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Understanding the Role of Student Narrative in the Reinstatement from Suspension Process

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ABSTRACT

Retention and persistence are concerns that are not soon going away for institutions of higher education. Students returning from suspension will continue to be a focus for institutions as they aim to graduate all admitted students. Yet, institutions still want more precise mechanisms that help them identify students who will be academically successful upon return from suspension and know what kind of support those students will need to be successful. Decades of research were unable to find objective criteria that administrators can depend on for making reinstatement decisions. Thus, suggesting further research is necessary to review subjective criteria in this process, namely through practices highlighted by narrative theory. A growing arm of research connecting the importance of this theory to academic advising practice provides a foundation for understanding how narrative theory can impact such an important process as reinstatement from suspension. The research aims to discover how student narrative is perceived as having an impact on reinstatement from suspension decisions. Further, this research seeks to understand whether reviewing student narrative, written and oral, through a narrative theory lens, can provide insight into future student success. A qualitative approach will provide an opportunity to engage those intimately involved in this process to understand their perceptions and interpretations of the importance of student narrative.

Key Words: Reinstatement, Narrative Theory, Academic Suspension, Student Narrative, Written Appeals, Student Success

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my family, Michael, Sofi, and Sara. You three are my world and I could not have done this without knowing that I had your love and support. Thank you for being there for me and know that I will always be there for you.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Student success has long been defined by degree completion. Traditionally, students enter a college or university out of high school, work diligently through a structured set of educational requirements, and achieve degree completion within four-years. As funding for higher education has become increasingly tied to improved retention and graduation rates, many success metrics were established with this very specific, traditional student population and path in mind. It is no surprise then, that many institutions of higher education are now struggling to measure success for students that don't fit this definition, and still ensure that students complete their degrees. Changing student demographics are forcing institutions to reevaluate how they define success and, importantly, understand what success means to their students. This is especially significant for those students who may struggle academically and be forced to stop taking courses due to academic suspension.

Traditional students are those defined as 18-26 years of age, entering college immediately after graduating from high school, and generally from a middle to upper socio-economic background (Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011). Non-traditional students fit into a broader range of definitions that can include age (primarily older students), race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, ability, first-generation, employment status, part-time vs. full-time student status, and limited or lower college preparation (Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011; Soares, 2013; Taylor & House, 2010). With such a diverse set of characteristics, little is understood about how non-traditional students define success. Non-traditional students may enter college later or return for a second chance. Their enrollment may be determined by factors that take priority over education, like work, family, and health concerns that can complicate and impact student motivations and efforts to complete a degree. It is not surprising to find that "data show that non-traditional undergraduates

… are far less likely to complete a credential than their traditional student peers" (Soares, 2013, p. 2).

Students who struggle academically at institutions of higher education can face academic suspension when their grade point average (GPA) and credit completion rate drop below certain thresholds. Every institution of higher education defines academic suspension as it is to be enforced on their campuses, so there is no one definition of academic suspension across the higher education sector. Criteria that lead to suspension may generally be defined by low cumulative GPA (usually when it drops below a certain threshold, often 2.0 on a 4-point scale), low completion ratios (when the percent of credits completed to those attempted falls below a certain threshold), or unsuccessful completion of basic critical skills (e.g. English and Math). Academic suspension can result in a student being required to take time away from pursuing their degree program from anywhere to a semester or up to a full calendar year to disrupt any further damage being made to the student's academic record. Certainly, academic suspension can impact a student's ability to complete their degree program in a timely fashion, or at all.

Scattered research over the past few decades has been unsuccessful identifying any objective criteria that may help higher education officials predict student success when returning from suspension. Such objective criteria might include, but are not limited to, GPA, high school standing, class level, amount of time out on suspension, and success of transfer coursework while out. Going back a few decades, Hall and Gahn (1994) provided one of the most comprehensive research reports on the entire reinstatement process at a Midwestern institution, describing the increase in written petitions for reinstatement that institutions of higher education were receiving with the increased enrollment of that time. The authors alluded to the significant amount of time taken by committees to review these petitions and sought to identify objective

criteria that could guide a committee's decision whether to reinstate a student. They briefly discussed the use of subjective criteria in the review process, as the review must be individualized to each student. However, they still sought to make the decision-making process easier for the review committee by identifying objective criteria from the student's record. In the end they found that higher cumulative GPAs and transfer GPAs (while suspended) predicted success for the students in their study. They also ruled out several other criteria previously assumed to predict success. Though this research did not detail what was included in the student petitions or what subjective criteria were being considered in the review process, the authors concluded that factors such as incentive and motivation may influence a student's likelihood of succeeding. In their recommendations, Hall and Gahn (1994) implemented personal interviews as part of the reinstatement process, perhaps in recognition that this narrative process would highlight some of the subjective factors not immediately apparent within student record data.

Another interesting study completed by Wang and Pilarzyk (2009) sought to research what they described as student swirl, the transitory nature of student enrollment each term and between institutions, especially as it related to non-traditional students, on post-suspension success. Swirl is predicated by non-academic, environmental factors, including work-life balance, financial challenges, and health concerns. The researchers wanted to determine whether retention initiatives alone, or combined with external factors (or lack thereof), had a positive impact on post-readmission GPA's. Conducted in two phases, the research first examined only institutional data for all successful retention initiative completers and found no difference on the impact of post-reinstatement GPA. The second phase included both institutional and survey data and found that those initiative completers with higher, post-intervention GPA's had fewer stressors, a longer relationship with the institution, stronger study skills, a higher GPA just prior

to suspension, completed high school (not a GED), and did not have dependent children at home. The significance of this research highlighted the need to qualify institutional data with survey data that gave the researchers better insight to the student's lives and the factors that could impact their academic success.

Continuing the search for objective criteria that could help administrators make reinstatement decisions, Cogan (2011) reviewed the history of reinstatement research back to the 1950's finding the results of the studies to be inconsistent and often conflicting. Utilizing logistic regression to determine which factors most influenced academic status he found that, rather than predicting success, he was better able to predict student failure using quality point deficit. Quality point deficit represents the number of grade points below the cumulative 2.0 GPA, and reflects the amount of effort required to regain good academic standing by raising one's GPA back to the 2.0 required minimum. Instead of being able to recommend factors that could assist in making sound reinstatement decisions, the author suggested using quality point deficit to identify students at risk for failure for early intervention programs. Still, the author concluded that "this knowledge, combined with interviews, recommendations, and other factors, may be used to make sound decisions to improve the probability of a student to succeed" (Cogan, 2011, p. 401). Thus, this research left open the possibility that review of qualitative data, including student narrative as found through 'interviews, recommendations, and other factors,' may provide additional, if not better, indicators for future student success post-reinstatement.

Little in the research speaks to the role of student narrative as part of the reinstatement process. Without clear objective measures that predicts future student success, administrators may rely more heavily on reading and interpretating the student narrative to determine whether a student should be reinstated. When applying for reinstatement from suspension, students often

need to provide a written appeal making a case for their reinstatement and may be asked to speak with an advisor or faculty member to discuss their appeal. Written appeals and/or in-person interviews provide critical personal narrative for those making reinstatement decisions. What is unclear is whether the content or quality of the student narrative impacts an institution's decision for reinstatement or how it is a predictor of subsequent student success. Narrative theory provides a theoretical model that may offer academic advisors and higher education administrators a better method for understanding their suspended students, what got them to where they are and what kind of support they may need to be successful moving forward. As institutions continue to find ways to ensure the majority of their students can successfully complete degree programs, it may be important to consider how narrative theory in the reinstatement from suspension process may help predict student success.

Theoretical Framework

No definitive objective criteria have been identified to assist higher education officials make decisions and predict success as a result of reinstatement. Yet, research recommendations tend to focus on advising provided to students going through the suspension and reinstatement processes, and the support that is provided to reinstated students (Dill et al., 2010; Drake, 2011; Kirk-Kuwaye & Nishida, 2001; Wang & Pilarzyk, 2009). Academic advisors are amongst the higher education officials that participate in the reinstatement process. They help students navigate the academic standing process. They engage students in discussions to reflect upon how their goals, interests, and values intersect with their chosen academic programs. They make connections for students on how their decisions and behaviors impact their ability to successfully complete their academic programs. And, advisors often facilitate, or help facilitate, the reinstatement process. Academic advisors are critically positioned to help a student understand

what is required for them to be successful, connect them with resources that support their success, and make meaning of their educational experiences.

Academic advisors have many theories and practices that guide their work, which includes "engaging students in reflective conversations about educational goals, teaching students about the nature of higher education, and provoking student change toward greater levels of self-awareness and responsibility" (Himes, 2014, p. 6). The use of narrative theory in academic advising is not new. Advisors engage in student narrative daily, hearing stories from students and telling stories to deliver important messages and provide guidance; like how the D grade they received in pre-calculus does not set them up for being successful in the following calculus course; or how students who attend their courses regularly are more likely to receive higher grades. Advisors also interpret student narrative to find congruence with stories they've known to be successful and those that haven't. For example, it's not uncommon for students to proclaim that they plan to "do better" in their courses or "earn all A's." However, advisors keen on a student's course history and previous rate of success understand that these emphatic statements may be more wishful thinking, or the student telling the advisor what they think the advisor wants to hear, rather than actual goal setting. The use of narrative theory can provide a framework for reviewing student stories to understand the whole student, including their background, their view on education, and how they define success, all of which may impact the student's ability to complete their degree program.

Academic advising as a profession is guided by multiple theories from disciplines like psychology, education, counseling, and social sciences. No one theory currently exists that captures all the critical elements of academic advising. Himes (2014) along with others evaluated several theories that are believed to have the greatest overlap with advising practices, including

developmental, self-authorship, narrative, hermeneutics, postmodernism, and prescriptive

advising (Champlin-Sharff, 2010; Hagen, 2008; Jordan, 2000; MacDonald, 2014; Pizzolato,

2006). While developmental theories may help advisors focus on the psychological stage a

student may be in currently through understanding their goals, values, and interests, they may not

help advisors appreciate how the student actually got to that developmental stage without

considering the student's narrative. Thus, student narrative is the one aspect that overlaps with all

of these theories. In *Human Communication as Narration: Toward a Philosophy of Reason,*

Value, and Action, Walter R. Fisher (1989) stated:

> Where the narrative paradigm goes beyond these theories is in providing a "logic" for
>
> assessing stories, for determining whether or not one *should* adhere to the stories one is
>
> encouraged to endorse or to accept as the basis for decision and actions. (p. 87)

Without student narrative, an advisor cannot assess where a student is at developmentally,

whether the student's motivations are extrinsic or intrinsic, or how the student is synthesizing

and reflecting on their own education. Narrative theory acts as a bridge across these different

philosophies where student narrative and how it is interpreted are key to understanding each

student, their identities, and how they are making meaning of their education.

This qualitative research was designed to identify and further strengthen the role of

narrative theory in the reinstatement from suspension process. The reinstatement process itself is

a perfect test case for how narrative theory may be utilized to review student narrative in line

with student academic record information to improve the reinstatement decision-making process.

No particular student academic record data have been found to predict student success upon

return from suspension, thus are unhelpful in making reinstatement decisions when used alone.

When supplemented with written and oral narrative through written appeals and interviews with

the student, decision-makers have a detailed story of what was happening in the student's life and how it was impacting their ability to be successful.

Statement of the Problem

Previous research has been unable to identify any strong association between student record data (e.g., last term GPA, number of completed credits, major program, coursework completed while on suspension, demographic data, etc.) and student success after suspension. However, some of the research pointed to the importance of the advising process throughout the reinstatement from suspension process in supporting student success. One aspect of the advising practice, as seen through narrative theory, is considering the importance of the student narrative in the reinstatement from suspension process, through student-written appeals and follow-up oral interviews conducted to gain additional insight from the student. The written appeal itself is narrative told by the student with the intention of persuading the committee toward a favorable response. Thus, the researcher seeks to understand the extent student narrative impacts reinstatement from suspension decisions as compared to objective data from the student's academic record specifically to see if factors such as articulation of academic goals, motivation, understanding of what led to their initial suspension, explanation of circumstances that have changed since suspension, and understanding of university processes, improve chances of student success upon returning from suspension.

Success here is defined as degree completion. However, how individual students define success for themselves, regardless of degree completion, is also important to note in the narrative process. The Higher Learning Commission (2018) reports that students may define success along a range from simply being able to show up to class, to acquiring certain skills and knowledge sets, to being able to support themselves and their families financially by obtaining meaningful

work (p. 6). While how students define success has typically not been a factor in considering whether to allow a student to return from suspension, it can be just as important when no clear objective criteria are proven to predict successful degree completion after suspension. Beyond objective criteria, reinstatement decisions are more likely influenced by information provided by the student in their written or oral narrative. This information may include how the student described the situation that led to their academic suspension (often supplemented with external documentation) and that the situation they described was relevant to the timeframe and nature of their academic studies at that time. Administrators of the process may want to know that the student understood the consequences of their actions/behaviors and what steps they are taking to move forward and be successful. It may also be important that the student's story is congruent with what reviewers know to be true and that the student discussed their desire and goals for returning to be academically successful that are consistent with the goals and values of the institution.

Purpose of the Study

It is clear from previous research that administrators responsible for making reinstatement decisions often look for objective data to simplify their decision-making process. However, with no conclusive evidence of objective data that can predict returning student success, it seems important that administrators consider more subjective data, like that obtained from the student narrative through the written appeal and/or personal interview. In this study, the researcher hoped to gain a better understanding of how administrators currently managing the reinstatement from suspension process at a mid-sized Midwestern institution of higher education perceived the importance of student narrative in their consideration. Further, it is hoped to identify what criteria or characteristics these administrators consider the most important in

making their reinstatement decisions, including subjective data such as goal identification, motivation, and resolution of issues or concern that existed at the time of suspension.

In addition to hearing from administrators of the process what aspects of narrative they consider important in the reinstatement process, the researcher also aimed to understand how students who recently went through the reinstatement process perceived the importance of the narrative they submitted as part of their appeal and whether they felt their narrative was heard, understood, and contributed to the reinstatement decision that was made, as well as what characteristics the students felt were important to their success upon returning from suspension. It is desired that this research will better clarify what subjective data, if any, administrators and students consider important that could provide a guiding framework for reinstatement decisions and lead to future research on whether these qualitative data may better predict student success post reinstatement.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this research is to better understand how administrators and students perceive the role of narrative in making reinstatement decisions and what factors they feel are most important in predicting future student success. There was no intervention used to change their perceptions. The administrators were not asked questions related to specific reinstatement decisions and no student academic record data was used. Rather, research focused on gathering administrator and student perceptions about what is important in making reinstatement decisions. The information collected gave the researcher a baseline from which to explore aspects of student narrative in the decision-making process and ultimately develop a rubric to guide reinstatement decisions, with the intention of including both student record data and qualitative data from the written appeal and personal interview.

This research is intended to fill a gap where other research has failed to include or attempted to measure the impact of student narrative on the reinstatement from suspension process. While Hall and Gahn (1994) alluded to the importance of subjective data and recommend implementing a personal interview as part of the reinstatement process, they did not suggest or measure what factors of the written appeal and personal interview were important to consider in the decision-making process. Whereas some research alluded to the influence of incentive, motivation and goal setting as potential important factors in predicting student success (Hall & Gahn, 1994; Kinloch, Frost, & MacKay, 1993; Santa Rita, 1998; Wisehart, 1990), these references were made in explanation where other objective data did not predict student success. By identifying through this research which subjective, student narrative data are considered important in the reinstatement decision-making process, future research can begin to measure those factors on whether they are able to predict student success post-reinstatement.

Research Questions

- **How does student narrative impact student success in the reinstatement from suspension process?**

- **How can information from the student narrative be included to help analyze and predict student success?**

Research Design

This interpretive hermeneutic phenomenological qualitative research utilized personal, online (via Zoom) interviews. The phenomenological approach was chosen because, "the type of problem best suited for this form of research is one in which it is important to understand several individuals' common or shared experiences of a phenomenon" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 79).

Research was conducted at a singular site, a mid-sized, Midwestern institution of higher education. Included in the research were students recently involved in the reinstatement from suspension process and administrators who facilitated and made decisions on reinstatement. Students who recently participated in the reinstatement process were sent an online survey to collect some basic demographic and reinstatement information and to ask for their voluntary participation in a follow-up interview. Those who volunteered were contacted and interviewed to gain a deeper insight into their experience, as it might "ultimately provide an understanding of the common experiences of the participants" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 79).

A similar process was conducted with administrators of the reinstatement process. All administrators were sent an online survey to gain their voluntary participation in a follow-up interview. These administrators were known to the researcher and were specifically sent the survey based on the researcher's understanding that these administrators had played a role in and were familiar with the reinstatement process. According to Briggs et al., (2012), it is "common in qualitative research for sampling to be purposive, where the researcher deliberately chooses to interview individuals who have particular expertise or hold a particular office" (p. 259). To that extent, informed consent was used to ensure that those participating in the interviews "know the likely outcomes and intentions of the researcher" (Briggs et al., 2012, p. 262).

The data collected from the student and administrator interviews were then organized, reviewed, and categorized into themes for analysis per the Data Analysis Spiral (Creswell & Poth, 2018 p. 186). From the data collected and analyzed, a "description of "what" the participants in the study experience with the phenomenon" was developed (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 201). Interpretive hermeneutic phenomenology rejects the idea that researchers bracket their own preconceptions (Crist & Tanner, 2003; Matua & Van Der Wal, 2015; Finlay, 2012) as

it is required of the researcher to drawn upon "their own subjective understanding and life experiences" to interpret and make sense of lived experiences of those being researched (Finlay, 2012, p. 22). Thus, the researcher attempted to make meaning from what was learned through the interviews on the role and importance of student narrative in the reinstatement process.

<center>**Definition of Terms**</center>

Academic Suspension. As defined by the mid-sized, Midwestern institution of higher education where this research takes place, academic suspension occurs when students are first placed on academic warning and do not return to good academic standing in the subsequent semester, after which students are required to sit out of the University of three semesters (1 calendar year). Other institutions may refer to this process as academic dismissal.

Student Narrative. Student narrative is how students describe or state, written or orally, focuses on the event or series of incidents that led up to a student's suspension and what has happened since, and reflects their significance to compel the reader (or listener) that they are fit to return and be academically successful (Chapman, 2004).

Student Success. Student success is defined as degree completion. Additionally, at the institution where this research took place, students are considered successful when they satisfactorily complete their first term post-reinstatement with a Term GPA of 2.0 or better and a completion rate of 67% or higher.

Reinstatement. At the institutions where this research took place, students wishing to return to the institution from academic suspension after more than three semesters, but no more than nine consecutive semesters, may submit a letter of appeal of the Office of the Dean no earlier than 60 days prior to the start of the semester. Students are instructed to include in their letter reasons for

previous academic difficulty, whether actions have been taken to address factors that led to

academic suspension, and how the student plans to be successful going forward.

Assumptions

This research used an interpretivist paradigm. By engaging with human subjects through

surveys and interviews, the researcher is inherently acknowledging the ontological approach that

no single reality exists, and that reality is created individually or in groups. Embracing multiple

realities is critical when reviewing narrative. As stated by Walter Fisher (1989), "the

philosophical ground of the narrative paradigm is ontology. The materials of the narrative

paradigm are symbols, signs of consubstantiation, and good reasons, the communicative

expressions of social reality" (p. 65). Further, "for an interpretivist, there cannot be an objective

reality which exists irrespective of the meanings human beings bring to it" (Briggs et al., 2012, p.

23). The information shared primarily through the interviews is significant to understanding how

each individual experiences the reinstatement process and understands the role of narrative in

influencing reinstatement decisions and future student success.

This research followed a social constructivist epistemology, whereas each individual

seeks to understand the world in which they live through subjectively constructed meanings of

their own experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This required the researcher to assume that each

participant is being truthful and forthright in relating their view of the reinstatement process.

Reality is co-constructed by the participants and the researcher, where understanding is agreed

upon through each side's telling and interpretation of their stories and experiences.

While an interpretive hermeneutic phenomenological research method required the

researcher to utilize their experience as a basis for interpreting and understanding the findings of

the study, it is still important to disclose what experiences and values shape the researcher's

perspective and biases (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this case, more than twenty years of experience in professional advising, nearly fifteen of them in leadership roles, influenced the researcher's appreciation for student narrative and the importance it plays in providing holistic and relevant advice to each student. Having worked with and coordinated the reinstatement process at two different institutions, the researcher gained a greater understanding of how subjective the appeal process is, depending on how a student's narrative is read, interpreted, and analyzed in conjunction with student record data. Additionally, fidelity and congruence of student narrative were important functions when considering decision-making precedent. As more emphasis continues to be put on data informed assessment and decision-making, the researcher is concerned about how to ensure student stories remain an important part of the academic journey and to seek ways to incorporate student narrative into the assessment and decision-making process.

Limitations

The limitations of this research included that the surveys and interviews were conducted with those administrators and students involved in the reinstatement from suspension process at one mid-sized Midwestern institution of higher education only. Thus, the data collected represented the perceptions of those from that institution and may be more indicative of the local process rather than generalizable to reinstatement processes at other institutions. Because the survey and interviews were conducted only with those students who recently went through the reinstatement process and to those administrators who facilitate or are decision-makers in the reinstatement process, the dataset was small. Although the survey and interview responses remained anonymous throughout this research, it is possible that administrator participants were concerned about how their responses would be represented to their immediate colleagues or be

influenced to answer in a particular manner based on what they believe the researcher wanted to find out. Student participants may be concerned about how their answers may impact the advising and support provided to them while they are still students. Other possible limitations include lower response rates or invalid data if participants move through interview too quickly, and whether all participants understood and interpreted interview questions in a similar manner (Fraenkel et al., 2019).

Conclusion

In this chapter, the attempt of researchers at institutions of higher education to identify criteria to help make reinstatement from suspension decisions was introduced. Efforts to identify objective student record data to predict student success post-reinstatement were inconclusive. The following chapter will expand on available research as well as continue to develop the argument that qualitative data gleaned from student narrative through written appeals and personal interviews may provide helpful criteria that could better predict student success. Narrative theory will be explored as a theoretical model that may provide advisors and higher education administrators with a better method for understanding their suspended students, what got them to where they are and what kind of support they may need to be successful moving forward. Additionally, aspects of student narrative that may be considered as possible criteria, including goal setting (incentive), motivation, self-awareness (particularly of the issues that led to suspension), and identification of support needed to be successful, will be discussed.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Institutions have long attempted to identify objective and consistent criteria by which to review student appeals for reinstatement from suspension. Objective criteria might include but are not limited to GPA, high school standing, class level, amount of time out on suspension, and success of transfer coursework while out. Lack of clear objective measures that can accurately predict student success upon reinstatement means that greater emphasis is put on the reading and interpretation of the written student appeal to determine whether a student should be reinstated. When returning from suspension, students often need to provide a written appeal making a case for their reinstatement. Appeals are reviewed by institutional officials who may look for an explanation of what led to the student being suspended, any actions the student has taken to remedy situations that did not support their success, understanding from the student about what actions need to be taken to be successful when returning, and clear indications that the student intends to seek support and resources to support their ability to be successful. The use of narrative theory can be beneficial in reviewing written and oral discourse with the student to understand who the student is holistically, including their background, their view on education, and how they define success, all of which may impact the student's ability to complete their degree program. The guiding question for this literature review is whether utilizing narrative theory, in addition to objective review criteria, may offer a more thorough methodology for determining appeals decisions, advising support, and subsequent student success post-reinstatement.

Methods of Searching

Research on this topic began by searching for articles on return from suspension processes expecting to find research on the factors that institutions found most useful for

reviewing in the appeal process to predict future student success. The initial searches, however, generated only a handful of research articles, most of which were published in the 1990's or earlier. Using key words and phrases such as return from suspension, readmission, reinstatement, suspension process, academic dismissal, suspension appeal process, academic probation, student retention, and degree completion, the search was expanded to find articles related to suspension processes, if not specifically factors considered in the reinstatement process. Using advanced search functions, the search was narrowed using key words such as higher education, college, and postsecondary.

Research was primarily conducted via online databases, including ERIC, EBSCO Host, ProQuest, Google Scholar, NACADA Journal, and the Journal of College Student Retention. To expand the literature base, reference lists from articles were reviewed for related articles and authors which did not appear in initial online searches.

Theoretical Orientation of the Study

This research was conducted from the perspective of academic advising, the researcher's professional field. Academic advising, as a field, is heavily influenced by student development theory initially proposed by Crookston in 1972 as an alternative to prescriptive advising (Himes, 2014). Student development theory in advising, as described by Crookston (1972/1994), is "facilitating the student's rational processes, environmental and interpersonal interactions, behavioral awareness, and problem-solving, decision-making, and evaluation skills" (p. 5). Crookston aligned this developmental work not only with what happens in advising, but also with teaching. Therefore, he construed academic advising as teaching.

