Forrester (2014) analyzed and interpreted over 33,500 survey responses from college students from 38 different institutions across the United States as part of the 2013 NIRSA/NASPA Assessment and Knowledge Consortium. Forrester (2014) found that 75% of students recognized that campus recreation activities and programming positively influenced their desire to stay healthy and in shape. Findings illuminated the fact that 64% of students participating in campus recreation programs felt they had learned skills that could be taken with them and would be beneficial after college (Forrester, 2014). The study further noted that 98% of students felt that maintaining a healthy lifestyle would be important to them after graduation (Forrester, 2014). Additional benefits illuminated in Forrester (2014) included an increase in soft skills such as time management, respect for others, academic performance, sense of belonging, and the ability to multi-task and develop friendships.

Hence, campus recreation is well-positioned to promote health and positivity in students through the promotion of physical activity (Ratey & Hagerman, 2008). Research has indicated that positive habits of well-being established during college years serves as a foundation for lifelong wellness (Baldwin, Towler, Oliver, & Datta, 2017). Holistic student wellness has become a priority in many institutions around the country (National Intramural and Recreational Sports Association, 2018b). The dimensions of well-being (National Intramural and Recreational Sports Association, 2018b) include physical, psychological, social, occupational, environmental, spiritual, financial, and intellectual.

Persistence

Retaining students is more cost effective than recruiting new ones (Raisman, 2009). Research indicated (Georgia Southern University Office of Strategic Research and Analysis, 2016; Kampf & Teske, 2013; Windschitl, 2008) students are more likely to persist in college when visiting the campus recreation center. Windschitl (2008) conducted a quantitative study at a comprehensive university in the Midwest to determine if the number of campus recreation visits could predict retention rate of 2,137 first-year new entering freshmen. Windschitl (2008) determined that students who visited campus recreation facilities had improved retention rates and higher GPA's.

Researchers have underscored the positive impact campus recreation has on persistence (Bradshaw & Ehling, 2017; Danbert et al., 2014; Forrester, 2014; Forrester, 2015; Georgia Southern University Office of Strategic Research and Analysis, 2016; Kampf et al, 2018; Kampf & Teske, 2013; McClymont, 2013; Sturtis & Ross, 2013; Windschitl, 2008). Survey data provided by NIRSA emphasized that student engagement in campus recreation increases the connection of students to the institution (Cressy, 2011; Forrester, 2014; Henchy, 2011). Addressing the needs of college students relative to access, equity and inclusion can create a campus recreation environment where students feel welcome, engaged, happier, persist and succeed (Delgado & Vorhees, 2018).

Momentum Year

A major component of the CCA (2018) program is intent to build momentum by identifying processes to help students navigate through their first 30 credits of college. The momentum generated during the first year of a college student is believed to have

major implications on their persistence (Complete College America, 2018). Providing purposeful structure at the outset of the college journey will drive momentum (Complete College America, 2018).

Evidence-based research has shown that persistence is strongly hinged upon first year student success, retention and completion (Complete College America, 2018). In order to facilitate persistence momentum CCA (2018) has identified processes to help students navigate through their first 30 credits of college. The momentum generated during the first year of a college student is believed to have major implications on their persistence (Complete College America, 2018). Providing purposeful structure at the outset of the college journey will drive momentum (Complete College America, 2018). Complete College America (2018) outlined this structure with the following first-year benchmarks: enrollment in 30 credit hours during the first year, completion of nine credit hours within an informed program of study to include math and English, access to assistance and direction to inform decision making, and incorporate the use of interest assessments as well as data from the labor market. Addressing many of these elements, institutions will be better able to guide students in building velocity toward their goals (Complete College Georgia, 2017).

Mindset

The mindset of the college student has become an increasing focus (Brock & Hundley, 2017). Momentum year research has demonstrated that students will be more successful when they enter college with a productive academic mindset (Complete College America, 2018, Complete College Georgia, 2017). Mindset was a term originally made popular by Carol Dweck (2006) referencing the extent to which inner

qualities such as intelligence, personality, and certain moral character can influence decision making.

Dweck, Walton, and Cohen (2014) studied results of a nationwide survey and interviews of approximately 500 students (Bridgeland et al., 2006) who had dropped out in high school which had found that 69% stated they were not motivated or inspired by school. Students ranged from ages 16 to 24 and had resided in cities, suburbs, small towns and rural areas (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Dweck, Walton, and Cohen (2014) stressed the loss of potential in these drop outs and sought answers for questions on whether a solution could be found in school or the individual. According to Dweck et al. (2014) the academic mindsets of students should be the focus and how non-cognitive, psychological qualities such as students' attitudes about education, their self-worth, and self-discipline influence learning and school. Collectively Dweck et al. (2014) refer to these non-cognitive factors as academic tenacity. Dweck et al. (2014) note the following examples of a student who is academically tenacious: view education as important and applicable, look to challenge themselves, stay engaged over the duration of school, remain focused on their academic goals despite difficult intellectual or social situations, work hard and can sacrifice short-term gratification, and belong academically and interpersonally.

According to Dweck (2006) mindset can either be fixed or growth and how one internalizes their mindset will profoundly influence how one lives their life. A person with a fixed mindset views challenging situations with a situational response to avoid embarrassment or failure. whereas a person with a growth mindset views similar challenging situations with the intent to grow and develop (Brock & Hundey, 2017).

Complete College Georgia (2017) stressed the importance of promoting an academic growth mindset to improve resilience when students face obstacles. Resiliency to challenges can best be developed by emphasizing the potential for a student to change rather than boosting self-esteem (Yeager & Dweck, 2012).

