5-2023

Goal Setting and Student Retention

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ABSTRACT

Student retention has been a problem with which higher education institutions must face. Institutions have employed numerous different programs and services to improve student retention. This study sought to open up a new way to improve student retention by utilizing a goal-setting intervention that focused on creating SMART goals for student areas of weaknesses. This study employed the use of a quasi-experimental interrupted time series to better understand how goal-setting interventions could impact the participant attitudes correlated to retention. It was shown that goal-setting interventions had no significant impact on likelihood of retention but did exhibit improvement in client engagement with coursework, which is a positive indicator of student retention. It was concluded that more research should be done on goal-setting and student retention to better understand the impact goal-setting has on student likelihood of retention.

Goal Setting and Student Retention

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the School Of Social Work

Abilene Christian University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science in Social Work

By

Hugh Castillo

May 2023

This thesis, directed and approved by the committee for the thesis candidate Hugh Castillo, has been accepted by the Office of Graduate Programs of Abilene Christian University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Master of Science in Social Work

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Assistant Provost for Residential Graduate Programs

Date

_____15 May 2023_____

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Dr. Rachel Slaymaker

To my Mom and Dad
and my brothers Michael and Joshua.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Increasing student retention can be a complex problem, as student retention is affected by numerous variables, including students' overall GPA, involvement with extracurricular activities, connection with school staff, and connection with peers, amongst many other variables. Goal-setting interventions have been shown to increase autonomy, improve decision-making skills, and increase overall performance in their selected fields. In this study, I utilized a goal-setting intervention corresponding to the client's weaknesses according to their Learning and Study Strategy Inventory (LASSI) as a means to improve student performance academically as well as socially to increase the likelihood of retention.

This was all done through a quasi-experimental study that employed the use of a goal-setting intervention and an attitudinal survey administered twice weekly. The attitudinal survey was employed to measure the four predictors of student retention discussed below to determine how setting goals can impact student retention.

Statement of Problem

Student retention has always been a problem for higher education institutions as student attrition has remained relatively stagnant, showing no improvements across the decades (Lang, 2001). It is of the utmost importance that universities address the issues of retention because without students, there is no university. An abundance of research has

been conducted on this topic to determine the best ways institutions can keep their students enrolled.

This research has revealed that there are four primary predictors of student retention. The first major predictor of student retention is how connected a student feels within their environment. This includes whether the student feels connected to peers within the institution (Fike & Fike, 2008; Melnyk et al., 2014; Pedler et al., 2022; Schudde, 2011).

The second major predictor of student retention is their overall engagement at the institution. This includes whether a student is involved in extracurricular activities, participating in institution-held events and actively engaging in class and their course work (Fiorini et al., 2014; Tight, 2020).

The third major predictor of student retention is student relationships with school faculty and staff. This includes whether a student feels connected with professors, academic advisors, counselors, or any of the institution's staff members (Alzen et al., 2021; Bai & Pan, 2009; Lee et al., 2009; Roberts, 2018).

The last major predictor of student retention is student success and drive. This includes a student's motivation level, whether a student has high self-efficacy, and whether the student is academically successful (Alarcon & Edwards, 2013; Barclay et al., 2018; Han et al., 2017; Morrow & Ackermann, 2012).

These four major predictors of student retention in higher education have been the main focal points on which institutions have centered their mission and purpose. As a result, institutions have focused more of their attention on creating learning programs like tutoring services and extracurricular activities as well as hosting events like freshman

orientations to create an environment where students can learn, connect with peers, and get to know university staff (Bean & Eaton, 2001). Some institutions are even going one step further by approaching student retention from a service-based industry approach, where student satisfaction is of the utmost importance (Gruber et al., 2010).

Despite all this research and effort implemented to improve student retention, overall student retention has remained relatively stagnant, showing only a 2% increase from 2009 to 2020 in full-time student retention (Gardner, 2022). This demonstrates student retention to be a complex problem for institutions as little improvement has been shown despite the overwhelming programs that have been implemented in universities solely to retain students.

Introduction to Topic

In my research, I took into account all four major predictors of student retention and completed a goal-setting intervention paired with academic coaching in hopes to improve student retention. The goal-setting intervention had a special focus on creating goals geared toward student retention factors like overall student belonging and connectedness as well as student motivation and self-efficacy. To measure the effectiveness of this goal-setting intervention, an attitudinal survey that measures student connectedness, engagement, relationships with staff and faculty, and motivation and self-efficacy was completed by the participants to evaluate the overall likelihood of retention. Upon completion of the survey, data was analyzed utilizing the pre and post-intervention results to determine whether a student is more likely to attend the same institution based on the factors that make up retention.

I researched how goal-setting interventions impact student attitudes toward their academics and how connected they feel within their institution. I completed research on this topic of goal setting in academic coaching to determine whether the goal-setting interventions increased student retention. To better grasp how effective goal-setting interventions in the context of academic coaching are, I implemented a quasi-experimental study utilizing an attitudinal survey administered twice a week to analyze student perceptions of the four student predictors of retention within their institution. My study aimed to expand on how goal-setting interventions can be an efficient method of increasing student retention.

Key Terms

The following definitions are used in this study:

- **Motivation:** Despite the numerous definitions of motivation, Merriam-Webster dictionary defines motivation as "something that arouses action or activity" (Merriam-Webster, 2023)

- **Goal-Setting Theory:** Goal-setting theory states that setting clear and concise goals improves an individual's productivity (Locke, 1968). Goal setting is associated with increased autonomy, efficiency, and overall effectiveness in completing tasks (Epton et al., 2017).

- **Student Retention:** Student retention is the rate of students who attend the same educational institution for the next academic year. Student retention is a significant problem in which institutions employ time, resources, and money to increase the likelihood of retention (Tinto, 1975).

- **Academic Coaching:** Academic coaching is usually a one-on-one session in which an academic coach and student will go over the student's areas of weakness academically and create a plan to help the student with their weaknesses (Alzen et al., 2021).