Student development theory is derived from Erik Erikson (1950/1964/1993) who defined human development as chronological stages based on age that described a normal person's

development from infancy to death. Erickson (1950/1964/1993) defined eight stages which considered a person's physiological, social, and ego/identity factors that guided a person through developmental dilemmas (Jordan, 2000). Resolution of the dilemma concluded each stage. Erikson recognized the possibility of humans moving through developmental stages though their dilemmas remain unresolved. Unresolved dilemmas leave developmental gaps that continue into future stages. However, skills developed in later stages may provide opportunity for a person to revisit and resolve previous developmental dilemmas.

Thomas and Chickering (1984) connected developmental theory to academic advising by arguing that "it must be assumed that colleges sincerely intend to facilitate the total development of each student" and that "developmental theory becomes extremely useful in that it provides advisor and student a solid conceptual base for their joint work" (p. 90). Thomas and Chickering alluded to the importance of the relationship developed between the advisor and the student. In such a relationship, the advisor gets to know the student, not just their academic pursuits, but holistically as a person. Developmental advising thus considers the whole student including their skills, interests, beliefs, goals, and attitudes, and provides an opportunity for the advisor to work in partnership with the student to develop self-esteem and awareness (Himes, 2014). When advisors understand developmental theory, they can better understand how to challenge and support a student based on their level of development. Knowing that not all students are at the same developmental stage, advisors need to approach each advisee without assumptions based on age and experience.

Developmental theory has, thus, been regarded as a foundation to academic advising, even while other theories were introduced to guide the work of an advisor. Theories such as self-authorship, hermeneutics, post-modernism, and learning centered advising are just a few theories

that have been applied from different disciplines to the profession of academic advising (Himes, 2014). Hagen (2008) argued that utilizing multiple theories may be more appropriate for looking at the whole student. In fact, it may not even be desirable to have one unified theory when one can gain more by seeking different perspectives from theories across a range of disciplines. Hagen (2008) stated "multiple theories can exist at the same time in academic advising, as is the case in all other fields of scholarly inquiry and in all other fields of practice" (p. 16). Therefore, instead of seeking one guiding theory, he recommended that advisors expand their use of theories from other disciplines, including the humanities and the arts (Hagen, 2008).

The use of narrative theory offers a unique perspective to understanding the whole student, including their background, their view on education, and how they define success. Narrative theory is such a theory that provides a method for advisors to engage students in storytelling to better understand from the student perspective what is happening in their lives and how they make meaning of the experiences they are having. Student narrative is a central aspect of most of the guiding theories mentioned above. Through student narrative, advisors come to understand who the student is beyond their student profile. Advisors also play a co-narrator role in this conversation, asking students questions to better understand how the student recounts their experiences, their knowledge base, their attitudes, and their beliefs. Advisors engage student narrative through discourse both spoken and written. That discourse is integral to all advising functions.

The use of narrative in the reinstatement from suspension process is highlighted usually through a written appeal a student submits to be considered for reinstatement, and sometimes through a follow-up interview with an advisor in which the student is asked questions to expand and explain what was written in the appeal. The narrative provides a lens through which an

advisor or reinstatement process administrator determines whether a student is ready to return and be successful. Ostensibly a subjective process, previous research has found no formal methods for recognizing the importance of the student narrative in this process or how advisors and administrators review and consider the narrative in their decision-making process. With this in mind, this research sought to find support for greater use of narrative theory in the reinstatement from suspension process. The guiding questions for this research are, how does student narrative impact student success in the reinstatement from suspension process? And, how can information from the student narrative be included to help analyze and predict student success?

The research was conducted from an interpretive hermeneutic phenomenological approach. Summarizing Moustakas (1994), Creswell and Poth (2018) refer to phenomenology as analyzing ""what" the individuals have experienced and "how" they have experienced it" (p. 77). Further, hermeneutic phenomenology provides the framework for reflecting on the emerging themes to better understand the key aspects of this lived experience. "Phenomenology is not only a description but it is also an interpretive process in which the researcher makes an interpretation of the meaning of the lived experience" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 78). Because the reinstatement from suspension process is highly subjective, the researcher found it important to not just understand how the process itself was being interpreted by those who lived it, but to interpret the themes that emerged to guide development of a rubric that more formalizes the use and interpretation of student narrative in the process.

Review of Literature

Introduction

  With national enrollment trends showing declining enrollments in higher education for years to come, it will be critical for institutions of higher education to focus on the success of their students to keep the students they have enrolled and persisting toward degree completion. Shifting demographics are also challenging colleges and universities to refocus their service models toward non-traditional, more diverse populations. Current research is just starting to dig into and understand the needs and motivations of these students and how they may differ from their traditional student counterparts. As understanding improves about these growing student populations, institutions may need to reconsider how they define success. With older, more diverse students seeking to expand their knowledge and skill sets, what defines success in higher education may also need to shift.

  Understanding why students persist and why students struggle academically helps institutions better support their students and keep them enrolled (Peltier et al., 1999). Much research exists on understanding why and how students persist. It is a field replete with arguments and counterarguments about why students behave the way they do and with ideas about how institutions can address these behaviors to retain students. However, much of the persistence research has focused on traditional-aged students and much less is known about adult, non-traditional students. Further, when students struggle academically, institutions have long applied what they understand about student persistence to making reinstatement decisions assuming that the same characteristics that lead to success for persisting students are the same characteristics for students returning from suspension. And, yet, success rates of academically suspended students remain dreadfully low (Goldman et al., 2003).

What is known is that there are many reasons and characteristics that impact a student's success. Failure to identify any consistent objective criteria that predict student success after academic suspension suggests that the more that is known about a student, beyond what their academic record demonstrates, may improve understanding of the student's likelihood of success upon reinstatement. In the reinstatement from suspension process, facilitators of the process learn a lot about a student through the student narrative, often collected through written appeals and interviews with the student (Bowlus & DelMar, 2021). The role of narrative theory in this process can be instrumental to learning more about the student. When reviewed through the lens of narrative theory, those working most closely with the student consider the student's whole story, which can illustrate the student's understanding of their own skills, needs, and motivations, as well as how they make meaning of their own educational experience. From this narrative, it may be better understood what drives the student and can better determine whether the student's goals match with the institution's goals for defining success.

National Enrollment Trends

Enrollment in higher education institutions is becoming a great source of concern for many higher education administrators. In *Demographics and the Demand for Higher Education*, Nathan Grawe (2018) warned of key demographic shifts bound to impact post-secondary enrollment in the decades to come. He highlighted dropping fertility rates due to the Great Recession that bottomed out in 2013 but have yet to show any improvement. Fewer traditional age students mean lower post-secondary enrollment, bottoming out in the higher education industry in 2026. Grawe (2018) also pointed to immigration, especially of undocumented immigrants, that "in addition to directly altering the racial/ethnic distribution of the US population, immigrant flows also indirectly affect future demand for higher education via effects

on the geographic distribution" (p. 8). The National Center for Education Statistics (Hussar &

Bailey, 2020) projected that overall enrollment in post-secondary education will only increase by

3 percent by 2028, versus previous enrollment growth of 17 percent between 2003 and 2017.

Breaking this down by age group, the report projected only a 6 percent increase of students aged

14-24 (versus a 32 percent increase between 2000 and 2017), and a 5 percent increase for

students aged 35 years and older years (which saw a 6 percent increase between 2000 and 2017).

Most concerning might be the projections for students aged 25-34 where enrollment is expected

to drop by 6 percent versus a 41 percent increase between 2000 and 2017.

Non-Traditional Students

Non-traditional students tend to be older than 25, may have attended more than one

institution, and often juggle attending school with competing responsibilities like working and

caring for family. The Lumina Foundation (n.d.) reported that 37 percent of current college

students are 25 year or older, and 46 percent are first in their family to attend college. Non-

traditional students are more likely to attend part-time in order to attend to their other needs. The

National Center for Education Statistics (Hussar & Bailey, 2020) projected that part-time

enrollment will increase by 5 percent versus a 2 percent increase for full-time enrollment.

Changing student demographics are also apparent with greater numbers of immigrants, first

generation, refugee, increasingly diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, and financial diversity.

Enrollment is expected to increase by 8 and 14 percent respectively for Black and Hispanic

students over the next 7 years (Hussar & Bailey, 2020). Defining success for such a diverse

student population may need to go beyond traditional degree completion and focus more on

student support and experiences, because "in such a complex landscape of competing priorities,

student success is not just about getting students to and through, but about redesigning

institutions to support students in the complex interplay of their lived experience" (Higher Learning Commission, 2018, p. 2).

Defining Academic Success

Academic success has long been defined as degree completion. To be sure, institutions of higher education have sought to improve retention and graduation rates compelled by funding structures that award higher rates of student success (Tinto, 2012; Shapiro et al., 2017). Despite longstanding research on understanding why students drop-out, institutions have not successfully developed retention or intervention programs that significantly improve retention and graduation rates (Berger & Braxton, 1998; Tinto, 2012, Shapiro et al., 2017). The National Student Clearing House (Shapiro et al., 2017) reported that the national college completion rate shifted from 56.1 percent for the pre-recession entering cohort of 2007, to a low of 52.9 percent during the recession. The 2017 report reviewed the entering 2011 cohort and found an improvement with a six-year completion rate at 56.9 percent. Despite these gains, completion rates remained unequal across different student populations.

Disaggregated outcomes from the report (Shapiro et al., 2017) found that students who started at private or public four-year institutions had the highest completion rates (76 and 64.7 percent respectively). Four out of five students who attended full-time throughout their degree programs completed a degree or a certificate by the end of the study period. Students attending exclusively on a part-time basis had the highest stop-out rates (70.7 percent). Students who mixed their enrollment (a combination of full and part-time) were more likely to still be enrolled at the end of the study period and were also more likely to complete their degree compared to part-time students. Further, Asian and White students were more likely to complete their degrees versus their Black and Hispanic classmates (68.9 and 66.1 percent versus 29.2 and 38.2 percent

respectively). Women completed their degrees at higher rates despite age, race, or ethnicity. Finally, traditionally aged students (20 or younger) had higher completion rates than their delayed-entry and adult learner counterparts (61.5 versus 40 percent).

Completion rates for students academically suspended are not promising. In 2003, Goldman et al. reviewed completion data for five cohorts of newly admitted first-year students from 1990-1994 to answer what percent of academic suspended students return and what percent ultimately graduate. Over a six-year review period, the researchers followed 6,993 students from those first-year cohorts, of which 699 (10%) were suspended. Of those suspended, 31% (221) returned to the institution, but only 6.2% (43) graduated. Male students comprised the largest percentage of the students suspended and were the least likely to complete their degrees. Further disaggregated, Black men were the most likely of any population to be suspended and the least likely to complete a degree.

Student Persistence

There is an overwhelming amount of research on why students drop out, either voluntarily or academically. Much of the research focused on understanding student persistence and retention efforts to keep students enrolled and on track to degree. Tinto (1975) is among the earliest to attempt to understand the key characteristics of students who drop-out. His interactionalist theory attempted to explain "the processes of interaction between the individual and the institution that lead differing individuals to drop out from institutions of higher education, and that also distinguishes between those processes that result in definably different forms of dropout behavior" (p. 90). His theory considered how family background (level of schooling of parents, socioeconomic status, level of refinement, interfamily relationships, and expectations for education), individual attributes, and pre-college schooling impact an

individual's initial goal and institutional commitments. Once in college, grade performance, intellectual development, peer-group interactions, and faculty interactions all impact that individual's academic and social integration on campus. The extent of an individual's academic and social integration serves to either reinforce or negatively impact the individual's goal and institutional commitment, thus leading to persistence or dropout decisions respectively.

Another attempt at explaining student persistence was made by Astin (1984) who introduced student involvement theory; a simplified version of student development theory that helped explain student persistence. Astin (1984) defined involvement as a combination of intrinsic motivation and student behavior. He postulated that higher student involvement results in greater persistence. Characteristics of positive student involvement included place of residence, as well as involvement in honors programs, academics, student-faculty interactions athletics, and student government.

The two theories have been tested over time. Milem and Berger (1997) examined both Tinto's and Astin's theories together and found that aspects of social and academic interactions, as well as student-faculty interaction, were important in student persistence. Specifically, they found that early involvement on campus was key to developing good social and academic interactions. Involvement during a student's transition period to campus seemed to have a positive impact on developing and perceiving peer support. Coupled with early support from faculty, the two were key to student persistence. In their review of student persistence research, Peltier et al. (1999) cited two articles in support of Astin's theory of involvement where students involved in athletics and extracurricular activities were more likely to complete a degree. Longwell-Grice and Longwell-Grice (2007-2008) found that Tinto's theory held true for first-generation, working-class students where social and academic interactions are critically impacted

when students do not live on campus and/or work more, and lack the cultural capital to develop supportive relationships with faculty.

The theories have also been challenged. Mannan (2007) tested Tinto's theory to see if it would hold true in small developing countries, like Papua New Guinea. He found Tinto's model to be applicable where social and academic interactions improved student persistence. Though, he also found that a student's program of study impacted social and academic interactions and commitment levels, and changed per the year of study (Mannan, 2007). His findings suggested that institutional initiatives to improve persistence needed to be varied and specific to year in college and program. Berger and Braxton (1998) found that organizational attributes of higher educational institutions, such as institutional communication, fairness in policy and rule enforcement, and participating in decision-making, all had significant indirect effects on student persistence.

Characteristics of Academic Non-Persisters

Tinto (1975) was clear to point out that grade performance was the single strongest predictor of academic dismissals. He stated that students facing academic dismissal "are often lacking in both intellectual and social development or are socially integrated to an extreme" (Tinto, 1975, p. 117). Further, he found that students who are academically dismissed tend to have lower aptitude, are less intellectually developed, and have lower social status. Tinto posited that programs aimed at lower socioeconomic status students to improve their academic performance may mitigate the effects of previous schooling and improve persistence (Tinto, 1975).

More recent research has attempted to identify personality traits and academic behaviors that contribute to academic failure. Using the 16PF-5 Personality Questionnaire created by

Cattell, Cattell, & Cattell (1993), Munt and Merydith (2012) found that "students who were not academically retained scored lower on Tough-Mindedness and Self-Control" and were "more open to experience and less conscientious" (p. 473). They also found that students struggling academically had lower Emotional Stability suggesting that "these students have greater difficulty coping with the academic demands of college life, such as attending classes and studying" (p. 473). In terms of academic behaviors, these students self-reported weaker time management and learning strategies and were less likely to self-monitor their own behaviors. Perhaps in contradiction to Tinto (1975), Munt and Merydith (2012) did not find that social interaction and goal commitment compensated for poor academic performance. When researching a probation intervention program, Isaak et al. (2006) found that students enrolled in the program identified motivational and stress-related difficulties, which may impact their "social integration, institutional commitment, and intent to reenroll" (p. 180).

Academic Suspension and Reinstatement

There are no unifying definitions or guidelines for academic suspension. Indeed, each institution of higher education defines its own academic standing policy and procedure. There is also no consistent naming convention for the different academic standing stages a student may go through. However, Isaak et al. (2006), stated that "in most institutions, students whose GPA falls below 2.00 are subject to academic probation, suspension, or dismissal" (p. 172). At the institution where this research was conducted, students are first placed on academic warning if their term GPA drops below 2.0 and/or their completion rate is below 67%. The student has one semester to improve their academic standing. If at the end of the term following being placed on Academic Warning, the student's cumulative GPA drops below 2.0 and/or their completion rate is below 67%, they are academically suspended. Students have the option to immediately appeal

their suspension. If approved, students are allowed to continue with no break on Academic

Probation. If their appeal is not approved, students must sit out for one academic year before

being eligible to appeal their suspension and be reinstated.

To be considered for reinstatement, students must submit a letter of appeal and often

meet with an academic advisor or other reinstatement process administrator to discuss their

intent to return. The student narrative provided through the appeal letter and follow-up interview

are critical to the reinstatement decision. The student narrative is how students describe or state,

written or orally, what led to their suspension, what has changed since their suspension, support

they may need moving forward to be successful, if they have specific goals they are attempting

to meet, and what their motivation is for returning (Chapman, 2004). At the institution where this

research was performed, students are asked to respond in writing to the following questions:

A) In your past semesters, what contributed to your academic difficulties?

  i) Review your academic record. Reflect, analyze and explain in your own words

  what happened each semester that you earned unsuccessful grades. What were the

  reasons for not successfully completing classes?

  ii) If you successfully completed courses, explain what made it possible for you to

  be successful?

  iii) What University resources did you engage with?

B) What has changed so you can complete courses successfully if your appeal is

approved? Explain what you have done to resolve each problem or barrier that interfered

with your academic progress. In what ways is your current situation improved?

C) What is your plan to improve your academic success if approved to return? Describe

specific steps and actions you will take to improve your academic success, if reinstated.

For example: explain your study strategies, outline your time management weekly plan, determine appropriate credit load, campus resources, etc.

Making Reinstatement Decisions

Since the early 1990's researchers have attempted to determine what factors administrators could use when making reinstatement from suspension decisions. While a few found stronger indications for success if pre-suspension GPA is higher (Hall & Gahn, 1994; Wang & Pilarzyk, 2009) or the number of remaining credits a student has to graduation is fewer (grade level) (Berkovitz, & O'Quin, 2006; Wisehart, 1990), another found that success could not be predicted by past academic success, prior college experience, and most placement scores (Santa Rita, 1998). A few researchers found that a higher quality point deficit, the amount of credit points a student needs to return to good academic standing, could sometimes predict success (Kinloch, Frost, & MacKay, 1993; Wisehart, 1990), where Cogan (2011) found quality point deficit to be most useful in predicting failure, rather than success. Berkovitz and O'Quin (2006) found that younger students and those that participated in a pre-freshman residential orientation were more successful than others. That connection to the institution as well as the support for developing key skills for success aligns with research by Dill et al., (2010) which indicated goal setting, motivation, and confidence as keys factors that can determine student success. Gender was found in some research to favor females in being more successful than their male counterparts after return from suspension (Kinloch et al., 1993). However, female students with dependents at home were also found to be more disadvantaged, even when retention initiatives were in place (Wang & Pilarzyk, 2009). Further, length of time away after suspension proved to have no impact on post-return success (Meadows & Tharp, 1996), but reinstatement conditions placed on the student when returning did (Kinloch et al., 1993).

Characteristics of Successful Students

While the search for objective, pre-suspension data that can ultimately predict a student's academic success continues to remain elusive, perhaps better understanding characteristics of students who are successful upon return can provide guidance for making reinstatement decisions. Tinto (2012) pointed out, "the process of persistence is not the mirror image of the process of leaving" (p. 5). While much focus of research has been on understanding why students leave, emerging research is attempting to understand how students succeed once they return. Padilla (1999) stated:

> While it is necessary to understand why some students fail to complete their programs of study so that students and institutions can be told what to avoid, it is crucial to understand what accounts for students' success when they do complete a degree program so that students and institutions can be told what to do. (p. 132)

Santa Rita (1998) conducted a study at the Bronx Community College of students readmitted from suspension for the fall semester in 1994. The intent was to identify some basis for making readmission (reinstatement) decisions and to inform the development of support programs for returning students. While he found that success post-suspension was unrelated to previous academic achievement and prior college experience, certain study skills, mindset, and motivation seemed important. Math and study skills were important for both males and females to be successful. Scale of extraversion was important, more significantly with males in this study. And aspects of incentive (being married, concerns about finances, being productive during time away) were important to future success. The study sample was small (86 students) and data was not disaggregated beyond gender. However, this study helped to shift the conversation to

considering characteristics beyond academic record information in making reinstatement decisions.

One study researched identity development and career exploration for academically dismissed students. Evaluating 164 reinstated college students participating in an academic and study skills course, Lucas and Hunt (2001-2002) found that the degree of identity development correlated to a strong relationship with career development increased with class rank. As students achieved higher class rank, they tended to have a stronger sense of identity and a greater understanding and appreciation for career exploration, especially as it was related to obtaining their preferred career position. The researchers did not denote what percent these 164 students comprised of the total number of academically dismissed students that chose to return and participate in recommended programs. Nor did they connect identity development and career exploration to completing a degree. However, they identified the growing importance and motivation career exploration provided for academically dismissed students. Many of the qualitative responses they received from students highlighted aspects of Tinto's (1975) lack of social and academic integration on campus, where students perceived lack of support and resources available. Thus, they concluded that students at academic risk "need regular and meaningful contacts with representatives of the university system. Advisors or counselors could help students assess or reevaluate interests and skills, which should lead to increased career clarification of the development of 'plan B,' when needed" (Lucas & Hunt, 2001-2002, p. 328).

Another study looked at characteristics of successful students from an organizational structure approach. Affirming what Berger and Braxton (1998) claimed about organizational structure impeding student success, Padilla (1999) researched the how and why students were able to be successful despite these organizational barriers. Padilla (1999) found that "what

accounts for the difference [between completing a degree or not] is the students' ability to avoid or overcome the barriers to degree attainment present on their campus" (p. 143). Though not looking specifically at success of academically dismissed students, Padilla (1999) drew conclusions about the important characteristics necessary for students to persist to degree. Namely, for any given campus, "there exists a corpus of knowledge and a repertoire of behaviors that allow successful students to overcome barriers to degree attainment" (p. 142). By understanding where students are at in their attainment of both this theoretical and heuristic knowledge, institutions can adjust their support and actions to help students prevail.

Intervention Strategies

Where objective data fails to provide any clear understanding or prediction of returning student success, more qualitative measures like academic advising support, connections with faculty and study skills resources, and focus on goal setting and motivations have been more promising. Describing one of the earlier retention initiatives, Garnett (1990) described the Students in Retention (SIR) program where students were required to visit the counseling center twice a term, meet with each course instructor, meet with an academic advisor three times during the term, and submit a weekly progress report as helpful to improving student success. Berkovitz and O'Quin (2006) researched the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) for students with financial and academic needs, which provided academic advising, counseling services, tutoring, and some financial assistance to help students be successful. Wang and Pilarzyk (2009) reviewed retention initiatives along with non-academic environmental factors and found that the intensive Just One Program, which included basic-skill reading and math courses, provided mentoring services, required 100% attendance, and an improvement by one grade level on Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE), was most successful in retaining students when coupled with fewer

outside stressors and not having dependent children at home. Highlighting the need for high intervention, Dill et al., (2010) discussed the Learning Skills Support Program (LSSP) for students recently suspended to continue in their academic programs while agreeing to meet with the LSSP coordinator every two weeks, meet with their faculty academic advisors, and complete a study skills course. The greater intervention improved goal setting, motivation and confidence. And Kirk-Kuwaye and Nishida (2001) found that students achieved higher GPA's and were less likely to be suspended when there is higher advising involvement, including clear communication about academic standing process and steps needed to return to good academic standing, meeting with an advisor three times during the term, utilization of campus resources, providing study strategy materials and web support, and requiring written assignments for self-reflection.

The Role of Academic Advising in Reinstatement

The role of academic advisors with regard to the reinstatement process is complicated. Advisors may participate in the advising and support of students prior to dismissal, participate in the decision process on whether a student should be reinstated, and also provide guidance and support for students once they're reinstated. Expectations for advisors can range from providing very prescriptive advising (e.g., explaining policies, how and when to appeal, what needs to happen for them to be successful, etc.) to developmental advising. Advisors may help students reflect upon and understand the challenges they encountered prior to being suspended and how those impacted their ability to be successful. Advisors provide support and direct students to resources available to help them work through those challenges once reinstated. And advisors work with students to better understand their motivations, goals and values and how they connect to being successful in their academic program (Hall & Gahn, 1994; Kinloch et al., 1993;

Wisehart, 1990). How advisors engage in the reinstatement process can also be determined by institutional structure (e.g., centralized vs. decentralized process, who all is involved and who makes the decision, etc.), educational philosophies, and guiding theories (see Advising Theories below) utilized by individual advisors and advising offices.

In several of the articles, advising support was highlighted in their recommendations in addition to any objective criteria they may have found. Hall and Gahn (1994) specifically recommended requiring a personal interview and follow-up advising as part of the reinstatement process. Recommendations made by Wisehart (1990) and Kinloch (1993) focused on advising support related to communicating what it will take to be successful, including a graduation plan, statistics on success, and a contract specifying reinstatement conditions. The processes did not consider individual student needs and situations. Rather, they attempted to impose upon all students a specific paradigm of success defined as degree completion. Instead, the Higher Learning Commission (2018) stressed that "institutions need to involve students as partners in the process of understanding the barriers they face coupled with meaningful data to better understand their pathways and opportunities" (p. 5). This requires student voice and participation in the narratives being told which may happen through the written appeal, the personal interview, or simply in on-going conversations with an academic advisor.

Thus, a key theme throughout this research is how advising intervention can impact student retention and success. According to Drake (2011), advising is key to developing strong relationships and connectedness to campus, understanding process and available resources, engaging in campus life, and synthesizing and contextualizing academic journey. When considered from the theoretical lens of narrative theory, "advisors are charged with the task of deciphering language, making sense of students (and themselves), uncovering how students find

significance, and what really matters to them, all in an effort to facilitate the co-construction of education" (Champlin-Sharff & Hagen, 2013, p. 223).