Grit

Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, and Kelly (2007) posited that high-achieving individuals exhibited a special trait known as grit. The non-cognitive trait grit is a combination of passion and perseverance (Duckworth, 2016). Duckworth and Quinn (2009) introduced the 8-question Short Grit Scale (Grit-S) in an attempt to validate as more efficient measure of grit than the 12-question Grit-O. As part of the Grit-S study, Duckworth and Quinn (2009) sought to 1) identify items for the Grit-S scale, 2) test the two-factor structure by applying confirmatory factor analysis, comparing scales and the Big Five Inventory personality dimensions (Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism), and examining predictive validity relative to career and education, 3) validated a version of the Grit-S, 4) measured 1-year test-retest stability, and 5) tested predictive validity. Duckworth and Quinn (2009) research validated Grit-S as more efficient measurement of grit and recommended the scale as an economical measure of trait-level perseverance and passion for long-term goals. Ultimately, Duckworth and Quinn (2009) found that grittier competitors advanced further in the Scripps National Spelling Bee, and predicted West Point cadet retention by recognizing the importance of both Consistency of Interest and Persistence of Effort.

Even when no positive feedback exists, individuals possessing grit remain focused on their goals (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009). Grit transcends talent (Duckworth, 2016). Grit has been found to be a better predictor of West Point cadet retention than SAT score, rank in high school, or self-control (Duckworth et al., 2007)

Grit can be developed from the inside out by cultivating interests (Duckworth, 2016). Institutions can cultivate interests by providing extracurricular engagement which are both challenging and fun (Duckworth, 2016). Grit can also be developed from the outside in through others such as teachers, coaches, mentors, etc. (Duckworth, 2016). Creating a culture of grit where students conform to fit in can go a long way toward students reaching their potential (Duckworth, 2016). The desire for meaning and purpose in life has been found to contribute to grit (Von Culin, Tsukayama, & Duckworth, 2014).

Research Design and Methods

A basic interpretive qualitative methodology was used in this study and allowed the experience of campus recreation to surface through the lens of the participants because this design focused on how participants interpret their experiences, construct their worlds and make meaning (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In hopes of understanding campus recreation programming and services that students from rural backgrounds perceive as important to their college persistence, the researcher served as the instrument for which an inductive strategy was employed to identify common themes in these data (Merriam & Associates, 2002).

Research Questions

To attain a greater understanding of how students from rural backgrounds perceive their campus recreation engagement, this study explored the following two research questions.

1. How do college students from rural backgrounds experience campus recreation?
2. How do students from rural cultures perceive the role of engagement in campus recreation as it relates to their persistence in college?

Setting

The research site for this investigation was a historical, residential, and agricultural State College located in the southeastern United States. Fall 2017 data indicated the institution had 3,394 students, of which 1,253 lived on campus, 53.6% were female and 46.4% male. Student classification for fall 2017 enrollment was 196 Dual Enrollment, 1,307 Freshman, 905 Sophomore, 560 Junior, and 413 Senior. The percentage breakdown by self-declared race/ethnicity was 82.6% White, 7.8% African American, 7.4% Hispanic/Latino, .9% Asian, and .3% American Indian or Alaska Native. Demographics identified 695 students, 20.5% of the campus population, as having a rural background. Out of these 695 students, 243 lived on campus. These students had a 2.7 term institutional GPA.

Campus wellness center statistics provided that a total of 1,283 students utilized the facility during fall 2017. Of these students, 256 students were identified from a rural background and represented 7.5% of the entire student body, and 20% of wellness center users with 47 utilizing the wellness center 15 times or more. These students had a 2.91 term institutional GPA.

Participants

Purposeful sampling was used for this study. Students were selected deliberately because their experiences would provide rich information to address the research questions and goals of this study (Maxwell, 2013). Although age, race, gender, ethnicity, and campus residency were not considered when selecting the sample, participants selected for interviewing included nine traditional college students who had attended the institution for at least one semester, were from rural backgrounds, and had participated in campus recreation activities a minimum of 15 times.

Data Collection

Prior to the initiation of the study, full Institutional Review Board approval was attained. This study adhered to the guidelines involving human subjects and was compliant with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Code of Federal Regulations, 45 CFR § 46.102(2009). A log of students utilizing campus recreation facilities was cross-referenced with institutional data identifying students from rural backgrounds by cross-checking student's permanent residence city and state against a list of rural cities cited by U.S. Census Bureau data (Florida Demographics by Cubit, 2010; Georgia Demographics by Cubit, 2010; South Carolina Demographics by Cubit, 2010). Students from rural backgrounds were invited to participate. Invitations were delivered to these students by hand or via email. Interviews were set up on a first-come first-serve basis until saturation of data had been reached (van Manen, 2016). Table 1 provides a brief biographical profile for each participant including their pseudonym, age, major, undergraduate classification, specific campus recreation involvement and number of participations per semester in campus recreation wellness center.

Table 1

Research Participant Profile Table

Pseudonym	Age	Major	Class	Campus Recreation Involvement	Semester Participations
Kate	21	Writing and Communication	Senior	IM, OG, FCC, FCW, OR	15
Grace	21	Biology, Agricultural Engineering	Junior	IM, FCW	17
Jessica	20	Nursing	Junior	FCW	27
Max	20	Business and Economic Development	Sophomore	IM, FCC, FCW, OR	27
Rick	20	Agriculture, Crop and Soil Science	Junior	IM, FCW, OR	15
Bean	21	Agriculture, Crop and Soil Science	Senior	IM, FCW, OR	27
Stew	20	Biology	Junior	FCW	29
Lucy	20	Early Childhood Education	Sophomore	IM, FCW, OR	16
Audrey	20	Biology	Sophomore	IM, FCW, FCC, OR	15

Note. IM = intramural sports; FCC = fitness center cardiovascular; FCW = fitness center weight training; OG = open gym; OR = open recreation.