- **LASSI Assessment:** The Learning and Study Strategies Inventory (LASSI) assessment is a scale that measures a student's anxiety, attitude, concentration, information processing, motivation, selecting main ideas, self-testing, test strategies, time management, and using academic resources all regarding their academics (Robertson, 1994).

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

To guarantee that the research and articles found are relevant to this research, key questions were formed to clarify what my research will attempt to answer. This literature review will attempt to answer the following:

- How effective are goal setting interventions in improving student retention?

- How does goal-setting improve student motivation and self-efficacy?

Student retention is a vast topic with many variables and factors to it. Given that I focused on student retention through the lens of academic coaching and goal setting, it was important to find valuable research regarding how academic coaching and goal-setting can be employed to better serve students and improve retention. I only selected peer-reviewed articles published between 2000 and 2022 to ensure that the best and most modern research was used. The exception to this, however, was if the article is classical. The keywords utilized to find data for this literature review included "motivation," "goal setting theory," "student retention," "academic coaching," and "LASSI assessment."

Inclusion criteria employed in this literature review were (a) the studies discuss goal setting, academic coaching, and/or retention; (b) they were published in or after 2000 for relevancy unless they were classical in nature; and (c) each study was peer-reviewed to ensure the credibility of the research. Both quantitative and qualitative research was employed for this literature review. The databases employed were Google Scholar, Taylor & Francis, Science Direct, ERIC, and Sage Journals.

To best understand what exactly makes up student retention in higher education, it is first important to define student retention. Second, it is significant to examine the different programs in college created for student retention and the different factors that contribute to a student furthering their education.

How *Student Retention* Is Defined

Student retention has many different definitions and varies widely with each higher education institution. However, there is a one commonality in how it is defined: the act of a student completing their education at one particular college (Tinto, 2010).

Types of Programs to Address Student Retention

To ensure that students do not drop out of their institution, institutions fund many different programs that aid students in their journey to graduating. These different programs can include tutoring services, counseling, residential life, and student support services (SSS).

Tutoring services are often funded by institutions free of charge for students, as tutoring is associated with higher GPAs, higher course completion, and increased student retention. This is found to be the case due to students reporting that they feel more involved and engaged in their institution when they receive help from their tutors (Kuh et al., 2018; Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice, 2008; Soria & Stebleton, 2012; Steenbergen-Hu & Cooper, 2014).

Counseling is another prominent program created for student success and wellness often offered and funded by institutions. Counseling has been shown to have significant effects on student success including higher completion of coursework, higher

reported self-efficacy and motivation, and increased retention in students who participated in counseling (Choi, 2010). It is also important to note that mandatory counseling sessions have been shown to decrease depression and anxiety symptoms in students, which increased student overall success (Prosek et al., 2013).

The next program that is heavily utilized in institutions is residence life. Residence life is the program that facilitates life on campus for students. This includes staff in dorms, events in residential housing, and aiding students in adjusting and living in campus housing. Institutions that proficiently use their residential life have been shown to increase student retention and increase student overall wellness (Brooks, 2010; Johnson et al., 2016).

Student support services (SSS) is a program under TRIO, a federally funded program that provides three different services to help students succeed in higher education, that was created to help at-risk and disadvantaged students succeed in higher education. SSS offers students additional support through easy access to mental health resources, active mentors, additional financial aid, technological support, academic tutoring, and counseling amongst many other things. SSS has demonstrated remarkable benefits to institutions as SSS programs have increased student retention, student GPA, and student course completion in students who participate (Chaney et al., 1998; Grant-Vallone et al., 2003).

Factors Associated with Student Retention

There are four primary factors associated with student retention: student connectedness, engagement, relationship with staff and faculty, and self-efficacy and motivation. Students who are more engaged, connected with support systems, have good

relationships with staff, and have the motivation to graduate from college demonstrate high levels of retention compared to their counterparts who lack those traits (Han et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2009; Pedler et al., 2022; Tight, 2020).

Student connectedness measures how much a student is connected to their fellow peers, if they feel they fit into the institution's culture, and if they are supported by friends and family. When a student feels they are connected within their institution, they are much more likely to complete their courses, raise their GPA, and stay at the same institution (Dennis et al., 2005; Fike & Fike, 2008; Melnyk et al., 2014; Schudde, 2011).

Student engagement measures how much a student actively participates in the classroom, how much time a student actively spends on their coursework, and how much a student is involved in extracurricular activities and clubs. A student that demonstrates higher levels of engagement at their institution tends to show higher levels of belongingness and self-efficacy and is more likely to further their education (Kahu & Nelson, 2018; Kuh et al., 2008; Tight, 2020). It is also important to note that students that demonstrate low engagement have lower GPAs and are much more likely to drop out compared to their more engaged counterparts (Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice, 2008; Soria & Stebleton, 2012).

Another primary factor in student retention is student-faculty/staff relationships. Whereas connectedness measures student connectedness with peers, student relationship with staff and faculty measures how supported a student feels by professors and other staff in higher education. A student who feels connected and supported by university staff and faculty are shown to have increased autonomy, self-efficacy, and rates of course completion (Alzen et al., 2021; Ban & Pai, 2009; Lee et al., 2009; Roberts, 2018). Also,

the more staff and faculty actively engage with students, the higher the institution's retention rate is (Swecker et al., 2013).

