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Retaining First-Generation College Students: Faculty and Staff Perceptions

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Retaining First-Generation College Students: Faculty & Staff Perceptions

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25th Annual Student Academic Conference

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Irony, I presented at the 2nd Student Academic Conference in 2000 as an undergraduate





This image:

Two side to a coin.

When we look at education in higher education – there are two sides to the learning experience: teaching and learning; to understand phenomena in higher education we have to look at the students' POV and the faculty/staff's POV.

Research supports the importance of Faculty-Student Interactions!

University faculty were one of the most important variables for students' sense of belonging (Means and Pyne (2017)

It was found that the “perceived worth of interactions with faculty outside the classroom is the single strongest predictor of student voluntary departure” (Tinot, 1987, p. 10).

Other studies substantiate the importance of faculty interactions in which they found student-faculty relationships improved persistence for students, in particular, FGCS and an increase of confidence (Cushman, 2007; Hardy & Aruguete, 2013; Ishitani, 2006; Kuh & Hu, 2001; Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005; Longwell-Grice, 2016).

What do these interactions look like?

faculty-student interactions include offering support sessions, one-on-one conversations, inviting student to attend office hours, and academic advising impact student engagement and satisfaction (Kuh

& Hu, 2001; Means & Pyne, 2017; Swecker et al., 2013).

Swecker et al. (2013) student persistence was significantly related to the number of advising meetings with faculty. The data showed that “for every meeting with an academic advisor, the odds that a student will be retained increased by 13%” (p. 46).

Retention Research

52% of college students
are first in their family to
complete college

(Miller et al., 2014).

FGCS have higher
attrition rates than CGCS

(e.g., Azmita et al., 2018;
Covarrubias, Romero, Trivelli,
2014; Engle & Tinto, 2008;
Schwartz, et al., 2018; Simmons
et al., 2017).

FGCS are four times more
likely to drop out as
compared to CGCS

(Engle and Tinto, 2008).

Graduation rate was
27.4% for FGCS as
compared to CGCS at
42.1%

(DeAngelo et al., 2011).

FGCS are twice as likely to
leave college without
earning a degree

(Schwartz et al., 2018).

Knowing the impact of faculty-staff interactions on retention – we need to look at statistics of the retention of FGCS.

FGCS have been one of several targeted groups by the United State Department of Education, in addition to low-income individuals and individuals with disabilities (United States Department of Education, 2022b). Since 1964, the federal government has recognized the support needs to access higher education of FGCS through grant-based TRIO programs.

TRIO programs consist of student support programs that include academic advising or counseling services, personal counseling, career workshops, support on financial assistance, tutoring, mentoring, and basic skills instruction (United States Department of Education, 2008).

While the TRIO program's footprint can be found in nearly 3,000 institutions in all 50 states, not all FGCS has access to TRIO services that may need the additional supports to experience full integration at the institution (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022c). With many two- and four-year institutions operating without TRIO programs to support FGCS, colleges and universities approach advising and support services differently, often using faculty to provide academic advising.

Tinto's model of Institutional Departure



Background Experiences
Prior Schooling
Skills & Abilities
Goals
Intentions
Institutional Commitment
External Commitments

Academic Systems

- Academic Performance
- Faculty/Staff Interactions

Social Systems

- Extracurricular Activities
- Peer Group Interactions



Retention
Persistence
Graduation

Problem Statement

With many two- and four-year institutions operating without TRIO programs, institutions approach advising and support services differently, often using faculty to provide academic advising.



The “perceived worth of interactions with faculty outside the classroom is the single strongest predictor of student voluntary departure”
(Tinto, 1987, p. 10).



Further research noted that faculty-student interactions which included one-on-one conversations, attending office hours, and academic advising, impacted student engagement and satisfaction

(Kuh & Hu, 2001; Means & Pyne, 2017; Swecker et al., 2013).



There is a need for faculty and staff voices to be collected regarding their perceptions of the effectiveness of the support systems used to promote retention for FGCS.

Research Questions



RQ1: What are the perceptions of faculty and staff of a two-year institution regarding the effectiveness of support systems that promote retention for first-generation college students?



RQ2: How do the perceptions differ between faculty and staff regarding the support systems for first-generation college students?