Semi-structured individual interviews, lasting approximately 90 minutes, were conducted with each participant. All interview questions were designed to address the research questions and obtain data from the participants representing the essence of their experience from their subjective perspective (Seidman, 2013). Interview questions 1-6 explored pre-college background participant information to contextualize their rurality

and high school extracurricular engagement. Questions 7-19 were guiding questions relative to the participants' campus recreation and extracurricular experiences during college as well as any rurality influences. Questions 20-24 attempted to ascertain the perceived impact campus recreation participation had on their college persistence as well as any rurality impact (see Appendix E for interview question guide). This interview process allowed exploration of key areas in depth, but also allowed the flexibility to pursue a topic which comes up in greater detail (Ary et al., 2014).

Data Processing and Analysis

All interviews were recorded and transcribed with *Rev Voice* application recorder from iPhone. The participant's name did not appear on any documents where information was recorded. The raw data collected during the interviews were initially played back from the recordings, reviewed, transcribed, and read line-by-line to gain a general sense of the overall meaning of the information obtained. Context, tone, impression of overall depth, and credibility of data were considered. Reflection and memos aided in this process.

Specific coding steps recommended by Tesch (1990) were followed, including selecting one interview at a time to consider the underlying meaning of each. Topics were categorized with the most descriptive wording. Reduction strategies were employed when possible. The most descriptive wording for topics and created categories was then identified with themes labeled and connected. Interrelating themes and descriptions were sought. Meaning was derived from the analysis of the interview data by interpreting broad meaning as applicable to the research (Lincoln & Guba,

1985). A matrix was then created to visually analyze these data and to reflect categorical coding in relation to the research questions (Maxwell, 2013).

Validity and Trustworthiness

Two types of threats to validity addressed in this study to ensure the accuracy of findings were bias and reactivity. The researcher's subjectivity represented a major threat to the validity of this study. His experiential professional and personal knowledge needed to be transparent so that the participants were not overly influenced. To address and control potential variables of influence, a researcher identity memo was created and frequently reviewed.

Reactivity was another threat to the validity of this research, especially due to the student-participants attending the same college the researcher worked. Because the participants self-reported data during semi-structured interviews, influences of exaggeration, attribution, or selective memory were possible. Close attention was given by the researcher to unwanted influences during interviews (Maxwell, 2013).

To promote accuracy of data collection and subsequent trustworthiness, triangulation, iterative questioning, peer debriefing, and member checking were employed (Shenton, 2004). Rich contextual information about the college and the student-participants allow others to determine whether results will be transferable to their situation (Shenton, 2004).

Finally, confirmability was maximized in this study by providing quotes from the student-participants as much as possible to reflect their ideas and experiences (Shenton, 2004). These quotes shaped the major themes which emerged from interviews. The transparency of detailed methodology provided an audit trail to support trustworthiness.

Findings

Three themes emerged as findings from the two research questions in this study as well as an overarching theme for students from rural backgrounds. The following discussion will concentrate on the four overall themes: 1) immediate involvement, 2) wellness appreciation, 3) academic complement, and 4) extra motivation to persist.

Immediate Involvement

Students (7/9) from rural backgrounds engaged in various forms of campus recreation their first semester upon arriving at the institution. These students had a familiarity with their campus recreation involvement activities and comfort level which contributed to their participation. Exposure to campus recreation programs, equipment, and facilities through on-campus employment also contributed to engagement.

Four of the students began engaging in campus recreation within the first few weeks upon arriving to campus. Max and a best friend explored campus to find recreation opportunities. The gateway to increased campus recreation involvement for Audrey happened while exploring the fitness center with her friend. Rick heard about intramural competitions prior to arriving to campus through an older, former high school teammate who had attended the college. Bean's involvement in campus recreation occurred through Greek pledge season and his fraternity having a team entered. Bean said that once he went on the website to register, he saw other sports in which he could become involved.

Three students became involved in campus recreation through their student employment in campus recreation. Kate began refereeing as a student-worker upon arriving at the college and progressed into playing. Stew also began his college

education as a student-worker in campus recreation. After Stew discovered the weight room was free on campus, he cancelled his gym membership in town and utilized the campus recreation facility. Jessica also began working in campus recreation as a lifeguard. However, because of a knee injury she had at the time, the extent of her campus recreation was rehabilitating in the weight room. This rehabilitation eventually became fitness training to which Jessica became dedicated.

Two students were not exposed to campus recreation right away and didn't get involved until their second semester. Lucy's friends invited her to get involved with intramural sports. As a varsity athlete, Grace was immersed in varsity softball her first semester arriving to the college. She utilized the gym, but it was for training with the team. She also began to recognize others having fun and playing. Eventually, Grace began playing intramural dodgeball with her teammates and working out for herself.

Wellness Appreciation

All student-participants (9/9) in this study continued to participate in campus recreation because of the perceived wellness benefits they received from various campus recreation programs, equipment and facilities. They were aware of the wellness benefits derived, such as reduced stress, increased physical strength, improved health, enhanced mental clarity, increased energy, leaner body composition, and management of anger.

