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Community College Faculty Perceptions of Their Role in Student Retention: A Replicated Study

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of Their Role in Student Retention: A Replicated Study

by
Maureen Ellis-Davis

An Applied Dissertation Submitted to the
Abraham S. Fischler College of Education
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Approval Page

This applied dissertation was submitted by Maureen Ellis-Davis under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Abraham S. Fischler College of Education and School of Criminal Justice and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova Southeastern University.

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Abstract

Community College Faculty Perceptions of Their Role in Student Retention: A Replicated Study. Maureen Ellis-Davis, 2020: Applied Dissertation, Nova Southeastern University, Abraham S. Fischler College of Education and School of Criminal Justice. Keywords: community college, faculty perception, high impact practices, institutional retention initiatives, student persistence, student retention

This investigation replicates a phenomenological case study of full-time community college faculty to discover the extent to which perceptions of faculty role in institutional student retention activities are shared. The study goal was to gain further insight into factors that encourage faculty support and participation as well into those that discourage participation in student retention activities offered by the college. This replication duplicated the original design by using the same sampling parameters, interview tools, and approach to analysis in order to discover the extent to which faculty views were consistent and how they differed across two structurally different settings, one rural and one metropolitan.

Significantly, respondents in both samples perceived their primary role to be teachers and devoted much of their efforts toward meeting instructional needs of their students. Respondents were also very firm in their position that good student-faculty relationships were fundamental to successful student retention and to their perception that motivating students was a significant aspect of their role as teaching faculty. There was additional agreement across the two samples that the institution itself often hampered their student retention efforts, either directly or indirectly.

This study adds to our growing understanding of community college faculty as a subset of the professoriate and offers an understanding into their role by describing their lived experiences as academic professionals. Some ways institutions can more effectively engage faculty members in their student retention activities were offered.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

There is much ongoing research focused on various aspects of community colleges, particularly studies on student success. Not surprisingly, research on these institutions tend to focus on institutional redesigns involving remediation and program alignment, student population characteristics, efforts to integrate students into organized college events and other campus-wide activities. Rarely do the redesign efforts include any systematic examination of one key component of student success, faculty. It is established, however, that faculty play a vital on-going role in students' college experiences (Brooms, Goodman, & Clark, 2015; Tinto 2016). Their impact transcends the classroom and is noted in examinations of student socialization to college life and persistence to graduation (Hlinka, 2017; Simmons, 2013; Tinto, 2016), specifically through mentoring, modeling, and teaching cultural capital (Tinto, 2016). The role of faculty in student persistence is considered even more critical for persistence among minority and other non-traditional student populations (Brooms, et al., 2015; Dulabaum, 2016; Tovar, 2015), a category that describes the typical community college student.

Phenomenon of interest. The role of faculty in successful institutional efforts in student retention is not well investigated. Yet studies of student retention have for many years consistently demonstrated that a relationship exists. In community colleges where most of the nation's nontraditional college students begin their higher education journeys, faculty may be unaware of their instrumental role in the retention process. This can challenge successful out comes of many institutional efforts.

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Background and justification. Today's community colleges have emerged as unique and significant institutions of higher learning. Community colleges have matured over the twentieth century into usefully networked, somewhat independent units with observable operating patterns (Davis, Dent & Wharff, 2015). According to the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), these are higher education's primary entry points for most non-traditional students seeking college degrees. In addition, community colleges function as education hubs for post-secondary vocational training and certification, personal enrichment courses, education programs for learners of all ages, and more (Davis, et al., 2015). Yet what draws and or keeps faculty at these institutions is neither well explored nor understood.

Deficiencies in the evidence. Literature on career choice and professional satisfaction among college faculty is still small but growing (Graham, 2017). There is a need to expand this body of information as the role played by community colleges in issues of educating our workforce as well as the historical role in higher education and social justice cannot be fully understood without the role played by faculty in the process.

Audience. Findings from this study will prove useful to all those interested in student success in community college. The findings will help administrators understand the key college-wide role of teaching faculty as well as teaching faculty appreciate their own long-range contribution to the college mission for student success.

Setting of the study. Large Metro Area Community College (LMACC) is a large public two-year degree granting college located in the northeastern United States. It was founded in an era when attitudes toward education and popular perceptions concerning the right to schooling was undergoing change in the country. Incorporated into its

mission and vision is acceptance of its role as a vehicle of advancement and opportunity for those with limited access to established means for success. Large Metro Area Community College (LMACC) remains a free access institution which give opportunities to many not completing high school in the upper tiers of their respective graduating class chances to succeed in a credentialed society.

The approximately 14,000 students attending LMACC represent 130 different countries, including the U.S. They are currently enrolled in degree programs taught by 219 full-time, and 728 part-time faculty and supported by 450 full-time non-instructional staff. Roughly 55 percent of the student body is enrolled full-time and 45 percent part-time, 3,451 students registered for one or more completely online courses (25 percent), and 1,622 (12 percent) for at least one hybrid format during the 2017-2018 academic year. Most (52 percent) of the total student body are female while the rest (45 percent) are male. The median age of students is 21 years, 56.4 percent of all full-time students are 21 years or younger. Ninety-two percent of all enrolled students during the 2017-2018 academic year (the most recent full academic year of available data) registered as degree-seeking students. Consistent with its Community College function, LMACC facilitates career changes for those with work experience as well as provides opportunities for retirees pursuing interests previously set aside. During the 2017-2018 academic year LMACC enrolled over 8,000 students in continuing education and adult education programs (CIE, 2018). Throughout its existence, the demographic composition of Large Metro Area Community College has remained consistent with those of the county within which it is located (CIE, 2018).

Definition of Terms

High Impact Practices consistent with the definition used by Graham (2017) this concept refers to undergraduate practices which are specifically designed to increase student retention in community colleges. Learning communities, service learning and study abroad are included.

Institutional Retention Initiatives refer to practices designed to increase student retention including HIPs, scheduling, advising and counseling programs, and early alert warnings (Graham, 2017).

Student Retention refers to the continuous enrollment of a student at a single institution after initial matriculation into a program of study (Graham, 2017).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this proposed applied dissertation is to further advance an understanding of how faculty view their role in student retention by exploring:

1. The extent to which views and academic behaviors of one cohort of community college faculty in a metropolitan area of the northeast United States are consistent with those reported in other studies.

2. To replicate, adapt and build on research questions from Graham's 2017 study of community college faculty in a rural setting.

3. To enhance understanding of this population as a professional subset of the professoriate and of faculty's role in supporting institutional efforts for student persistence.

Though growing in volume, existing literature concerning faculty role in student retention efforts is focused on faculty as role models, academic advisors, their classroom

practices, and other forms of direct student-faculty interactions. How faculty see themselves as academic professionals is not well investigated. In community colleges where student readiness is often an issue and faculty-student relationships are linked with rates of student retention, a deeper understanding of faculty perception of their role in the process will benefit planning retention activities.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Community colleges are in the news arguably as the nation's most likely way to level the playing field in anti-poverty/pro-prosperity efforts. Today almost half of all enrolled college students are attending, or have attended, a two-year college, few of them arrive academically prepared and, as first-generation ever to attend college, even fewer report that they understand what to expect in or outside the classroom (Bailey, Jaggers & Jenkins, 2015; Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014; Levin, Viggiano, Damian, Vazquez, & Wolf 2017; Palmadessa, 2017). Today community colleges play a vital role in the overall system of American higher education as a pivotal element of the overall education system. They provide access, through transfer, to established four-year colleges and research universities yet historically, community colleges were destinations in themselves.

Origins of Community Colleges

During the first half of the 20th century, the community, or junior, college became the place to go for vocational training and dissemination of basic knowledge. Over the course of its development as independent institutions of higher learning these colleges established themselves as destinations for large numbers of women drawn by teacher education programs, college bound students unable to travel too far from home, immigrants who received instruction in citizenship as well as youth leaving rural areas needing nonagricultural marketable skills. Post-World War II America also benefited greatly from returning veterans who, thanks to the GI Bill, could retool and re-enter the labor force with skills cultivated in what was then called junior colleges (Bailey, et al., 2015; Cohen, et al., 2014).

From their inception, community colleges were greatly impacted by on-going social problems, on-going trends and issues originating in the society and outside their individual structures. They emerged as components of the nation's system of higher education as "dynamic and flexible centers of learning which are responsive to local, regional and global needs" (Davis, et al., 2015, p. 334). Their very purpose includes the offer of a relatively low-cost liberal arts foundation along with up-to-date technical and vocational skills (Harbour & Wolgermoth, 2015). According to the American Association of Community Colleges, these are higher education's primary entry points for most non-traditional students seeking college degrees. In addition, community colleges function as education hubs for a range of post-secondary vocational training and certification opportunities, personal enrichment courses, education programs for learners of all ages, and more (Davis, et al., 2015). Today's community colleges remain unique and significant institutions of higher learning. They have matured over the twentieth century into usefully networked, somewhat independent units with observable operating patterns (Davis, et al., 2015; Hendricks, Lane, Harris, & Dorman, 2013).

Transforming the Academic Side of Community Colleges

Sociocultural revolutions of the mid-twentieth century sparked societal changes that ushered in extensive variations among the nation's institutions of higher education. Two-year colleges were placed on a path which set them apart from other centers of post-secondary education, first and foremost four-year liberal arts colleges and research universities. Specifically, they became ideal places within the higher education system through which underserved student populations could begin their academic journeys.

Nationally, social programs aimed at rectifying historical disadvantages experienced by groups considered disadvantaged minorities were created and two-year education institutions, now known as community colleges, responded. Collectively, these socially responsive college programs were referred to as "open door" or "free access" policies or programs. Many of the more restrictive enrollment criteria traditionally used to identify viable college candidates were eliminated as high school completion, either a diploma or GED, became the new entrance requirement, at least among public colleges and universities (Bailey, et al., 2015; Cohen, et al., 2014; Levine & Dean 2012). This concerted push for improved college access had consequences to how higher education would function in the years to come. The consequences had transformative effects on community colleges.

Through the last half of the 20th century community colleges swelled nationwide in numbers and sizes and their populations came to be characterized as "non-traditional college students," referencing ethnic and racial minorities, women, lower income students, students with physical challenges and learning disabilities, students who are first in the family to attend college, and a substantial proportion of students generally considered underprepared (Hendricks, et al. 2013). According to Hendricks, et al. (2013), community colleges devote many resources to assisting disadvantaged and underprepared students overcome deficits in their academic preparedness as well as social skills needed to successfully navigate college environments. Attention to these needs are provided largely through remedial and first semester courses that give lessons in study skills, note-taking, time management skills and study habits, in addition to personal counseling, assistance obtaining child care services and career counseling in

college success courses. Studies generally report that these variables, essential components of college success, reinforce each other thus maximize student success (Bailey, et al., 2015; Cohen, et al., 2014; Hlinka, 2017). Today almost half of all enrolled college students are attending, or have attended, a two-year college, few of them arrive academically prepared and, as first-generation ever to attend college, even fewer report that they understand what to expect in or outside the classroom (Bailey, et al., 2015; Cohen, et al., 2014; Levin, et al., 2017; Levine & Dean 2012; Palmadessa, 2017). When assessing the growth and development of community colleges as viable institutions in the latter half of the 20th century, it is easily argued that its greatest challenge was accommodation of non-traditional students. Today, it is understanding student retention.

Statement of the Problem

Much of the research on student retention highlights the fact that today's community college student is likely to undertake a course of study ill-equipped for the rigors of that selected program. Too often the reason is a misunderstanding of what is needed for success with an unfortunate outcome being withdrawal from the college rather than redirection or development of alternative paths for completion. Importantly, one explanation for this pattern is that most research on student success in community colleges is focused on academic readiness and retention rather than students' experiences in the environment (Cohen, et al., 2014). While the former is quite significant, the latter is equally crucial to meaningful understandings of why some students succeed while others do not and how colleges can facilitate more successes. The latter is also an arena in which faculty's role is underexamined.

Approaches to Research on Community College Student Success

What is now understood about most students attending community colleges is that their identified needs encompass both academic and sociocultural domains, yet research intended to clarify issues and improve intervention efforts have focused heavily on academics, particularly remediation (Bailey, et al., 2015; Levin, et al., 2017; Palmadessa, 2017). Moreover, the focus of these undertakings is most often the student alone. Numerous studies of community college students offer clear explanations of several factors that influence a student's decision to remain in a college through degree completion or leave prior to graduation. Early more exploratory studies of the 20th century focused on sociodemographic characteristics of students assuming identified commonalities would lead to valid explanations of why the new generation of students stopped their course of studies. But those carried out later in the century emphasized the institution's role in student retention in their examinations including aspects of student experiences, such as adjustment to college life and the role of academic advising and counseling (Kiyama, Luca, Raucci, & Crump-Owens, 2014). This avenue of investigation was considered extremely important as it highlighted the need for structural changes in how higher education functioned and documented the changing student population.

The growing impact of technology and distance education, the steady growth of non-traditional student populations in community colleges, challenges of an evolving workforce, and more that are characteristic of the most recent decades, has added volume to a growing body of information about students in the nation's community colleges (Baily, et al., 2015; Braxton, 2013; Graham, 2017). Among the most recent avenues of

systematic study are those which explore the impact of shifts in the economic sector on college completion. Most notable among these studies are those discussing growing interest of funding and accreditation agencies on questions of student retention. This interest is focused on issues of student debt, workforce needs, and ideas of accountability (Dougherty, Jones, Lahr, Natow, Pheatt & Reddy, 2016).

Community colleges transformed during the mid-twentieth century moving away from their original "junior college" model characteristic of the early years and becoming an institution of higher education meeting the needs of a distinct student population by century's end. The combination of social movements and demographic trends reflecting major shifts in cultural attitudes and government policies resulted in steadily increasing numbers of veterans, minorities, women, language learners, working adults, and more, enrolling in primarily community colleges, too often not quite "college ready." Too regularly community college students withdrew from the institution prior to graduation raising serious questions and concerns about how student needs were being addressed. The latter half of the 20th century was the era during which nontraditional students became the traditional community college student and their needs the focus of social research. The focus on retention dominated scholarly literature in higher education leaning heavily on explaining student behavior while offering little insight into contributing organizational practices and even less on faculty role in student's decisions to continue or end their college experience.

Theories of Student Retention

Focus on student development: Retention research in much of the century was heavily influenced by a body of theories which shaped much of our current understanding

of the process, at least from the student perspective. Graham (2017) discusses five from

this theoretical body that were each significant in the direction of research and has served

as a springboard for ongoing efforts today. Briefly, they are the theories of Spady (1971),

Tinto 1975), Bean (1980), Astin (1985), and Kuh (2008). According to Graham (2017),

Spady presents a sociological model of student behavior which explains student ability to

balance both the academic and social systems in the college as a function of student

integration into college. It is an important theory in that it acknowledges the student's

multiple social systems and the impact of external forces on individual actions within the

college system.

