Improving Student Retention: A Student Services Perspective

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Abstract

The following research examines the level of impact student services interventions have on student retention in America’s colleges and universities. This research also addresses the influence of the Adlerian philosophy on student services philosophies. Outcome statistics and methodologies have been evaluated from 15 empirical articles on this subject to provide a comprehensive approach to the topic. Additional Qualitative and Quantitative research has been collected, recorded and summarized by the author to provide additional evidence to this project. The results of this project uncover mixed data regarding a variety of student services interventions and their impact on student attrition.
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Project Introduction

Overview

Historically students pursuing higher education have aspirations for leadership, personal development and career satisfaction. College students arrive on campus full of wonder and excitement; rarely do they enter college expecting to drop out. However, it has been statistically calculated in a recent study by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development that only half of the students who enter college in the United States finish a bachelor’s degree in 6 years or less. It should be clarified that not all students leave a college or university permanently. Some students simply transfer to other institutions; some withdraw temporarily and others return to the schools that they entered in their first year at a later date. Ultimately, this statistic about student retention should be clarified, 30% of students who attempt college fail to earn a Bachelor’s degree in their lifetime (Green, 1983). Student retention in institutions of higher learning has significant room for improvement and ideas need to be explored regarding how to remedy this problem.

Researchers question why students in the United States leave colleges and universities prior to graduation in significant numbers. The single best indicator of a student’s predicted attrition in college is one’s academic record from high school. A student’s recorded GPA and class rank in one’s high school years often inform a college administrator about a student’s likelihood of degree completion than any other factor (Pantages & Creedon, 1978). Research completed by Summerskill (1962) also advises that two-thirds of students who drop out of college do so while in good academic standing. It is a misconception that the reason that students
leave higher education is because it is just too difficult. Student retention is a complex puzzle that deserves attention for myriad reasons.

Student retention is critical for a number of reasons. America’s colleges and universities have economic considerations to consider regardless of whether the institution is proprietary. If students drop out in large numbers the financial consequences for a school are troubling. Studies completed by Pascarella and Terenzini (1983); and Tinto (1993) determined that it costs more to recruit new students than it does to retain current students. This research also concluded that institutional budgets concentrate on student recruitment in higher amounts than those allocated to reduce student flight. Expenses delegated to travel and recruiting materials for admissions recruiters could be diminished if a school could reduce the percentage of student attrition. The student retention goal at colleges and universities can incorporate a mission aimed at reducing excess school spending. Research supports the notion that a discussion may create an environment of cost savings for colleges and universities. Promoting excellent student retention can directly impact a financial bottom line at a college or university in a positive way.

America was founded on the principles of capitalism and growth. Traditionally, colleges and universities have to be prepared to retain students both in the deepest economic downturns and also in times of significant economic progress. Better student retention would allow schools to invest their resources in creating improved classroom curriculum and faculty development and less time on new student recruitment. Therefore, a successful model for improved student retention in our nation’s colleges and universities would benefit both students and institutions. Student retention efforts nationwide could create more options for students to learn and achieve.

Retaining students has been a long-respected goal of most higher education institutions. Additionally an argument for the reason that student retention statistics should be of importance
to college administrators is that government and accreditation agencies commonly require accountability. Student retention is often used to determine if a school is serving students effectively. For example, financial aid programs supplying colleges and universities with federally insured student loans enforce a policy that requires that schools with default rates of 25% or more for 3 consecutive years lose aid eligibility. This legislation targeting student retention responsibility was developed by the federal Higher Education Act of 1965, and this policy uses graduation rates as a measure of institutional effectiveness.

Failing to meet retention percentages in higher education has many implications. A quarter of America’s community colleges do not participate in the federal student loan program because of poor student retention. This statistic accounts for nearly one million, or about 10 percent, of community college students in the United States according to a report published in April of 2008 by the Project on Student Debt. Tragically, students enrolled at colleges that have lost the privilege of offering low interest federal loans must resort to riskier forms of debt, such as credit cards or private bank loans. The loss of federal financial aid programs could have devastating effects on a school; in certain cases the loss of federal support would put a college or university out of operation.

The final reason that student retention is an important topic for review is because an educated workforce is an excellent benefit to society. Skilled professionals are necessary for the progress and success of a productive economy. The Bureau of Labor Statistics calculated that Americans with bachelor’s degrees earned a median of 962 dollars per week in 2006. In that same year, Americans with some college, but no degree, earned a median of 674 dollars per week. Unemployment statistics are also impacted by one’s education level. Americans with some college, but no degree, coped with an unemployment rate of 3.9 percent in 2006. Workers with
associate’s degrees had a smaller unemployment rate at 3.0 percent in 2006. Lastly, according
the Bureau of Labor Statistics, candidates who had attained bachelor’s degrees had an
unemployment rate of 2.3 percent in 2006. Collectively, college graduates earn more money and
are more likely to sustain employment. Statistically, workers with an unfinished degree will not
contribute to society at the same level as a person with a college degree.

Incorporating Adlerian Philosophy

This Master’s Project proposes that the philosophies of Alfred Adler, which focus on the
commitment of social interest and holism, could have a positive impact on student retention in
America’s colleges and universities. Adler emphasized the training of parents, teachers and
social workers to actively participate in democratic approaches with children. Adler expected
teachers to encourage reasoned decision making in their students and he detested instructors who

The concept of social interest in Adlerian philosophy is practical behavior exercised for
community well-being. Social interest focuses on a positive outlook on life and could be defined
as an interest in furthering the welfare of others. In Adler’s ideal world everyone would work
together toward the goal of social interest. Adler believed that all capable people moved forward
together to help society; his teachings were remarkably optimistic and goal-oriented; social
interest is the foundation of Adlerian principles (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956).

Holism is a form of psychological thinking developed by Adler that incorporates not only
one’s self awareness and personal depth, but also considers the social and community issues that
influence one’s behavior. Therefore Adler believed that people must be seen in context in social
situations. He felt that interconnectedness among people was not only essential for living
together in a community, but also for the successful development of each individual person (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956).

It is hypothesized that a positive correlation exists between the commitment to the Adlerian philosophy at colleges and universities and successful student retention. Adlerian psychology provides a specific framework for methods of communication, social involvement and encouragement. Probing the impact of the Adlerian philosophy in the classrooms and administrative offices of America’s schools will lend guidance to institutions struggling to overcome their student drop out rate. Educators, administrators and staff coping with the issues of student retention will be able to review this research to gain background regarding Adlerian thinking and its possible influences on student attrition.