Last, a student's motivation and self-efficacy are primary factors in how successful they will be. However, before motivation is talked about in regard to student retention, it is important to define and further talk about what motivation exactly is. Despite Merriam Dictionary's simplistic definition of motivation being "the reason or reasons one has for acting or behaving in a particular way," psychologists still argue over what exactly the definition of *motivation* entails (Kleinginna & Kleinginna, 1981; Merriam-Webster, 2023). Motivation was first majorly researched and developed by B.F. Skinner when he completed his infamous behaviorism studies, which demonstrated that motivation is created through positive and negative reinforcement, especially in younger and easily influenced populations (Skinner, 1938). Motivation was then further expanded upon by Abraham Maslow when he released the "Theory of Human Motivation*,*" which discussed all the motivations humans have come from the primal motivation to have food, water, and shelter and ultimately to achieve self-actualization (Maslow, 1943). From there, human motivation became more complex, as motivation was split into intrinsic and extrinsic desires while also maintaining that humans have basic primal motivations that constantly drive them in a certain direction (Harlow et al., 1950)

Motivation is a key factor in student retention because if a student is motivated to succeed and get their desired degree, they are more likely to stay. For this study, *motivation* is defined as the desire to pass classes, while *self-efficacy* is defined as the student's self-perceived ability to achieve their own academic goals. Motivation is significant in goal-setting interventions, as the essence of the intervention is to motivate

the individual to achieve the mutually agreed-upon goals (Locke & Latham, 1990). The higher a student's motivation and self-efficacy are, the more likely the student is to have a high GPA and ultimately graduate from their institution (Barclay et al., 2018; Friedman & Mandel, 2009; Garriott et al., 2015; Han et al., 2017, Vuong et al., 2010).

Goal Setting

To comprehend the importance and effectiveness of goal-setting, it is important to examine the history of goal-setting and how it is used in different practices with different individuals. It is also important to analyze why it works and the benefits goal setting has exhibited in recipients.

History

Goal setting was first proposed by Edwin Locke in 1968 when he published an article detailing the benefits goal setting can have on increasing motivation in the workplace (Locke, 1968). As goal setting was further developed and researched, it was found that goal-setting interventions can not only increase motivation in a client but also increase the client's likelihood of success and being able to achieve moderately difficult goals (Locke et al., 1981). It was not until 1990 when Edwin Locke and Gary Latham released their *Theory of Goal Setting and Task Performance* in which they revealed that creating clear, measurable, and challenging goals could push people to achieve high levels of productivity. This research opened the door to more research being conducted on the effectiveness of goal setting and how it can be employed in different settings and practices.

This research led to the discovery of a unique way of setting goals to increase productivity, motivation, and ability to achieve desired outcomes. This type of goal-

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setting was coined SMART goals as the premise of setting these types of goals was to create a specific, measurable, actionable, relevant, and time-bound goal to give recipient a clear direction in how they can achieve their goal (Doran, 1981).

Use in Practice

Due to the flexible nature of goal-setting interventions, goal setting can be employed in several different ways to improve client impact. The first and primary reason goal setting is employed in practice is to increase client motivation. Clients who participate in a goal-setting intervention tend to demonstrate higher levels of motivation than those who do not participate in goal setting (Locke & Latham, 2006). It is also important to understand that motivational interviewing (MI) has a heavy foundation in goal setting and MI shows significant increases in overall client motivation (Rollnick & Miller, 1995).

The second way goal setting is used is to increase client esteem, confidence, and overall autonomy. Individuals who underwent a goal-setting intervention demonstrated increased levels of confidence, esteem, and autonomy (Cheng & Chiou, 2010; Locke & Latham, 2006). These increased levels of self-confidence and autonomy were usually associated with the client's newfound motivation to create and achieve their personal goals (Khosla et al., 2020).

The third primary reason goal setting is utilized in practice is because of the increased client likelihood to be more successful. Individuals who created clear, measurable, and challenging goals were more likely to attain their goals and become more successful than their counterparts who did not create concise and challenging goals

(Vigoda-Gadot & Larisa, 2007). Goal setting helps push individuals to create and achieve goals which ultimately increases overall individual performance (Khosla et al., 2020).

Last, goal setting itself can be employed in a variety of different ways such as utilizing progress, performance, and outcome goals with a client or through the gamification of goals. The three progress, performance, and outcome goals can be employed to increase the likelihood of accomplishing difficult goals. This increases the likelihood of achievement as the three goals map out what the client has to do in order to achieve their ultimate goal (Locke & Latham, 2019; Swann et al., 2021). The gamification of goals has also been shown to increase the likelihood of accomplishment of desired goals as it makes the process more gratifying and pleasurable for the individual (Fortes-Tondello et al., 2018).

How It Works

Goal-setting interventions have been shown to be effective and efficient. This is because they trigger a behavior change, provide direction, and increase accountability for the client.

First and foremost, goal-setting interventions are beneficial because they trigger a behavior change which then triggers a motivational change in the client as well. Clients who participate in the goal-setting process and create their own unique goals show an increase in behavior change that is conducive to achieving their desired goals (Epton et al., 2017).

Goal-setting interventions also work because they provide clear directions for the client to work toward which allows them to manage and accomplish their goals. Clients who created meaningful and clear goals were much more likely to achieve their desired

life's mission as the goals provided a direction for the client to follow. The vice versa is true as well. When a client had a meaningful life mission or vision, they were more likely to create meaningful and clear goals to guide them (Masuda et al., 2010).

Last, goal setting works because it creates accountability which improves an individual's likelihood of accomplishing their goal. It is shown that individuals who actively participate in creating goals for themselves are more likely to achieve those goals compared to their counterparts who were not active in creating goals for themselves. This is due to their increased accountability to accomplish the goals (Karakowsky & Mann, 2008).

Additional Institutional Aid

Higher education institutions provide additional programs and settings to help students at risk of dropping out become more successful. These programs can include TRIO programs like Student Support Services (SSS).

TRIO

TRIO is a collection of three federally funded programs that provide services to educational institutions targeted toward at-risk students. These different services include Upward Bound, Talent Search, and Student Support Services (SSS).

Upward Bound is a program designed to aid high school students in transitioning to higher education and having the skills to be successful in higher education. The services Upward Bound provides are counseling, tutoring, mentoring, and other educational programs that can be beneficial toward high school student growth. Upward Bound has demonstrated benefits such as increasing the rate students apply for college

and increasing the rate students stay in college who have been in the program before (Coverdale, 2009).

Talent Search is also a program under TRIO that aids high school students in finding and being admitted into the college best suited for them. The different services Talent Search provides to students are mentoring, career exploration, tutoring services, and exposure to college campuses through trips. The Talent Search program has exhibited an increased likelihood for students to enroll in higher education institutions (Brewer & McMahan, 2005).