Vincent Tinto's research on student retention continued Spady's work and

provided an important springboard for continuing research. Like Spady's (1971), Tinto's

models illustrate the significance of student attributes, social and institutional experiences

in the process of establishing levels of student academic and social integration and how

they shape retention patterns, as an outcome (Hlinka, 2017; Tinto, 2014). Among factors

emphasized by Tinto two are important to this study. One is his shift in perspective

which steered research from a focus on institutions to one on student experiences. His

position that students should be the focus marked a meaningful conceptual shift in

research focus to one on the student experience. The second is his position of the

meaningful role played by faculty in socializing students to the college culture. This

study continues to expand approaches used to gain an understanding of student retention

by both its focus on faculty and by utilizing theories that consider environmental factors

which impact persistence as well.

Focus on campus environment: Ecological approaches to understanding human development provide a way to understand how interaction between people and their environments promote growth and development. Ecological approaches also draw attention to how people influence their surroundings and the fact that some settings favor the development of some individuals more than they do others. These environment-based theories helped to redirect mid-twentieth century attention placed on student deficits by emphasizing the fact that a broad spectrum of experiences and processes shape possible outcomes (Schuh, Jones, Harper, et al., 2011).

Focus on institutional processes: Many theories are available for explaining what community colleges should do to retain students through to graduation. Most were developed during the latter half of the twentieth century and many provide guidelines or frameworks for programs and initiatives still used by colleges and universities nationwide. These theories can be categorized under headings which draw attention to the type of intervention typically deemed necessary for students to succeed in the college environment. Organizational theories, such as the four frames in higher education, shift focus from students to college as a structured environment within which students must function even while finding it akin to a foreign, even bewildering, one. Environmental or context theories (i.e., *campus ecology*) and theories emphasizing intersectionality of various sociocultural factors (i.e., *critical race theories*) add yet another dimension to understanding as impacts of several sociocultural factors on student success are examined (Schuh, et al., 2011, pp. 168-256).

Importantly, these theories share a common perspective. They are focused on helping educators understand factors that are related to graduation as the only real goal.

Accordingly, they highlight academic deficits, cultural disconnects, and developmental processes of students that negatively impact graduation rates. The cumulative work of Vincent Tinto adds an important layer to theoretical discussions. Reflecting on findings from years of research on retention, including his own, Tinto alerts us to the idea that too little attention is devoted to the flip side of measures of retention, namely persistence. While "retention" has become the standard indicator of worthwhile college programs for accreditation agencies, government and private funding sources, even colleges and universities themselves, it has been challenged as a meaningful outcome measure (Brint & Clotfelter, 2016; Cohen, et al., 2014; Hlinka, 2017; Simmons 2013). According to Tinto (2016), focusing on retention is neither the only nor best way to understand why some students remain to graduation while others drop out. "Students …do not seek to be retained. They seek to persist. The two perspectives, although necessarily related, are not the same. Their interests are different" (Tinto, 2016, p.1). This is a sentiment echoed by several studies (Brooms, et al., 2015; Hlinka 2017; Martin, Galentino & Townsend, 2014; Rice & Alfred 2014).

Focus on persistence. Tinto (2016) explains that excellent college programs fail to retain students because they are unable to affect the student's own motivation for persistence. At the core of student motivation, he argues, are the student's own sense of belonging, their belief that they can and will succeed (self-efficacy) and a trust that the curriculum itself has value. Each of these are factors that separately motivate students to remain within a single institution through to completion. There are also factors that are consistently demonstrated as tied to persistence by other studies as well, particularly among non-traditional students.

Martin, et al., (2014) reviewed several studies as they explored student success in community colleges, including Tinto's classic model of student persistence. They found that although factors such as low income and lack of academic preparation, poor knowledge of college systems and external demands such as employment were significant factors, the greatest predictor of student success was being goal oriented, a dimension of self-efficacy and related to perceived value of the curriculum. Their review of numerous studies revealed characteristics such as "motivation, control, self-efficacy, empathy, attention needs, parental education, and anticipatory socialization," (Martin, et al., 2014, p. 224) as factors predictive of degree completion among community college students. Furthermore, they found not only academic preparedness to be a significant factor for success, but having definite plans for completing college, what to do after graduation, as well as *cultural capital,* to all be key factors in student success. The same factors, they argue, can be, and are used in numerous, studies explaining why students do not persist.

Cultural Capital and Student Persistence

Martin, et al., (2014) framed their examination of a cohort of college students meeting stereotyped views of first-year students (18-24 years old, enrolled full-time directly from high school graduation, at a 4-year institution) within the framework provided by *persistence theory.* They demonstrated that for this cohort persistence is a viable concept, thus adding support for Tinto's position. However, most students in community colleges do not fit this stereotype and generally lack social characteristics studies conclude are predictive of student success, particularly cultural capital. The concept cultural capital, introduced in 1977 by Pierre Bourdieu, is aligned with social

reproduction theory. It describes the role of schools in society as a particular form of socialization. The process is carried out in such ways that students maintain the social position of their parents in the social structure (Martin, et al., 2014).

As a concept, cultural capital is easily utilized in explanations of why nontraditional students do not persist in college. Social reproduction theory explains that society is recreated generation after generation through a systematic passing on of norms and values which inform one's interpretations of society's opportunity structures as well as interpretations of one's social roles (Brint & Clotfelter 2016). These are all aspects of cultural capital. Additional aspects of cultural capital include types of parent-child interaction that vary meaningfully by social class, education resources which are likely maintained within the home, types, frequencies, and duration of conversations among family members, approaches to disciplinary behaviors, and so on (Louque & Latunde, 2014; Wood & Palmer, 2013). Independently and collectively possessing these social factors advantage some groups, while disadvantaging others in society and shape views of college completion as a necessary goal for success. Sharing the mainstream view of college as a necessary goal is the viewpoint consistent with college success. Not surprisingly, literature on colleges success repeatedly demonstrate that the higher the social class, the more aligned is social capital obtained from family (specifically, attitudes, values, and behaviors) with those of education institutions at all levels. In the specific case of college or university, the higher the social class, the greater the likelihood that a freshman college student will be goal directed, have a greater sense of self-efficacy, and believe seeking a degree is a worthwhile venture. This correlation reflects the shared mainstream cultural goals of traditional college students and the social institutions

designed to educate them (Brooms, et al., 2015; Louque & Latunde, 2014; Wood & Palmer, 2013). Low income students exhibit behaviors, attitudes, and values that are not always consistent with those research correlates with student success. Sometimes this latter group instead reflect ideas of peer group members, even some family members, who view academics as less contributory to current or future successes than would a marketable trade (Brint & Clotfelter 2016; Hlinka 2017).

Faculty Role in Student Retention

Preparation for college is not limited to reading level, grammar skills or comfort level in math (Wood, Newman & Harris, 2015). It also includes general self-discipline, study skills, and academic self-confidence (Martin, et al., 2014, p. 225). Cultural capital is now understood to be as important to student persistence and graduation as is any other social factor. Cultural capital can enable or limit an individual's ability to negotiate diverse types of social groups, organizations, or institutions themselves (Brooms, et al., 2015). One new and important line of inquiry that has not been systematically investigated is the role of faculty in student retention efforts among the nation's community colleges, particularly their meaningful role in non-academic areas.

The heavy focus on student performance minimizes a significant aspect of the student experience that research indicates is important to persistence; it is student-faculty interaction. Studies continually show that most efforts to remediate poor academic preparation have been insufficient to increase retention. Students are found most likely to remain in college through graduation when they have internalized completion as a personal goal as well as embraced the perception that they are able to do so. Although

academic skills are a particularly important contributing factor to this outcome, it is not the only one.

Arguments have been made that colleges and universities are strongholds of middle-class society's values, beliefs, and norms (Brint & Clotfelter, 2016). Goal-setting and self-efficacy are among them. However, these are not just aspects of the cultural capital most characteristic of society's middle- and upper middle-classes, they are important skills for college success. Well intentioned programs of inclusion and remediation that were carefully developed in community colleges generally reflect these values and are frequently interpreted by students as having an undertone of elitism, unconsciously and unintentionally modeled by faculty and administrators (Schuddle & Goldrick-Rab, 2015). The unfortunate consequence of this undertone is a further alienation of non-traditional students who are the primary utilizers of the nation's community colleges (Brint & Clotfelter, 2016; Martin, et al., 2014) however, positive interactions with faculty can still lead to a positive outcome (Fike, Fike & Zhang, 2015; Tovar 2015).

The role of faculty can be pivotal to the experience of non-traditional students in community colleges. Faculty mentoring has been linked to higher grade point averages among students as well as student persistence to graduation (Hlinka, 2017; Tovar, 2015). But positive relationships are not consistently found across studies, largely due to inconsistent measurement of the concept "mentoring". Similarly, student engagement is established as tied to student success in several ways, including academic performance, retention, and cognition (Brint & Clotfelter, 2016; Tovar 2015). Finally, student engagement is also demonstrated as related to numerous social and socioeconomic

variables impacting community colleges. Race and ethnicity, gender, marital status, and employment status are all correlated with student involvement in the general college culture (Tovar, 2015).

Building a Body of Research on Faculty Role in Student Retention

Stakeholders in the success of higher education in the U.S. have been giving increasing amounts of attention to the role of faculty in institutions of higher education, including the balance needed between several components of faculty role (Lloyd, 2016; Kapitulik 2013; Suvedi, Ghimire, Millenbah & Shrestha, 2015). Major professional agencies, foundations, and research universities, such as The American Association of Colleges and Universities, The Carnegie Foundation and the University of California, have partnered to systematically fill-in information gaps helping us understand the changing role of the professoriate as well as how faculty view themselves. Reviewing some of these efforts, Kezar & Holcombe (2015) point out that among universities nationwide, faculty are increasingly aware of major shifts in perceptions of faculty role and highlight the extent to which such changing views are tied both to organizational and structural changes within institutions and in how post-secondary institutions are being managed. Processes such as the deinstitutionalization of tenure and increased reliance on contingent faculty, an increased professionalization of administration which progressively draw personnel from outside the academy, a growing reliance on technology-based highly regimented course delivery modes, large numbers of students ill-prepared for college, and funding sources encouraging redefinitions of the purpose of post-secondary education, combine as forces for change in how colleges function (Cohen, et al., 2014). Not surprisingly, administration and faculty are at odds about the

parameters of college faculty role. Meaningful distinctions in perceptions are revealed when types of institutions are compared, and these differences have ramifications to how this professional cohort functions. Whereas the primary role of faculty as researchers and scholars seems a consistent view among the nation's senior and research universities, faculty role as academic professionals and shapers of student experiences in community colleges is less precise and divers (Kezar & Holcombe, 2015).

The body of research drawing attention to a need to better understand college faculty as educators, rather than scholars who teach, is growing (Brown, Blount, Dickinson, Better, Vitullo, Tyler, & Kisielewski, 2016; Fairlie, Hoffmann, & Oreopoulos, 2014; Flaherty, 2018). Among recent attempts to explore contributions of faculty to student persistence or student success, are three that examine dimensions of faculty role and function in the nation's community colleges. Kapitulik, Rowell, Smith & Amaya (2016) utilize national survey data to examine the professionalization of community college faculty, including processes that impact identity formation and motivations for remaining part of this segment of higher education. Brown, et al., (2016) also utilize a national data sample to focus their study on career choice and job satisfaction among community college faculty. A third recent study of community college faculty offers a qualitative analysis of a small sample from one community college and focuses on faculty perceptions of the role they play in college wide efforts at student retention (Graham, 2017). What these and other works demonstrate is that community colleges are not simply two-year versions of four-year liberal arts colleges but are entities unto themselves with their own culture, challenges and successes (Brown, et al., 2016; Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014) and must be understood in this context.

Self- Perception of Community College Faculty

Of interest to several investigators recently seeking to understand student retention is a view that community college faculty comprise a select cohort of academicians, professionals in a unique environment (Brown, et al., 2016; Flaherty, 2018; Flynn, et al., 2017; Graham, 2017; Kapitulik, 2013; Kapitulik, et al., 2016; Schudde & Goldrick-Rab, 2015; Tovar, 2015). Brian Kapitulik (2013) offers a systematic assessment of community colleges in the overall system of higher education, including institutional constraints impacting faculty role and student expectations. He argues that their origins as post-secondary institutions created to expand the society's opportunity structure makes them places where both "… second-chance students could earn college credits at a relatively affordable price" (Kapitulik, 2013, p. 367) and faculty embracing notions of equity and social justice through education are drawn. He further emphasizes that the culture of community colleges differs from those of their older affiliates in several ways all which stem from their functional role as main elements in the nation's opportunity structure. They have evolved with student-centered cultures and draw faculty whose focus is the classroom. Additionally, community college faculty teaching loads are larger than those required in four-year colleges and universities, but this load is countered by a much lesser emphasis on research and publishing. Still the challenges to faculty in two-year institutions are great. In their quests for social justice these institutions generally support a free-access admission policy with resulting wide variations in student's skills and serious pedological challenges for instructors. In addition, the multi-purpose nature of these colleges can cultivate internal conflicts when

the needs and goals of the academic and vocational divisions are at odds (Kapitulik, 2013).

Kapitulik, et al. (2016) utilized national survey data to assess self-perceptions held by full-time community college faculty as academic professionals. Key to this study is the issue of the professional status of this higher education cohort. The authors focused on community college faculty from a single academic discipline, sociology, to determine (1) the extent to which their "work" meet objectively determined criteria of a profession; (2) how faculty see themselves; (3) whether others see faculty as "professionals"; (4) how being in a community college impacts faculty ability to function as professionals. Importantly the authors discovered that among higher educators, teaching alone was not generally considered enough to establish one's professional status within an academic discipline and has often been cited as justification for considering community college faculty as more akin to high school teachers than to university professors (Kapitulik, 2013).

This view, however, has been changing and over the last several years, along with a growing public and political interest in community colleges are studies demonstrating that most of their faculty chose this segment of the higher education system as their career goal (Kapitulik, et al., 2016). But also, of interest are findings that community college faculty seem to be distinguishing themselves from other academics in some meaningful ways. Most often they identify with their college more so than with their academic discipline. Moreover, the stigma of community colleges being "less than" rather than an alternative choice is being challenged by faculty who have turned their energies toward professionalizing the art of teaching for this student population giving

themselves an area of expertise that is not shared by their four-year and university colleagues (Brown, et al., 2016; Flynn, et al., 2017; Kapitulik, et al., 2016).