Literature Review

Introduction

Data and research were evaluated in this literature review to determine if certain colleges are out-performing competing institutions when tackling the retention issue by offering specific student service interventions. Student services resources sponsored by colleges and universities may be a pertinent variable in addressing the student retention dilemma. This review will focus on data from empirical studies evaluating methods and results of a variety of student services interventions; findings reviewed discuss the implications of student services interventions and how they influence student attrition on college campuses around the country.

Many colleges and universities support courses designed for first time students that function as a method for newcomers to get adjusted to college life. “Freshman Seminar”, “First Year Experience” and “Student Success” are course titles offered as an optional or required class for incoming students. These courses are largely created and publicized by higher learning
institutions to promote better student retention. First Year Seminar courses assist students in engaging in intellectual exploration, personal and academic problem solving and serve as a gateway for deeper involvement within the institution. Research also reveals that many universities specifically develop First Year Seminars that target “at-risk” students (enrollees with below average grades or standardized test scores). Researcher Hendel at the University of Minnesota has evaluated the efficacy of the First Year Seminar on student satisfaction and retention at an urban, public-land grant institution (Hendel, 2006-2007). Data from this study, in conjunction with other research, articulates opinions about where the best use of precious school funding promotes the best student retention.

Another avenue though which student services professionals attempt to secure better student retention is tutoring programs. Research has been completed to determine if students who involve themselves in tutoring services are more likely to stay in school. Higgins (2004) states in her research that tutoring is a strategy used to prevent at-risk students from leaving their academic institutions. Her study targets nursing students and their success rate with volunteer peer tutoring programs. Higgins (2004) discovered that students at Tarrant County College felt that the school’s traditional tutoring program was simply too regimented and inconvenient for their schedules. The study’s research focuses on a small departmental peer tutoring system that Higgins analyzed to determine if the program had an influence on academic success for nursing students (Higgins, 2004).

Wilson et al. (1997) addresses the role of university-based personal counseling services and the impact counseling availability has on student performance and attrition. Counseling offices at colleges and universities focus on a variety of complex student problems. Services can include help for concerns about loneliness, lack of self-confidence, eating problems, abuse
issues, procrastination, family problems, interpersonal conflicts, questions about sexuality/sexual preferences, depression, cultural/ethnic concerns, achievement conflicts and alcohol and drugs. These services can provide students with resources to encourage problem solving and personal empowerment. Wilson et al. (1997) point to a body of research that indicates that students tend to seek out personal counseling at their university when struggling with problems that pose a direct threat to staying in school. Additionally, personal counselors often address topics with their clients in the college and university setting that investigate career decisions, learning disabilities or roommate conflicts. Wilson’s study reveals the results of students seeking personal counseling and their rates of persistence compared to their classmates who did not obtain counseling services (Wilson et al., 1997).

Americans have a vested interest in keeping college and universities accountable. Whether one is a student paying tuition or a taxpayer funding federal student aid programs and public universities, one should demand that programs developed and funded with the mission of increasing student retention at colleges and universities be evaluated to determine effectiveness. Studies confirm that first year seminars, tutoring and counseling services are expensive to operate at schools; if the programs are not being utilized or there is no benefit to student success the services should critically examined or dismantled. This literature review addresses research of various student services interventions and their impact on student retention at America’s colleges and universities in research completed in the years 1994 to 2008.

**Literature Review Methodology**

In all 15 studies examined in this literature review the populations researched are college students enrolled in American colleges and universities. In each study, the college or university’s registrar’s office provides qualitative data regarding student enrollments, departures and
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graduation rates. This analysis will provide critical review of the methods documented by researchers when obtaining data on student attrition at college campuses. Sample selection and size, measurement techniques and operational definitions will be items for review and assessment.

Operational definitions in retention research are not consistent nor clearly identified in 13 of the 15 empirical articles reviewed. Authors in the reviewed research fail to distinguish between students who met their educational goals before graduating but did not receive a degree and students who enrolled intending to graduate but did not do so. Tinto (1997) and Tinto and Russo (1994) define drop outs as students who enter a college or university with the intention of completing degrees, but fail to do so. The authors noted that these students leave school for an extended periods of time due to personal or institutional failures. Drop-outs do not return to the original, nor any other school (Tinto, 1997, Tinto & Russo, 1994). Other researchers included in this review neglect to clarify whether data includes transfer students, single subject (non-degree seeking students) or students who elect to take a single term off from school and return in good standing. Data could be skewed negatively or positively depending on operational definitions.

Longitudinal studies in the field of student retention are critical to determine whether the data truly has substantial impact on the topic. Four of the 15 articles researched include a long term review of the data collected. Williford et al. (2000-2001) discussed the impact of a Student Success course at a large public university; the study completed reviewed data over the course of 9 years. Turner and Berry (2000) spent 5 years tracking students at a moderate-size public university to determine if personal counseling had an impact on student attrition. Pan et al. (2008) completed a multi-level research study over a 3-year time period analyzing student orientation programs, first year seminars, tutoring programs, advising programs and social
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integration programs. Tinto and Russo (1994) evaluated the Coordinated Studies Program at Seattle Central Community College over a 3-year time period. When assessing student retention it is particularly valuable to assess student data collected for more than a single year or semester. A brief snapshot of an institution can provide the reader with an unfair or misleading picture of student retention. Perhaps more should be demanded of researcher’s articles to include a more comprehensive, long-term evaluation of the variables being addressed.

When reviewing the sample sizes supplied from the 15 articles, the numbers range from 26 to 5086. Any study reviewed that incorporated more than 550 participants produced inconclusive results. The studies that produced the strongest connection between student services intervention and student retention had the smallest sample sizes. Higgins (2004) developed a study of just 26 students to look at voluntary peer tutoring. Her data revealed a 9% increase in retention if students who were struggling academically accepted tutoring (Higgins, 2004). The 3 largest studies, with a minimum of 1305 participants, completed by Hendel (2006-2007), Turner and Berry (2000) and Pan et al. (2008) provided the unambiguous finding that student services interventions had no significant impact on retention rates. Generally there is a correlation in sample size and results within this body of literature.

Research completed by Crissman (2001-2002) contributes another possible obstacle when addressing methodology. In her study concentrating on “class clustering” with first year students at a small independent Liberal Arts college in the northwestern United States, she disclosed that the university she evaluated already had a very high student retention rate prior to her research. Crissman (2001-2002) comments that the student retention rate at the university she researched historically staying in the 95% range. She discussed that her study’s measurements may be difficult to assess because with or without the student services intervention only a
handful of students leave the institution without graduating (Crissman, 2001-2002). Crissman’s methodology was poorly developed because even if student retention reached 100% at this university the results may not be dramatic enough to be considered statistically significant (Crissman, 2001-2002).

