AN INVESTIGATION OF RETENTION
OF
BUSINESS STUDENTS AT A FOR-PROFIT COLLEGE

A thesis presented
by
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Abstract

This case study sought to understand the factors that enhance business students’ persistence at Roosevelt Dusty College, a for-profit college in the north central part of the United States. The research question, which factors enhance the probability that a business student at "Roosevelt Dusty College" will persist to graduation, was investigated through interviews and field observations. Data were analyzed using a general inductive approach in which continuous triangulation was done between the different source of data. Findings identified four themes that enhanced student persistence: Remembering the Inspiration, Developing a Success Plan, Overcoming Outside Obstacles, and Cultivating College Support. The findings of the study led to four conclusions. First, business students must continue to remember the inspiration that initiated their college journey. Second, during the early part of the process, business students must develop a success plan to support their persistence. Third, while attending college, business students must have a support system outside the institution to support their persistence. Fourth, a great college system is important for business student persistence.

Keywords: persistence, retention, attrition, business students, and programs, student satisfaction
DEDICATION

To my late grandfather, Roosevelt Dusty Jackson, who fought for my rights so I could have equality; my mom, Coleeta Jackson, who instilled in me the importance of hard work and dedication; my grandmother, Jessie Jackson, who encouraged me to accomplish my dreams; and my aunt, Juanita Martin, who has been my advisor, supporter, and cheerleader through my entire journey.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The irony of this journey is that completing this dissertation on college persistence was quite a challenge for me as a student. I have never in my life taken on a task of such magnitude that required so much persistence, patience, and discipline. Fortunately, with the support of family and friends, I was able to persevere through the tough times.

First, my family has supported me with this journey. My aunt has listened to my every story regarding my journey, and she has provided guidance and continued to encourage me to press forward. My mother has constantly held me accountable by making sure that I stay focused. Her constantly letting everyone know that her son would be a doctor one day prohibited me from even thinking about quitting. My grandmother who has persevered through so many things during her lifetime provided support by continuing to let me know that anything is possible as long as I put my mind to it.

Second, my coworkers reviewed documents and constantly reminded me of my capabilities. My cohort from the doctoral program (Rosa Hanco, Locksley Knibbs, Nikole Rossano, and Dr. Sol Odafe) has provided me support, guidance, and resources. My friends (Gerald Gibson, Maurice Adkins, Omari Aarons, Darrell Harper, Samaria Wilson, Ron Hill, and Lee Foley) have supported me more than they ever will know. I am sure that I may have forgotten a few people, but I could not have completed this journey without the support and encouragement of everyone.

Finally, my advisor, Dr. James Griffin, who constantly pushed me to think and to revise this document to perfection. I would also like to thank all of the participants in the study. Hopefully, the information from the study will help support student persistence.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table of Contents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 1: ................................................................. 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION ................................................................. 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROBLEM STATEMENT ....................................................... 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COLLEGE PROFILE .......................................................... 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE ....................................... 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POSITIONALITY STATEMENT .......................................... 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESEARCH QUESTION ...................................................... 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS ............................................ 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS .......................................... 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY ....................................... 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 2: ........................................................................... 29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ........................................... 29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION ................................................................. 29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOR-PROFIT COLLEGES .................................................... 29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RETENTION THEORIES AND MODELS ............................... 32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RETENTION VARIABLES .................................................. 44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PERSONAL VARIABLES .................................................... 46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACADEMIC VARIABLES .................................................. 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOCIAL VARIABLES ......................................................... 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXTERNAL VARIABLES .................................................... 51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUMMARY OF RETENTION VARIABLES ........................ 53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RETENTION IMPROVEMENT INITIATIVES ......................... 53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH DESIGN

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH: CASE STUDY

PARTICIPANTS

RECRUITMENT AND ACCESS

DATA COLLECTION

In-depth interviews

Field observations

Field notes

Documents

ASSUMPTIONS

DATA ANALYSIS PLAN

DATA ANALYSIS

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

DATA STORAGE PLAN

TRUSTWORTHINESS

SUMMARY

CHAPTER 4:

FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

CASE STUDY COLLEGE PROFILE

STUDY PARTICIPANTS

OVERVIEW OF THEMES AND CATEGORIES

THEME 1: REMEMBERING THE INSPIRATION

Purpose of my journey

THEME 2: DEVELOPING A SUCCESS PLAN

Understanding their capabilities and goals

Adjusting their lives

THEME 3: OVERCOMING OUTSIDE OBSTACLES

Weathering the storms of life

THEME 4: CULTIVATING COLLEGE SUPPORT

Adapting to a caring environment

Appreciating active and collaborative learning

Utilizing the resources

Exceeding Expectations

CONCLUSION

CHAPTER 5:

INTERPRETATION OF PRIMARY FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

Theme 1: Business students must continue to remember the initial inspiration that initiated their college journey

Theme 2: During the early part of the process, business students must develop a success plan to support their persistence

Theme 3: While attending college, business students must have a support system outside the institution to support their persistence

Theme 4: A great college system is important for business student persistence
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IMPLICATIONS</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDICES</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX A: Tinto’s Student Departure (Dropout) Model</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX B: Student Satisfaction and Retention Model</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX C: Revised Student Satisfaction and Retention Model</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX D: Institution’s Approval Letter</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX E: Email and Telephone Solicitation Verbiage</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX F: Consent Form</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX G: Interview Questions</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**LIST OF TABLES**

Table 1: Theoretical Model Comparison ................................................................. 19
Table 2: Retention Variables .................................................................................... 45
Table 3: Interview Participants ............................................................................... 69
Table 4: Overview of Findings .................................................................................. 71
Chapter 1:

Introduction

This study will add to the literature on college completion in the for-profit sector. The business programs at these schools support underserved student populations and help meet the national economic need for a qualified workforce (D. L. Bennett, Lucchesi, & Vedder, 2010). Today many Americans remain unemployed even while employers are searching for individuals with the knowledge, skills and education needed to fill in-demand positions (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015; Cappelli, 2012). In 2009, this phenomenon prompted President Obama to establish a goal of creating a more educated and skilled workforce by helping 5 million Americans earn degrees or certifications by 2020 (Kelly, 2010). At the time of the President’s initiative, the U.S. ranked 10th globally in awarding degrees to young adults. By 2012, the U.S. dropped to 16th, behind countries like Canada, Japan, and Korea (Guida & Figuli, 2012; Kelly, 2010).

In response to this, the Lumina Foundation implemented its “Big Goal” of increasing the percentage of Americans earning post-secondary degrees, certificates, or other credentials to 60% by 2025, which would maintain the U.S.’s status as a global leader in education. Achieving this goal begins with increasing high school graduation and college enrollment rates (Matthews, 2012). Although Lumina anticipates an increase in college completion rates at public colleges and will assess this growth, its initial plans did not account for for-profit college enrollment. Retention of students, who encounter hardships such as inadequate finances to support their family or insufficient skills to gain employment, at for-profit institutions during their first to the second year will support both the Big Goal 2025 and the Obama 2020 initiative.
Problem Statement

The problem of practice that serves as the focus of this study is low retention rates among business students from their first to the second year at a for-profit college, which could result in program elimination because of noncompliance with program accreditation requirements. For-profit colleges across the country provide pathways to postsecondary credentials for roughly 3.2 million students, including working adults, low-income and first-generation students, and students of color (D. L. Bennett et al., 2010; Guida & Figuli, 2012; Matthews, 2012). The U.S. Department of Education and accrediting bodies regulate educational institutions to ensure accountability in meeting established standards including those for retention and placement. Like most educational institutions, for-profit colleges struggle with retaining students and improving completion rates (DeNicco, Harrington, & Fogg, 2015; Foss, Foss, Paynton, & Hahn, 2014; National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). Consequently, low retention and low completion rates can potentially jeopardize continued accreditation and qualification for Title IV funding, which is a primary source of revenue (Cooley, 2012; Cronin & Bachorz, 2005; D. Deming, Goldin, & Katz, 2012; Dervarics, 2011; Morey, 2004; Schade, 2014). Without Title IV funding, most institutions including for-profit colleges cannot operate (McGuire, 2012). Additionally, loss of these funds would mean the possible elimination of essential programs that serve the needs of the underserved population matriculating at for-profit colleges.

To address this problem of practice, this study is designed to gain insight into how retention of first to second-year students can be increased at a for-profit institution. The study will hopefully prevent program elimination, which would be detrimental to the research site institution as well as to the local community. The institution would lose about 14% of its student
population. The community would lose a program that has been able to change lives within an underserved population.

This research is needed because little research has been conducted that focuses on business students at for-profit institutions. Most research on retention and persistence is based on community colleges and private and public 4-year institutions. Also, these studies have identified factors that increase students’ likelihood to withdraw, but few focus on areas that enhance the probability that the student will succeed. Since so little literature concentrates on for-profit college business students’ retention, the study would help fill in these gaps in the literature. In doing so, the research will help us understand how to support an underserved population and help meet the national economic need for qualified workers.

**College Profile**

The selected institution for this study is a for-profit college in the north central part of the United States. A pseudonym, Roosevelt Dusty College (RDC), will be used to refer to the college. RDC opened its doors in the early 1980s with two students and two programs in secretarial and office automation. Within roughly 10 years, RDC began offering degrees, diplomas, and certificates in the following programs: legal secretary, legal assistant/paralegal, machine shorthand reporting, medical transcription, scoping specialist, secretarial/office automation, computer repair technology, computer technology, and word processing. In early 2000, RDC offered its first baccalaureate degree, was acquired by a venture capitalist, and became a limited liability company.

In early 2009, RDC opened a second campus about 45 miles north of the founding campus. The campus now offers 15 different programs in various areas such as business, information technology, nursing, medical assisting, criminal justice, dental assisting, chiropractic
assisting, and massage therapy. RDC has an open enrollment policy, which means admission requires only a high school diploma or GED. Also, students have to take a nationally normed assessment test (ACT Compass) to determine their knowledge level in English, reading, and mathematics.

The college population consists of 425 students. Most (84%) are women; most (73%) are non-traditional (25 years old and older); about half (52%) are enrolled full time. The campus is racially diverse 48% are Caucasian (White), 47% are African American (Black), 2% are Hispanic or Latino, 1% are Asian, and 1% are other ethnicities. Almost all (92%) of the students are Federal Pell Grant recipients.

The business program represents 14% of RDC’s entire student population. The program’s demographics as of June 2015 differ from RDC as a whole: 66% of its students are female, 80% are non-traditional students (25 years old or older); 69% are part-time. Demographically, 37% of business students are Caucasian (White), 57% are African-American (Black), 3% are Asian, and 3% are other ethnicities. The students are split between morning attendees (46%) and evening attendees (54%).

RDC is accredited by the Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools (ACICS), which is the largest national accrediting organization recognized by both the U.S. Department of Education and the Council of Higher Education Accreditation (ACICS, 2014). ACICS accreditation standards included define standards for student achievement including retention rates, placement rates, and licensure examination pass rates (ACICS, 2014). ACICS determines average retention and placement rates annually for campuses, based on information collected in the Campus Accountability Report and provides this data to all accredited campuses in the Key Operating Statistics (KOS) report (ACICS, 2014). The acquired
data is then used to determined standards for campuses. ACICS has two standards for both campuses and programs: benchmark and compliance levels. The benchmark level for retention is 65% as of 2014 (ACICS, 2014). Colleges must reach the benchmark level and, if they fail to do so, leaders have to develop an improvement plan for the campus and/or for specific programs that failed to meet the benchmark (ACICS, 2014). The standard compliance level for retention was 50%, which increased to 60% in 2014 (ACICS, 2014). Currently, the research site’s business program has reported retention as 52.9% in 2010, 48.6% in 2011, 52.9% in 2012, 48.6% in 2013, and 57% in 2014, which fails to meet its accrediting body’s benchmark.

RDC must have national accreditation from ACICS to receive Title IV funding. Ninety-six percent of students who attend for-profit colleges are eligible for financial aid and receive Federal Pell Grants (Cellini, 2010). Like other tuition-dependent institutions, college retention is essential to survival since retention performance is linked to sustained accreditation and Title IV eligibility. As Leppel (2002) explains, “Persistence is important financially for higher education institutions. It takes four students who leave prior to their sophomore year to produce as much tuition revenue as one student who stays for four years” (p. 433). Thus, if students are not remaining in school, these colleges do not accumulate the necessary income to maintain operations. Since RDC’s financial survival depends on federal funding and national accreditation, retention should be a priority.

Statement of Significance

All academic institutions are concerned about improving student persistence and graduation rate. Attrition at 2-year institutions in the United States is 30-40%, and is 10-20% at 4-year institutions; both rates are quite alarming (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2015). Student attrition results in loss of college revenue, and it costs the taxpayer. In 2010,
institutions received $6.8 billion in subsidies to fund education for students who did not complete their education (American Institutes for Research, 2010; Habley, Bloom, Robbins, & Robbins, 2012) and $2.9 billion in grants for students who did not continue their education beyond a year (American Institutes for Research, 2010). These alarming rates of attrition and waste of government funding and taxpayers’ contributions reinforce the significance of President Obama’s 2020 initiative (Hawkins, 2011) and the Lumina Foundation Goal 2025 (Lumina Foundation, 2011) in supporting college enrollments and programmatic persistence while increasing college completion rates to meet workforce needs.

Since for-profit college enrollment represents a substantial percentage of overall post-secondary enrollment in the U.S., and some of the for-profit institutions have low graduation rates, understanding the key factors affecting for-profit college student retention is crucial to achieving President Obama’s 2020 initiative and Lumina’s Big Goal 2025 (Apling, 1993; Berg, 2005; D. Deming et al., 2012). Nontraditional students, those 25 years old or older, represent the majority of for-profit college students and 43% of the nation’s college students overall. Nontraditional students are the fastest growing population in higher education (Bowl, 2001; Choy, 2002; Jinkens, 2009; Schuetze & Slowey, 2002; Wyatt, 2011). Nontraditional students face many obstacles when enrolled. These obstacles include adapting to new technology, balancing multiple roles, and figuring out if college is a good fit (Choy, 2002; D. Deming et al., 2012; Wyatt, 2011). Some nontraditional students are also low-income students which they face similar obstacles; however, working low paying or multiple jobs to get by while a student is a continuous challenge (Choy, 2002; D. Deming et al., 2012; Guida & Figuli, 2012; Wyatt, 2011). In light of the growing population and obstacles, additional research would provide insight into
potential strategies for improving persistence and completion for nontraditional students as well as others like working adults, low-income, and students of color that the for-profit sector serves.

Research on student retention currently focuses on academic preparation, student involvement, and ability to pay as critical factors. However, very little of this research examines students who are enrolled in for-profit colleges. This gap suggests a need for research in the for-profit sector (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Braxton, 2002; Dale & Zych, 1996; Drea, 2004; Hanewicz, Hammond, & Ness, 2008; Hotchkiss, Moore, & Pitts, 2006; Napoli & Wortman, 1998; Rohr, 2012; Spittle, 2013; Stage, 1989; Tinto & Cullen, 1973; Tinto, 1975; Wyatt, 2011). Of the estimated 21 million students enrolled in postsecondary institutions, 13%, or 2-3 million, are enrolled in for-profit colleges (Cooley, 2012; National Center for Education Statistics, 2013; Tierney, 2015). One-third of these students is earning an associate degree in business, management, or marketing (D. Deming et al., 2012). This study investigates factors that can improve the graduation rate of nearly a million students annually.

As an educator, the researcher believes that every individual can be molded into an employable individual who can provide a service to the community to the best of his or her ability. It is the institution’s responsibility to provide the necessary programs to prepare students for the real world. As Michael Potts proclaims, “The main purpose of a college or university is to provide knowledge, including particular intellectual virtues such as free inquiry, intellectual honesty, and academic excellence” (Hassler, 2006, p. 64). The business program provides students with the basic skills needed to be employable in the community. Even though retention is low in the business program, it has made tremendous changes in some students’ lives based on website testimonials from both current students and graduates. Therefore, elimination of the
business program due to loss of accreditation if standards are not met would be detrimental to the students, RDC, and the community.

**Positionality Statement**

Improving the lives of people through education has always been important to the researcher. Two of his favorite quotes are attributed to Nelson Mandela and Maya Angelou: “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world” (Mandela, 1990) and “People may not remember exactly what you did, or what you said, but they will always remember how you made them feel” (Angelou, 1994). Education has increased the researcher's knowledge and has propelled him in his career. It has allowed him to understand that life is not only about himself but also about how he impacts the lives of others. His goal is to gain insights about retention among the underserved population that for-profit colleges serve, so he can ensure that the population that he serves attain an education. In particular, he wants to increase retention and completion rates for business students at his research site.

The researcher entered the field of education with high hopes and aspirations to make a difference in people’s lives. His experience began at a traditional college and then continued at a for-profit institution where he served as an instructor, an advisor, a mentor, a tutor, and an academic dean. During his time at the for-profit institution, he noticed a consistent problem with retention among business students. Historical data showed that the institution, on average, retained only about 47% of the students who enrolled in the business program. If the institution is unable to meet ACICS’s requirements for two consecutive years, then the failing programs eventually enter a *teach-out plan*, which means no future students can enroll in those programs (they will only operate until the last program participant completes).
The researcher chose a qualitative approach because it allows him to discover personal stories, which is one of his favorite parts of being an educator. Each person has his or her story, which can provide understanding and support to others on similar journeys. For example, one student — an unemployed single mother with five children, a criminal record, and little self-confidence — attained a position at a nonprofit organization that supports struggling mothers. While she was enrolled, she mentored other students who were experiencing similar struggles. She is now starting a new nonprofit organization. This student is just one success story of the many that have become possible because of the opportunities offered in the business program.

Although the program has assisted students in transforming their lives, the institution still has to increase retention if it wants to continue doing this work. The researcher expects that this study will reveal knowledge that can deepen the understanding of retention and the persistence of students in for-profit college business programs. The researcher has some bias since he is so closely connected to the research site and is so passionate about the study. For instance, he believes that students can surpass any obstacle because he was able to do so during his undergraduate studies. Also, he has some assumptions regarding how persistence can be improved; however, he does not want to influence the study with his bias. Therefore, measures will be implemented to reduce bias. All participants will be volunteers and advised that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. During the data collection process, the interview questions will be standardized to avoid any leading questions (Maxwell, 2012; Pannucci & Wilkins, 2010). When conducting observations, the researcher will position himself in locations where participants will not easily notice him so they will exhibit their natural behaviors (Maxwell, 2012). All data will be analyzed objectively to ensure impartial consideration (Maxwell, 2012; Pannucci & Wilkins, 2010). After utilizing different data
collection methods, triangulation of data will help provide background or explanation regarding behaviors of participants, while also verifying details that participants supply. The researcher will continue to reflect, acknowledge biases, and work to minimize the impact as the study develops by being objective and consciously considering his positionalities as related to this study.