In its simplest form, physical activity benefits can be gained from utilizing campus recreation programs, equipment and facilities in a low-to-moderate degree of physical exertion. Kate described such an approach, with reference to walking, outdoors, and activity instead of sitting. Bean discussed the cardiovascular benefit of playing competitive intramurals and spoke to the benefits received from participating at

a moderate-to-high degree of exertion. Stew, who works out routinely in the weight room and competes in body building competitions said, “I feel like I’m a better person every week because I put myself through so much that it really helps you feel like you can do anything.” Jessica, who also works out intensely in the weight room, described working out as one of the most important priorities for her because of the physical health connection to mental health. Audrey addressed the appreciation for wellness benefits received during campus recreation participation, but also emphasized her enjoyment while participating.

Academic Complement

Students (8/9) from rural backgrounds perceived campus recreation as providing programs, equipment, and facilities which serve as a counterbalance to their academic responsibilities. These students didn’t have to look far to identify an activity which was readily available to them on campus and would provide them with a readily available reason to get out of their rooms as well as structure. Max pointed out the importance of the campus recreation rounding out his college experience by providing a physical and social outlet. Grace said, “It makes me feel better because I know that I’m doing something, not just sitting around. Socializing’s always fun. You’re not just thinking about school the whole time. You can actually have fun and be free.” Stew similarly stated, “I think it definitely keeps me focused, working out and stuff like that.” Audrey said, “Intramurals has definitely helped me stay in school because it makes me look forward to something. It helps be take my mind off chemistry.” Jessica added that working out in the campus recreation fitness center was an integral part of her college

regimen. Kate also spoke to the importance of physical activity providing some inspiration to her studies.

Campus recreation was even viewed as a reward for addressing academic deadlines. Kate stated that campus recreation helped her refine her time management skills. Grace also recognized the importance of time management and prioritization of academics with the enjoyment of engaging in physical activity to alleviate stress.

Extra Motivation to Persist

Although not directly related to the two research questions in this study, student-participants (8/9) spoke to a perceived edge they brought with them from their rural culture based upon wanting a better life for themselves and their families. This theme was not directly related to their campus recreation participation, but became apparent from analysis of these data provided from the *input* questions of the conceptual framework. The student-participants in this study provided comments which contained an embedded edge in the belief that their rural environment limited their options and dreams. This edge encouraged them to take advantage of college opportunities and the eventual degree college could provide them. Lucy spoke to the expanded opportunity college offers her. Rick sees college as an opportunity to achieve what he could not in his rural town. Jessica views her degree as opening up doors for her to work and reside in a non-rural area. Kate acknowledged that the concept of going to college was abnormal in her rural town. Stew said that college provided a tremendous opportunity for him.

Discussion and Conclusions

The purpose of this research was to gain an understanding of the needs of college

students from rural backgrounds as they relate to engagement in campus recreation, and to identify rural students' perceptions of the role that engagement played in their college persistence. This study contributes to the growing body of literature from a qualitative perspective by illuminating several key factors.

First, findings indicate students establish a connection to the campus community immediately through campus recreation programs, equipment, and facilities. This finding supports existing research suggesting that students who establish a connection to their campus community early in their college journey will be more likely to persist toward graduation (Astin, 1993; Enochs & Roland, 2006; Tinto, 1993). Understanding that there are major persistence implications from creating momentum during the first year of a college a student (Complete College America, 2018), this study recognizes the importance that students from rural backgrounds gravitate toward various campus recreation programs, equipment, and facilities due to a comfort they feel in the transition from high school.

Many of the student-participants had been involved in sports during high school. Campus recreation allows these students an extracurricular activity to socialize within an environment they are familiar and have confidence. Campus recreation provides a non-intimidating on-campus conduit to further campus recreation participation or on-campus activities. Students may showcase their athletic skills from high school and continue engaging on a comfort-level continuum ranging from fun to competitive, structured to unstructured, individual to team, and indoor to outdoor. Student worker positions also provide a pathway to participation and a natural transition into student participation.

Second, the findings show that students from rural backgrounds appreciate the wellness benefits (National Intramural and Recreational Sports Association, 2018b) derived from campus recreation participation. As the physical education requirement disappears around the United States (Cardinal, 2016), campus recreation is positioned to fill a void in promoting wellness on the college campus. Campus recreation programs, equipment, and facilities allow students the ability to acquire wellness benefits through structured and unstructured modes. These flexible services enable students to incorporate physical activity into their busy schedules at their own pace and level of comfort.

Socially, campus recreation provides a connection for students on campus who do not have to leave campus to meet others. Although students are ultimately responsible for connecting with others socially, institutions can facilitate connections through the campus recreation microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). This social wellness benefit is supported by Hoang et al. (2016) who posited that students desire to be around other students trying to be healthy.

Third, findings recognize a perceived benefit by students from rural backgrounds that their academic responsibilities and persistence are complemented by the programs, equipment, and facilities inherent to the campus recreation. Campus recreation programs, equipment, and facilities connect the students to the institution by facilitating an engaging fit, fun, social, and wellness environment allowing for a variety of accommodation to student interests. Campus recreation staff should view themselves as key stakeholders in student persistence and understand the importance of meeting students where they are in terms of programs, equipment, facilities, services, and hours

of operation. After all, there is a connection between the contribution of campus recreation participation to an increased GPA and persistence (Kampf et al, 2018). Tailoring campus recreation to targeted groups to increase connection and persistence is critical. Actively promoting campus recreation to targeted populations of students, such as students from rural culture, may contribute to changing the campus culture from a focus on student-preparedness upon arriving to college, to an accountability of institutions to prepare and construct an environment facilitating college success (McNair, Albertine, Cooper, McDonald, & Major, 2016; White, 2016).