Graham's 2017 study of community college faculty and student retention offered an important view of this less explored relationship. Her work underlined the fact that a body of research focusing on teaching strategies, accumulations of data about graduation rates, curriculum design, assessment models, and institutional practices is now growing (Graham, 2017). To date however, few have offered insight into how faculty view their own roles in the retention process and even less examines views of community college faculty as a specific and viable subset of the professoriate. Graham's phenomenological case study offers insight into several factors that the developing body of research on faculty perception indicate may be important and underscores the fact that community college faculty do see motivating students as a dimension of their role and as essential to student retention. This finding is consistent with prior and ongoing research (Flaherty, 2018; Flynn, et al., 2017; Kapitulik, et al., 2016; Tovar, 2015). In addition, Graham also found support for previous investigations that highlight the significant role of institutional culture and climate in faculty ability to establish supportive relationships with students (Graham, 2017; Kapitulik, et al., 2016).

Engaging Faculty in Activities Leading to Retention

Engagement in faculty-student interactions: Faculty participation in student retention activities is essential for success. Yet retention activities are often deemed the purview of Student Affairs, an outcome of successful co-curricular planning. Arnsparger & Drivalas (2016) point to national survey data that confirm connections between engagement in ongoing or established student-faculty activities and student success in

college, regardless of the type of post-secondary institution. Students who describe experiences that most positively shaped their college years overwhelmingly include engagement with faculty members that helped them learn new material and persist to course or program completion. Faculty themselves report, particularly in community colleges, being able to connect with students directly gives them opportunities to aid those trying to acclimate to this new social environment. They report their greatest successes as outcomes of active and collaborative learning as well as enriched educational experiences such as learning communities, service learning, and study abroad programs (Arnsparger & Drivalas, 2016). These are fast becoming paradigms driving teaching and learning in the nation's community colleges and are primarily faculty-driven initiatives. Community Colleges such as Kingsborough and Guttman, both part of the New York City University and Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington are examples of institutions that have embraced this new teaching-learning paradigm and impacting how students today succeed in community colleges.

Academic advising and mentoring: Both academic advising and mentoring faculty roles that that are important to students throughout their college years but present challenges for many faculty members at the community college level. In contrast to those in vocational or professional programs, liberal arts students may not have made a definite career choice within their first few semesters making effective program planning difficult. In addition, because advising is generally the responsibility of full-time faculty, who comprise a minority portion of all faculty, it is unlikely that students will work with the same advisor throughout their tenure at the college. This further challenge both student and faculty member opportunities to cultivate a meaningful relationship. The

literature has consistently emphasized the importance of mentoring students in community colleges, particularly minority students, to foster a sense of belonging among them (Tovar, 2015). However, the normative faculty to student ratio in the community colleges, where such mentoring and advising is so greatly needed, generally lessens the likelihood of this as an outcome (Arnsparger & Drivalas, 2016).

Engaging faculty in scholarship: Senior colleges and universities consider the research skills and ongoing scholarship in the form of publications produced by its faculty one of its greatest assets (Massey, 2016). Among community colleges, it is teaching. However, the instructional work of community college faculty has historically been under rated by the larger academic community. Within the last two decades, the importance of pedagogy and faculty-student t interaction has evolved along with the body of knowledge devoted to the scholarship of teaching and learning. Still, for some, this has not yet earned community college faculty a seat at the table as a scholar of higher education (Kezar, Holcombe & Maxey, 2016; Massey, 2016).

Engaging faculty in accreditation activities: Connections between course or program assessment of student learning and between student learning and student retention are not always seen by faculty as a practical reality. Instead, they too often view assessment as actions engaged in to maintain accreditation, accreditation being necessary for the institution's viability. When asked, most faculty will describe assessment activities as being time consuming and done only because of bureaucratic requirements. Few consider possible relationships between assessment and improvements in their own teaching or in their own student's learning (Kuh, Ikenberry, Jankowski, Cain, Ewell, Hutchings & Kinzie, 2015). Yet research shows the most

beneficial assessments of student learning are those undertaken and completed primarily by teaching faculty with a goal of improving both classroom effectiveness and course-program alignment (Kuh, et al., 2015; Massey, 2016).

Assessment of student learning is a critical component of a college's academic programs and must necessarily involve faculty. Increasingly, accreditation agencies and funding sources as well, require post-secondary institutions to demonstrate that students have knowledge, skills, and competencies consistent with institutional and appropriate higher education goals. This process has resulted in numerous curricular as well as pedagogical changes and an ongoing, long-term general education program reviews which now often inform academic decisions, including restructuring of some departments and programs in the nation's community colleges (Kuh, et al., 2015; Massey 2016). Supporting this trend, Graham (2017) also emphasized a need for participation in ongoing assessment of student learning activities as an important vehicle for involving faculty in institutional processes that support student retention.

Conceptual Framework

Understanding what motivates faculty to fully engage in student retention activities is essential to developing successful strategies for student persistence to graduation. Graham's (2017) recent examination of community college faculty's perception of their role in student retention is a useful example of research that contributes to this understanding. Her study utilized two classic theories to inform its conceptual framework: namely, Herzberg's 1959 Motivation-Hygiene Theory and Deci and Ryan's 2008 Self-Determination Theory.

In community colleges. Both theories are incorporated into the conceptual framework for this current study.

Herzberg's theory is used to explain links between motivation to work and factors in the workplace, those he categorized as being hygiene factors (such as supervision, salary, work environment, organizational policies and interpersonal relations) and motivation factors (factors related to Maslow's higher-level needs. According to Graham (2017), "Herzberg believed that increased satisfaction came from motivation factors related to Maslow's higher-level needs of love, esteem, and self-actualization. This set of job content factors, or intrinsic factors, includes responsibility, recognition, the work itself, achievement, and advancement" (Graham, 2017, p. 40). In the case of faculty, perception of hygiene and motivation factors in the college itself would determine their motivation and satisfaction. To this end, a number of recent studies have utilized Herzberg's theory in studies of satisfaction among community college faculty (Graham, 2017).

The second theory giving form to Graham's study is Deel and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (SDT). This is a macro level theory that focuses on type of motivation rather than amount as predictive of behavior and determining psychological well-being. The authors identified competence, autonomy, and relatedness as three universal psychological needs for effective functioning and psychological health (Graham 2017). According to Graham, in this theory,

> "(C)ompetence describes the degree to which individuals feel they are doing well at the activities in their lives. Autonomy is an individual's sense control over life choices. Relatedness comes from meaningful contact and relationships with

others. Evaluating the degree to which these three needs are satisfied provides a means of understanding how individuals are impacted by autonomous and controlled motivation and helps to explain why individuals find certain factors motivating." (2017, p. 41)

Causality orientation and life goals are two more SDT concepts included in Graham's conceptual framework. She summarizes the former as two categories of individual behavior. The first describes how individuals generally situate themselves within an environment as it reflects information connected to the prompting and regulation of actions. The second refers to the extent to which people are generally self-determined, regardless of specific situations. The theory explains that individual orientations are the product of the degree to which an individual's basic psychological needs are met while the controlled orientation results from satisfaction of those needs. Three causality orientations are discussed: autonomous, controlled, and impersonal. How well an individual's basic psychological needs are met determines their individual orientation. "A strong autonomous orientation is the result of ongoing satisfaction of all three needs; the controlled orientation comes from some satisfaction of the three needs; and the impersonal orientation results from a general thwarting of the three needs" (Graham, 2017, p. 41-42). The three causality orientations were each related to different aspects of psychological well-being; autonomy orientation to positive psychological well-being, controlled orientation to diminished psychological well-being, and impersonal orientation to symptoms of psychological deficiencies (Graham, 2017).

Life goals is the second factor used in SDT to explain individual differences. When long-term goals are considered, two general categories, intrinsic aspirations,

related to personal development, and extrinsic aspirations, including factors such as wealth, fame, and attractiveness, are considered important (Graham, 2017). According to Graham (2017), "When the three basic psychological needs are met, individuals tend to develop internal aspirations; in contrast, when they are thwarted, individuals seem to develop external aspirations as substitutes" (p. 42).

Graham utilized Herzberg's 1959 classic Motivation-Hygiene Theory to frame her examination of specific workplace factors that might impact faculty participation in retention activities. Self-Determination Theory was used to account for how individual faculty members interact with the work environment (Graham, 2017). In the current study, three additional theories are added to the framework. The first is Vincent Tinto's Theory of Student Persistence. Specifically, it is used to help explain the role of faculty in the socialization process of community college students, including their role as promoters of non-classroom activities such as student clubs. Tinto argues throughout his works that students remain in college when they feel connections to others in the environment. His is among many that emphasize the crucial role of faculty in shaping students' attitudes and a student's willingness to push themselves toward completion even when they believe themselves to be not well prepared. Aspects of faculty role such as academic advising, mentoring, and role model are among those examined in the current study.

Two ecology theories are also part of the conceptual framework of this replicated study. The first is Brofenbrenner's pioneering 1979 Human Ecology Theory and the second, Strange and Banning's 2001 Campus Ecology Theory. Although the theories utilized in the original investigation give some attention to environmental factors, they do

not explicitly account for several structural and environmental factors that directly impact faculty in large community colleges. The setting for the current study is a large public community college in an area that is both urban and metropolitan. The sample size is much larger than was the original. Utilizing a framework such as Human Ecology Theory to account for multiple environments is considered beneficial. But also as a consequence of the setting, Campus Ecology Theory is added to account for aspects of the campus culture that both directly and indirectly shape faculty actions, including structural factors such as its multi-campus composition and the impact of scheduling, climate issues such as tension around union actions and state/county elections, and external influences that directly impact faculty functions, such as state mandates regarding program offerings.

Conclusion

The nature of education is always changing though many are not often aware of how the process occurs. Outside the academy, most people thinking of college faculty envisions an individual who appears, sounds, and behaves in an almost scripted way. But for others, "The traditional faculty model is made up of a number of important concepts such as academic freedom, tenure, specialized knowledge, and multifaceted roles involving teaching, research, service, and other essential functions" (Kezar & Maxey, 2016, p. viii). Collectively, these concepts similarly describe the shared view of faculty work. It is an image that has become a default model, one used to frame conversations or share understandings. It is also one that is being challenged as the number of institutions it aptly describes diminishes (Albertine, 2013, Kezar & Maxey, 2016). The faculty, the nature of teaching and learning, how post-secondary education institutions continue to

restructure are all now in the news and of public concern as the necessity of college degrees for economic success is debated and challenged (West, 2018). Opinions regarding what colleges and universities should "look like" today are not new. The American Association of Colleges and Universities has been writing about these issues for years. In 2012, Steven Volk reported numerous constant changes occurring in college culture nation-wide including an emphasis on learning rather than teaching isolated subject areas, a growing focus on cumulative and collective learning, treating student learning as holistic rather than as single subjects, out-of-classroom learning experiences and more (Volk, 2012).

The once dominant view of faculty as content expert and lecturer to students is giving way to faculty as mentor of learners who guide cognitive development (Kezar & Maxey, 2016). Moreover, the long-held view of the scholar who engages in research is also giving way to an image of faculty as "scholarly educators" whose scholarship includes practical classroom application. These trends and attitudes directly impact community colleges and their faculty.

Community colleges continue to play a vital role in the overall system of higher education in the United States. Historically, they have been places for both individual advancement and for second chances. Lower in costs than traditional colleges and universities, offering vocational training for those tooling up for the industrial workforce, places of opportunity for those seeking mid-career changes, these institutions of higher learning have always provided opportunities to individuals not fitting the stereotype of traditional college students (Palmadessa 2017). This classification has evolved over the last century transforming these institutions of higher learning into unique organizations

within the system of higher education which have proven effective learning centers for individuals of very different needs and desires (Schuddle & Goldrick-Rob 2015). Meeting student needs is a faculty that has emerged as a specialized subset of college teaching professionals.

Significant to its success as institutions of higher learning is meeting needs of students whose diversity is multi-faceted yet must be met by a system often still functioning along guidelines established for a quite different category of student. This is a study of a cohort of teaching faculty, the role they play in retention and their perception of their own effectiveness, full-time community college teaching faculty. It replicates a study completed on another community college in 2017 with a goal of furthering understanding of this important component of the overall system. The utility of this line of investigation is without question. Student retention is of paramount importance to colleges, accreditation agencies, funding agencies and student families alike. Faculty are on the front line of the process. Gaining more insight into how faculty see their function and how meaningful ways for them to partner with administration to help students persist to graduation will benefit all involved in the college.

Initial Research Questions

This is proposed research is a continuation of a study originally carried out by Graham in 2017. It builds on her original work by reexamining her three guiding research questions using a larger sample in a different environment. Replications such as this are effective approaches to validating new knowledge and discovering additional avenues for meaningful investigations. The research goal is improvement of our understanding of how faculty perceptive their role in institutional efforts that result in

student retention, including learning what motivates and deters their participation (Graham, 2017).

Three questions guided the current study:

1. How do full-time community college faculty members perceive and describe their role in student retention?

2. What experiences do faculty describe as motivating their participation in institutional retention initiatives?

3. What experiences do faculty describe as deterring their participation in institutional retention initiatives?

This proposed study may add to a growing body of knowledge which may be useful to those motivated to improve teaching and learning in community colleges. The study may add to our understanding of a category of college personnel whose influence transcends several sectors of the community college organization and often impact students' post-graduation experiences. Understanding more about those responsible for creating and sustaining both academic programs and their delivery as well as guiding students through their programs of study is essential for effective planning.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Aim of the Study

This investigative study replicated a phenomenological case study, which explored "how full-time community college faculty members perceive their role in student retention and what factors motivate and deter their participation in institutional retention initiatives" (Graham, 2017, p. 45). The goal of the original study was to identify some factors that motivate as well as others that may dissuade faculty from participating in the college's retention activities. Given recent and ongoing national attention directed toward issues of student retention in higher education, adding to this growing knowledge base makes this a worthwhile undertaking. Like the original, this is a faculty-focused study which sought to shed light on how one facet of the nations' professoriate conceptualizes their role in the institution and how this perception may impact institutional function regarding student retention.

Faculty is an essential element in the ability of any educational institutions' mission-driven success. Faculty members translate the institutions' mission into action by developing and carrying out its academic programs and activities (Hendrickson, et al., 2013). The work of faculty revolves heavily around classroom instruction, individualized student support during office hours, and student academic advising. Involvement with college students is typically direct and their influence on student decision-making regarding persistence assumed to be impactful. Consequently, faculty role is deemed significant in the overall system of higher education. But variation exists between how faculty-institution expectations are conceptualized and practiced. Size and type of higher education institution, size of academic department and specific academic discipline,

evolved institutional culture and current changes in the society itself individually and collectively shape how faculty function within any given academy (Hendrickson, et al., 2013). Understanding relationships between faculty and institutions actions as they relate to specific outcomes, such as student retention, is growing in importance in scholarly literature, particularly when community colleges are considered.