**Research Question**

This qualitative research study will enhance the literature on retention in the for-profit sector by seeking an answer to the question: which factors enhance the probability that a business student at "Roosevelt Dusty College" will persist to graduation? A theoretical framework, literature review, research methodology, and interview questions have been developed to address this research question. The researcher hopes to use the information collected to support retention efforts in the business program at Roosevelt Dusty College. Also, the findings can be used at other for-profit institutions with business programs to help improve persistence in support of the Obama 2020 and Lumina 2025 goals, thereby supporting the underserved population that attends RDC and similar institutions.

**Theoretical Frameworks**

This study is concerned with retention among business students; thus, student persistence theory informs the review of the literature and data collection. Often the terms “persistence” and “retention” are used interchangeably (Hagedorn, 2005). However, the National Center of Education Statistics defines retention as an institutional measure and persistence is a student measure (Hagedorn, 2005). Therefore, institutions retain and students persist (Hagedorn, 2005). Retention is the opposite of attrition, which is the rate at which students leave school (Hagedorn, 2005).
The majority of studies focusing on business students use a student satisfaction model as a theoretical lens for understanding retention rates (Gibson, 2010; Keaveney & Young, 1997). Persistence theory provides a broader perspective while the student satisfaction model focuses specifically on the sample population. To help understand the detailed explanation that follows, Table 1 compares the three models.

**Summary of Theoretical Models.** Similarities and differences among persistence theory, the student satisfaction, and retention model, and the self-esteem, satisfaction, and commitment model, are charted in the table below.

**Table 1: Theoretical Model Comparison**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Persistence Theory (Tinto, 1975)</th>
<th>Student Satisfaction and Retention Model (Keaveney &amp; Young, 1997) (DeShields, Kara, &amp; Kaynak, 2005)</th>
<th>Self Esteem, Satisfaction, and Commitment (Bennett, 2003)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model based Population</td>
<td>All students</td>
<td>Business students</td>
<td>Business Students (Majority Low Income)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal variables</td>
<td>Individual attributes (Age, Gender, &amp; Ethnicity) Precollege experiences Family background</td>
<td>Age Gender</td>
<td>Self Confidence (Self Esteem) Supportive Family Subject Interests Job prospects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic variables</td>
<td>Academic Performance Faculty Staff Interaction Academic Integration</td>
<td>Academic Staff/Teaching Classes/Curriculum Advising Support Skills Developed Preparation for future Student Centeredness/responsiveness</td>
<td>Academic Performance Teaching Quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social variables</td>
<td>Extra-curricular activities Peer group interactions Social Integration</td>
<td>Social Integration</td>
<td>Social Integration (Relations with students and staff)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External variables</td>
<td>External commitments</td>
<td>Environmental Factors</td>
<td>Financial Hardship Personal Problems</td>
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A combination of these three models and additional findings directly related to business students are suitable for determining the factors that enhance the probability that a business student will persist. Tinto’s (1975) works focused on student and institutional interactions that contribute to
withdrawal or persistence. While his model provides great insight, it is not specific to the case study population; therefore, the student satisfaction and retention model and the self-esteem, satisfaction, and commitment model will be used to focus specifically on business students. Employing a lens where the three theoretical perspectives intersect reduces the probability that relevant themes will be missed while engaging this specific student population.

**Vincent Tinto’s theoretical framework.** Student persistence has been studied for many years. In the seminal study used to understand persistence, Vincent Tinto (1988) identified variables that affect the underrepresented student population. His research evolved to suggest that low-income students continuously face persistence challenges, and this perspective justifies that further research is necessary to support the low-income students served by Roosevelt Dusty College (Tinto, 2006). His recent findings suggested that student success is not improved by chance (Tinto, 2014). Student success requires intentional, structured, and proactive attention that must be maintained by faculty, staff, and administration (Tinto, 2014). So much has been done to improve student success; however, he indicated there is still much more to do (Tinto, 2014).

Tinto identified personal attributes, family background, pre-college schooling, goal and institutional commitment, and social and academic integration as the leading variables contributing to student persistence (Tinto, 2012a). Tinto’s theory derived from Emile Durkheim’s 1951 theory of suicide (Taylor, 2012; Tinto, 2013; Tinto, 2014; Tinto, 1975). According to Durkheim, a person will withdraw from society because of insufficient moral integration and insufficient collective affiliation, or person to person contact, which could lead to suicide (Taylor, 2012; Tinto & Cullen, 1973; Tinto, 1975).
Using aspects of Durkheim's theory, Tinto (2014; 1975) proposed a longitudinal theory that provides a holistic understanding of student departures. His original studies were conducted during the early 1970s and 1980s at Syracuse University, where the campus experiences were quite different from those at for-profit colleges (Taylor, 2012; Tinto, 1988; Tinto, 2013; Tinto, 2014; Tinto, 1975). Syracuse University, a non-profit institution, is a traditional college, which means it has a campus with residential housing and firm entry requirements (D. Deming, Goldin, & Katz, 2013). Nontraditional (for-profit) colleges usually are located in corporate offices, shopping malls, and industrial buildings and have open enrollment (Chung, 2012; D. Deming et al., 2013). From a resource utilization perspective, for-profits institutions have a cost advantage over nonprofit institutions since they usually lease office building space making them much leaner and less capital intensive usually required for high fixed cost for maintenance, utilities, and ground keeping of office buildings and residential housing (D. L. Bennett et al., 2010). Also, for-profit and nonprofit differ in their operational approach. Most nonprofit institutions mission is to provide instructions to students while producing research, providing public service, and or contributing to society’s understanding of the world (D. L. Bennett et al., 2010). Most for-profit institutions mission is to maximize shareholder wealth by selling a product to customers (D. L. Bennett et al., 2010). Students at for-profit institutions are typically older than nonprofit institution (D. L. Bennett et al., 2010). For-profit students usually seek career opportunities in the most efficient way possible.

While Tinto mainly evaluated his theory among traditional students, his theory revealed some factors that may contribute to student attrition at other educational institutions with nontraditional student populations. Tinto identified individual attributes as sex, ability, race, and ethnicity while precollege experiences related to grade-point average, and academic and social
attainments (Tinto, 1975). Family background factors included social status attributes, value climate, and expectational climate (Tinto, 1975). Personal attributes, precollege experience, and family background directly contribute to an individual’s goals and institutional commitment. Goal commitment is defined as the behaviors of individuals that measure the degree of their aspirations (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). Institutional commitment is defined as an individual expectation of satisfaction and the level of importance he or she places on completion or remaining at a certain institution (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). Goal commitment is enhanced through grade performance and intellectual development while institutional commitment is improved by peer-group and faculty interaction.

**Goal commitment.** Based on family background, individual attributes, and precollege schooling, Tinto’s (2012b; 1975) theory suggested that individuals develop goals influenced by academic integration in the classroom where they receive graded feedback based on curriculum comprehension. The theory indicates that grades are an external reward (Tinto, 2012b; Tinto, 1975). As students learn, continuous grade improvement inspires greater commitment to intellectual development and thus influences commitment and persistence. Faculty set the expectations for student performance and encourage them to change or adjust their behaviors so they can succeed in their academic studies (Tinto, 2012b). With consistent and constant feedback from classroom assessments, students are continuously aware of their progress throughout the academic term (Tinto, 2012b). High grades build confidence and show students that they understand the material and are excelling at learning.

Another component of goal commitment from Tinto’s model is intellectual development. Intellectual development is an intrinsic reward of goal commitment. Smith (2013) advised that intellectual development involves constructing individual knowledge and processing and
understanding information so it can be used in real-life experiences. In other words, when individuals develop a deep understanding of college course information, they can use this information to improve their everyday lives and understand the importance of college, which supports student success (Smith, 2013).

**Institutional commitment.** Along with goal commitment, students persist based on institutional commitment. Tinto (2012a; 1975) suggested that institutional commitment involves peer-group and faculty interaction that encourages social integration into the institution. Factors such as campus living, extracurricular and co-curricular activities (e.g., sports, fraternities and sororities, honor programs, ROTC, etc.), group research projects, and work study contribute to student integration, which encourages persistence. Reduced involvement increases the likelihood of students becoming college dropouts (Tinto, 2012a; Tinto, 1975).

In addition to peer to peer interaction, faculty interaction and diversity impact student persistence. Since faculty are involved with students more often than administration and staff, Tinto’s (1975; 2012b) theory suggested that interaction with faculty in the classroom, academic advising, and outside activities tremendously increase students’ persistence. Faculty assist in persistence by providing timely feedback on assessments, advising students in areas that need improvement, giving the students necessary support and resources to succeed, and implementing engaging classroom activities to increase the comprehension of course curriculum (Tinto, 2012b). According to Tinto, the more faculty engage and relate to their students, the more likely the students will persist and be inspired by the faculty.

Tinto (2012a; 1975) suggested that people withdraw for reasons other than lack of social and academic integration. He posited that individuals make decisions based on a cost-benefit analysis or environmental factors. For instance, individuals leave college when the perceived
costs are more than the understood benefits. Thus, if a student gets a good paying job while enrolled in school and the salary matches or is more than the potential salary after degree completion, then the student is likely to withdraw instead of investing time, energy, and resources in school. In this scenario, persistence to degree completion is a less desirable option than working.

Tinto’s theory serves as a great starting point. His theory explained the processes of interactions between students and institutions that lead to potential attrition or persistence (Tinto, 1975). Within the context of this study, the researcher focuses specifically on the case study student population, using student satisfaction models to study business students.

**Student Satisfaction and Retention Model.** In higher education, colleges sometimes overlook opportunities to improve the way students are served because they fail to see students as customers. Educational institutions can make improvements based on student satisfaction just as businesses use satisfaction to improve customers’ overall experience and retain their business. Therefore, the student satisfaction model is particularly appropriate for understanding the factors that support the probability of business students’ persistence.

Keaveney and Young (1997) developed the student satisfaction and retention model (SSRM). Their model suggested that student satisfaction leads to the intention to enroll, which then leads to student retention. Within the model, three important variables were identified that influence student satisfaction and retention (Keaveney & Young, 1997). First was faculty performance, which included faculty understanding, accessibility, professionalism, helpfulness, and timeliness of feedback (Keaveney & Young, 1997). Second was advising staff performance, which included accessibility, reliability, helpfulness, responsiveness, and understanding
(Keaveney & Young, 1997). The third and final variable was classes, which included real-world relevance, course scheduling, and project/case skills (Keaveney & Young, 1997).

Deshields and Kara (2004) administered a modified questionnaire developed by Keaveney and Young to 160 business students, most of whom were traditional male students. The objective of the study was to investigate the role of satisfaction and intention on retention. The results indicated that faculty and classes were key factors that influence whether the student's college experience leads to positive experiences and satisfied students.

In another study, DeShields, Kara, and Kaynak (2005) investigated student satisfaction among 160 business students at a state university utilizing the SSRM model. The study used Herzberg’s two-factor theory, which consists of satisfiers and dissatisfiers (DeShields et al., 2005). Satisfiers are typically internal items, usually controlled by the student, such as growth and achievement (DeShields et al., 2005). On the other hand, dissatisfiers are typically external items beyond the control of the student, such as environmental factors (DeShields et al., 2005). Based on the three variables of the SSRM model, higher satisfaction with faculty performance and classes had a positive influence, while advising staff had no clear relevance to satisfaction or dissatisfaction (DeShields et al., 2005). Overall, the study concluded that students with positive college experience are more satisfied and usually remain in school. Other studies followed the DeShield, Kara, and Kayak study and affirmed their findings (Gibson, 2010).

When the SSRM has been used to study business students, the research has focused only on the faculty, advising staff, and classes. However, other studies focusing on student satisfaction and persistence have identified other variables that are important as well. Social integration includes opportunities to socialize, a sense of belonging, enjoyable experience, and the diversity of student body (Delaney, 2001; Gibson, 2010; Thomas & Galambos, 2004).
Student-centeredness/responsiveness indicates that the institution is responsive to student concerns and suggestions and also is helpful in providing personal and academic support (Gibson, 2010). Lastly, a sense of self-confidence contributed to business student satisfaction (Letcher & Neves, 2010).

**Self Esteem, Satisfaction and Commitment Model.** In a modified model using components from Tinto, Keaveney, and Young, Bennett (2003) conducted a study of 377 business students in which the majority came from low-income families. Bennett researched how student satisfaction, motivation, and self-esteem are linked to academic integration, financial hardship, and other personal problems (Bennett, 2003). He suggested that self-esteem is a motivating factor that contributes to academic performance (Bennett, 2003). For example, individuals with low self-esteem or self-confidence tend to demotivate easily when worried, which leads to possible withdrawal. Also, he identified financial hardship as a direct influence on retention. When faced with financial hardships, students tend to choose short-term options like work over school. Also, student commitment during school depends on their level of satisfaction with courses and the program, as well as their degree of social integration (Bennett, 2003). He noted that a large number of dropouts creates financial problems for the educational institution because of loss of revenue (Bennett, 2003). Also, like a customer in any business, an unsatisfied customer usually tells 9 to 10 people about their experience, which affects recruitment and retention (Bennett, 2003).

His findings revealed that older students were usually more satisfied due to enjoyable experiences within courses (Bennett, 2003). Students with high motivation usually had better relationships with staff (Bennett, 2003). He did not find that peer to peer relationships significantly correlated with either motivation or commitment (Bennett, 2003). Financial
hardship had the highest connection to low commitment, poor academic performance, and persistence/withdrawal (Bennett, 2003). Students with little self-confidence in themselves were more likely to leave school when faced with poor academic performance or financial hardships (Bennett, 2003). Essentially, students are responsible for their success as well. They must have an understanding of their purpose for attending college as well the knowledge, motivation, energy, focus, and initiative to succeed (Daley, 2010).

Definitions of Key Terms

**Attrition:** Attrition occurs when a student leaves an institution in which he or she is enrolled; this includes both voluntary withdrawal and academic dismissal (Ishitani, 2006).

**Nontraditional Students:** Nontraditional students are typically those who delay enrollment until at least age 25 (Kenner & Weinerman, 2011).

**Pell Grant:** Pell Grants are a source of funding that recipients do not have to pay back. Eligibility is determined according to family income, assets, and household size (Cellini, 2010).

**Persistence:** Persistence is the rate at which students who begin higher education at a given point in time continue in higher education and eventually complete their degree (Tinto, 2012a).

**Retention:** Retention refers to first-time, full-time first year students who enroll in September and return the following September of the second year.

**Title IV:** Title IV is financial aid funding in the form of Pell Grants and student loans provided to accredited institutions to fund students’ education (Cellini, 2010).

**Traditional Students:** Traditional students are usually recent high school graduates between ages 18 and 24.
**Student Satisfaction:** Student satisfaction is defined as a short-term attitude resulting from an evaluation of a student's overall educational experience (Elliott & Healy, 2001).

**Organization of the Study**

The dissertation encompasses five chapters. Chapter 1 includes the topic, problem statement, college profile, and the significance of the problem, purpose, research question, positionality statement, theoretical frameworks, and definitions of terms. Chapter 2 reviews the literature, including for-profit college, retention theories and models, retention variables, and retention improvement initiatives. Chapter 3 explains the research design and includes the sample population, data collection and analysis, and study limitations. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study based on the research questions. Chapter 5 discusses the results of the study compared to prior research and provides suggestions for future research.
Chapter 2:

Review of the Literature

Introduction

The first part of this literature review discusses the history of for-profit colleges. The next part of the literature review is organized around theories of student departure and student satisfaction models. Tinto’s model focuses on the experiences of students in post-secondary institutions. The student satisfaction aspect focuses on academic fit and student-institution congruency. Then it will review specific retention variables that influence student departure and persistence. The literature review will then describe what has been researched in other post-secondary institutions regarding retention. Lastly, it will examine successful efforts at improving retention. The literature review contains the following sections: 1) For-Profit Colleges; 2) Retention Theories and Model, 3) Retention Variables, and 4) Retention Improvement Initiatives.

For-Profit Colleges

For-profit colleges are also known as proprietary colleges or career colleges (D. Deming et al., 2013). These colleges are private educational institutions operating as a business in pursuit of profits. For-profit colleges offer certificates, diplomas, associate degrees, baccalaureate degrees, master’s degrees, doctoral degrees, etc. These institutions focus their programs on fast growing occupational degrees that provide students with a quick start in a rewarding career (D. Deming et al., 2013; Hassler, 2006).

For-profit colleges have been in existence since the early seventeenth century (D. Deming et al., 2013; Kirp, 2003). For-profit schools filled the demand for practical training and skills for working class people (T. Bailey, Badway, & Gumport, 2001; D. Deming et al., 2013). For-profit colleges are distinct because of their emphasis on and development of specialized programs (Tierney, 2015). During the early stages of for-profit schools, traditional colleges only
provided classical education for a small percentage of young male adults aspiring to become ministers, lawyers, doctors, and educated leaders of society (Urman, 2007). For-profit schools gained momentum because they provided coursework for practical jobs such as bookkeeping, accounting, and surveying that filled the gaps that traditional colleges were missing (Hassler, 2006; Urman, 2007). This filled a niche in the education arena. As employment needs have changed so has the market that the for-profit sector serves, they offer programs such as information technology, medical services, business management, and other vocational skills programs that offer students fast employability, and they are continuously changing and adding programs based on students and industry needs (D. L. Bennett et al., 2010). Most of the programs require few capital resources and can be taught by practitioners instead of highly paid researched terminal degree professors (D. L. Bennett et al., 2010).

According to a National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS), for-profit colleges enroll nontraditional students such as women; minority group members; and older, low-income, and/or first generation students (Apling, 1993; D. Deming et al., 2013). As a means of retaining and enticing students to select a for-profit education, the colleges cater to their students, treating them as customers (Kirp, 2003; Tierney, 2015). They are located close to residential and business districts to enhance access and visibility, and they provide flexible schedules (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Floyd, 2007; Urman, 2007). Also, the instruction at for-profit colleges combines traditional strategies like lecture and recitation with innovative visual and hands-on methods that are more engaging for kinesthetic learners (Chow, Woodford, & Maes, 2011).

Traditional public and community college leaders have examined for-profit colleges to understand the colleges’ substantial growth over the past century (T. R. Bailey, Badway, & Gumport, 2001; Iloh & Tierney, 2014). For-profit colleges have changed the face of higher education because of the “students as a consumer” philosophy, and the consumer model has become common with most
higher education institutions. Consumer focus does not mean providing or giving in to every student preference because by doing so devalues the product (D. L. Bennett et al., 2010). Therefore, institutions understand their target market, access their needs, modify their offering based on customer needs, and utilize the information to enhance the customer experience by delivering superior quality services (T. R. Bailey et al., 2001; Iloh & Tierney, 2014; Kara & DeShields, 2004).

Major growth in for-profit colleges has occurred in the last eight years during the recession following the housing crisis. From 1998-99 to 2008-09, for-profit college associate degree conferment grew by 125% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). Many people became unemployed and looked for work without the necessary skills to gain employment. For-profit colleges offer online courses; night, day, and flexible course times; and practical, hands-on training to get individuals ready for careers that are in high demand (Tierney, 2015).