Student support services (SSS) is a program designed for at-risk college students to help them adjust and be successful in college. SSS offers an array of services including tutoring services, aid with finding scholarships, and help with transitioning into higher education such as graduate school (US Department of Education, 2022). The at-risk students include students that are first-generation, low-income, and disabled.

Student Support Services

As mentioned in the above section, SSS is a sub-section of TRIO, which was created for at-risk college students and designed to help them adjust to college life and be successful in their coursework. To better understand the benefits of SSS, it is important to examine the unique service SSS provides which is academic coaching.

Academic Coaching

Academic coaching is a beneficial program SSS employs to help improve students' overall success. Academic coaching usually takes place through one-on-one sessions in which an academic coach will help guide a student through their particular academic problems. The different problems an academic coach will address include

motivation, time management, study skills, anxiety associated with academics, using academic resources, and attitudes toward school. Students who undergo academic coaching demonstrate benefits like increased GPA, increased course completion, and higher motivation in regard to academic completion (Alzen et al., 2021; Canaan et al., 2022; Capstick et al., 2019; Pechac & Slantcheva-Durst, 2021). Next, it is important to understand that often times academic coaches will have students complete an evaluation survey to better understand student weaknesses and strengths. One such assessment is the Learning and Study Strategies Inventory Assessment (LASSI).

LASSI Assessment

The LASSI assessment is a survey that is often employed with academic coaching to determine the student's strengths and weaknesses. Once the academic coach knows the student's weaknesses based on their LASSI results, they can then target the student's areas of weakness (Weinstein, 1988). The different aspects of the LASSI assessment include anxiety, attitude, concentration, information processing, motivation, selecting main ideas, self-testing, test strategies, time management, and using academic resources. The LASSI assessment has shown great potential in helping students academically as practitioners or academic coaches can implement set interventions depending on the student's weaknesses (Robertson, 1994).

Conclusion of the Literature Review

Overall, based on the findings of this literature review, goal-setting interventions have been shown to typically benefit recipients of the intervention in increasing their motivation, productivity, and in accomplishing goals set forth. In the setting of academic coaching, goal-setting interventions are proven useful in benefiting clients in achieving

academic goals as well as benefiting recipients in their academic areas of weaknesses such as motivation, concentration, information processing, etc. Additionally, when students are successful in their academics and engaged with their coursework, they are more likely to continue attending their institution.

Some of the research gaps encountered in the literature review were how student retention is defined and the impacts of different programs in student retention. In addition, there are many definitions of student retention in universities and there are different approaches in handling student retention and improving it in higher education institutions.

According to the literature, there are many different approaches and programs implemented at universities to increase student retention. These different approaches and programs include using residential life, counseling and tutoring, and student support services. My research seeks to open a new route in retaining students by focusing on an easy and effective intervention any school faculty or professor can employ to help students succeed and finish their education. Goal setting has demonstrated significant effects in helping recipients be motivated, productive, and accomplish their goals.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to determine how effective goal-setting interventions are in improving student retention. In order to examine the goal-setting interventions impact on student retention, I conducted a single-system quasi experimental design focused on collecting attitudinal data of students.

Design

The study design was a single-system interrupted time series, which employed the use of an attitudinal survey to measure the impact a goal-setting intervention had on student retention. The survey seeks to measure a student's connectedness to peers, engagement with coursework, relationships with professors and staff, and motivation and self-efficacy, which are all significant in determining whether a student will return to their institution.

Goal-Setting Intervention

The goal-setting intervention consisted of a student creating three SMART goals with their academic coach that was associated with their Learning and Study Strategies Inventory (LASSI) assessment weaknesses and academic grades. The LASSI assessment was employed to determine what weaknesses the participant had and what areas the goal-setting intervention should focus on. After creating three SMART goals, the student placed their signature under their goals, stating they will work to the best of their ability to accomplish these three goals. This was done to ensure the student recognizes the

seriousness of accomplishing their goal and to create accountability on their end. The researcher was willing to take on a maximum of 40 clients to ensure each student is provided a chance to participate in the research, but only one student completed the pre-intervention survey, goal-setting intervention, and completed the post-intervention data.

Survey

The 17-question Likert attitudinal scale that was employed with this study measured the student's connectedness with peers, their engagement within the university, relationships with staff and faculty, and lastly, measured overall self-efficacy and motivation. The goal-setting intervention was employed alongside academic coaching sessions. To effectively measure the impact a goal-setting intervention will have on a student, the research employed a time-interrupted series with pre-intervention and post-intervention results.

Population

The population and sample were students who were involved and participating in the TRIO program. In particular, students below a 3.0 GPA and in academic coaching within TRIO are selected to participate in this study. These students included first-generation, low-income, and/or disabled college students. The participants in this population range from 18–60 years old.

Human Subjects Protections

In order to ensure the protection of human subjects, this research was presented to and approved by the ACU IRB as an expedited study (See Appendix A). I also got approval from my place of employment to conduct this research in the TRIO setting (See Appendix B). The researcher employed the use of a numbers system to keep

confidentiality safe. This number system includes the use of a separate Excel spreadsheet in which the participant was put into excel with only their gender, ethnicity, and race being kept. The student did not provide the researcher with any identifying information asides from their email addresses, gender, ethnicity, and race when they complete the attitudinal survey. Upon completion of the survey, the researcher collected data from the third-party site (Google Forms) and saved it onto a USB flash drive. A number system was then utilized to keep track of specific client data like gender, ethnicity, and race without including explicit identifying information. Once the data were collected, all client identifiers was deleted from Google Forms.

Instrumentation

The attitudinal scale I created for this study is based on the four primary predictors of student retention, which are student connectedness with peers, student engagement within an institution such as involvement in extracurricular activities and coursework, student relationships with staff and faculty, and overall student self-efficacy and motivation. There are 17 total questions on the survey, which employed a Likert seven-point format. Each of the four primary predictors of student retention has four questions. The last question is a direct question asking the participant how likely they are to return next year. The last question will not be used in analyzing data.