Finally, a finding emerged through the course of the study related to the persistence of students from rural backgrounds independent of their engagement in campus recreation. The participants in this study believe their rural background provided enhanced motivation for them to take advantage of opportunities college afforded them to create a better life for themselves. As a result of their experiences growing up in rural culture, these students self-proclaim an extra level of motivation to persist. This edge seems to contribute to a positive and purposeful academic mindset, in which students feel a part of a community and have grit and perseverance contributing to college success (Denley, 2018b; Duckworth, 2016; Duckworth & Yeager, 2015).

Overall, findings highlight the need for higher education officials to focus on the value specific extracurricular activities can have on persistence. Although a focus exists in higher education on the best strategy for college completion relative to academics (Complete College America, 2018; Complete College Georgia, 2017; Denley 2018a), little focus exists on the contribution extracurricular engagement such as campus recreation can have on students' academic mindset. Considering limited institutional

budgets and the finite amount of time and energy students have to invest in out-of-classroom activities (Astin, 1999), these findings may assist campus officials making intentional extracurricular investment decisions best supporting student persistence and complementing the academic mission.

Closing gaps in postsecondary attainment across various student populations such as rural culture is important (Lumina Foundation for Education, 2017). Campus officials should understand their student populations and promote extracurricular programming tailored specifically, rather than having a cookie-cutter approach to offerings. For example, understanding the students from rural backgrounds in this study brought with them athletic and physical activity experiences prior to college highlighted the important connective opportunities campus recreation programs, equipment, and facilities had on them in positively impacting their persistence.

Practical Implications

Implications of this study called for campus officials to consider providing students from rural backgrounds engagement opportunities such as those inherent to campus recreation. The majority of students enjoyed either competition or play, and appreciated the wellness benefits derived from the physical activity inherent to campus recreation programming and facility usage. Institutions should advertise the value of campus recreation as an extracurricular program in promoting a purposeful growth mindset fostering grit and perseverance. Colleges should also market these benefits to students, faculty, and staff as a complement to overall persistence efforts. Students from rural culture should be oriented to campus recreation engagement opportunities at the outset of their first semester, or earlier (Forrester et al., 2018), in order to promote a

connection to the institution. Students from rural culture who incorporate campus recreation into their college routine may sharpen their grit and perseverance, enhance their growth mindset, and become better equipped to persist.

Institutions should consider being as intentional with extracurricular programs, equipment, and facilities as they are with academic program maps and scheduling. Institutions should make sure extracurricular opportunities meet student needs by offering the programs, equipment, and facilities best serving them with flexibility adaptive to complicated schedules and lives. Ascertaining the why students participate Applying qualitative data such as gathered in this research may better inform programming (Parnell, Jones, Wesaw, & Brooks, 2018). Placing value in an extracurricular environment to strengthen grit may play a beneficial role in complementing momentum year, ultimately maximizing persistence.

Limitations

This study was limited in its focus on students from rural backgrounds at one residential State College in the southeastern United States. By nature of the qualitative research design being used and small sample size, subsequent findings of this research are not generalizable to all colleges. Additionally, the experiences of the participants could be different from the experiences of students from other regions in the country.

This study only considered the four campus recreation sport activities of cardiovascular training, weight training, open recreation, and intramural sports. Although intramural sports has been reported as the most commonly reported program at institutions reporting an enrollment of less than 5,000 students (National Intramural and Recreational Sports Association, 2018c), and open recreation, cardiovascular, and

weight training programs have been reported as the most frequently participated in campus recreation programs (Forrester, 2014), the campus recreation sport activities of group fitness classes, aquatics, racket sports, outdoor recreation, club sports, personal training opportunities, and assessment testing served as delimitations of this study. These services were not available to students at the smaller institution where the research was conducted. Hence, potentially pertinent data were neither collected, nor factored into this research.

Other considerations not taken into account were the length of time, intensity of physical activity and the specific type of physical activity performed. The American College of Sports Medicine guidelines state that a minimum of 75 cumulative minutes of vigorous aerobic activity or 150 minutes of moderate intensity activity per week should be performed (American College of Sports Medicine, 2017). The American College of Sports Medicine (2017) also recommends moderate or high intensity physical activity from strength training of all major muscle groups be performed at least two days per week.

Because the participants self-reported data during semi-structured interviews, influences of exaggeration, attribution, or selective memory were possible. As recommended by Maxwell (2013), reducing such unwanted influences was understood by the researcher and minimized throughout the interview process.

Researcher bias was also a concern of this research as the researcher served as the primary instrument for the study (Maxwell, 2013). However, the researcher's experiential knowledge was viewed as a strength from which the research was constructed (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). To address and control these potential variables,

a researcher identity memo was created and frequently reviewed by the researcher to understand how the participant may be influenced (Maxwell, 2013).

Future Research

This study examined the perceptions of campus recreation experiences and the impact on persistence of students from rural backgrounds. Although this study revealed campus recreation to have a positive persistence impact on students from rural backgrounds, the campus recreation influence on students from other populations and cultures, such as first-generation and urban, would be interesting to examine. Furthermore, while determining the value of campus recreation as an extracurricular activity for students from rural backgrounds, campus administrators could benefit from understanding the impact of other extracurricular programs, equipment, and facilities on the academic mindset and grit of its student population.

Additionally, exploring data for students of rural backgrounds relative to perceived impact of campus recreational sports programming and services other than those explored in this research, may reveal interesting insight. Also, examining the perceptions of the student-participants regarding the impact of campus recreation after college graduation upon their persistence could be beneficial.