For-profit colleges offer a wealth of opportunities to their students; however, these opportunities have come at a cost. Most for-profit colleges are owned and operated by large publicly traded companies like The Washington Post, Lincoln Education, Duff’s Business Institute, Apollo Group, Career Education Corporation, and Education Management Corporation (Cooley, 2012; Kinser, 2006; Kinser, 2007; Schade, 2014). All of these companies operate under a business model that places profitability as a top priority. Thus, the pursuit of profit has enticed some institutions to conduct and facilitate their organizations unethically, resulting in numerous lawsuits, changes in regulations and laws, and increased public scrutiny of their practices.

For-profit colleges are driven by profit, and their business model focuses on recruiting individuals that are eligible for federal financial aid (Schade, 2014). They accept poorly prepared students that other colleges cannot accommodate because the vast majority of their revenue is acquired from federal financial aid (Apling, 1993; Cooley, 2012; D. Deming et al., 2013).
As a result of their business model and recruitment and enrollment practices, some for-profit colleges have experienced low graduation and retention rates, which endangers the accreditation that is required for Title IV funding. According to the National Student Postsecondary Aid Study from 2004-2009, 45.5% of students at for-profit colleges did not receive a degree or certificate and were no longer enrolled (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). These percentages are on the high end compared to the national 30 to 40% attrition. Therefore, for-profit colleges can learn from retention literature to improve student persistence.

Retention Theories and Models

Student retention has been studied for various purposes and from a variety of perspectives (Abel, 1966; Bean & Metzner, 1985; Braxton, 2002; Cellini, 2010; Cooke & Sims, 1995; Croteau & Wolk, 2010; Dale & Zych, 1996; Drea, 2004; Hanewicz et al., 2008; Kamens, 1971; Kamens, 1974; McArthur, 2005; Mobley, Griffeth, Hand, & Meglino, 1979; Napoli & Wortman, 1998; Spady, 1970; Stage, 1989; Tinto, 2012a; Tinto, 2014; Tinto & Cullen, 1973; Tinto, 1975; Wyatt, 2011). Most notable are investigations of family background, academic preparedness, and ability to pay tuition. Several theories have developed from this research that now inform retention discourse.

McNeely’s research. John McNeely is known for his early contribution to research on student attrition. In 1937, McNeely (1937) studied 15,535 students at 25 public and private universities, including one historically black institution. He wanted to discover the factors that contributed to student withdrawal behavior. McNeely (1937) defined student mortality, also known as attrition, as the failure of students to remain in college until graduation. He found that student attrition was extremely high for first-year students, older students, and commuters.
(McNeely, 1937). He subdivided student attrition into gross and net mortality (1937). Gross mortality included students who left during a school year and may have returned without completing their degree. Net mortality included all students who left and never returned (1937). McNeely discovered that students left college because of academic dismissal, financial difficulties, lack of interest, sickness, disciplinary dismissal, family needs, and death.

His studies have been later attributed to identifying differences in institutional policies that support student persistence while other policies discourage persistence (Morrison & Silverman, 2012). McNeely’s research was limited since it did not include all educational institutions, such as the for-profit institutions. His research primarily focused on four-year institutions and did not sample a diverse population. These limitations became opportunities for further research; therefore, Alexander Astin conducted additional research related to two-year institutions similar to RDC.

**Astin’s theory.** Alexander W. Astin (1975) investigated many factors that could influence student persistence; among these, he recognized two main categories: personal and environmental. Personal factors included academic preparedness, family background, educational aspirations, study habits, expectations, age, and marital status (Astin, 1975). Environmental factors related to residency, employment, academic environment, and college characteristics (Astin, 1975).

Under the personal factors, students that had stronger academic grades in the past were more likely to persist (Astin, 1975). Students with high educational aspirations were more likely to persist (Astin, 1975). If students completed or turned in their homework, they were more likely to persist (Astin, 1975). If a student had parents with education, they had a higher chance
of persistence (Astin, 1975). Married men and single females usually have higher chances of persistence (Astin, 1975).

Under the environmental factors, students that lived on campus were more likely to persist (Astin, 1975). Students with a part-time job had a better chance of persisting (Astin, 1975). Students that were involved in extracurricular activities persisted more (Astin, 1975).

Astin also posited that student involvement is essential for student persistence. He suggested that student involvement in campus housing, intramural sports, campus organizations, and work study increased students’ likelihood of remaining in school. Of these options, the only one currently available at RDC is campus organizations. Astin (1999) also noted that students at two-year colleges lack connection on campus because they tend to work full-time jobs and commute, which reduces time on campus. Braxton (2002) suggested a need for further research on commuter students because of their low completion rates. These findings support conducting research at RDC because all of its students are commuters, and the majority of them are employed (Braxton, 2002; Seidman, 2005).

Within Astin's most recent studies, he collaborated with other authors in looking at the effect of cultivating the spirit of students to enhance their college lives (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2010). Spirit represents what is most important to the individual by identifying who they are and where they come from and also their logic behind why they exist (Astin et al., 2010). His recent data revealed that faculty support students' spirituality through a sense of caring and connectedness (Astin et al., 2010). The faculty support student growth especially through student-centered environments (Astin et al., 2010).

Astin’s research identified student involvement and student-centered environments as a key factor in retention. However, many of his findings are quite challenging to incorporate in the
for-profit sector since the student population is primarily commuters. Fortunately, student
centeredness can be duplicated in for profit because the classroom is the main point of contact
with students. Beyond Astin's findings, further research has been conducted to determine what
other components may factor in retention. One study that followed Astin was conducted by
William G. Spady, a sociologist.

**Spady’s model.** William Spady (1970) focused his research on the effects of familial,
institutional, and peer group influences on educational aspiration and attainment. He provided a
more holistic perspective on the students (Spady, 1970). He also claimed students’ family
background is significant because it informs moral values, attitude, alignment with educational
aspiration, and interaction with peers and the institution (1970). Finally, Spady (1970) insisted
that pre-college academic work affects attrition because if students do not excel academically,
they will eventually be dismissed from school due to low grades (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Hader,
2011; Spady, 1970).

**Tinto’s theory.** Vincent Tinto, educator, and researcher has published many articles
regarding attrition and retention (Tinto, 2012b). Tinto’s theories derived from Spady, Arnold
Van Gennep, and Emile Durkheim (Taylor, 2012; Tinto, 2013; Tinto, 2014; Tinto, 1975).
According to Durkheim’s theory, a person will withdraw from society because of insufficient
moral integration and insufficient collective affiliation or person to person contact, which results
in suicide (Tinto & Cullen, 1973; Tinto, 1975). Withdrawing from school is not as severe as
suicide, but the rationale and cause(s) of both phenomena mirror one another (Tinto, 2014).
Thus, individuals who lack social interaction in college have lower commitment during their
academic experience and eventually become dropouts.
Tinto (2014; 1973; 1975) claimed an individual’s educational aspirations, goals, and commitments are the results of the individual’s personal disposition, family background, personal attributes, and pre-college schooling. Soria, Weiner, and Lu (2014) suggested that children from low-income households usually have a higher dropout rate than children from wealthy households. In addition to socio-economic status, commitment is also determined by the family’s expectation of the child’s educational attainment and performance (Tinto, 2012a; Tinto, 2014; Tinto, 1975). When students have great family support, they demonstrate an interest in their collegiate endeavors and are motivated to persist in college (Tinto, 2014; Tinto, 1975).

Tinto also claimed students must have the academic ability to persist. According to Gary Marks (2013), student academic ability is a better predictor of student success than socioeconomic background. In Marks’ (2013) study, he discovered that even students from low socioeconomic backgrounds excelled more when they have high academic ability. Vaughan (1968) found that when students realize they lack the ability to persist, emotional commitment wanes, and they drop out impulsively.

Economic status, family support, ability, gender, and high school academic performance are all pre-enrollment factors. Tinto (2014; 1973; 1975) also accounted for challenges with retention that surface once enrolled. Students’ perceptions of their educational experience are positively influenced when they become academically and socially integrated into the institution. Hagel, Horn, Owen, and Currie (2012) noted that positive experiences with academics and social integration directly assist with improving retention.

Lastly, Tinto (2014; 1973; 1975) suggested that people may withdraw for reasons outside of social and academic integration. Students will not persist when the cost of attending college is not as beneficial as other alternatives. Hunt, Body, Gast, Mitchell, and Wilson (2012) asserted
that students fail to persist because of competing priorities, and school normally is not privileged over a job or family obligation.

Overall, Tinto contributed to understanding several aspects of retention. Over time, his research evolved to reflect changes in student demographics (Tinto, 2012a; Tinto, 2012b; Tinto, 2014). He transitioned his inquiry from why students leave to what institutions can do to help students stay and succeed (Tinto, 2006). He stated that knowing why students leave tells institutions nothing directly (Tinto, 2006). Theories provide many variables that influence withdrawal; however, the theories do not identify what practitioners can implement and put into action to support student success and help students stay (Tinto, 2006). He realized that retention is different in different institutional settings, such as residential and nonresidential or two- and four-year colleges (Tinto, 2006). Nonresidential settings must emphasize the importance of the classroom as it relates to student retention (Tinto, 2006). He indicated that it is less clear how to make involvement matter in nonresidential settings and thereby enhance persistence (Tinto, 2006). Another aspect that supports institutional retention efforts is the development of faculty. Faculty are essential for increasing student persistence. He also suggested that much research is needed on low-income students (Tinto, 2006).

More recently Tinto suggested that four conditions support persistence and graduation completion: expectations, support, assessment, and feedback (Tinto, 2010). Persistence is derived from what the students expect from themselves as well as the expectations of them from the institution and faculty (Tinto, 2012a). If expectations are high for students, the student must have the necessary support to help them achieve their goals whether these be academic, social, or even financial support. Support is most important during the first year (Tinto, 2012a). Showing up for the class is not enough; the student must be assessed on what they are learning and
provided adequate feedback so they can adjust their behaviors (Tinto, 2012a). Involvement is the most important condition. The more students are involved with faculty, staff, and peers, and provided social and emotional support, the more likely they will persist (Tinto, 2012a). Tinto indicated that based on these four conditions institutions can implement actions to support student success involving everyone (Tinto, 2012a).

Tinto reiterated Obama's statement indicating that an educated workforce is critical for the nation to remain competitive, and the nation has to do a better job of making sure students not only have access to education but graduate as well (Tinto, 2012a). He suggested that since so many institutions have commuter students, most retention efforts need to focus on the classroom (Tinto, 2012a).

Tinto argued that access without support is not opportunity (Tinto, 2015). He indicated that allowing students’ free tuition to two-year community college for high school graduates increases enrollment: however, it does not increase college completion, especially for low-income students (Tinto, 2015). He suggested that colleges should put the effort in the classroom to enhance student success. For many campuses, the classroom is the only place of engagement (Tinto, 2015). Therefore, colleges should focus on students developing relationships with faculty and faculty should focus on engaging activities in the classroom (Tinto, 2015). Tinto's most recent findings directly relate to the research study and can be used to understand the factors that enhance persistence at RDC (Chung, 2012; Tinto, 2014).

**Terenzini and Pascarella.** Patrick Terenzini and Ernest Pascarella (1980) attempted to validate the earlier works of Tinto. After examining six studies of random samples of freshman entering Syracuse University, Terenzini and Pascarella (1980) discovered that student background and precollege experiences were not significant factors for persistence behavior. On
the other hand, the study supported Tinto’s conception in regards to the influence of social and academic integration on persistence, although the influence varied based on gender (Terenzini & Pascarella, 1980). Social integration was more important for women whereas academic integration was important to men (Terenzini & Pascarella, 1980). Terenizini and Pascarella (1980) suggested that retention initiatives should not be one size fits all; instead, initiatives should be based on individual students’ social and academic integration. Seidman (2005) agreed that institutions must tailor retention to fit the needs of its students. Tinto later thanked Terenizini for his contribution to his research (Tinto, 2014).

Terenenizi, Pascarella and the works of others continued to add to the retention literature. In 1999, a study revealed that minorities and non-minorities adjust to college in similar manners (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999). Academic preparedness, positive experience, strong family support, and academic performance are retention factors for both minorities and non-minorities (Cabrera et al., 1999). When prejudice and intolerance are present on campus, persistence is weakened for both groups (Cabrera et al., 1999). Lastly, when institutional policies and practices focus on needs over ethnicity, student retention is consistent for both groups (Cabrera et al., 1999). Other recent studies by Terenzini and Pascarella focused on how college affects students and college experiences and outcomes (Pascarella, Terenzini, & Feldman, 2005; Pascarella, Wolniak, Pierson, & Terenzini, 2003).

**Bean and Metzner’s theory.** John P. Bean and Barbara S. Metzner (1985) focused their research on nontraditional students while examining variables that had been researched by others as well as new variables, and they discovered these students’ attrition is affected by external factors related to social integration (Apling, 1993; Bean & Metzner, 1985; D. Deming et al., 2013). Bean and Metzner (1985) realized that environmental factors such as finances, work, lack
of encouragement, and family responsibilities have a great impact on student attrition. Other studies indicated that competing priorities like family obligations and employment influence attrition (Hunt et al., 2012).

Bean and Metzner (1985) discovered that, first, students withdraw because of personal financial problems and the cost of school. These students are unable to manage the stress of school and financial instability. Second, students working fewer than 20 hours a week were more likely to persist; however, when hours surpassed 20, their persistence was reduced (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Morrison & Silverman, 2012). Because work consumed their time, they had to reduce the amount of time devoted to studying (Hunt et al., 2012). Third, people who are important to the students such as parents or spouses, close friends, or mentors are positive factors for persistence in college because these people provide encouragement to students during their collegiate journey (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Morrison & Silverman, 2012). Finally, family responsibilities were a major factor for withdrawals (Bean & Metzner, 1985). Whenever faced with family issues and financial obligations, students always chose their family over the school.

Bean and Metzner’s study supports the need for research on students at for-profit colleges. These students typically have low incomes and will withdraw from school for financial and family reasons (Cooley, 2012; Schade, 2014). Also, for-profit students usually find competing priorities like family, work, and school quite challenging (Hunt et al., 2012). When it comes to sustainability, for-profit students choose immediate needs, which is usually work because work provides income to support the family over the school (Hunt et al., 2012). Therefore, Bean and Metzner’s study provides insight to build our understanding of retention in the for-profit sector.
Bean’s theory. John P. Bean took his research beyond just looking at nontraditional student attrition. He equated student attrition to employee turnover in the workplace, which typically is caused by dissatisfaction. He believed that students leave colleges for the same or similar reasons that employees leave their places of employment (Bean, 1980). Students matriculate into educational institutions with certain expectations that are confirmed or disproved by campus experiences (Fischer, 2007). Furthermore, he discovered that men and women leave colleges for different reasons (Bean, 1980; Leppel, 2002). Men leave because of low institutional commitment, low GPA, a low value placed on education, and limited or no knowledge of social and academic rules (Bean, 1980). Women, however, withdraw because of lack of institutional commitment, low high school performance, and lack of visible employment opportunities after graduation. Women do not think education improves self-development and do not feel they are fairly treated (Bean, 1980). Each of the variables noted are similar to employment. People leave their places of employment because they have no ties to the job. If a person is performing poorly, he will leave. If a person sees no opportunity for growth and development, he or she will leave. If a person feels left out, he or she will leave.

Bean’s theory supports the research study by identifying and further affirming that involvement and engagement, institutional commitment, poor academic preparedness, and lack of connection all affect persistence. These factors have been confirmed as reasons why for profit students do not persist (Morrison & Silverman, 2012). The study suggests that more research is needed to understand better persistence and implement improvement initiatives.

Quigley’s theory. Along with Astin and Bean, Allen Quigley expands Tinto’s theory. Tinto posited that half of students entering two-year colleges leave at the end of their first year (Braxton, Milem, & Sullivan, 2000). Quigley, in turn, argued that the first three weeks of college
are the most important for these nontraditional students (adult learners) (Boice, 2007; National Center for the Study of Adult Learning, and Literacy, 1998). During those first three weeks, administrators and faculty should be in frequent contact with students both inside and outside of the classroom (Boice, 2007; National Center for the Study of Adult Learning, and Literacy, 1998). Even more importantly, admissions representatives should be in touch with students because of the relationship they build during the enrollment process. Quigley and other researchers suggested attrition could be reduced by identifying potential dropouts early during placement testing, registration, and academic advising (Boice, 2007; National Center for the Study of Adult Learning, and Literacy, 1998).

**Student Satisfaction Retention Model.** With retention and attrition being a major factor in higher education, student satisfaction has been a component for determining why one student leaves and another stays. Most businesses make major changes based on customer satisfaction, and likewise, the educational sector can use student satisfaction to understand persistence. Customer satisfaction is established when a brand fulfills the needs and desires of customers (Hanif, Hafeez, & Riaz, 2010). Studies have found what fulfills the needs and desires of students at educational institutions.

In a recent study of student satisfaction among business students, psychologists discovered that student satisfaction builds self-confidence, and self-confidence, in turn, aids the student in developing the skills needed to attain knowledge (Letcher & Neves, 2010). On the other hand, dissatisfied students receive bad grades and present an unpleasant relationship with the educational institution (Letcher & Neves, 2010). Consequently, they are more likely to leave the institution due to academic dismissal or voluntarily withdraw.
One study regarding student satisfaction indicated that sometimes there is a mismatch between the student and institution (Schertzer & Schertzer, 2004). The institution is just not a great fit for the student. Hence, the study specified that sometimes institutions need to stop looking just to get students into school but rather look for students who think the institution will serve their needs. As Frank Daley (2010) indicated, college is not for everyone and some people, do not have self-direction or goals. Therefore, they will not be satisfied with attending any college. Another study including business students indicated that faculty performance and classes (real world relevance) were high factors for student satisfaction (DeShields et al., 2005). An additional study concluded that social connectedness and faculty approachability were top factors for student satisfaction (Roberts & Styron, 2010). Another study concluded that service quality was an important component of student satisfaction (Sumaedi, Bakti, & Metasari, 2011).

Another study focused on student satisfaction based on ethnicity. The study suggested that Blacks and Hispanics were satisfied when they had close relationships with faculty (Fischer, 2007). The study found that students who were academically prepared for college were more satisfied with the college, resulting in better grades (Fischer, 2007). On the other hand, students who struggled academically were not satisfied with the challenges of college (Fischer, 2007). Also, student satisfaction was linked mostly to the relationships established on campus that enhanced social interaction (Fischer, 2007). Students who had a negative perception of the racial climate at their institution had the lowest satisfaction (Fischer, 2007).