Many of the studies reviewed in this collection of articles include samples of self-selected participants. Only 3 of the 15 articles reviewed assessed populations of college students that did not elect to participate in a student services intervention. This is critical distinction because one could conclude that if someone has the ambition and resourcefulness to take advantage of assistance measures, perhaps he or she is the kind of student who is intrinsically motivated to finish school. In citing research on class clustering, Crissman (2001-2002) was able to obtain data at a university that randomly assigned all members of the freshman class to a clustered or non-clustered schedule. Students at this university did not sign up or request a clustered schedule (Crissman, 2001-2002). Additionally, Johnson (2000-2001) researched data at the University of Southern Maine to examine multiple student interventions and their impact on student attrition. One component of her research included a population of students who were under contract to complete the student service interventions in order to maintain enrollment because they demonstrated poor grades and/or attendance in the previous academic term (Johnson, 2000-2001).

The University of Southern Maine required 235 students to enroll in a program called Project 100 that provided more intense faculty advising for struggling students. Johnson (2000-2001) analyzed the impact of this increased level of faculty advising on retention for an at-risk population. Cox et al. (2005) researched a first year seminar class intervention required for all business students entering into a large public university. Due to the fact that the university
researched in the Cox et al (2005) study required a freshman seminar by all students in the business program, a control sample was absent from the data. None of these studies produced significant results.

Morrison and Brown (2006) elected to research the impact of a sophomore seminar and cohort class arrangement on student retention with at-risk Criminal Justice students at a major public university. The sample was a self-selected group of 29 students that were recruited by department personnel (Morrison & Brown, 2006). This study did not produce significant findings that the cohort/seminar intervention impacted drop-out rates. Yet Morrison and Brown (2006) argued an important aspect of their research; that their findings had significance because their population of 29 participants had similar retention rates to those of the general school population. The study projected that the sample population of 29 should have had a lower retention percentage than the general student body because the at-risk participants previously had poor grades and class attendance (Morrison & Brown, 2006). There is a significant methodology flaw in this research; the study did not provide the reader with a randomly selected control group to document the author’s statement that students with below average grades and attendance drop out at higher rates. The logic is sensible, but there is no data to confirm the claim. The fact that the sample population was self-selected was not addressed in this study. One could also argue that the reason the study population maintained similar retention rates to the general student population was that this group made the choice to seek out resources to improve their academic performance. Could the sample group demonstrate an increased level of motivation to finish school more than their poorly performing classmates who rejected the invitation to participate in a student services program?

*The Analysis of Literature Review*
Research examining student retention provides few definitive answers when addressing the outcome of student services interventions. College administrators and professors face a difficult problem with an unclear solution. Eleven of the 15 articles produced inconclusive or negative findings connecting student services interventions and student retention (Hendel, 2006-2007; Cox et al., 2005; Pan et al., 2008; Johnson, 2000-2001; Nagda, 1998; Morrison & Brown, 2006; Braunstein et al. 2008,; Turner & Berry, 2000; Williford et al., 2000-2001; Crissman, 2001-2002; Ryan, 2004). Four of the 15 studies reviewed argue that the targeted student services intervention programs positively impacted student retention with significant results (Tinto & Russo, 1994; Tinto, 1997; Schulte, 2002-2003; Higgins, 2004).

Research completed by Ryan (2004) evaluates student services at 363 colleges and universities; his large study provides the reader with a general snapshot of the correlation between student services development and graduation rates. The research revealed no statistically significant connection between a college’s budget for student services and the rate of student persistence. This article reported that institutions that fund comprehensive student services interventions do not see an improvement in student retention. Ryan (2004) defined student services as activities or services that contribute to a student’s well-being. This well-developed, but general study, sets the tone for the research in this field.

An example of qualitative and quantitative research complied in this literature review that provides strong evidence of student service intervention success is the project evaluated by Tinto (1997) at Seattle Central Community College. Tinto (1997) conducted a mixed-method study of 517 participants to evaluate the impact of school sponsored learning communities on student retention. The research reviewed a program at a large community college in an urban setting. The Coordinated Studies Program enrolls students in thematic cluster of classes who were served
in a cohort model. A certain percentage of students registered to participate in the CSP because of prior interest, and another portion of students in Tinto’s (1997) research are a part of CSP because it was their only remaining option (late enrollees). Therefore a segment of the participants in this study are not directly self-selected; the specific number of non-self selected participants is not identified in the article. Tinto’s (1997) examination of this project disclosed the complex nature of effective student services interventions. The research points to a multi-layered approach to student services. The CSP program at Seattle Central Community College incorporated faculty involvement, peer support and class clustering in a multidisciplinary thematic approach (Tinto, 1997). The unique variable of thematic coursework could be an important trigger for student attrition. Retention rates were considerably greater for students enrolled in CSP after one quarter, and after one year a small measurable improvement in student retention could still be observed (Tinto, 1997).

Schulte (2002-2003) provided additional research to contribute a positive correlation between class clustering and student success. This is a small pilot study created to highlight the impact of a cohort system on graduation rates with graduate students at a large midwestern university (Schulte, 2002-2003) which revealed an increase in graduation rates for students participating in a cohort model over those who did not. Schulte (2002-2003) provided additional data to support the work completed by Tinto (1997) reviewing the Coordinated Studies Program. Three other studies evaluated in this review discuss class clustering and student cohort models. These articles provide negative implications to student retention rates (Morrison & Brown, 2006; Johnson, 2000-2001; Crissman, 2001-2002). The cohort and clustering intervention deserve further evaluation.
Studies reviewing the impact of first year seminars provide inconclusive answers to administrators seeking a student services program that produces successful student retention.

Cox et al, (2005) report that 70 percent of all colleges and universities in America have a freshman seminar course offering. The authors contend that students who fall away from school in the greatest percentages will do so during their first year of college more than any other time; half of the students who drop out of college will do so in their first year (Cox et al., 2005). None of the 8 studies examined produced statistically significant research that students participating in a first year seminar increased their chances of completing a degree (Cox et al, 2005; Hendel, 2006-2007; Pan el al, 2008; Johnson, 2000-2001; Nagda, 1998; Morrison & Brown, 2006; Williford et al, 2000-2001; Crissman, 2001-2002). Research in this literature review addressed studies where First Year Seminars were required for incoming students (Cox et al., 2005; Crissman, 2001-2002) and studies where the Freshman Seminars were optional for student participation (Hendel, 2006-2007; Johnson, 2000-2001; Nagda et al., 1998; Morrison & Brown, 2006; Williford et al., 2000-2001).