Qualitative Research Approach

Creswell (2013) offers several advantages of utilizing qualitative approaches to research designs when the investigative goal is identifying factors that might contribute to or expand upon general knowledge about a phenomenon. Graham's (2017) original study utilized a qualitative approach demonstrating its usefulness in identifying explanatory factors which offer insight into existing understandings of faculty behavior regarding student persistence in community colleges. Her intention to contribute viewpoints of a cohort of faculty members involved in institutional retention activities regarding their role in the process to a growing body of scholarly literature is well suited to this approach. Qualitative approaches are optimal for providing participants opportunities for describing events as they are experienced as well as for reflecting on personal meanings attributed to identified events, rather than relying on interpretations from the investigator (Yin, 2016, pp. 9-11). Moreover, a qualitative approach offers researchers a potential for revealing multiple sources of evidence which lead to new, more useful concepts and more robust theories as well (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2016).

The original investigation was defined by Graham (2017) as an instrumental case study through which relationships between faculty perceptions and student retention could be understood. Results were reported following a phenomenological analysis of

data gathered through open-ended interviews of individual participants. Utilizing a phenomenological approach to data analysis effectively gave participants' voices to the phenomenon being examined. Giving voice to this specific faculty cohort was an important step in the general process of expanding research in this area of higher education. Although faculty in community colleges have recently become a focus of an expanding body of knowledge regarding community colleges generally and issues of student retention specifically (Brown, et al., 2016, Flaherty, 2018; Kapitulik, et al., 2016; Tovar, 2015), study findings have largely relied on survey generated data, on variables determined meaningful by investigators, and too often focus on faculty actions or activities rather than perceptions.

The current study continues the conversation initiated by Graham (2017) to discover both the extent to which faculty views are consistent and how they differ across two structurally different settings. The qualitative approach is optimal for this goal as it allows the researcher to "suspend all judgements about what is real…until they are founded on a more certain basis" (Creswell, 2013, p. 77, cited in Graham, 2017, p. 46). In the current climate of accountability and increasing student debt, colleges are dedicating much time and resources to what they believe are effective retention strategies. Given the pivotal role of faculty in such undertakings, it is important to understand how their role is perceived. The extent to which the current undertaking discovers faculty perceptions that are consistent with the original, will support the conclusion that the discovery is meaningful.

Participants

As the study's goal is gaining an understanding of faculty perception of their role in the college's retention activities, it is necessary to ensure that potential respondents have had such an experience within the college to reflect on as criterion for participation. A number of initiatives, programs and student-focused activities designed to enhance student learning and encourage persistence over the years (see appendix A for a listing) have been implemented at the current site. However, only those meeting the criteria of the Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U), which are based on Kuhn's 2008 definition of high impact practices (HIP) and are also consistent with practices included in the prior study, are considered for this replication. Five categories of HIP courses or programs meet these criteria: (1) Collaborative Assignments and Projects, (2) Community-Based Learning, (3) Learning Communities, (4) Service Learning, and (5) Writing Intensive Courses (AAC&U, 2018).

Criteria of participants: To continue consistency with Graham's (2017) study design, participants for this study were selected only from among full-time faculty who had taught or currently utilize one or more HIPs, as defined above. The limitation is required as this was a replicated investigation but the original rationale for this criterion is sound. On most college campuses, full-time faculty are regularly engaged in campus-wide activities that afford them greater access to many administrators and involvement in several aspects of institutional planning, a greater potential for seeing the scope of collegewide plans for retention strategies from an insider's perspective and for possibly authoring retention activities or initiatives (Kezar & Maxey, 2016, Flaherty, 2018).

The number and proportion of full-time to part-time faculty nationwide is steadily shifting balance as contingent faculty now comprise the greater share of faculty numbers on most community college campuses. Full-time faculty during the 2016-2017 academic year, the year of her data collection, the majority of course credits were delivered by full-time faculty on the SRCC campus. In the three previous academic years at LMACC, the proportion of full-time faculty dropped from 53 percent of the total faculty to 23 percent, while contingent faculty increased from 47 percent of the total faculty to 77 percent. During the same time period, the number of courses taught by full-time faculty decreased from 53 percent of all offerings to 44 percent while the number of courses taught by contingent faculty increased from 47 percent of all courses offered to 53 percent of all courses offered.

During the semester of data collection, full-time teaching faculty at the college, excluding those on leave or released from teaching assignments, consisted of 219 members, in contrast to 728 part-time. Of the 219, 99 were males and 120 were females. By ethnic/race categorization, 187 self-identified as white, 12 as Asian/Pacific Islander, 10 as Black/African American, 8 as Hispanic, and one did not specify an ethnic/racial category (Fact Book, 2019, pp. 103-104).

Data Collection Tools

This qualitative investigation used a semi-structured interview protocol developed by Graham (2017) for a study conducted at Small Rural Community College. Permission to utilize the instrument was obtained through email contact at the time permission was granted to replicate the study. Slight revisions were made to the instrument to adapt its use for the current population. These adjustments were limited to rephrasing one

interview question to reflect LMACC's student population and the listing of retention strategies used at LMACC (See Appendix B for the original and edited interview protocols). Graham's (2017) final instrument was the product of focus groups and pre-testing which both ensured question clarity and that important concepts were captured. These steps are not required for the replication as changes made to the original questionnaire were negligible. Like the original, the final instrument used consists of 18 open-ended along with five questions categorized as "demographic."

Procedures

Full-time faculty who presently or have used any of the high impact practices described above will be invited to participate in the current study. Given established criteria, the selection pool is greatly reduced from the total population of full-time faculty at LMACC. Names of potential respondents will be obtained from two primary sources: archived registration records maintained by the registrar's office and from department chairs and program coordinators who make course assignments. Although the there is potential for the selection pool to be as large as 25-30 individuals, it is important to note that many faculty members are simultaneously engaged in more than one HIP, and a few engage only intermittently. Of further importance is that HIPs are also taught by contingent faculty at LMACC further reducing the size of the selection pool.

Upon receiving IRB approval, an emailed invitation to participate in the study was sent to identified faculty. The invitation included an electronic form of the consent form which detailed the goals of the study as well as what participation entails (See Appendix C for a copy of the consent form used). Receipt of the signed consent form were followed by a request from the principle investigator for an appointment for an

interview. Anticipated time needed for the recorded, in-person interview was 20-30 minutes.

Interviews were conducted during the late summer and early fall of 2019 in a campus setting that placed respondent most at ease. Several small conference and meeting rooms were available for faculty use and could be reserved for that purpose. To maximize response accuracy, like in the original study, interviews were audio recorded using the Voice Record application on the investigator's smartphone and through use of a LiveScribe Echo smart pen. The added measure of recording devices freed the investigator to take note of nonverbal gestures and forms of communication that helped interpret verbal responses. Further remaining consistent with Graham's procedures, the transcription service NoNotes was utilized to transcribe MP3 files generated from the investigator's smartphone. Respondents had an opportunity to review and comment on their transcribed interview prior to data analysis. Recorded interviews were stored by the researcher off campus on a home-based laptop in password protected files. Access to recordings were limited to the investigator, Institutional Review Board members, and to those whom a respondent had given express written permission.

Data Analysis

MAXQDA is the software program that was used to organize data collected in this study. It is a tool designed for use with qualitative as well as mixed-methods data and was chosen because the investigator had some prior experience using the program. Software used for qualitative data are extremely useful in the initial steps of sorting data. Specifically, they are useful for visualizing, coding, and generally identifying patterns within and across narratives. They are not, analytical tools, however, and cannot

determine that any identified comments or descriptions discovered within narratives should be considered more, or less, significant than any others. Qualitative data software sort "themes" or categories that are pre-determined by the investigator thus facilitate analysis. It is anticipated that the same, or similar, themes discovered in Graham's (2017) study will be identified in the current one.

A second advantage of using a software program is the visualization of data they offer readers (Chandler, Anstey, & Ross, 2015). Visualization is a distinct benefit when reporting results of qualitative studies. Descriptions and narratives are often dense and can be lengthy as explanations are placed in contexts and interpretations justified.

Ethical Considerations

The ability of the investigator to protect the rights of his or subjects is of paramount importance in any research effort. These rights include maintaining promised anonymity and freedom to withdraw from participation at any point during the process. Both are essential rights and are at the heart of research integrity (Yin, 2016). Both are promised to respondents in this study and documented by the signed consent. Storing recorded narratives off site is an essential part of this protection. Audio recordings were saved as MP3 password protected files on the investigator's computer that is kept off campus. Written notes were also be secured as password protected files on the same computer. Audio files that were transcribed will be destroyed. Respondents will always have the right to remove themselves from the study at any point and completed interviews will not be used if they elect to withdraw.

The principle investigator of the current study is also involved in high impact practices at LMACC and therefore known to several similarly motivated faculty.

However, the potential for influencing the views of subjects is minimal as the data collection tools are not unique to this effort and the selection pool of voluntary respondents enough for successful unbiased selection procedures.

Trustworthiness

According to Yin (2016), in qualitative studies "the design process is a recursive one" (p. 85). The investigator will often find it useful, and necessary, to construct the design as the study proceeds, adjusting as needed. Consequently, qualitative designs rely greatly on the integrity of the investigator as adjustments made while a study is in progress can potentially have undue influence on results, intentionally or unintentionally (Yin, 2016, pp. 84-85). The design of the current study utilizes a structured, open-ended questionnaire to interview a sample of full-time faculty thus eliciting their perspective on the essential research questions: How full-time community college faculty perceive their role in the institution's student retention activities.

As a replicated investigation, this study has potential for demonstrating validity of findings from the original. "A valid study is one that has properly interpreted its data, so that the conclusions accurately reflect and represent the real world that was studied" (Yin, 2016, p. 88). The extent to which the current undertaking identifies faculty perceptions that are consistent with the original, will support the conclusion that a real-world phenomenon is identified and described. It would also underscore the importance of understanding perceptions of faculty when planning student retention activities.

Potential Research Bias

As a full-time faculty member at LMACC the researcher is involved in many college-wide initiatives and activities, including several designed to increase student

retention rates. This involvement can potentially influence perceptions of potential participants. However, by relying on a sound research design that includes valid sampling techniques, a questionnaire that has previously yielded valid and reliable data, and having respondents member-check their interview transcripts for accuracy (Yin, 2016), investigator bias will be minimized.

The principal investigator's familiarity with the site and potential respondents will present both an advantage and disadvantage to the success of this study. However, by taking care to limit information used in the analysis to what is yielded by the data gathered, personal biases can be reduced to a minimum. The bias of the principle investigator is also reduced through the study's design. Community college faculty have not traditionally been viewed as a significant component of the professoriate. A desired outcome of this study was to add to the growing body of scholarly literature while illustrating the meaningful role played by this professional cohort in higher education.

Limitations

The most significant hinderance to the success of this study may come from possible reluctance of some respondents to being recorded. Full-time faculty at LMACC support a strong union and the environment is politically charged. Faculty, individually and through its union, are often at odds with administration around issues related to retention, including faculty involvement in student retention activities. As a result, some may not wish to record their personal views, regardless of promises of confidentiality.

In addition, student retention is especially important to the college president and has become a driving force for many college-wide activities. The relationship between the general faculty body and the president are now both cordial and mutually supportive,

but there are some faculty members who believe the issue of retention is overemphasized. Some may suspect this research to be part of an effort to justify and support to the president's focus.

Another possible limitation is the criterion that participation is limited to full-time faculty members. Several of the more frequently offered HIP course sections are regularly taught by contingent faculty, an example of this is several co-op courses. However, the basic design of this study precludes their participation.

Finally, numerous high impact initiatives and programs have been attempted at LMACC since its opening. Many were successful and almost all the result of faculty-driven projects. Some of the larger programs cannot be successful without much administrative support as they require structural changes in the college system. An example of this needed structural cooperation impacts the programs such as Learning Communities (LC). LCs can only be successful if students are required to register for class sections that are included in the program. This requires changes in how registration is now completed.

Chapter 4: Results

A large metropolitan area community college was the site selected to answer some questions about how faculty members see their role, as well as what motivates them to participate in their institution's efforts to retain students. It replicates Jennifer Graham's 2017 study conducted at a community college set in a rural area of the northeast United States. This replication was considered worthwhile as both the role and function of community colleges in the system of higher education as well as student retention remains a national concern. Like the original, this study adds to the growing body of investigations of community college faculty as a significant segment of the professoriate.

Three research questions directed this study:

1. How do full-time community college faculty members perceive and describe their role in student retention?

2. What experiences do faculty describe as motivating their participation in institutional retention initiatives?

3. What experiences do faculty describe as deterring their participation in institutional retention initiatives?

Consistent with the objectives of phenomenology, these research questions facilitated the investigator's objective of describing a shared experience among a cohort of respondents as well as contexts that typically influenced their identified experience. The following summary statements highlight shared backgrounds and experiences of

eleven full-time faculty at LMACC that was used as the framework for the data analysis which follows as well as the discussion in Chapter 5.

Data Analysis

      Sample selection. In early December 2019, invitations to participate in the current study were extended to 33 full-time LMACC faculty. The potential respondents were identified using the colleges' published records of course instructors and recommendations of Department Chairs and program coordinators. The invitation yielded 17 eligible and willing participants. Quick responses were received from seven, two of whom were interviewed before the end of the Fall 2019 semester while the other five asked to be interviewed during the College's 2020 Winter break. Attrition of full-time faculty at the college greatly impacted the number of eligible individuals, including sabbatical leaves during the data collection period, retirement, individuals who moved from the area and individuals who had never taught a course that met study criteria. Four potential respondents did not reply to the invitation or follow-up requests. Finally, closing the college due to the 2020 Coronavirus pandemic necessitated an abrupt ending to data collection efforts. The remaining six potential study participants were actively engaged in county health care related activities and were no longer available for interviews. The final sample consisted of 11 full-time faculty who self-identified as being, or having once been, actively involved in one or more of the college's retention activities, or used an instructional approach that was considered a retention strategy.

      Interview process. All interviews were recorded in single face-to-face sessions ranging in time from 34 to 72 minutes. Interviews were conducted in each faculty

member's office, with two exceptions: one took place in a nearby seminar room frequently used by the respondent, the other was conducted in the researcher's office. All locations and times were chosen by respondents. Recorded interviews were transcribed by the transcription service "NoNotes" and respondents were given opportunities to review, comment on and edit their interview that was formatted as a Microsoft Word document. Once approved, a pseudonym replaced the respondent's name to further assure anonymity.

Preparation for data analysis. As a preliminary step to the formal data analysis a systematic review of each respondent-approved transcript was completed by the researcher to identify statements, themes, viewpoints, and descriptions that could prove useful. This review involved numerous replays of each recorded interview to add notes regarding respondent's gestures and tones of voice, interviewer thoughts during both the face-to-face interview and review processes. Issues and patterns revealed in each interview were also noted. Notes developed for each of the eleven interview transcripts were then assessed and a final set of notes highlighting shared views and key differences among respondents was developed.