Procedures

The study followed a typical interrupted time series. This participant filled out the attitudinal scale in their first session without any mention or implementation of a goal-setting intervention. The participant then filled out the attitudinal survey twice weekly to establish a baseline of pre-intervention data (See Appendix C For Attitudinal Survey).

After a month, the researcher then initiated a goal-setting intervention with the participant. The researcher and the client created three mutually agreed-upon goals related to their LASSI assessment areas of weakness within this intervention. The participant continued doing the attitudinal survey to measure the client's pre-intervention and post-intervention results to see if the client's scores on the attitudinal scale improved. At least seven administrations of the scale was completed by the participant to accrue a meaningful pre-intervention and post-intervention baseline.

Data Analysis

The researcher then analyzed pre- and post-intervention data utilizing a two standard band to determine whether significant change occurred in client likelihood of retention. After the overall data was analyzed, data were then categorized into the four different predictors of retention which include a student's engagement, connectedness with peers, relationships with staff and faculty, and own motivation. The two standard band was also utilized for the four different predictors to see if improvements were made in single areas.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to determine whether goal setting interventions could positively impact student retention. To accomplish this, a participant was asked to complete weekly surveys measuring the four predictors of student retention. The four predictors we are measuring are student connectedness with peers, engagement in school, relationships with staff and faculty, and motivation and self-efficacy to complete school. After establishing a baseline in pre-intervention data, a goal-setting intervention was implemented with the participant. Afterward, data were collected to establish a post-intervention baseline then data was evaluated to determine whether the client likelihood of retention changed significantly. Data were also evaluated by looking individually at the four different predictors of student retention to deduce whether goal-setting interventions impacted one of the four different predictors of student retention more than the others.

Description of Subject

One participant completed the goal-setting intervention and completed the three pre-intervention attitudinal surveys and four post-intervention attitudinal surveys. The participant was a female African American junior student.

Description of Data Collection

Data were collected via the use of the third-party platform Google Forms. The client was asked to complete a weekly survey for pre-intervention data. After the client

completed three pre-intervention surveys, a goal-setting intervention was implemented.
Afterwards, clients were asked to complete weekly surveys measuring post-intervention
results to determine whether the goal-setting intervention impacted the client's likelihood
of retention.

Overall Impact

Data were analyzed by completing a two standard band to determine whether
significant change occurred in the participant. The maximum score the participant could
score in the survey was 112, reflecting a perfect score in all four areas of student
retention, while the lowest score that could be scored in this survey was 16. In Figure 1,
the mean baseline for the pre data survey was 101.6, while the post data survey mean was
101.5. Upon placement of the two standard bands calculated by the standard deviation
multiplied by two, it is seen in Figure 1 that the post data was not significantly out of the
bands. This demonstrates that no significant change occurred in the client after the goal
setting intervention was completed. The client demonstrated a spike in the fifth
administration of the survey but quickly reverted to baseline.

Figure 1

Pre and Post-Intervention Survey Results
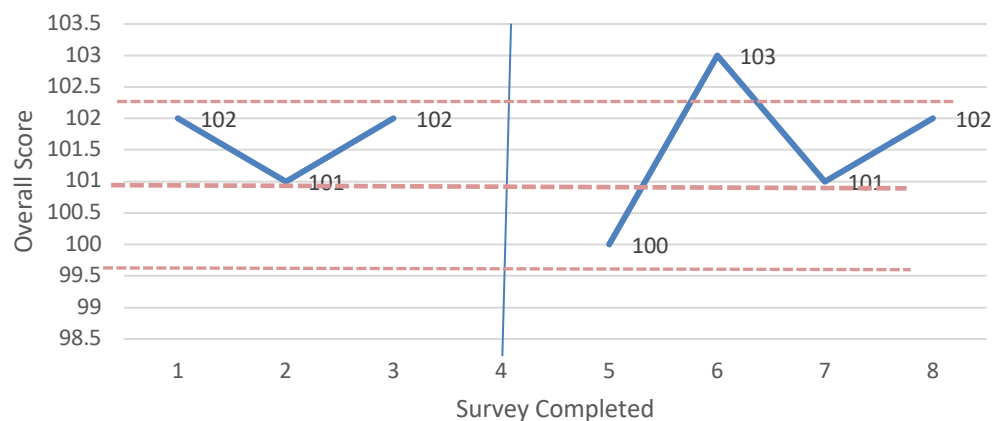
Impact on Connectedness

As seen in Figure 2, there was no change that occurred in how the student felt connected to peers in both pre- and post-intervention data. The highest the participant could score in individual areas was 28, and the lowest was 4. The client recorded a mean score of 26 in both pre and post intervention data. Completing a two standard band was unnecessary, as no change occurred in data.

Figure 2

Student Connectedness with Peers
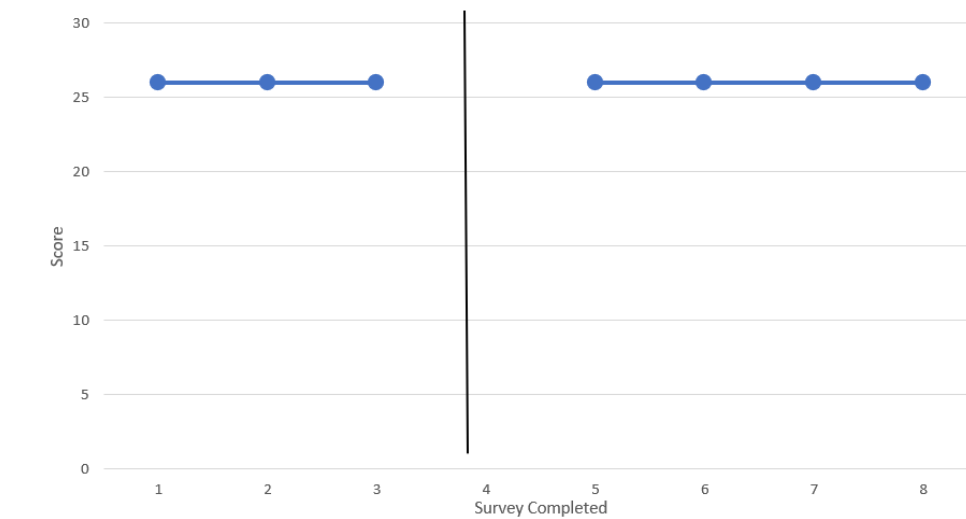
Impact on Engagement

In Figure 3, the mean of the pre-intervention data was 23.3. A two standard deviation line was completed to see whether significant changes occurred in participant's engagement with coursework. In the post-intervention data, the participant had a mean score of 24.3. The difference in mean scores demonstrates that the client improved after the intervention was implemented.