Four of the articles appraised in this literature review concentrate on the need to target student services interventions to populations viewed as “at-risk” (Braunstein et al., 2008; Higgins, 2004; Morrison & Brown, 2006; Johnson, 2000-2001). As discussed in the Methodology section, “at-risk students” are defined as students with lower GPA’s and/or standardized test scores than the general population. These authors are attempting to assist students in persisting with their education at the same rate as students not considered “at-risk”. The outcome from this research is mixed. None of the 4 articles with at-risk populations offered readers an independent control to document persistence rates for students with below average grades and standardized test scores (Braunstein et al., 2008; Higgins, 2004; Morrison & Brown,
2006; Johnson, 2000-2001). None of the 4 articles offered data beyond one academic year or term (Braunstein et al., 2008; Higgins, 2004; Morrison & Brown, 2006; Johnson, 2000-2001). Student services for at-risk populations in colleges and universities could be a logical use of school funding; the studies reviewed on this topic have methodological flaws that cannot grant the research significant consideration.

The data analysis reveals that there were many variables under the umbrella of student services interventions and student persistence. Tinto found that a holistic, thematic view of student services intervention could be the best way to achieve successful student retention. One may assess that it is unlikely that a single institution can find a sole program that can dramatically increase student retention rates. The application of resources to any student retention program has complex implications and should be reviewed in a comprehensive manner.

Scholars have long held an interest in student persistence. Complex assessment of human behavior is required to determine what factors contribute to retention rates. An important question for parents of prospective students seeking resources from institutions of higher education is, “What is the percentage of student persistence at this institution?” Few students want to leave higher education without completing their goals. Colleges and universities with poor student retention find themselves grappling with high administrative costs because they are forced to spend time and money recruiting more students to fill slots vacated by absent students (Ryan, 2004). Efforts spent on retention should not be dismissed. Successful student services and student retention influences university operations in numerous ways. Social integration, academic success and individual attitudes can be targeted and improved with organized initiatives, but research provided in this literature review cautions administrators not to look for the “quick fix” to the student retention problem.
Research reveals the importance of student retention in many avenues although evidence exists that programs designed to improve student retention may not be working as hoped. College administrators developing a First Year Seminar anticipating students to benefit from increased social integration and school commitment may want to consider reserving costs and energy because of the lack of conclusive statistics to confirm positive retention outcome (Cox et al., 2005; Hendel, 2006-2007; Pan et al., 2008; Johnson, 2000-2001; Nagda, 1998; Morrison & Brown, 2006; Williford et al., 2008; Crissman, 2001-2002). Or maybe retention is not the only factor to consider in continuing these programs.

Cohort and clustering class models researched by Schulte (2002-2003) and Tinto (1997) provide emerging data that students respond well to a holistic, long-term approach to student services interventions. Peer tutoring research provided by Higgins (2004) again identifies an emerging outlet for retention relief.

Professionals in the field of student retention should also look to Ryan (2004) for the findings that increased student services funding does not provide a significant connection to better student retention. If schools feel overwhelmed by budget constraints for student services they may feel comforted by the research supporting the notion that a quality education does not require deep pockets (Ryan, 2004).

Poor student retention at America’s colleges and universities is a dilemma that continues to baffle administrators and instructors. There is no shortage of ideas on ways to improve this situation. Generally the research is discouraging; studies tackling student services interventions tend to only show a significantly positive impact when small sample sizes are assessed. Large, comprehensive studies reviewing student services programming reveal stagnant rates of student
attrition with little explanation. After extensive research the findings reviewed suggest possible research projects in student services interventions.

The student service intervention completed by Higgins (2004) on volunteer peer tutoring in this literature review produced the strongest data that student services can impact student attrition. This research study needs to be expanded with a larger sample size and data should be collected over a series of academic cycles. Higgins’ (2004) sample size was only 26 and she only followed the participants for one academic term. Every study in this review that demonstrated positive results should be investigated and replicated with the removal of methodology flaws to secure stronger evidence. More studies should be completed without self-selected participants and control variables should be included when previously absent in studies producing positive results.

Research examined in the student retention field point to “financial hardship” as a reason for students dropping out of college in America (Ryan, 2004). Studies could be conducted to determine if mandatory financial literacy courses at college campuses could reduce flight from school because of poorly managed debts and anxiety over financial aid. The expense for a personal finance course would not necessarily be excessive for a university; students would be required to take the class on a pay-per-credit system. The intervention could pool resources from the Financial Aid and Economics Departments to reduce development expense. This course idea could supply students with desperately needed information about the changing economy and how a college education improves economic security for Americans.

A new trend in university student services is parent education. It is a widely accepted belief that family obligations can represent a great burden to college students. Could a parent orientation program involve parents in a productive way to reduce family stress and confusion?
This type of orientation could be piloted at institutions where the parents of the traditional-age students are largely immigrants or not college educated. Research could be performed to address whether parents of college students receiving orientation to their son or daughter’s school would be stronger advocates for their children. Student orientation programs were reviewed and studied in this literature review; perhaps a parent orientation warrants examination to determine if one of the reasons why students are leaving school is a lack of family support, enthusiasm or understanding. Orientation programs with parents could energize a group with powerful influence to encourage student persistence and degree completion. Research could determine if parents would indeed provide the university with a strong collaboration to fight the retention battle.

A growing field in higher education is online degrees. Research on student retention’s relationship to this complicated variable is absent. Does a self-motivated online student without the influence of being in a classroom benefit from similar student services interventions in the same way that a traditional residential student succeeds? Research could be done to determine whether either college environment could learn from each other’s strengths and develop student services interventions that could flex to either type of student.

Lastly, research reviewing the difference in student retention in non-profit and for-profit institutions of higher learning could be explored. No research could be found of a retention study performed at a proprietary school. Could a school motivated by profit have a different approach to student retention? Do proprietary schools handle the student retention problem in a different way than non-profit institutions because investors at for-profit schools put increased pressure on administrators to maintain retention goals? Research could also be done to assess the level of
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satisfaction students have with their student services experience at for-profit schools versus students being educated at non-profit schools, to see if their experience differs.