Overall, research has concluded that many factors contribute to students not persisting. Student satisfaction affects students’ trust and their future behavior. While student satisfaction supports persistence, it also affects the institutional, economic returns, profitability, market share, and return on investment (Clemes, Gan, Kao, & Choong, 2008; Sumaedi et al., 2011). Student
satisfaction affects so many components that it should be continuously evaluated to implement initiatives to improve persistence to serve the needs of the underserved population while preparing them for the workforce.

The literature discerns that numerous factors affect retention. Within the student departure and student satisfaction conceptual lens, McNeely supported the individual attributes component by identifying that first-year students, older students, and commuters have high mortality. Astin affirmed that the social integration component of student involvement increased persistence. Spady reinforced the family background component by discovering that family background influences goal commitment and academic preparedness improves student success. Bean and Metzner expanded the individual attributes component that nontraditional students are affected by competing priorities like family and work. Quigley added more to the individual attribute component indicating that nontraditional students are more at risk during the first three weeks. Lastly, Bean added to both student departure and student satisfaction. Bean intertwined two conceptual frameworks by comparing job turnover to student attrition. Students will leave when they are not satisfied with the organization, and they have low organizational commitment and involvement. Student satisfaction directly relates to students’ trust and influences future behavior. All the theories and models provide great insight about retention. However, the literature review will narrow the scope to variables that focus specifically on the research student population based on the theoretical models.

**Retention Variables**

Within the retention theories discussed previously, many variables and factors were identified. The table below identifies the four variables, descriptors, and the authors who have conducted research regarding the variable.
### Table 2: Retention Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Retention Variables</th>
<th>Descriptors</th>
<th>Contributors</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal Variables</strong></td>
<td>Individual attributes (Age, Gender, &amp; Ethnicity)</td>
<td>(Tinto, 2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self Confidence (Self Esteem)</td>
<td>(Bergman, Gross, Berry, &amp; Shuck, 2014)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Precollege experiences (Academic Preparedness)</td>
<td>(Marks, 2013)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Family background</td>
<td>(Tinto, 2012)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supportive Family</td>
<td>(Jansch &amp; Van, 2012)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Deming, Goldin, &amp; Katz, 2012)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Academic variables</strong></td>
<td>Academic Integration</td>
<td>(Lectcher &amp; Neves, 2010)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Advising Support</td>
<td>(Conger &amp; Long, 2010)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Skills Developed</td>
<td>(Price, 2010)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Preparation for future</td>
<td>(Astin, 1999)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Student Centeredness</td>
<td>(Terenzini &amp; Pascarella, 1999)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Teaching Quality</td>
<td>(Tinto, 1975)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Social variables</strong></td>
<td>Extra-curricular activities</td>
<td>(Astin, 2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peer group interactions</td>
<td>(Roberts &amp; Styron, 2010)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social Integration (Relations with students and staff)</td>
<td>(Astin, 1999)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>External variables</strong></td>
<td>External commitments</td>
<td>(Spady, 1970)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Financial Hardship</td>
<td>(Fischer, 2007)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal Problems</td>
<td>(Cellini, 2010)</td>
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<td>(Chen &amp; DesJardinsi, 2010)</td>
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<td>(McNeely, 1937)</td>
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Within Table 2, the persistence model examines four variables. Personal variables include gender, age, enrollment status, social economic status, ability to pay, and academic preparedness. Academic variables encompass advising, course availability, and institutional governance. Social variables are comprised of extracurricular activities and peer and faculty interactions. External variables include competing priorities like family, work, outside support, and financial obligations. All of the remaining findings will be classified into these four categories.
**Personal Variables**

Within many studies, personal variables such as gender, age, enrollment status, socio-economic status, and ability to pay have been identified as persistence factors. Studies have revealed the completion differences between women and men (Conger & Long, 2010; D. Deming et al., 2012; Leppel, 2001; Price, 2010; Tinto, 2014). Studies on traditional and nontraditional students indicated that these students persist differently depending on their circumstances (Bergman, Gross, Berry, & Shuck, 2014; Boice, 2007; Kaighobadi & Allen, 2008; National Center for the Study of Adult Learning, and Literacy, 1998). Parental educational background and family income have been determined to be factors influencing persistence and lastly, the ability to pay for school has been a factor.

**Gender.** Students enter college with personal variables that support persistence. In a study by Tinto (2014), he indicated that gender was an influential factor in persistence. He concluded that men complete more college degrees than women (Tinto, 2014). A study conducted by Conger and Long (2010), on the other hand, indicated that men fall behind women after their first academic term. The study results suggested that women persist more after enrollment and have higher graduation rates than men (Conger & Long, 2010). Another study points that women persist more when taught by women instructors (Price, 2010). A study of college freshmen discovered that women with business majors are less likely to persist over other majors and men with business majors are a little more likely to persist than men in other majors (Leppel, 2001). These findings pose a challenge for the RDC because the majority of their student population is women (D. Deming et al., 2012).

**Age.** Beyond gender, several studies have found age to be an influential factor for persistence. Many studies have discovered that nontraditional students have higher attrition than
traditional students (Bergman et al., 2014). On the other hand, a study of 5,190 business students pointed out that older students and females have higher grades than younger and male students (Kaighobadi & Allen, 2008). With age being a persistence factor, Quigley argued that the first three weeks of college are the most important for nontraditional students (adult learners) (Boice, 2007; National Center for the Study of Adult Learning, and Literacy, 1998). These findings identify why the for-profit sector encounters retention problems because a large percentage of their population are nontraditional students who have high withdrawal potential.

**Enrollment Status.** While age has been a persistence factor, students’ enrollment status has been a factor as well. Findings have indicated that full-time students have higher retention rates than part-time students (Attewell, Heil, & Reisel, 2012). Some explanations indicate that part-time students have other commitments such as family obligations and financial responsibilities that prevent them from persisting (Nakajima, Dembo, & Mossler, 2012). These findings provide evidence regarding the for-profit sector’s high attrition because half of the students enroll part time which means they may be at higher risk of not completing their degree.

**Socioeconomic Status.** The literature suggests that socioeconomic status affects student persistence. Socioeconomic status is measured based on education, occupation, and income (Bumgarner, 2013). Early studies revealed that a father’s education is a greater predictor of a child’s educational persistence than a father’s income (Jaffe & Adams, 1970; Tinto & Cullen, 1973; Warburton, 2001). These studies were conducted in the early 1900s when fathers were the primary breadwinners. Today, the family dynamic has tremendously changed, and the father’s education may be less of a predictor than it was during the early 1900s (Lamb, 2000). In a study of business students, students that had, at least, one parent who attended college or parents that
contributed to paying full fees had higher motivation and grades that contributed to persistence (Bennett, 2010).

**Ability to pay.** While family income may or may not be a factor for persistence depending on the educational institution and students, the ability to pay tuition has been determined to be a major factor in student persistence. Cellini (2010) notes that approximately 96% of students that attend for-profit colleges are eligible for financial aid and receive Federal Pell Grants. Studies have been conducted to determine the effectiveness of financial assistance and how it supports student persistence (Cabrera, Nora, & Castaneda, 1992; Jensen, 1981; Nora & Rendon, 1990; Olivas, 1985; Tinto, 2012a). Some studies found that grants have a positive effect on student persistence while loans have a negative effect (Dowd & Coury, 2006; Hossler, Ziskin, Gross, Kim, & Cekic, 2009). In a recent study using longitudinal data from students from their freshman year up to six years of schooling, the students that received non-grant assistance were at higher risk of attrition than students that receive grants (Chen & DesJardins, 2010). These findings are a concern for RDC. Ninety-five percent of their population receives financial aid, and most students take additional loans because they are unable to pay tuition out of pocket, and they need additional financial support.

**Academic Preparedness.** Academic preparedness has been a very important determining factor for student success in college (Jansen & Van, 2012). Tinto claims students must have the academic ability to persist. According to Gary Marks (2013), student academic ability is a better predictor of student success than socioeconomic background. Vaughan (1968) found that when students realize they lack the ability to persist, emotional commitment wanes, and they drop out impulsively.
Academic under-preparedness can be discerned by the lack of English proficiency, mathematical ability, and effective study skills (Du Plessis & Gerber, 2012). Bean and Metzner (1985) suggest that students with a high GPA in high school are more likely to persist in college. Studies focused primarily on African American males confirm that students with high GPA before college persisted more than those with lower GPA (Farmer & Hope, 2015). Another study affirms this, claiming that high school rank with high GPA is associated with persistence in college, especially at two-year institutions like RDC (Peng & Fetters, 1978). In a study including business students, college preparatory GPA and the aggregate SAT score were predictors of academic success (Rohr, 2012). In that study, when GPA increased by a point, students were twice as likely to be retained, and also for every point increase in SAT, retention increased by 0.3% (Rohr, 2012). In another study of 284 business students, GPA was found to be a strong predictor of retention, and higher grades increased the likelihood of business students graduating and completing college (Truell & Woosley, 2008).

Moore and Carpenter (1985) note that 30-40% of individuals entering college are not prepared for courses. Thus, 44% of individuals have to take at least one remedial course to prepare them for more rigorous courses in their curriculums (Moore & Carpenter, 1985). For-profit colleges enroll many students who need remedial courses, which affects persistence (D. Deming et al., 2013; D. Deming et al., 2012). Ultimately, if a student is not prepared for college and must be remediated, the student is more likely to withdraw (Garcia, 1991; Moore & Carpenter, 1985; Morrison & Silverman, 2012; Warburton, 2001; Young, 2002). Finally, Spady insists that pre-college academic work affect attrition because if students do not excel academically, they will eventually be dismissed from school due to low GPA (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Hader, 2011; Spady, 1970).
**Academic Variables**

Looking beyond the personal variables, much of the literature supports the impact of academic variables on student persistence. Academic variables include academic integration, teaching quality, academic advising, student centeredness, and preparation for the future. For academic integration, students persist when they relate to the course or program curriculum, and they received graded feedback for continuous improvement (Tinto, 2012b). Within the classroom, students need more than just a lecture; they need engaging and dynamic faculty that provide a great learning environment through quality teaching (DeShields et al., 2005; Keaveney & Young, 1997; Tinto, 2006; Tinto, 2012b). Students persist more when the environment is student centered. Students are satisfied when treated fairly and provided support academic, socially, and emotionally from the faculty, staff, and administration (Astin et al., 2010; Gibson, 2010). Faculty advising has been credited with supporting persistence as well (McArthur, 2005; Swecker, Fifolt, & Searby, 2013). Another component of the academic variable is preparation for future. Students want to know that they are getting skills and knowledge needed to prepare them for their future aspirations (Smith, 2013; Tinto, 2012b).

**Social Variables**

While academic variables are important for persistence, the social variables have a major effect as well. The social variables depend primary on the interpersonal relationship between student and staff (Bennett, 2010). Astin (1999) posits that student involvement is essential for student persistence. Thus, persistence is supported by great relationships with faculty and staff and student involvement in institutional activities (Astin, 1999; D. L. Bennett et al., 2010; Walpole, 2003). He (1999) suggests that student involvement in campus housing, intramural sports, campus organizations, and work study increases students’ likelihood to remain in school.
Walpole (2003) indicated that clubs, groups, and volunteering serve as a foundation for developing social and cultural capital. Looking from a socioeconomic perspective, Walpole (2003) postulated that low socioeconomic students typically are less involved in clubs and groups than high socioeconomic students, and low socioeconomic students spend less than one hour a week in student involvement activities. Given the importance of student involvement in persistence and student growth, these findings cause some concern because the low socioeconomic students seem less involved in student activities than their peers (Astin, 1984, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1987, 1993).

Currently at RDC, students’ only option for institutional involvement would be campus organizations because the other aforementioned are not available. Also, Astin (1999) notes, students in general lack connection on campus because they tend to work full-time jobs and commute, which reduces time on campus at two-year colleges. All of RDC’s students are commuters and majority of them are employed which increases the lack of connection and reduces persistence.

**External Variables**

During students' academic experience, they are faced with numerous challenges both academically and socially; thus many studies have argued that external variables are the major influence on persistence (D. L. Bennett et al., 2010). Bennett, Lucchesi, and Vedder (2010) pointed out that external variables like financial hardship influence retention rates more than any other issues related to the educational experience which it typically out of the control of the educational institution.

John P. Bean and Barbara S. Metzner researched nontraditional students, and they discovered these students’ attrition is affected by external variables related to social integration
Bean and Metzner (1985) realized that environmental factors such as finances, work, lack of encouragement, and family responsibilities have a great impact on student attrition (Morrison & Silverman, 2012). Other studies indicated that competing priorities like family obligations and employment influence attrition (Hunt et al., 2012).

What Bean and Metzner (1985) discovered is that, first, some students withdraw because of personal financial problems and the cost of school. These students are unable to manage the stress of school as well as financial instability. Second, students working fewer than 20 hours a week were more likely to persist; however, when hours surpassed 20, their persistence reduced (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Morrison & Silverman, 2012). Because work consumed their time, they had to reduce the amount of time devoted to studying (Hunt et al., 2012). A recent study of 377 business students concluded that there was no significant correlation between the number of hours worked in part-time employment and academic performance (Bennett, 2010). Third, people who are important to the students such as parents or spouses, close friends, or mentors are positive factors for persistence in college because these people provide encouragement to students during their collegiate journey (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Morrison & Silverman, 2012). Finally, family responsibilities were a major factor for withdrawals. Whenever faced with family issues and financial obligations, students always chose their family over the school.

For-profit students typically have low incomes and will withdraw from school for financial and family reasons (Cooley, 2012; Schade, 2014). Also, for-profit students usually find competing priorities like family, work, and school quite challenging (Hunt et al., 2012). When it comes to sustainability, for-profit students choose immediate needs, which is usually work because work provides income to support the family over the school (Hunt et al., 2012).
Summary of Retention Variables

The literature discerns that many factors affect retention. Like so many other educational institutions, for-profit colleges face the challenge of student retention—especially because accrediting bodies are holding them more accountable since they receive a large percentage of their funding through Title IV. Numerous studies have been conducted regarding factors that affect retention, such as personal variables, academic variables, social variables and external variables. Despite these studies, attrition nationwide remains high, especially among the populations that tend to enroll in for-profit colleges. With so many corporate job opportunities available today for persons with degrees, examining retention in for-profit business programs will support the labor market, the Obama 2020 initiative, and the Lumina Foundation Goal 2025 initiative. Therefore, the last part of this literature review provides some insight on retention improvement initiatives that have been successful, such as faculty advising, tutoring, coaching, and orientation courses.

Retention Improvement Initiatives

The final section of this literature review will examine studies that have successfully improved persistence. Research has concluded that many students are academically underprepared, and therefore, additional resources are needed to support student academic success. One study of business students indicated stress contributes to students leaving school; therefore, students need guidance in understanding how to manage stress and other resources to support persistence (Bennett, 2010).

 Horizons Student Support Program. Dale and Zych (1996) conducted a study at Purdue University using a comprehensive retention strategy involving low-income families, first-generation college students, and physically challenged students. The researchers implemented
strategies to improve retention such as tutoring, assessment testing to determine strengths and weaknesses, academic counseling, peer counseling, studying and time management training. The study’s experimental group attained an 85% retention rate compared to 47% retention in the control group. This study suggests that retention can be improved tremendously. However, Dale and Zych were unable to isolate a particular retention strategy as the one that most helped increase the experimental group’s retention. In a recent study at a private, four-year university, 66% of at-risk students participated in tutoring persisted more than the students did not. (Laskey & Hetzel, 2011). At-risk students may lack basic and soft skills, motivation, and personality traits needed to enhance academic success (Laskey & Hetzel, 2011). Additionally, students with high precollege GPAs persisted at higher rates than those with lower precollege GPAs (Laskey & Hetzel, 2011).

**University of Phoenix.** Bean and Metzner (1985) argued that one sign of potential withdrawal is absenteeism. The University of Phoenix (UOP) has significant experience in dealing with absenteeism. Cronin and Bachorz (2005) researched the University of Phoenix because of its global reach in the for-profit education sector. UOP focuses on students over 22 years of age whom public universities do not target and allows students to study part-time and complete courses year round. UOP contacts students via phone when they begin to miss class or assignments, which is rarely done by public universities (Cronin & Bachorz, 2005). Calling students have been a great retention initiative for UOP. Other studies have found that calling students to increase attendance supports persistence (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002).

**Atlantic Cape Community College.** Ronald McArthur (2005) evaluated the assumption that increased interaction between faculty and students in the form of developmental academic advising affects student persistence at a specific community college. He argued that community
college students face significant barriers such as being first generation college students, having family and work pressures, struggling with language, being minority students, and coming from poor high schools that lacked rigor.

Since most Atlantic Cape Community College students commute to school, the college was faced with challenges in maintaining a connection with its students. These students tend to go to class and then leave campus having interacted with only faculty and classmates. Hence, McArthur (2005) claimed faculty members “drive the bus” in improving retention. Faculty can improve retention with faculty academic advising outside of the classroom. McArthur’s study increased retention with academic advising, which Swecker, Fifolt, and Searby (2013) claimed increases retention by 13%. Hsu and Bailey (2011) added to the literature, suggesting that business students are more likely not to return to school because of faculty advisors’ unwillingness to help during advising sessions.

**Utah Valley State College.** Utah Valley State College (UVSC) conducted a quantitative study to determine factors that contribute to attrition rates (Hanewicz et al., 2008). The Utah Valley State College’s Institutional Research Department identified universal factors that impact attrition such as financial challenges with living expenses and conflicts between work and academic demands (Hanewicz et al., 2008). The study revealed that students drop because of lack of financial support, resources, and connectivity with faculty (Hanewicz et al., 2008). To increase retention, UVSC established a success hotline, developed a first-year experience program, and distributed success cards that contained best practice strategies for staying in college. While the study provides great ideas for reducing attrition, it lacks evidence concerning the effectiveness of each initiative.
George Mason University. Since nationwide, 66% of students never return to college for their second year (Cambridge-Williams, Winsler, Kitsantas, & Bernard, 2013), George Mason University (GMU) conducted a study to determine the effectiveness of a first-year orientation course. As Quigley indicated in his early studies, students usually leave within their first three weeks of college (Boice, 2007; National Center for the Study of Adult Learning, and Literacy, 1998). Therefore, retention efforts to support new students are critical. In the GMU study, the University 100 courses incorporated higher academic self-efficacy and self-regulated learning, which enhances motivation (Cambridge-Williams et al., 2013). The study concluded that retention of students who attended University 100 courses consistently increased by 12-15% each year (Cambridge-Williams et al., 2013). Another study including business students concluded that students who did not have exposure to items usually included in orientation courses like study skills, advising information, curriculum planning, group activities, and campus tours were less likely to persist (Davig, 2003). Another study of business students indicated that orientation courses had no correlation with retention (Potts & Schultz, 2008).