Finally, almost all (8/9) of the student-participants in this study participated in high school sports. Since research exists suggesting collegiate recreational sports contributes to a successful college transition for former high school athletes with higher athletic identity (Helms & Moiseichik, 2018), exploring the impact of campus recreation on former high school student athletes from various cultures (i.e. rural) may provide significant persistence insight.

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APPENDIX A:

Institutional Review Board Protocol Exemption Report

APPENDIX B:
Letter of Cooperation



ABRAHAM BALDWIN AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE

Office of Academic Affairs

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January 31, 2018

Ms. Elizabeth Olphie
Institutional Review Board
Valdosta State University
1500 North Patterson Street
Valdosta, GA 31698

Dear Ms. Olphie:

This letter serves as the letter of cooperation for Alan Kramer's proposal to conduct research activities related to the project "*How students from rural culture make meaning of their campus recreation engagement.*" The ABAC IRB will rely on the approval of the Valdosta State University IRB for review, approval, and continuing oversight of the human subjects' research proposed. Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College grants site permission contingent upon the approval of the Valdosta State University IRB.

If you need additional information from ABAC, please contact me.

Sincerely,

Dr. Darby Sewell
Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs,
Engaged Learning
Acting Dean, School of Agriculture and Natural Resources
Chair, ABAC Institutional Review Board

APPENDIX C:
Consent Statement

Title of Research: Understanding How Students from Rural Backgrounds Make Meaning of Campus Recreation Engagement.

Consent Statement

You are invited to participate in a dissertation research study being conducted by Alan M. Kramer in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the doctoral degree in Leadership, Higher Education at Valdosta State University. This study is conducted under the supervision of Karla Hull, Ed. D., of Valdosta State University. This consent form is designed to fully inform individuals of their research involvement. Please review the document carefully and feel free to ask for additional clarification.

What is the purpose of this research?

I am interested in learning how students from rural backgrounds experience and understand their campus recreation engagement.

Who can participate in this study?

Students selected are from a rural background and participated in campus recreation fifteen or more times during fall semester 2017 or spring semester 2018.

What is the time commitment for participating in this research?

You will be asked to participate in a face-to-face interview (approximately 90 minutes) how you experience and understand your campus recreation involvement. You will be provided with the typed transcription from your interview and asked to check for accuracy and share any additional commentary within seven days of receiving the transcription.

What are the risks of participating in this study and how will these risks be minimized?

There are no foreseeable risks to you for participating in this study. It is expected that findings will illuminate factors impacting the academic persistence of students from rural backgrounds. Pseudonyms will be immediately applied at the time of interview consent to replace personal identifiers and respondents will be required to submit subsequent information under their chosen code name.

What are the benefits of participating in this study?

Your participation in this study may help shape the way we understand meaningful and accessible student college programming. You may benefit from knowing you are

participating in giving a voice to student stories about extracurricular experiences from the lens of students from rural backgrounds.

Are there any costs or compensation associated with participating in this study?

Students selected to interview will be given a \$15 food gift card. There are no costs or further compensation associated with participating in this study. The researcher's personal account will fund the gift cards. Students will be eligible to receive a gift card even if they do not answer questions. A Participant Form will be maintained to log all payments in accordance with institutional research participant payment procedures.

How will confidentiality be maintained throughout this research?

All of the interview information collected from you is confidential. Your name will not appear on any documents where information is recorded. Interview forms will be coded with a pseudonym of your choosing. The investigator will keep a separate interview master list with names of participants and corresponding pseudonyms in locked safe owned by the researcher. All audio recordings and master list of participants and corresponding pseudonyms will be destroyed immediately once interview data have been transcribed. All transcribed data and notes for this study will be stored in a locked safe owned by the researcher for three years and then be shredded or destroyed. The safe will remain at the researcher's residence and can only be accessed by him.

What if you want to stop participating in this study?

You may choose to stop participating in the study at any time for any reason. You will not suffer any prejudice or penalty and will not experience any consequences if you choose to withdraw from this study.

Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed to Alan Kramer at akramer@valdosta.edu. This study has been exempted from Institutional Review Board (IRB) review in accordance with Federal regulations. The IRB, a university committee established by Federal law is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of research participants. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB Administrator at 229-259-5045 or irb@valdosta.edu.

APPENDIX D:
Invitation to Participate

Invitation to Participate

You are being asked to participate in an interview as part of a research study entitled “*Understanding How Students from Rural Culture Make Meaning of Campus Recreation Engagement*,” which is being conducted by Alan Kramer, a student of Valdosta State University. The purpose of this study is to understand the needs of college students from rural backgrounds engaged in campus recreation programs, equipment, and facilities. The interviews will be audio taped to accurately capture your concerns, opinions, and ideas. Once the recordings have been transcribed, the tapes will be destroyed. No one, including the researcher, will be able to associate your responses with your identity. Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate, to stop responding at any time, or to skip any questions that you do not want to answer. You must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study. Your participation in the interview will serve as your voluntary agreement to participate in this research project and your certification that you are 18 years of age or older.

Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed to Alan Kramer at akramer@valdosta.edu. This study has been exempted from Institutional Review Board (IRB) review in accordance with Federal regulations. The IRB, a university committee established by Federal law, is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of research participants. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB Administrator at 229-259-5045 or irb@valdosta.edu.

APPENDIX E:
Interview Guide

Interview Guide: Students from Rural Culture and Campus Recreation Engagement
*Research Topic: Understanding How Students from Rural Culture Make Meaning of
Campus Recreation Engagement*

Date: _____ Time: _____

Interviewer: _____ Interviewee(Pseudonym): _____

Location: _____

Thank you for your participation in this research study. In order to increase accuracy, I will record this interview with a digital recorder. Once this study concludes, I will erase this recording to protect your confidentiality.