Summary of Literature Review

Nearly all students pursuing degrees in higher education face obstacles. An increasing percentage of students arrive at universities with adult burdens of full-time work and dependent families that compete for their time. Learning how to best support students at varying stages of life and educational rigor is critical for those in higher education administration managing the retention dilemma. Goals for retention professionals need to include an understanding of the complex nature of student flight. Expanding effective student services interventions to address student retention can benefit society by reducing unemployment and increasing worker salaries. This topic has a long standing economic impact that cannot be ignored.

Research findings on student intervention as it relates to retention are mixed. Small or targeted studies support the notion that tutoring and learning communities can reduce student flight at America’s colleges and universities. Larger longitudinal studies produce consistent findings that there are independent variables involved in student drop-out rates (Pan et al., 2008; Turner & Berry, 2000; Williford et al., 2000-2001). Tinto’s (1997) research on Coordinated Studies Program at Seattle Central Community College is promising for college administrators. Thematic, multi-layered approaches to student services interventions could be the direction to take at more colleges and universities to reinforce Tinto’s research.

The literature review summary points to a lack of support for student services interventions to improve student retention in colleges and universities. Only one student services program deemed statistically significant showed modest gains in student retention. More
research may need to be completed; based on the reviewed data in the literature review student services programs have limited or no significant value on student retention.

Successful retention strategies need to address a complex mix of procedures and regulations and look to minimize the anxiety in the individual student. Student services interventions need to be accessible, affordable and effective. Finding the right place for a student so he or she can eventually get a degree should be the business of all university administrators; the benefits of better student retention reach society at multiple levels. Schools should strive to learn more about why students drop out or move between schools, institutions should consider investigating what is the desired outcome for each student. When focusing on the retention goal; school administrators cannot overlook that their aim is to serve the student. Unlike other service industries, the higher education system all too often caters to institutions as opposed to the actual consumers, a group comprised of students.

Methodology

Problem

Research referenced earlier by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development documents that student retention in America’s colleges and universities hovers around 50%. Poor student retention forces institutions into a cat and mouse game to recruit new students to replace those who have dropped out. This process is expensive, time consuming and inefficient. If schools were able to improve student drop out rates, it is possible for schools to budget further, offering a lower tuition cost. College recruiting expenses could be reduced and these funds could be re-circulated to other departments or programs.

Statistically, according the Bureau of Labor Statistics, individuals who have completed college degrees will earn a larger income and have lower rates of unemployment than individuals
who have dropped out of college or not attended at all. Student retention has implications for society at large; the more students who are successful in school the greater possibilities local, state and federal governments have for a stable and flourishing economy.

An additional complication to the student retention issue is the fact that many higher educational professionals and researchers promote ineffective student services programs. As addressed in the Literature Review, most student services programs have no impact on keeping students returning to campus year after year. Many of these tutoring, cohort or student orientation programs are costly to operate and provide minimal or no benefit to the problem of student attrition.

The purpose of collecting quantitative and qualitative data from professionals in higher education was to more comprehensively document specific descriptions of student services interventions. This research was completed to record trends and opinions from student services staff to determine if there was additional evidence to be collected that further proved effective or ineffective approaches to retaining students.

Population

This qualitative and quantitative research mandated 7 interviews with student services professionals employed at institutions of higher education. The 7 subjects selected for interviewing represent a mix of individuals. Two interviews were completed by student services professionals in 100% online, for-profit college or university environments. One individual was interviewed from a mid-sized public university. One interview was a representative of a small, private graduate school. Three interviewees represented a small for-profit career college. A variety of professional disciplines were targeted to create the most varied and fair opinion sources. One Dean of Students was interviewed, 1 Director of Career Services was interviewed,
1 Academic Advisor was interviewed, 1 Director of Student Services was interviewed, 1 Academic Associate was interviewed, 1 Associate Dean of Students was interviewed and 1 Associate Dean of Faculty was interviewed.

Instrumentation

All 7 individuals interviewed responded to a 5 question survey that requested qualitative and quantitative responses. The first question posed was close-ended and it asked the interviewee for a numerical response. Two of the 5 questions asked the interviewer to reply using a 7 point Likert scale. Two additional questions in the survey were open-ended. All participants involved signed a release form that provided instructions on how to contact the researcher for more information and supplied additional details about the purpose of the interview.

Data Analysis

Data Question 1

Question 1: What is the percentage of students at your institution that complete their degree program in less than five years?

Subject A:

I do not record that information in my office, but I would like to supply you with a name and phone number of the individual on campus that would be happy to direct you better with this question.

Subject B:

I will respond back to you via email, I do not have the information available. I will also check with a colleague to confirm that I have permission to release this information.

Subject C:

I do not know the answer to that question.
Subject D:
Our school only records retention rates on an annual basis. For the 2006-2007 academic years, our retention rate was 72%. The annual goal for retention at this school is 70%; we are quite pleased with the results.

Subject E:
Our retention rate is very good. Our school does not record percentages that I can provide on retention because we do not keep track of that information. Students generally stay in school because of high interest in the subject matter. If a student enrolls beyond 2 classes, he or she will almost always graduate. Students may take time off, but they always come back. I estimate that our retention is greater than 90%.

Subject F:
I do not deal with that part of the operation. You should contact XX for that information.

Subject G:
Well, I don’t know that information just off the top of my head, but wait a minute and I will look it up. Since our school has only been operational since 2002, we have limited data on a five year retention history. My search in CampusVue shows that in the year 2007-2008 we were able to retain 72% of our students. This statistic also includes data from the residential campus too. There is no way for my system to separate the data.

Summary Question 1

Only 2 of the 7 participants were able to provide student retention data to the interviewer, but neither participant could provide data for more than just one school year. Of the 2 participants who provided the interviewer with a statistic on retention, 1 of the 7 participants was able to provide the information on their school’s attrition rate from memory and the other
participant who provided data needed to use his computer database to locate the statistic. One participant promised the interviewer that he would provide the student retention information via email. That data was never sent as a follow up. One participant responded that her school does not record student retention data. Three participants did not know the answer to the student retention percentage at their school.

Data Question 2

Question Two: What do you think are the best student services interventions offered at your school that promote the best student retention?

Subject A:
Our school offers Welcome Weeks for our students to help them get acquainted with student services and campus life. Also I think that the FYE (First Year Experience) program is really good. The Academic Day hosted on campus provides students with excellent resources for student services. Probably the most important thing that promotes student retention is good academic advisors that provide students with solid relationships and deeper campus connections. Also campus events, tutoring services and assessments help with retention.