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Figure 3

Student Engagement in Coursework
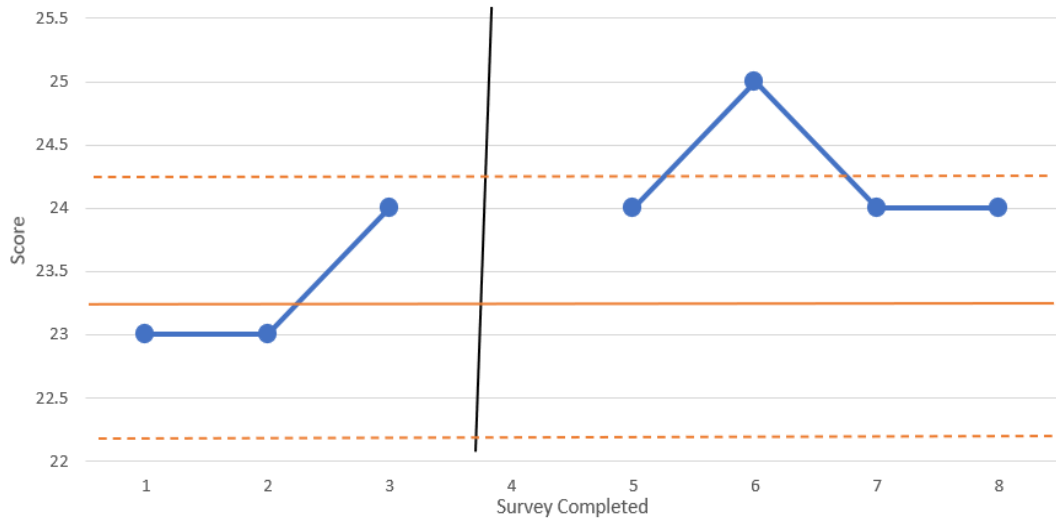
Impact on Relationships

In Figure 4, the mean of the pre-intervention data was 24 with a high of 25 and a low of 23. The post-intervention data had a mean of 23.5 with a high of 24 and a low of 23. No significant change occurred after the intervention. In fact, the client scored lower in the post-intervention than the pre-intervention.

Figure 4

Student Relationships with Staff and Faculty
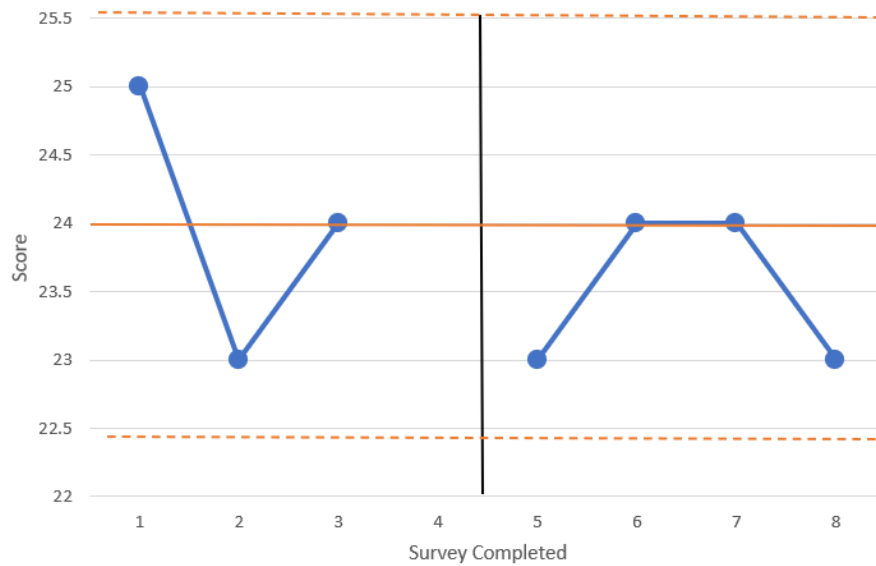
Impact on Motivation

In Figure 5, which measures student overall motivation and self-efficacy, the client recorded a pre-intervention mean score of 21.3 while having a mean score of 20.8 in their post-intervention data. These data suggest that no significant change occurred in participant motivation, but the participant did record lower scores after the intervention had taken place suggesting that the goal-setting intervention decreased the client's motivation and self-efficacy.