Use of software for data analysis. Like Graham (2017), the researcher followed a general approach to phenomenological analysis which called for the investigator's engagement in the process of *bracketing* through which the investigator used a written transcript of her own responses to interview questions prior to organizing and beginning formal data analysis. According to Creswell and Poth (2018) bracketing is an added measure of maximizing investigator objectivity. Bracketing facilitated the process of

coding through which emergent themes as well as significant responses both to questions and compelling quotations used in the discussion were uncovered. MAXQDA was the software tool selected to aid in the formal analysis. The software was used to complete a lexical/word frequency search followed by open coding of identified word patterns. The process revealed a total of 19 nodes that were then categorized as four themes from the data. Six nodes were unique to this replicated study while 14 overlapped or duplicated those in the original study, for a total of 20 identifiable nodes. Table 1 presents the 20 nodes resulting from the procedure.

Table 1

Nodes Created Through the Process of Open Coding

Nodes unique to this study	Nodes found in both studies	Nodes comparable in both
Classroom practices	Advising	Obstacles
Cohort advising	Faculty attitudes	Retention rate
Financial aid	Faculty role	Time with faculty
Pedagogy	Professional development	Culture
Teaching load	Learning communities	Writing intensive courses
14-hour advising		Student background

A further examination of identified nodes indicated that there were strong similarities among a few. MAXQDA provides a second useful approach to uncovering in meaningful patterns in data, In-vivo coding. This technique allows the investigator to code whole segments of text that contain original, previously defined, codes thus including context that illustrate themes. This third step in the analysis process, revealed

four themes among the eleven interviews in the data set: (1) faculty view student retention as an outcome of good faculty-student relationships; (2) faculty view motivating student learning as crucial to retaining students; (3) faculty view institutional practices and policies as directly impacting their ability to retain students; (4) faculty view external factors as having a significant impact on both their and the college's ability to retain students. Three of the four identified themes were consistent with those of the original investigation. Table 2 presents the themes identified in each study.

Table 2

Community College Faculty Perceptions of Student Retention: Themes

Original Study	Current Study
Faculty perceive relationships as central to student retention	Faculty view student retention as an outcome of good faculty-student relationships
Faculty describe motivation to retain students as being primarily intrinsic	Faculty view motivating student learning as crucial to retaining students
Faculty's ability to retain students is and impacted by institutional practices ability and culture	Faculty view institutional practices policies as directly impacting their to retain students
Student retention is complex and is a influenced by multiple factors, some of which cannot be addressed by the institution	Faculty view external factors as having significant impact on both their and the college's ability to retain students

Background and Characteristics of Respondents

Each formal interview began with five questions referred to as "demographic questions." These questions collected descriptive information on the academic background and teaching experiences of each respondent in the study. These questions were followed by 17 semi-structured, open-ended interview questions and concluded with an opportunity for each respondent to add their own thoughts to the overall discussion. Responses to the demographic questions provided the following general description of the sample for this replicated study.

Educational background. Six respondents held a doctorate degree in one of the physical sciences or the humanities. Two respondents earned an education doctorate, one in teaching the other in educational leadership. All respondents had at least one earned master's degree in a subject area, three held more than one in different areas. One respondent with a master's degree is currently in a doctoral program and another is all but dissertation. While the sample reflects a variety of undergraduate majors, on the graduate level only three respondents held degrees in an area outside the humanities. Most of the sample had pursued graduate studies in language, language arts, literature, writing/composition. Four were formally trained on the graduate level to teach English as a Second Language, three to teach English Basic Skills, and one was formally trained in Applied Linguistics. Six respondents had formal teacher training at the elementary or high school levels, five of them taught in a K-12 system at some time in their career and held certification or a state license in this area. One respondent's graduate level preparation was in teaching students with disabilities and had a current state license in the specialization at the time of the interview.

Teaching experience and practice. Full-time faculty status at LMACC was an inclusion criterion for this sample. Each respondent had been a member of the LMACC full-time faculty for at least seven years, one had been teaching at the college for 42 years. Each was also tenured. For one respondent who had been at the college for more than 30 years, LMACC was her only teaching experience. Prior to their appointment at LMACC, all other respondents taught in at least one other college, either full or part-time. One maintained a part-time teaching position at an area four-year college in addition to their LMACC appointment.

Four respondents reported having high school level teaching experience prior to joining the faculty at LMACC, one of them for 30 years. For two of these respondents, LMACC has been their only teaching experience at the college level. Another respondent had been an elementary school classroom teacher for several years prior to joining the faculty.

Each of the eleven respondents in the sample considered teaching at a community college their career goal and each made frequent references to this preference during their interview.

Non-teaching roles in higher education. In community colleges, "service to the college" is one of several non-classroom contractual obligations that faculty fulfill. At various points during their years at LMACC each respondent served on one or more major college-wide committees, such as Curriculum or General Education Committee. One respondent was one of the architects of the college's Learning Communities. One designed and coordinated the college's original "Success-101" (First Year Experience)

course and another is its current director. Three were members of the Faculty Senate when interviewed. Six respondents were program coordinators at some time during their years at LMACC, three still held that title.

Four respondents were in positions of authority at the college during their years at the college. These positions included Academic Department Chair, Academic Divisional Dean, and Vice President for Academic Affairs. At the time of interview, each of the eleven respondents were teaching full-time and considered teaching their primary college function.

Program/discipline and typical classes taught. At LMACC, seven of the respondents held a full-time, tenured position in a department in the Humanities. Three were tenured in either Mathematics, a Natural or a Social Science. Faculty in the natural and social science departments reported that they had taught all courses offered in their respective departments. One person, tenured in the natural sciences, reported that his teaching focus was on the general introduction courses more than the upper level ones. Both are two-semester sequenced courses. Most of his students have ambitions for the health professions. The mathematics faculty member reported that she only taught developmental/remedial level, pre-college, courses.

In addition to traditional survey courses in areas such as American Literature, world civilizations, and composition, English as a Second Language (ESL), ESL for International Students, Developmental English, and English Basic Skills, were regularly taught by humanities faculty in this sample as well. One respondent often taught in her subject area in the college's Honors Program as well. Four respondents in the sample

regularly taught the college's version of the First Year Experience course, called Success-101, in addition to their area specialty.

Results on Respondent's Views of Student Retention Activities at LMACC

Faculty Definitions of Student Retention

Each participant was asked to define student retention in their own words. For most, the definition was succinct and reflective of a focus on retention as an outcome of their own classroom practices. For a few, the question presented an opportunity to express concerns about how data on student retention was collected, how it was used and the extent to which LMACC administration considered the issue important. All respondents used fall-to-fall registration as their general time span for measuring student retention. Using pseudonyms to preserve anonymity, a brief summary of respondent's definitions follows.

Student retention defined with an emphasis on class completion. Four respondents emphasized program completion throughout their discussion on student retention. Sofia, Alice, Lisa, and Peter each defined student retention with class attendance and continued registration at its core. Both Sofia and Alice spoke of the student "not giving up" because they were still taking courses after three semesters. Lisa said student retention is when students "actually come to class on a regular basis and they come back the next semester." Peter added "earned, transferable grades" as a criterion. "From my perspective, retention must be defined through the lens of success" and he measured success as a function of passing *his* class.

Focus on student behavior. Belle's definition of student retention illustrates the view of many faculty whose focus is on student behavior rather than on a course or program. She defined student retention as "persistence, resilience and motivation to stay with a goal." She later added that "the goal must be an academic goal" to count as persistence. In this vein, Belle did not limit her definition to completing a specific course or program but, instead, felt that students needing remedial or English language courses prior to beginning degree requirements had to be included in the definition. Sylvia's very student focused definition was reflected in her statement "students who don't give up on learning." Frances shared this perspective as she defined student retention as "persistence" and clarifying by saying "they stay on track once they start and come back if they leave."

A student-centered position is echoed throughout the responses of most study participants. For some, like Sylvia, Frances, and Sophia, persistence reflected the student's commitment to completion while for eight others it was a direct outcome of the faculty member's role as a motivator, helping students become learners, and creating enthusiasm for further exploration of their own subject area. Helen and Dean included the impact of non-academic factors, such as employment and academic skills, in their definitions of student retention. Dean characterized student retention as both completing his class and program and transferring to a four-year college. In addition, he sees it as "outside goals are met" and included getting a better job among its measures. Helen, like Belle, focuses on contributions of college ready skills in her definition. Although the time frame is the same, "coming back . . . taking another class especially if you have to

take remedial classes" was either stated or implied in definitions of student retention offered by most respondents.

Focus on interpersonal relationships. In stark contrast to the other respondents, Bruce characterized student retention completely in terms of interpersonal relationships, "Retention comes from how you treat people." For him, student retention cannot by measured by statistics or influenced by adding programs. Students choose to attend college due to both personal drives and outside pressures, such as job markets and family relationships or obligations, he explained. Trying to define it without factoring in the role of outside forces or characteristics of students themselves is, to him, a wasted exercise.

Results Presented by Themes

Theme 1: Faculty View Student Retention as an Outcome of Good Faculty-Student Relationships

Each respondent considered relationships as playing a pivotal role in student retention. Regardless of how they defined student retention, each respondent expressed their belief regarding where the responsibility for retention rested most heavily, on the faculty member, student, college, or outside forces. Importantly, each reported positive faculty-student relationships as essential to success, but this view applied only on the classroom level. Several respondents pointed to outside forces that impede any efforts made by faculty to connect to students individually and for students to avail themselves of needed services that would allow them to remain in school.

Helen's immediate response to the question, "What role do you think faculty members play in student retention?" was "Is that a trick question?... A huge

role...whether intentional or not!" represents the viewpoint of several respondents. Other respondents placed responsibility for establishing relationships with students that resulted in their retention solely on the instructor. For Frances, "…it's all about engaging with students. . .talking with them…establishing rapport…getting to know them." Similarly, Lisa saw the teacher as responsible for maintaining viable relationships. "It's critical," she said. "It's also exhausting." She added her opinion that fostering such relationships is crucial when it is understood that their role is to "develop a mind NOT dispense information." Drawing on previous experiences as an administrator and department head and citing studies that supported his position, Dean was emphatic in his response that faculty members probably play the greatest role in student retention. "I think faculty are the critical part in retention."

Bruce devoted much time and energy to responding to this question and revisited it several times during his interview session. For him, making connections to students is central to his definition of an effective instructor. "The teacher's role is to expand learning, not just get through the course." He expressed feelings of obligation to make certain that he has regular contact with each of his students throughout the semester, especially in online classes. Although not always successful in establishing viable connections, Bruce stated that he will never stop trying. The instructor, the classroom, and established rapports are what he sees as the core elements of student retention.

Two respondents believed student retention was primarily a faculty responsibility but also felt other factors hindered their ability to develop impactful ones. Like Bruce, Alice was clear that the faculty member's role was large and limited to the classroom.

"Professors can make their courses more accessible, more engaging and try to engage students to keep coming back and help students be successful in their course, but they can't necessarily impact to a high degree the impact of other courses." For Alice, faculty members can and should make strides in improving retention within their own classes but even the best of their efforts can be thwarted by factors over which they have no control or influence. They can, for example, help their own students succeed in their course but if the student fails another subject, they may have to leave the college. Remaining open to making a connection with students generally and each one specifically, was fundamental to Sylvia. But this meant the faculty member's role includes "identifying strengths for students and directing them on paths that would be productive for them …" To accomplish this the instructor must help the student connect to needed programs and support services available within the college.

Peter was firm in his position that faculty can only be responsible for retention within their own classroom but that accounts for only one part of the reason why students remain and or return. He can improve the delivery of his own course content, he said, but he has no influence over the operation of the tutoring center, library hours, scheduling, and so on, that also influence students' decisions to persist. Belle reported that her view on faculty's role in student retention had changed over the years. She still believed that their role was seminal, but she had come to believe that the part played by factors such as financial status, medical and family issues had come to overshadow academic factors. The teacher, she reasoned, is often able to keep a student engaged and successful in their own class if they are enthusiastic, compassionate, and so on, but they are not able to keep the student in the college if there was no financial aid or if the student had family

obligations. Like Belle, Kelly's position on the question has changed as well. She now gives much more credence to assertions that not all students attending community colleges seek degrees or any other credential, a view also repeatedly voiced by several others when discussing student retention. Kelly reported that she used office hours and individual appointments to learn as much as she could about each student to help them learn. Her silent prayer at the start of each class is "I hope that I can teach the students who came here to learn for every different reason."

Sofia was hesitant to take a position on the question. She reported that her assumption was that most faculty did not give much thought to retention outside of their own classes, and neither did she. She immersed herself in helping her students be successful in her program, which also involved working within a Learning Community.

Theme 2: Faculty View Motivating Student Learning as Crucial to Retaining Students.

The second theme that emerged from the data was related to the first. Few respondents spoke of faculty's role in student retention without also discussing, or alluding to, the importance of motivating students. Moreover, respondents consistently became energized when discussing faculty as motivators for student learning. Although few made direct statements about the issue, embedded in responses to several questions were direct and indirect references to instructors as a primary source of encouragement.

According to Helen, "If the reason for going to class is learning, is gaining confidence, and more, it's all from the teacher. It's fundamental. Without good faculty there's no retention. Students go somewhere else." Dean discussed at some length the

direct impact faculty have on students, both positive and negative. He described several instructors from his own years of schooling who had a lasting impact on him and named several colleagues who he knew could share similar stories. He also described instances when, as a Dean or as a department chair, he discussed with faculty the impact they have on student's willingness to "just give up or keep trying" even when they are unaware of the student's dilemma. Peter stated that he was very aware that his courses always fill quickly and always have a waitlist. He felt very strongly that part of his role as the instructor, was to make sure that each student in each of his sections was able to "get a good learning experience" and feel the time spent in his course was beneficial to them. "I take personal pride in their success. I want them to learn. I believe that I am 'creating learning'. I've stopped teaching. I'm creating learning – a learning environment."

Bruce was animated while discussing his desire to motivate student learning. He repeatedly stated that he wants every student in his classes to learn and "I want them to know that I care about their learning." This, he passionately believes, will encourage them to continue to learn, even after the semester ends. Lisa was emphatic in her position that "the student needs to feel invested in the class in order to succeed. They need to relate the material to other things they value." The instructor, she felt. must make this connection for them.

A common thread found among respondents on the issue of motivating students was tied to the fact that all sampled respondents were community college faculty by choice. According to Helen, "in the community college the faculty more often sees themselves as a teacher rather than an academic." To this end, "instruction" rather than

"lecturing" drives classroom practices. Most faculty do not talk about it but most "include outreach and keeping their students on track and enthusiastic about success" as part of their role. Alice was truly clear on the subject of motivating students. She chose community college even though she had offers and experience in four-year college and universities. She works extremely hard to keep students in her classes motivated and, like Peter, her classes are usually at capacity with very few dropouts. Although she reports her efforts to be both "physically exhausting and mentally draining," she also sees them to be fundamental to her role as faculty.