Subject B:
The service that helps students stay enrolled in school the most is the tutoring program. The one-on-one attention from qualified staff and the peer tutoring available is critical to getting students through their program. Our school also offers the Writing Center and the Math Center open at flexible hours with training professionals. The small campus environment here provides a sense of community with lots of academic support that keeps students reenrolling. Small things like free coffee in the Academic Services department send a message to students that we care about
them. Library services are also important for retention. The Librarians provide excellent academic support.

Subject C:
I think the small student body and the one-on-one attention is the best thing that we do for student retention. Students are able to have relationships with staff and faculty on a personal level that provides accountability.

Subject D:
I think the personal connections our staff makes with students in academic advising is the most helpful element in student retention. Our academic advising staff offers in-person meetings and they make many “care calls” to student to check up on them when they are absent from class or have failing mid-term grades.

Subject E:
The best thing that we do is give the student the opportunity to come back to school after a leave of absence. Since we are so flexible with our readmissions policy we find that we lose very few students. Our school does not offer student services programming.

Subject F:
Our quick resolution support services for online learners have improved in quality dramatically this year. The system allows for students to call or email in to our school with problems or complaints they have with instructors or technology or anything else they may need. Our online system is able to prioritize requests due to high-tech tracking device. Students experience fast response times from academic advisors and other professional staff.

Subject G:
I think tutoring is the best example of student services assistance our school provides to our students. Tutoring reinforces learning for our student tutors who are paid hourly and the struggling student gets one-to-one support.

*Summary Question 2*

Six of the 7 participants interviewed responded that relationships with professional staff and peers are helpful promoting student retention. Five of the 7 participants interviewed quoted student services relationships via academic advising to promote student retention. Two participants interviewed recorded that tutoring is a student service that promotes good retention. One participant advised that flexible admittance policies promoted retention. One participant advised that relationships via newly improved computer technology were a method that promoted good retention. In addition, 1 participant mentioned the library services as a good retention method and 1 participant mentioned First Year Experience/Orientation workshops as a good retention method.

*Data Question 3*

Question 3: On a scale of 1 to 7 how would you rate your schools ability to serve student’s work/life balance?

Subject A:

I would rate our school a 5 because students are under increased pressure to work and they have lots of financial pressure due to increasing tuition costs. More students are working more hours off campus than ever before.

Subject B:

I would give our school a 6 because this school provides students the option to enroll in classes at any 1 of our 9 campuses. All administrative, academic and registration services are fluid
between all campuses, so if a student selects to take a class at another campus for scheduling reasons there is no delay with the paperwork. The nine campus offering allows students more options.

Subject C:
I think 5 because our school offers flexible scheduling due to the population we serve. Many students come to us with full-time jobs and family commitments; we have to cater to students who require balance. Lots of our students are of a non-traditional age.

Subject D:
I would score us a 6 because this school does not require students to enroll in a specific credit load each term. We also offer a variety of student programs to promote flexibility if a student wants to scale back on their coursework or if they want to change their degree. A student can take on a diploma degree instead of a two year degree if it fits their time needs better. Also, I know from experience that the homework load is lighter at this college than at other competing schools.

Subject E:
We are a 7 because the entire program we administer was designed for the working adult desiring flexibility.

Subject F:
My school is a 7 because we have developed an elaborate system to accommodate student’s needs to have flexible due dates and “class times”. An online university is able to serve students with hectic schedules; our school has liberal policies on homework extensions that promote a work/life balance.

Subject G:
I would rate us at a 7 because we are an online school with lots of flexibility with scheduling. We attract students that might live in a rural location or have family or work demands that might prevent them from finishing a degree. Our students are able to complete their work at any time that is convenient for them.

**Summary Question 3**

Three participants out of 7 advised that their school ranks as a 7 in work/life balance on the Likert scale, with 7 being the highest and 1 being the lowest. A second group of 2 participants reported a score of 5 on their work/life balance. The remaining 2 participants recorded a score of 6 on their school’s work/life balance.

**Data Question 4**

Question 4: On a scale of 1 to 7 how do you feel that extra-curricular activities influence student retention at your university?

Subject A:

My answer is a 6 because students do need something to do and I think that our extra-curricular activities actively promote relationships with staff and faculty that creates a long lasting connection. Extra-curricular activities are also critical because they provide balance to a student’s life.

Subject B:

Overall our school would rate at about a 5. Our business and nursing programs would be a 7 score because they offer strong support to our students. The DEX group is really popular with Business students. Students are successful competing at a national level in this group. The nursing program also offers extensive support with board exams.

Subject C:
Realistically we are probably at about 2-3 if you compare this school with others in the area that have sport teams, theater or fitness centers. Some students could rate our extra-curricular activities at a 5-6 if they are interested in the most popular programs. I think our extra-curricular programs are struggling right now. I guess it depends on the student.

Subject D:
Overall in higher education I would rate our school at a 2, but compared to other career colleges in this market we are a 5. Our building simply does not have the facilities to allow for sports or music like other schools. We do have programs to support academic needs, like the Student Medical Association and the Video Game Programming Group. Also we now have a danceline team, an off-campus soccer group and tutoring groups.

Subject E:
I would have to identify our school at a 1 because we have no extra-curricular activities.

Subject F:
Our school would be at a 1; we have no extra-curricular activities.

Subject G:
I would have to rank us at a 1 for extra-curricular activities. We do not offer any extra-curricular activities for students.

Summary Question 4

Three participants ranked their school a 1 out of 7 on the Likert scale for question 4. A score of 1 on this scale means that there is little or no influence of extra-curricular activities on student retention and a score of 7 means that extra-curricular activities are highly influential on student retention on that particular campus. Three participants responded with mixed answers to
the question with different rankings factoring in different variables. One participant recorded her school with a score of 6.

*Data Question 5*

Question 5: Do you think that vocational assessments administered upon school admission to all students would have an impact on student retention statistics?

Subject A:

Interesting idea, I am not sure if your idea would work. I do think that a benefit of such assessments would promote the Career Services Center and raise awareness of the student support offerings at this university.

Subject B:

No, I think vocational assessments would steer away students and would give students the wrong ideas about their program. I think assessments can be inaccurate and I think there is a risk that a student would not receive enough review or explanation from trained staff after taking that sort of test.

Subject C:

I think vocational assessments might be an interesting tool. I imagine that it could be hard for those tests to be useful if the student does not have a personal stock set up yet in their chosen program. A vocational test might be disheartening. I would have to learn more before I would be able to give a straight answer.