Academic Advising Theories

As was highlighted in Chapter One, academic advising as a profession is informed by multiple theories from multiple disciplines. The fact that the advising profession has not coalesced around one theory over another is in part due to the complexity of human interactions, individual development, prejudgment and biases, and understanding the many factors and characteristics that go into impacting student persistence and success. Of the different theories that academic advisors might subscribe to, each contributes unique aspects to advising and provides a different lens through which to view a student and their particular situation. No one lens, however, highlights all aspects that may need to be considered in an advising relationship. Yet, the importance of the different theories that advisors might tap into necessarily influences the scholarship required of academic advisors to "think deeply about what we accomplish through academic advising and about why we think particular practices are relevant" (Himes & Schulenberg, 2013, conclusion).

Narrative Theory in Academic Advising

A fair amount of research has connected the importance of narrative theory to the practice of advising (Champlin-Scharff, 2010; Champlin-Scharff & Hagen, 2013; Hagen 2008; Himes, 2014; Jordan, 2000; Pizzolato, 2006). However, no research currently exists that directly connects the importance of the theory to the reinstatement process or predicting future student success. Narrative theory is the act of hearing and telling stories (Hagen, 2008). The importance of this research will be to examine how narrative theory can be employed through the initial suspension process, review of the written appeal for reinstatement, making connections with

students about their goals and motivations, and helping students make meaning of their educational experiences.

According to Hagen (2008), advisors engage daily in "telling and hearing stories; we enact them and reenact them; we create them and destroy them" (p. 18). As opposed to the more Social Science-based theories utilized in academic advising, Humanities-based theories provide an avenue for exploring the ever-changing narrative, or authorship, of our students as related through their experiences and as we engage them in reflection processes to make meaning of those experiences (Champlin-Scharff, 2010; Hagen, 2008; Himes, 2014; Jordan, 2000; Pizzolato, 2006). Champlin-Scharff (2010) discussed the importance of hermeneutics in advising, defined as the theory and methodology of interpretation. She stated that hermeneutics "provides both the opportunity to uncover how advisors might better understand their advisees as well as the occasion to explore how an active and ongoing interpretation of the advisee's continuously changing situation can lead to more effective and useful advice" (p. 59). Interpreting a student's situation, however, cannot exist without their narrative. Utilizing narrative theory and hermeneutics together provide an opportunity for advisors to get to know students holistically through more subjective matters, rather than solely objective criteria.

Summary

The literature reviewed provides an overview of the theories upon which student persistence and success are most frequently measured. But few resources exist that focus on non-traditional, diverse, and adult learners, and their characteristics for success. Even less have attempted to define what the success characteristics are of students returned from suspension. Unable to identify objective data that predicts student success, especially upon reinstatement, researchers often recommended more advising support, conversations, and reflections with

students where student narrative and meaning-making becomes more important than any particular data point. Intervention programs reviewed focused more on subjective data, like motivation, incentive, support, study skills, responsibilities, and concerns, and how they were more likely to impact success. None of the research ventures to consider how student narrative itself may provide the information that many have identified as being helpful indicators of future success.

The role of advising and use of narrative theory are reviewed as important functions where student interaction with academic advisors provides an environment of storytelling and meaning-making, where the student and the advisor co-narrate the story of the student's education. Through the student's story, advisors begin to learn and understand some of those key characteristics that are compelling the student to be successful, or not. The use of narrative theory provides a platform for more intentional review and use of that student narrative to consider aspects of the student story that may lend themselves to identifying factors for future student success.

Synthesis of Literature

With declining enrollments and changing demographics, institutions of higher education will be challenged to take a deeper look at how they are assisting their non-traditional, diverse, and adult student populations persist toward degree, even after academic suspension. Changes made now may positively impact student populations for years to come, whereas, maintaining current practices may not meet the needs of who our student are and are going to be. Understanding student persistence from Tinto's (1975) or Astin's (1984) theories provides a good understanding of how traditional-aged students may behave in traditional college settings. But, these theories do not go far enough in helping to understand persistence in non-traditional,

diverse, and adult student populations, especially those who are seeking and engaging in education in non-traditional environments (e.g. online, part-time, at multiple campus sites).

It is unlikely that institutions of higher education will distinctly move away from measuring success by degree completion, especially as it remains a factor tied to funding and national ratings. However, a sole focus on degree completion, without deeper analysis of how our students are defining success, may cause some institutions to miss the mark and not understand how to best support their students through to completion. The Higher Learning Commission (2018) noted that:

> The consequences of the focus upon the completion agenda leads to potentially negative behaviors or implementation of under exploited analytic models to address "leaks in the educational pipeline" with little understanding of today's learners or the implications of such approaches to issues of equity, learner agency, institutional type and/or mission. (p. 4)

Institutions need to take stock of their current student population and the shifting demographics around them in their main service areas/regions to understand more about the students they will be serving. If campuses take a deeper dive into getting to know these students, they may learn more about their motivations, interests, competing priorities, and support needs that can help them be successful academically. "What is needed is an understanding of the students of today, models to support their growth and development, along with institutional responses that align with institutional missions as well as the students served" (Higher Learning Commission, 2018, p. 3).

If Tinto's or Astin's theories will continue to be relevant, even as student demographics change and the demand on institutions of higher education shifts slightly away from traditional

approaches to post-secondary education, it will depend greatly on how social and academic interactions and involvement are defined for students outside of the traditional setting. Institutions will need to consider how non-traditional, diverse, and adult learners engage with campus, either online or in-person, what motivations are driving them to seek education when they are, and whether competing priorities will impact the support they require and/or their time to degree. If students are not necessarily 'on-campus,' then institutions will need to rethink what early involvement (Milem & Berger, 1997) on campus looks like. When students are managing multiple priorities, like academic achievement, obtaining stable and financially supportive employment, taking care of family, and progressing in their careers, institutions will be confronted with assessing these student needs and providing support to help them achieve success in all these areas to maintain successful progress toward degree completion. As the Higher Learning Commission (2018) points out, student "support needs to be available to them when they need it, in the form they need it, and not based on institutional convenience" (p. 2). To truly understand their students and their needs, institutions need to listen to the students' stories and engage students in narrative discourse to understand how they are constructing meaning out of their experiences and how they are defining success.

For students who are academically suspended, this narrative becomes even more important. Where objective, past student data may not help us understand which students will be successful moving forward, student narrative may help us understand how students are processing past behaviors or mistakes, what they have learned about themselves, and the kind of support they need to be academically successful. Further, it can be learned how their academic program aligns with their current motivations and interests, and their commitment to completing their degree. Where the numbers illustrate poor retention and completion rates for academically

suspended students, institutions of higher education should be held accountable for learning more about these students and understanding how to help them work toward degree completion. As seen through the different intervention programs described above, institutions can begin capitalizing on the success characteristics that these programs have begun to identify, as well as the skill sets and concerns that continue to impede student success. Learning from these programs, institutions have an opportunity to ask better questions of their returning students, engage them in discourse, and involve them in decisions about how they can be successful.

The reinstatement process is inherently a narrative process. Events occurred leading to a student's suspension. Once suspended, the student who wishes to return to complete their academic program must tell the story of those events, make meaning of what happened to lead to their suspension and utilize self-reflection and personal insight to propose how they will be successful if allowed to return. An academic advisor, or other process administrator, plays a key role in connecting with the student throughout this process. They engage the student in discourse about the events that led to the suspension. They relate the master narrative of the student's degree program and the role of academic standing. They explain the process of reinstatement and tell stories of successful students as they may relate to the current student's situation. They also play the role of co-narrator, helping the student make meaning of their experience, and the role of interpreters of the student's narrative to determine fidelity and congruence with the narrative of the institution. Thus, reviewing appeals and making decisions through a narrative lens may provide a method that is better aligned with the fundamental nature of the reinstatement process.

Critique of Previous Research Methods

The previous research on persistence, especially that of Tinto (1975) and Astin (1984) is based on the traditional student experience. However, these models fail to consider the

experience of non-traditional, diverse, and adult student populations who may not be arriving on campus as freshmen direct out of high school and reside on campus. These students, whose population is growing and will continue to be a larger proportion of higher education enrollment, tend to arrive later in life, often with some post-secondary education already completed, have multiple responsibilities vying for their attention, and may have fewer resources, financially, emotionally, and academically, that set them up for success under traditional models of education. Yet, no persistence models similar to Tinto or Astin exist that truly integrate the experience or success characteristics of non-traditional, diverse, and adult students, especially considering the various ways in which these student populations tend to interact with higher education.

Student persistence and success characteristics have generally stopped at the point of academic suspension. Scant research exists that identifies what contributes to a student's success once they have returned from suspension, especially with non-traditional, diverse, and adult populations, that is not focused on previous academic record data or characteristics prior to suspension. And, yet, many continue to use pre-suspension data when making reinstatement decisions though no conclusive evidence exists that pre-suspension data can predict post-suspension success. While reinstatement processes usually require a student to provide a written appeal, administrators of the process have continued to scour student record data for objective data to ease their decision-making.

It is understandable that administrators of the reinstatement process look for simplified methods of making their reinstatement decisions. Persons being asked to make these decisions are no doubt engaged in many teaching and advising activities, where reinstatement is just a small part of that focus. Many of the attempts to identify objective data in hopes of predicting

future student success are tied to heuristic models of thinking. Heuristics provide relatively fast, simplistic short-cuts to make decisions quickly and efficiently (Cherry, 2020). Strategies used in heuristic decision-making include, "(a) examining fewer cues, (b) reducing the effort of retrieving cue values, (c) simplifying the weighting of cues, (d) integrating less information, and (e) examining fewer alternatives" (Gigerenzer & Gaissmaier, 2011, p.454). According to Cherry (2020):

> In order to cope with the tremendous amount of information we encounter and to speed up the decision-making process, the brain relies on these mental strategies to simplify things so we don't have to spend endless amounts of time analyzing every detail. (p. 3)

Therefore, it makes sense that higher education administrators would turn to easy-to-identify student record data, not the more complex student narrative, in attempt to make reinstatement decisions. After all, heuristics tend to disregard some information in order to make decisions more efficiently (Gigerenzer & Gaissmaier, 2011, p.454). In the cases reviewed above, however, heuristic decision-making in the reinstatement process has not proven to predict greater success in students returning from suspension. Yet, none included in their models data gleaned from the student narrative. By using narrative theory and better understanding the characteristics of student who are successful post-reinstatement, we may be able to identify key data within student narrative that can help make those decisions.

Conclusion

The literature reviewed in this article on predictors of success for reinstated students provided no consistent objective criteria by which to make reinstatement decisions. Committees who review student appeals for reinstatement continue to sort through subjective criteria via written appeals and student interviews to determine whether they provide any indication of

future student success. Much of the research reviewed were written prior to narrative theory emerging as an important theory that informs the academic advising process. Thus, there is an opportunity to review the reinstatement process from a stance that can consider both objective and subjective matter in the reinstatement decision-making process as they may predict student success after reinstatement. The next chapter will review methodology chosen to collect data from both students and administrators on factors each group perceives to be important to the reinstatement decision-making process. The chapter will examine the instruments developed, the interview process conducted, the sample and participants, and how the data was analyzed.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Students returning from suspension will continue to be a focus for institutions as they aim to graduate all admitted students. Yet, institutions still want for more precise mechanisms that help them identify students who will be successful and, in turn, know what kind of support those students will need to be successful. Decades of research unable to find objective criteria that administrators can depend on for making reinstatement decisions suggests further research is necessary to review subjective criteria in this process, namely through practices highlighted by narrative theory. A growing arm of research connecting the importance of this theory to academic advising practice provides a foundation for understanding how narrative theory can impact such an important process as reinstatement from suspension.

This chapter will review the methodology of this interpretive hermeneutic phenomenological qualitative study. The research aimed to discover how student narrative is perceived as having an impact on reinstatement from suspension decisions. Further, this research sought to understand whether reviewing student narrative, written and oral, through a narrative theory lens, can provide insight into future student success. Using a qualitative approach provided an opportunity to engage those intimately involved in this process to understand their perceptions and interpretations of the importance of student narrative.

Purpose of Study

This interpretive hermeneutic phenomenological research study will use a narrative theory framework. According to Smith et al. (2009), "interpretive phenomenological analysis involves a double hermeneutic as it integrates not only the participant's sense of their lived experience but also the researchers' attempt in understanding how the participant makes sense of their personal and social world" (as cited in Creswell & Poth 2018, p. 82). This approach was

chosen for this research in attempt to understand others' understanding of the role of narrative in the reinstatement process and how it is used to predict future student success. The research does not wish to simply describe the experiences of the students working through the reinstatement process. A study conducted by McConnell-Henry et al. (2009) (as cited in Matua & Van Der Wal, 2015) found that:

> Interpretive research departs from 'simply raising awareness about a phenomenon' through simple description in favour [sic] of wanting to 'attain a broader and deeper understanding' of what the phenomenon means to those who experience it in their own social-cultural contexts and realities, including how the experience alters their entire being. (p. 24)

This research sought to understand the importance of the student narrative and how it is interpreted in the reinstatement process. In the reinstatement from suspension process, it is not just the students whose experience the researcher is attempting to understand, but also those of the process administrators, especially as their own backgrounds and experiences may impact how they interpret those of the students who are appealing for reinstatement. As McManus Holroyd (2007) stated, "interpretive hermeneutic understanding is born from the recognition that all human experiences are both rich and complex" (p. 2).

The reinstatement from suspension process involves several participants from different backgrounds: administrators of the process and the student wishing to return to their academic program. Administrators may include academic advisors, faculty, or academic leadership like deans or provosts. Each of these administrators brings to the process their understanding of student success, their experience of working with students in the past who have and have not been successful, and an understanding of key attributes that may lead to student success.

However, the student wishing to return is the only one who can truly define what success means to them, and that success will be contextualized based on their life experiences leading up to the moment of appeal (Higher Learning Commission, 2018). Administrators of the process may have heard about similar experiences from other students, but how those students engaged with and made meaning of those experiences will have been dependent on their own understanding of their situation. Whether the students with comparable experiences were able to be successful after returning from suspension may impact how administrators of the process perceive a future student's ability to be successful when they present a similar narrative. Thus, how students make meaning of their experiences and whether they can be successful upon return from suspension creates a relationship structure that may impact an administrator's view of how to interpret future narratives, or otherwise stated, "there can never be a presuppositionless stance in any act of interpretation" (McManus Holroyd, 2007, p. 3).

As stated above, most of the research on the reinstatement process attempted to identify data from student records that could help predict returning student success. In some cases, where no specific data, or combination thereof, could be identified, researchers spoke about the importance of student narrative through written appeals or interviews. An interpretive hermeneutic phenomenological approach provides a method for contextualized review of that student narrative and its perceived role in the reinstatement process. Through this method, the research explored how all participants in the reinstatement process make meaning of experience as it impacts future student success. Further, it recognized that while presuppositions may guide understandings of experience, "any description of lived experience by participants needs to be seen in the context of that individual's life situation" (Finlay, 2012, p. 22). When reviewed and interpreted student narrative is added to the reinstatement process, a decision can no longer

remain beholden to any specific objective (student record data) criteria. The reinstatement

process is very individual to the student's situation, understanding what happened, what's

changed, and how the student plans to move forward. But that is currently not formally

recognized in any methodology for determining reinstatement decisions. Peter Hagen (2018)

identified this dichotomy of the desire to seek truth and meaning in data through scientific

approaches as opposed to the interpretation, meaning, and understanding that is gained through

narrative. He argued, "engaging in narratives may well be the most thorough and most efficient

way that advisors have to come to understand the student before them and to be understood by

the student" (Hagen, 2018, p. xvi).

      The framework of narrative theory was thus chosen due to the aspect of storytelling and

the necessary dialogue that occurs during the reinstatement from suspension process. "The

narrative paradigm proposes that human beings are inherently storytellers who have a natural

capacity to recognize the coherence and fidelity of stories they tell and experience" (Fisher,

1989, p. 24). Whether solely reviewing a student's written appeal or if a follow-up interview

with the student is also incorporated, administrators begin a dialogue with the student appealing

for reinstatement through their written and/or oral narrative. That narrative tells a story of that

student's experience in attempt to help the administrator understand whether they are ready to

return and be successful. The importance of dialogue here is where "persons mutually engage in

and constitute a transaction and the message that emerges from it" (Fisher, 1989, p. 25). The

reinstatement process is not one-sided. Students and administrators of the process each play a

part in this story, at times working together to construct a mutual understanding of the

experience. In a sense, students and process administrators are working together toward

emergent goals, "deciding on plot, the nature of characters, resolutions, and their meaning and

import for themselves and others" (Frentz & Farrell, 1976, as cited in Fischer, 1989, p. 64). Yet, administrators must recognize the power they operate over the students applying for reinstatement in deciding their fate, returning to complete their degree program. As Hagen, 2018, explained, "the difference in power between the student and the advisor can constrain discourse because the student might not feel free to engage in open discourse" and students may "self-censor their narratives on the assumption that the power of the advisor should not be bothered by trivial concerns" (p. 29).

Narrative theory also provides a potential framework for reviewing student narrative. When students are asked to write an appeal for their own reinstatement, the intent is to have these students tell a story about their experience, hopefully in a way that the process administrators can glean greater understanding of the student. When the student tells their story in this process, they attempt to "give order, unity, and purpose to what may otherwise seem like an incoherent onrush of unrelated experiences" (Hagen, 2018, p. 7). Further, their stories "provide structure and coherence of events, processes, and motivations that may lack for viable interpretations unless we impose narrative structure on them" (Hagen, 2018, p. 7). When administrators review the narrative, they are essentially searching for the 'logic of good reasons.' Fisher (1989) broke down what he considered an integral part of the logic of good reasons, by first reviewing the five components in the logic of reasons. They are:

1. Considering whether the facts presented in the narrative are indeed facts.

2. Determining whether any possible relevant facts have been omitted and whether the ones being presented are being distorted or taken out of context.

3. Recognizing and assessing the pattern of reasoning.

4. Determining the relevance of the arguments intended to inform the decision are sound and are the ones that should be considered in making the decision.

5. Whether or not the narrative told deals with the questions on which the matter is concerned.

To transform the logic of reason into the logic of good reasons, he suggested the following five questions:

1. The question of fact: What are the implicit and explicit values embedded in a message?

2. The question of relevance: Are the values appropriate to the nature of the decision that the message bears upon? Included in this message must be concern for omitted, distorted, and misrepresented values.

3. The question of consequence: What would the effects of adhering to the values – for one's concept of oneself, for one's behavior, for one's relationships with others and society, and to the process of rhetorical transaction?

4. The question of consistency: Are the values confirmed or validated in one's personal experience, in the lives or statements of others whom one admires and respects, and in the conception of the best audience that one can conceive?

5. The question of transcendent issue: Even if a prima-facie case exists or a burden of proof has been established, are the values the message offers those that, in the estimation of the critic, constitute the ideal basis for human conduct? (Fisher, 1989, p. 109)

The researcher explored these questions as a possible basis for developing a rubric by which reinstatement decisions may review student narrative, at least more consistently, while recognizing the importance of the decision-makers own understandings and values. Such a rubric could also help place emphasis on content over form to accommodate all methods of narrative

(written and oral) and where cultural background, English-language proficiency, or narrative skill may distract from the experiences, understanding, and meaning being presented by the student.

Research Questions

How does student narrative impact student success in the reinstatement from suspension process?

How can information from the student narrative be included to help analyze and predict student success?

Research Design

This interpretive hermeneutic phenomenological qualitative research study was conducted in phases via online surveys and online (via Zoom) interviews. Students recently involved in the reinstatement from suspension process were selected and contacted via email to complete an online survey to gather basic demographic and reinstatement information, as well as their willingness to participate in a follow-up interview to gain a richer understanding of their experience. The interview included questions that attempted to elicit information about their experience in the process, whether they understood what was being asked of them to convey in their written appeals, whether they had a follow-up interview, and their perceptions on how they were being assessed to determine their reinstatement. Additionally, administrators were similarly surveyed and asked their willingness to participate in an interview to understand their perceptions on the role and importance of student narrative in the decision-making process for reinstatement.

According to Crist and Tanner (2003), to conduct hermeneutic interpretive phenomenological research, it is generally recommended that multiple interviews take place to gain deeper insights from the research subjects and to allow for "co-creation of substantive findings" (p.203). They recommend conducting at least three interviews or observations:

1. To develop the informant's focused life history;

2. To elaborate and develop specific issues and events that appeared important during the first interview (also providing new lines of inquiry for the same or other informants); and

3. To gain informant's reflections on the interpretations derived from the previous narratives, and any new lines of inquiry (p. 203).

The basic information collected through the online surveys served as a first interview by which the second interview allowed the participant and the researcher to review the reinstatement process, discuss further for greater insight, and explore additional questions regarding the participant's experience with the reinstatement from suspension process.

"The philosophy of hermeneutics underpins interpretive methodology, the science of interpreting human meaning (Gadamer, 1976, Polkinghorne, 1983, as cited in Crist & Tanner, 2003, p. 202). Further, "Through the application of hermeneutic interpretive phenomenology, practical acts of living, accessed through 'narratives' (interviews and observations) to reveal meaning" (Crist & Tanner, 2003, p. 202). The information gathered from the student and administrator surveys contributed to the semi-structured interviews thus conducted to delve more deeply into the participants' experiences with the reinstatement process. The researcher then compared the information gained from the interviews for congruence of understanding on the role and importance of student narrative. This aspect of data analysis followed the systematic

process of identifying significant statements and then broader units of meaning to describe in detail "'what' the individuals have experienced and 'how' they have experienced it" (Moustakas, 1994, as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 77). The third phase required gaining the participants' reflections on the co-created interpretations derived from the previous interviews. This also provided an opportunity for follow-up questions that were conceived during the interpretive process.

Participant Selection

This research study followed the phenomenological process for reaching the 'point of saturation' (Kvale, 2007, as cited in Briggs et al., 2012, p. 260) where no new information is being gleaned from participant interviews. To get to this level of saturation, participant selection was steered by the phenomenological research guideline to interview between five to 25 individuals who have experienced the reinstatement process (Polkinghorne, 1989, as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2018). Interviewing up to ten people is thought to be sufficient for reaching saturation (Boyd, 2001; Creswell, 1999, as cited in Groenewald, 2004). The researcher sought to interview up to ten students who completed the recruitment survey and up to eight administrators. Choosing this size for the sample from each of the respective populations was intended to gather enough data to develop "a textual and structural description of the experiences, and ultimately provide an understanding of the common experiences of the participants" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 79).

The participants in this study included undergraduate, degree-seeking students, that recently appealed for reinstatement from suspension during the year preceding this research. At the research site selected for this study, before being suspended, a student is first placed on academic warning if their term GPA drops below 2.0 and/or their completion rate is below 67%.

The student has one semester to improve their academic standing. If at the end of the term following being placed on academic warning, the student's cumulative GPA drops below 2.0 and/or their completion rate is below 67%, they are academically suspended. Students have the option to immediately appeal their suspension. If approved, students are allowed to continue taking classes on academic probation. If their appeal is not approved, students must sit out for one academic year before being eligible to appeal their suspension and be reinstated. The students recruited to participate in this research were out for at least one year and appealed their suspension for reinstatement during the fall, 2020, spring, summer, and fall 2021 terms. Students not included in the sample successfully appealed their academic suspension and were allowed to enroll in the term immediately following their suspension. These students, then, were not required to sit out for one academic year prior to appealing for reinstatement.

The administrative 'key actors' included academic standing representatives and deans from each of the seven colleges who act as decision-makers in the reinstatement from suspension process at this Midwestern institution. Fraenkel et al. (2019) described key actors as "especially knowledgeable individuals and thus often excellent sources of information" (p. 407). Each academic standing representative is responsible for coordinating review of reinstatement from suspension requests from students in their college/unit. Per this institution's state system policy, college deans are the ultimate decision-makers in a student's reinstatement. The administrators who volunteered to participate were intimately familiar with the reinstatement process, had more than one-year experience working with the process, and had a general understanding of how their college reviewed reinstatement appeals. Those newer to the institution and to the institution's reinstatement process were not included in this process.

Procedures

The researcher first gained permission from the institution's vice provost to conduct the survey and interview research with students, staff, and faculty on this campus. Students who participated in the reinstatement from suspension process during fall, 2020, spring and summer 2021, were identified and their contact information collected. Previous research on the reinstatement process, as well as the researcher's knowledge of the reinstatement process at the Midwestern institution being studied, informed the development of survey questions related to the first research question. The surveys were piloted by colleagues familiar with the reinstatement process for comprehension and validity. After piloting, the surveys were emailed to the identified students and academic standing representatives directly involved in the reinstatement process for their response. Participants were asked to complete the survey within two weeks' time, with a reminder message sent four days before the survey closed.

