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COMMUTER STUDENTS AND INVOLVEMENT THEORY

by

Yamesha Woodley

A Thesis

Submitted to the
Department of Educational Services and Leadership
College of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirement

For the degree of
Master of Arts in Higher Education

at
Rowan University

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Thesis Chair: Burton Sisco, Ed.D.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my parents, Angela and Russell, who have supported me in everything that I have ever set out to accomplish. Without their endless belief in me, I would have never been able to complete my graduate journey. All of my successes have been a reflection of their sacrifices and I am forever indebted to them.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Sisco for his commitment to seeing me through the successful completion of my graduate experience. He has taught me that it is never too late to fulfill educational aspirations, and that self-motivation is the key to seeing yourself through any experience. The knowledge and skills that I have amassed throughout my graduate journey are immeasurable, and I will continue to use the knowledge that I have gained to inspire my own students.

I would also like to thank my family for being endless sources of love, light, and laughter. My niece in particular is a daily reminder for me to never stop asking questions or pursuing new experiences, and to find joy in the simple things that pass me by.

Abstract

Yamesha Woodley
COMMUTER STUDENTS AND INVOLVEMENT THEORY
2016-2017
Dr. Burton Sisco, Ed.D.
Master of Arts in Higher Education

The purpose of the study was to better understand the involvement patterns of commuter students at Rowan University. The study examined their levels of involvement and gathered information regarding their attitudes on the holistic collegiate experience at the institution. This study also examined links between a commuter's physical proximity to the main campus and their subsequently reported frequency of participation in various areas of campus life. The study examined the levels of involvement of the subjects and their satisfaction with areas of campus in order to gain insight on commuter satisfaction surrounding the student experience.

Previous research had not examined the frequency of commuter involvement in specific activities, nor the impact of their physical proximity to main campus on the chosen involvement activities prioritized by the student. The study surveyed 75 commuter students attending Rowan University during the 2013-2014 academic year in order to collect information related to demographics and levels of involvement in specific activities. The study highlighted an emphasis by commuter students on the academic components of their student experience. The subjects reported moderate satisfaction with academic involvement, social involvement, and campus environment, but placed particular emphasis on the scholastic components of the areas when gauging importance.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

While there has been extensive research on student involvement on college campuses, a very limited amount has focused on the commuter student population. Commuters are a sizable portion of most campuses, and thus a critical population to understand at colleges and universities. Commuter students must balance a host of responsibilities that place demands on their time. Due to these additional time investments outside of academics, commuter students tend to be less involved on campus than their residential counterparts. The issue of involvement is critical because it is closely related to a student's college development (Kuh, Gonyea, & Palmer, 2001).

Statement of the Problem

There is a prevalent perception that commuter students are less involved on campus. There is extensive research related to the importance of involvement for college student development. Commuter students in particular have statistically been at a disadvantage for baccalaureate degree completion when compared to residential students (Jacoby & Garland, 2004). In this study, I explored the impact of commuting and levels of involvement on campus while attending Rowan University as a full-time student.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate commuter student involvement at Rowan University in order to expand upon outcomes of involvement on the college experience. It is important to understand whether commuter students are in fact less

engaged than students who reside on campus. In order to ensure that all students at higher education institutions are receiving the support that they need to succeed, additional research is needed in this specific area. The study sought to better understand the attitudes of Rowan commuter students on the issue of involvement and how important they perceive it to be to their personal experience at the campus. The findings of this study provided new insight into commuter student involvement.

Significance of the Study

The commuter population continues to increase on college campuses across the country as the definition and outside responsibilities of the traditional college student have changed. This research study assessed the impact commuting has on campus involvement at Rowan University. It is crucial for higher education administrators to recognize the importance of exploring the effects commuting to campus has on student involvement. The findings presented in this research study provide increased awareness for college administrators and practitioners who seek a clearer understanding of the needs and challenges of commuter students on their own campuses.

Assumptions and Limitations

The researcher acknowledges the limitations of this study and the assumptions made that could influence the results. The scope of this research study was limited to students who attended Rowan University during the 2013-2014 academic year. While many were offered the opportunity to participate in the research study, the results could inevitably be limited to those students who completed and returned the survey. The subjects may also have their own motivations for participating in the research study. It

was assumed that all of the students who partook in the study answered truthfully and without bias. Several additional limiting factors are present in the study. I worked on campus as a Graduate Resident Director and interacted with members of the Commuters at Rowan (CAR) club. These factors could be sources of potential bias. Finally, I used a convenience sample, so the sample is not a true representation of the commuter population at Rowan University.

Operational Definitions

1. Commuters: Refers to any student who does not live in campus housing owned or leased through Rowan University's Office of Residential Learning and University Housing during the fall 2013-spring 2014 academic calendar year.
2. Higher Education: The undergraduate education offered at Rowan University.
3. Rowan University: Refers specifically to the main Glassboro, N.J. campus and does not include the satellite campus in Camden, N.J., or either of the two medical schools affiliated with the institution.
4. Students: Refers to undergraduate students enrolled in 12 or more credits during the spring 2014 semester at Rowan University.
5. Student Involvement: Physical or psychological participation by the student that enhances his or her academic experience (Astin, 1999).

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the involvement patterns of commuter students at Rowan University?

2. How important are and satisfied with are Rowan commuter students in terms of the social and academic involvement, and campus environment at Rowan University?
3. Is there a difference in the involvement levels of commuter students in walking distance and commuter students who drive to campus?
4. What significance is there between the demographic variables and commuter participation in specific involvement activities?

Overview of the Study

Chapter II provides a review of the relevant scholarly literature on commuter student populations. This chapter includes relevant student development theory research, an overview on the issues surrounding commuter students, the effects of on campus living on student involvement, and discussion of current practices and recommendations for commuter student success.

Chapter III describes the methodology and procedures to be used for the study. The focus of this chapter is to clearly define the terms of the study including information on the population and sample size, data collection methods, and appropriate data analysis.

Chapter IV presents the findings of the study. The purpose of this chapter is to directly address the research questions that are the foundation of the study.

Chapter V summarizes the study and its key findings. The chapter concludes with interpretations and recommendations for practice and further research.

Chapter II

Review of the Relevant Literature

While the college experience is distinctive for every student, a common thread is that students in general must feel that they are integrated into the atmosphere of their institution. Students who are not socially and academically integrated might feel that they do not matter and can be more likely to leave the institution before completion of their degree. Some student populations on campus can be particularly susceptible to these feelings of disengagement. In 2001, Astin stated that commuting is, “negatively related to attainment of the bachelor’s degree and enrollment in graduate or professional school” when compared with residential students (as cited in Jacoby & Garland, 2004, p. 61). This admonition should and has gained the attention of some colleges and universities. Given the substantial population of commuter students on most campuses, their success and overall retention is vital to the core mission of the institution.

Involvement Theory

Alexander Astin introduced the student involvement theory in 1984. The theory is based off of his 1975 longitudinal study on college dropouts. The purpose of the study was to determine factors that affect student persistence rates. Nearly every significant factor could be attributed to the student’s level of involvement on campus. Astin declared, students “learn by be[ing] involved” (Astin, 1985, p. 133). When students are actively participating in their learning, they get more out of their college experience. Astin describes his theory in a very simple foundational framework. Student involvement can be defined as “the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student

devotes to the academic experience” (Astin, 1999, p. 518). This energy can be physical such as activity in sports, spending time on campus doing activities, or helping with an organization. Involvement can also encompass what Astin calls psychological energy in terms of time spent studying or interacting with faculty. By this definition, an uninvolved student would not likely be found devoting much time to interaction with his or her peers or faculty, involved in a plethora of campus organizations, or dedicating considerable time and effort to personal academic studies (Astin, 1999).