Subject D:

I think we could somewhat benefit from vocational assessments.

Subject E:
Vocational assessments would probably harm our student retention rates and make it worse. Those tests can mislead students and be very discouraging.

Subject F:
I think our undergraduate students could benefit from vocational testing to provide more direction and guidance. It might be a good analytical tool. I do not think that our graduate or PhD students would find a vocational assessment helpful because they are already established in their career field and it may muddle the process.

Subject G:
Possibly, but I generally don’t think so. Our students come to our school with a program in mind that they plan to complete. Other than a non-degree seeking student, it is not possible to be undecided or undeclared in this institution. I think if we started administering vocational assessments it would just be confusing for our students or we might lose them to other schools. If a student’s assessment reveals an interest in another program that our school doesn’t offer, we might see an increased student drop out rate and that would be a bad thing for us.

Summary Question 5

Five of the 7 participants interviewed replied with a mixed answer to whether or not vocational assessments may influence student retention at their schools. Two participants clearly thought vocational assessments would harm student retention.

Data Analysis Summary

Information collected in these interviews recorded that 2 of the 7 professionals could readily provide the interviewer with statistics on their school’s student retention rate. Three of the 7 professionals interviewed ranked their school poorly in the support and availability of extra-curricular activities. The same professional who viewed her schools as a place that did not
offer any extra-curricular activities also indicated that she thought her retention rate was around 90%. Career Development Centers at colleges and universities in the United States overwhelmingly offer vocational assessments to students to guide in the selection of a major or career field. Five of the 7 of the interview participants responded with little interest, knowledge or support for vocational assessments to be included as admissions requirement for all students. Participants interviewed responded with mixed answers to the question about vocational assessments; the Director of Career Services trained to administer vocational assessments did not support universal testing in her interview. Participants that scored their institutions highly in honoring the work/life balance also scored their school poor in their offerings of extra-curricular activities. Data on specific school retention rates was limited, but the 2 school officials that provided percentages on student retention from their schools were both representing small for-profit schools. There may be a relationship between for-profit education and diligence with attrition rates.

Project Summary and Conclusion

Overview

High expectations promote excellent student retention in America’s colleges and universities. Students fail and retreat when exposed to low expectations. It is of critical importance that the level of intellectual involvement students experience in the classroom is challenging. To make a sincere effort to invest in student retention, institutions need to recognize the influence and the value of integrity. Educational settings where student learn and thrive cannot abandon the mission of student retention.

The Literature Review presented a theme aimed to encourage higher education to reevaluate student services due to the lack of consistent data confirming that the interventions
introduced on campus have any statistically measurable effect on retaining students. Many authors in the literature review argued the student services in colleges and universities are expensive and labor intensive with little or no impact. Articles repeatedly concluded that academic advising, personal counseling, cohort classes and freshman seminars are sometimes bureaucratic headaches for college administrators that do not produce results.

The Literature Review did have one bright spot to positively correlate student retention and student services interventions. The “Coordinated Studies Program” developed by Vincent Tinto drafted statistically relevant data that students participating in a clustered, theme based learning environment tend to have greater retention rates over students in the mainstream. The Coordinated Studies Program research was a large, longitudinal study that provided readers with significant data to confidently trust the impact. It should be noted that student retention was improved in Tinto’s study, but the margin of improvement was small. Additionally the costs of program management were only briefly discussed in the research and no specific numbers were provided to the reader to weigh a cost/benefit analysis (Tinto & Russo, 1997).

Seven interviews were completed with student services professionals at colleges and universities that have direct roles in the prevention of student drop out rates to collect qualitative data on student attrition. Only 1 of the 7 people interviewed could provide accurate data on student retention rates without advanced preparation or review of a computer database. Of the 6 individuals interviewed about their role in student retention that did not readily know their school’s student retention rates, only 1 of the 6 knew where that data could readily be obtained on a computer database.

All 7 of the candidates interviewed as higher education professionals had inconsistent responses to questions about the benefits of career development testing, the importance of
student activities and the value of a life/school balance. The researcher found that all responses from the interviewees were shared with clarity and confidence. Other than the question that asked about the percentage of student retention at their school, the professionals interviewed were all able to provide the researcher with complete answers to the questions.

Conclusion

Alfred Adler (1870–1937) was an Austrian psychologist and community advocate. He was a complex thinker, who often distilled common, pragmatic themes and he wrote in uncomplicated terms. Adler tirelessly argued for social belonging as a priority for strong health. His client base often consisted of poor and working class participants. Importantly, Adler argued that people profit from prevention strategies versus community crisis management (Ansbacher, 1958).

Alfred Adler's concept of social interest is one of the cornerstones of his personality theory (Ansbacher, 1958). According to Adler, "social interest is the main characteristic of each person and is involved in all his actions" (p. 774). Social interest, or *gemeinschaftsgefühl*, involves a sense of social feeling toward all humankind and valuing of something outside the self without hidden motives. Social interest can also be regarded as a philosophy with a true absence of self-centeredness, egocentricity, and self-absorption. Social interest results in a genuine concern with and striving for community and human welfare that successfully assists one to cope with major life challenges. Adlerians believe that social interest has implications for the well-being of society. Many feel that societal difficulties could be traced to an absence of social or community feeling.

Large and small campus communities strive to resemble an Adlerian philosophy identified as *gemeinschaftsgefühl*. Adlerians tend to operate using *gemeinschaftsgefühl*, a phase
that loosely translates to “sense of community”, to summarize an important value that has been found distinctive when reviewing attrition models in colleges and universities. This philosophy possibly correlates and serves as a predictor for student retention by tabulating the level of group cohesion and belongingness. *Gemeinschaftsgefühl* is a holistic concept that can unify campus communities. Tinto’s research discussed earlier in the Summary and Literature Review records the influence on class clustering and thematic curriculum at Seattle Community College as a positive match to improved retention. Could *gemeinschaftsgefühl* be the solution to the student attrition epidemic?

**Recommendations**

Vincent Tinto’s findings at Seattle Community College stressed shared, connected learning to form self-supporting groups that extended beyond the classroom. Tinto highlighted that students spent more time together out of class in his clustered learning environments than do students in traditional classes and they do so in ways which students see as supportive. Encouraging *gemeinschaftsgefühl* needs to take high priority in college and university settings.