Research Sample

Place

- Two-year community college
- Southern Minnesota

Time

- Online Questionnaire available from 9/12/22-10/10/22
- Interviews were conducted via Zoom from 9/27/22 to 10/26/22

Participants

- Twenty-three ($n = 23$) faculty and staff consented and completed the online questionnaire
- Eight ($n = 8$) faculty and staff consented to participate in the interviews

Conducted two phases – first, an online questionnaire and then interviews.

Retention Themes

1. Institutional Commitment,
2. Academic Integration,
3. Social Integration,
4. Degree Commitment,
5. Academic Conscientiousness,
6. Financial Strain, and
7. Support Services Satisfaction

Online Questionnaire focus on the 7 themes

1. Institutional Commitment is defined by Davidson et al. (2009) as the “extent to which students are confident in and satisfied with their selection of a college or university” (p. 374).
2. Academic Integration is defined as a student’s “grade performance and intellectual development” (Aljohani, 2016, p. 6) including student-faculty interactions regarding course content, quality and satisfaction of instruction, access to tutoring, and interest in course options (Davidson et al., 2015; Katrevich & Aruguete, 2017).
3. Social Integration is defined as a student’s “interaction with college society” (Aljohani, 2016, p. 6) including the influence of peers on personal and intellectual growth, establishing a sense of connectedness with peers, faculty, and staff, and satisfaction with one’s social life (Davidson et al., 2015; Katrevich & Aruguete, 2017).

4. Degree Commitment is defined by Davidson et al. (2009) as a student's intention, certainty, and commitment to complete their degree.
5. Academic Conscientiousness is defined by Davidson et al. (2009) as a student's diligence in completing course work.
6. Financial Strain is defined by Davidson et al. (2015) as difficulty handling costs associated with attending college including purchasing course materials, meeting personal needs, and reducing course load due to costs in addition to tuition and fees.
7. Support Service Satisfaction is defined by Davidson et al. (2015) as overall satisfaction with academic advising including the ease of obtaining answers regarding education questions and the effectiveness of communicating important information.

Asked faculty and staff about the perceived impact of each theme on FGCS retention and their perceived preparedness to advise FGCS on each theme

The results from the online questionnaire informed how the interview protocol questions were worded; questions on the interview protocol were written to allow participants to describe their experiences working with support systems for FGCS around ideas that emerged from the online questionnaire

Online Questionnaire Key Findings



Faculty and staff perceived the following as having **significant impact on retention of FGCS**:

- Academic Integration
- Academic Conscientiousness
- Support Service Satisfaction
- Financial Strain

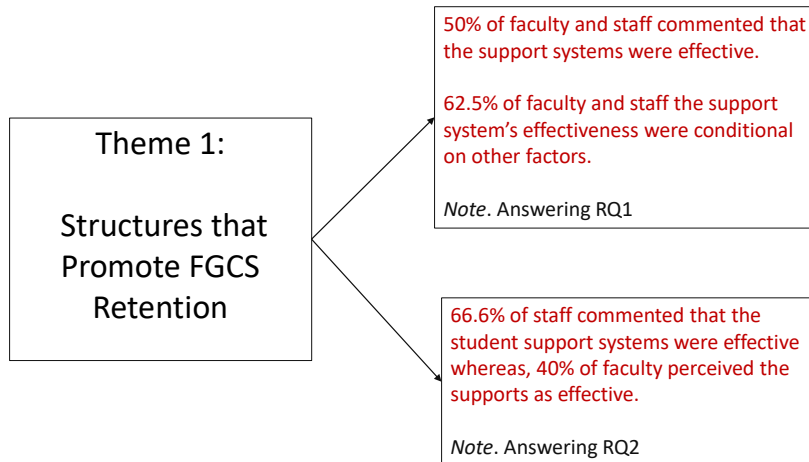
Faculty and staff perceived themselves as **slightly prepared to advise FGCS** on topics related to:

- Financial Strain

Note. Based on a 5-point Likert Scale regarding impact (i.e., No/Slight/Moderate/Significant/Extreme Impact)