Theme 3: Faculty View Institutional Practices and Policies as Directly Impacting Their Ability to Retain Students

The role of the college in retention policies and practices was a contentious issue in this sample. No one was neutral on the issue and each respondent was clear about their position. Each respondent believed that their ability to successfully retain students within their own classes was directly or indirectly related to institutional practices. Sofia's position was that retention was the sole responsibility of the classroom instructor and, as such, faculty's focus must remain focused on their own courses. She did acknowledge that her ability to successfully fill her classes as part of a Learning Community was tied to scheduling, an institutional function, but firmly believed that aggressive recruitment and working closely with colleagues would overcome any potential obstacle.

Once again, voicing a strong opinion, Bruce felt that the institution's role in student retention was unapologetically and detrimentally focused on collecting statistics. He saw various programs and initiatives instituted in the college over the years to help

students succeed as being self-serving, "no retention, no institution." He argued that the college makes no serious effort to schedule support services in ways that align with class schedules, hire enough tutors, or needed counselors, and so on. If true policies exist regarding retention, faculty are not aware of them. Furthermore, Bruce strongly felt "retention should not be the goal. It should be the outcome of providing a quality education with a career focus." For this reason, he stated, his focus in on his classes and how best he can help his students. Outside of the classroom, like Sofia, Bruce is skeptical of what is done in the name of student success.

Other respondents took a less extreme position but positions that still saw the institution as impacting their ability to retain students. Alice voiced concern several times over the unavailability of tutoring in subjects other than basic math and basic English as well as the limited hours of available support services, especially on satellite campuses. Lisa pointed out that close to half the students in her Literature classes have a 5th grade reading comprehension level, yet they are also placed in courses such as Basic Chemistry, Anatomy & Physiology, and World Civilizations. This presents an almost insurmountable obstacle for students to overcome, she explained, yet the college makes no efforts to make certain skills levels are considered when students try to register. Thus, inattention to such a crucial detail on the part of institutional policy hamstrings instructors' ability to teach their subject matter, she maintained. Peter, Helen, Frances also supported the position that much of what they can accomplish within their own classes is shaped by institutional policies and practices.

Both required teaching load and class size were additional factors that respondents believed impacted their ability to retain students in their classes. Faculty carry a five-class load and class sizes are considered large. The size, according to Lisa, makes it nearly impossible to get to know students past a very superficial level. Students in community colleges are often 1st generation, English language learners, with weak math skills and heavy family obligations. They need encouragement to continue. "How do you do that when you have five classes of 31 students?" says Alice.

Theme 4: Faculty View External Factors as Having a Significant Impact on Both Their and the College's Ability to Retain Students.

The extent to which factors external to either the classroom or the college impacted the college's ability to retain students what mentioned by most respondents. A few believed societal factors outweighed almost anything faculty could do to keep students on track, a few did not see it as a major concern for the instructor, others felt societal forces impacted students' desire and ability to register for college but was less consequential to class completion.

Peter saw student retention as a function of high school graduation rates. When rates are high in the college's feeder high schools, administration does not worry about retention. When high school graduation rates drop, there is a flurry of activity around retention. Bruce felt retention reflected reputation. Students select LMACC and choose to remain because of its reputation. When its reputation was good, so was enrollment. As the reputation faded, the numbers of new students dwindled along with graduation and transfer rates.

Others were focused on the general economy. Most respondents mentioned trends across the nation that reveal an inverse correlation between employment rates and registration in community colleges. A few, like Dean, made several references to the fact that LMACC is a commuter college in a huge metropolitan region with a large immigrant student body. Most students live with their family and must work, not just for tuition and books, but to also supplement the household income.   The fact that English is a second language for many, that required remedial courses often depleted a large portion of any financial aid they may have obtained, that many are single heads of household with young children, were among several reasons cited why economic concerns was the driving force behind retention rates.

Transportation issues and an ability to devote the amount of time needed to succeed were also factors cited by a few. Sometimes administrators forget the large segment of the student population that rely on public transportation to access the campus, was also reported by others. Other issues, too often overlooked as personal and not widespread, such as medical problems, domestic violence, and consequences of poverty such as hunger and homelessness, were also cited by several respondents who believed not enough attention was being given to non-academic factors that impact student retention.

Non-Themed Responses

Responses to a few interview questions did not emerge as independent themes or subthemes but were often expressed or implied by many of the eleven faculty members in the sample. The questions addressed each respondent's knowledge of (1) the college's

published student retention rate, (2) college policies and practices intended to increase student retention, and (3) a suggestion for increasing faculty involvement in student retention activities.,

Awareness of retention rate. Six respondents had accurate knowledge of the college's current student retention rate. Two of them reported the source of their knowledge was information regularly received in their current position in either a college-wide committee or involvement in a program for students requiring multiple remedial level courses. Another admitted that he felt a need to remain informed about trends that impact the college generally. Three other respondents did not know the present rate, but their estimate was close to the actual rate. All six of the respondents familiar with the retention rate expressed disappointment and discomfort with the low student retention rate, especially knowing that it was lower than the national rate.

Five respondents did not know the college's current student retention rate, two felt it should not be a focus of interest for the college or faculty. Three repeated several times that such information is collected by administration but not often shared with faculty. Two, in fact, stated that they had no faith in the accuracy of such numbers thus gave it little to no attention. Both respondents explained in several different ways that they believed administration does not share accurate data with the faculty.

Awareness of retention activities. In addition to knowledge of the retention rate, the knowledge of sampled faculty regarding activities and initiatives intended to increase student retention was also limited. Most were generally unaware of programs or initiatives offered by the college designed to address student retention. Retorts such as,

"do they really have any?" were not unusual. Of the five programs used as criteria in this study or the many initiatives, ongoing programs, or support services developed to retain students, respondents focused on those in which they had direct involvement. When prompted, most added services such as Tutoring, the Math Lab, personal and academic counseling, the computer center, The Food Pantry and The Clothing Exchange.

Retention strategies used by respondents. One respondent reported that "instilling excitement in learning" was the only retention strategy he used in his courses. However, he does encourage collaborative assignments with other faculty as well as service learning, both defined as student retention strategies by the college as well as the AACC. Belle listed several programs and initiatives also cited by several other respondents as well. Learning Communities was most often named by respondents. A few programs or courses focused on remediating basic skills, such as developmental math or basic English skills, some college-wide services, such as Tutoring Center or the Early Alert Pipeline, were named by several faculty respondents.

Belle, Frances, Dean, and Sofia described academic advising and use of office hours as student retention strategies. They reported that they realized the college did not recognize those two offerings as strategies but felt that they were singularly important opportunities for faculty to work directly with students and establish a relationship that could keep students on course. Three respondents discussed the potential value of a faculty-student mentoring program as an effective student retention strategy.

Student retention as a permanent part of the culture of higher education. According to Bell, "everything is data-driven." Student-retention will be a permanent

part of the culture of higher education. "In fact, this is how they're going to justify just about everything—raises, promotions, etc." Bruce stated, "student retention is essential to the survival of the institution. It has nothing to do with anything else. Nothing to do with students actually succeeding and everything to do with the institution surviving…no retention no institution." Lisa shared their view that an institutional focus on student retention is already a permanent part of the culture of higher education and felt it was already tied to money – "headcounts equals money counts." Helen believed that it was not a trend but a simple reality, "you can't have a college without students."

Alice, Sylvia, and Peter each felt that giving thought to student retention would only be a concern to the institution when rates are low. Each expressed a belief that the rates fluctuated with societal factors, such as high school graduation rates, the general and local economies, the cost of tuition and availability of financial aid. None described it as part of the culture of higher education.

Professional development and student retention. Bruce expressed no interest in receiving any type of training or professional development related to student retention. All others named combinations of formal and informal training through conferences, workshops, webinars, readings, and some committee work at the college in their responses. According to Belle, "I read something about student retention every single day." Three referenced formal course work completed on their own in addition to a few courses taken through continuing education as evidence of formal training in student retention.

Emphasis on pedagogy in professional development. Respondents with doctorate degrees, as well as one enrolled in a doctoral program in higher education leadership, emphasized the importance of pedagogical training, describing it as a significant aspect of their own professional development. Five cited some amount of formal training in aspects of classroom practices and instruction methods which included attention to student retention. At the time of the interview, three respondents were registered in, or had completed, a one-year course in pedagogy designed by the Association of College and University Educators specifically designed for college faculty. Peter, who had already completed the course, described ways in which he was able to apply some of the knowledge and skills developed through it to his course delivery. Although he did not think of it as a specific retention strategy, he also stated that, if it helped him become better at reaching his students, then he will accept it as a retention strategy. The course was offered on campus for LMACC faculty. Respondents who had formal training in teaching philosophies and methods, those who had experience teaching on the K-12 level, all described instructional methods as an important retention technique. Each one also discussed many ways in which they used such techniques to help their students bridge skills gaps in their courses. All considered what they did as one of the reasons why they really enjoy teaching in the community college. Helen stated, "here you make a difference." Kelly reflected the same sentiment when she said, "We work so hard but look at the pay-off! They get through."

Increasing faculty involvement in student retention. Each respondent was asked to offer suggestion(s) a community college administrator could use to increase faculty involvement in student retention activities. Although the phrasing of the question

was general, respondents focused on characteristics of LMACC to formulate their response. Frances suggested restructuring the "14-hour advising obligation around retention." Lisa felt it should be "tied to tenure, but it would have to start early—like at hiring." Kelly supported this position feeling it should be a condition of employment. Sofia stated, "the teaching load must be reduced." Belle suggested that any effort to increase faculty motivation to become involved in student retention activities would have to be built into faculty development. Kelly suggested some type of small stipend, "something that validates the effort." Helen felt such suggestions must come from faculty, not administration, if they are to work.

Each of the eleven respondents stressed the critical role of academic advising in any successful activity to retain students and underscored the role of academic faculty in the process. Each respondent also discussed the use of a 14-hour contractual obligation of all full-time faculty at LMACC for academic advising for students suggesting a reimagining of how this time block is now used as a solution.

Reasons for faculty's non-participation in college's retention activities.
Dissatisfaction with the college's attention to student needs and faculty efforts to meet them was voiced by all faculty interviewed. Some were truly clear statements, forcefully made in response to questions about the institution's activities. Examples of these include: "administrators at this college never stay here long enough to do anything that really matters," "the only thing administrators care about is having meetings and taking attendance—nothing ever comes of any of them" people do not feel valued by the administration—and they do not respect administration" "there's an ongoing animosity

between faculty and administration –it's an us versus them mentality here." Lisa, Alice, and Peter very frequently raised the issue of what they saw as the institution's inability, or unwillingness, to meet the non-academic needs of students required to improve retention.

Several respondents made off-the cuff comments throughout their interviews that reflected general disillusion or dissatisfaction with the college administration. Such comments were made using a more casual tone or a softer voice. Examples of such comments are, "these administrators have no clue what our students are really like," "those folks in the [administration]wing only care about money anyway." Negative comments by far outweighed neutral ones. Very few positive comments about administration were made by any respondent.

A few comments in this category pointed to a tension between student services and faculty over responsibility for advising. Sofia stated, "What does student services do? Is there overlap?" A few, like Belle, took the position that "some faculty may not know how to advise" and there are not enough workshops or training sessions to help them improve. On the other hand, Belle also faulted some faculty who she stated, "operate on old assumptions of college students—the sage on the stage model." Her view was echoed by others, such as Frances and Kelly who each described many LMACC faculty as having elitist tendencies and administrators as not relating to present day students at the college.

Summary Statement on Results From Graham's Study (2017)

Findings from this replicated study were generally consistent with those reported by Graham in 2017. In each setting, community college faculty perceived their role in the college's student retention efforts to be significant and success an outcome of relationships they developed with their students. In both samples, motivating students was also deemed an important faculty role. Both samples expressed beliefs that college policies and practices impacted their abilities to retain students in their own classes. While comments of faculty in Graham's sample emphasized student support and counseling services, those from the current sample emphasized the role of faculty as academic advisors. Both samples saw administrators and institutional policies and practices as factors in their own desire to engage in retention practices. For faculty at LMACC, the institution was more often seen as a hinderance to their own efforts to retain students than reported in the original sample. External factors such as family and work obligations, academic preparedness, and time commitments were also mentioned by both samples. Overall, there was a high level of agreement across the two samples regarding faculty's perception of their role in student retention efforts.

Summary and Conclusion

Results of a replicated phenomenological study of perceptions of community college faculty about their own role in their college's student retention activities were presented. There was general agreement among the eleven participating faculty regarding their role in motivating students to continue their education and complete their courses of study, of the role played by the institution itself, and of the impact of outside

forces on retention rates. All respondents believed that the most important thing they can do to support student retention is develop strong relationships with their students. A belief that a good faculty-student relationship was at the core of successful student retention efforts and that faculty played a large role in motivating students were themes that emerged from the data. Two additional themes reflected the two main obstacles to successfully retaining students reported by this sample, the college policies and practices and non-institutional factors.

Most respondents were extremely focused on their own classroom activities and pointed out that their efforts to impact students were also affected by the availability of support programs and college policies as well. Several respondents cited heavy course loads coupled with large classes as factors over which they had no control yet factors that hindered their own effectiveness. Almost all respondents suggested that required office hours, along with the contractual 14-hour academic advising obligation of full-time faculty, may well be re-imagined as approaches to improving student retention rates.

In chapter 5 findings presented in this chapter are discussed. Comparisons to Graham's (2017) study result is presented and possible explanations for differences and similarities between the two studies are offered.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

Community colleges and their unique role in expanding post-secondary education opportunities in the U.S. was a focus of much research in higher education throughout the second half of the twentieth century. Although some of those efforts explored and added to our understanding aspects of faculty roles in these institutions, their overwhelming purpose was discovering factors predictive of student success, most often using quantitative designs and large samples (Bailey, et al., 2015; Levin, et al., 2017; Palmadessa, 2017). As that era of higher education research moved into the 21st century, the conceptual focus shifted from "student success" to "student retention" (Kiyama, et al., 2014; Hlinka 2017). Graham (2017) described this research trend and pointed to an existing information gap that her study sought to address. Importantly, she argued that, although quantitative approaches offer useful data for describing trends and is useful for planning, qualitative approaches help us to understand experiences of those involved in situations being assessed through examinations of their lived experiences (Graham 2017). To help close this suggested gap in our knowledge base, her study, sought to add "practitioner voices to the discourse on student retention by examining faculty experiences and perceptions about student retention" (Graham, 2017, p. 101) using a sample from a small, rural community college (SRCC). The current study continues this avenue of research by replicating her work using a sample from a large metropolitan area community college (LMACC).