Interview Questions:

Input-oriented Guiding Questions

1. What words/phrases come to mind when thinking of your extracurricular experiences prior to college?
2. What emotions arise when you think back of your participation in extracurricular activities prior to college?
3. Tell me about some of your most memorable extracurricular experiences prior to attending college?
4. What were the motivating influences for you to become involved in physically active extracurricular activities prior to college?
5. What impact, if any, do you feel your rural background had on your extracurricular experiences prior to college?
6. What did you feel you gained through participation in extracurricular activities prior to college?

Lived experiences Guiding Questions

7. How did you first learn about campus recreation facilities, programs, and services?
8. Tell me a story about your most memorable college campus recreation experience?
9. How involved are you in campus recreation?
10. Understanding that you are very busy, why have you decided to engage in campus recreation facilities, program, or services?
11. What other extracurricular activities are you involved in at college? Why?
12. Explain any competing responsibilities or obligations of your time in college which prevent you from becoming more involved in campus recreation?
13. Tell me about your how important physical activity is in your life.
14. Explain to what level of importance to you personally is being fit and well?
15. How do you feel campus recreation contributes to being fit and well?
16. What do you think/feel about yourself during your participation in campus recreation? Immediately following?
17. What do you feel you have gained from participating in campus recreation facilities, programs, or services? Why?
18. How do you feel your rural background has influenced your campus recreation experience differently than other students?
19. What facilities, programs, and services do you feel are important to students from rural backgrounds?

Persistence-oriented Guiding Questions

20. In what ways has your involvement in campus recreation influenced your decision to remain in college?
21. How do you feel your rural background has influenced your decision to remain in college?
22. How do you envision campus recreation benefitting you after college? Explain.
23. Is there anything else we haven't discussed yet that you think that is relevant to your rural background and extracurricular involvement?
24. How do you envision incorporating physical activity into your life after college?

APPENDIX F:
Researcher Identity Memo

Researcher Identity Memo

My engagement in athletics and fitness piqued in college. During my undergraduate college years, I attended Truman State University, a residential, liberal arts state university in Kirksville, Missouri. I represented the institution as a student-athlete on the men's tennis team, joined Greek fraternity Sigma Phi Epsilon, worked in the intramural sports department, and regularly competed in the intramural racket sport events: badminton, pickle ball and table tennis.

Immediately upon arriving to campus, walking on to make the college tennis team was a priority. I had been absorbed in the sport during high school and tennis provided a comfortable and challenging transition to college life. I never wavered from my passion to earn a position on the team and eventually became captain my last year in college. Undergraduate tennis opened up leadership experiences for me in the summer by providing the opportunity to work as an instructor of tennis at Thousand Hills Tennis Camp in Kirksville, MO, Camp Canadensis in Stroudsburg, PA, and even earn college internship credit as Director of Tennis at Camp Powhattan in Portland, ME.

Although varsity tennis was a priority and consumed the majority of my free time, Greek life opened many doors socially and professionally. Immediately as a Sig Ep, I connected with a group of brothers who were athletic, competitive, fun, and networked socially. Greek life provided a leadership opportunity for me to serve as the Intramural All-Sports Chair. I was responsible for organizing our fraternity in a year-long competition with other fraternities on campus. The rivalries were intense, and the level of competition inspired me. I found myself attracted to the structure, energy, and seriousness of the competition.

Eventually, the familiarity of the Intramural competitions through serving as the All-Sports Chair of our fraternity opened the door to working as student Assistant Intramural Director in the Intramural Office. I began earning money and gaining experience refereeing competitions and supervising various intramural events during the year.

My involvement in intercollegiate tennis and Greek life connected me to the institution and provided a purpose for which good grades were required to continue participation. After graduating Truman State University, I was able to utilize my B.S. in Exercise Science with an emphasis on teaching and coaching, to take advantage of an opportunity to attend Baylor University in Waco, TX on an assistantship to pursue a M.S. degree in Higher Education with a focus on Health and Human Performance. While teaching tennis classes at Baylor University, I volunteered as Assistant Men's and Women's Tennis Coach at nearby McLennan Community College (MCC) where the teams nationally finished 1^s and 2, respectively. I found myself once again gravitating toward opportunities providing structure, social interaction, and a very high level of competition.

My professional career began after graduate school where I basically continued what I found myself interested in and successful. I accepted the position of Instructor of Health, Physical Education, and Recreation (HPER) and Women's Tennis Coach at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College (ABAC). I was being paid to teach, coach, advise, and mentor others. Eventually I taught and coached both the Men's and Women's Tennis teams for 20 years. During that time, I began accepting greater administrative challenges including Director of Athletics. I became tenured as an

Assistant Professor of HPER, having taught classes such as Health and Wellness, Weight Training, Personal Conditioning, Tennis, Badminton, Jogging, Walking, Swimming, Golf, Bowling, Adaptive Physical Education and Archery.

While serving as Athletics Director, I brought Recreation Sports under the same umbrella as Intercollegiate Athletics. I realized both had a similar outreach for our students in promoting student engagement by providing inclusive competition, fitness, and recreation experiences on campus through sportsmanship to foster development and fit and well habits that will prepare them for life. Leadership opportunities are inherent to both types of sport and with a smaller campus the facilities and resources overlapped with student use.

A shared facility need echoed by the students was captured through student survey data and secured momentum and funding for a renovated wellness center and swimming pool on campus. The institution executed a data-driven decision which expanded the campus recreation footprint on campus and allowed us to reach more students with improved programs, equipment, and facilities.