Astin asserts that involvement theory can serve to expound upon years of research based on student development. The theory can be of assistance to faculty, administrators, and scholars in developing environments that are more conducive to student learning (Astin, 1999). Astin emphasizes the importance of behavior to involvement theory. While motivation is also an integral component, he contends that the behavioral factor is most crucial. Astin asserts, “it is not so much what the individual thinks or feels, but what the individual does, how he or she behaves, that defines and identifies involvement” (p. 518).

Astin highlights five general postulates to his involvement theory. Postulate one is that involvement includes physical and psychological energy that can be very general or highly specific in nature. Postulate two is the notion that involvement happens along a continuum. This means that each student allocates different levels of energy to the same object and that the extent of his or her involvement can change over time. Postulate three states involvement can be measured qualitatively or quantitatively. Postulate four suggests that the level of development and learning associated with a given program is

directly related to the quality and quantity of involvement within that program. Postulate five states that the success of any given educational policy is inextricably linked to its ability to increase involvement. The more a student is involved in college, the more he or she will get out of his or her college experience due to a higher level of investment on their part. This investment contributes directly to the personal and professional development of the student (Astin, 1999).

The term involvement has often been used interchangeably with the term engagement (Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Kinzie, 2009). Both terms are related to student development and thus have similarities, but there are important distinctions between the terminologies that make them unique. George Kuh's theory of student engagement was influenced by involvement theory but has an additional component. Engagement theory examines the efforts and resources that institutions put into making sure students are actively participating in activities. Engagement is not only about the effort put in by the student, but also the effort of the college or university to meet him or her halfway with resources and initiatives (Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Kinzie, 2009).

Involvement is an important topic for any individual connected to higher education. Researchers consistently demonstrate that being involved on campus facilitates student learning and development outside of the classroom environment. A study by Kapp (1979) found students involved in multiple activities were twice as likely to view college as having increased their leadership ability. It also positively affected student satisfaction with social life, contact with classmates and faculty (as cited in Lizza,

2007). Involvement in campus activities can help students foster important life skills such as problem solving, communication, and public speaking (Ackermann, 2005).

Due to the general consensus on its relevance, the scholarly discussion around the concept of involvement has gradually shifted to become more focused on the types of involvement that are most effective or influential in shaping the college experience. It is important to understand the intended and unintended consequences of student involvement. The increased concentration of colleges and universities on learning objectives and assessment methods has only served to fuel this question further. Some common positive influences on college campuses are student government, Greek life, and orientation programs. These services and programs help students to hone their interests and get them involved in the community early on in their college careers (Moore, Lovell, McGann, & Wyrick, 1998).

Student Involvement Research

There is a plethora of scholarly research related to student involvement and its impact on performance in college. A significant amount of this research demonstrates that involved students are more successful and satisfied in their college experience. Student involvement is inevitably influenced by outside variables such as demographics, institutional factors, and individual student traits. Age can influence the ways in which students get involved and their propensity to do so. Non-traditional age students might potentially feel tentative about getting involved on campus due to their age difference with the majority of traditional students and busy schedules outside of their academic course load. Older students generally need to be encouraged by someone else on campus

to get involved in order to make that transition. In addition, commuting to campus can influence a student's ability to get involved. While there was an early assumption that commuter and older students did not care to be involved, recent research has helped to combat that myth, and instead challenge faculty and staff to do more to incorporate these groups on campus (Moore et al., 1998).

There are other characteristics that can affect a student's inclination to get involved. Pike, Kuh, and Gonyea (2003) found females, minority students, and students with degree aspirations beyond the baccalaureate level reported higher levels of involvement and had more positive perceptions of their campus environment. In the same study, the researchers found that being a first-generation college student negatively impacted social involvement and affected integration. Roberts and McNeese (2010), concluded that transfer status had an impact on involvement levels. In the study, "native" students, or those who attended the same college or university for all four years, were the most likely to be involved on campus. Transfer students who came from a community college were more likely to be involved than transfer students from other four-year institutions. It is important for colleges and universities to make sure that transfer students do not simply view the college as a place to finish their degree. Incorporating transfer students into involvement activities is critical to the overall success of the institution (Roberts & McNeese, 2010).

Institutional factors can also considerably affect levels of involvement on a college campus. These factors include the selected major of students, their level of satisfaction and interaction with faculty, their associated group of friends, and financial

aid. Each of these variables can have an impact on a student's propensity and ability to get involved on campus. The size of the college or university can also indirectly influence involvement levels. A smaller college can create a more manageable environment mentally for a student to interact within. At smaller colleges, student affairs professionals can also have a more direct level of contact with the student population, which can impact student involvement. However, this is only one potential factor and does not imply that interaction between these two groups is not possible at bigger institutions or that student involvement quality is diminished (Moore et al., 1998). Another study found that institution type had an effect on academic and social involvement in college, but student backgrounds played more of a key role in the differences than the institution type itself (Pike, Kuh, & Gonyea, 2003). Conversely, an earlier study by Pace (1984), found that those students who attended liberal arts colleges had higher levels of involvement than students at other types of colleges and universities through his use of data from the *College Student Experience Questionnaire (CSEQ)*.

Moore et al. (1998) found that being a part of Greek organizations and student government positively influences student involvement. Living on campus can also positively influence student interaction and involvement. Astin (1999) found living on campus positively influenced the level of student interaction with faculty, propensity to be involved in campus student government, and involvement in Greek organizations. Astin's research demonstrated that living on campus positively influenced the persistence rates of students. Students who lived on campus were more likely than their commuting counterparts to be in leadership roles, involved in athletics on campus, and feel positively about their college experience (Astin, 1999). Involvement in co-curricular activities has

also been shown to improve critical thinking skills (Gellin, 2003). It can also have an impact on a student's psychosocial development. A recent study looked at the impact of involvement in clubs and organizations on the psychosocial development of the students. Students with high levels of involvement in these activities demonstrated greater development in finding purpose and moving towards interdependence (Foubert & Grainger, 2006).

Working on campus had a similar constructive impact (Astin, 1999). In his 1975 study of college dropouts, Astin found that working on campus had a positive influence on student retention. If a student is working on campus, he or she is going to be exposed to that much more interaction with their fellow peers, faculty, and other staff members or administrators (Astin, 1999). A master's thesis study conducted at Rowan University in early 2009 found that 20% more students employed on campus were involved in activities inside and outside of the residence halls compared to those students with off campus employment (Anderson, 2009). Another positive way to become involved on campus is through service learning. Students who are required to take part in service learning report developing relationships with their peers and feeling more integrated into their academic programs. Consequently, more institutions are moving towards emphasizing service learning through added requirements (Roberts & McNeese, 2010).

Growing Commuter Populations

Today's definition of the traditional college student differs considerably from the past. According to Attewell and Lavin (2007), less than a quarter of undergraduate students today fit the description of a full-time student entering college straight out of

high school, living on campus, and not working due to financial support from home (Attewell & Lavin, 2007). Not only does today's college student likely have a job of some sort outside of his or her classes, but a sizeable portion of the college student population opts to commute to their college or university from a nearby area (Newbold, Mehta, & Forbus, 2011).