An initial survey was emailed to students via Qualtrics to their school and personal email accounts. The electronic survey included several demographic questions and asked students to provide their name and contact information if they wished to participate in an interview with the researcher. The initial survey was sent in mid-June 2021 to 72 students and resulted in three interviews taking place between June 29 and July 1, 2021. To reach the required threshold for purposes of sampling, a follow-up email was reformatted to be more personalized to each student and was sent on June 24, 2021. In this version of the email, a $25 Target gift card was offered as an incentive to elicit greater participation. Singer and Couper (2008) found that "Incentives are also more effective in surveys where the response rate without an incentive is low" (p. 49). A fourth interview was completed August 3, 2021. Seeking to increase the number of student participants, the researcher again reached out to academic standing representatives on campus

and gained names of students who appealed for reinstatement fall 2021. Waiting until after the

start of fall term, the researcher resent the email to 90 students on September 24, 2021. With this

invitation, the researcher connected with six more students for a total of 10 interviews. All

participants received the $25 Target gift card after completing the interviews. The $25 Target

gift card incentive was nominal and did not "induce participants to undertake risks they would

not be willing to accept without the incentive" (Singer & Couper, 2008, p. 50). All outcomes

discussed during the interviews had occurred in the past. Additionally, initial communications

with the student participants were sure to indicate that their participation would have no impact

on their academic standing or reinstatement decisions.

Students were interviewed online via Zoom. Each interview took no longer than 30-45

minutes and was recorded and transcribed for analysis. Administrators of the reinstatement

process who volunteered to be interviewed were also interviewed online via Zoom to discuss

their perceptions of factors in important in the decision-making process for reinstatement. Each

interview was similarly recorded and transcribed for coding and theme identification. The survey

responses for those who did not identify themselves as being willing to be interviewed were

discarded and not included in this research.

Sampling

This purposive sample included all students who had been out of school for at least one

year due to academic suspension and who appealed their suspension for the fall, 2020, spring,

summer, or fall 2021, terms and those key actors that facilitate the reinstatement from suspension

process. Per Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun (2019), purposive sampling is appropriate when the

researcher uses "their judgment to select a sample that they believe, based on prior information,

will provide the data they need" (p. 100). The intent of the student sample is to connect with

students who recently went through the reinstatement process, whether they were reinstated, to understand how they perceived their experience in that process, how they perceived the role and importance of their narrative, and if they understood what they were being asked to convey in their narrative. The intent of the key actor sample is to understand the characteristics and perceptions of this particular group as they determine whether students will be able to return to their academic programs after academic suspension. It was important to learn from this group whether they believed factors from student narrative to be important in the process.

Setting

This research was conducted at a mid-sized, Midwestern institution of higher education. This public, doctorate-granting institution primarily serves a diverse, adult, transfer student population. Celebrated for its focus on diversity and community engagement, this institution seeks to provide access to undergraduate and graduate-level programs to underserved populations. The ever-changing and growing campus currently serves nearly 11,000 students across a large metropolitan area. The demographic make-up of the student body is majority female, non-white, and enrolled part-time. Students often delay their degree progress or experience academic challenges due to competing work, personal, and financial responsibilities and concerns. As such, the institution's six-year graduation rate is lower than the national average.

Protection of Participants

The researcher assured the protection of the participants by first explaining the purpose of this research as part of the researcher's doctoral degree program requirements, gaining implied consent through the online survey, and through informed consent before conducting follow-up interviews:

Respect for persons encompasses the treatment of persons and their data involved in the

research process and this means that we must provide evidence of measures for

respecting the privacy of participants and ensuring the consent process is clearly

communicated including the rights of the participants to withdraw from the study.

(Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 54)

The researcher took further caution and acknowledged their practitioner role at the research

institution and that the research being conducted would not be influenced by that role in hopes to

minimize how that role would "influence the choice of people to participate or not in a project

and the way participants shape the information they give them" (Briggs et al., 2012, p. 100).

Confidentiality was maintained using pseudonyms and without any identifying information.

Data Collection

Data collection was completed during summer and fall 2021. Electronic surveys were

sent during early summer to students who participated in the reinstatement from suspension

process for the fall, 2020, spring, or summer, 2021, academic terms. To gain further respondents,

a $25 Target gift card was added as an incentive and the survey was again sent in early Fall 2021

to all previously targeted students as well as students who applied for reinstatement in Fall 2021.

An electronic survey was chosen for its free access through the researcher's institution and for its

ease of use. Additionally, it was assumed that students receiving the survey through their school-

assigned or personal email addresses had access to the Internet to be able to complete the survey

(Briggs et al., 2012, p. 275). The electronic survey began with an introductory paragraph

describing participants' rights, assuring the anonymity of their responses (unless they agreed to

participate in a follow-up interview), how confidentiality of those who do participate in follow-

up interviews will be maintained, and how all survey and interview responses will be used for

this research (Briggs et al., 2012, p. 275). Follow-up interviews occurred between July and October 2021.

In early fall, reinstatement process administrators were sent an electronic survey. Similar to the students, the electronic survey began with an introductory paragraph describing participants' rights, and how survey responses will be used for this research (Fraenkel et al., 2019, p. 368). Administrators asked to participate in a follow-up interview signed a Letter of Informed Consent authorizing the use of their statements in this research and acknowledging their ability to discontinue their participation at any time (Fraenkel et al., 2019, pp. 412-413). Interviews took place mid-fall. Total time commitment for student and administrator participants was approximately 5 minutes to complete the online survey and 30 minutes to 1 hour for the follow-up interview.

The information collected through the online surveys and follow-up interviews was exported to an Excel document for analysis. Due to COVID-19 and social distancing restrictions, student and administrator interviews were conducted online via Zoom using Zoom's audio, video, and transcription recording functions. Recordings were downloaded, deleted from the cloud, and saved onto the researcher's password protected computer. Using the mobile phone application VoiceRecorder, the audio from each student interview was captured via a second method to ensure accurateness of the transcription. The researcher captured answers to interview questions in writing during each interview, as well as notes to identify nonverbal communication, to assist with transcription at a future time. The documents collected assisted with the triangulation of the research. Multiple sources and methods were used to corroborate "evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 260).

The researcher selected a colleague to help review the Zoom transcriptions and compare them to the voice recordings to ensure the accuracy of the transcriptions. Per Bloomberg and Volpe (2016), having a third-party review the transcripts helped establish credibility in the documents used, as well as provided an opportunity for "peer debriefing" to ensure accuracy of the account (p. 163). The colleague was a co-worker who had recently completed their doctoral program and had experience reviewing transcriptions of research participants. All transcriptions were stored on the researcher's password protected personal drive provided by the research institution through the researcher's professional role. All survey responses and interview documents were saved on the researcher's password-protected computer and were permanently deleted once all research was complete and dissertation accepted.

Data Analysis

Data collected from the participant interviews were analyzed using a combination of the five-step data analysis spiral activities, strategies and outcomes as described by Creswell and Poth (2018) and interpretive process as described by Crist and Tanner (2003). Creswell and Poth's (2018) Data Analysis Spiral includes five steps as illustrated below:

Figure 1

Creswell and Poth's Data Analysis Spiral

Once data was collected and transcribed and verified for integrity, the researcher followed the interpretive process as described by Crist and Tanner (2003) which includes five phases:

Phase 1. Early Focus and Lines of Inquiry

Phase 2. Central Concerns, Exemplars and Paradigm Cases

Phase 3. Shared Meanings

Phase 4. Final Interpretations

Phase 5. Dissemination of the Interpretation (p. 203-204).

A more detailed description of each phase is provided in the next section. Because the sample was not random and only consisted of those individuals recently involved in the reinstatement process on this one Midwestern campus, inferences to perceptions of the importance of student narrative pieces in the reinstatement process at other campuses were not possible.

Managing and Organizing the Data

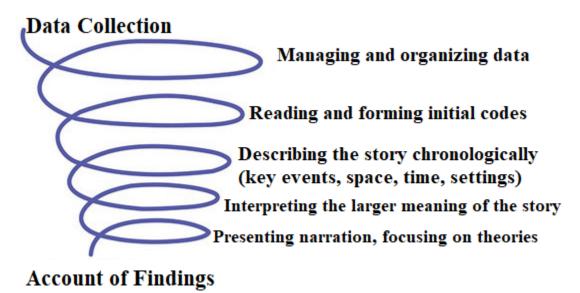All interview recordings and audio files were saved to the researcher's secured personal drive for transcribing. The information collected through the online surveys and follow-up interviews was exported to Microsoft Excel and Word documents for analysis. Each participant file was named using a pseudonym (e.g., Student 1 Interview) to protect participant identity and to be able to easily locate the appropriate files when needed. Each interview was transcribed verbatim utilizing the transcription feature in Zoom and by comparing audio collected via VoiceRecorder. Transcriptions were compared against the researcher's handwritten notes to ensure the entire conversation was captured. Each transcription was labeled by date and participant and securely saved to the appropriately name electronic file.

Reading and Memoing Emergent Ideas and Phase 1. Early Focus and Lines of Inquiry

After first managing and organizing the data as described above, each transcription was read, underlining key phrases, and noting key ideas. Each document was read in its entirety four times, with partial readings for understanding after that. Notes were taken while reading to aide in code development and summaries were written to include initial interpretations. As per Crist and Tanner (2003), missing or unclear information was tagged, and further lines of inquiry were determined if additional information was required.

Describing and Classifying Codes into Themes and Phase 2. Central Concerns, Exemplars and Paradigm Cases

Based on the memoing, notes, and summaries created in the previous phase, information was formulated into "central concerns, important themes or meanings that are unfolding" (Crist & Tanner, 2003, p. 204.). As Creswell and Poth (2018) described this stage, the researcher will "build detailed descriptions, apply codes, develop themes or dimensions, and provide an

interpretation in light of their own views or views of the perspectives in the literature" (p. 189).

Key to this phase and to hermeneutic interpretive phenomenology is that the approach "does not

require researchers to bracket their own pre-conceptions or theories during the process" (Crist &

Tanner, 2003, p. 203). This stage or phase is critical to determining themes comprised of several

codes that relate to or identify a common idea. The emerging themes were reviewed against the

research questions and further interpretive summaries will be developed.

Developing and Assessing Interpretations

Phase 3. Shared Meanings

"Interpretation in qualitative research involves abstracting out beyond the codes and

themes to the larger meaning of the data" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 195). The interpretive

summaries produced were reviewed and, if necessary, rewritten to identify the connections

between the participants' responses and themes developed. These interpretations included the

researcher's own hypotheses as well as were compared against existing literature.

Phase 4. Final Interpretations

In this phase of interpretive analysis, the researcher pursued "peer feedback on early data

interpretations" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 195) by reconnecting with participants and sharing

the interpretive summaries developed. Giving that opportunity for feedback from the participants

served as a form of member checking as well as provided the researcher an opportunity to

address any missing data or lines of inquiry that were developed throughout the analysis process.

Representing and Visualizing the Data and Phase 5. Dissemination of the Interpretation

Finally, the interpretations were described and explained through the context of the

analysis process. Understanding that interpretations are an iterative process, final interpretations

were presented as they related to the research questions and supporting literature. By disseminating these interpretations, the researcher identified key elements of the interpretations that could be used in development of a reinstatement decision-making rubric.

<div align="center">**Instruments**</div>

Recruitment Survey

The researcher chose survey design collect basic demographic and reinstatement data and recruit students for in-person interviews for ease of use since it was conducted through an online survey instrument. Responses gained from this initial survey served to inform the interview questions for those participants who agreed to be interviewed. As part of the interpretive analysis process, the survey served as a first interview with participants. The survey design was also chosen to be able to collect information from "a group of people in order to *describe* some aspects or characteristics (such as abilities, opinions, attitudes, beliefs, and/or knowledge) if the population of which the group is a part" (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2019, p. 358). Additionally, the sample was carefully selected from students who recently participated in the reinstatement process and administrators intimately involved in the process. The survey was directly emailed to those selected to gain insight into their experience with the process and how they perceived the role of their narrative in the decision-making process (Fraenkel et al., 2019).

The student survey consisted of nine multiple-choice questions, that provided for a single answer. The administrator survey was an informed consent survey that explained the research process and asked for their voluntary participation. Those willing to participate agreed to the informed consent and provided their contact information. Completing either survey should take no more than 5 minutes.

Interviews

The researcher interviewed the students recruited from the survey and met with each student online via Zoom. The format of the interviews was semi-structured, first to ensure all participants were asked the same questions to 'increase comparability of responses', but also to provide the researcher some flexibility to ask follow-up questions and seek richer, more in-depth responses based on the context of the conversation (Fraenkel et al., 2019). Follow-up and sub-questions were derived from responses participants provided immediately during the interview. Administrators of the reinstatement from suspension process were also recruited and interviewed in order to better understand the opinions and perceptions of administrators of the reinstatement from suspension process at a Midwestern institution. In the data analysis phases, the information gained from administrative key actors was cross-checked with the information gained from students to discover any similarities or differences in understanding about the reinstatement from suspension process and the role and importance of student narrative (Fraenkel et al., 2019).

Role of Researcher

The researcher's role was to collect, analyze and report on the data collected. I developed and administered all online surveys to selected participants. After survey data was collected, the researcher contacted and arranged interview times with those agreeing to follow-up interviews. One-on-one interviews were then conducted with each participant utilizing Zoom technology, recording responses via voice recording technology and handwritten notes. The researcher personally transcribed each interview and conducted member checking through participant review of my transcriptions. All coding and themes developed were entirely those of the researcher. While this is the researcher's first foray into qualitative research, the knowledge and experience necessary to conduct such research was gained through the Doctor of Education in

Educational Leadership program at Minnesota State University Moorhead. Additionally, more than twenty years of professional experience in academic advising leant itself to the researcher's knowledge and experience with the subject area under review.

Previous Knowledge and Bias

The researcher's current position as Director of Advising at this Midwestern institution is indirectly involved in the academic standing process. The researcher has observed the process as a non-participant, as well as participated in reviewing the overall process with colleagues directly involved, assisted in creating supporting materials, and helped make recommendations for reinstatement. The survey and interview questions were developed after discussing the process with administrators and working with individual students through the reinstatement process. In a previous role at another four-year, public institution, the researcher facilitated a similar process for students in a college nearly the same size as the Midwestern institution which serves as the site for my current research. That role provided familiarity with how student narrative was reviewed, questioned, and interpreted to inform the decision-making process, even though there was no formal method for reviewing student narrative or understanding about how the narrative was to be assessed. Reviewed by committee, aspects of precedent were set based on committee member knowledge of previous decisions, but no formal criteria were established to review each appeal consistently.

The researcher's participation in this study is based on an interest to better understand the role of narrative theory in academic advising, the role of student narrative in the reinstatement process, and whether a model can be developed to review students' narrative more consistently whereas reinstated students are more likely to succeed upon their return. Part of the purpose of using an interpretive hermeneutic phenomenological approach is to integrate the researcher's

knowledge and experience to make the research more meaningful. Matua and Van Der Wal (2015) found that "hermeneutic research differs from descriptive approaches because it does not require researchers to bracket their preconceptions during data analysis …" (Streubert & Carpenter, 2011, as cited in Matua & Van Der Wal, 2015, p. 25). However, the researcher must be aware of their own knowledge and understandings and remain open to new perspectives gained throughout the study. By taking into consideration the participants' experiences in addition to those of the researcher, it was attempted to "spawn the emergence of new perspectives through the 'fusion of horizons'" while constantly questioning and re-questioning previous experience, known as the "hermeneutic circle of understanding" (Matua & Van Der Wal, 2015, p. 25).

Ethical Considerations

Utilizing Creswell and Poth's (2018) framework for ethical considerations in qualitative research, approval was first obtained from the Midwestern institution to conduct the research on site. Prior to conducting any research, approval was obtained through the Minnesota State University (MSU) Moorhead's Institutional Research Board. All research was supervised and reviewed by a dissertation committee, comprised of the chair - a tenure-track, core faculty member of the Doctor of Education program, a tenure-track faculty member from the School of Social Work at MSU Moorhead, a fellow cohort member, and an industry expert in narrative theory in academic advising. At the beginning of the study, the researcher was certain to "contact participants, and inform them of the general purpose of the study" and "assure participants that their participation is voluntary" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 55). The population of students sought for participation were considered non-traditional, diverse, adult learners who recently

went through the reinstatement from suspension process. They were assured that their participation would not harm nor impact their academic standing or their ability to continue in their academic program.

As the research site is also the researcher's place of work, extra care was taken to seek permission to conduct research and interview administrators of the reinstatement process without disrupting the normal academic standing process on campus. Extra care was also exercised through careful interview procedures to ensure no power imbalance occurred. Reciprocity with the research site was created through sharing of the completed research to consider whether or not to include the narrative theory rubric developed. Steps taken during data analysis and reporting include maintaining the anonymity and confidentiality of participants through the use of pseudonyms, aggregated data, and reporting multiple perspectives. Ultimately, final reports will be shared with participants and stakeholders at the research institution.

Conclusion

Collecting data on student and administrator perceptions of what factors are important to consider in the reinstatement from suspension process will clarify the current role of student narrative and subjective data when making decisions on reinstatement appeals. The data collected from the surveys and the themes developed from the interviews provide a benchmark to begin analyzing how narrative theory could inform reinstatement decisions. The data collected provided the basis for analysis in the next step in this research to determine which data from student narrative can readily be examined and how it may help predict student success post-reinstatement to create a rubric by which reinstatement from suspension decisions can be made. Chapter Four will explore the in-depth data analysis of the data collected through the interpretive hermeneutic phenomenological process with a narrative theory framework. The experience of

students and administrators will be described and elaborated upon to establish an understanding

of how student narrative and the role of narrative theory may impact reinstatement decisions and

subsequent student success.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Introduction

This interpretive hermeneutic phenomenological qualitative study sought to explore how student narrative is perceived as having an impact on reinstatement from suspension decisions. Utilizing the research and methods documented in Chapters 1 through 3, this chapter details the investigation conducted through interviews with student participants and administrators of the reinstatement from suspension process. Using an interpretive hermeneutic phenomenological approach provided an opportunity to engage students and administrators who recently participated in the reinstatement process to understand their perceptions and interpretations of the importance of student narrative. Analysis of the data collected from personal interviews sought to understand whether reviewing student narrative, written and oral, through a narrative theory lens, can provide insight into future student success.

Chapter 4 begins by describing the role of the researcher, descriptions of each group of participants, and reviewing the research methodology and data analysis process. The findings presented in this chapter are organized by the two groups of participants, students and administrators. Findings for each group will be presented separately, detailing research procedures, data collection, and analysis, to highlight key themes identified within each group. The findings from each group will then be compared as they relate to the research questions with key themes identified from the two groups combined. The chapter concludes with a synthesis of the findings.

Researcher's Role

Having been involved in the reinstatement from suspension process across two different institutions of higher education, the researcher understood the complexity of the process and had

witnessed how student narrative can impact decisions made. Recognizing the role that student narrative plays, the researcher sought to understand how aspects of narrative theory could be applied to the decision-making process. Previous research on the reinstatement process solely focused on attempts to identify objective data to aid in reinstatement decisions. Where those attempts failed to provide any conclusive findings, no further research was identified that considered the role of student narrative in making reinstatement from suspension decisions. The researcher was motivated to understand through a phenomenological perspective how the role of student narrative was perceived by participants in the reinstatement process, including students and administrators. Both groups were included because the researcher was interested to learn if perceptions varied between the two groups about the role of student narrative and, more specifically, what participants in the process considered important to include in the student narrative to influence a reinstatement decision.

At the time of this study's publication, the researcher held the role of director of advising for a college at a mid-sized, Midwestern, four-year, public institution of higher education, where this research took place. In that role, the researcher acted as a consultant on the reinstatement process for their college and worked with a small committee of advisors to make decisions on reinstatement appeals each academic term. Prior to that role, the researcher served as an assistant director of advising in a college at a large, Midwestern, research institution of higher education, where they led the reinstatement process for the college for more than 10 years. Working with a committee of 12 members, review of student appeals generated robust discussions around committee member interpretations of what students had written considered against decision precedence and student academic record information. Understanding the subjective nature of reinstatement decisions influenced the researcher's interest in further exploring the role of

student narrative in reinstatement from suspension, as well as understanding whether narrative theory provides some possible structure and guidance to formally incorporating student narrative in the decision-making process.

This analysis was the researcher's first foray into an interpretive hermeneutic phenomenological qualitative study. Choosing this research method was intentional because of the interpretive process that occurs when any narrative is involved. Preparation for this research was provided through the researcher's dissertation program coursework. The researcher also co-wrote a qualitative research article reviewing key themes identified in submitted reinstatement appeal letters. Extensive background in and experience with the reinstatement process and knowledge of narrative theory in advising influenced the direction the researcher took in this study. Interest in further exploring narrative theory in advising motivated the researcher's investigation of the role of student narrative in the reinstatement from suspension process through interviews with participants in the process. Incorporating narrative is inherently subjective because of the interpretive process and required a subjective approach to understand the nuances and complexities of the student narrative submitted and reviewed for the reinstatement process.

Description of the Sample

The sample included two groups of participants, students who had recently participated in the reinstatement from suspension process, and administrators of the reinstatement process. Both groups of participants came from the same, mid-sized, four-year, Midwestern institution. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling. Student participants were recruited from those reported to the researcher as having gone through the reinstatement process for the terms fall 2020, spring 2021, summer 2021, or fall 2021. Administrators of the process were previously

known to the researcher through their professional role. All participants were sent a recruitment survey online via Qualtrics, which included demographic questions and requested they provide contact information if opting-in to the interview process. Initially, informed consent was gathered after the students had filled out the survey and agreed to be contacted. Confusion about this process (e.g., not understanding the informed consent process or why it was needed, or not having the technology to sign and send an electronically signed version back to the researcher) led the researcher to restructure the survey in a second round of emailing the students to include the informed consent as part of the survey. The survey for the administrators requested they respond with contact information if willing to participate in the interview process and acted as their informed consent.

Student Participants

For the student participants, 96 students from seven different colleges within the same institution were sent the recruitment survey between June and August 2021. Of the 96 students, 17 responded to the survey representing an approximate 18% response rate, and 10 of those 17 committed to and participated in an interview with the researcher. Nine out of the 10 interviewed had been reinstated. Eight females and two males participated. Of the eight females, four identified as Black and four identified as White. Both males identified as Black. Transfer status was pulled from the host institution's student record database and confirmed that all student participants transferred previous college credit into their current institution. Two of the students indicated they had been pursuing higher education for 1-3 years, four indicated 4-6 years, and three indicated they had been pursuing their undergraduate degree programs for 7 or more years. Five of the seven colleges were represented. All student participants stated that they had declared

majors. Though more females participated in the interview process than males, the remaining

demographics closely met those of the institution at large.

Table 1

Student Participant Demographics

Name	Gender	Race	How Long Pursuing Degree	Time Out
Student A	Female	White	7+	1 year
Student B	Female	White	4-6 years	> 1 year
Student C	Female	Black	4-6 years	> 1 year
Student D	Male	Black	4-6 years	> 1 year
Student E	Female	White	1-3 years	> 1 year
Student F	Female	Black	1-3 years	> 1 year
Student G	Female	White	7+	1 year
Student H	Female	Black	7+	Still suspended
Student I	Male	Black	4-6 years	> 1 year
Student J	Female	Black	4-6 years	1 year

Administrator Participants

The administrator participants included academic standing representatives, who are also

professional academic advisors, and academic deans who, per academic policy, have final

decision-making authority over reinstatement decisions. Each administrator represented a college

or unit within a college at the University. Of the seven representatives, two were female and five

were male. Five of the administrators interviewed were White, one Asian American, and one of

Middle Eastern descent. The administrators had participated in the reinstatement process for one

or more years. All advisors, except one, reported either making recommendations to their dean, or making decisions in conjunction with their dean. Administrator E (See Table 2) was the only advisor who discussed making decisions with a committee that did not include the dean. Originally, an eighth participant was included. Their interview revealed the participant did not fit inclusion criteria. Therefore, that administrator's interview and information were omitted.

Table 2

Administrator Participant Demographics

Name	Role	Gender	Race	Yrs. in Role	Ave. # Appeals Reviewed Each Term	Recommends/ Makes Decisions
Administrator A	Advisor	Male	White	1 yr.	1 to 5	New dean, deciding together
Administrator B	Advisor	Female	White	4-5 yrs.	1 to 2	Makes recommendations
Administrator C	Dean	Male	White	4 yrs.	5 to 10	Makes decisions
Administrator D	Advisor	Male	Asian American	3 yrs.	1 to 2	Makes recommendations
Administrator E	Advisor	Female	White	3.5 yrs.	7	Makes decision with committee
Administrator F	Advisor	Male	Middle Eastern	1 yr.	5 to 6	Makes recommendations, Reviews with dean to make decision
Administrator G	Dean	Male	White	3.5 yrs.	3 to 6	Makes decisions

Research Methodology Applied to the Data Analysis

Purposive sampling was used to identify participants for both samples in this research. For student participants, the researcher first contacted academic standing representatives in each college and requested a list of all students that have gone through the reinstatement process for

the terms fall 2020, spring 2021, and summer 2021. An initial survey was emailed to these students via Qualtrics to their school and personal email accounts. The electronic survey included several demographic questions and asked students to provide their name and contact information if they wished to participate in an interview with the researcher. Ninety students were contacted and 17 responded. After contacting those 17 students to set up interviews, 10 interviews were successfully completed.

To recruit administrators of the reinstatement process, purposive sampling was again used. The researcher emailed the academic standing representatives and college deans (including those who were currently serving in administrator roles and some who previously served in those roles) with a Qualtrics recruitment survey in which they could indicate willingness to be interviewed. The survey also acted as their informed consent. Eight administrators (three deans and five academic standing representatives) agreed to be interviewed.