InsideTrack. InsideTrack, a student coaching organization, conducted a study on persistence related to student coaching and mentoring (Bettinger & Baker, 2011). The study included 17 institutions from private, public and for-profit colleges with randomly selected students (Bettinger & Baker, 2011). Each student was randomly assigned a coach. Each coach was carefully trained to identify strategies for success (Bettinger & Baker, 2011). The coaches contacted their students regularly using multiple communication channels and, in some instances, the coaches had access to syllabi, transcripts, and academic performance reports for some courses (Bettinger & Baker, 2011). The goal of the coaching was to guide academic and personal barriers and provide strategies for persistence (Bettinger & Baker, 2011). The study
found a five percent increase in retention among students who had coaches; many of these students were part-time and nontraditional students (Bettinger & Baker, 2011). The study did not have a great increase in retention; however, even a moderate or low increase is better than none.

**Conclusion**

Like so many other educational institutions, for-profit colleges face the challenge of student retention—especially since accrediting bodies are holding them accountable since they receive a large percentage of their funding through Title IV. Many studies have been conducted regarding factors that affect retention such as academic preparedness and student satisfaction. These studies provide some insight on retention improvement initiatives that have been successful such as absenteeism phone calling, faculty advising, tutoring, coaching, and orientation courses. Even with these studies and initiatives, attrition nationwide is high, especially among populations that tend to enroll in for-profit colleges. Qualitative research can reveal the reasons why different strategies may help reduce attrition.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This study will add to the literature on college completion in the for-profit sector, which supports underserved student populations that enroll in business programs. These programs support the national economic need for a qualified workforce, are heavily funded by Title IV, and are highly regulated by accrediting bodies. The purpose of this study was to explore what factors enhance the probability that business students at Roosevelt Dusty College will persist. This chapter explains the research design for the study including research methodology, sample population, data collection, assumptions, data analysis plan, data analysis, limitations, and research bias.

Qualitative Research Design

A qualitative case study method was chosen to answer the research question and provide insights into how to increase retention of business students at Roosevelt Dusty College. The findings will support saving the business program from losing program accreditation due to failing to meet compliance standards for two consecutive years. Little research has been conducted on undergraduate business student retention at for-profit institutions (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006) - most research has related to retention at public or private non-profit institutions. A qualitative design was selected for this research because that design allows the researcher to understand the phenomenon taking place while getting first-hand perspectives from the participants (Merriam, 2014). A qualitative design was ideal for Roosevelt Dusty College because the data from the participants provides an understanding of the events, situations, and actions that enhance the probability of business student persistence (Merriam, 2014). Qualitative research can be conducted by phenomenology, ethnography, grounded theory,
or a case study approach (Merriam, 2014). A case study approach was most suitable for the research question and research site.

**Methodological Approach: Case Study**

A case study was chosen as the best research method to answer the research question, which focuses on the experiences of business students at a particular college. A case study is typically used to answer research questions that answer “how,” “why”, and “what” (Yin, 2013). This method is appropriate because case studies seek to explain contemporary phenomenon when the relevant behaviors cannot be manipulated (Yin, 2013). A case study uses empirical inquiry to understand real-world cases by involving important contextual conditions related to the case (Yin, 2013). In general, case studies try to illuminate why a decision or set of decisions were taken or implemented to accomplish desired results (Yin, 2013). A case study usually uses two sources of evidence, observations of the participants involved in the event and interviews with those participants (Yin, 2013).

During case studies, the researcher had little to no control over the behavioral event and focused on the contemporary phenomenon (Yin, 2013). The contemporary phenomenon for this study understands business student persistence at RDC. RDC has a culture that is similar to most institutions. It offers student services, career services, and counseling services through Well Connect, an independent student resource services contractor, to support student persistence. The study examined the resources students have to support them during the life obstacles that affect their persistence. Since not much research has been conducted on business students at for-profit colleges, the research findings serve as a foundation for helping other institutions increase retention (Kuh et al., 2006). However, the top priority for the study was to identify factors that can increase retention of business students at RDC.
Case studies are in-depth and investigative studies relating to a particular topic or event (Creswell, 2012). The investigation searched for connections between the student’s school life and personal life to determine common themes that affect persistence. For an in-depth case study, multiple data sources were required, and the researcher mined thoroughly the data for themes that were not easily identified or uncovered (Creswell, 2012). Interview transcripts, observations, field notes, and college documents were reviewed, and the data was extracted and triangulated to discover similar patterns and concepts.

For the case study, twelve students from the business program were interviewed. The case study is bound at RDC where the participants attend and share experiences during an 11-week term. Field observations were conducted during highly populated days on campus in public areas. For anonymity, no specific person was identified. Also, college documents, the college website, and college catalog were used to gather additional information and provide a clearer understanding of the research site. The data from the study helped in understanding how to help student persist as well continue to support the financial stability of RDC.

Participants

As recommended by Creswell (2012), the study employed a purposeful sampling approach in the selection of potential participants. The purposeful sampling approach is typically used for discovering, understanding, and gaining insight from a sample (Merriam, 2014). Twelve students currently enrolled at Roosevelt Dusty College were selected as participants, which represent roughly 38% of the current business program population. All participants were volunteers. The participants within the intended study all shared similar demographic markers, but they have unique personal experiences.
Recruitment and Access

RDC does not require an IRB (Institutional Review Board) approval; however, the researcher presented the executive summary of the study to the campus leadership for approval. The campus leadership provided the formal approval letter in Appendix D and therefore, the researcher had permission to conduct the study.

Once the researcher received final approval from NEU’s IRB, the email invitation in Appendix E was sent out to all business students regarding their interest in the study. For students who usually did not check their emails, the researcher contacted them by phone to solicit their participation in the study using the same wording as in the Appendix E. When participants were interviewed, the researcher reviewed information from the consent form in Appendix F verbatim, answered all questions, and ensured participants were aware of the process and their rights to withdraw from the study at any time.

Data Collection

Since a case study approach was used, multiple data collection sources were used during the study. Interviews served as the primary data for the study. Field observations, college documents, and the college website were secondary data sources. For a better analysis of data, field notes were used to help process data. Interviews were conducted on an individual basis with business students. Observations occurred in business classes, the Learning Assistance centers, the library, and the student lounge.

In-depth interviews. In-depth interviews were conducted with currently enrolled business students at all stages of their degree program. Emails and phone calls were used to solicit participation in the study. The preferred method of conducting the interviews was
face-to-face on RDC’s campus in one of the conference rooms so that participants would be comfortable and feel safe. When face to face was not the best option, a phone interview was conducted as an alternative.

The interview process was informal so participants would be comfortable and willing to share. Open-ended questions in Appendix G developed by the researcher and other academic leaders were used. While the interview questions were developed in advance, the researcher allowed the interview to flow naturally, and other questions were asked based on the preliminary answers to the original set of questions. Once informed consent form was reviewed, the recorded audio interviews ranged from 10 to 45 minutes. Interview lengths were based on questions and answers of the participants.

**Field observations.** Observation is key to collecting qualitative data (Creswell, 2012). It allows the researcher to observe interaction, activities, and conversation (Creswell, 2012). The researcher will be a nonparticipant observer and will just record data without direct involvement with activities or people (Creswell, 2012). Observations were conducted in business classes, the Learning Assistance centers, the library, and the student lounge to identify factors that related to social and academic integration in connection with teaching quality, student centeredness, and peer support. The observations conducted varied from 25 to 45 minutes. Notes were taken during the observations and were used as field notes.

**Field notes.** Field notes were used during the entire data collection and analysis process. The field notes provided details regarding data collection and provided insight to the researcher regarding his thoughts after each interview and observation. The notes provided better triangulation of the data.
**Documents.** Business students’ files were accessed as part of this research for personal and academic elements. Enrollment paperwork identified students’ initial reasoning for enrolling in school and classified students’ employment status. Precollege student experiences were determined based on students’ grades prior to college enrollment. Transcripts identified academic preparedness and remedial courses placement. Personal identifiers such as marital status, enrollment status, ethnicity, and age were collected while reviewing student files. Attendance records were reviewed relating to academic commitment. Financial aid documents provided insight on students’ ability to pay and financial standing.

The institution’s website described the school’s diversity based on gender, age, ethnicity, and enrollment status. The website provided graduation rate and program placement. Organizational meeting minutes, school newspapers, marketing press releases, scrapbooks and photo albums, and student services communications provided information on social and external elements. Finally, historical retention data were reviewed.

**Assumptions**

The study relied on three assumptions. First, it was assumed that the participants will be completely honest during the interview process. The second assumption was that the sample size is adequate to obtain enough data to understand retention. Finally, the third assumption was that all business students have access to the same institutional resources to help support their success.

**Data Analysis Plan**

An inductive analysis was used to group larger, more meaningful units and themes through textual description. The researcher reviewed transcripts of the interviews with the first cycle coding to summarize segments of data and compare them to each case. Next, the researcher used second cycle coding to look for common themes and connections across categories. After
all coding was completed, the researcher identified findings, conclusions, and made recommendations.

**Data Analysis**

Qualitative studies are often small studies with a low count of participants to preserve the individuality of each participant during data analysis. This was perfect for RDC’s study because the study was bound to one location with only 12 participants (Maxwell, 2008). Data analysis in this study was continuous and iterative. Data analysis consists of data condensation (coding), data display (graphs or matrix), and conclusion drawing/verification (Maxwell, 2008). Qualitative interviews tend to unearth primarily textual descriptions from the chosen participants. Observations tend to provide a better scope of how events or activities occur. As the researcher began to review the data, the researcher simplified and transformed these textual descriptions from the interviews and observations into evidence. The field notes were used as a source of comparison to make sure everything aligns based on the analysis. Once the data was analyzed, it was compared to the theoretical framework to determine similarities and differences in findings (Yin, 2013).

Using Deboose as the analysis software, the researcher entered textual data and defined codes. The software allowed the researcher to locate textual data by words or phrases, to set codes, and count the incidence or occurrence of the words and patterns (Yin, 2013). During the first cycle coding (data condensation), labels were assigned symbolic meanings and descriptive information and organized into large chunks. The labels were contrived from words or short phrases captured from the transcripts. From the initial labels, the researcher was able to see the larger scope of data, and then coding became heuristic, ushering the researcher into a discovery phase. Within this coding process, the research identified the reasons for defining the initial codes while connecting the codes to the research question and design (Yin, 2013).
During the second cycle of coding, the larger chunks of data from the first cycle of coding were broken down into smaller groups based on patterns, themes, categories, or constructs. The researcher then focused on the threads that link the data. Lastly, the researcher created a data display (network diagram) to provide a visual representation of how data was coded from the first cycle to the second. Other data displays included exemplary quotes that support the themes identified in the second cycle of coding.

Within the data analysis, all forms of evidence (such as observations, field notes, transcribed interviews, and documents) were constantly compared to make sure that all data was properly triangulated. This allowed the data to surface themes that answer the research question. All data were categorized based on five criteria: responsive, exhaustive, mutually exclusive, sensitizing, and conceptually congruent (Merriam, 2014). Responsive means making sure the categories relate to the purpose and research question (Merriam, 2014). Exhaustive means that all data fits in a specified category (Merriam, 2014). All data should fit into only one category; thus, they are mutually exclusive (Merriam, 2014). Sensitizing means that all data should be accurate and understandable (Merriam, 2014). Conceptually congruent means that all categories should fit together (Merriam, 2014).

Limitations of the Study

Since the sample population was so small, and from only one institution, the results were not generalized to include the entire for-profit sector. Additionally, because student participants were volunteers, they were not likely to represent at-risk students. At-risk students rarely participate in activities outside of the classroom; however, they were encouraged to participate by explaining to them that their experiences are just as important as any other participants and also being flexible to their availability. Furthermore, data was collected for only a brief point in
the participants’ matriculation. Thus, a full picture of participants’ experience in the business program will not be available.

Data Storage Plan

The interviews were audio recorded. All digital recordings, transcribed interviews, and field notes were stored on a password-protected hard drive. All handwritten documents were stored in a filing cabinet only accessible by the researcher. Recorded data was destroyed after being reviewed by participants. Signed consent forms were stored in a locked file cabinet only accessible by the researcher and will be kept for the required three years and then destroyed afterward.

Trustworthiness

The institution employed the researcher as the Business Academic Dean. All of the students in the study had prior knowledge of the researcher as a consequence. Thus, efforts were put in place to reduce bias. All participants were volunteers and were advised that they can withdraw from the study at any time. All interviews were transcribed and reviewed by the participants for accuracy. The interviews were supplemented by observations and document review to provide three sources of data; this allowed triangulation to support and explain participants’ behaviors and personal experiences. Researcher bias was clearly identified within the study, and all data was reviewed by a third party or a person affiliated with the chosen research site to verify accuracy. A peer review by other doctoral students was used to verify the information and processes. The researcher identified assumptions related directly to the study and participants. In the end, the researcher allowed the data to speak for itself.

Summary

This chapter discussed the qualitative research methodology to be used to address the given research questions regarding retention and persistence. Roosevelt Dusty College
(pseudonym) was the chosen research site for this study. It is a for-profit college with two campuses in the north central United States. RDC’s business program has failed to meet the ACICS student retention rate benchmark for the last four years and is in jeopardy of losing its programmatic accreditation. A bounded case study was utilized to understand the perspectives of the student participants regarding the factors that enhance their ability to persist. The study provided great insight regarding business school completion rates while increasing the number of qualified working individual and lastly, it discovered persistence factors that will support RDC from having to eliminate the business program due to noncompliance while maintaining operational revenue.
Chapter 4:

Findings

Introduction

The case study was conducted using the research design described in Chapter 3. Data were collected from interviews, observations, field notes, and college documents. The data were analyzed and triangulated to understand retention at RDC. This chapter identifies and explains findings based on the results of the case study. The chapter includes the following sections: college profile, study participants, an overview of themes and categories, and a conclusion.

The purpose of this case study was to identify factors that support student persistence, thereby increasing business program retention rates and increasing eligibility for employment to support the Obama 2020 initiative and the Lumina Foundation Goal 2025 initiative. The study sought to answer the research question: what factors enhance the probability that business students at Roosevelt Dusty College will persist?

Answers to the research question were discovered through observations at Roosevelt Dusty College and interviews with current business students. During the process of data triangulation and comparison, the researcher constantly refined codes to identify emerging themes. These codes were combined into eight distinct categories. The main focus of this chapter is to present clearly the voices of business students who persist at Roosevelt Dusty College.

Case Study College Profile

A brief history and description of the college where the case study occurred was provided in Chapter 3. This chapter presents the perspectives of the students at Roosevelt Dusty College, a small for-profit college where the business students have individual and shared experiences. The business program at Roosevelt Dusty College has struggled to retain students since its inception.
Study Participants

Twelve students seeking an Associate of Applied Business Degree at Roosevelt Dusty College were interviewed during their winter term. All were business students who had continuously persisted in their studies. Table 3 summarizes the participants’ ethnicity, gender, age, marital status, enrollment status, degree progress, employment status, GPA, and campus involvement. This chapter provides a thorough understanding of the participants through their experiences.

Table 3: Interview Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Joe</th>
<th>Coco</th>
<th>Mike</th>
<th>Sue</th>
<th>Ann</th>
<th>Mae</th>
<th>Sam</th>
<th>Bill</th>
<th>Lily</th>
<th>Sol</th>
<th>Jan</th>
<th>Jess</th>
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<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
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</tr>
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<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
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<td>F</td>
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</tr>
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<td>No</td>
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<td>No</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Part</td>
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<td>&lt;3.0</td>
<td>&lt;3.0</td>
<td>&gt;3.0</td>
<td>&gt;3.0</td>
<td>&lt;3.0</td>
<td>&lt;3.0</td>
<td>&gt;3.0</td>
<td>&lt;3.0</td>
<td>&gt;3.0</td>
<td>&gt;3.0</td>
<td>&gt;3.0</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Shift-Morning (M) and Evening (E) Not Applicable (N/A)

Overview of Themes and Categories

The data collected from the observations and interviews were analyzed, synthesized, and organized into eight categories as shown in Table 4. The first theme that emerged in the transcripts and observations was Remembering the Inspiration. Remembering the Inspiration involves participants looking within themselves and recalling the intrinsic or extrinsic motivation
that inspired them to attend college. Under this theme, one category was identified: Purpose of My Journey. This category is defined as the reasons why a student matriculated into college, which may include family, career change or promotion, or business ownership.

Developing a Success Plan was the second theme. With any journey, a plan must be developed to support success. Participants developed success plans by evaluating their current abilities and aspirations and aligned them with a plan that required adjustments to their daily lives. This theme had two categories, Understanding Their Capabilities and Goals and Adjusting Their Lives. Understanding Their Capabilities and Goals is defined as having self-confidence and believing in one’s ability, as well as setting goals that help one stay focused while attending college. Adjusting Their Lives is defined by the things participants did to transition into college, such as practicing time management, having initiative, and eliminating or sacrificing distractions.

Overcoming Outside Obstacles was the third theme. In life, many unforeseen challenges surface. Participants identified obstacles they experienced, such as disobedient children, parental abandonment, family distractions, work/life balance, illnesses, and financial hardships. Participants described how they were able to overcome these obstacles. Overcoming Outside Obstacles had one category, Weathering the Storms of Life. Weathering the Storms of Life is defined as addressing the unexpected things that surface regarding home, health, work, and finances, and also identifying factors that support overcoming these obstacles while enrolled.

Cultivating College Support was the fourth theme. The Cultivating College Support theme describes how participants transition into the college environment by becoming familiar with faculty and staff, understanding what teaching methodologies work well for them, understanding what resources are available to support them, and realizing what they are truly capable of accomplishing in the RDC environment. Cultivating College Support included four
categories: Adapting to a Caring Environment, Appreciating Active and Collaborative Learning, Utilizing the Resources, and Exceeding Expectations. Adapting to a Caring Environment is defined as student interaction with faculty and staff members who care about students’ academic progress and personal development. Appreciating Active and Collaborative Learning is defined as students appreciating teaching methods and developing peer groups that support their learning. Utilizing the Resources is defined as taking advantage of resources such as tutoring and counseling. Exceeding Expectations is defined as students being pleased or surprised with their academic performance, including their receipt of academic awards.

Table 4: Overview of Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Remembering the Inspiration</td>
<td>Purpose of My Journey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This category is defined as the reasons why</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a student matriculated into college, which</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>may include family, career change or promotion,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>or business ownership.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing a Success Plan</td>
<td>Understanding Their Capabilities and Goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This category is defined as having self-confidence and believing in one’s ability, as well as setting goals that help one stay focused while attending college.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adjusting Their Lives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This category is defined by the things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>participants did to transition into college,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>such as practicing time management, having</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>initiative, and eliminating or sacrificing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>distractions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overcoming Outside Obstacles</td>
<td>Weathering the Storms of Life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This category is defined as addressing the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>unexpected things that surface regarding home,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>health, work, and finances, and also</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>identifying factors that support overcoming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>these obstacles while enrolled.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultivating College Support</td>
<td>Adapting to a Caring Environment</td>
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<td>This category is defined as student interaction</td>
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<td></td>
<td>with faculty and staff members who care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>about students’ academic progress and personal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>development.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appreciating Active and Collaborative Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>This category is defined as students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>appreciating teaching methods and developing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>peer groups that support their learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Utilizing the Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This category is defined as taking advantage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>of resources such as tutoring and counseling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exceeding Expectations</td>
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<td></td>
<td>This category is defined as students</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>being pleased or surprised with their academic</td>
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<td></td>
<td>performance, including their receipt of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>academic awards.</td>
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</table>

Theme 1: Remembering the Inspiration
Remembering the Inspiration surfaced as the main theme. It is defined as finding one’s inspiration for embarking on an academic journey. The context within this section provides supporting data on participants understanding their inspiration and identifying why they choose to attend college.