The National Clearinghouse for Commuter Programs (NCCP) and the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) both define commuter students as those who do not live in university-owned housing (Jacoby & Garland, 2004). In other words, one whose "home and campus are not synonymous" (Commuter Students: Myths, Realities, 2006, p. 1). According to this NCCP definition, commuter students account for over 80% of the average institution (Commuter Students: Myths, Realities, 2006). Distinctions can be made between types of commuter students. Commuters who drive to campus tend to differ in certain areas when compared to their peers who are within walking distance. Driving commuters are more likely to be older, first-generation, and students of color. These commuters are also more likely to be working to support family members. This may also explain the fact that driving commuters have a greater tendency to be part-time students. The researchers found that the farther away commuters live from campus, the less likely they are to take advantage of campus opportunities (Kuh, Gonyea, & Palmer, 2001).

It is important for higher education institutions to understand the nuances surrounding this group of students as their numbers are expected to continue increasing. In order to address their overall persistence rates, many colleges and universities are

increasingly concerned with the needs of the commuter population. Residential and commuter students often exhibit differences along three lines: socioeconomic and demographic, academics, and obligations or activities outside of the school environment. Commuter students on average are more likely to be older and to be from working class families. These students are more likely to be found cycling in and out of college throughout their academic career (Newbold, Mehta, & Forbus, 2011).

For many commuter students, school is something that needs to be worked around the rest of their responsibilities, and consequently this balancing act can result in the need to take semesters off for other matters. The main support systems of commuter students can also be off campus due to the fact that they live and work elsewhere. Commuters may feel that there is no one experiencing the exact same struggles, which can be frustrating and lead to feelings of alienation (Newbold, Mehta, & Forbus, 2011). Race can also play a role in the commuter experience. Black commuter students in particular might be disadvantaged due to the trailing trends for both minority and commuter students in higher education. Some research suggests that black commuter students can benefit significantly from taking part in Greek organizations and increased interaction with the faculty inside and outside of the classroom (Yearwood & Jones, 2012).

A recent study found that commuter students were more likely to be transfer students (Newbold, Mehta, & Forbus, 2011). This adds complexity to the already difficult position of transferring institutions. Transfer students are a large population on many campuses, and yet programs and services often overlook this group. Issues such as credit

transfers, registration confusion, and financial aid are common complaints of transfer students. Being a commuter can just add another level of stress (Kodama, 2002).

Despite the high rates of commuter students on the average college campus, misconceptions about the group still persist today. In “Commuter Students: Myths, Realities,” Garland focuses on what he believes are four common myths about commuter students. The first is that in order to be true college students, commuters need to become more involved on campus. Garland argues that if one looked at the lives of commuter students he or she would see that they live full lives, involved in community service and developing skills through work and family. The second misconception Garland seeks to address is the notion that commuter students will not get involved in programs regardless of the effort put forth by the institution. He posits that the topic, location, time and format are important factors for commuter students when they gauge whether to make time for a particular event or program on campus around classes.

Garland stresses that contrary to the belief of some, it is not impossible to reach out to commuter students. While many administrators and student affairs staff complain that commuter students are difficult to reach out to because they are only on campus for class, Garland challenges these individuals to reach out through different means. By reaching out by way of mail, fliers in parking lots or academic buildings, and on campus shuttles, institutions can more effectively meet commuter students halfway. Lastly, while having an office dedicated to commuter services has a significant impact, it takes commitment from various offices across campus to meet the needs of this group (Commuter Students: Myths, Realities, 2006).

Residential Status and Involvement

Commuter students by default spend less time on campus than those students who live in the residence halls and apartment complexes. Due to their work and family obligations, commuter students often intentionally schedule their classes for blocks of time on a limited number of days per week. By only commuting to campus two or three days a week, their schedule becomes more available to addressing other responsibilities they have outside of the campus setting. This can limit the ability of commuter students to be involved on campus, which is directly related to persistence rates (Jacoby, 2000). The fact that over two thirds of commuter students hold outside jobs while pursuing their academic degree can result in a more “vocational” mentality on the part of the commuter student. Consequently, commuter students tend to be more focused on furthering their career goals through academic efforts rather than looking to outside the classroom learning like a residential student might be inclined to do (Smith, 1989).

In a recent study by Alfano and Eduljee (2013), over 65% of commuters reported being involved in no student activities on campus, while approximately 20% of residential students reported the same lack of involvement. Another study essentially confirmed this pattern finding that commuter students were significantly less likely to take part in college-sponsored events or social activities (Newbold, Mehta, & Forbus, 2011). While a higher level of residential students felt more integrated into the campus community, both groups of students expressed a desire to become more involved at their institution. The study also examined the effects of work stress on these two groups of college students (Alfano & Eduljee, 2013). A direct correlation was found between the

increase in the cost of higher education and the increase in college student employment. Employment can have a significant impact on a student's academic and social satisfaction during his or her college years (Riggert, Boyle, Petrosko, Ash, & Rude-Parkins, 2006). Commuter students with jobs reported higher levels of stress than working residential students (Alfano & Eduljee, 2013). Working commuter students also earn more income on average when compared with their peers who work on campus (Newbold, Mehta, & Forbus, 2011).

The benefits of living on campus during one's college years can be significant. As a result, many colleges and universities mandate that their students live on campus for at least their freshman and often sophomore years. Previous research has found that residing on campus can influence academic performance with an increase of up to a full letter grade during the student's time on campus. Even after choosing to live off campus, students who resided on campus in the past continued to experience meaningful gains in their academic grade point average (GPA). In a recent study, de Araujo and Murray (2010), sought to understand why living on campus seemed to positively influence student performance and success. The scholars concluded that residents that live on campus spend more time studying in their living space due to the fact that the environment is more conducive to learning. Living on campus can help students to develop cultural sensitivity and also increase their acceptance of diversity. Residence halls and campus apartments can help to foster an environment in which students are exposed to a variety of issues and people they might not have experienced or interacted with otherwise (Pike, 2002).

Students who live on campus can be exposed to a social support system with easy access to campus resources that can encourage integration into the larger community. In hall activities can also help to combat feelings of isolation or loneliness (Schudde, 2011). While many agree that living on campus can be beneficial to student success, some are more skeptical of a correlation between the two. Critics argue that the students who chose to live on campus were more academically prepared and therefore from the outset had a better chance at persisting than those who chose to live off campus. These critics assert that deciding to live on campus can be a reflection of that student's academic preparedness, familial situation or background, and financial security. These critical scholars contend that the self-selection decision of students on whether to live on campus influences the results of any study focused on the matter (Turley, 2006).

Increasing Commuter Involvement

In order to increase the involvement of this student population, it is first critical to better understand their needs and common realities. Reliable transportation is important as this stressor can drain both time and energy from the student that might have otherwise been placed into a campus event or program. Institutions must also consider the various life roles a commuter student is often juggling. Commuter students must be strategic when choosing their involvement due to time commitments elsewhere. These students must feel a sense of belonging if institutions hope to retain them. Otherwise, these students may view their campus experience as a series of pit stops on their way towards a degree (Commuter Students: Myths, Realities, 2006).

Commuter students do not typically have high expectations for the institution to provide programs and initiatives focused on their needs (Newbold, Mehta, & Forbus, 2011). Some colleges and universities have recently developed new initiatives to reach out to this group. For example, the University of Massachusetts Lowell has created a commuter newsletter, commuter lounges to give the students a place to connect between classes, and events such as commuter breakfasts. The university has also sought to foster relationships between faculty members and nonresident students (Santovec, 2007). Meanwhile, Mansfield University of Pennsylvania sought to help bridge the gap between residential and commuter students. Mansfield University set aside a number of rooms in one of its residence halls for use by commuters when needed with no charge to the student (Lorenzetti, 2009). These efforts demonstrate potential opportunities and the ability of commuter students to be brought into the fold of the institution.