All interviews were conducted online via the video streaming software, Zoom, which the researcher had access to as part of their professional role. The interview conversations were captured via Zoom transcripts. The researcher also used the iPhone application, Voice Recorder, to record audio files for the conversations as back-up and to confirm what was noted in the transcriptions. Once all transcriptions were completed, the researcher printed the transcriptions to read through, highlight, and complete initial coding manually, following the data analysis process described by Creswell and Poth (2018) as aligned with Crist and Tanner's (2003) interpretive process. Initial highlighting drew out key phrases or interesting comments and the researcher made notes and memos in the margins and at the end of each transcript noting initial impressions and thoughts on the data. The researcher used inductive coding to identify codes for repeating or common statements throughout the transcripts. The researcher then organized the

inductive codes and key statements in an Excel spreadsheet. The codes were further organized into themes creating a code book used in a final reading of the transcripts (See Appendices F and G).

Data analysis is presented in two phases, first with the data collected from the students interviews and then with the data collected from the administrator interviews. Data for each group is presented under emergent themes from the interviews. A draft of key findings was sent to each group's participants as part of the member checking process (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Three administrators and one student responded only to say that they agreed with the key findings. The findings from each group were then synthesized for similarities under the research questions.

<div align="center">**Results and Presentation of Data Analysis**</div>

Student Interview Findings

Finding 1: Inconsistent and Confusing Communication Throughout the Reinstatement Process

A significant finding was how the students found the reinstatement from suspension process confusing. Eight out of 10 of the students indicated that the process was confusing or complex. Students weren't always certain who to contact about starting the reinstatement process and many were bounced from one person to another. A few students mentioned that of the people they did connect with, those people often weren't clear on the process themselves or provided conflicting information to the student. Student C highlighted this confusion:

> I was getting sent to one person and then another person and then … I don't know if they
>
> rushed through the process but then they went back and saying they weren't sure if I was
>
> reinstated or not, which I was reinstated, which is cleared up now, but at the time it

wasn't cleared up, so it was a lot going on. So, then I was like, well, I'm just going to take

a pause on school. … I think it was just like a lot of miscommunication so I ended up just

delaying for a year.

Student D described that it "took a while to get responses, until everyone got on same page, it was challenging to get direction." Student E also expressed, "I had to constantly keep reaching out to my counselor and then I was like well, what now? What now?" The two students who did not express confusion both connected with advisors who helped guide them through the process.

Seven of the 10 students reported that they did speak with someone during the process, but most communications were managed via email. One student described the communication process as some things came through email and some came through mail. Some students visited the institution's website to find information about the reinstatement process. Communication was not consistent. Student J described this convoluted process as:

I went on the school website, there's a lot of materials on the school website, and then I

talked to counselor as well. I just read about it online and there's just a little sheet of

paper online. That's the one I printed. And then they email you, ... I think they email you

the other stuff you need to do.

Where students did speak with an advisor at some point during the process, six of the students found that person helpful. One of the four students who did not find their advisor helpful found guidance from an advisor connected with a nonprofit college access and success organization. The other three students discussed being sent from one advisor to another, confusion amongst the advisors, and miscommunication, as reasons their advisors were not helpful.

One of the students who did not speak with anyone during the reinstatement process expressed that they felt having a conversation with someone would have been helpful to better understanding the process. Student D explained:

> Yes, I think, at the beginning, it would have been a lot helpful because then I would have got a better understanding of what I need to do, and a lot more clearer than waiting for a day or two to get responses from people on what the next step would be.

> Only two students reported having an interview as part of the reinstatement process. When asked whether they felt the interview was helpful or expanded on what they had written in their appeal letters, the Student G responded:

> [I] already had written a letter and then already been in communication with my advisor so I was like Okay, I guess I'll meet with this person, because I have to, but it didn't feel like any different conversation than I had already had … directly with my advisor or in that letter that I had written or in the previous letters that I had written.

Student I also expressed:

> They had read the letter, and asked me about the letter confirming everything that I said was what I said, and also asked me what my plans were by which we discussed and their plans and my plans completely aligned and what coursework I would take this semester, and so forth, and so on, so, yeah, we were pretty much on the same page on what we were going to do.

Most of the students interviewed reflected that they provided their narrative only through the appeal letter. Student B, when asked whether they had participated in an interview, replied that they had not, but they thought:

Depending on the student and the student's needs, I think some students may be able to

more successfully communicate verbally in a conversation like this versus having to do a

written piece that gets sent in. So, I think there's probably some accessibility with that

that somebody might be able to have a more compelling conversation then … just typing

up a document and emailing it off.

This student recognized the need for flexibility in the process to address different students'

needs, especially where written communication may not be as strong, or where students may be

uncomfortable about writing down their previous challenges and concerns.

Table 3

Communication Processes for Reinstatement Process

Student	How learned about process?	Spoke with someone?	Who?	Process confusing?	Advisor helpful?	Had interview?
Student A	Advisor	Yes	Academic advisor	No	Yes	No
Student B	Gateway	No		Yes	No	No
Student C	eServices	No		Yes	(No)	No
Student D	Website/ Advisor	No		Yes	Yes	No
Student E	Advisor	Yes	Academic advisor	Yes	Yes	No
Student F	Advisor	Yes	Academic advisor	Yes	No	No
Student G	Advisor	Yes	Academic advisor	Yes	Yes	Yes

Student H	Website	Yes	Academic standing representative	Yes	No	No
Student I	Website/ Advisor	Yes	Academic advisor	No	Yes	Yes
Student J	Website/ Advisor	Yes	Academic advisor	Yes	Yes	No

Finding 2: Pressure to Write Compelling Stories

Another significant finding was that the students who were successfully reinstated understood that they needed to tell a compelling story for reinstatement approval. That story needed to include what happened that led to their suspensions, what had changed, and plans and goals for being successful. When asked about their perceptions of what needed to be included or what they thought administrators were looking for, students provided a variety of answers that included needing to be honest, truthful, showing that they were taking responsibility for what happened, and that they were reprioritizing school (See Table 4). Their statements needed to be personal, yet well-presented, for administrators to be able to understand and relate to their stories.

Perceptions of What Should be Included in the Reinstatement Letters. When asked what they considered to be important to incorporate in their letters, all students gave examples of what they thought administrators wanted to see. Student A said, "my perception is that they wanted honesty as to why I struggled … they certainly wanted you to take responsibility for what happened." Student B more specifically discussed needing to write a good story, "you need to write a really good story … with really good reasons and a really compelling excuse for why

your previous … attempt was not successful." Student E similarly expressed the need to tell their story, "just the hardships that I was going through. Just kind of telling my life story of where I was at that time of my life." Student D explained what they thought would help them win reinstatement:

> I think in that appeal letter I … say how did it come what happened, basically what led me to have the challenges that I had, am I different now to overcome those challenges in order to be successful if I'm reinstated … I wanted them to understand, so I could be reinstated and then what my plan was to make sure I'm successful in that semester.

> The researcher perceived an understanding amongst the students that the person(s) reading their written appeal would assess whether they thought the student was telling the truth, or that their story was compelling enough. In some cases, students provided additional documentation to corroborate their stories. Student E said they were specifically asked to "have a family member or friend write what were my issues in life at that time, too, and just to back up what I was saying." Student J took the initiative to request a letter of support from a therapist they had been seeing. That student commented, "My therapist letter helped a lot explaining how I will change. It was also like that I took some initiative so showing that through my writing and telling them that also helped." Student B specifically identified the inherent subjectivity of the written appeal process. They said:

> You can … write your request to be readmitted and explain … what happened and what things are like now and then provide any documentation to support … whatever the reasoning was, but somebody at some point is going to say whether that reasoning is, you know, air quotes, good enough for you to not have been successful and then what you're doing now to be again good enough to come back, which is subjective.

The students described that they needed to provide proof of their stories, either through how they explained what happened and what had changed, or by providing additional documentation to back-up what they had written. Several of the students expressed how they provided as much detail as possible to provide the administrators a clear picture of what was going on in their lives.

Factors Considered by Administrators. When asked about what factors they thought were considered by administrators when reading the letters, several of the students described the administrators as having reasonable expectations. All the students expressed similar sentiments that administrators were looking for a good description of what had happened that had led to suspension, and that previous issues had been addressed. Even more, the students believed that administrators wanted to hear from students that they took responsibility or initiative to make change, and that what was presented was real, truthful, and relatable. Student D explained it this way:

> When I wrote my letter, I was looking at … what can I do to show them that I changed, and what … my academic challenges in the past is different than what it would be today. So, when I was writing my appeal letter and my personal statement, I was thinking of how to show them that the old challenges that I had no longer exists today.

> Student J expressed how not knowing exactly what the administrators considered made

them nervous. Student B likewise identified that no objective scale was provided or known to them for what administrators looked for in the letters. That student commented, "I think if there's something in what happened that they could relate to, or that they've experienced, I think that they might … have more empathy to understand how challenging it was." In general, students described writing enough about what was going on in their lives and why or how they would come back and be successful was important. Student A stated, "it seems like they really wanted

to make sure you were addressing any issues that would make it difficult for you to be successful." Student I commented on how they felt administrators were considering their own records when making reinstatement decisions. The student stated:

> My assumption is that they are considering whether or not the statement that I made aligns with what they believe to be factors in which I can control and improve upon, as well as their own interest in admission, so that they don't hurt their own record by letting people who clearly aren't going to succeed in.

> Several of students acknowledged the importance of academic records in the

reinstatement process, in addition to the narratives they were providing. Student G believed that it was being so close to graduation that was important to the administrators, along with acknowledging and taking responsibility for what had happened previously. They stated:

> In their response to me it seemed as though, what was important to them was that I was very close to, I'm 10 credits away from graduation, and so the fact that I'm very close, I think, my thorough understanding of where I've been and kind of what I need to do to get there seemed important to them and they kind of reiterated that to me in their language when they gave me my reinstatement and letter back, so I think those were like the most important factors which just kind of I guess my taking responsibility or just showing understanding for how I got in this situation.

Student I clearly stated that, "I think that the administrator people looked at my grades, I know that for sure." Student B commented on issues of legality when considering protections provided by the American with Disabilities Act. They stated, "I'm guessing a level of legality, that it somebody has something protected by the American Disabilities Act that their decision to say no

might have legal issues with saying that, if it was a medical issue." And Student G couldn't escape the feeling that administrators were only looking at their record and not at their story:

> I think, with the process being so intense and it even felt like I wasn't a person, you know, like they weren't really looking at my story. They were looking at the numbers even right down to that meeting. Now that I'm looking back and processing a little more, it was numbers, numbers, numbers.

Student H who was not successfully reinstated felt that administrators were not employing empathy or trying to understand where students were coming from. The student also expressed their feelings that this process, perhaps higher education itself, was being run like a business, to try to extract money from students and the Federal Government. They stated:

> From my own side, I thought this whole business they're trying to milk some money from the Federal Government, so maybe they were looking at the way I'm looking at it maybe they would have some common sense and sympathize with me, that's my thought.

Further, Student H stated, "They are not putting themselves in our shoe, about the same idea like, oh yeah, other people have children too." As the student was describing their situation and why their reinstatement was denied, they described what the researcher interpreted to be possible plagiarism. Yet, Student H did not see that as important, rather that the administrators seemingly were not relating to their circumstances, which they described as being similar to other students:

> They rejected it and they comment … my information is similar to some other lady information and they reject, like I don't know why, I mean everybody's going through the same thing we're going through, unless they don't have any children they're not going through the same thing, but if they have children they have to go to work and pay bills then all our lives is going to be the same thing.

Table 4

Key Words About Perceptions of What Should be Included in the Written Appeals and of Factors

Considered by Administrators

Student	Perceptions of What Should be Included in Appeal Letter Key Words	Factors Considered by Administrator Key Words
Student A	Honesty, taking responsibility	Reasonable factors, real things, issues were addressed
Student B	What happened, Subjectivity - good enough reasons, really good story	Something they can relate to, empathy, legality (ADA)
Student C	What happened, what they would like to change, explaining what brought them here	What's different, taking control, previous challenges and obstacles, priorities
Student D	Personal statement, challenges, overcoming challenges, plan for graduating/being successful	What changed, challenges in the past, no longer exist
Student E	Telling life story, what happened, prove could be successful (plan/reasonable goals), what's different	Truthfulness (is student really struggling or just using the system), not just being lazy, they have reasonable expectations
Student F	Use professional/educated language, goals, what happened	Why failed, how can improve, proof
Student G	History/academic history, what happened, plan for being successful, goals	Close to graduation, student's understanding of what happened and what needs to change, taking responsibility
Student H	Why struggling, support needed, hours putting in to school, balancing work	Trying to get money from federal government, not relating to working parents or having sympathy, (possible plagiarism)

Student I	Evidence (proof) able to return and be successful, what happened	Statement aligns with what they believe, student taking control, improving, needed to agree with one another
Student J	What happened, the type of person you are	Grades, academic record, reasons, put as much as they could to win the case, supporting letter, initiative

Finding 3: Vulnerability

A third key finding was that all the students who were asked acknowledged that the process was a vulnerable one for students. One interview did not include this question. Two of the students stated that they did not necessarily consider the process difficult for themselves but acknowledged that it may be challenging for others in different situations than them. Student E shared, "It wasn't difficult to share but I've never had difficulty sharing personal things. Like I said, some people might, but not me. I can pretty much talk about anything, anywhere." When asked if it was difficult to discuss what happened in the letters of appeal, students used a range of words from vulnerable, painful, challenging, having reservation, shameful, stressful, and being disappointed in oneself to describe how the process made them feel. Several of the students noted that they were hesitant at first to provide so much detail about their lives but did anyway to provide that compelling story to win reinstatement. For example, Student D said, "Yes, in general I did have reservations about being candid in my personal statement but felt it would yield better results than giving them a general overview and hope that they accepted my narrative."

Some of the vulnerability stemmed from not knowing exactly what the administrators would be looking for in the letters, making them uncertain about how much detail to provide or

whether the reasons the student provided would be relatable to the person(s) reading their letter. Student J expressed:

> I didn't like the whole process, to be honest, it was very stressful just thinking about the final answer, like to say yes or no. And my biggest worry was, like all these people don't know me, what if they just say no to me because I didn't maybe explain enough or ... align those things. It was hard but not hard, because I was first of all, I was very disappointed in myself.

Student B specifically stated that they felt some students may be deterred from appealing for reinstatement if they need to provide such personal information:

> It's a challenging process because you really do have to be very vulnerable and lay out what obviously was not a great time in your life because you weren't doing well in school to tell a group of strangers and I'm sure that there are people who go through struggles and traumas that they just don't either come back because they don't want to talk about … what may be a really painful situation … You really have to put that out there and I think that might be really painful for some people, or could be really painful if they … put all that out there and then they're told that you still can't come back.

Student H confirmed Student B's assumption as the student refused to discuss their personal life with strangers. Student H stated, "I don't like telling people my private life … I don't like writing my own thoughts on my life, is because of this, because of that, … I feel like it is a waste of time."

Not all students were convinced that administrators were reading the letters with empathy or were really considering what was happening in their lives at that time. Student G expressed frustration with the process, feeling that what they were experiencing was not something they

were in control of, yet administrators didn't really seem to be acknowledging that factor. The student reflected, "the situation that brought me to this last suspension was so out of my control and it didn't feel like there was much sympathy for that." Student D, who felt they were reinstated because of proximity to graduation, was frustrated thinking they could've left out some of the details of their situation:

> To be honest, in retrospect, I don't think I would have been as candid in my appeal letter for my personal statement, as I was. Like I said it might just be because it's my last semester, and I feel they supported me more because it was my last semester versus because it was a personal appeal letter. So, I kind of feel I wouldn't have been as candid in my letter had I known then what I know now.

Despite finding the process challenging to share such personal details several of the students discussed engaging in self-reflection and really considering what was important to them. Student F related the process to a therapy session. Student J discussed how they felt the reinstatement process helped them in realizing that they really wanted to go back to school and realizing that this time they'd be more dedicated to being successful in school. The student stated, "I'm also grateful it happened because it taught me … a lesson, how did I let myself get to this point." Student C found:

> It was also good … just to self-reflect and … when I wrote the letter, I'm like I'm ready to go back to school, I was ready to do my career. So, it was a good self-reflection and a good way to look back and if things were different, if I could change, … what I would've changed, at that time, and now that it's in my control, what I can go about doing in the future or in the present.

And even though Student E wasn't happy about being suspended, they realized that the time away was overall beneficial. The student reflected, "I was upset, but that was actually the right thing to do. They actually made a good decision for me back then."

Finding 4: Support for Future Success

The final key finding was that the majority of the students interviewed did not feel they received support to return and be successful. Of the students interviewed, five specifically stated that they did not or were unsure whether they received any additional advising or academic success support due to the reinstatement process or the narratives they provided as part of the process. Student C was successfully reinstated but had not yet returned to school, so was unable to say whether they received more support. Though Student C did discuss that they planned to connect with their advisor and utilize tutoring services when they return as part of their own success plan. Student H who was not successfully reinstated felt unsupported throughout the entire reinstatement process, being confused by the messages and directions they were receiving. Of the students who discussed not receiving any additional support, one reflected that once the process was completed, they were simply a student again. Student D, who had been reinstated close to graduation, expressed appreciation for the support instructors provided in their last semester but did not think that support was related to what the student had written in their reinstatement appeal. Student D stated that, "I was not sure that the support I was receiving was due to it being my last semester or personal statement." Student G and Student J both said that they did feel supported by their advisors in general but felt they would need to reach out for additional support when it was necessary.

Only three of the students stated that they did feel that they were receiving additional support as part of going through the reinstatement process. Student A explained, "I do … I

needed to make sure that I was checking with her on what classes I should be taking next so that I could increase my GPA quicker." Student E gained greater confidence in reaching out for support, "I knew that I could reach out to my teachers and tell them like hey, I struggled the last time I was in college, can you please help me get ahead on this." And, Student J noted, "definitely, yes. It showed me more that she cared; that I can reach out to her for anything that I needed." While these students said they felt supported, their statements indicated that they needed to take the initiative to receive that support.

When asked if there was anything they would change about the reinstatement process having been through it, receiving additional support was the overwhelming response from the students being interviewed. Student D specifically said that they wished there was a workshop offered during suspension to help students through the reinstatement process and connect them to support resources for when they return from suspension. Others felt that the process could have been made more explicit and have counselors reaching out to students rather than the students having to research the process on their own. Student B expressed, "[I] feel like there could be a more supportive way to say here are some resources that we offer." Student E felt they needed greater support:

> Maybe have them reach out to me and explain it to me more instead of me having to
> reach out to them and find my counselor. … If [the school] were to communicate a little
> more, instead of me having to research it, it might have went through a little better.

And Student G even provided specific examples of how they could have been better supported:

> I have a chronic record of failing, of not being successful in what I'm doing, and so you
> know if somebody was following up with me more often to make sure that I'm on the
> right path, then would that be more helpful, I guess. Setting goals and weekly check-ins

and things like that … somebody like me who tends to fall behind needs to be held

accountable, like who is going to be holding me accountable if it's not me.

Two of the students, recognizing how challenging the process can be for students, recommended

that students have ready access to advisors or counselors during the process. Student B thought

more explanation in the reinstatement process form could help "recognize that this might be a

very challenging time in your life to revisit or painful experiences and … here's the number to

reach out to for your advisor to help you with this process." Student G felt a counselor as part of

the process could help:

Adult lives come with adult problems and as people grow older those problems turn into

different things, and so maybe putting a counselor in the process to be that ear of feeling,

of emotion, of understanding, rather than looking at the numbers … at least to just know

that there's some level of empathy around the exposure that someone would have to make

to explain why school didn't go well for them.

Administrator Interview Findings

Finding 1: The Reinstatement Process Varies Across the Colleges/Units

The first key finding of the administrator interviews is that each administrator approached

the process slightly differently. While some similarities existed, each administrator took some

liberties in how they compiled information from or about the student, who they engaged in the

process, and how decisions were reached.

Documents included in the Review. All administrators discussed the reinstatement

appeal as a key document in their review. Some of the administrators also collected the

University's centralized Reinstatement form which collects some basic student demographic data

and provides the prompts for the appeal letter. However, most did not require this form as part of

their process. Administrator F mentioned students completing a form that they use in their college. It was not immediately apparent to the researcher whether this form was different than the one provided by the University. Administrator F stated, "Typically, they're already writing out a reinstatement process or essay and then they're also filling out a reinstatement form that we use in our college. So those are the key documents if they have anything additional, that's great." Administrator E discussed how their college created their own form:

> Our process is different from the university's process, because the form that was provided by the University didn't get as detailed and some of the letters didn't include a lot of information or students didn't seem to be getting a lot of guidance, and there isn't really any one responsible for updating that form anymore so that's also an issue. We created a request for reinstatement form … [and] … we have students fill out the form with their information. We have some instructions on what we're looking for in terms of what we want them to write in the letter, so we try to direct them a little bit. And then we also came up with a list of extenuating circumstances to help [students] brainstorm and then we have other as an option that we asked them to explain. And then we have some other general questions on the back of the form that go over how many credits are you planning to take? How many hours are you working? … because students tend to forget to put those things in their letter.

Some administrators also mentioned supporting documentation that students can provide as part of the process to supplement or corroborate their appeal letters but is not required.

Interviews with Students. Only three administrators discussed including interviews with students as part of their formal process. The approach and structure of the interviews were

different for all three. For Administrator F, the conversation serves as a vehicle for them to explain the process to the student and help create understanding about what reinstatement means:

> When they submit their appeals, whether that's directly to us, or through admissions, the first step is I'll schedule a meeting with them to review their appeal, review their transcripts, their academic standing, and then also review any questions they may have, talk about the process, how they get back into good standing, sort of a lot of information actually.

Administrator D approaches the interview with students, "to have candid conversation with them, constructive conversation, like build their control of the situation, build their understanding of how to control situation and not let the situation control [them] and that kind of very important conversation." Administrator E discussed using the interview to delve deeper into what the student had written in their appeal letter:

> I would say that everything we do, it's more of the individual meaning in the letter, where I personally get more information. And if we don't do those pieces, I feel like we wouldn't be making good decisions. That's why I … have an interview with each individual like hands down because I think it's such an important piece to clarify what they're trying to state.

> Although Administrator B discussed not having an interview as part of their process, they said they could see the value in having an interview, "especially if there were pieces missing, if the appeal letter wasn't very strong, or just an opportunity for the students to share more of their story." Administrator A thought that they reach their reinstatement decisions "thoughtfully and accurately" despite having no interview. Although they may reach out to students with questions when necessary to fill in gaps or provide additional information. The two deans interviewed felt

an interview would be an unnecessary barrier for students in the reinstatement process and would not necessarily provide information to which they did not already have access. Administrator C stated, "I would have looked at that as one more hoop the student had to jump through." Similarly, Administrator G mentioned:

> I am a little skeptical off the top of my head about what value it would add. … I seriously doubt there's anything that the dean needs to hear from the student, that the academic advisor and [Satisfactory Academic Progress] Rep won't have already heard.

Role of the Academic Advisor. While the academic standing representatives are themselves professional academic advisors, the role of the student's assigned academic advisor in the reinstatement process varied from college of college. Some students will reach out to their academic advisors first to learn about the process, while others will be directed to the academic standing representative for the college. The extent that advisors participate in the reinstatement process ranged from very little, if anything, to being asked to provide their own recommendation for a student's reinstatement. Administrator B discussed how they engage a student's academic advisor:

> I will reach out to some of the other advisors, if I have one of their students that's coming in for reinstatement, to say is there anything else that I need to know, have you talked with the student, do you support this reinstatement appeal, just to gather information and context so that I can put it together when I bring it to [the dean].

Administrator G also mentioned gaining additional information from a student's advisor for consideration in the process. Administrator G stated:

We also weigh some other documents and considerations when making a decision,

including whether or not the student has been actively engaged with their advisor, is the

advisor supportive of them coming back, does the advisor think that they're ready.

And Administrator C said that "we did sometimes go back and ask for additional information

from the advisor."

Two of the administrators discussed leadership roles that advisors play in the

reinstatement process. Administrator E described how in their college, reinstatement decisions

are made not by the dean, but by a committee of advisors, "I am the primary person who reviews

for reinstatement but then I also consult with a committee of three other people." Administrator

D, when describing the need for a central leadership over the academic standing process,

impressed the importance of that leadership coming from an advisor. The administrator stated,

"when that leadership is somebody who's an academic advisor as well and more tuned to the

policy and the effect of the policy on the student rather than somebody who … doesn't hear the

story of the students" there is a greater focus on student success.

The main role of the academic advisor as described through the interviews was assisting

the student after the reinstatement decision was made. Four of the administrators specifically

mentioned referring the student to meet with their advisor in the reinstatement decision letter or

copying the academic advisor on the decision letter so that advisors were aware of the

recommendations being made to reinstated students. For example, Administrator C explained:

I put in the recommendation letter that went to the students that they should discuss their

schedule with their advisor before committing to it and that would at least give the

advisor a chance to raise the question of [the student's] ability to carry that out.