Strengths and Limitations of Qualitative Approaches

Whether qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods, all approaches to research have advantages and disadvantages and what is found to be the most effective design for a specific study is best decided by the question(s) being addressed. In this era of a growing reliance on big data and opinion polls quickly done as information sources (Athey, 2017, Hernan & Robins, 2016, Zimmerman, 2019) consequently the notion that small-scale data gathering tools remain valuable ways to obtain reliable and valid information may be overlooked. Some of the main disadvantages of qualitative approaches are also their greatest advantages: relatively small sample sizes, use of open-ended interviews, utilization of investigator observations to provide context for analysis (Yin, 2016). Seeing a situation through the eyes of those experiencing it is a necessary step in gaining a firm understanding of ongoing issues and is an eloquent way to expand our knowledge base of many important social institutions. Yet some of the drawbacks cannot be ignored. This approach can be time consuming, and results are not especially generalizable. One of the intensions of this undertaking was addressing the last issue of generalizability. In this era of challenges to our higher education system in terms of high student debt, workplace readiness of graduates, newer viable course delivery formats, and more, deepening our understanding of how this important component functions in the overall system cannot be underestimated. Community colleges and their faculties have evolved over the last half century and many see their faculty as having done the same. Given the academic and social challenges faced by huge numbers in this student body

coupled with trends in rates of non-completion (Levine & Dean, 2012), understanding behaviors of faculty who instruct them is important.

As a replicated study, a qualitative approach, using phenomenological analysis, was predetermined for this investigation. The advantages of phenomenology outweighed its disadvantages in this case study. Using it allowed the researcher to uncover insights and information from respondents that should prove useful to both faculty and administrators of community colleges generally, as well as to those at the study site.

Setting a tone for interviews. The interview instrument was divided into two sections, one section focused on respondent characteristics, the other on respondent's views on issues of student retention. Launching each formal interview with a description of their own academic background and activities indirectly encouraged respondents to focus on their own role as an academician, as a member of the college's faculty, and on their continued motivation to teach. Although not originally designed for this function, during the conversation each of the respondents became visibly less self-conscious about their anticipated responses, a few making comments about the possible connection. The original intent of the "pre-interview section" was creating a framework within which responses to subsequent questions could be better understood. During the analysis, they also provided a context for weighing, or comparing, respondents' positions on specific issues and for understanding the college's culture.

Interviewing and the role of the investigator. Using open-ended interview questions as a data collection tool was advantageous in this study. It allowed the investigator to comfortably engage respondents in dialogs which helped clarify positions

and strengthen assessments that their individual views were valuable. While allowing each respondent free expression on issues raised during the session, interview formats can also temper responses offered when answers are being recorded. Yet, for the sake of accuracy, recording such sessions are necessary. Recordings importantly help to maximize accuracy in the analysis. Recording each session also allows the investigator to shift their active focus from what was said to how it was said. Being able to capture voice tones, body movements, facial expressions, and so on, are particularly important to the analysis (Yin 2016). Additionally, when interviews are recorded, the investigator can engage more fully in the conversation as an attentive listener, creating a less formal ambience that encourages respondents to express true beliefs.

In any research effort the investigator must take care to remain objective and not knowingly influence the outcome. This can be difficult to achieve when the researcher is also an actor in the situation under study and a colleague of those who became respondents. In this study, having a prior working relationship with respondents proved advantageous. A positive prior working relationship with several LMACC faculty helped to eliminate concerns about how study results might be used in the future and promoted the relaxed atmosphere that encouraged free expressions. It contributed to respondent's willingness to quickly respond to requests to review typed transcripts, even while the college was officially closed because of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic.

Being a member of the college faculty as well as one using high impact practices also meant the researcher had a deeper understanding of issues respondents found significant and was able to draw on knowledge of the college culture to give context to

many responses. In this study, shared experiences encouraged lengthy discussions of issues and identified problems such as frequent changes in cabinet level administrators, opinions about academic advising and counseling, the validity of available data on student retention, and more, evoked by questions in the interview.

Meanings and Understandings

Implications and significance of LMACC findings. Findings from this investigation were largely consistent with those from Graham's (2017) study. In both samples a faculty member's ability to establish and maintain a strong relationship with students was considered the primary mechanism for successful student retention. Although reported more often by respondents in the original study, faculty at LMACC also described frustration at using existing academic advising practices as a retention tool and suggested significant reform. In both samples, retention was incorporated into their perceived role as a community college faculty member. LMACC faculty were emotional in their discussions of their role in motivating students. When responding to this key question, LMACC faculty drew heavily on their own personal experiences as college students and the impact select faculty had on their own career paths. Neither sample had accurate knowledge of the college's retention rate. However, respondents in the earlier study expressed interest in learning about it and using the information to help their own retention efforts while those in the current sample expressed distrust of any statistics reported by the college.

There were more similarities than differences in how LMACC faculty viewed their role in the college's efforts to retain students. Each of the respondents expressed

views that reflected dedication to student learning and only a few felt that such learning

extended outside their own classroom. Almost all expressed a firm belief that they could,

and did, make a difference to their students. All expressed an idea that "sharpening their

skills" helped students succeed, however, there was less agreement on how this could be

accomplished. Formal and informal training through participation in conferences and

workshops, keeping up with scholarly literature and pairing with colleagues, were among

several methods mentioned. There was little agreement that any training should be

mandatory, except for new hires.

Respondents were expansive in their answers to key questions in the study and the

expansion provided good evidence of their commitment to students. All included

statements describing good or positive student-faculty relationships as key elements in

student's decisions to continue their studies. When clarifying what they meant by "good

student-faculty relationships," LMACC respondents often drew on their own experiences

as undergraduate students for explanations. Most were themselves first generation

college graduates, a few being the first in their family. They had not lost sight of their

own encounters with culture shock, feelings of self-doubt, conflicts between school and

family obligations, fears of disappointing parents, and so on. One respondent paralleled

his own academic journey through state and city university systems to those of his

students, citing their shared working-class backgrounds as one way he established

rapport. Nevertheless a few respondents endorsed a position that the onus for

establishing a positive student-faculty relationship was on the student themselves. They

maintained that their own role was confined to the classroom and did not go beyond it.

Stated in many ways throughout each of the interviews, respondents referred to student

retention as an expected outcome of positive faculty-student relationships and something that they consciously attended to through their normal teaching activities.

LMACC respondents were similarly energetic and expressive when discussing how they motivate student learning within their classrooms. Several became emotional while discussing the question. For almost all, motivating students was an issue of helping them internalize a love for discovery and a heightened curiosity about the world. Regardless of specific words used, respondents equated "discovery" with "learning." Several talked about a need to feed students' own interests. Helping them develop abilities to recognize facts different from opinion and not accept everything found on the internet was a position often mentioned as well. One individual presented numerous examples of how he emphasized to students the transferability of reading and writing skills acquired in his literature class to other courses and as an everyday life skill. Another discussed, at length, the types of field trips and observation-based assignments he gives along with some of the feedback he gets from students during and after each semester. More than any other single factor, respondents reported their maintaining enthusiasm for their own subject matter and being able to demonstrate its utility, as being their most effective way to retain students.

A third important outcome of this replicated study was a shared view that the college does not actually support student retention activities when in fact it does. This outcome is important for several reasons. First, only a few LMACC respondents correctly named most of the initiatives, policies, or programs already available to support student retention. Many recognized specific established activities provided college wide

as being effective but did not associate them with student retention as an intentional outcome. Lastly, some methods used by a few respondents when interviewed were not recognized as being a student retention activity. This finding also addresses the importance and utility of research that focus on faculty perception of their role.

Understanding faculty perception. This study was undertaken to add to a growing body of literature on the role of community colleges in the overall system of higher education by focusing on how its faculty perceive their role in student retention activities (Graham, 2017). The growing body of literature indicated that faculty in these institutions had emerged as a unique segment of the professoriate who possessed an evolving skills-set not routinely found among their four-year college or university colleagues. Faculty members in community colleges overwhelmingly direct their energies toward meeting instructional needs of their students and tend to self-describe as teachers (Brown, et al., 2016; Flaherty, 2018; Flynn, et al., 2017; Kapitulik, 2013; Kapitulik, et al., 2016). Self-identification of their primary role as a teacher, rather than as an academic researcher, shaped behaviors of many community college instructors both in the classroom and within the college itself that positively impact student retention (Brown, et al., 2016; Flaherty, 2018; Flynn, et al., 2017; Kapitulik, 2013; Kapitulik, et al., 2016; Tovar, 2015). Perceptions of roles among respondents at both SRCC and LMACC were consistent with those reported in earlier studies. Importantly, respondents at both SRCC and LMACC described their own instructional role as including motivating student persistence. This perception may help explain why LMACC respondents were so animated when they described their own efforts to engage students in learning activities and why so many expressed frustrations at what they termed the college's non-support.

Administrators who understand that community college faculty see themselves as motivators and believe they have a role in student retention, and incorporate both goals into their instructional practices, may find it easier to engage them in student retention activities that extend to the college as a whole.

Theoretical explanations. Several theoretical explanations developed and tested during the latter parts of the twentieth century are still proving useful for issues community colleges face today. Campus ecology theory can be applied here as it explains how several independent environments may intersect to shape an outcome, in this case student retention. The sample at LMACC frequently highlighted issues such as students having full-time employment and heavy family obligations, students needing remediation of academic skills, heavy teaching loads for faculty, among factors that mitigate against retaining students. Campus ecology theory is one of several environmental theories that can help contextualize results from this study and suggest meaningful future actions. Campus ecology theory is useful in that it "applies principles of human and developmental ecology to higher education settings, provides a framework for understanding, designing, and evaluating educational environments that promote learning and development" (Schuh, et al., 2011, p. 244). Community colleges continue to provide access to postsecondary education to millions of people seeking vocational skills or are needing remedial courses. They are also cost saving pathways to four-year colleges through transfer. Yet there is still much to be discovered about how these institutions function. By highlighting consequences of intersections between internal and external environments, campus ecology theories can be used to fill-in some of the information gaps of how the campus culture of a community college generally and its

component parts specifically shape and influence student retention (Schuh, et al., 2011, pp. 245-246). Respondents in LMACC and SRCC samples frequently referenced competing environments that impact student success, as well as the institution's ability and willingness to address issues of external environments, in their explanations of factors that impact student retention.

Several LMACC sample respondents described their classroom retention activities as "motivating students to want to learn," a sentiment echoed by those from SRCC. In effect, respondents all echoed Tinto's position that "colleges retain students" while "students persist" in their studies (Tinto 2016). By also using persistence theory as a framework, the faculty's focus on engaging students on a less formal level, by getting to know them and demonstrate interest in their individual success, engaging them as active learners and showing enthusiasm for their own discipline, can be understood as faculty behaviors that lead to better retention in courses of study (Tinto 2016; Tinto 2017).

Another important factor affecting faculty perceptions involves what respondents describe as the institution's unwillingness, more than inability, to change in ways that better serve student needs. Specifically they cited the physical layouts of administrative areas that were deemed "obstacle courses" by many, the timing of course offerings throughout the day and week reported as problematic for working students and young parents, block scheduling needed to support learning communities and other high impact courses, requirements for remedial courses that use up financial aid, and so on. Although a few mentioned a shared role of senior faculty in affecting such processes, for instance

through the Faculty Senate, various committees, direct influence as colleagues, most considered the institution largely self-serving and self-perpetuating. Only one respondent believed that the administration was genuinely interested in change. All respondents emphasized that the college itself would pay attention to student retention only to the degree that rates were tied to funding. Each of the factors emphasized by respondents are elements of ecology theory's internal environment.

Impact of the pandemic: Sample size and composition. In January 2020, interviewing for this investigation began in earnest. Unfortunately, an unprecedented pandemic was also gaining traction and ultimately forced an abrupt, early end to data collection. This unforeseeable event impacted this investigation in several ways, not all negative. The early end decreased the final sample from 17 to 11 respondents, enough to complete the investigation. There is no way, however, to determine how their inclusion might have shaped findings. Although all respondents in the final sample regularly utilized high impact practices at the college, the six omitted faculty were in departments and programs in which these practices are considered normal and required rather than optional. Four were faculty in health professions. Without them the final sample was dominated by teaching faculty from the humanities. The final two potential respondents were heavily involved in converting the college to a total online format in a truly short period of time. What, if any, difference to results the addition of these individuals to the sample cohort would make cannot be determined.

Impact of the pandemic: Post-interview follow-up. The pandemic impacted the review process for transcripts from completed interviews as well. The sudden shift in

course delivery platforms to total online presentations was a time-consuming procedure for many faculty members, particularly for those unaccustomed to the format. For a few, reviewing and commenting on typed versions of their sessions had an understandably lower priority than redesigning courses while also learning to use systems they had previously resisted. Transcriptions of interviews were successfully reviewed and approved during telephone conversations with two respondents. For others, comments concerning the accuracy of transcriptions were made and returned electronically. Overall, transcripts approved electronically included fewer comments than those completed before the national emergency and respondents were generally unwilling to engage in follow-up discussions to help supplement them. It cannot be determined if or how additional comments might have shaped overall results.

Significance of the Study and Implications for Future Research

Advising students was considered an important, though sometimes undervalued, student retention activity by several LMACC respondents. It was further deemed a divisive issue at the college for many in the sample yet all perceived academic advising as an important facet of their faculty role. Some suggested that the college provide ongoing training in this area. In fact, specific training to effectively advise students was a need expressed by faculty SRCC as well. For those at LMACC the importance of this issue that was reflected in responses to several questions, particularly one asking the respondent to offer suggestions to administrators hoping to improve student retention.

Apart from vocational or professional programs such as nursing, paramedic, veterinary technician, early childhood education, or social work, community college

students are generally designated general education or liberal arts majors and faculty providing academic advising seldom work with students in their own disciplines and rarely with the same student in any sustained way. It is a common approach to academic advising among community colleges. It is also a method LMACC several respondents described as being frustrating for both advisor and advisee when they work with students outside of their academic discipline. Examining the impact of academic advising that is provided by both faculty and dedicated academic counselors to students' persistence to course completion and or graduation, is a useful direction this line of investigation might take. Learning more about how faculty perceive their role as academic advisors, particularly for students outside their discipline, could also be important to those seeking to improve faculty development and other training offerings.