Summary of the Literature Review

The concept of the traditional college student is changing and commuter students are a growing population on college campuses across the country. While commuters account for a large percentage of college students, the longstanding residential tradition within higher education has had a negative impact on the urgency with which institutions have sought to address the group's issues. Commuting can have a negative impact on a student's prospects of earning his or her bachelor's degree and can significantly increase levels of stress (Jacoby & Garland, 2004). While they might live off campus, these students still need to feel a sense of belonging and connection to the campus community.

The importance of involvement research cannot be overstated. Studies show that students who are involved socially and academically report higher levels of satisfaction with their college experience. While involvement is linked to other theories, Astin's student involvement theory is predominant. Astin acknowledges that student time is "finite" and educators and administrators must compete with various factors for the attention of a student (Astin, 1999, p. 518). Involvement has become a dynamic conversation piece in higher education as more institutions seek to address retention issues. Transfers and dropouts often occur when students do not feel a part of their college. As such, student retention and student involvement are inherently linked to one another. Colleges and universities must address this involvement gap in order to improve their persistence rates. More research is needed to determine the differences in involvement between commuter and residential student populations and the resources essential for the future success of both.

Chapter III

Methodology

Context of the Study

The study was conducted at Rowan University, in Glassboro, N.J. Rowan University is a medium sized public institution in southern New Jersey. The university was originally founded in 1923 as Glassboro Normal School and has expanded at a remarkable pace into the research-classified institution it is today. At present Rowan University has a satellite campus in Camden along with two medical schools—the Cooper Medical School and the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey’s School of Osteopathic Medicine. *US News & World Report* ranked the growing institution #19 in the northern region in its listing for Best Colleges of 2016 (Rowan University, 2015). The Rowan University brand also continued to expand its reach when nearby Gloucester County College underwent a name change in late 2013 to become Rowan County College to signify a newly formed partnership between the institutions (Romalino, 2013).

Rowan University’s main campus boasts 12 colleges and schools including business, engineering, biomedical sciences, medicine, and education. The institution offers over 70 bachelor’s programs along with post-masters programs and four doctoral programs. Rowan University has a student body of approximately 16,000 students. While it is primarily a residential campus with a focus on undergraduate students, the institution has over 2,000 graduates and over 900 professionals. Students experience more student/faculty interaction due to Rowan University’s generally small class sizes and the

absence of teaching assistants. Over 90% of faculty holds a doctorate or the terminal degree in his or her field of study. The average class size is 22 with a 17 to 1 student/faculty ratio. The institution seeks to socially engage its student population through 146 total clubs and organizations, athletics, intramural sports and campus housing. Rowan students also have the benefit of utilizing student services such as the Center for Academic Advising & Exploration (CAAdE), the Career Management Center, and the Center for Academic Success to meet their needs and ensure success (Rowan University, 2015).

Population and Sample Selection

The target population for this study was the commuter student population across New Jersey. The accessible population was the fall 2013-spring 2014 commuter student population enrolled at Rowan University. The convenience sample consisted of commuter students that were available and willing to complete the survey. A nonrandom convenience sample was used because the survey data were compiled from students that were either involved in CAR directly, reached by someone involved in the organization, or were asked while in the Student Center and Campbell Library on campus. In order to safeguard the rights of the subjects involved in the study, an Institutional Review Board (IRB) application was submitted on March 5, 2014 with a copy of the survey instrument attached. The application was approved by the IRB on March 12, 2014 with formal written approval received on March 18, 2014 (Appendix A).

Instrumentation

The survey instrument titled *Commuter Student Involvement* was a replication of an instrument previously developed by Thomas Iacovone (2007). The original instrument was based primarily on the *Ohio University Student Involvement Study* with aspects of the *CIRP Freshman Survey*, the *National Survey of Student Engagement 2006*, and the *2005-2006 College Student Survey*. The modified survey instrument (Appendix B) inquired about student academic standing along with several questions related to the student's perceived involvement throughout the academic year.

The instrument was divided into two separate sections to distinguish between the collection of background information and the involvement information. The background section consisted of checkboxes in order for the subject to answer questions related to their age, class year, race, and GPA. The following section contained involvement questions that were separated into five sections. Section one asked subjects to mark the activities they were involved in and to estimate the number of hours per week they put into that activity. The second section asked respondents to indicate the number of hours they participated in the involvement activities on a monthly scale. The third section pertained to the proximity of the subjects living arrangements to the main campus. The fourth section of the instrument looked at the subject's relationships with other students and faculty at Rowan University using a five-option scale ranging from unfriendly and unsupportive to friendly and supportive. The final section of the survey instrument looked at three areas related to involvement on campus: Social, Academic, and Campus Atmosphere. This section consists of a Likert scale of five numbers pertaining to

importance and satisfaction in the three areas of social involvement, academic involvement, and campus atmosphere. Very important or very satisfied was labeled five, whereas the number one indicated a lack of importance to the student or their dissatisfaction with that particular area. The instrument received a Chronbach's alpha measure of .847. Alpha coefficients with a value of .70 and above indicate consistency and reliability of an instrument.

After making a slight adjustment to the instrument to remove an inapplicable question it was distributed to three students from the CAR club at Rowan University to determine the content validity and reliability of the instrument. The recipients were asked to examine the survey for content and feasibility. Each participant was a current Rowan student and thus could gauge whether the instrument would be easy to complete by their peers. No additional concerns or problems were recorded on the survey, so the researcher moved forward with the data collection process.

Data Collection

Following approval from the IRB of Rowan University (Appendix A), the survey instrument was first distributed to the executive board members of the CAR club with additional copies given to each of them to disseminate to further students. The survey was administered in late March 2014 and in April 2014. Subjects were drawn from CAR meetings and sponsored events such as the CARnival. All subjects were informed of the nature of the study and its connection to the fulfillment of the researcher's master's degree requirements. Surveys could be returned to the researcher directly or via other members of the CAR club. Participation in the study was completely voluntary and no

identifying information was collected from the survey participants in order to maintain confidentiality.

Data Analysis

The demographic information, involvement level on campus, and student attitude information were collected from the survey responses and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software program. Descriptive statistics were utilized in order to provide frequency information, percentages, means, and standard deviations for both the demographic information and the attitudes of the surveyed commuter students at Rowan University. A Kendall rank correlation coefficient (Kendall's tau-b) was used to determine whether there were significant relationships between collected demographic information such as age range, class, cumulative GPA, race and ethnicity and selected involvement activities at Rowan University.

Chapter IV

Findings

Profile of the Population

The subjects in the study consisted of 75 commuter students enrolled at Rowan University in Glassboro New Jersey during the 2013-2014 academic year. The subjects were recruited through convenience sampling by me. This sampling was based on availability and willingness to be a part of the study. Of the 150 surveys distributed, 75 were returned for a response rate of 50%.

Tables 4.1 through 4.4 represent the frequency breakdowns of age range, race and ethnicity percentages, residence distance, and GPA of the subjects. Table 4.1 represents the age range of survey subjects. The majority were between the age range of 21 to 22 at 53%. The 19 to 20 age range was the second largest age bracket in the surveyed sample. The 23 and older age range represented the third largest age range of the subjects at 8%. Those identifying as 18 and under were the smallest representation consisting of only 1%.