Administrator F further ascribed the role of academic advisors by stating "I think that's really key. I mean, as long as they're meeting with their advisors, they're getting good advice."

Who Recommends, Who Decides. A final note of variation in process is the role either the academic standing representative or the dean plays in decision making. All the academic standing representatives discussed making recommendations for decisions. However, in most cases, their recommendations became decisions, or they were working together with their dean or others to decide. Administrator B described their role as making recommendations, but those recommendations are generally the decisions agrees upon with their dean:

> The Dean has used my recommendation. I can't think of a time, whether it's approve or deny, I can't think of a time where they didn't [use my recommendation]. They may add some caveats like meet with your advisor, create a plan. They may put in a recommendation [to] only take two classes. So, they may add additional parameters, but those aren't necessarily enforceable.

Administrator D similarly stated, "We agree. I normally don't make my recommendation lightly." Administrator F said that discussion only happens when they can't recommend approval, "A lot of times I would recommend approval. Typically, if it's gonna [*sic*] be anything besides that, I don't have recommendations, I'll just go to the Dean, and we'll review and discuss together."

Administrator A further discussed the need to learn how their dean thinks and works to make recommendations that the dean will support:

> Part of my job also is to learn how the deans work and how their mind works and how they come to conclusions and what questions they have. And so the three, four people that I've worked with in this process, just even under two years or almost two years,

they're very different individuals, very different personalities, very different learning

styles, vary as instructors, they all teach very differently.

Administrator E's process, being quite different than the others since their dean is not involved,

discusses decision-making as a group process, "I give an opinion based on my interaction, so I

meet with the person, I provide summaries for our group. I do give my opinion but I'm not the

sole decision maker on reinstatement, it's a group process."

The two deans interviewed, while recognizing the recommending role that their academic

standing representatives played, held on to their capacity in final decision-making. Administrator

G described this as such:

I make decisions. My SAP rep makes recommendations to me and then I make the final

determination. That includes yes, no decisions on the request, but also approving any

stipulations and helping to craft those stipulations, for example, student is limited to one

class per term, something like that.

Administrator C explained how their approach was more toward approval despite the

recommendations they would receive, "I will say that my general approach to this was more

tending toward reinstatement than the committee's recommendations."

Finding 2: The Importance of the Appeal Letter in the Reinstatement Process

All administrators interviewed stressed the importance of the written appeal letter in the

reinstatement process. While the letter is not the only document used in the process, the letter

provides important context upon which reinstatement decisions are based. Administrator F

highlighted this in their statement, "That written statement is really [the student's] chance to talk

about and introduce what it was that led them to their current circumstances." Administrator B

corroborated this thought when they said, "If they can demonstrate through their words that this

is a thoughtful process and they're now ready, that again increases my confidence with the approval." The two deans interviewed agreed that the letter was central to decision-making. Administrator G explained, "we scrutinize the letter, or the account that the student provides the narrative that explains … what happened, why they went away, but more often, what they've been doing since, and why they're ready to come back."

The Importance of the Student's Story. During the interviews, all administrators were asked what they looked for or were hoping to hear in a student's reinstatement letter of appeal. What was confirmed by all the administrators interviewed is that the appeal letter is the vehicle for the student to tell their story. Administrators' answers may have varied slightly, but the general understanding was that the appeal letter allowed students to tell administrators what was going on in their lives at the time of suspension, what had changed since their suspension, and how they planned to come back and be successful. Administrator A captured this in their statement:

> What I think is so wonderful about our reinstatement process is that we do let students write a letter. It's a personal letter, it's a very personal experience … That appeal letter is absolutely the most important thing for me, learning their story and then of course the supporting documentation.

A couple of the administrators discussed the importance of the three prompts provided to students to answer in their appeal letters. Very generally, Administrator B noted, "Those three questions really are ones that we look for in the appeal letter." When discussing how the letter impacts decisions, Administrator A mentioned, "I think all of those answers, that narrative, that this story the student is telling us, … and we give them those three prompts which I think are excellent, they're exactly what needs to be answered."

Making Meaning of Their Experience. Several of the administrators discussed the importance of what students discussed in their appeal letters based on how they were making meaning of their experience. Administrators described looking for explanations from the students about why they were not able to be successful before and steps they have taken to make change, recognizing that change could only take place if the student really understood what happened that led to their suspension in the first place. That perceived understanding from the students encouraged positive decisions from the administrators. Administrator C explained this as:

> In their appeal letter they explain why they were not able to complete their studies before successfully and what had changed. … I generally took their word for that, something had changed, and they now were ready to succeed in this, whereas before they were not able to do it.

Administrator G also described their interpretation of the students' narrative in their decision-making process, "is the student able to provide the account of what was going on at that time that caused the nonsuccess? We're looking for kind of patterns about why wasn't the student succeeding before." Captured another way, Administrator D expressed that the letter is the student's opportunity to really show they understand how and why they became suspended:

> I want them not just to write an appeal, I want them to understand their situation, that's my goal. … I like the student to give me more information, acknowledgement, explanation why they got there. They are aware of their situation. This is probably not a tangible thing but it's in my case my being supportive, as you have to acknowledge or understand why they got there.

Storytelling Ability is Not All Equal. While the appeal letter is central to an administrator's reinstatement decision, the student's ability to write their story can impact how

decisions are made. Administrator A described the need to learn as much as possible from students in their letters, "They need to bring something to the table as well, and I think that's what I look for, what are you bringing to the table, what story do you have, please tell us as much as you can." Lack of detail or evidence that the student really understood their situation could lead to appeals being denied. Administrator C encapsulated this when they stated:

> There were times when a student wanted to get back in after one semester, and there was nothing in [the letter] that was addressing the reasons why or there was nothing plausible about what had changed, then I would deny that appeal.

And decisions could be delayed if administrators felt they needed to get more information from a student. Administrator D mentioned the importance of the letter and explanation being complete before taking the information to their dean for a decision, "Sometimes they will give me the draft and I'll [say], oh, this is not going to work. I will them tell them that the way it is written out there, the dean may not accept."

> Administrator F and Administrator E discussed how the appeal letters informed the interview process for them, especially where information was incomplete or missing from the letters. Administrator F stated:

> We do get appeals not well written or they don't explain really well the student's academic history, or what impacted them. … If we get something that feels incomplete, I'll probably schedule a longer meeting with a student to really gather that story, that information, before meeting with the dean.

Administrator E went a bit further explaining how difference in student background and writing preparation can impact what is received in the letter, mentioning that some students are multi-

lingual and/or have not yet completed a writing course. Thus, the interview with the student could be important to giving the student another opportunity to tell their story:

> Sometimes it's the student's ability to tell their story. We have students from a variety of different backgrounds, and it can be confusing for some of our students to be able to describe what they're trying to do. So, sometimes we have a letter and sometimes that can be very helpful and almost explain everything, but then some students don't have those skills to be able to do that written form and they're better able to tell their story through a conversation, so I think having that in person meeting is also important for students.

Even where an interview was not a part of the process, Administrator G discussed having to suspend their judgement as a writing instructor when reviewing appeal letters. The administrator explained that the appeal letter was not always written in a way that matched what they were looking for academically, but more important was that the student aptly expressed their understanding of their situation:

> I'll preface this comment by saying my background and training is as a writing instructor and I'm aware because of that background that there's a tendency to conflate different signals that are coming in through written documentation. So, a student's letter is going to give us some signal about their proficiency with written English or their familiarity with academic language and argumentation or how academic officers think, and I try to set all of that aside, because [it] ends up being noise, rather than signal in this particular process trying to make this particular decision.
>
> The training is the ability to separate things out and say, all right, this student is more emotionally expressive than I find necessary, but I'm not going to ascribe to that some type of irrationality or whiny-ness or excuse making. They're just choosing to have

emotional expressiveness in the statement and, whether or not that's appropriate for the genre is beside the point because, again I'm not grading them on the writing. I'm trying to assess whether or not they will come back and be successful.

While Administrator G actively worked to suspend judgement on writing style, Administrator A explained how a previous dean they worked with seriously considered how well the appeal was written:

The first assistant dean I worked with had been at the university for 35 years was very hung up on grammar and spelling and spacing of the letter and making sure it looked very professional, making sure the student was not copying from a prior letter, or Googling or anything like that. [The assistant dean] was very hung up on like that grammatical piece of it. And then I've worked with some of the other deans and there'll be spelling errors or punctuation errors and they we don't even talk about it.

Finding 3: Consistency and Reasonableness Provide the Basis for Decision Making in the Reinstatement Process

The administrators were asked several questions to understand what they considered important in their decision-making process for reinstatement. Their answers largely fell into two categories: consistency and reasonableness. The administrators all agreed that there was no one measure upon which they could make a reinstatement decision. Rather, decisions hinged on review of the student statement and their academic records. Where student stories aligned with their records, and their changes and plans they put forth in their appeal letters made sense, administrators were more likely to approve reinstatement.

Consistency. Consistency was a key factor for administrators when making reinstatement decisions. When a student's story lined up with what was in their academic records, decisions

were more easily made. When they did not line up, reinstatement decisions became more complicated and hinged on what additional clarifying information administrators could gather from students, or assumptions administrators made. Administrator E described this conundrum:

> Sometimes students can't explain it, which is hard when a student can't explain what was going on. If you look at the transcript and they aren't making any sense, what they're telling me isn't matching what's going on there, or they can't identify that there was something that occurred and it's matching with the transcript that can be concerning.

Administrator A discussed how when things did match up, decisions were easy:

> The transcript doesn't lie, those are numbers, those are facts, … our previous Dean … was very good about making sure that the answers that were in the appeal letter [were] matching with what really happened in the transcript. So, I think [when] those things match, we're pretty set in making a decision, feel very confident.

Administrator G was certain to point out that this didn't mean administrators went into the process assuming students were intentionally not telling the truth. They said:

> I don't mean to suggest that we're entering into this process with a suspicious mindset that the students trying to pull it over, but we do have some due diligence, just are all the pieces lining up because, if they're not, we need to ask some questions.

Reasonableness. How students described their circumstances, changes made, and plans for moving forward, and whether administrators interpreted what was described as reasonable, was the second key factor in reinstatement decision-making. A student's story first needed to be consistent with their academic records, and then assessed as reasonable in terms of whether the student was setting themselves up for success. If what the student said did not make sense for the administrator, they questioned whether the student would be successful upon return.

Administrator E described their thinking process about this, asking "Does their story make sense or are they just telling us something because they want to come back, but maybe they're not ready, and they haven't done a lot of reflection." Similarly, Administrator A listed questions they think about, such as "How is this really going to go? Is this really a legit plan? Is it a realistic plan that the student has?"

Whereas, when students laid out clear plans and expressed eagerness about returning to school, administrators assumed reasonableness. Administrator F spoke about how they assessed reasonableness in student statements:

> I think things that I've seen students share, especially students who have been successful after coming back in, really have to revolve around they've planned out things nicely, they're enthusiastic about coming back, and they have clear cut goals on how they're going to come back and be successful.

Administrator B provided a specific example of how they would assess the reasonableness of a student's plan:

> A reasonable consideration of class load. If a student [says] I'm planning on repeating my classes to improve my GPA or I'm going to start two classes at a time to make sure that I can work into it, that raises my confidence level more so than if a student [says] I have it under control and I'm going to take 16 credits because I need to finish as soon as possible.

Administrator G went a step further stating that plans do not necessarily need to be the ones that they will ultimately agree to, but more importantly "do they seem to have a reasonable plan even if it's unlikely or even if it's not the plan I would [endeavor] myself, but reasonableness is the standard that they are going to change." Giving students the benefit of the doubt, Administrator

C commented, "Most of the time it just seemed kind of reasonable what was being said, plausible, I guess."

Finding 4: Locus of Control is a Key Characteristic Administrators Look for in the Reinstatement Process

The fourth finding was drawn from answers the administrators provided to questions asking what they hoped to hear from students in the appeal process. Valuing education, self-reflection, clear goals and plans, and initiative all repeatedly came up during the interviews. All are aspects of locus of control for which the student needed to take primary responsibility. When present in a student's story, administrators believed students were actively engaged and intrinsically motivated to return and be successful and were more likely to approve reinstatement. Not all aspects needed to be present, but the absence of any aspect of locus of control was discussed as a detriment. Further, the four different aspects of locus of control could be seen in combination with one another, for example, valuing education might be tied to self-reflection, or clear goals and plans may be combined with initiative. Either way, the presence of these aspects of locus of control gave the administrators more confidence in their reinstatement decisions.

Value Education. Four of the administrators discussed wanting to hear from students that they value their education enough to return and be successful. Administrator E expressed this simply as, "Prioritizing school is key." Administrator B considered whether students were thinking about future outcomes, "I like to hear that they value their education and they're able to make the connection [that] education is going to equal an improved quality of life." Administrator A and Administrator D looked for how students value their education in their responses to the reinstatement appeal prompts, often as it may be tied to plans, self-reflection,

and initiative. Administrator A provided an example of how valuing education comes through in student responses:

> This is your money, this is your education, this is your time away from your family, this is a very temporary life experience, so make the most of it. So, I think what I look for is what initiative have they taken … to self-reflect to appropriately and thoughtfully and vigilantly answer those questions, those three prompts.

Self-Reflection. When students are answering the prompts in their reinstatement appeal letters, six of the administrators talked about wanting to see or hear about some aspect of self-reflection in what the students wrote. The importance ascribed to self-reflection was significantly connected to whether the student understood their situation, was taking initiative to make change, and had thought about how they will go about being successful upon return. Administrator A described self-reflection as most important because, "I think self-reflection to me leads students to take initiative for their education." Administrator D described self-reflection as being in control of their situation, "you need to have control of the situation; you need to think about your situation and analyze." Administrator F mentioned that student initiative to go through the reinstatement process signaled self-reflection for them "because to me that means that they're taking their reinstatement request seriously and that they've actually thought about how they want to come back and finish out versus just coming back." But Administrator E mentioned how the absence of self-reflection could indicate that a student is not ready to return, "does their story make sense or are they just telling us something because they want to come back, but maybe they're not ready, and they haven't done a lot of reflection." And Administrator G described how self-reflection and plans to return needed to be aligned, "we're just trying to

figure out if the plan matches the students self-assessed causes, and not even try to say if they're right or wrong, it may be that the student hasn't figured it all out yet."

Clear Goals and Plans. While it was important for administrators to understand whether a student's situation that had led to suspension changed or was no longer a concern, knowing the student's goals and plans for moving forward were critical. Administrators made clear that it was especially important to know that the student wouldn't be returning to habits or behaviors present at the time of suspension. Students were specifically asked in their third prompt what their plan was to return to academic success. Administrator B noted that:

> I probably am leaning heavily on the answer to that third question. I still want the first two because I want that context, but to that third question of how are you going to, what's your level of commitment to coming back and getting your education.

Administrator A also explained how the first two prompts lead to the answer for the third prompt, where a "good, solid plan" indicated self-reflection and understanding for how a student can be successful. Administrator F compared what students wrote in their appeal to what the administrator knew worked well for students in the past:

> Students who have been successful after coming back in really have to revolve around they've planned out things nicely, they're enthusiastic about coming back, and they have clear cut goals on how they're going to come back and be successful.

But plans could indicate that the student hasn't really figured out what caused them to struggle in the past and may be concerning for their future success. Administrator E explained:

> Sometimes students will say, well, I'm planning to work full time, I have these things going on, and I want to take 16 credits. That is a disconnect that maybe they're not understanding what it takes to be successful and having that conversation with them

about there's only so much time in the day, that doesn't set you up for success, do they understand what it takes to be successful.

Takes Initiative. The reinstatement process itself requires the student to take initiative. After having been out an academic year, it is up to the student to initiate the reinstatement process. That could indicate motivation to return. Administrator G described it as a "process [that] is really student driven. We are largely dependent upon that student's motivation to come back and reapply." Administrator A similarly expressed that the process "all has to be student initiated, we do not reach out to students … unless they email us or contact us." Beyond just initiating the process, however, students needed to indicate how they had taken control of their situation and initiated change. Administrator D explained that when they read appeal letters, "the question I put in my head, is a student aware of his situation or her situation, what factor he or she acknowledges that they are in his control or her control." When students described how they had taken initiative, administrators felt that students were assessing their situation and being accountable for their actions. Administrator C stated that they "felt the student is taking primary responsibility for his or her education. It's not my job to substitute my judgment for theirs." Taking initiative was also tied to being intrinsically motivated. Administrator F elaborated on that student initiative showed how the student was internalizing their goal to return and complete their degree. They stated:

> We do have students who apply for reinstatement because maybe they have exterior pressures or motivators to come back and finish up a degree. But I really think it has to be themselves, it has to be the student themself that wants to be successful, versus having other outside pressures.

Finding 5: Using the Student's Narrative to Determine Support Needed Upon Return

The last finding was significant in that all administrators, minus one, used what they learned about the students through their narrative to stipulate actions or recommend support services and resources for their successful return. Stipulating actions could include recommending students take a certain number of courses, specific courses, complete a workshop, or meet with an advisor. Administrators A, B, E, and F specifically mentioned the possibility of limiting students to one or two courses upon return to help students be successful upon return. Administrator B discussed how they help direct students to quickly improve their GPAs by repeating courses they previously failed when they return:

> If a student has three terms of F's and they're coming back, part of the conversation in the appeal [approval] letter might be that you need to work toward improving your GPA as quickly as possible, you may want to consider this as an option and repeating some of these classes as you build for future terms, using it to provide guidance within that [approval] letter about how the student can move forward and be successful.

Administrator G discussed how the narrative provided by the student gave insights for the administrators to make recommendations:

> It is fairly rare that we say to a student yet come back in whatever you like, pick up where you left off, you're good to go whatever. It's much more often we say come back in and complete this degree plan updating workshop or come back in but only take one or two classes, or even take this specific class.

Recommending support services or resources was another common aspect applied by administrators in their appeal approvals. Based on the student narrative that was provided throughout the reinstatement process, administrators A, B, D, and E all discussed directing students to specific resources on campus that may be beneficial for them, based on what their

stories elicited. Administrator A described this process as part of their conversation with their dean when determining how whether to approve a student's reinstatement request:

> I think most of her questions are about [the narrative and records reviewed] and then also the next steps that the students should take advantage of … obviously the academic success workshop and advising appointment, but then also all of our great free services, Counseling, Tutoring, any of those, and putting that information with contact information in the approval letter so the students have that documented and can refer back to it, if needed.

> Only, Administrator C, a previous dean, specifically discussed not making

recommendations to students in their reinstatement approvals. When discussing how they resisted making assumptions about adult learners and their own determination about whether they were ready to return and be successful, the administrator felt they also resisted making recommendations:

> The second thing that I resisted doing, and the person who came before me was very big on this, [was] take a counseling approach on this and say I'm going to restrict the student to a certain number of credits or something like that. I just felt like that was overreach and I didn't ever do that.

<div align="center">Synthesis</div>

Findings from both the student and administrator participants were organized by emergent themes. In this section, findings from both groups will be synthesized under the research questions. The intent is to showcase how the emergent themes answered the questions that were posed by the researcher at the outset of this study. The research questions were:

Research Question 1: How does student narrative impact student success in the

reinstatement from suspension process?

Research Question 2: How can information from the student narrative be included to help

analyze and predict student success?

Research Question 1: How does student narrative impact student success in the

reinstatement from suspension process?

When considering participant responses in relation to this research question, the

comments provided by administrators most directly addressed how student narrative impacts

student success in the reinstatement process. Particularly, the comments attributed to *Finding 2:*

The Importance of the Appeal Letter in the Reinstatement Process provided great insight into the

weight administrators assigned student narrative in making their reinstatement decisions. First,

the written appeal became the main vehicle by which students could tell their stories. Only a few

administrators gathered additional information through interviews, but where those interviews

did take place, the students were able to elaborate or expand their narrative to provide

administrators the information they were looking for. How well students provided that narrative

and how they described their experiences mattered. Detail, context, and explanation were

necessary for the administrators to feel that students really understood their situation and what

they needed to do to be successful moving forward. When students did provide the detail,

explain their situation, as well as what had changed and their plans for returning, administrators

were more likely to approve reinstatement.

Finding 3: Consistency and Reasonableness Provide the Basis for Decision Making in

the Reinstatement Process and *Finding 4: Locus of Control is a Key Characteristic*

Administrators Look for in the Reinstatement Process from the administrator interviews also

provide context for how student narrative impacts success in the reinstatement process. Administrators all agreed that the student narrative needed to align with student records, in a way that was corroborating the student's story. When students could not connect their experiences back to what was happening during the academic terms they were struggling, administrators had a harder time approving reinstatement. Often giving students the benefit of the doubt, administrators often gave students a chance to respond to those discrepancies.

The consistency of the student narrative with the academic record was then weighed against the reasonableness of the student's plan for success. If students were able to articulate specific changes they had made and plans they had set forth to return and be successful academically, administrators were very likely to approve reinstatement. However, administrators were the ones interpreting the reasonableness of those plans. Delving further into the student narrative, aspects of locus of control needed to be present in a student's story for reinstatement to be approved. Valuing education, self-reflection, clear goals and plans, and initiative were all considered important to student success when returning from suspension. Though not all aspects needed to be present for approval because administrators often assumed the missing aspect by how the student discussed the others.

Student comments that answered the first research question fell under *Finding 2: Pressure to Write Compelling Stories* and *Finding 3: Vulnerability*. Especially in *Finding 2*, students answered interview questions about what they perceived they needed to include in their appeals letter as well as what administrators were looking for in those letters. Table 4 highlighted some of the key phrases that students used in their interviews. Students generally understood that they needed to tell a story about why they struggled, what had changed, and provide a clear and reasonable plan for being successful upon return. They also generally understood that whatever

they provided in their stories needed to be relatable to the administrators, that administrators wanted to see students taking responsibility for what had happened and what had changed, and that detail mattered. Students A and E specifically said that administrators have reasonable expectations of students. Only Student H who was not reinstated felt that administrators were not reading student stories with empathy or were able to relate to working parents.

Finding 3 was more challenging for students but also indicative of how student narrative impacts student success in the reinstatement from suspension process. While a couple of students expressed that they did not struggle providing personal detail in their narratives, most of the other students discussed feeling more vulnerable in that process, making it difficult to know how much to share. Students discussed about not knowing exactly what the administrators were looking for, therefore making it challenging to know what all should be included in the appeal letter. Providing details in the appeal letters did not always seem to the students to relate to their decisions. The one student who was not successfully reinstated purposefully did not include details in her letter because she did not feel comfortable sharing those kinds of intimate details with strangers. However, the other impact of this vulnerable process was that it led to self-reflection, often helping students determine their own commitment to returning to school and being successful.

Table 5

Findings and Key Statements as They Relate to Research Question 1

Research Question 1: How does student narrative impact student success in the reinstatement from suspension process?	
Administrator Findings	**Key Statements**

Finding 2: The Importance of the Appeal Letter in the Reinstatement Process	I mean the students are really pouring out their heart into these statements so it's hard to look at it in any other way. (Administrator F)
Finding 3: Consistency and Reasonableness Provide the Basis for Decision Making in the Reinstatement Process	It's contingent upon an individual situation. Have they identified what was preventing success before now and do they have a reasonable plan for changing those factors, so that there will be success in the future? (Administrator G) We have done that in the last year, year and a half, where we've asked student for some follow up information, but most of it would be probably the unmatched realistic experience the student had compared to what their letter and their reflection of what they thought happened. (Administrator A)
Finding 4: Locus of Control is a Key Characteristic Administrators Look for in the Reinstatement Process	We're really looking to see that the student has been able to make changes to the things that have affected them negatively in the past, so whether that's finding more time and flexibility from work [Clear Goals or Plans], or being able to resolve you know, interpersonal or family conflict that maybe impacted their education in the past [Self-Reflection]. Or it could even be that you know they gone on taking classes at a Community College or another university and they've been successful [Initiative/Valuing Education]. (Administrator F)

Student Findings	Key Statements
Finding 2: Pressure to Write Compelling Stories	You need to write a really good story … with really good reasons and a really compelling excuse for why your previous … attempt was not successful. (Student B)
Finding 3: Vulnerability	Yes, in general I did have reservations about being candid in my personal statement but felt it would yield better results than giving them a general overview and hope that they accepted my narrative. (Student D)

Research Question 2: How can information from the student narrative be included to help analyze and predict student success?

The findings as they relate to Research Question 2 are a bit more opaque. Of all the students interviewed, only one had not been reinstated. Whether that had to do with the quality of

that student's narrative (though there is some indication it may have been) is difficult to surmise from only the student's perspective. All the other students interviewed had been successfully reinstated, though three had yet to return to school. Of those who had returned to school, five of the students reported that they were doing well (e.g., A's and B's, honor roll, average) and one of those one had graduated. And, where findings from more clearly answered Research Question 1, findings as they relate to Research Question 2 suggested issues with process throughout the reinstatement process and support post-reinstatement as possibly impacting student success upon return the most.