**Purpose of my journey.** During data collection, many of the participants elaborated on the reasons that they attended college, and these reasons kept surfacing during the interviews and observations. Many participants had people who inspired them to attend college, or they wanted to make a change in their lives. This category consists of factors that inspired the participants to enroll in college, such as family, friends, a new job, a career change, or business ownership.

The family was mentioned specifically as an inspiration for many of the participants. Lily was inspired to enroll in the business program with her father, but unfortunately, she soon became pregnant and withdrew to have her first child. After becoming a mother, her mindset changed and her inspiration resurfaced, so she reenrolled in the business program after adjusting to being a mother. Lily explained how she was inspired first by her father (who left with her when she withdrew to have her child, and he never returned. Lily explained:

> Now that I am a mother, my daughter is my motivation. I am her role model, and I want to make sure she is able to get whatever she wants and not have to go through the things that I have gone through.

Bill shared similar inspirations about being in school and being a father. Bill stated:

> I have three girls, and I want to show them that if daddy can study hard for school and go to work. Then they can study hard since they are not even working. It is a motivation thing for me to show my daughters that you can get good grades, work hard, study, and stay focus. They can do whatever they want to do.
From Bill’s perspective, he is an inspiration for his daughters as they are an inspiration to him as well. Sam also stated that his daughter was his inspiration:

Attending college was something I was determined to do, especially for my daughter. I wanted to improve her situation and mine. My daughter is what actually pushed me to change and decide to come back to school because I wanted her to do well. She was not doing well before I enrolled in college.

On the other hand, Joe has no kids, and he shared, “My sister is an instructor at RDC, and she forced me to go back to school.” Mike’s brother was his inspiration. He mentioned:

My brother graduated from college, and he stuck with it and got his degree. I want the same feeling that I had for him that he will have one day for me because I was one test away from getting a G.E.D. I did not walk across the stage with my high school class even though I graduated. I never got the experience or exposure of what it feels like to walk across the stage with your class and toss your cap and tassel. I just want the celebration moment of knowing I made it.

While family inspiration surfaced for Coco, Sue, Ann, Mae, Sol, Jess, and Jan as well, other items were their reasons for inspiration. Mae wanted to find a better job after working in fast food for over 14 years. Jess wanted to get a new job at a demolition company. Sue experienced a rough couple of years which prohibited her from using her prior certificates in the medical field, and therefore, she was inspired to return to school to gain the knowledge needed to start her own business. Sol wanted a changed life from his wayward path with drugs. Bill added, “The main reason I am here is because of my best friend dying. He actually always encouraged me to go back to school. I was smart enough to go back to school for me and him to represent the both of us.”
Theme 2: Developing a Success Plan

In the previous theme, participants discussed remembering their inspiration and discovering the purpose of their journey. The next theme that appeared and will be discussed in this section was Developing a Success Plan, which included Understanding Their Capabilities and Goals and Adjusting Their Lives. Participants developed a success plan, assessed their abilities and goals, and aligned those goals by making life adjustments.

Understanding their capabilities and goals. Understanding Their Capabilities and Goals is defined as having self-confidence and believing in one’s ability, as well as setting goals that help one stay focused while attending college. One factor favoring persistence was self-confidence, which coincided with setting goals. Coco explained:

I didn’t think I was fit for the program and was too old to be in the program or learn how I should . . . . Before I came here, I was not as confident in my ability and I did not think I would ever get a job. And after I got here, my confidence came. Even though I would get sidetracked or down, I would still do the best I could with what I had to work with.

Jess was concerned about her capabilities at her age as well. Sol, the youngest of the participants, specified, “I didn’t think I was going to get in because of my GPA or something.” He didn’t have much self-esteem, but his self-esteem began to flourish as he began attending RDC. During a classroom observation, he was encouraging others about their capabilities; in the beginning, he did not even believe in himself. Sam shared a similar perspective:

When I first started the program, I didn’t think I was suited for business, but when I got into the program and started class, and I started to understand what I needed to know in business, things begin to click, and I had an easier time just doing it. When things do not click, and I don’t understand, and nobody is trying to help me to understand or make me
or help me get what I need to know, it becomes a problem. I know I am not cut out for nursing because I do not like the sight of blood. I would not be cut out for dental because I just don’t like looking in people’s mouths.

Sam gained his confidence for the program after doing a process of program elimination and enjoying the curriculum of the business program.

While some participants’ self-esteem and confidence were developing during their matriculation into RDC, others had quite a lot of confidence. Lily stated, “I have never not finished anything in my life, and I wanted to return to complete my degree.” Jan mentioned, “I have to credit my success to self-determination. I pride myself on completing what I start.” Bill had a similar perspective stating, “I am already a confident person, but I feel like a more intelligent person. I already felt like I was a genius. Now I feel like I am a notch above, and I feel like I know a lot more.”

Participants not only credit their success to believing in themselves, but also to setting goals. Sue shared, “Finishing school has been my goal, and this is something that I have to prove to myself will work.” Jan said, “Sit down and set short and long-term goals. Then position yourself in the place that those goals are obtainable. And, finally, never give up.” Mae stated, “In 2015, I began to set goals and now I am two terms from completion.” Lily made a similar point saying, “Students should continue to PUSH through regardless of what is going on. They have to motivate themselves. They need to remind themselves of their end goals and end dates.” Overall, all the participants’ end goal was to graduate from RDC to either get promoted, get new jobs, continue their education, start their own business, or prove to themselves that they could make it.
**Adjusting their lives.** While understanding their capabilities and establishing goals, the participants realized that just having the ability to go to school and set goals would not be enough to persist. Embarking to go to college required some adjustments in their personal lives. The Adjusting Their Lives category is defined by the things participants did to transition into college, such as practicing time management, having initiative, and eliminating or sacrificing distractions. Mae suggested that things like partying, clubbing, and hanging around with the wrong people had to be eliminated because they would keep you from succeeding. Mae, a mother of 6, said:

> Working hard, applying yourself, studying more and actually reading the books that I am paying for helps. While you are watching television, you can be looking at a book studying. Within 48 hours, you can lose what you have learned in class. A customer once suggested to me that when you are taking your kids somewhere or to the grocery store, you will have downtime in your car. Then take the 5 to 10 minutes to actually read a chapter. Even if the chapter is short, you still need to read and go over the material continuously.

Sol echoed Mae indicating that he has had to manage his time wisely because he has gotten where he is today from much studying and time management. He also mentioned that sometimes he prefers hanging with friends and family over doing work. So he, like his other classmates, have had to make some sacrifices so he could persist.

Joe suggested that preparation, initiative, and time management are crucial to adjusting to college. He stated, “Take initiative and read ahead three or four chapters so you will have a better understanding of the chapters before class and know more than others, with the exception of the instructor, of course.” Joe laughed that it is more easily said than done because he still
struggles with time management in his life. Sue and Jess take one day at time and schedule one or two hours for their homework so they can stay prepared and focused. While most participants had some ideas or suggestions regarding what helped them adjust their lives to the college experience, preparation, initiative, time management, and sacrifices were common items that supported their persistence.

**Theme 3: Overcoming Outside Obstacles**

Most participants mentioned outside factors that challenged them while enrolled at RDC. Therefore, the third theme that appeared and will be discussed in this section was Overcoming Outside Obstacles which included one category, Weathering the Storms of Life. Weathering the Storms of Life is defined as addressing the unexpected things that surface regarding family, health, work, and finances that affect persistence and identifying the factors that support overcoming obstacles while enrolled.

**Weathering the storms of life.** Participants brought up many challenges they encountered while attending RDC. However, these students had figured out ways to weather the storms that appeared while in attendance. Many of the challenges were related to family, health, work, and finances. With respect to the family, participants dealt with disobedient children, parental abandonment, and family distractions. Some participants struggled to balance their work life with school while others lost their jobs and dealt with financial hardships. Others had jobs that barely supported their financial needs. Lastly, some had health challenges related to food poisoning, diabetes, pregnancy, and other undisclosed issues.

Sue, mother of 3 grown men, took in her granddaughter who had been placed in foster care due to her father’s incarceration. Sue and her 16-year-old granddaughter had confrontations regarding parental discipline which resulted in Sue getting into trouble with the law and causing
distractions and delays in her educational studies. The issue has been resolved, and she and her granddaughter are now in a better place. However, the entire situation took a toll on her mentally and physically. She also suffered many illnesses that prevented her from attending class and at one point she was hours away from being withdrawn from school because of nonattendance.

Sue stressed that her family has supported her through her journey, and she would not be where she is without them. She explained:

Mainly my two brothers have been supportive. One may give me a ride. My other brother is a motivator. Growing up, “can’t” was not a word that we could use in my household. My brother tells me that “I can do anything that I want to do as long as I put my mind to it.” He gives me money. I try not to go to them when it comes to money because I am going to have to hear a lecture. What did you do with your money? You know you are on a budget. These are my two older brothers, and I am the only girl, and my mother is not here. They have always been the daddy figure for me. They are still right there. They help me with my boys and grandkids.

With the support of her family, she has done well getting through her storms of life.

During one period in Sol’s life, he was living in a group home because his parents did not want him to live with them. He attended group meetings like Alcoholics Anonymous, at which he expressed his personal problems. During these meetings, he indicated that “I got compliments from the group facilitator, and it just kept making me feel better about myself. The group home was a great outside motivator.” Even though he was going through family problems, he managed to continue to stay focused. When he did return home, he explained:

My household drama affected my studies in a negative way. My stepdad and mom used to argue a lot, and they were not getting along. My sister would not help around the
house, which caused arguments. And things would get thrown. That was affecting my studies because I couldn’t really do my homework because I had to mediate between them fighting. Try to get them both to calm down. Also, my stepdad would try to distract me, and he would try to talk me into going out to the movies instead of doing homework. The way he would do it was in a devious kind of way. It all affected my studies.

Currently, Sol is living with his mom and does not see much of his stepdad anymore, so he does not have as many distractions. Sol’s mother has been a major factor in his life. She used to transport him to school, but now he drives himself. Also, she is constantly encouraging him when he does well, stating, “You are taking steps in the right direction.” Sol indicated that he feels like he owes it to her to graduate since she had to deal with him during his troublesome times with drugs.

Joe explained that he withdrew from another program before he enrolled in the business program. He stated:

I was working at a dead-end job, and I was not able to pay my school bills. I also had to get another job on top of that as well. That prevented me from continuing school. I had to take care of my mother. She was working and getting older. She is working now, but not as hard as before. Now she works at a job that she can do without hurting herself. Since Joe had the financial obligation to support his family, he had to determine which was more important: taking care of the family or going to school. Joe was able to weather the storm by the support of his family especially his sister who continues to motivate him by being a good role model and also finding a good job. Joe’s job has been supportive because his job requires him to have a higher education to get a promotion. He loves what he does. He wants to move forward with the company and for him to do that, he has to be knowledgeable about the business aspects.
Mike explained that when he originally started school, he only worked six hours a day on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday on third shift. He was able to do classwork while he was at work because no managers were on duty. Once he got hired full time, he gained more responsibilities and more hours, which eliminated his work study time. He is now working 12 hour days, 7 days a week. So he worries about getting enough sleep. He stated:

Going from two incomes to one income when my wife got pregnant, you think about how am I going to pay rent, electricity, and car note. Is this check going to cover the bills? If not, how many hours do I need to work to cover the bills from month to month? When you have gotten stuck with this situation, you have to make a choice of going to school or going to work. If you go to school, you are going to have to leave school early. Nine times out of ten you are going to be too tired and end up going to sleep or skipping out on school and get the extra hours of sleep so you can be up at one so you can do a 2 to 10 shift. Once you get to that 8-hour mark, and you have to do 12 hours, 7 days a week, your body gets tired and lazy. You get frustrated, angry, and it builds up. When you don’t have time for yourself, you want to say forget it, and you don’t want to do it anymore.

Mike is encouraged by his work team leader. The team leader tells him “Listen nah you can’t quit school. You got to get through school. If you need help, just let me know. You don’t have to go through this alone. I have been in it, so I know how hard it is.” Like Mike, Ann, Mae, Bill, Lily, Jess, and Jan all struggle with balancing multiple roles and most get overwhelmed with stress, sleep deprivation, and sacrifices. During a few observations, Bill and Mike were observed sleeping or fighting sleep in class.

Ann suffered from depression due to being unemployed and not being able to support her family of five. Ann gets financial support from her mother. Ann also mentioned that it gets hard
trying to do homework with five kids, so the father of her one-year-old takes the baby to allow her to do homework. Ann, like other participants, receives encouragement from other family members and friends to continue to stick to it and keep pushing through it. After getting another job, Ann’s manager allows her to leave work at 4:15 p.m. so she can be to class on time at 6 p.m. Her company wanted her to continue her education and offers tuition reimbursement that requires her to be with the company for two years after graduation.

No one thought Sam should go to school at first because everyone thought he should be working. He agreed, but at the same time if he did not know or have the skills that he needed to know to improve his situation, then what was the point of just finding a job? He did not want to work for just little to no pay when he knew he could do better. That was his argument, and now his family thinks differently:

My family has been an impact. Even though they can be a distraction, they can be encouraging as well. Recently, I have not been able to help like I want to. I am a workaholic. I haven’t been able to work. Things have not been going my way when it comes to getting a job. So they just keep telling me “Keep trying and work hard. Do what you are doing. It is going to come. It is just going to take time.” If it is not happening now, I can’t give up. Sometimes I forget not to give up. My family usually reminds me and that is what really is important. They are a very big support group for me.

Sam’s brother has been a major supporter in his journey to continue school. Sam indicated that his younger brother has helped with transportation and money. His brother tells him “just don’t give up or quit, just make sure you finish, and do what you need to do and don’t waste too much time because you never know how long you are going to live. So live each day to the fullest.”
Sam mentioned that statement has been his brother’s motto since they were kids, and it is always encouraging to hear.

Coco stated that her psychiatrist and job coach provides her advice and encouragement. Also, her children are her motivator. Every time she brings home a certificate, they say, “Go, Mom, go Mom.” Coco has three girls. One daughter, a computer engineer (Coco is not computer savvy), tells her how to do things and gives her suggestions on improving her school work. Her youngest daughter is her backbone and always tells her, “It is almost done and don’t give up.”

Most participants explained that family and work support had a great impact on clearing the path for their success. Jess gets financial support from her boyfriend. Jess’ job allows her to make her schedule based on her school schedule. Lily’s mother picks up her daughter when she gets off work at 6:30 a.m. so Lily can attend class. Mae also indicated that the father of her kids sometimes helps when she needs him to. Other than him, she has no one else to help her support her six kids and manage school. Mae’s job was flexible with her work schedule by allowing her to switch from days to overnights (10 p.m. to 6 a.m.). Thus, she can attend class at 8:30 a.m. and still have time to spend with her kids during the afternoon. Overall, the most influential support came from the participants’ family believing in them and continuously encouraging them to press on and fight the battle.

Several participants sought out spirituality as a factor to support their persistence. Ann was able to get out of her depression by reading the Bible. Coco used to be disappointed when she missed choir rehearsal because of conflicts with Thursday classes. However, she went to church every Sunday because it helped her get through the week. Also, Coco’s church director encourages her by telling her, “You can always do what you choose to do. Just put it at God’s feet and leave it alone.” When Mae gets overwhelmed, she just vents and prays and believes that
she will be okay. Lily indicated that she would not be where she is if it was not for God, and Him blessing her with a wonderful family foundation. Mike believes that the Lord is going to help with his progress and get him through things as long as he willing and has the drive to do it for himself. He just has to have that drive and not be afraid to let it show.

**Theme 4: Cultivating College Support**

Even with the support of faith, family, and work, participants indicated that one of the major influences on their persistence was college support at RDC. Cultivating College Support was the fourth theme that appeared during the data analysis. Cultivating College Support consists of four categories: Adapting to a Caring Environment, Appreciating Active and Collaborative Learning, Utilizing Resources, and Exceeding Expectations. Adapting to a Caring Environment is defined as student interaction with faculty and staff members who care about students’ academic progress and personal development. Appreciating Active and Collaborative Learning is defined as students developing peer groups that support their learning. Utilizing the Resources is defined as taking advantage of resources such as tutoring and counseling. Exceeding Expectations is defined as students being pleased or surprised with their academic performance, including their receipt of academic awards.

**Adapting to a caring environment.** All participants mentioned that they felt the environment at RDC was a caring environment. They explained that they felt that the administration, staff, and faculty genuinely cared about their well-being and personal development. In the words of Jan:

I have loved my experience here at Roosevelt Dusty College. I have learned a lot of valuable information and met a lot of great people. I was very apprehensive about coming back to school at my age, but at RDC, I felt as if I belonged. From the first day I
was placed at ease in Dr. Xavier’s class, I knew that this was a great decision for me and for my family.

Participants felt the staff was very pleasant from the president on down, always speaking and trying to see how they were doing especially when it came to grades and attention level. During many observations, the staff was quite cheerful and inquisitive with most students they met.

Participants felt involved on campus with the help of the Student Services Coordinator. Sam stated, “She has made sure that I have been able to get to school and all the extracurricular activities that she heads ups and leads are fun. Most of the time, she tries to get everyone involved, and if she sees you passing, she always speaks to you.” Mae likes the monthly birthday announcement sent from Student Services.

Before returning to school, Lily got encouragement from the Student Services Coordinator and her academic dean. The Student Service Coordinator stated that “I could do this and only have to start back.” Her academic dean stated that “there are always going to be things going on in your life, and there is never going be a perfect time to do anything.”

When participants approached graduation or faced struggles in their lives, many sought the help of Career Services. Mike appreciated their help and support. Coco thanked them for helping her learn how to interview and what to wear. During an observation, Coco, Mike, Lily, Sam, and Jan sought resume, interview, and employment information from Career Services. Career Services also provided the students with critiques meant to help them prepare for employment. Currently, Jan, Jess, Coco, and Bill are working in their desired careers. Career Services is working to find jobs for the remaining participants who desire new careers after graduation.
The contributors to persistence that participants brought up the most were their faculty and academic dean. Bill credited his success to two instructors he had during his first quarter at RDC. Bill explained:

During my first quarter here, it was two people that I hold very close in my heart. Some people do not care for Ms. Moseley because of the way she teaches, but I love that woman. She did not let you give up. I could be reading something or looking at something, and she would not let me just give her anything. I would write a paper and just give it to her. She would tell me to reach more and look for that extra. Ms. Moseley and Ms. Plain encouraged me to do more than I was giving because they knew my capabilities. That is what I love about both of them. That is what I like about Dr. Xavier as well because he doesn’t let me stay here. Dr. Xavier be like you can do better than that. If I give him an answer, he will say give me something else. I can rattle out anything but give me something else. Even Ms. Smiley never let me stay here. She would be like you can go there. They never just let me settle. That is what I love about here. They just want you to grow. I went to State University when I first went to school. Classes have like 40 people and the teacher doesn’t know you. Ms. Plain just had a conversation with me, and I had not had her class since when I started last year. It is like a family atmosphere. I compare here to being a customer at a restaurant, and you all are giving me a worthwhile experience.