Table 4.1

Age of Commuter Student Subjects

	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
18 and under	1	1.3
19 to 20	26	34.7
21 to 22	40	53.3
23 and older	8	10.7
Total	75	100

Table 4.2 describes the self-identified racial and ethnic distribution of the subjects in the study. The majority of the subjects identified as White or Caucasian at 68%. African Americans represented the next largest group with 14% of the sample. The third largest group was Hispanic with 7% representing Mexican American/Chicano at 1%, Puerto Rican at over 2% and other Latino at over 2%. Asian Americans made up 4% of the sample population with subjects identifying as other making up slightly over 6%.

Table 4.2

Race and Ethnicity of Commuter Student Subjects

	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
White/Caucasian	51	68.0
Puerto Rican	2	2.7
African American/Black	11	14.7
Asian American/Asian	3	4.0
Mexican American/Chicano	1	1.3
Other Latino	2	2.7
Other	5	6.7
Total	75	100.0

Table 4.3 describes the residence distance make-up of the subjects in the study. A total of 52% indicated living in a residence that was within walking distance of the Rowan University main campus, while 48% reported living in a residence that was within driving distance of the main campus.

Table 4.3

Residence Distance of Commuter Student Subjects

	<i>f</i>	%
Residence within walking distance	39	52.0
Residence within driving distance	36	48.0
Total	75	100

Table 4.4 represents the cumulative grade point average of the subjects. The greatest number of subjects was between the GPA ranges of 3.3 to 3.0 at 22%. The GPA ranges of 3.6 to 3.4 and 2.9 to 2.7 both accounted for 20% of the sample. The GPA range of 2.6 to 2.4 represented the third largest subject response at 14%. The remaining 22% sample represented the GPA ranges of 4.0 to 3.7 at 10.7%, the GPA ranges of 2.3 to 2.0 at 8% and the GPA ranges of 1.9 and below at 4%.

Table 4.4

GPA of Commuter Student Subjects

	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
4.0 to 3.7	8	10.7
3.6 to 3.4	15	20.0
3.3 to 3.0	17	22.7
2.9 to 2.7	15	20.0
2.6 to 2.4	11	14.7
2.3 to 2.0	6	8.0
1.9 to 1.7	3	4.0
Total	75	100.0

Analysis of the Data

Research question 1. What are the involvement patterns of commuter students at Rowan University?

Tables 4.5 and 4.6 provide information related to research question 1. The tables distinguish the involvement level of the subject in a variety of involvement activities. The tables also take into account the average amount of time the commuter student spent taking part in that particular involvement activity. Table 4.5 provides information on how many commuter students participated in each of the individual involvement activities and the average amount of hours spent per week participating in each respective activity at Rowan University. The activities in which the most commuter students participated in were off-campus part time job with 38 participants and social clubs with 22 participants.

The activities in which the surveyed commuter students were involved in the least were university publication, residence hall activities, and independent study with zero commuter participation documented. The activities with the highest average time spent a week were off-campus part time job with 26 hours, social fraternities or sororities with 12.44% a week, and on-campus part time job with 15.17 hours a week.

Table 4.5

Hours per Week of Campus Involvement

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Hours a week spent in off-campus part time job	38	26.21	10.41
Hours a week spent in social clubs	22	4.18	2.08
Hours a week spent in professional or department clubs	20	2.95	1.57
Hours a week spent in on-campus part time job	18	15.17	4.26
Hours a week spent in social fraternities or sororities	16	12.44	3.54
Hours a week spent in religious organizations	14	2.21	1.36
Hours a week spent in volunteer service	14	4.07	2.86
Hours a week spent in internship	14	10.43	4.97
Hours a week spent in leadership programs	5	2.8	0.837
Hours a week spent in intramural athletics	3	4.00	1.73
Hours a week spent in college productions or performances	3	4.67	3.51
Hours a week spent in field experience	3	4.33	1.15
Hours a week spent in student government	2	4.00	2.82

Table 4.6 provides additional information related to involvement activities. It illustrates the amount of commuters that participated in each individual involvement activity, and the average amount of times per month the student spent engaging in those involvement activities. The activities with the most participation at Rowan University were “times a month spent working with classmates outside of class,” with 50 participants, and “times a month spent discussing grades or assignments with instructor,” with 41 participants.

The activities with the least amount of participation from commuters were “times a month spent tutoring other students,” with 13 participants and “times a month spent participating in community based projects,” with 12 participants. The activities that commuter students spent the most time in were “exercising” at 10 times a month, and “working with classmates,” at 4.58 times a month. The activities in each commuter students spent the least amount of time participating in each month at Rowan University were “participating in community based projects,” with an average of 1.92 times a month, and “discussing ideas with faculty members,” at 2.14 times a month.

Table 4.6

Times per Month of Campus Involvement

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Times a month spent working with classmates outside of class	50	4.58	1.66
Times a month spent discussing grades or assignments with instructor	41	2.44	1.34
Times a month spent discussing ideas with faculty members	36	2.14	0.899
Times a month spent exercising	29	10.28	5.61
Times a month spent participating in religious or spiritual activities	24	3.54	1.64
Times a month spent attending an art exhibit, gallery, play or dance	14	2.29	1.89
Times a month spent tutoring other students	13	2.23	1.16
Times a month spent participating in community based projects	12	1.92	1.24

Research question 2. How important are and satisfied with are Rowan commuter students in terms of the social and academic involvement, and campus environment at Rowan University?

Tables 4.7 through 4.12 provide information related to research question 2. The tables highlight the mean scores and standard deviation of commuter student's attitudes towards the importance of and personal satisfaction related to social involvement, academic involvement, and campus atmosphere at Rowan University. Table 4.7 examines

attitudes related to the importance of social involvement. Commuter students at Rowan University felt that the most important social involvement activity was “establishing personal relationships with peers,” with a mean score of 4.28, while the least important social involvement activity was “getting involved in religious activities,” with a mean score of 2.58. The overall average attitude of commuters regarding the importance of social involvement at Rowan University was 3.64.

Table 4.7

Attitudes about the Importance of Social Involvement

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Establishing personal relationships with peers at Rowan	4.28	0.609
Getting involved in student organizations at Rowan	3.89	0.869
Getting involved in campus activities at Rowan	3.68	0.813
Attending cultural events on campus	3.23	0.9
Interacting with students of different races or cultures	3.28	0.884
Getting involved in religious activities	2.58	1.123
Having a job while enrolled at Rowan	4.58	0.662
Total	3.64	0.837

Table 4.8 looks at the attitudes of commuter students towards the importance of academic involvement at Rowan University. Commuter students valued “faculty availability outside of class,” with a mean score of 4.38, while the least important academic involvement activity was “academic advising,” with a mean score of 4.12. The

overall average attitude of commuter students in regards to the importance of academic involvement at Rowan University was 4.24.

Table 4.8

<i>Attitudes about the Importance of Academic Involvement</i>		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Faculty availability outside of class	4.38	0.753
Social contact with faculty	4.22	0.781
Academic advising	4.12	0.701
Total	4.24	0.745

Table 4.9 looks at the attitudes of commuter students regarding the importance of campus environment. Rowan University commuter students felt that the most important aspect of the campus environment was “adequate academic atmosphere,” with a mean score of 4.57. The aspect deemed least important was “adequate physical environment on campus,” with a mean score of 3.74. The overall average attitude of commuter students in regards to the importance of the campus environment was 4.23.