Figure 5

Student Motivation and Self-Efficacy
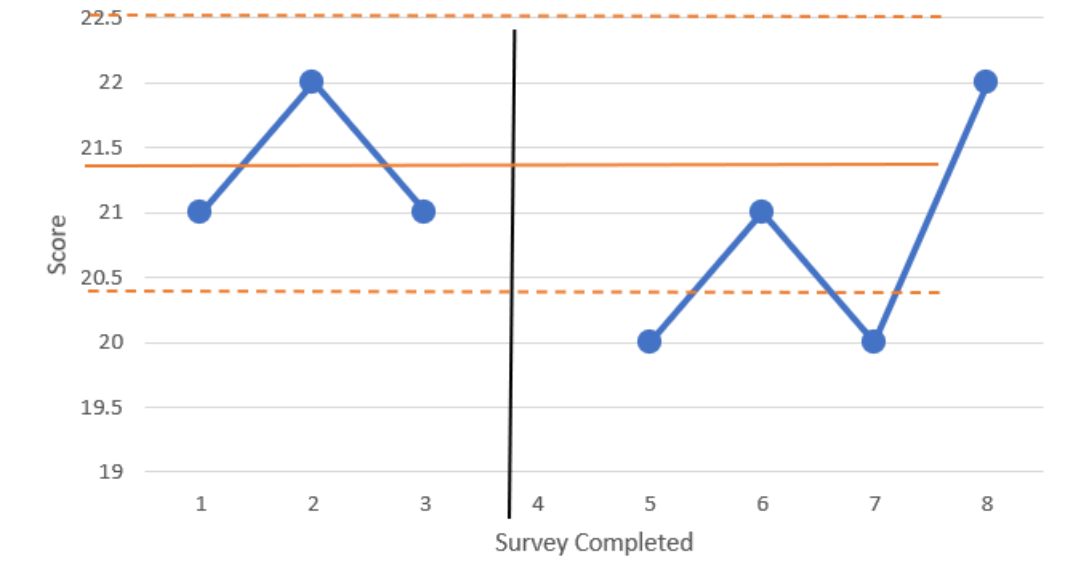
Findings Conclusion

After analyzing the data, it can be concluded that no significant change occurred in the participant overall in the goal-setting intervention. The goal-setting intervention demonstrated no significant improvement in the participant's connectedness with peers, relationships with staff and faculty, and in motivation. However, the goal-setting intervention may have improved the participant's engagement with coursework.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Although the participant exhibited no significant changes in their likelihood of
retention after implementation of the goal-setting intervention, the participant made
improvements in their engagement with academics, which is a strong indicator of student
retention. The participant also exhibited decreases in motivation and self-efficacy after
the intervention was implemented suggesting the goal-setting intervention decreased
participant motivation. Goal-setting interventions have potential to aid students in
continuing their journey in higher education and should be further studied to understand
more how these quick and effective interventions can be utilized.

Overall Impact

Overall, the goal-setting intervention demonstrated no significant impact on
participants likelihood of retention. In Figure 1, it was shown that no significant changes
occurred in the client after the intervention was implemented. This suggests that goal-
setting interventions have no impact on student retention. However, when data was
looked at individually, the goal setting intervention had unique impacts on student
engagement and motivation.

Impact on Engagement

The goal-setting intervention had a positive impact on student engagement as
shown in Figure 3. This follows closely to Locke and Latham's 1990 *Theory of Goal
Setting and Task Performance* as proficient goal setting improves recipients' ability to be

successful in what they want to achieve. This directly coincides with engagement as the SMART goals provided a clear direction for the client to work toward to achieve their desired goal. Other factors that could have influenced impact on engagement is clients own work ethic and previous engagement with coursework.

Impact on Motivation

Although the client demonstrated improvements in engagement with coursework, which is a positive for student retention, after the implementation of the goal-setting intervention the client's motivation decreased. This directly goes against goal-setting principles, as goals are meant to provide motivation to participants. There are a few factors that could explain why this decrease in motivation happened, including student burnout toward end of semester, student personal life problems, family involvement, and/or classroom difficulties, amongst many other factors.

<div align="center">

Implications for Practice

</div>

In practice, it is important for those that are in higher education supporting students to be aware of the numerous different interventions that can be employed for students to increase their chances of retention. Although the data findings point to goal-setting interventions being insignificant in aiding this specific student in retention, the intervention may have improved the client's engagement with their coursework, which indicates higher chances of retention. Furthermore, with goal-setting interventions being a relatively quick practice to implement, it can be stacked with other interventions and programs to increase student's likelihood of retention.

Higher education institutions must be aware of the best practices for student retention. Though institutions implement and create great programs for student retention

such as residential life, tutoring and counseling, and student support services, there is a lack of research on how institutions can focus on the micro level for retention such as implementing interventions for students. With the goal-setting intervention showing that it improves the participant's engagement with coursework, there may be potential in utilizing more one-on-one interventions in higher education. Overall, though, it needs to be stated that goal-setting interventions do not significantly impact student retention. In regard to policy, goal-setting interventions should be carefully looked at before they are implemented at the micro, mezzo, and macro level.

Implications for Research

Based on the research done, this goal-setting intervention showed no significant improvement in our participant's likelihood of student retention. However, due to the limitations of my research, which will be discussed further in strengths and limitations, goal-setting interventions have potential to improve student retention. As noted in my findings, the goal-setting intervention improved my participant's engagement with coursework which is an indicator of likelihood of retention. More research should be completed on goal-setting interventions in student retention as the goal-setting intervention demonstrates promise in improving student's likelihood of retention. The research that should be completed over goal-setting interventions should follow a typical randomized experimental design with a control group to see how goal-setting interventions impact the control group compared to counterparts. SMART goals are to be set in student areas of weaknesses with the student completing an attitudinal survey to measure participant's behavior change.

Strengths and Limitations

The research was completed with correct implementation of a A-B design measuring pre and post-intervention results. However, the research demonstrates limitations such as the sample size, survey validity, and the changes that occurred after interventions or lack thereof.

The research took two months to complete, as the baseline data had to be established before completing the intervention and then collecting the post-intervention data. The correct implementation of an A-B experimental design made the research more valid in its findings and results.

Despite the research methodology implementation, there are limitations in the research such as the sample size. There was only one participant who completed both the seven pre and post-intervention surveys as well as the goal-setting intervention itself. This may have caused the data to not thoroughly reflect the true impact goal-setting interventions can have on recipients. This may have also caused the results to be skewed since the sample size is not large enough.

The next limitation of the research is survey validity. The survey was created for this study, so it does not have any prior use which hinders the measures' validity. Also, Cronbach's alpha was not utilized to determine the validity of the survey which hinders the validity of the survey as well. Since the survey lacks validity, so do the data that were collected.