From the administrator interviews, *Finding 5: Using the Student's Narrative to Determine Support Needed Upon Return* provided some insight into how administrators reviewed student narrative to provide recommendations for successful return. Those recommendations could include limiting students to taking a certain number of courses in their first term back, specifying which course(s) the students should take, workshops to complete, and/or resources to connect with. Those administrators who discussed providing such recommendations did so from the purview of wanting the students to succeed and persist toward degree. Only one administrator specifically discussed not making such recommendations based on the students being adult learners and providing those learners the benefit of determining their own path to return. Though Findings 2 through 4 from the administrator interviews more clearly answered how student narrative impacts student success in the reinstatement from suspension process, those Findings did not specifically address whether administrators used that narrative to predict success upon return. More so, they used the narrative to identify the likelihood of success.

From the student interviews, *Finding 4: Support for Future Success* found that most students did not feel supported to return and be successful. Half of the students interviewed reported not receiving any additional support due to the reinstatement process. Where students did feel they were supported, those students still felt that they needed to take the initiative for connecting with and receiving that support. When asked what recommendations they had for improving the reinstatement process, support for success upon return was a common response from the students. Students described wanting more direct support and guidance from the institution, as well as more understanding of and compassion for adult students and their unique situations.

Interviews from both participant groups identified issues with the process being unclear, inconsistent, and not very supportive. *Finding 1: Inconsistent and Confusing Communication Throughout the Reinstatement Process* from the student interviews indicated they found the reinstatement process confusing and complex. Students did not always know who to contact or where to find information. Seven of the students reported that they ultimately did speak with someone, but five of those seven students still found the process confusing. A few of students spoke about confusion about amongst the advisors, or that students had about deadlines, delaying their return to school.

Similarly, *Finding 1: The Reinstatement Process Varies Across the Colleges/Units* from the administrator interviews confirmed that each administrator approached the reinstatement process slightly different. While all the administrators collected a student letter of appeal as part of the process, other forms, records, interviews, or additional information collected and used was dependent on what each administrator felt was important or necessary to make an appropriate reinstatement decision. An inconsistent and confusing process does not lend itself to analyzing

student narrative or predicting student success post-reinstatement when students are not certain

what to include in the appeal letters or who to consult with, and administrators all approach their

decision-making process differently.

Table 6

Findings and Key Statements as They Relate to Research Question 2

Research Question 2: How can information from the student narrative be included to help analyze and predict student success?

Administrator Findings	Key Statements
Finding 1: The Reinstatement Process Varies Across the Colleges/Units	We really need somebody to lead the group to be consistent [across] the university. The second thing [is] to stick with the policy and modify policy that are across the board, not just for one department. And also, education, because not everybody are on the same level of knowledge about the process. (Administrator D)
Finding 5: Using the Student's Narrative to Determine Support Needed Upon Return	To be successful, and so do they have that understanding now, or are they at a point where, if we allow them back and we support them they will be able to so maybe they're not fully there yet, but maybe we can get them there. (Administrator E)

Student Findings	Key Statements
Finding 1: Inconsistent and Confusing Communication Throughout the Reinstatement Process	I got confused at first. All I did was fill out the paperwork and I didn't even know I had to really write a letter. And [I asked] my counselor, did I do everything? And she's like, no, you didn't write the letter. I thought the letter was just the basic paperwork that you had to fill out to get reinstated. I didn't know you had to actually write a letter. (Student E)
Finding 4: Support for Future Success	Setting goals and weekly check-ins and things like that, but if somebody like me who tends to fall behind needs to be held accountable, who is going to be holding me accountable if it's not me? (Student G)

Conclusion

The findings reported in Chapter 4 support the importance of student narrative in the reinstatement from suspension process. Student participants understood that they needed to write compelling stories, acknowledging why they struggled, what changes they had made, and laying out a success plan for their return. Administrator participants highlighted the different aspects of student narrative that were important to their decision making, including making certain that the narrative was corroborated when compared with the student's academic records. Whether the student narrative could be analyzed and used to predict student success was less clear. Certainly, administrators reported using the narrative to identify support services and make recommendations they felt would facilitate student success upon return. However, students did not unanimously report feeling supported once they were reinstated. Students did recommend implementing more success support for improving the reinstatement process. Finally, interview findings supported the conclusion that the reinstatement process was inconsistent and confusing, and may not lend itself to analyzing and predicting future success of students unless more standard processes were applied.

Chapter 5 will provide the researcher's analysis of the findings discussed in Chapter 4. Implications and conclusions from the findings will be discussed, as well as suggestions for process improvement and formalization of student narrative as part of the decision-making process. The findings will be related back to the literature review and framework of narrative theory. Research limitations and possibilities for future research will also be considered.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Return from academic suspension is a challenging process for students hoping to complete their undergraduate degree programs. Academic suspension often requires that students take time away from their academic pursuits to reflect upon and make changes to their academic behaviors that can help them return and be successful. For many students, and especially those at the institution where this research was conducted, return from suspension is not a guaranteed process. This research found that students hoping to be reinstated must demonstrate, usually through a written appeal, that their circumstances have changed, that they can acknowledge what happened in the past, have taken responsibility for their actions, made changes, and have a solid, realistic plan in place to return. The extent that administrators of the reinstatement from suspension process trusted what students said to be true, and that it was congruent with what was reflected in their academic records, impacted reinstatement decisions. The reinstatement process itself was found to be complex and complicated to navigate for students wanting to return. Writing the reinstatement appeal was a vulnerable process that required students share intimate details of their lives with complete strangers to persuade those strangers that they are ready and capable of returning. That complexity and vulnerability could discourage future students from ultimately returning to complete their degrees.

The COVID-19 pandemic, that began in 2020 and continued through the entirety of this research, has significantly impacted postsecondary enrollments, which were already expected to decline in the coming years. According to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, "total postsecondary enrollment declined by 2.7 percent or 476,100 students in fall 2021, for a total two-year decline of 5.1 percent or 937,500 students since the beginning of the COVID-19

pandemic" (2021, p. 1). The report highlighted a decrease in enrollment for fall 2021 across all demographic characteristics, but women fared worse than men (-4.1% vs. -3.4% respectively). Adult learners, aged 25-29, saw the largest decline (-9%) compared to traditional students, aged 18-24 (-2.6% for students aged 18-20 and -3.3% for students aged 21-24). The accelerated rate of enrollment decline is certain to have institutions of higher education scrambling to retain and graduate currently enrolled students, as well as seeking approaches to improve access for students to return and continue their education.

Chapter Five will discuss the findings of this interpretive hermeneutic phenomenological research study compared to the literature reviewed in Chapter Two and the framework of Narrative Theory. The researcher's analysis and interpretations of the findings will be presented. Limitations, implications of the research, and recommendations for future research will also be considered.

Summary of Results

The data collected through semi-structured interviews with students and process administrators sought to answer the following research questions:

Research Question 1: How does student narrative impact student success in the reinstatement from suspension process?

Research Question 2: How can information from the student narrative be included to help analyze and predict student success?

Findings highlighted the importance of student narrative in the reinstatement from suspension process as perceived by both groups of participants. Students understood the necessity of writing a compelling story to persuade administrators of their readiness to return. Administrators viewed the narrative as key to understanding whether students had reconciled previous issues and

concerns, took responsibility for their actions, made changes, and had a reasonable plan for return. Congruence of the student narrative with academic records established fidelity of the student story. Thus, student narrative was found to be imperative to reinstatement decisions. The research is not clear, however, on whether analyzing that student narrative could predict future student success.

Interviews with students elicited four themes. The first theme denoted a complex and confusing reinstatement process. Though not explicitly stated, the researcher understood that students had to initiate the process for reinstatement and often did not know where to start or who to contact. When they did make contact, they were often redirected to someone else or simply directed to the reinstatement process forms. Connection with an advisor was generally helpful, but also led to some misunderstanding or miscommunication. Some students had delayed even further their return to school because of the process. And the one student who failed to gain reinstatement still did not understand exactly what she needed to do to return.

The second and third themes highlighted what the students perceived was important to include in their narratives, what they believed administrators were looking for in their narratives, and how vulnerable a process writing that narrative was. Although students recognized they needed to write a compelling story to convince administrators of their readiness to return, it was not an easy process to go through, especially where they felt obligated to reveal personal, intimate details of their lives to people they didn't know. Students found it challenging not knowing what administrators were looking for in the written appeals and, in hindsight, some offered that they would not have been so forthcoming with personal information if they had known on what administrators base their decisions. What students thought they needed to provide in their letters was the truth about their situations, that they had taken responsibility of

their circumstances, that they acknowledged the challenges they had faced, could prove they had made change, and that they had success plans in place. These aspects of their stories needed to be told in a way that was relatable to administrators, provoked empathy, and were reasonable.

The fourth theme indicated that students did not receive additional support for success because of their narratives. Once they 'won' reinstatement, students returned to being students. Most support received was initiated by the students reaching out to advisors or instructors. The deeply personal process students went through to be reinstated did not transform their relationships with advisors, instructors, or available support resources outside of what the students themselves sought to pursue. Considering the weight given to the student narrative in the reinstatement process, the research reveals that administrators were not utilizing that narrative to ensure student success once they returned.

Five themes were drawn from the administrator interviews. The first theme corroborated the students' perception of a complex and confusing process. Every administrator interviewed approached the reinstatement process differently. While every administrator required a written letter of appeal, what other documents were included or evaluated along with the narrative varied. A few included an interview as another way to collect student narrative, but most did not. Who participated in the process and who made decisions (advisors, academic standing representatives, deans) also varied. The lack of consistency across the administrators and their colleges at the research institution was likely to blame where students were misdirected or bounced around when initiating the process. With no common guidelines for how administrators should make their reinstatement decisions, interpretations of the student narrative and personal beliefs strongly influenced outcomes.

Theme two reinforced the importance of the student narrative in the reinstatement decision-making process. Administrators wanted to hear the student's story with as much detail as possible. The researcher interpreted this to suggest that where detail was lacking, administrators were left to fill in the gaps with academic record information which lacked context and meaning. How the students told their stories mattered. The stories needed to include as much detail as possible to resolve any questions the administrators had, and students needed to show that they had reflected upon their experience and learned something about it that was going to help them move forward in their program. There was a recognition amongst the administrators that not all students had the same storytelling capabilities. How the administrators managed the varying capabilities ranged from requiring additional information from students, potentially delaying the reinstatement process, to flat out denial of the appeal. None of the administrators suggested a need for better preparing students to tell their stories. Rather, individual administrators would piece together the story from the written appeal, information from the student record, sometimes from information provided by the student's academic advisor, and sometimes by going back to the student for more information.

Themes three and four highlighted what the administrators interviewed found most important when considering the student narrative in the reinstatement process. Administrators considered consistency with academic records as necessary to establish the fidelity of a student's story. They sought reasonableness in the student's plan for return to confirm that the student had made meaning of their suspension experience and knew what was necessary to come back and be successful. Additionally, the administrators wanted to see some aspect of locus of control in the student's story to convince them that the student had taken ownership of their situation enough to prove their level of commitment to successfully completing their academic program.

Theme five provided some insight to how student narrative could be analyzed to predict student success through the recommendations made in the decision process. The majority of administrators discussed using the student narrative to stipulate number of or type of course(s) the student should take when they return. They also used the decision letter as a vehicle to direct students to support resources on campus but did not necessarily make those connections for the students or follow-up to see if the students had used the resources.

Comparison of the Findings with the Theoretical Framework and Previous Literature

This research was guided by the framework of narrative theory as defined by Walter Fisher (1989). As was stated in Chapter One, the narrative paradigm provides "a 'logic' for assessing stories, for determining whether or not one should adhere to the stories one is encouraged to endorse or to accept as the basis for decision and actions" (p. 87). Previous research on the reinstatement from suspension process found no conclusive evidence of objective measures that could be used to predict student success post reinstatement. Research did allude to the use of student narrative in making reinstatement decisions and the importance of student dialogue with advisors or counselors once returned. No literature reviewed discussed the importance of the student narrative in the reinstatement process or analyzed the narrative in its decision-making process. The importance of student narrative in the reinstatement process is possibly best described by Chapman (2004) when discussing the role of critical personal narrative, "It is personal because it is about the author, often embarrassingly and deliberately so, even though the very intimate nature of personal writing and the visceral reactions it elicits can be both a strength and a weakness" (p. 98).

As mentioned in Chapter Three, Walter Fisher (1989) noted that "the narrative paradigm proposes that human beings are inherently storytellers who have the capacity to recognize the

coherence and fidelity of stories they tell and experience" (p. 24). This definition of narrative theory aptly defines the reinstatement appeal process. Students are obliged to tell their stories, the good and the bad, in a coherent and relevant manner that compels administrators to approve their reinstatement. Both students and administrators agreed that the stories needed to describe events as they happened, align with student records, and be relatable. Fisher (1989) purported, "human communication is tested against the principles of probability (coherence) and fidelity (truthfulness and reliability)" (p. 47). While nine of the ten students interviewed were successfully reinstated, their capabilities as storytellers were not assessed. They did describe, however, providing enough detail so administrators would have few, if any, questions about their desire and ability to return.

Administrators, as well as some students, acknowledged that not all students have the same storytelling capabilities which can impact the success of an appeal. Perhaps this is a weakness of the reinstatement process where students are being asked to utilize a skillset they have not yet refined. Although students are prompted what questions to respond to in their appeal letters, they are provided little other guidance on how to provide those answers. Chapman (2004) declared that "it's also crucial to give clear criteria in narrative assignments" (p. 100), including how much to write, what style to use when writing (e.g., APA, MLA, etc.), and what will be considered acceptable as part of the writing. Where a student's academic future figuratively 'hangs in the balance', administrators are basing the student's success or failure on their skillset as a writer narrator.

The role of the academic advisor in the reinstatement from suspension process at the research institution is, indeed, complicated. This research found that academic advisors also serve as academic standing representatives, gathering and reviewing reinstatement applications,

and sometimes meeting with students to discuss the processor gather additional narrative. These advisors may or may not be the assigned academic advisor for the student going through the reinstatement process. Regardless, their role in the process is more of administrator than counselor as they play a critical part in deciding the fate of the appeals. Where the student's assigned academic advisor was not also an administrator of the process, their role became most important after the student was reinstated. This advising role was supported by the previous literature where connecting with advising was recommended for reinstated students to develop a success plan. What was not indicated in the previous literature, and was highlighted as a concern in this research, is that the role of academic advisors could be critical to the support students feel going through the reinstatement process. Six of the ten students interviewed reported their advisor helped guide them through the reinstatement process. Some of the advisors read the student appeals and provided feedback before it went to the academic standing representative. The importance of this co-narration is best described by Hagen (2018) as a way of helping students build their skills as narrators, that "advisors must seek ways to help students make their voices heard and overcome any obstacles to recounting their stories forthrightly, without fear or oppression" (p. 27).

The previous literature found no research connecting narrative theory to the reinstatement from suspension process. However, narrative theory has been connected to the practice of academic advising (Champlin-Scharff, 2010; Champlin-Scharff & Hagen, 2013; Hagen 2008; Himes, 2014; Jordan, 2000; Pizzolato, 2006). Most theories utilized in academic advising are based in the social sciences. Walter Fisher (1989) described social science-based theories as Cartesian, seeking an either/or predictive knowledge. Social science-based theories, Fisher states, "…are, or at least can be interpreted as, various ways to account for *how* people come to adopt

stories that guide behavior" (p. 86). What narrative theory offers over social science theories,

Fisher argues, is a "logic" for assessing stories. Specifically:

> The precise way in which the narrative paradigm goes beyond such traditional social-
> scientific theories is in introducing the concept of narrative rationality. This concept
> provides principles – probability and fidelity – which are considerations for judging the
> merits of stories, whether one's or another's. (p. 87-88)

This research confirmed that aspects of probability and fidelity are important in making

reinstatement decisions. Probability refers here to coherence or consistency of the student

narrative with academic records, whereas fidelity refers to providing as much detail as possible

and providing reasonable plans based on the student's understanding and description of what

happened and what changed. Additionally, locus of control was a key characteristic that

administrators were looking for in the appeal process. The literature reviewed supported this

characteristic as it relates to mindset, motivation, study skills, and students' ability to overcome

organizational barriers (reinstatement process). A recent article by Bowlus and DelMar (2021)

focused more specifically on the key success indicators found in reinstatement appeal letters.

They found that locus of control, along with self-efficacy, to be an important success indicator

when reviewing reinstatement letters of appeal. The authors defined locus of control or personal

responsibility as an aspect of self-determination that:

> Encapsulates how students exhibit control over their own academic success and own their
> decisions and behaviors that can impede that success. Students who take responsibility
> for their actions, and do not place blame on others for their failings, are more likely to
> honestly assess their shortcomings, know where they need to seek additional support, and
> express greater self-advocacy to get the support they need. (p. 10)

Locus of control also lent itself to why the students interviewed had not been successful in the first place. Though the early research by Tinto (1975) suggested that students who are academically suspended are less intellectually capable, the researcher did not deem this to be the case of the students interviewed. Instead, the students spoke to intervening life circumstances, lack of direction, and inability to hold oneself accountable, which was more in line with the more recent research reviewed.

The previous literature reviewed regarding reinstatement decisions focused greatly on objective, student record data. This research found that, while academic records were important, the analysis of the student record was key primarily as it corroborated the student narrative provided through the appeal letter. To be clear, no administrator questioned the fidelity of the student record. Rather, the student narrative needed to address the story of the student record. Where the student narrative and academic record aligned, the narrative was deemed reasonable and reinstatement appeals were more likely to be approved. Where the narrative and academic record did not align, or gaps were present, administrators might delay decisions to gather additional information from the student to fill in those gaps or address the misalignment, or simply deny the appeal. The importance of the narrative in helping administrators interpret and understand what they were seeing in the student academic record, thus, does not support utilizing only objective data when making reinstatement decisions.

Interpretation of the Findings

The data collected as part of this research and its comparison to previous literature strongly support and answer the importance of student narrative and the impact it has on student success in the reinstatement from suspension process. Less clear is how information from the student narrative could be included to help analyze and predict student success. The students

interviewed largely felt that they did not receive any additional support based on the narrative they provided during the reinstatement process, potentially indicating that their academic advisors were either not made aware of that narrative or provided guidance from administrators on what kind of support students might need to be successful. Administrators did discuss stipulating some success factors in their reinstatement decision letters. The extent, however, of those stipulations was limited to expressing how many or what specific courses a student would take upon return, and potentially directing students to support resources available on campus. No method of enforcement of the stipulations was mentioned.

The inconsistency found to exist in the reinstatement process suggested that no analysis was taking place to evaluate the quality of the reinstatement decisions or to track student success post-reinstatement. Students returned to being students and administrators moved on to the next reinstatement appeals. Only if a student was suspended another time and appealed again for reinstatement did administrators consider whether their initial reinstatement decision for that student had been flawed. Providing more consistency and common practice to the reinstatement process across colleges could alleviate confusion and complexity of the process for students and provide a basis for analysis for administrators.

How student narrative in the reinstatement process should be assessed remains a question. This research highlighted the importance of student narrative in determining reinstatement. Utilizing the framework provided by narrative theory, Walter Fisher (1989) provided some ideas through the logic of good reasons. As discussed in Chapter Three, Fisher describes the five components in the logic of reasons. First, consider whether the facts presented in the narrative are indeed facts. Administrators considered student narrative to be factual when the narrative aligned with the student record. Second, determine whether any possible relevant

facts have been omitted and whether the ones being presented are being distorted or taken out of context. If administrators discovered misalignment between the student narrative and academic record, they questioned whether information is missing and can be gathered from the student, or whether the student was not truly connecting or understanding why they struggled academically when they did. Third, recognize and assess the pattern of reasoning. A coherent sequence of events in which the student takes responsibility for their actions and reflects upon what changes were important to make lends itself to an identifiable pattern of reasoning. Fourth, determine the relevance of the arguments intended to inform the decision are sound and are the ones that should be considered in making the decision. Reasonable plans for return needed to address whether previous challenges were resolved or being managed, whether changes made were appropriate to facilitate success upon return, and whether the student addressed why they want to return. Fifth, whether the narrative told deals with the questions on which the matter is concerned. Students can tell a good story, but it needed to be one that specifically addressed the academic challenges the student faced, what changed, and what plans they had in place to be successful. Any other aspect is not relevant to the reinstatement process.

Transforming these five components into a logic of good reasons further extends analysis of reinstatement appeals and potentially provides a basis for analysis of success post-reinstatement. Key to the logic of good reasons is the assessment of values presented in the student narrative. Fisher (1989) argues that "because norms and values are social constructs, socially derived and maintained, one cannot assess them without at least the implicit involvement of others" (p. 110). In the reinstatement process, this is illustrated by the student appealing their case to persons unknown but knowing that the persons will be judging their story. Conversely, administrators are placed in a position to examine student narrative against their own ideals (or

those of their institution) to determine a student's academic fate. The implicit involvement of both students and administrators is understood and accepted by both parties. The implied values of the institution being appealed to are also at play. Students and administrators alike are obliged to uphold the institution's values. Students do this by aligning their own values with that of the institution's to express their intent on returning to be successful. Administrators uphold the institution's values by how they assess the student narrative against previous student stories that proved to be successful.

The researcher of this study used the five questions posed by Fisher (1989) that create a logic of good reasons, and aligned them with the reinstatement process as follows:

1) Fact: What are the implicit and explicit values embedded in the student's reinstatement appeal? Does the student's story corroborate what is found in the academic record? Does the student acknowledge and accept responsibility for what occurred and are they making changes forthwith?

2) Relevance: Are the values appropriate to the nature of the decision that the message bears upon? Are there any gaps or misalignment between the student's story and the academic record? Is the story relevant to the potential of their future academic success, not just the resolution of their personal struggles?

3) Consequence: What would the effects of adhering to the values – for one's concept of oneself, for one's behavior, for one's relationships with others and society, and to the process of rhetorical transaction? Does what the student describes in their story address the needs of what it means to be successful academically? Does the student provide a reasonable plan for success?

4) Consistency: Are the values confirmed or validated in one's personal experience, in the lives or statements of others whom one admires and respects, and in the conception of the best audience that one can conceive? Does the student's reasonable plan align with what administrators know to have been successful for students who came before them?

5) Transcendent Issue: Even if a prima-facie case exists or a burden of proof has been established, are the values the message offers those that, in the estimation of the critic, constitute the ideal basis for human conduct? Based on the student narrative, can the administrator foresee the possibility of success upon reinstatement? Does the student express the values held by the institution in alignment with perceived best practices for academic success?

Utilizing the narrative theory framework accommodates individuals and their unique stories as it does not prescribe that a story must be one way or another. Instead, it requires that those assessing the narrative consider the underlying values being presented. As described above, those underlying values can be assessed through the posed questions. The act of assessing the student narrative also reveals the values held by the administrator. As several of the administrators commented during the interviews, the reinstatement process is inherently subjective. Fisher (1989) acknowledges this and accounts for it as follows:

One can be fairly "objective" about what values are in fact present in a message, but as one moves to the questions of relevance, effects, confirmation, and ideals, greater and greater degrees of "subjectivity" enter into the assessment. The intrusion of such "subjectivity" is not a fault in a logic of good reasons. Instead, it is a recognition of the very nature of human communication. (p. 109-110)

There is potential for a rubric to be designed under the logic of good reasons. Not one that demands a particular answer, but one that allows a student's individual story to shine through. Administrators using such a rubric would ultimately be guided by their own values, but by reviewing the logic of good reasons, will be encouraged to look for and recognize the values of the student being professed through the reinstatement appeal. Adopting a more common review of reinstatement appeals could then be the basis for further analysis of student success post-reinstatement.

For students, the inconsistent and complex process was challenging to navigate, was unclear about what all should be included in an appeal letter and fostered emotional insecurity when providing such intimate details of one's life. Knowing upfront what administrators will be looking for in their appeal letters could help alleviate or make more amenable the vulnerable process. To be sure, the three prompts provided in the reinstatement process evaluated by this research helped guide the student narratives provided in the appeal letters. However, the prompts themselves do not reveal to students what administrators will be looking for or how their answers will be evaluated. A rubric developed from the logic of good reasons could be provided to students as part of the reinstatement process, not only as a way for students to know what their letters will be evaluated against, but to provide more guidance on how to write their stories, especially for those students who lack more sophisticated storytelling capabilities.

Further, this research revealed that students need clear guidance through the reinstatement process both to eliminate confusion and to improve support for success in the process. Connection with their academic advisor early in the process could foster dialogue and increased understanding of the reinstatement process. Through conversation with academic advisors, students could be guided through self-reflection on their suspension. Advisors can also

help students think about how to tell their stories, providing just the necessary detail, and emphasizing their plans for return. Connecting with an academic advisor in the beginning of the process may increase student confidence and feelings of belonging to the institution.