Table 4.9

Attitudes about the Importance of Campus Environment

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Adequate personal security	4.32	0.664
Adequate physical environment on campus	3.74	0.861
Adequate social atmosphere at Rowan	4.15	0.715
Adequate academic atmosphere at Rowan	4.57	0.551
Fitting into campus community	4.38	0.676
Total	4.23	0.693

Tables 4.10 through 4.12 look at commuter student satisfaction with the variables that were just assessed for importance in their college experience. Table 4.10 looks at commuter student's attitudes related to their satisfaction with their level of social involvement. Commuter students deemed "establishing personal relationships with peers," as the most satisfying aspect with a mean score of 3.64, while the least satisfying aspect of social involvement to them was "getting involved in religious activities," with a mean score of 2.93. The overall average attitude of commuter students in relation to satisfaction with social involvement was 3.41.

Table 4.10

Attitudes about the Satisfaction of Social Involvement

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Establishing personal relationships with peers at Rowan	3.64	0.853
Getting involved in student organizations at Rowan	3.34	0.832
Getting involved in campus activities at Rowan	3.24	0.857
Attending cultural events on campus	3.16	0.642
Interacting with students of different races or cultures	3.26	0.741
Getting involved in religious activities	2.93	0.896
Having a job while enrolled at Rowan	4.36	0.563
Total	3.41	0.769

Table 4.11 provides information related to commuter student's attitudes on the satisfaction level of academic involvement at Rowan University. Commuter students deemed "academic advising," the most satisfying aspect with a mean score of 3.26, while the least satisfying aspect was "social contact with faculty," with a mean score of 3.11. The overall average attitude of commuter students in regards to satisfaction with academic involvement was 3.19.

Table 4.11

Attitudes about the Satisfaction of Academic Involvement

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Faculty availability outside of class	3.22	0.815
Social contact with faculty	3.11	0.82
Academic advising	3.26	1.76
Total	3.19	1.13

Table 4.12 provides information on the attitudes of commuter students towards the satisfaction level of the campus atmosphere. Commuter students felt that the most satisfying aspect of the campus atmosphere at Rowan University was “adequate academic atmosphere,” with a mean score of 3.62, while the least satisfying aspect was “fitting into campus community,” with a mean score of 3.07. The overall average attitude of commuter students in regards to satisfaction with the campus atmosphere was 3.29.

Table 4.12

Attitudes about the Satisfaction of Campus Environment

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Adequate personal security	3.42	0.524
Adequate physical environment on campus	3.2	0.596
Adequate social atmosphere at Rowan	3.18	0.834
Adequate academic atmosphere at Rowan	3.62	0.789
Fitting into campus community	3.07	0.865
Total	3.29	0.721

Research question 3. Is there a difference in the involvement levels of commuter students in walking distance and commuter students who drive to campus?

Tables 4.13 and 4.14 provide information related to research question 3. These tables demonstrate the involvement of commuter students within walking distance and driving distance of Rowan University's main campus. The tables provide information on how many of each type of commuter student participated in the individual involvement activities and how often per month they spent doing that activity. Table 4.13 illustrates those commuter students within walking distance participated the most in "working with classmates outside of class," with 30 participants and "discussing ideas with faculty members," with 21 participants. The activities walking distance commuters participated in the least were "participating in community based projects," with 8 participants and "time spent tutoring other students," with 7 participants. The activities the students spent the most amount of time were "exercising" with an average of 10.5 times a month and

“working with other students,” with 4.8 times a month. Commuter students within walking distance spent the least amount of time “tutoring other students” with an average of 1.71 times a month.

Table 4.13

Involvement of Commuter Students Within Walking Distance

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Times a month spent working with classmates outside of class	30	4.8	1.69
Times a month spent discussing ideas with faculty members	21	2.14	0.964
Times a month spent discussing grades or assignments with instructor	21	2.43	1.07
Times a month spent exercising	16	10.5	6.28
Times a month spent participating in religious or spiritual activities	13	3.15	0.987
Times a month spent attending an art exhibit, gallery, play or dance	9	2.11	1.05
Times a month spent participating in community based projects	8	1.75	0.886
Times a month spent tutoring other students	7	1.71	0.488

Table 4.14 provides information regarding those commuter students within driving distance of Rowan University’s main campus. The activities in which driving commuters participated in the most was “working with classmates outside of class,” and

“discussing grades or assignments with instructor,” with 20 participants. The activities they participated in the least were “attending an art exhibit, gallery, play, or dance,” with 5 participants and “participating in community based projects,” with 4 participants. The activities that driving commuters spent the most amount of time doing was “exercising” at an average of 10 times a month, and “participating in religious or spiritual activities,” with an average of 4.27 times a month. Driving distance commuters spent the least amount of time doing was “discussing ideas with faculty members,” with an average of 2.13 times a month.

Table 4.14

Involvement of Commuter Students Within Driving Distance

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Times a month spent working with classmates outside of class	20	4.2	1.63
Times a month spent discussing grades or assignments with instructor	20	2.45	1.6
Times a month spent discussing ideas with faculty members	15	2.13	0.834
Times a month spent exercising	13	10	4.89
Times a month spent participating in religious or spiritual activities	11	4.27	2.05
Times a month spent tutoring other students	6	2.83	1.47
Times a month spent attending an art exhibit, gallery, play or dance	5	2.6	3.05
Times a month spent participating in community based projects	4	2.25	1.893

Research question 4. What significance is there between the demographic variables and commuter participation in specific involvement activities?

Tables 4.15 through 4.17 seek to address the fourth research question. I looked at relationships between the commuter students' demographics of academic performance (measured as GPA), age range, class status and specific involvement activities at Rowan University in order to determine whether there were any significant relationships between the variables. Kendall's tau-b correlation coefficient was used to examine this query.

Table 4.15 highlights the significant relationships between class status and areas of campus involvement for the subjects. There is a weak inverse correlation between class status and frequency of participation in tutoring of classmates ($r = -.427, p = .043$) at a $p < .05$ level found. A correlation between the commuter student's class status and hours per week involved in a social fraternity or sorority ($r = .486, p = .032$) at a $p < .05$ level. The table also indicates a positive linear relationship between class status and hours per week involved in independent study ($r = 1.00, p = 0.00$).

Table 4.15

Significant Correlations of Class Status and Campus Involvement

	<i>r</i> coefficient	<i>p</i> -level
Class and frequency participated in tutoring of classmates	-.427*	0.043
Class and hours per week in social fraternity or sorority	.486*	0.032
Class and hours per week in an independent study	1.00**	0.00

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 4.16 illustrates the significant correlations between GPA and involvement in other areas of campus. There is a weak inverse relationship between GPA and participation in professional or department clubs ($r = -.241, p = .019$) at a $p < .05$ level.

Table 4.16

Significant Correlations of GPA and Campus Involvement

	<i>r</i> coefficient	<i>p</i> -level
GPA and frequency participated in professional or department clubs	-.241*	0.019

* $p < .05$

Table 4.17 illustrates the correlations between age and involvement in areas of campus. There is a weak relationship between age and frequency of participation in community based projects for class monthly ($r = .583, p = .026$) at a $p < .05$ level.