Another limitation of the research is how goals were set regarding student retention factors. Since the LASSI assessment was employed to know what goals were to be set in student areas of weaknesses, specific goals were not set for certain retention

areas. This hinders the goal-setting intervention results as the goals set in the goal-setting intervention did not have direct correlation with the four factors of student retention.

The last limitation of the research was that no significant changes occurred after implementation of the intervention. A two standard band was utilized to see if any major changes occurred in the student's likelihood of retention. Upon employment of the two standard band, it was shown that no significant changes occurred. This limits the research since nothing can be conclusively said about the improvement of the student based on the goal-setting intervention.

Conclusion

This research was completed to explore the potential benefits of employing goal-setting interventions for increasing student likelihood of retention as well as gaining a better understanding on how goal-setting interventions can improve different areas of a student's life. After researching the literature, it was determined that implementing a A-B design focusing on a student's connectedness with peers, engagement with course work, relationships with staff and faculty, and motivation were the best factors to measure student retention. It was also determined that implementing a goal-setting intervention that focused on creating three clear and actionable goals focused on student's academic areas of weaknesses would be best to improve the student's retention. After the intervention was completed, data was collected and analyzed utilizing the two-standard band to better understand the changes that occurred in pre and post-intervention data. The data exhibited no clear significant changes but suggested improvement in the student's engagement with coursework. Based on the results and findings, it can be concluded that more research should be done with goal setting in student retention.

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APPENDIX A

IRB Approval Letter

myACU
powered by Google

Hugh Castillo <hdc17c@acu.edu>

IRB-2022-145 - Initial: Initial - Expedited – ACU
2 messages

do-not-reply@cayuse.com <do-not-reply@cayuse.com>
To: hdc17c@acu.edu, wintert@acu.edu

Mon, Feb 6, 2023 at 10:18 AM

Date: February 6, 2023

PI: Hugh Castillo

Department: RES-Residential Student, 20531-Masters in Social Work

Re: Initial - IRB-2022-145

Goal Setting and Student Retention

The Abilene Christian University Institutional Review Board has rendered the decision below for Goal Setting and Student Retention. The approval is effective starting February 3, 2023.

Admin Check-in Date: --
Expiration Date: --
Decision: Approved

Category: 7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Research Notes:

Additional Approvals/Instructions:

Upon completion of this study, please submit the Inactivation Form within 30 days of study completion. If you wish to make any changes to this study, including but not limited to changes in study personnel, number of participants recruited, changes to the consent form or process, and/or changes in overall methodology, please complete the Modification Form. If any problems develop with the study, including any unanticipated events that may change the risk profile of your study or if there were any unapproved changes in your protocol, please inform the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs and the IRB promptly using the Incident Report Form. All approval letters and study documents are located within the Study Details in Cayuse IRB.

The following are all responsibilities of the Primary Investigator (PI). Violation of these responsibilities may result in suspension or termination of research by the Institutional Review Board. If the Primary Investigator is a student and fails to fulfil any of these responsibilities, the Faculty Advisor then becomes responsible for completing or upholding any and all of the following:
• If there are any changes in the research (including but not limited to change in location, members of the research team, research procedures, number of participants, target population of participants, compensation, or risk), these changes must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation.
• Report any protocol deviations or unanticipated problems to the IRB promptly according to IRB policy.
• Should the research continue past the expiration date, submit a Continuing Review Form approximately 30 days before the expiration date.
• When the research is completed, inform the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs. If your study is Expedited or Full Board, submit an Inactivation Form.

• According to ACU policy, research data must be stored on ACU campus (or electronically) for 3 years from inactivation of the study, in a manner that is secure but accessible should the IRB request access.
• It is the Investigator's responsibility to maintain a general environment of safety for all research participants and all members of the research team. All risks to physical, mental, and emotional well-being as well as any risks to confidentiality should be minimized.

For additional information on the policies and procedures above, please visit the IRB website
http://www.acu.edu/community/offices/academic/orsp...
or email orsp@acu.edu with your questions.

Sincerely,

Abilene Christian University Institutional Review Board

Tom Winter <wintert@acu.edu>   Mon, Feb 6, 2023 at 10:24 AM
To: Hugh Castillo <hdc17c@acu.edu>

Congratulations, Hugh! You can now begin collecting data.

Thomas L. Winter, EdD, LCSW
Professor, School of Social Work
Abilene Christian University
ACU Box 27866
Abilene, Texas 79699
325.674.2072
325.260.8387 (Cell)
[Quoted text hidden]

APPENDIX B

Approval From Agency

APPENDIX C

Attitudinal Survey

1. I am constantly learning new things from my classes that I will use in the future. *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly Disagree	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly Agree

2. I enjoy participating in extracurricular activities and school events outside of academics. *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

3. I spend a significant amount of time studying and reviewing information for my classes. *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly Disagree	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly Agree

4. I enjoy attending this university. *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly Disagree	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly Agree

5. I feel that I matter at this institution. *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly Disagree	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly Agree

6. I have a friend I can talk to If I am having trouble in school. *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly Disagree	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly Agree

7. I am involved in an extracurricular group and/or organization associated with *
the institution.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly Disagree	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly Agree

8. I feel like I belong at this school. *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly Disagree	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly Agree

9. I know I am going to be successful in my academics. *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly Disagree	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly Agree

10. I feel confident in my academic abilities. *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly Disagree	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly Agree

11. I would describe myself as a "underachiever" in academics. *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly Disagree	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly Agree

12. I am committed to passing all of my classes. *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly Disagree	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly Agree

13. I feel that my professors care about my success *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly Disagree	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly Agree

14. There are staff at this institution who care about my well-being. *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly Disagree	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly Agree

15. I know I can talk to staff at this institution if I am having hard time. *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly Disagree	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly Agree

16. There are organizations on campus who care about my success and health. *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly Disagree	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly Agree

17. How likely are you to remain enrolled at this university next school year? *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Not Likely At All	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Planning To Return