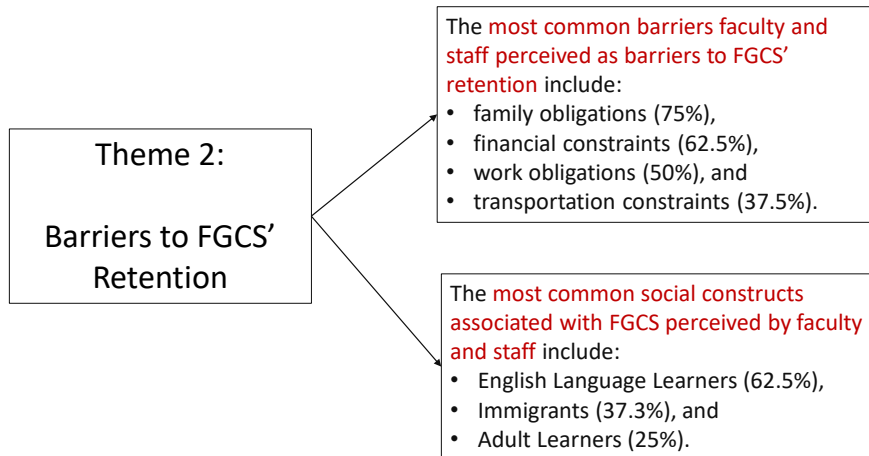
Note. Based on a 5-point Likert Scale regarding preparedness (i.e., Not at all/Slightly/Moderately/Very/Extremely Prepared)

Interview Key Findings



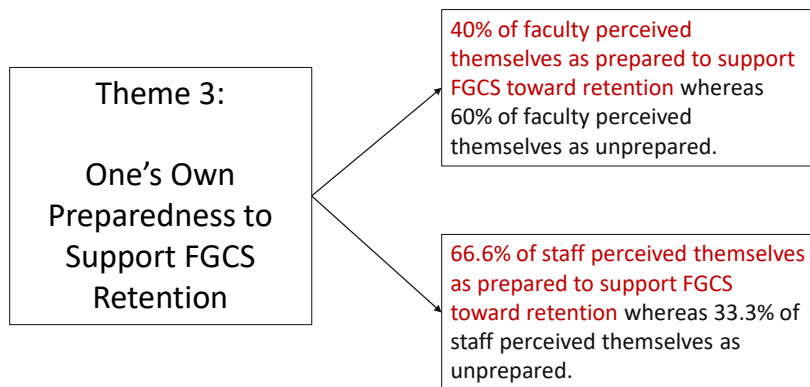
Perceived effectiveness of support systems at the institution

Interview Key Findings



Barriers to retention

Interview Key Findings



Perceived preparedness to advise

Recommendations



Interpretation of Findings	Recommendations
<p>There is a difference in perception between faculty and staff regarding the effectiveness of support systems for FGCS at the institution.</p>	<p>Further research is needed regarding the degree of effectiveness.</p>
<p>Faculty and staff perceive themselves as reasonably prepared to advise and support FGCS. However, faculty do not perceive themselves as prepared as staff.</p>	<p>The research site examine the professional development opportunities available to faculty.</p> <p>Professional development can be differentiated between faculty and staff because faculty are likely trained in the content areas in which they provide instruction.</p>
<p>Faculty-student interactions can influence student decisions to persist.</p>	<p>It is important that faculty be trained on the factors that lead to retention of FGCS and the support systems currently in place to support FGCS.</p> <p>The research site administration communicate the purpose, goals, outcomes, and impact of support systems in place for FGCS with faculty and staff.</p>

What's Next?

Further study at the site

- What are the positive and negative impact of the support systems for FGCS?
- Developing differentiated professional develop for faculty and staff about the factors of retention of FGCS.
- Develop processes for faculty to collaborate with staff regarding factors of retention for FGCS.

Replicating the study at other institutions.

Using the model of Institutional Departure to explore teacher retention.

E.g., teacher mentoring process

Use the model of Institutional Departure to provide professional development to faculty new to teaching in higher education; how be student-ready colleges

Dissertation

Full dissertation can be found at <https://red.mnstate.edu/thesis/766/>

Citation:

Wolff, David Shawn, "How do faculty and staff perceive the effectiveness of student support systems that promote the retention of First-Generation College Students?" (2023). *Dissertations, Theses, and Projects*. 766.



Dr. David Wolff

Responsibilities

- Assistant Professor, Elementary Education Unified
- Advisor, Para-2-Teach Program

Education

- Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership, Minnesota State University-Moorhead
- Certificate in Gifted and Talented Instruction, St. Mary's University of Minnesota
- Specialist in Educational Leadership, Minnesota State University-Mankato
- Master of Education, MidAmerica Nazarene University
- Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education, Minnesota State University-Moorhead

Research Interests

- Preservice Teacher Development
- Teacher Professional Development
- Effective Pedagogy in Elementary Education Instruction
- Culturally Responsive Teaching Practices
- Gifted Education and Talent Development



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