Table 4.17

Significant Correlations of Age and Campus Involvement

	<i>r</i> coefficient	<i>p</i> -level
Age and frequency participated in community based projects for class monthly	.583*	0.026

* $p < .05$

Chapter V

Summary, Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Summary of the Study

This research study took place at Rowan University during the 2013-2014 academic year and investigated the involvement patterns of commuter students across an array of campus activities and academic opportunities. The study also looked closely at the subject's feelings of satisfaction and importance in the areas of social involvement, academic involvement, and campus atmosphere. Lastly, the study sought to determine any relationships between demographics and the activities the subjects participated in across campus. The subjects in this research study were 75 commuter students attending Rowan University during the 2013-2014 academic year.

The review of the relevant literature demonstrated the importance of involvement on campus to college student development and retention. Research has indicated that students who choose to commute to campus are at a disadvantage in successfully completing their bachelor's degree. This statistic is of great concern since the reality of higher education today has seen a continuous increase in commuter student populations across the nation. Understanding the patterns of involvement for this population is crucial for higher education personnel, since a plethora of research has identified involvement as a considerable influence on satisfaction with the college experience. While a handful of studies have cited potential factors related to commuter disengagement, there is a gap in knowledge as it relates to their patterns of involvement in specific activities. More

information about these specifics can aid an institution in their quest to further bond this student group to the campus community.

The survey instrument utilized in this study was originally developed by Iacovone (2007) and based predominantly on the *Ohio University Student Involvement Study* with influence by the CIRP *Freshman Survey*, the *National Survey of Student Engagement 2006*, and the *2005-2006 College Student Survey*. This modified survey gathered involvement information from subjects in five separate sections. The initial section collected background demographic information. The first involvement section asked about participation in various activities per week with estimations of time spent in each activity. The second asked subjects to account for participation in activities on a monthly basis. The third section collected information about the subject's proximity to the main campus. The fourth section asked about attitudes and opinions surrounding the subject's relationships with others on campus. Lastly, the final section collected information on feelings of importance and satisfaction in three areas: social involvement, academic involvement, and campus atmosphere.

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) computer software program was used to analyze the results of the study. Descriptive statistics and frequencies were used to examine demographic information and levels of involvement. Correlations were used to determine whether there were significant relationships between the demographic variables and activities the subject identified taking part in.

Discussion of the Findings

The findings of this study demonstrate the involvement patterns of commuter students, answering research question one. Involvement in specific activities was collected on a weekly and monthly scale. The findings indicate that the involvement activity that most commuter students identified spending time in was an off-campus part time job with 38 subjects estimating 26 hours per week. A total of 18 commuters estimated spending 15 hours per week at an on campus job. This suggests a significant amount of time and energy being expended solely to working. This does fit with Smith's (1989) finding that two thirds of commuters hold jobs on top of their academic workload. The findings show that the lowest levels of participation were in field experience and student government. On a monthly basis, time spent working with classmates outside of class had the highest amount of participation, but only averaged 5 hours per month. While only 29 subjects indicated spending time exercising, this averaged the highest time spent in the activity with 10 hours per month.

The second research question related to importance of and satisfaction with social involvement, academic involvement, and campus atmosphere. Overall, feelings of importance in this area were indicated. The importance of academic involvement was highest with a mean score of 4.24. The most important aspect within this category was faculty availability outside of class. This indicates the importance of availability for commuters who generally spend less time physically on campus than their residential counterparts. The importance of campus atmosphere followed with a mean score of 4.23. The most important aspect was adequate academic atmosphere with a score of 4.57.

Interestingly, social involvement had the lowest mean score of importance for commuter students with an average of 3.64. The most important factor of social involvement was having a job while enrolled at Rowan University with a 4.58 score. It is telling to see that even within a social context, the most important area for commuters is still related to their ability to work outside of the academic experience. This importance placed on work from the commuter perspective supports previous research by Newbold, Mehta, and Forbus (2011) on key differences between commuters and residential students. Their research indicated that there were significant differences in socioeconomic status and obligations outside of college between the two student groups. Since commuter populations are more likely to be from working class backgrounds, the ability to work could be a necessity in order to be able to continue with academic studies.

Satisfaction in the aforementioned three areas was found in relation to the second part of research question two. The highest level of satisfaction was in the area of social involvement with a mean score of 3.41, followed by campus environment with a mean score of 3.29. Last was satisfaction with academic involvement with a mean score of 3.19. The highest satisfaction within social involvement was having a job while enrolled with a mean score of 3.41. The highest level of satisfaction with campus environment was in academic atmosphere with a score of 3.62. Commuters reported feeling most satisfied with academic advising within the area of academic involvement at a 3.26 score. Overall, the satisfaction rates indicate moderate satisfaction in the three areas. While previous studies had not examined commuter satisfaction in these specific areas, a previous study by Lizza (2007) found a positive relationship between involvement and subsequent satisfaction with social life, contact with classmates, and faculty.

The differences in monthly involvement between commuters within walking distance and the commuters within driving distance were found in response to research question three. The significant differences between the groups were not in what they were involved in, but rather in the amount of time spent in the activity. While both groups had the highest number of subjects indicate spending time with classmates outside of class, the commuters within walking distance spent approximately 4.8 hours in this activity in comparison to driving distance commuters who reported an average of 4.2 hours. Similarly, walking distance commuters reported more time spent discussing grades, ideas, and assignments with instructors. Commuters within driving distance did report spending more time tutoring other students with an average of 2.83 hours a month in comparison to 1.71 hours a month for commuters within walking distance.

The fourth and final research question sought to determine any significant relationships between the demographics and subsequent participation within specific involvement activities. There were a few correlations found within this particular research study. The demographic area of class status and campus involvement found weak correlations between frequency in tutoring of classmates, involvement per week in social fraternities or sororities, and time per week spent in an independent study. The finding related to involvement in social fraternities or sororities supports Moore et al. (1998) finding that involvement in Greek life serves as a positive influence on student life with an impact similar to living on campus. A weak inverse correlation was found between the demographic area of GPA and frequency of participation in professional or department clubs. Lastly, a weak correlation was found between age and participation in community based projects on a monthly basis. These particular findings neither supported

nor refuted previous research in the relevant literature review, as this was the first study to examine commuter involvement in specific activities.

Conclusions

The results of this study highlighted a consistent emphasis by commuter students on the value of the academic experience. While commuter students reported feeling that relationships with peers were important, they also indicated valuing faculty availability outside of class and noted that the most important aspect of the campus environment for them was in fact the academic atmosphere. Previous research by Astin (1999) indicates an influential relationship between faculty interaction and overall satisfaction on campus for a college student. Specifically for commuter students, Smith (1989) cites the tendency for commuters to have a more “vocational” outlook on the higher education experience due to the number of external factors and commitments that they retain off-campus.

This study also focused on the differences between commuters who are within walking distance to campus versus commuters who drive. Commuters within walking distance spent more time discussing ideas with faculty than their driving counterparts. Research by Kuh et al. (2001) indicated that commuters who lived further away from the campus setting were more likely to be part-time and working to support other household members than commuters within walking distance. Less time available to devote to campus activities can influence one’s feeling of connection to the campus experience.

A significant finding in this study was in relation to commuters within walking distance reporting more time spent discussing ideas and assignments with faculty.

Available time is a significant contributor to student involvement. Outside

responsibilities can significantly cut into the amount of time a student has left to devote to campus opportunities. Kuh et al. (2001) report that commuters who drive to campus are more likely to be part-time, older, and first generation students. Each of those factors alone can be considered individual barriers to the higher education experience, without adding into the equation their limited time spent physically on campus.