Mae and Sol agreed with Bill’s experience. Both indicated they loved the experience at RDC. Mae elaborated, “With setting the example of going back to school at the age of 30-something years old, it is big. I don’t have much help outside. I look at my college as my family. Being with Dr. Xavier, he teaches you a lot, and he has open ears all the time and an open door policy. He
Dr. Xavier has been a positive impact on me. It is not many people who push and figure out the way to push each and every person that they come in contact with. But he has a way of doing, so that is amazing, honestly. I can’t explain it, but he does. Not to put that we are falling over, but he gently nudges us into the direction that we need to go to get things done. And that is a really big positive thing because I never like to be thrown into something that I do not understand. Nudging me in the direction that I need to go, I will see what I am looking at, and I will figure it out which it helps a lot of us students when we need to see where we need to go. When staff and teachers are doing it that way, it helps. If Dr. Xavier cannot help us, he has a way of directing us in the right direction.

Mike probably had the most profound story regarding his support from Dr. Xavier. He stated:

I am glad I have Dr. Xavier as my dean because there have been plenty of times that I came to his office and I am like Dr. Xavier I am withdrawing this quarter. And he is like “No Mr. Mike that is not going to happen. You need to finish whatever thing you are doing. You need to get it together because you are almost done. Therefore, we are going to get through this.” He never was going to give up on me when he should have and when he was supposed to. Instructors were probably emailing him saying that this Mike is not a good student. He does not show up. For him going to bat for me behind closed doors, the way that he did it and way that he still shows me that he listens, he really, really, really, really cares. Therefore, the only thing that I owe this man is to graduate and get this degree. If nothing else, if I never tell him how much I really
appreciated what he did, at least get the degree for the man. That is it. That is not too much to ask.

Jan added, “I feel that the instructors/deans/staff members are amazing. I feel they give you all the tools you need to succeed. Dr. Xavier will email/call you randomly, and when/if you are absent just to see if you are okay and yes, I know that is a type of hand holding, but some of us need that especially in the beginning, just to find our way.” Most of the participants had similar sentiments regarding the faculty caring for them, holding them accountable, and challenging them to try harder and work harder and never settling for average. In Mike’s words, “Every business instructor has been cool, laid back and down to earth. It makes the learning easier.”

**Appreciating active and collaborative learning.** The participants expressed that active and collaborative learning supported their persistence more than other teaching methods. Participants realized after taking a few courses that different learning methods helped them increase their comprehension of course material. Also, when they encountered problems, they were able to seek help from their instructors and peers.

Mike explained that he liked all of his business courses. Teachers would break down concepts so he could easily understand them. He also appreciated that teachers’ real world experiences allowed them to go beyond just teaching material from textbooks. Mae realized that instructors had their own teaching techniques, and some instructors do not follow the syllabus. Sam identified that the best way for him to be successful in class is to have structure; then he can follow a plan.

Participants expressed that they learn in different ways, and appreciated instructors who understood and employed measures that supported their learning styles. Sam mentioned:
For learning style, I don’t get much out of what I need to learn if I am not being tested. In English class, I had four tests the entire term. Because I already knew the material, I was able to get at least a “C.” In sociology, we have a quiz, midterm, and I feel like what I learned by just discussing the topic in class sometimes is hard to follow and comprehend. Just discussing material in class and having me figure out what I have to learn just creates a problem for me that is a negative for me. If I were being tested, I could know more about what I need to study to improve my grades myself. Having to figure out whether or not I wrote the right thing in a paper does not work for me. I can’t learn that way. In my opinion, that is busy work, and I really hate busy work. I want to have a purpose for what I am doing. In business, everything has a purpose. You are doing something for a reason. Even if you don’t know the reason, you will know there is a reason behind it.

Lily expressed similar concerns regarding her experience in the classroom and how she learns:

I have had to get use to different instructor teaching styles. Some instructors have spoiled me because they are structured and provide weekly quizzes that help me make sure that I understand the material that has been taught. They are interactive by playing games and keep the lecture material very entertaining. Instructors that are enthusiastic are better. I am a hands-on and visual learner, and I don’t learn just from the lecture. I cannot learn simply by reading the book. I need to understand how it relates. Some instructors just provide papers and then have a midterm and final exams that it hard for me to study because the teacher does not connect the papers to what is being accessed on the midterm and final exam.

Joe added, “The quizzes we do right after the lecture or before the lecture help. We do active activities that help, especially the quiz bowls. The activities that we do before taking the quiz just
are a refresher, and they remind us of what we study. Those are great.” While many participants attribute their success to having engaging activities like quiz bowl competing against other classmates, class discussion contributed to their success as well. Sol excitedly stated:

I enjoy participating in class and getting answers right. It is like a boost of confidence which everybody needs. I enjoy getting feedback from my instructors and having a discussion in class. The way to describe discussion in class is if you were a lawyer and you won a case, it is kind of like that. You learn the material, and if you get the question right, then it is kind of like a mini celebration. It is a good feeling.

Sam concurred that he likes class discussion, and he intentionally sometimes starts arguments in class just to get the conversation going. He just likes to get questions asked and sometimes from that; he gets a lot answered. Based on the participants’ answers, active and collaborative learning contributed to their success. As a result of collaborative learning, students gain additional support from their peers. Mae stated, “Two and three brains are better than one. There are some things that you cannot learn yourself from your dean or just looking it up on the internet.”

Many participants expressed that they have learned and appreciate being around their peers who have supported them in their academic and personal growth. For example, Sol expressed:

If you talk out loud like I am not going to do the homework, and they will say yeah you are going to do it. It is kind of like a team or something. Before enrolling in school, I didn’t have that much support. Sam is very supportive and easy-going, and he lets me talk about what is going on with me, and he has a viable solution. When I was not going to do homework or something, he would say your teacher is not going to like that
basically. I didn’t want to do the homework because I thought going to a job would be better.

By getting to know their peers through collaborative learning, the participants developed a bond and held each other accountable. Sam mentioned:

My classmates are a good support. When people ask questions, they hear the stress and frustration, and they try to help out. I have never met a big group of classmates that I have all liked. But each and every one of them has talked to me about something. And they have been able to get help from me too. And in helping them, I was able to learn something and get something out of it too.

Participants help others learn by asking the questions that some students are not willing to ask during class. Mike expressed that you had to ask questions to understand. Coco identified that listening and participating in class as a whole has helped her do well. She likes the idea of teamwork. The people that she has met have helped her in class, and she even calls them at home for homework. Lily stated:

Peer support has helped me as well because I get frustrated and sometimes a peer can explain a concept in a way that I can understand. The light bulb comes on. Mae actually just helped me get through the sociology class by talking to me and giving advice. I actually call other students and go to their homes or vice versa so that I can get support for my classwork.

Overall, most of the participants enjoyed the active learning activities that instructors employed during their classes while also realizing what teaching methods worked best for their own learning style. Also, they appreciated the bonds that developed by working with classmates that now serve as a support system by encouraging them and holding them accountable.
Utilizing the resources. At RDC, many tools were observed that were available to help students persist. The campus has 4 designated study areas that students can utilize when on campus to reduce distractions they encounter at home. Also, many classrooms are available for students when classes are not in session. Some participants were observed staying in the classroom after class to complete assignments before heading home.

The campus also has a library and librarian on campus to support students with conducting research, providing guidance with utilizing the library on site and electronic resources, and orientating students for online classes. The librarian was probably the least used resource observed on campus. The campus has two computer labs and multiple wireless printers and Wi-Fi readily available for use. Students that do not have computers or the internet at home can use the resources on campus. Many participants were observed using the computer lab, Wi-Fi, and printers. The campus has an IT coordinator on campus to help with computer malfunction and anything related to computer issues. The IT coordinator was seen utilized quite often fixing the printers, working on students’ laptops, and helping with students with emails.

Flyers were posted throughout the campus regarding tutoring both online and on ground. Regular tutoring session was scheduled weekly for basic reading, writing, and math while programmatic core course tutoring was available for request contingent on tutor availability. All tutoring was offered at no additional cost to students. The campus also has two Success Strategists on site to help students with anything related to academic success such as testing and study skills. The Student Service Coordinator was available as well to provide resources related to transportation, housing, financial, etc. The campus has an independent contractor, Well Connect, to provide legal services, counseling services, family and caregiving services, financial services, and health and wellness resources all free to students.
Some participants were aware of resources; however, they did not use them. Mae suggested checking her email was the best source of information regarding resources; however, when she first started school, she never checked her email. Mae stated, “When you feel overwhelmed and want to quit, use your resources such as tutoring. We have the library and free tutoring.” Mike used the library and computer lab when his laptop was broken. Mae likes that the campus is open on Saturday so students can use the library, Wi-Fi, and computer lab.

Joe, Coco, Lily, and Mae were observed being tutored in courses they struggled with. Coco credited her academic dean for taking hours to tutor her in person and over the phone. Sue indicated that she used Well Connect for her legal problems. Ann and Bill indicated that staff recommended using Well Connect, but they did not use it. They do appreciate that the service is available for students. Sue summed up resources by saying, “Use the resources that are available to you. Open your mouth and ask for help because help is not going to come knocking for you. Be wise and do not be afraid to ask for help.”

**Exceeding Expectations.** When participants utilized the resources and got the support they needed to help them, they ended up exceeding their expectations. Coco, a nontraditional student, was extremely proud of herself after she got help from her academic dean and tutors to help her understand how to complete classwork online. Now she can navigate her online classes on her own, and she has done well in most of her online classes.

Mae stated, “I am a student ambassador and maintaining a 3.5 GPA had me in tears. It is like seeing your kids, and it makes you happy. It makes you want to strive for more and not quit.” As Mae is progressing toward graduation, she is always aiming for a 3.5 or above and continuously challenging herself.
Some students like to see they are excelling in their work. Sol likes seeing his letter
grades in his class. He stated:

Just me getting an award. It was the first time for me getting an award in a long time. I
mean I really think the school was a big help in getting me on the right track. I no longer
do drugs or see myself going down the wrong path or potentially not being free. RDC has
made me want to live my life right. I know that it is not a rehab or nothing but using my
brain puts me in a good mood. I feel like I doing something. Thank you for enrolling me.

Jess and Mike mentioned that they enjoyed doing well in their classes because it impressed
themselves and their family. Joe stated, “The fact that they give out prizes especially during
student-faculty appreciation where they recognize students for 4.0 and perfect attendance. Now
and then students need that recognition to keep them going, and it shows new business students
how to conduct themselves, how to be in class, and how to be successful.” Jan, Mae, Sol, and Joe
have all been the recipient of the Business Student of the Quarter award for their hard work and
dedication. Based on the feedback from the instructors and recognition during student
appreciation, participants were very excited with their progress. With frequent recognition, they
are constantly striving to do better and be better in their classes and their personal lives.

Conclusion

The participants who persisted expressed four themes about their persistence:
Remembering the Inspiration, Developing a Success Plan, Overcoming Outside Obstacles, and
Cultivating College Support. Participants indicated that they were inspired to enroll in college for
many reasons. Some participants wanted to be good role models for their children. Others were
influenced by family members who thought college would be a great option for them to change
their lives. Some saw college as a viable alternative to life challenges like drugs or legal issues.
Others wanted to change careers or get promotions or gain the knowledge needed to start their own business. Some just wanted to prove to themselves that they could get a degree.

While remembering the inspiration and understanding the purpose were major components, participants realized that they needed more than inspiration and purpose to support their persistence. Participants had to have confidence and set goals. Some developed confidence by being in a college environment and working with others while others had already had enough confidence to support them in their journey. Many participants suggested that they had to set goals. Some set a goal based on their graduation date and goals for completing certain courses as well as assignments. Each goal had to be an attainable one.

Even with confidence and setting goals, participants needed more to support their persistence. They had to adjust their lives. Some had to sacrifice time doing leisure activities like clubbing, partying, and spending time with friends and family. Others had to let go of people who did not support their educational goals. Some participants had to develop the initiative to do work such as reading and studying before class. Because many had other obligations outside of school, they had to figure out ways to be focused and manage their time. Some used small pockets of time to study and do work.

While embarking on their educational journey and making life adjustments, participants faced many challenges that affected their persistence. Some of the challenges were disobedient kids, parental abandonment, family distractions, work/life balance, health issues, unemployment, and financial hardships. Despite these issues, the participants pressed toward their goal to graduate with the support of other factors. Participants received support from family in the form of transportation, money, and encouragement. Some of the participants’ employers were flexible
with their work schedule so they could attend school. Other received support from their faith in God and their church.

Besides the outside support, students indicated that they received a lot of support from RDC. They indicated that that faculty, staff, and administrators were caring and believed in their personal development. Student Services implemented many activities on campus that engaged the students. Career Services supported students with employment information. Career Services also placed some students in careers and continues to work with future graduates on job placement.

Participants acknowledged that they learn differently and that they appreciated faculty who employed active and collaborative learning rather than just lecturing and minimum learning assessments. Participants liked quizzes and quiz bowls. They were engaged by class discussions related to course topics. They liked team activities that allowed them to get to know their peers and helped them develop new connections. Their peers helped them understand course material and held them accountable.

When participants needed help, they could draw on readily available resources such as tutoring and counseling. Participants indicated that they were very appreciative that the college had so many resources on campus to help students. Thus, students had no reason not to succeed unless they were not willing to ask for help.

Some participants impressed themselves by achieving good grades. Other participants were excited to be recognized for their academic achievement. Some participants liked that the college publicly acknowledged students for their hard work and dedication.

All of these findings were discovered utilizing data from interviews, observations, field notes, and college documents. Interviews were conducted face to face and via phone. Interviews
averaged around 29 minutes. Observations were conducted in business classes, the Learning Assistance Center, the library, and the student lounge. Observations varied from 25 to 60 minutes. Field notes were taken during both observations and interviews and used to triangulate data. Personal identifiers such as marital status, enrollment status, ethnicity, and age were collected using student files. The institution’s website and documents provided program placement information. Student Services communications provided information on campus activities. The last chapter presents conclusions based on the case study findings and suggests recommendations for practical applications and further research.
Chapter 5:

Introduction

Chapter 4 described findings based on the data collected and analyzed during the case study. This chapter ties together the research findings by discussing them in relation to the research question. Based on the findings, conclusions were reached, and these were linked to the literature and theoretical frameworks. This chapter includes the following sections: interpretation of primary findings, implications for practice, recommendations for further research, and a conclusion.

The purpose of this case study was to identify factors that support student persistence in school. These factors will help increase business program retention rates and support the labor needs to support the Obama 2020 initiative, and the Lumina Foundation Goal 2025. The study sought to answer the research question “What factors enhance the probability that business students at Roosevelt Dusty College will persist.” The case study utilized interviews, observations, field notes, and information from college documents to determine factors that enhance persistence among business students at Roosevelt Dusty College. A combination of theories about persistence, student satisfaction, self-esteem, and commitment was used as the theoretical lens to review the literature and frame the study. The data were collected and analyzed using a general inductive approach to identify themes that answered the research question. Based on the findings, four conclusions and implications of practice are presented in this chapter. Recommendations for additional research projects and final thoughts conclude this chapter.

Interpretation of Primary Findings
The findings in Chapter 4 indicated that many factors contribute to business student persistence. The findings clustered into four main themes: Remembering the Inspiration, Developing a Success Plan, Overcoming Outside Obstacles, and Cultivating College Support. Based on these findings, the following conclusions were drawn about the factors that enhance persistence among business students at Roosevelt Dusty College:

1. Business students must continue to remember the inspiration that initiated their college journey.
2. During the early part of the process, business students must develop a success plan to support their persistence.
3. While attending college, business students must have a support system outside the institution to support their persistence.
4. A great college system is important for business student persistence.

This section interprets each conclusion as it relates to the literature and theoretical framework.

**Theme 1: Business students must continue to remember the initial inspiration that initiated their college journey.**

All of the participants came to Roosevelt Dusty College with some form of inspiration, driven by a purpose. As the participants began their journey, their inspiration was one factor favoring persistence. They had to understand the reason they enrolled. Within this aspect, remembering the reason for beginning the journey helps students understand their motivation for continuing to persist during their journey. For some participants, people were their inspiration, and they wanted to prove to people that they were capable of continuing and ending the journey positively.
Within the theoretical framework referenced in Table 1 in Chapter 1, the persistence and self-esteem, satisfaction, and commitment theory included family background and motivation. Based on this conclusion, Tinto’s (1975) theory would be most suitable for the family component of inspiration. Tinto indicated that background factors such as social status attributes, value climate, and expectations affected student persistence. Participants used their family background as a factor for persistence to develop and cultivate that environment to show a new generation that education is attainable. The new generation can get what they want, and the participants serve as the example. Also, within the literature, preparation for the future was a factor favoring persistence (Smith, 2013; Tinto, 2012b). Participants were inspired to change their lives by going to school and preparing for the future by getting the knowledge needed to open a business, earn a promotion, or get a new job.

While the motivation component would fit the modified student satisfaction and retention model from Bennett (2003), many participants were motivated by factors that inspired them to enroll in school. They used this motivation as a recurring thought for them to press forward and persist in their journey. These findings add to the Malaysian Polytechnic Institution study indicating that motivation relates to student satisfaction and persistence (Yunus, Ishak, & Razak, Ahmad Zainal Abidin Abdul, 2010).

Theme 2: During the early part of the process, business students must develop a success plan to support their persistence.

When developing a plan for success, business students had to understand their capabilities and develop goals. Students had to believe in themselves to truly understand and reach their full potential. While understanding their capabilities, they had to establish timely and
attainable goals. Setting goals allowed participants to stay focus so they could continue to work toward accomplishing their goals.

In addition to understanding capabilities and developing goals, findings indicated that participants had to adjust their lives to help them persist. Findings indicated that focus, preparation, and time management all supported them in adjusting to the college environment. Participants eliminated distractions in their lives that would serve as barriers and made sacrifices. Participants realized that time management was important if they were going to find a balance with family, work, and school.