Results from this study support findings from Graham's original 2017 examination of faculty perceptions of their role in student retention at a community college. The parallel responses offered to the same questions support notions that perceptions are attributes of roles rather than some other factor. Further investigations of this question are still needed. There are differences among community colleges that potentially could influence how faculty view their role in the college's student retention activities. The relatively large LMACC compared to the small SRCC colleges used here is but one possible point for comparison. Perceptions may be quite different among faculty at institutions featuring a variety of characteristics such as highly regimented or integrated programs or those that operate as a component of large integrated systems. Some community colleges have established transfer agreements with four-year colleges or universities which may influence faculty perception of their role as well as their

activity. Do these faculty interpret their role differently than those teaching in career or vocational programs? Do they emphasize their role as providing the first two years of a four-year program thus launching points while those in vocational departments envision theirs as career preparation, for example? There are presently many community colleges where the emphasis is placed on vocational and occupational programs and liberal arts are minimized. This number is growing (Delbanco, 2012; Flaherty, 2018; Kezar & Holcombe, 2015). Private, religious based, and for-profit institutions all may have different relationships with faculty which color perceptions of their role. Replicating this study in different settings will further clarify findings reported here.

To remain consistent with the original design, this study limited its sample to full-time faculty. Across the nation, colleges and universities are becoming more reliant on part-time faculty. At LMACC, more than half of all high impact courses offered are taught by part-time faculty, most of whom have been with the college more than 10 years and who instruct in the professional programs, such as Nursing, Dental Hygiene, Legal Studies and Social Work. Their perceptions are also valuable in gaining an understanding of faculty's role and should be considered in designing the next line of research.

Every campus has a culture yet explorations of possible contributions of campus culture is not generally part of studies of student retention (Schuh, et al., 2011). Both faculty and administration would benefit from understandings how their own campus culture shapes their perceptions and ultimately their interactions.

Summary and Conclusion

Spotlights placed on community colleges during the last quarter of the 20th century continues to grow. The need for this study is one outcome of a recognition that these institutions remain significant components of the larger system of American higher education and that too little is understood about their professoriate. LMACC remains the largest public community college in the state and was the site of a replicated investigation of full-time faculty's perceived role in the college's retention activities. The study was shaped by three research questions which collectively both addressed issues of perception and asked faculty to describe (1) their perceived role in student retention, (2) their experiences in the college's retention activities, and (3) the kinds of experiences that made their participation unlikely. Results reported in the previous chapter were based on data gathered from eleven full-time LMACC faculty members who incorporated high impact practices in their teaching methods.

Faculty at LMACC generally described their role in both motivating students to succeed and retaining students in their own classes as incorporated in their expected role as a teacher. When describing their own education background and professional experience, each respondent indicated that teaching in community college was their career choice primarily because of its focus on teaching. All considered student learning of paramount importance to them personally and all were committed to seeing students though completion of their own courses. A few respondents described their commitment to student learning as going beyond their own individual courses, incorporating a felt obligation to help students develop viable lifelong learning skills into their explanations.

Most viewed the college's efforts to engage faculty in student retention policies negatively. Specifically, most described either heavy faculty course loads or poor coordination with student support services, or both, as factors that inhibit their abilities and lessen their desire to do more. Importantly, most faculty respondents criticized what they saw as the college's inability, if not unwillingness, to address some of the socioeconomic needs of students that impact rates.

Comparisons of results conducted at SRCC and LMACC revealed much agreement across cohorts. Both samples perceived retention and motivating student learning essential parts of their normal role as teaching faculty. In both cohorts, respondents enjoyed teaching and considered the community college a good choice for them. There was also similarity between the two groups regarding what they considered obstacles to their retention activity success. Both cited institutional practices, such as course scheduling, heavy teaching loads added to general college obligations, expectations for advising students that they are not trained for as important obstacles controlled by the institution.

There were, however, disagreements. Samples differed in the extent to which each believed their college administration to be an ally or obstacle in faculty's efforts. Most notable differences were in the positive relationship between counseling and advising reported by SRCC and the more strained, sometimes contentious, and underutilized one described by several at LMACC. In the latter case, faculty reported that they were not properly trained to offer the kind of advising most students needed and

that the advising being provided by faculty was seen by many as simply, a contractual obligation rather than as a way to connect with students.

This investigation continued Graham's (2017) line of inquiry, both in its focus on faculty perceptions and through use of a qualitative design. It adds to the growing knowledge of community college faculty as a subset of the professoriate and offers an understanding into their role by describing their lived experiences as academic professionals. What was learned can help those interested in improving opportunities offered through the nations' community colleges as these institutions attempt to successfully meet their mission goals as post-secondary institutions offering transfer to four-year colleges, career education, and places to obtain foundational skills. Having a solid understanding of faculty's perception of their own role in carrying out the institution's mission is necessary to its success.

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Appendix A

Retention Strategies

Retention Strategies

Strategies Included in the Graham (2017) Study

Advising and Counseling Programs
Attendance Policies
Block Scheduling
Capstone Courses and Projects
Collaborative Assignments and Projects
Common Intellectual Experiences
Diversity/Global Learning
Early Alert/Warning Programs
First-Year Seminars and Experiences
Internships
Learning Communities
New Student Orientation Programs
Service and Community-Based Learning
Undergraduate Research
Writing-Intensive Courses

Retention Strategies Meeting Criteria for Study Replicated at LMACC

Collaborative Assignments
Community-Based Learning
Learning Communities
Service Learning
Writing Intensive Courses

Appendix B

Semi-Structured Interview Protocols

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol
(Graham, 2017)

Demographic Questions:

1. Tell me about your own educational background.
2. How long have you been teaching full-time at SRCC? Have you always been full-time or
did you adjunct/work in another capacity here?
3. What program/discipline do you teach in? What classes do you typically teach?
4. Do you have teaching experience at other schools or colleges? Have you served in other
roles in higher education (here or elsewhere)? Please describe them.
5. Do you hold a certificate or license related to the program you teach in? Do you have
professional experience in that field?

Retention Questions:

1. How do you define student retention?
2. Have you had any professional development or education around student retention? This
could be formal or informal – workshop days, conferences, articles you've read, classes
you've taken, etc. If so, please describe it.
3. What role do you think faculty members play in student retention?
4. What role do you think the institution plays in student retention?
5. From the list of retention strategies, can you tell me which ones you have used or
participated in?
a. Follow up: Tell me about your experiences with 1-2 of those strategies
b. How did you choose to use the strategies that you did use?
c. Why didn't you use the others?
6. Do you know SRCC's retention rate? According to the National Center for Educational
Statistics, for the academic year 2014-2015, our campus's retention rate was 52%. The
system rate was 55%. The national rate was 60%. This is for all students (full-time and
part-time) who started in the fall and returned in the spring. How do you feel about this?
7. What factors do you think account for a school's retention rate?
8. Do you believe there a relationship between a school's retention rate and what faculty do
in their classrooms? Can you explain why you feel that way?
9. Have you or a colleague ever been asked to participate in a retention strategy but chosen
not to at that time? What factors do you think influenced that decision?
10. Is there a way to structure a faculty member's job responsibilities to increase student
retention? What would that look like?
11. Is student retention a priority for our college? How can you tell?
12. Is student retention a priority for our faculty? How can you tell?

13. If you could make recommendations to community college administrators about how to

increase faculty use of/participation in retention strategies, what would they be?

14. What do you think are obstacles to faculty wanting to participate in retention strategies?

15. In education, trends come and go. Do you think student retention is a trend, or that it will

be a permanent part of the culture of higher education in the future?

16. Student success and retention is part of our system's new five-year strategic plan. Do you think this will improve our student retention rate? In what ways do you think it might impact what you do in your classroom?

17. You use retention strategies in your teaching – why? What motivates you personally to

use them?

18. Is there anything else you'd like to add regarding your thoughts on student retention?

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol – Edited for LMACC study

Demographic Questions:

1. Tell me about your own educational background.
2. How long have you been teaching full-time at this college? Have you always been full-time or

    did you adjunct/work in another capacity here?
3. What program/discipline do you teach in? What classes do you typically teach?
4. Do you have teaching experience at other schools or colleges? Have you served in other

    roles in higher education (here or elsewhere)? Please describe them.
5. Do you hold a certificate or license related to the program you teach in? Do you have
    professional experience in that field?

Retention Questions:

1. How do you define student retention?
2. Have you had any professional development or education around student retention? This

    could be formal or informal – workshop days, conferences, articles you've read, classes

    you've taken, etc. If so, please describe it.
3. What role do you think faculty members play in student retention?
4. What role do you think the institution plays in student retention?
5. From the list of retention strategies used here at the college, can you tell me which ones you

    have used or participated in?
        a. Follow up: Tell me about your experiences with 1-2 of those strategies
        b. How did you choose to use the strategies that you did use?
        c. Why didn't you use the others?
6. Do you know this college's retention rate? According to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, the six-year completion rate for students in the nation's public two-year colleges is 27.86% for those remaining at the same institution. LMACC's three-year completion rate is currently 22% for graduation and 14% for transfers. How do you feel about this?
7. What factors do you think account for a school's retention rate? (Retention being measured as fall to fall registration.)
8. Do you believe there a relationship between a school's retention rate and what faculty do

    in their classrooms? Can you explain why you feel that way?
9. Have you or a colleague ever been asked to participate in a retention strategy buts now chosen

    not to at that time? What factors do you think influenced that decision?

10. What do you think are obstacles to faculty wanting to participate in retention strategies?

11. Is there a way to structure a faculty member's job responsibilities to increase student retention? What would that look like?

12. You use retention strategies in your teaching – why? What motivates you personally to

    use them?

13. Is student retention a priority for our faculty? How can you tell?

14. Is student retention a priority for our college? How can you tell?

15. If you could make recommendations to community college administrators about how to

    increase faculty use of/participation in retention strategies, what would they be?

16. In education, trends come and go. Do you think student retention is a trend, or that it will

    be a permanent part of the culture of higher education in the future?

17. Student success and retention is part of our college's current five-year strategic plan. Do

    you think this will improve our student retention rate? In what ways do you think it might impact what you do in your classroom?

18. Is there anything you'd like to add regarding your thoughts on student retention

Appendix C

NSU Consent to be in a Research Study

NSU Consent to be in a Research Study Entitled:

Understanding Community College Faculty Perceptions of Their Role in Student Retention:
A Replicated Study

Who is doing this research study?

College: Nova Southeastern University, Abraham S. Fischler College of Education
Principal Investigator: Maureen Ellis-Davis, M. Phil.
Faculty Advisor/Dissertation Chair: Joanne Campbell, Ph. D.
Site Information:

Bergen Community College   Bergen Community College at the
Meadowlands
400 Paramus Road   1280 Wall Street West
Paramus, NJ 07652   Lyndhurst, NJ 07071

Funding: This study is unfunded.

What is this study about?

This is a replicated research study that will expand the knowledge base of community college faculty as an important subset of the higher education professoriate. Though growing in volume, existing literature concerning faculty role in student retention efforts is focused on faculty as role models, academic advisors, classroom practices and other forms of direct student-faculty interactions. How faculty see themselves as academic professionals is not well investigated. In community colleges where student readiness is often an issue and faculty-student relationships are linked with rates of student retention, a more thorough understanding of faculty perception of their role in the process will benefit retention activities.

Why are you asking me to be in this research study?

You are invited to participate in this study because you are a full-time faculty member of this college who has taught at least one course the college describes as "a high impact course," meaning a course specifically associated with student retention in community colleges.

A total of thirty faculty from this college are invited to participate.

What will I be doing if I agree to be in this research study?

Participation in the study involves a one-time, 20-30-minute interview with the principle investigator, Maureen Ellis-Davis, at a mutually agreed time. The interview will be conducted in English and will be recorded to ensure accuracy of responses. Recordings will be erased following transcription and neither your name, nor any other personally identifying information, will be attached to your recording.

Are there possible risks and discomforts to me?

This research study involves minimal risk to you. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, responding to the interview questions will have no more risk of harm than you would have in everyday life.

What happens if I do not want to be in this research study?

You have the right to leave this research study at any time, or not be in it. If you do decide to leave or you decide not to be in the study anymore, you will not get any penalty or lose any services you have a right to get. If you choose to stop being in the study, any information collected about you **before** the date you leave the study will be kept in the research records for 36 months from the conclusion of the study but you may request that it not be used.

What if there is new information learned during the study that may affect my decision to remain in the study?

If significant new information relating to the study becomes available, which may relate to whether you want to remain in this study, this information will be given to you by the investigator. You may be asked to sign a new Informed Consent Form, if the information is given to you after you have joined the study.

Are there any benefits for taking part in this research study?

There are no direct benefits to you from being in this research study. It is hoped the information learned from this study will add to the growing body of knowledge of community college faculty as educators in a subsystem of higher education.

Will I be paid or be given compensation for being in the study?

You will not be given any payments or compensation for being in this research study.

Will it cost me anything?

There are no costs to you for being in this research study.

How will you keep my information private?

Information learned about you in this research study will be handled in a confidential manner, within the limits of the law and will be limited to people who have a need to review this information. This data will be available to the researcher, the Institutional Review Board and other representatives of this institution, and any regulatory and granting agencies (if applicable). If the results of the study are published in a scientific journal or book, you will not be identified. All confidential data will be kept securely. Recordings will be kept by the principal investigator off campus as a written transcript

once the interview is completed. All data will be kept for 36 months and destroyed after that time by shredding.

Will there be any Audio or Video Recording?

This research study involves audio recording. This recording will be available to the researcher, the Institutional Review Board, and other representatives of this institution, and any of the people who gave the researcher money to do the study. The recording will be kept, stored, and destroyed as stated in the section above. Because what is in the recording could be used to find out that it is you, it is not possible to be sure that the recording will always be kept confidential. The researcher will try to keep anyone not working on the research from listening to or viewing the recording.

Whom can I contact if I have questions, concerns, comments, or complaints?

If you have questions now, feel free to ask us. If you have more questions about the research, your research rights, or have a research-related injury, please contact:

Primary contact:

Maureen Ellis-Davis can be reached at 201-301-1244 or 347-275-6571.

Research Participants Rights

For questions/concerns regarding your research rights, please contact:

Institutional Review Board
Nova Southeastern University
(954) 262-5369 / Toll Free: 1-866-499-0790
IRB@nova.edu

You may also visit the NSU IRB website at www.nova.edu/irb/information-for-research-participants for further information regarding your rights as a research participant.

All space below was intentionally left blank.

Research Consent & Authorization Signature Section

<u>Voluntary Participation</u> - You are not required to participate in this study. In the event you do participate, you may leave this research study at any time. If you leave this research study before it is completed, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits to which you are entitled.

If you agree to participate in this research study, sign this section. You will be given a signed copy of this form to keep. You do not waive any of your legal rights by signing this form.

SIGN THIS FORM ONLY IF THE STATEMENTS LISTED BELOW ARE TRUE:
- You have read the above information.
- Your questions have been answered to your satisfaction about the research.

<u>Adult Signature Section</u>

I have voluntarily decided to take part in this research study.

Printed Name of Participant   Signature of Participant   Date

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