The task of faculty development can be another critical factor to improve student retention. Universities may need to establish conditions for their faculty that promotes student involvement, learning and retention in all classroom settings. Those conditions depend on the institution, student population and discipline of the instructor, but they must be consistent, tractable and enforceable by university leadership. The job of student retention cannot fall solely on the department of Student Services. In addition to quality faculty training and accountability, academic advising has surfaced as one of the most predominant needs identified across all institutional types. In the interviews completed with Student Services professionals, nearly all the
participants argued that it was the “relationships” that kept students on campus for the duration of their degree or program.

Additionally it should be noted that students expect faculty to provide a competent level of meaningful advising and career focused support to them as they begin to make important academic decisions. Colleges and universities may need to consider assigning groups of students (at-risk or not) to faculty for advising sessions. Research demonstrates that college students prefer faculty advisors over professional advisors. In fact, the data uncovers that students have lower expectations for professional advisors than for faculty advisors (Smith, 2002).

Vincent Tinto’s successful “learning communities” began with a kind of co-registration or block scheduling that can also improve faculty development. Learning communities do more than simply register students around a topic. In their fullest implementation, they also change the manner in which students are taught. Instructors alter their teaching and their classrooms to promote shared, collaborative learning experiences among students across the linked classrooms. In other cases, it may mean streamlining the entire first-semester curriculum so that students in the learning community study the same material throughout the semester. The courses can be connected by an organizing theme, for example, a learning community entitled “Of Body and Mind” which links courses in biology, psychology, and sociology.

In Tinto’s designed classroom, students are required to work together in some form of collaborative groups and to become active, indeed responsible, for the learning of both group and classroom peers. In this way, students in learning communities are asked to share not only the curriculum, but also the experience of learning the curriculum. The benefits for students are many (Tinto, 1997; Tinto, 2001). Students are more likely to form their own self-supporting groups that extend beyond the classroom, more likely to spend more time together out of class
than do students in traditional, stand-alone classes, and do so in ways that students see as supportive. More importantly, they spend more time learning together both inside and outside the classroom. Their involvement with others in learning within the classroom becomes the vehicle through which attachments are made and commitments to the institution engendered. Learning communities are being used successfully in a variety of majors and fields of study and are being adapted to the needs of varying groups of students. For instance, they are being adapted to the needs of undecided students as well as those who require academic assistance. In residential campuses, some learning communities have moved into the residence halls. These “living learning communities” combine shared coursework with shared living. The power of these and other arrangements is that they enable the institution to integrate the provision of academic and social assistance to the social and academic needs of students in a way that is connected to their needs as learners (Tinto, 2001). In many cases, such as those described above, the “faculty” of the learning community is made up of both academic and student affairs professionals. For the learning communities to succeed, they must work together to ensure that the linked courses provide a coherent, shared learning experience that is tailored to the needs of the students the community serves.

The bottom line in student retention is that faculty and staff at colleges and universities need to be accountable for attrition figures. It is terribly interesting that only 1 college professional out of 7 interviewed by the researcher could promptly respond to the principal question “what is your student retention rate?” How can this epidemic improve if the leaders in our private, public and for-profit educational systems do not have a simple handle of the gravity of the problem? If institutions genuinely cared about the 5 year student graduation rates, attrition and serving at-risk students more effort and accountability may need to be placed on providing
staff, faculty and administrators more facts about the true levels of student retention. Perhaps the public and private educational systems need to borrow a philosophy from the for-profit world and entice college leaders with promotions or bonuses for improved attrition rates. If a staff person’s employment or salary hinged on student retention would the statistically useless student services programs get cut at colleges across the country and new creative promotions be introduced to save students?

Lastly, what expense should be paid to achieve *gemeinschaftsgefühl*? Another recommendation for student retention practices should include evaluating the significant costs of programs promoting excellent student attrition. Is it possible that student retention is poor in the United States because tuition costs climb much faster than the rates of inflation? Many colleges and universities need to review the outcome measures of the financially draining “pet projects” of Student Services departments nationwide. Staff salaries, faculty training and facilities expenses force student fees and tuition costs to skyrocket to ranges that can prevent student continuance. Based on the review of the literature, it is possible that the best practice to promote the positive student retention is to shut down their program doors and slash tuition costs by 30%. Research reveals marginally positive or neutral student service influences on actual retention statistics, as per the Literature Review. Tuition costs are frequently surveyed as the number one reason why students fail to continue school (Smith, 2002). More investigation is warranted into college costs and overall accountability of administration at all schools could be prioritized.
You are invited to participate in a research study for student retention interventions in higher educational institutions. You were selected as a possible candidate because you are currently employed in a college or university setting and you have daily interaction with students. In addition, any affiliation with the investigator prior to consent to be a participant was in no way a factor in being chosen as a participant. The only reason for selection was that you have the necessary prior experience level and knowledge related to the specific topic of this study. Also, by signing below you are indicating that you have in no way been coerced to participate in this study. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in this study. This study is being conducted by Jill Carlson, a Masters candidate at the Adler Graduate School.

**Background Information:**
The purpose of this study is to determine if certain approaches to student retention interventions impact student persistence in colleges and universities.

**Procedures:**
If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do participate in a brief interview that is scheduled to last less than 10 minutes.

**Benefits of Being in the Study:**
The benefits of being in this study is that new research may be revealed to aid higher education professionals in promoting better student retention. Research may be produced that provides colleges and universities valuable information to make more informed decisions regarding where to spend student retention resources.

**Confidentiality:**
The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report that might be published, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be kept in a locked file; only the researcher will have access to the records.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**
Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the Adler Graduate School or with other cooperating institutions. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**Contacts and Questions:**
The researcher conducting this study is Jill Carlson and advisor Dr. William J. Premo. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Jill Carlson at 1209 Hillside Lane, Burnsville, MN 55306 or 952-892-0683
You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

**Statement of Consent:**
I have read the above information. I have asked questions and received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Name (Print) ___________________________ Phone: ____________________
Signature: _____________________________ Date: ______________

Signature of Investigator: ___________________________ Date: ______________
Interview Questionnaire

Question 1: What is the percentage of students at your institution that complete their degree program in less than five years?

Question 2: What do you think are the best student services interventions offered at your school that promote the best student retention?

Question 3: On a scale of 1 to 7 how would you rate your school’s ability to serve student’s work/life balance?

Question 4: On a scale of 1 to 7 how do you feel that extra-curricular activities influence student retention at your university?

Question 5: Do you think that vocational assessments administered upon school admission to all students would have an impact on student retention statistics?
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*The Project on Student Debt*. (2008). Community college students denied access to
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