One of the myths that Garland (2006) sought to address in “Commuter Students: Myths, Realities,” is that commuters will not get involved no matter what institutions do to attempt to reach this population. The results of this study conclude that not only do commuter students take part in involvement activities, but they genuinely value their social and academic involvement. It is important for institutions to keep this fact in mind when attempting to create space for the group in order to avoid a defeatist mindset that can harm initiatives before they even begin.

Recommendations for Practice

1. Student affairs professionals need to be cognizant of the fact that commuter students tend to have much more limited availability. It would be recommended for practitioners to consider the feasibility of getting to campus for certain events and be sensitive to the needs of commuter students if they wish to engage this population in a meaningful way.
2. Greek life as confirmed in this study and past research by Moore et al. (1998) can positively influence involvement. There is a need to consider opportunities through which practitioners might collaborate with other departments or organizations to reach this particular group of students where they are.

3. There is a relationship between academic success and further integration into the college campus. Student affairs practitioners must be fully invested in the importance of working with academic affairs to ensure commuter students will benefit from a well-rounded college experience.

Recommendations for Further Research

Findings from this study revealed a number of opportunities for further exploration of the involvement and mattering of commuter students on college campuses. Based upon the findings and conclusions, the following suggestions are presented:

1. Further studies with a larger sample of commuter students should be conducted in order to gain a more approximate understanding of the target population.
2. Further investigation might explore the impact of Greek life and efforts to increase commuter involvement on campus.
3. A study could be done to explore the correlation between distance from campus and levels of involvement on campus.
4. A future study using mixed-method or qualitative measures could be utilized in order to delve deeper into the dynamics affecting the overall college experience and involvement levels of commuter students.

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Appendix A

Institutional Review Board Approval Letter



March 12, 2014

Yamesha Woodley
[REDACTED]

Dear Yamesha Woodley:

In accordance with the University's IRB policies and 45 CFR 46, the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, I am pleased to inform you that the Rowan University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has exempted your project, category 2, through its exempted review process.

IRB application number: 2014-172

Project Title: Commuter Students and Involvement Theory

If you need to make significant modifications to your study, you must notify the IRB immediately. Please reference the above-cited IRB application number in any future communications with our office regarding this research.

If, during your research, you encounter any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects, you must report this immediately to Dr. Harriet Hartman (hartman@rowan.edu or call 856-256-4500, ext. 3787) or contact Dr. Shreekanth Mandayam, Associate Provost for Research (shreek@rowan.edu or call 856-256-5150).

If you have any administrative questions, please contact Karen Heiser (heiser@rowan.edu or 856-256-5150).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Harriet Hartman".

Harriet Hartman, Ph.D.
Chair, Rowan University IRB

c: Burton Sisco, Educational Services, Administration, Higher Education, James Hall

Office of Research
Bole Hall Annex
201 Mullica Hill Road
Glassboro, NJ 08028-1701

856-256-5150
856-256-4425 fax

Appendix B

Commuter Student Involvement Survey

Commuter Student Involvement

Participation in this survey is completely voluntary and you are not required to answer any of the questions. The data collected from this study will be used to complete the requirements for the researcher's Master's thesis. All participants in this study must be 18 years or older and all responses will remain anonymous with no identifying information being requested. There are no physiological or psychological risks involved in this study and you are free to withdraw from participating in the study at any point. The enclosed survey should take no longer than 10 minutes to complete.

If you have any questions or problems concerning this thesis study and survey, you may contact researcher Yamesha Woodley by phone at 856-256-7471 or via email at woodle31@students.rowan.edu or advisor Dr. Burton R. Sisco by phone at 856-256-4500 ext. 3717 or via email at sisco@rowan.edu.

Background Information

What is your age?

- 18 & under
 19 to 20
 21 to 22
 23 & older

What class are you in?

- Freshman
 Sophomore
 Junior
 Senior

Are you:

- White/Caucasian
 American Indian/Alaska Native
 Pacific Islander
 Puerto Rican
 Other
- African American/ Black
 Asian American/Asian
 Mexican American/Chicano
 Other Latino

What is your cumulative GPA?

- 4.0 to 3.7
 2.9 to 2.7
 1.9 to 1.7
- 3.6 to 3.4
 2.6 to 2.4
 1.6 to 1.4
- 3.3 to 3.0
 2.3 to 2.0
 1.3 to below

Please print your major(s) or your expected major(s) below: _____

Involvement Information

SECTION I

In your experience at Rowan University, have you participated in any of these activities? If so, check "yes" and write in how many hours you participate in the activity each week on average?

- | | YES | Hours per week |
|--|--------------------------|----------------|
| 1. Member of a social fraternity or sorority | <input type="checkbox"/> | _____ |
| 2. Intramural Athletics | <input type="checkbox"/> | _____ |
| 3. Student Government | <input type="checkbox"/> | _____ |
| 4. University Publication | <input type="checkbox"/> | _____ |

Commuter Student Involvement

- 5. College Productions or Performances [] _____
- 6. Professional or Department Clubs [] _____
- 7. Social Clubs [] _____
- 8. Residence Hall Activities [] _____
- 9. Religious Organizations [] _____
- 10. Volunteer Service [] _____
- 11. Leadership Programs [] _____
- 12. Off-Campus Part Time Job [] _____
- 13. On-Campus Part Time Job [] _____
- 14. Internship [] _____
- 15. Field Experience [] _____
- 16. Participated in Independent Study [] _____

SECTION II

In your experience at Rowan University, on average how frequently do you participate monthly in each activity below? (Give total number for each category below)

How often

- 1. Worked with classmates outside of class _____
- 2. Tutored or taught other students _____
- 3. Participated in community-based projects as part of class _____
- 4. Attend an art exhibit, gallery, play, or dance _____
- 5. Exercised or participated in physical activities _____
- 6. Discussed grades or assignments with an instructor _____
- 7. Discussed ideas with faculty members _____
- 8. Participate in religious or spiritual activities _____

SECTION III

Which of the following best describes where you are living? (Check one)

- [] Residence (house, apartment, etc.) within walking distance
- [] Residence (house, apartment, etc.) within driving distance

SECTION IV

Mark the box that best represents your relationship with people at Rowan University:

a. Relationships with other students

Unfriendly, Unsupportive Friendly, Supportive

- [] 1
- [] 2
- [] 3
- [] 4
- [] 5
- [] 6

b. Relationships with faculty members

Unfriendly, Unsupportive Friendly, Supportive

- [] 1
- [] 2
- [] 3
- [] 4
- [] 5
- [] 6

Commuter Student Involvement

SECTION V

The following questions have two parts. First rate how important each item is to you by circling one of the numbers from 1-5. Second, rate how satisfied you are with each item by circling one of the numbers from 1-5. Use the following scale.

<u>Importance</u>					<u>Satisfaction</u>				
Not at all			Very		Not at all			Very	
important			important		important			important	
1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5

	Importance					Satisfaction				
Social Involvement										
1. Establishing personal relationships with peers at Rowan	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
2. Getting involved in student organizations	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
3. Getting involved in campus activities	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
4. Attending cultural events on campus	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
5. Interacting with students of different races or cultures	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
6. Getting involved in religious activities	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
7. Having a job while enrolled	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Academic Involvement										
1. Faculty availability outside of class	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
2. Social contact with faculty	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
3. Academic advising	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Campus Atmosphere										
1. Adequate personal security	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
2. Adequate physical environment on campus	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
3. Adequate social atmosphere	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
4. Adequate academic atmosphere	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
5. Fitting into campus community	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5