As this theme relates to the literature and theoretical framework, self-confidence was a personal variable in the self-esteem, satisfaction, and commitment model (R. Bennett, 2003). Self-confidence was identified as a contributor to academic performance and persistence (R. Bennett, 2003). Individuals with high self-confidence were more likely to persist. Findings in the study discovered that both low and high confidence individuals can persist if they are placed in the right environment with the right support. The right environment would be in a caring environment with individual that are understanding and willing to advise students on their capabilities while also nurturing those capabilities and when individuals excel in their journey, they build confidence.

Setting goals was another factor in persistence. Comeaux and Harrison (2011) indicated that goal commitment was the behavior of individuals that measures the degree of their aspiration. Tinto’s (2012b; 1975) theory suggested that individuals develop goals influenced by academic integration in the classroom where they receive graded feedback based on curriculum comprehension. Based on the findings of this study, most students persisted because they
established goals. Some participants set short term goals for their courses; they shared the long-term goal of graduating.

Preparation and time management were mentioned as factors for persistence. Previous studies indicated that students who were academically prepared persist more (Jansen & Van, 2012; Morrison & Silverman, 2012). The findings indicated that some students were already prepared and had figured out that they had to adjust their lives by managing their time wisely.

**Theme 3: While attending college, business students must have a support system outside the institution to support their persistence.**

When participants encountered challenges while attending college, their support system outside school enhanced their ability to persist. All of the participants had family members who supported them in some way. Another outside source that supported persistence was spirituality and faith in God.

All three of the theoretical lenses argued that persistence was affected by the external environment, such as external commitments, financial hardship, and personal problems. Persistence theory and the self-esteem, satisfaction, and commitment model indicated that family support was necessary for persistence. Tinto (2014; 1975) suggested that students who have great family support systems demonstrate an interest in their academic journey and are more motivated to persist in their studies. Hunt, Body, Gast, Mitchell, and Wilson (2012) and the self-esteem, satisfaction, and commitment model (2003) suggested that students fail to persist because of competing priorities, and dropped out of school over a job or family obligation. None of the theoretical frameworks mentioned spirituality (church) as a form of outside support. In Astin's recent studies, he suggested cultivating the spirit of students to enhance their college success.
(Astin et al., 2010). Spirit represents what is most important to the individual by identifying who
they are and where they come from, and also the logic behind why they exist (Astin et al., 2010).

**Theme 4: A great college system is important for business student persistence.**

A great college system consists of adapting to a caring environment, active and
collaborative learning, utilizing resources, and exceeding expectations. Participants consistently
expressed that Roosevelt Dusty College had a caring environment. Student Services hosted
activities on campus to support and recognize students for their academic achievements. Career
Services was friendly and offered advice, guidance, and support to help students prepare for jobs,
and actually placed some participants in careers before graduation. The faculty seems to have
had the most influential impact. Within the classroom, participants expressed that they enjoyed
active and collaborative learning. Participants were able to persist by utilizing resources on
campus. Lastly, students could persist because they were able to exceed their own expectations.

All theoretical lenses specified that student persistence was affected by student
interactions with the faculty and staff. Tinto (1975; 2012b) suggested that faculty have more
interaction with students than staff. Faculty that engage students in the classroom, academic
advising, and outside activities tremendously increase students’ persistence. RDC’s students
mentioned that staff such as administrative assistants, student service coordinator, career
services, and the president had a great impact on their persistence. Based on the participants’
statements, the faculty and staff demonstrated all the characteristics that influence student
persistence: they were understanding, accessible, professional, helpful, reliable, and responsive
(Keaveney & Young, 1997). The findings align with the student satisfaction and retention model
as well because students with high motivation usually have better relationships with staff.
The other aspects that enhanced persistence were active and collaborative learning. Tinto (2012b) discovered that faculty that implement engaging classroom activities increase the comprehension of course curriculum. According to Tinto, the more faculty engage and relate to their students, the more likely the students will persist and be inspired by the faculty. Bennett’s (2003) findings revealed that older students were usually more satisfied due to enjoyable experiences within courses. Hence, Sue, Coco, Bill, Mae, and Sam all enjoyed the courses that engaged them and faculty that kept courses exciting.

As a result of collaborative learning, peer relationships were developed and became a key factor that enhanced student persistence. The persistence and student satisfaction and retention lenses align with the findings. Both discovered that peer interactions support student persistence (DeShields et al., 2005; Tinto, 2012b; Keaveney & Young, 1997). The self-esteem, satisfaction, and commitment model did not correlate peer relationships with motivation or commitment; however, students’ level of satisfaction was dependent on their degree of social integration (Bennett, 2003). Based on the peer relationships developed and observed, the participants have a great peer support system that provides guidance and support and holds them accountable.

Tinto (2012b) indicated that students persist when they are provided the necessary tools and resources to succeed. Based on the findings from the transcripts and observations, business students at RDC had a wealth of resources to support them. They just need to take the initiative to utilize them and ask for help.

Tinto (2012b; 1975) postulated that grades are an external reward. Faculty encouraged students to change or adjust their behaviors so they can succeed in their academic studies by providing continuous feedback (Tinto, 2012b). As Mae, Sol, and Joe mentioned, they love to get
grades and continue to strive for better ones. Bill and Sam indicated that faculty encouraged them to strive to their best.

**Implications**

This study supports the retention variables (personal, academic, social, and external) discussed in Chapter 2 while also filling in some gaps in the literature. There was no variation between the persistence of students in part-time and full-time enrollment status; they both persisted similarly while balancing multiple roles (Attewell et al., 2012). Ten of 12 participants had to take some remedial courses (D. Deming et al., 2013; D. Deming et al., 2012). Fortunately, these study participants persisted even after taking remedial courses, contradicting other studies (Garcia, 1991; Moore & Carpenter, 1985; Morrison & Silverman, 2012; Warburton, 2001; Young, 2002).

This study supports the academic variables of academic integration, teaching quality, and student centeredness. Students persist when they receive graded feedback that supports continuous improvement (Tinto, 2012b). The study suggested that engaging and dynamic teaching provide a better learning environment (DeShields et al., 2005; Keaveney & Young, 1997; Tinto, 2006; Tinto, 2012b). Student-centeredness is a factor in persistence. The study suggested that students persist when faculty, staff, and administration treat them fairly while supporting them academically and socially (Astin et al., 2010; Gibson, 2010). Also, the study suggested that calling absent students or just checking in with them supports persistence (Cronin & Bachorz, 2005; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002).

Regarding the social variables, the study implied that social interaction supports persistence (Bennett, 2010). In the study, some students were involved on campus outside the classroom; however, because they were all commuter students, their interaction in the classroom
supported their persistence the most. Campus activities increased students’ likelihood to remain in school (Astin, 1999). While Astin (1999) indicated that students lack connection when they are commuters, the study demonstrated that students do feel connections when the campus culture is student-centered, with faculty, staff, and administration who care about their well being and personal development.

The study suggested that external variables are a major influence on persistence (D. L. Bennett et al., 2010). The majority of the challenges that students encountered were out of the control of the educational institution (D. L. Bennett et al., 2010). The majority of participants had competing priorities like family obligations and employment that constantly challenged their endurance to persist (Hunt et al., 2012). Work was discovered to consume a large amount of time that should have been devoted to studying (Hunt et al., 2012). The major factor the study discovered was that parents, spouses, close friends, or colleagues were positive factors for persistence because these people provided encouragement to students during their collegiate journey (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Morrison & Silverman, 2012). Also, the study suggested that students had to decide if school was a good option when faced with family issues and financial obligations.

**Recommendations for Practice**

Utilizing the findings, conclusions, and implications, the researcher suggests some recommendations that can be implemented into practice.

- Since Remembering the Inspiration and Developing a Success Plan were the two first themes, business students should work with advisors or academic deans to develop an inspiration story they can continuously refer to during their journey. Next, business students need to work with advisors or academic deans to identify their strengths,
weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to develop short and long-term goals to support their academic persistence.

- **Overcoming the Obstacles** was another theme. Since the business students are so heavily motivated by their outside supporters, the academic dean, faculty, and student services should develop activities that periodically involve these outside supporters, thereby keeping them engaged with the students so they can continue to hold them accountable for their actions.

- **Cultivating College Support** was the fourth theme. The campus must continue to hire, train, and maintain a faculty and staff that are student-centered. Faculty, especially the general instructors, could have some training in active and collaborative learning and providing engaging assessment activities. If collaborative learning is properly employed, peer groups will develop which will support continuous persistence.

Since RDC has many other activities that support persistence, these activities will supplement the rest while also enhancing student’s ability to persist and also focus on areas that have proven to be successful.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

This research study explored the factors that enhanced persistence among business students at Roosevelt Dusty College. The findings led to conclusions and suggestions that could be implemented into practice to support student persistence. Since little research has been conducted on business students at for-profit colleges, the study addressed a gap in the literature and developed recommendations about how to address business student persistence. Some of the recommendations are specific to Roosevelt Dusty College, but could also be implemented at
other for-profit, technical, and community colleges. The other recommendations are general in nature.

- This study focused intentionally on factors that supported persistence. For a better understanding of business students at Roosevelt Dusty College or other colleges, student attrition must be researched. This could provide insight on why students leave, and then strategies can be implemented that support reduction of potential withdrawals while enhancing persistence.

- Spirituality was considered as a factor in persistence. Researching how involved students are with churches or other forms of spirituality could provide more insight.

- Since active and collaborative learning were factors for persistence, further research can study what active and collaborative learning activities are most effective in support of persistence and peer support development.

- A study on an examination of how race and SES influences persistence can provide another aspect of insight.

- Since the institutional supports commuter students, further research involving the collaboration of student affairs and academic affairs to enhance student engagement would support increasing persistence.

- Also, research on the role of how students play in their persistence can provide insight beyond looking from the institutional perspective.

All of these recommendations could provide more insight into persistence and methods that can be implemented to support students.
Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to gain insight into this research question: which factors enhance the probability that a business student at Roosevelt Dusty College will persist to graduation? The study used a combination of persistence theory, the student satisfaction model, and the self-esteem, satisfaction, and commitment model to reduce the probability that relevant themes were missed. After conducting the case study and following the research design, four themes surfaced: Remembering the Inspiration, Developing a Success Plan, Overcoming Outside Obstacles, and Cultivating College Support.

These themes led to four conclusions that answered the research question. First, business students must continue to remember the inspiration that initiated their college journey. Second, business students must develop a success plan to support their persistence during the early part of the process. Third, business students must have a support system outside the institution to support their persistence in college. Last, a great college system is important for business student persistence.

The findings support previous literature that discovered that confidence, goal setting, family inspiration, external support, faculty and staff support, active and collaborative learning, and recognition and feedback all support student persistence. This study was able to demonstrate that these factors support for-profit business students, just as they supported previously studied populations.

While persistence factors were identified, more can be done to support business student persistence. Business students can work with academic leaders to develop inspirational stories they can continuously refer to during their journey; to identify their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats; and to develop short and long-term goals that support their academic
persistence. College personnel can develop activities that periodically involve outside supporters, thereby keeping these supporters engaged with the students so they can continue to hold them accountable for their actions. Also, college administration must continue to hire, train, and maintain a student-centered faculty and staff.

This study provides a great framework for understanding business student persistence; however, more can be done to enhance this understanding and address remaining gaps in the literature. This study focused only on factors that supported persistence. Student attrition should also be researched to provide insight on why students leave. Strategies thereby identified that reduce student withdrawal will thereby enhance persistence. Additional research on how involved students are with churches or other forms of spirituality could provide more insight on persistence. Lastly, further research can study which active and collaborative learning activities are most effective in supporting persistence and developing peer support.

Roosevelt Dusty College has done a lot to support its students, but more is still required to improve persistence. Research for developing initiatives to support students’ academic success should be a holistic and continuous process. Students are unique in what they bring to their academic endeavors, and the college should learn how to support each one in the most feasible and student-centered way.
References


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doi:10.1007/s13384-011-0044-6


Appendices

Appendix A: Tinto’s Student Departure (Dropout) Model

(Tinto, 1975)
Appendix B: Student Satisfaction and Retention Model

(Kara & DeShields, 2004; Keaveney & Young, 1997)
Appendix C: Revised Student Satisfaction and Retention Model

(R. Bennett, 2003)
Appendix D: Institution’s Approval Letter

Letter of Institutional Consent

Date

Jasmeial Jackson
Street Address
Town, State Zip Code

Dear Mr. Jackson:

I am writing to offer my support for your dissertation study research, “An Investigation of Retention of Business Students at a For-Profit College.” This letter affirms that you, a Higher Education doctoral student at Northeastern University, have permission to interview business students who are 18 years of age or older and to gather data from student files as outlined in your approved prospectus.

Since you will receive approval from Northeastern University’s Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, the college understands that you have agreed to emphasize the voluntary nature of student participation. Please remind participants that their responses will remain entirely anonymous, confidentiality will be maintained throughout the collection and reporting process, and that their student status will not be affected in any way by their participation or lack of participation.

Thank you for helping support our organization by researching ways to improve business student retention.

Sincerely,

Campus Administrator
Appendix E: Email and Telephone Solicitation Verbiage

Email and Telephone Invitation to Participate in a Case Study Research

Date

Dear Students,

In addition to being an Academic Dean at Roosevelt Dusty College, I am also a student at Northeastern University. As part of this program, I will be conducting a research study to learn about factors that enhance the probability of business students at Roosevelt Dusty College to persist. I'll be working with many business students in this study and would like to invite you to be a part of it.

Below is some information to help you make an informed decision:

**Why I am doing this study:** I have seen numerous students come and go from Roosevelt Dusty College. Some student have provided some information regarding why they leave school while other just leave with no explanation. Therefore, I want to identify what factors enhance student persistence and how can RDC support student persistence.

**What will happen to you if you are in the study?** If you participate in this study, I'll ask you to meet with me for a 90-minute long interview to talk about your college experiences and personal life that affect your college experience.

**Will any part of the study hurt you or help you?** This study will not hurt you in any way, and it may not help you either. However, this study will provide a chance for you to think and talk about your experiences in the business program and how it has and will affect your life. Your opinions will be useful to the faculty, staff, and administration in trying to make sure that the school has all the necessary resources to help students achieve their goals. You may not be around for the changes that may occur as a result of this study, but by sharing your experiences you could help the institution better understand how to make the program serve the needs of the students.

**Who will know that you are in the study?** I am going to keep whatever I hear from you separate from what I hear from other people and other students. I will not tell them what you tell me, and I will not tell you what they tell me. However, I will write a dissertation based on the interesting things I will learn in this study. I will conceal your name so that no one will know who you are, or that you did or said a particular thing.

**Do you have to be in the study?** No, you don’t. No one will get angry or upset with you if you do not want to do this. If you do not volunteer to participate, I will assume you are not interested. And remember, you can change your mind later if you decide you don’t want to be in the study anymore.
Questions? You can ask questions at any time. You can ask now. You can ask later. You can talk to me about this study at any time. My telephone and e-mail are: 513-399-7735 and j.d.jackson@live.com.

If you have concerns about this research, you can also contact my advisor via email, Professor James Griffin, who will be supervising this research: jam.griffin@neu.edu

I am hoping you will volunteer for this study. Please email me at j.d.jackson@live.com if you are interested in participating or have any questions and we can schedule a time and day for the interview.

Sincerely,

Jasmeial Jackson
Appendix F: Consent Form

Research Study Informed Consent Form

| Northeastern University, Department: College of Education-College of Professional Studies |
| Name of Investigators: James Griffin (Principal Investigator) & Jasmeial Jackson (Student Researcher) |
| Title of Project: An Investigation of Retention of Business Students at a For-Profit College |

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask this person any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

We are asking you to be in the study because you are a business student at a for-profit college.

Why is this research study being done?

The purpose of this research is to identify what factor enhance student probability of persisting and how can RDC support student persistence to increase the business program retention rates.

What will I be asked to do?

If you decide to take part in the study, we will ask you to answer some questions during a 60 to 90-minute interview.

Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?

The interview will take place at a location you choose, by telephone, or by Skype whichever method is suitable for the participant and will take 60 to 90-minutes.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?

There is no foreseeable risk or discomfort.

Will I benefit from being in this research?

This study will provide a chance for you to think and talk about your experiences in the business program and how it has and will affect your life. Your opinions will be useful to the faculty, staff, and administration in trying to make sure that the school has all the necessary resources to
help students achieve their goals. You may not be around for the changes that may occur as a result of this study, but by sharing your experiences you could help the institution better understand how to make the program serve the needs of the students.

<table>
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<th>Who will see the information about me?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Your part in this study will be confidential. Only the researchers on this study will see the information about you. No reports or publications will use the information that can identify you in any way or any individual as being of this project.</td>
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<th>If I do not want to take part in the study what choices do I have?</th>
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<tr>
<td>No one will get angry or upset with you if you don’t want to do this. Just tell the researcher if you don’t want to be in the study. And remember, you can change your mind later if you decide you don’t want to be in the study anymore.</td>
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<tr>
<th>What will happen if I suffer any harm from this research?</th>
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<tr>
<td>You will not suffer any harm during the research unless you experience a personal breakdown during the interview process. If you do, the interview will be concluded at that time, and you will be given the option to stop and reschedule or seize the study.</td>
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<th>Can I stop by participation in this study?</th>
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<tr>
<td>No one will get angry or upset with you if you don’t want to do this. Just tell the researcher if you don’t want to be in the study. And remember, you can change your mind later if you decide you don’t want to be in the study anymore.</td>
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<th>Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You can ask questions at any time. You can ask now. You can ask later. You can talk to me about this study at any time. My telephone and e-mail are: 513-399-7735 and <a href="mailto:j.d.jackson@live.com">j.d.jackson@live.com</a>.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you have concerns about this research, you can also contact my advisor the Principal Investigator, Professor James Griffin, who will be supervising this research at: Email: jam.griffin@neu.edu

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<th>Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?</th>
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<tr>
<td>If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: <a href="mailto:n.regina@neu.edu">n.regina@neu.edu</a>. You may call anonymous if you wish.</td>
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<th>Will I be paid for my participation?</th>
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<tr>
<td>If you participate in the study, no compensation will be provided.</td>
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Will it cost me anything to participate?
At the moment, the only cost associated with the study is transportation cost to the campus for the interview if that is the location of choice for the participant.

Is there anything else I need to know?
You must be at least 18 years old to participate unless your parent or guardian gives written permission.

I agree to take part in this research.

______________________________  ________________
Signature of the person agreeing to take part      Date

______________________________
Print name of person above

______________________________  ________________
Signature of the person who explained the study to the Participants above and obtained consent      Date

______________________________
Print name of person above
Appendix G: Interview Questions

1. How would you describe your experiences studying at RDC in the Business Program?
2. What factors are occurring now or in the past that have affected your studies either positive or negative?
3. Based on your prior answer, how have you gotten to the point you are at now?
4. Have you ever thought of withdrawing (quitting) from the program? Why?
5. What obligations do you have outside of school? Please explain.
6. What outside resources have supported you to get to this point?
7. What advice would you give a business student to help them succeed in the business program?
8. What would you recommend that needs to be implemented or kept to help business students graduate from Roosevelt Dusty College?