As my administrative responsibilities progressively increased, I was afforded the opportunity to serve as Assistant Dean of Students. While serving in this capacity, I was able to become familiar with many other student activities on campus, including Campus Activities Board, Greek Life, Interclub Council, Student Government, Campus Recreation, and Intercollegiate Athletics. I collaborated with others in planning, coordinating, and providing direct and indirect leadership toward many recurring campus-wide events including Homecoming, Welcome Week, Town and Gown, Fun with Finals, Club Day, Student Leadership Reception, Athletic Hall of Fame,

Convocation, Stallion Days, and Orientations. These experiences reinforced my belief in the importance of the holistic college experience and the responsibility therein.

I have been afforded recent professional leadership opportunities which validated through education the importance of student extracurricular engagement for which I believed to be true from personal experience. Such leadership opportunities included the University System of Georgia (USG) Executive Leadership Institute (ELI), the Student Affairs Foundations Institute (SAFI), Fulbright Hays Professional Curriculum Development Seminar in Brazil, Executive Leadership Institute Tifton, and the Leadership in Higher Education Doctoral Program at Valdosta State University. Through these experiences, I was able to not only study leadership in higher education, but also visit with colleagues who have a worldview from advanced professional perspectives.

While participating in the USG ELI, I had the opportunity to shadow the Vice President of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management Director at Georgia Southern University (GSU). During the ELI experience, I became aware of a report published by their Campus Recreation and Intramurals (CRI) Department, stating that students who utilize the fitness center at least 19 times a year have a higher GPA and are more likely to persist. The CRI study intrigued me because it offered data supporting my own experiences and feelings. When I asked a colleague at a metropolitan state institution about its Campus Recreation program compared to that of another state institution in a rural area, he stated that he was not surprised that campus recreation is so popular in that rural area because nothing else distracts students. Inferring that rural boredom versus

urban excitement raised my suspicions and contributed to the formation of my eventual dissertation investigation.

Although I grew up in suburban St. Louis, my undergraduate college student days and career have largely occurred at institutions which attracted students from rural backgrounds and were located in towns where the college had a major economic impact. I became aware of the importance of rurality when ABAC created a Rural Studies degree. I realized that an institution where agriculture is not only the largest major, but that students from rural backgrounds may have different needs than other students.

As an Assistant Professor of Health, Physical Education and Recreation for 20 years, I have seen the physical education (p.e.) requirement decrease. Our institution has reduced the p.e. requirement; going from six required p.e. classes to three p.e. classes and a health and wellness class; to two p.e. classes and a health and wellness class; to one p.e. class and a health and wellness class. The diminution of the p.e. requirement follows suit with the trend across the country to phase out p.e. classes in the curriculum.

While required p.e. in schools across the U.S. have decreased, obesity rates and other health issues have increased. Hence, the importance of helping citizens become fit and well remains relevant. Campus Recreation on the college campus is ideally positioned to facilitate a fit and well lifestyle appreciation by offering opportunities for students to develop an affinity for physical activity which leads to incorporating fit and well habits into their lifestyle.

In reviewing the literature, more studies exist relative to race than culture relative to student extracurricular activities. System-wide reports capture self-identified race

data from admissions paperwork. Understanding cultures could be of greater value for institutions to base decisions such as programming, facilities and services for which its customers would benefit most.

In summary, I have an extensive background in higher education from both faculty and student affairs professional perspectives. I also have experienced the benefits of extracurricular engagement as a student and recognize its relationship with persistence. Such real world and practical experiences have provided me with an understanding of the programmatic aspects of student development and support activities aimed at retention and student success. My academic and leadership experiences have provided me with a rich understanding of the importance of student engagement and the value of a positive holistic college experience. The unique combination of experiences ideally positions me to approach new research in the area of campus recreation with an appreciation of the physical fitness benefits inherent to its facilities, equipment, and programming. My experiences also lend to a realistic and practical lens of rural cultural framing.

APPENDIX G:
Questions and Methods Matrix

Questions and Methods Matrix

Research Questions	Goals	Types of Methods	Analysis Methods	Potential Conclusions	Validity Threats	Methods to Decrease Threats
How do college students from rural backgrounds experience campus recreation?	To understand how the population experiences campus recreation during college.	Interview: Semi-Structured and open-ended; Experience guiding questions; Memoing	Audio taping; Re-reading; Transcription; Coding to categorize and form themes; Memos about code/category relationships and potential interpretations; Matrix of codes with their relevant themes	Quality of facilities, equipment, and programs influenced participation; structure of programming attracted population; continued social influences and appreciation of physical activity influenced participation	Lack of clarity in interview questions; Invalid interpretation; Researcher bias; Lack of variability in responses; Errors in data	Interpretation/member checks; Follow up questions; Clarifying questions; Identity memos; Maximum variation/purposeful selection; Rereading; Data saturation; Triangulation
How do students from rural cultures perceive the role of engagement in campus recreation as it relates to their persistence in college?	To understand the perceptions of the population of their extracurricular engagement on their college persistence.	Interview: Semi-Structured and open-ended; Output guiding questions; Memoing	Audio taping; Re-reading; Transcription; Coding to categorize and form themes; Memos about code/category relationships and potential interpretations; Matrix of codes with their relevant themes	Population has increased feelings of well-being, increased GPA, increased quality of social life, increased confidence, increased connection to the institution	Lack of clarity in interview questions; Invalid interpretation; Researcher bias; Lack of variability in responses; Errors in data	Interpretation/member checks; Follow up questions; Clarifying questions; Identity memos; Maximum variation/purposeful selection; Rereading; Data saturation; Triangulation