Limitations

This research was conducted through an interpretive hermeneutic phenomenological approach. The researcher attempted to understand the lived experience of the participants while also making meaning of how the process and lived experience impacted one another. Per Creswell and Poth (2018), "phenomenology is not only a description but it is also an interpretive process in which the researcher makes an interpretation of the meaning of the lived experience" (p. 78). Utilizing the framework of narrative theory necessitated the interpretive process as Walter Fisher (1989) found, "narrativity as a legitimate and useful way to interpret and understand human relations" (p. 89). The reinstatement from suspension process heavily involves analysis of narrative and places value judgements on that narrative. Not only was it important for the researcher to understand how the students and administrators perceived their experience with the process, but it was also important for the researcher to understand and interpret the values that impact the process. Where narrative is involved, subjectivity will be in play. In this research, the researcher did not bracket out their previous experience with the reinstatement process. Rather, the researcher utilized that experience and knowledge in making their interpretations of the findings.

The research provided an in-depth review of the reinstatement process at one mid-sized, Midwestern, public, four-year institution. For the results to be generalizable, further research would need to include additional institutions in different geographic areas to determine similarity and replicability of reinstatement processes. The host institution where this research was

conducted primarily serves an adult, diverse student population, as was depicted in the student participant pool. Some concern should be given to how different student populations participate in processes like reinstatement and whether any differentiation of process per population is necessary or equitable.

Recruiting student participants for this study was challenging, especially considering that the students contacted had already participated in reinstatement process, and likely because of the sensitive nature of the process. Of the students interviewed, only one student was not reinstated after their participation in the process. While the data collected from all participants in this research was used to develop the themes and findings, interviewing more students who were not reinstated could highlight different concerns or experiences with the reinstatement process separate from what was found in this study. This one student's experience cannot be seen as representative of all students who are not reinstated. While the conversation with participants focused on the narrative provided and reviewed for reinstatement, this study did not evaluate any actual narrative. Student storytelling capability, amount of detail present in the appeal letter, or whether key aspects described in the findings were included in the letters could not be ascertained. The students interviewed for this research had already participated in the reinstatement process, and the administrators interviewed did not know who the student participants were and only spoke about their general approach to the reinstatement process. Although the researcher reached out to students who had gone through the reinstatement process in the past year, some time had elapsed from participating in the reinstatement process to the research interview. One student interviewed had already graduated. Recollection of the exact steps students took was not exact and some students even went back to old emails to reconstruct how the process went for them. Following students through the reinstatement process and

comparing their experiences directly to those of the administrators working with the students in the process may elicit different or more nuanced results.

Implications of the Study

Previous research on reinstatement from suspension decision-making processes primarily focused on objective student record data and found no conclusive evidence that no one, or combination of, student record data could predict future student success. This research provided a different perspective that situated student narrative more formally as a key aspect in reinstatement decisions. No previous research was found that discussed the importance of student narrative or considered how it should be analyzed for reinstatement, though most research acknowledged that appeal letters were included in their review. What this research attempts to provide is a more systematic approach to formally assessing student narrative in the reinstatement process through the narrative theory framework. Academic suspension and return from suspension are deeply personal experiences that are impacted by any number of factors in students' lives. Those experiences and how students make meaning of them, therefore, should guide the reinstatement process.

Academic advising as a profession is guided by many different theories largely based in the social sciences, though the work itself is inherently relational and based on student-advisor dialogue. Aspects of narrative theory are present in the different social science theories but being able to view advising processes through the lens of narrative theory provides a more nuanced understanding of student experiences, how they are making meaning of those experiences, and how advisors use their own experiences to counsel their students. As this research discovered, student stories, and how they tell them, are important to the academic process. When working from a narrative theory lens, advisors can act as co-narrators in those stories by leading students

through the self-reflection processes that help them make meaning of their experiences, as well as helping them navigate a process for which many are not set up to succeed. As every student story will be different, the assistance students receive would be fairer and more equitable where all stories are valued.

As changing demographics and a global pandemic impact future higher education enrollment, institutions may be inclined to help previously enrolled students return to complete their degree programs. In doing so, institutions may seek ways to ease the process, for both students and administrators, in addition to being more cognizant and respectful of diverse life experiences as they are told through student stories. Each student's experience will be different, but the experiences of students before them will certainly impact how administrators view success. Being aware of different student stories and experiences through student narrative will ultimately help expand that view of success.

Recommendations for Action

Based on the themes identified from the participant interviews and the findings of this study as they align with the research questions, the researcher makes the following recommendations for action:

Research Question 1: How does student narrative impact student success in the reinstatement from suspension process?

- Connect students with their academic advisor at the beginning of the reinstatement process to help them navigate the process and understand how best to tell their story.
- Make sure students understand the importance of their narrative in the reinstatement decision-making process.

- Provide students access to their own academic records so that they can address what happened and when regarding their academic suspension.

- Ensure students respond to all prompts provided, especially what has changed and how students plan to be successful moving forward.

- Present upfront what administrators will be looking for in the appeal letter so that students can decide and take ownership of what details to include in their narrative.

Research Question 2: How can information from the student narrative be included to help analyze and predict student success?

- Make more consistent the reinstatement across colleges to eliminate confusion about the process.

- Simplify reinstatement for students by first connecting them with their academic advisor, who can guide them through the rest of the process.

- Utilize student narrative to develop a support plan for students upon return, that is communicated both to the student and their academic advisor, with expectations about how the plan will be executed or assessed.

- Follow up with the student regularly during the first term post-reinstatement, to ensure student is utilizing support plan and making successful progress through their course(s).

The researcher also recommends administrators use a common rubric based on the logic of good reasons to guide their reinstatement decisions. After considering the previous research on reinstatement, and lack of any formal procedure for reviewing student narrative as part of the decision-making process, the researcher contends that a rubric based on the logic of good reasons

would help level the playing field for students attempting to be reinstated. A draft rubric

developed by the findings in this research is presented below but has not been piloted. The

researcher recommends initial piloting with this rubric among administrators as an aid in

decision-making. A cut-off score would need to be determined. With a maximum of 20 points

assigned, perhaps a minimum of 15 points would be required for reinstatement, where a student

would need to meet the requirements for at least half of the specified components. If the rubric

proves to be helpful to assess student narrative more formally in the reinstatement decision-

making process, leveling the playing field for students, then the researcher recommends

developing or modifying the rubric to be shared with students going through the reinstatement

process so they know how their narrative will be assessed.

Figure 2

Rubric for Analyzing Student Narrative in the Reinstatement from Suspension Process

Rubric Component	Does not meet requirements (0)	Meets some requirements, but not all (1)	Meets Requirements (2)	Score
Fact	Narrative does not match up with student record	Narrative mostly matches what is in student record, but some gaps or misalignment may be present	Narrative matches what is in the student record	
	Student does not acknowledge or accept responsibility for what led to their suspension	Student acknowledges what led to their suspension but does not accept full responsibility for their part in it	Student acknowledges and accepts responsibility for what led to their suspension	
	Student has not made changes since being suspended	Student has made some changes, but unaddressed issues still exist	Student has made changes since being suspended and issues leading to initial suspension have been addressed	

	Student does not acknowledge any gaps or misalignment of narrative with student record	Student acknowledges gaps/misalignment with student record but does not explain them	Student acknowledges and explains any gaps or misalignment with student record	
Relevance	Student narrative does not address potential for future academic success or resolution of personal struggles	Student narrative addresses resolution of personal struggles but not potential of future academic success	Student narrative addresses resolution of personal struggles and describes potential for future academic success	
Consequence	Student does not address what is needed to be academically successful	Student may understand what is needed, but does not describe how it will lead them to academic success	Student describes what is needed to be academically successful	
	Student does not provide a descriptive or reasonable plan for success	Student provides a plan, but it is not descriptive or does not seem reasonable for success	Student provides a descriptive and reasonable plan for success	
Consistency	Student's plan does not align with what has been successful for other students in the past	Aspects of, but not all, of the student's plan aligns with what has been successful for other students in the past	Student's plan aligns with what has been successful for other students in the past	
Transcendent Issue	Student narrative does not elicit hope or possibility for success upon reinstatement	Student narrative elicits hope for success, but the possibility of success is unclear	Student narrative elicits both hope and possibility for success upon reinstatement	
	Student does not express any values of the institution or how they align with academic success	Student expresses some values of the institution, but does not align them with academic success	Student expresses values of the institution and aligns them with academic success	

Note. A one-page version of the rubric can be found in Appendix H.

Recommendations for Further Study

Previous research has expounded upon the importance of narrative theory in academic advising but further research on its practical application across advising functions should continue to be explored. This research highlighted direct application of narrative theory in a critical process for students that could impact whether they successfully complete an academic

degree program. Other critical stages or aspects of one's academic career – admission, program declaration, academic standing, scholarships, and financial aid – are key intersections where student narrative is collected and used, but perhaps not formally analyzed. Institutions of higher education have a lot to learn from the student narrative they collect through these processes. Where demographic data is collected and analyzed to describe a student population, collected student narratives can provide a more nuanced understanding of that population and its intersections.

Where administrators use past student experience to inform decisions on potential future success, more analysis on the quality of reinstatement decisions and subsequent success of reinstated students should be further studied. For example, analysis of the rubric developed through this research should consider ease of use, whether it supports student success in the reinstatement process, and if, through the use of this tool, future student success can be predicted should be investigated. The researcher is also interested to learn whether providing the same or similar rubric to students at the beginning of the reinstatement process could help students feel better about participating in a process that is deeply personal and could have significant implications for future success in their lives.

Finally, because enrollment in institutions of higher education is a national concern as well as a desire to decrease the number of people with some college and no degree, this researcher would like to see more nationally-oriented studies on reinstatement to determine if reinstatement itself is a barrier for students to return and whether formal acknowledgement and assessment of student narrative can help institutions learn more about their students in order to support their continued success.

Conclusion

This interpretive hermeneutic phenomenological study explored the importance of student narrative in the reinstatement from suspension process and the role narrative theory can play in its analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with two groups of participants, students and administrators, to gather data about their experiences with the reinstatement process at one mid-sized, Midwestern, public, 4-year institution. The data collected informed emergent themes clearly answering the research question one how student narrative impacts student success in the reinstatement from suspension process. Though less clear, several themes derived from the interviews provide insight into how student narrative could help analyze and predict future student success. The findings from this research indicate that the narrative theory framework can be used to analyze student narrative and a rubric was thus developed as a sample. Future research will be needed to test such a rubric and determine if the recommended actions impact student experience and success in the reinstatement process.

The results of this research take one step in the direction of understanding practical applications of the narrative theory framework in academic advising. The researcher is encouraged by the findings of this study that the framework of narrative theory can be applied to other aspects of advising that will help institutions learn more about their students than what they know from academic records. Academic advisors already know that our students are more than just numbers, as are represented in retention, persistence, continuous enrollment, and graduation data. But the stories behind those numbers have proven elusive and anecdotal. Narrative theory acknowledges the importance of student narrative and provides a framework for analysis. More systematic collection and analysis of student narrative through this lens could provide institutions

a more nuanced understanding of their students and how they can best support their academic

success.

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APPENDIX A: STUDENT SURVEY QUESTIONS

The main purpose of this survey is to recruit students to participate in one-on-one interviews to discuss their experience with the reinstatement from suspension process at Metropolitan State University. A secondary purpose is to gain some initial feedback from students about their experience with the reinstatement and their perceptions of the role their narrative played in the decision-making process. The information collected will be used to fulfill the requirements for doctoral program at MSU Moorhead.

Gender: (Please choose one)
___ Male
___ Female
___ Non-binary/Third gender
___ Prefer not to say

Race: (Please choose all that apply)
___ Native American or Alaskan Native
___ White
___ Black
___ LatinX
___ Asian
___ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
___ Unknown
___ Other

For how long have you pursuing your undergraduate degree?
___ 1-3 years
___ 4-6 years
___ 7 or more years

Have you declared a major program?
___ Yes
___ No
If yes, what major program are you pursuing?
Text box

During what term were you initially placed on suspension? (select the term and enter the year)
___ Fall (Year)
___ Spring (Year)
___ Summer (Year)

During which term did you seek reinstatement? (select the term and enter the year)
___ Fall (Year)
___ Spring (Year)
___ Summer (Year)

Were you aware of the process you needed to complete to be considered for reinstatement?
___ Yes
___ No

How important did you think it was to discuss: (Not at all important, Slightly important, Moderately important, Very important, Extremely important) – Should I just do four and end with very important?

      1) **what led to your initial suspension**

      2) **what you have been doing since your suspension**

      3) **changes that have happened since you were suspended**

      4) **why you think you can be successful when you return**

      5) **support you have in place or will need in order to be successful academically when you return**

      6) **your motivation for returning to your academic program**

      7) **your goals for completing your academic program**

What do you perceive are the factors considered by administrators when making reinstatement decisions? (same Likert scale as above question)

1) **Past GPA**

2) **Your description of what led to your suspension**

3) **Your description of what changes have been made since your suspension**

4) **Your description of what support you need going forward to be successful**

5) **Your statement of your academic goals**

6) **Your statement of your motivation to return and be successful**

7) **Coursework you completed elsewhere while suspended**

8) **Total number of credits you have already completed**

9) **Your major program**

10) **The number of credits you have remaining to complete your degree**

11) **Other**

Did you meet or speak with an academic standing representative regarding your appeal for reinstatement?
___ Yes
___ No

Were you reinstated?
___ Yes
___ No

Would you be willing to complete an interview with the researcher to further discuss your experience in the reinstatement from suspension process?
___ Yes
___ No
If yes, please provide your name and preferred email and phone number at which you can be reached
Text box

APPENDIX B: STUDENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Protocol: Role of Narrative Theory in the Reinstatement from Suspension Process

Date of Interview:

Time of Interview:

Location of Interview:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of Interviewee:

Description of Project: This interpretive hermeneutic phenomenological qualitative study will explore the role of narrative theory in the reinstatement from suspension appeal process at Metropolitan State University.

Questions:

1) **When and how did you learn about the process to appeal for reinstatement?**

2) **When you completed your appeal for reinstatement, what was your perception of what you needed to write in your appeal letter?**

3) **What do you believe are the factors considered by administrators when making reinstatement decisions?**

4) **Did you speak with someone about the appeal process? If yes, then who?**

5) **During that conversation, did you discuss information you had not included in your written appeal? Why or why not?**

6) **Did you think the conversation was helpful to your appeal process? Why or why not?**

7) **How have you been doing academically since being reinstated?**

8) **Do you feel the information you discussed in your written appeal and/or interview has impacted the support you (have) received from your advisor or college?**

9) **In retrospect, do you think you would have included other information in your written appeal, since you have now been through the process? If so, what other information do you think you would have included?**

APPENDIX C: ADMINISTRATOR SURVEY QUESTIONS

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey about your perceptions of factors important in making reinstatement from suspension decisions. Your completed survey will be anonymous and no identifying information will be tied to any responses. Please answer the questions as openly and as honestly as you can. By submitting this questionnaire, you are giving consent to use these results in further research. The results of this survey will be analyzed as part of dissertation research toward the Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership program through Minnesota State University Moorhead. The purpose of this research is to explore the role of narrative theory in the reinstatement from suspension process. The survey should take no more than 15 minutes to complete.

Gender: (Please choose one)
___ Male
___ Female
___ Transgender or Gender non-conforming
___ Do not wish not to answer

Race: (Please choose all that apply)
___ Native American or Alaskan Native
___ White
___ Black
___ LatinX
___ Two or more races
___ Asian
___ Unknown
___ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
___ Other
What position do you hold at Metropolitan State University?
Text box

How many years have you worked at Metropolitan State University in your current role?
Text box
How many years have you served as an academic standing representative or Dean for your College or School?
___ 1-2 years
___ 3-5 years
___ 5 or more years

Are you the primary person who reviews requests for reinstatement in you College?
___ Yes
___ No

Who all is involved in the review process?

Text box

In your role reviewing requests for reinstatement, do you:
___ Recommend decisions on student requests
___ Make decisions on student requests

On average, about how many requests for reinstatement to you receive and review each term?

___ 1-4 appeals
___ 5-8 appeals
___ 9 or more appeals

What do you require to consider a student's request for reinstatement? (select all that apply)
___ Written appeal
___ Interview with student (in person or over the phone)
___ Academic Success Workshop
___ Student Degree Audit Report
___ Student transcript(s) of courses taken elsewhere while on suspension
___ Other _____

When reviewing a student's request for reinstatement, what information do you consider important in your review? (Likert Scael: Not at all important, Slightly important, Moderately important, Very important, Extremely important)

1) **Student's past GPA**

2) **Student's last term of attendance**

3) **Student's description of what led to their suspension**

4) **Student's description of what changes have been made since their suspension**

5) **Student's description of what support they need going forward to be successful**

6) **Student's statement of their academic goals**

7) **Student's statement of their motivation to return and be successful**

8) **Coursework completed elsewhere while suspended**

9) **Total number of credits student has already completed**

10) **Student's major program**

11) **The number of credits student has remaining to complete their degree**

12) **Other**

Please rate the following information in order of importance 1 to 11, with 1 being the highest, when reviewing a student's request for reinstatement:

_____ **Student's past GPA**

_____ **Student's last term of attendance**

_____ **Student's description of what led to their suspension**

_____ **Student's description of what changes have been made since their suspension**

_____ **Student's description of what support they may need going forward to be successful**

_____ **Student's statement of their academic goals**

_____ **Student's statement of their motivation to return and be successful**

_____ **Coursework student completed elsewhere while suspended**

_____ **Number of credits completed**

_____ **Student's major program**

_____ **Number of credits remaining to degree completion**

_____ **Other**

APPENDIX D: ADMINISTRATOR INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol: Role of Narrative Theory in the Reinstatement from Suspension Process

Date of Interview:

Time of Interview:

Location of Interview:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of Interviewee:

Description of Project: This interpretive hermeneutic phenomenological qualitative study will explore the role of narrative theory in the reinstatement from suspension appeal process at Metropolitan State University.
Questions:

1) **How long have you served as an academic standing representative or Dean for your College or School?**

2) **Are you the primary person who reviews requests for reinstatement in you College?**

3) **Who all is involved in the review process?**

4) **In your role reviewing requests for reinstatement, do you recommend or make decisions on student requests?**

5) **On average, about how many requests for reinstatement to you receive and review each term?**

6) **What forms or information do you require to consider a student's request for reinstatement?**

7) **When reviewing a student's request for reinstatement, what information do you consider most important in your review?**

8) **When you receive a student's request for reinstatement, what do you look for, or hope to hear, in their written appeal?**

9) **When reading the student's narrative, what kinds of questions are you thinking about?**

10) **If you have a follow-up interview with the student after receiving the written appeal, how does the written appeal for reinstatement inform the follow-up interview you have with the student?**

11) **During the follow-up interview, what are you hoping to hear from the student?**

12) **Based on what you have learned from the student through the written appeal for reinstatement and the follow-up interview (if you have one), on what do you base your decision/recommendation for reinstatement?**

Statement of Thanks: Thank you for participating I this interview. Your responses and identity will remain confidential. Any findings will be anonymized for publication.

APPENDIX E: INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

"The Role of Narrative Theory in the Reinstatement from Suspension Process"

Dear Participant,

The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You should be aware that you are free to decide note to participate or withdraw at any time without affecting your relationships with me, the Academic Standing Committee, or with Metropolitan State University.

The purpose of this study is to explore the role of narrative theory in the reinstatement from suspension process. This interpretive hermeneutic phenomenological qualitative research design will incorporate survey data and interviews with students who recently appealed for reinstatement and interviews with academic standing representatives that focus on the process of reading, understanding, reviewing, and interpreting the student narrative provided during the appeal process.

Data collection will occur roughly from June 01, to October 15, 2021. Data collection will be gathered at different points, including an electronic survey sent to students, follow-up interviews with students who identified through the survey, and surveys to and interviews with academic standing representatives at Metropolitan State University. Individuals involved in the data collection will include the students and academic standing representations who participated in the reinstatement process.

Please do not hesitate to ask any questions about the study prior to or while participating. I am happy to share the findings with you after the research is complete. The information collected will be used to fulfill the requirements for doctoral program at MSU Moorhead. Your name will not be associated with the research findings in any way, and findings will not be published or publicly presented.

Any information obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will not be disclosed. To keep your personal information confidential, you may use a pseudonym if desired. To help protect your confidentiality: (1) storage of data and notes will be kept in a secure location accessible only to the researcher; (2) purging of all personally identifiable information from transcripts and research reports. This project will involve making an audio recording of your interview conversation. The digital audio recording, accompanying notes, and transcriptions will be kept on a password-protected computer. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue or refuse a follow-up interview at any time.

There are no known risks and/or discomforts associated with this study. The expected benefits associated with your participation are the information about your experience informing the reinstatement from suspension process through intentional utilization of narrative theory, as well as the opportunity to participate in a qualitative study.

Please get in touch with me at any time with questions about this study. You may contact me, Angela Bowlus, at angela.bowlus@metrostate.edu or 612-659-7275.

Acceptance to Participate: *Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above, and you have given consent to participate. You may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty after signing this form.*

Signature of Participant	**Date**

Signature of Researcher	**Date**

Thank you for your time and consideration.

With gratitude,

Angela Bowlus, Student
Minnesota State University Moorhead
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership Program

APPENDIX F: STUDENT INTERVIEWS CODEBOOK

Theme	Codebook	Topic
Communication	1	Connecting with Advisor
Communication	1a	Advisor guidance on the reinstatement process or written appeal
Communication	2	Confusion of process
Communication	2a	Complexity of process
Communication	3	Communication about process
	4	Immediate appeal process
Compelling Story	5	Perception of what was needed in the letter
Compelling Story	6	Factors considered by administrators
	7	barriers to success
	8	Changes made
Support for Future Success	9	What was written in appeal impacted support received
	10	Goals/Motivations
Vulnerability	11	Vulnerability of process/Difficult to discuss
	12	Success Plan
Vulnerability	13	Self-reflection
Support for Future Success	14	Recommended changes for process
Communication	15	Interview Process

APPENDIX G: ADMINISTRATOR INTERVIEWS CODEBOOK

Theme	Code	Topic
Narrative Rationality	1	Congruency
Decision-Making	2	Second Chance(s)/Benefit of the doubt
Locus of Control	3	Values education/Prioritizes school
Locus of Control	4	Takes responsibility/Locus of Control
Locus of Control	5	Flexibility (not used)
Decision-Making	6	Every student different/unique situation
Process	7	Timeline to complete process
Process	8	Process of review
Process	8.1	Consistency of process
Process	9	Process post-reinstatement
Process	10	Items included in review
Decision-Making	11	Importance of appeal letter/supporting documentation/narrative
Support	12	Success support (College)
Process	13	Advisor involvement
Locus of Control	14	Student taking initiative
Decision-Making	15	Most important in review/decision making
Locus of Control	16	Extenuating circumstances resolved
Locus of Control	17	Changes made
Locus of Control	18	Success plan/Goals/Motivations (Student)
Locus of Control	19	Self-reflection
Decision-Making	20	What's most important to 'hear' in the appeal letter
Decision-Making	21	Why would deny a student's appeal
Narrative Rationality	22	Realistic/Reasonable/Relatable
Process	23	Interview
Process	24	Academic record (transcript, degree audit)
Process	25	Student understands process/what administrators are looking for
Narrative Rationality	26	Subjectivity - Different points of view/Prejudice/Bias; Interpretations/Assumptions
Narrative Rationality	27	Fidelity - factual/accurate

APPENDIX H: REINSTATEMENT RUBRIC

Rubric Component	Does not meet requirements (0)	Meets some requirements, but not all (1)	Meets Requirements (2)	Score
Fact	Narrative does not match up with student record	Narrative mostly matches what is in student record, but some gaps or misalignment may be present	Narrative matches what is in the student record	
Fact	Student does not acknowledge or accept responsibility for what led to their suspension	Student acknowledges what led to their suspension but does not accept full responsibility for their part in it	Student acknowledges and accepts responsibility for what led to their suspension	
Fact	Student has not made changes since being suspended	Student has made some changes, but unaddressed issues still exist	Student has made changes since being suspended and issues leading to initial suspension have been addressed	
Relevance	Student does not acknowledge any gaps or misalignment of narrative with student record	Student acknowledges gaps/misalignment with student record but does not explain them	Student acknowledges and explains any gaps or misalignment with student record	
Relevance	Student narrative does not address potential for future academic success or resolution of personal struggles	Student narrative addresses resolution of personal struggles but not potential of future academic success	Student narrative addresses resolution of personal struggles and describes potential for future academic success	
Consequence	Student does not address what is needed to be academically successful	Student may understand what is needed, but does not describe how it will lead them to academic success	Student describes what is needed to be academically successful	
Consequence	Student does not provide a descriptive or reasonable plan for success	Student provides a plan, but it is not descriptive or does not seem reasonable for success	Student provides a descriptive and reasonable plan for success	
Consistency	Students plan does not align with what has been successful for other students in the past	Aspects of, but not all, of the students plan aligns with what has been successful for other students in the past	Students plan aligns with what has been successful for other students in the past	
Transcendent Issue	Student narrative does not elicit hope or possibility for success upon reinstatement	Student narrative elicits hope for success, but the possibility of success is unclear	Student narrative elicits both hope and possibility for success upon reinstatement	
Transcendent Issue	Student does not express any values of the institution or how they align with academic success	Student expresses some values of the institution, but does not align them with academic success	Student expresses values of the institution and aligns them with academic success	