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Understanding Community College Faculty Perceptions Of Their Role In Student Retention

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UNDERSTANDING COMMUNITY COLLEGE FACULTY PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR ROLE IN STUDENT RETENTION

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UNDERSTANDING COMMUNITY COLLEGE FACULTY PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR ROLE IN STUDENT RETENTION

Abstract

This phenomenological case study examined full-time community college faculty perceptions of their role in student retention. Eight participants were asked to reflect on their understanding and use of student retention strategies, as well as what motivated and deterred their participation in institutional retention initiatives. Interviews were conducted to add practitioner voices to the conversation on student retention in higher education.

Three research questions guided the study: (1) How do full-time community college faculty members perceive and describe their role in student retention? (2) What experiences do faculty describe as motivating their participation in institutional retention initiatives? (3) What experiences do faculty describe as deterring their participation in institutional retention initiatives? Once the data were collected, member checks were conducted and data were analyzed using NVivo qualitative software.

Four themes emerged during data analysis: (1) faculty perceive relationships as central to student retention; (2) student retention is complex and is influenced by multiple factors, some of which cannot be addressed by the institution; (3) faculty’s ability to retain students is impacted by institutional practices and climate; and (4) faculty describe motivation to retain students as being primarily intrinsic. The four themes contained 13 subthemes that provided deeper explanations of the participants’ experiences.
The findings indicated that faculty have moved beyond needing to be persuaded that they are important to student retention to recognizing the value of their role. Faculty are willing to participate in student retention initiatives that align with their values. Initiatives that increase collegiality and interaction among faculty may be more successful than those based on individual efforts. Institutions can encourage faculty participation by providing release time, small class sizes and reduced teaching loads, professional development, recognition, and incentives such as stipends.
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Doctor of Education
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

In the United States, earning a credential in higher education is becoming an economic necessity. By 2020, an estimated 65% of all jobs will require postsecondary education or training (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2013). Jobs requiring a minimum credential of an associate degree are projected to grow twice as fast as those that require no college experience (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). In his 2010 State of the Union Address, President Barack Obama identified community colleges as the career pathway for children of working class families (Office of the Press Secretary, 2010) and set the goal for community colleges to produce an additional 5 million graduates ("Building American," n.d.). This goal positions community colleges, the most accessible and affordable postsecondary institutions in the United States, in a vital and challenging role.

Community colleges are both degree-granting institutions and entry points for students who plan to transfer to bachelor and graduate programs. In the fall of 2014, 42% of all undergraduate students and 25% of full-time undergraduate students were enrolled at community colleges, and between 2000 and 2010, enrollment in public two-year institutions increased from 5.7 million to 7.9 million (Ma & Baum, 2016). As these statistics demonstrate, enrollment at community colleges is on the rise. Although these trends reflect the growing significance of the community college system in American higher education, they do not tell the whole story. Despite the fact that enrollment is increasing, student completion rates have not shown a comparable increase (Kelly & Schneider, 2012). This finding suggests that obtaining a college credential requires more than just access to higher education.
According to data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), of first time, full-time, degree-seeking students who started at community colleges in 2010, 19.5% earned a certificate or an associate degree from the same institutions within 150% of the normal time (Ma & Baum, 2016). The IPEDS data does not include completion rates for students who began at community colleges, transferred earned credits into four-year institutions, and completed bachelor degrees. Including this data indicates higher completion rates, with about one-third of students earning a credential within six years (Ma & Baum, 2016). Statistics from both data sets, however, indicate that the majority of students who enroll at community colleges do not earn the credentials they sought when they made the choice to pursue a degree in higher education.

Over the last decade, completion has emerged as a priority for the community college system, with institutions focusing on student success, student retention, and institutional graduation rates (Bailey, 2012). Students who do not complete their degree programs may face employment challenges or the inability to earn an income that adequately services student loan debt. Non-completion is not only a problem for students, but a problem for institutions, as well. Community colleges are facing increased accountability for student outcomes, which means that retaining and graduating students is central to the overall health of an institution (Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015; Braxton, Doyle, & Hartley, 2013; Burke, 2002; Harris & Goldrick-Rab, 2010; Immerwahr & Johnson, 2010). Lost students represent lost dollars, which could result in the closure of programs and, ultimately, schools.

Completion depends on retaining students through their programs of study, and this represents a complex challenge for community colleges. As open-access institutions, community colleges tend to enroll a greater percentage of lower-income, minority, and first-generation
students (Bailey et al., 2004). A correlation exists between graduation rates and demographics such as race and socio-economic status; Black, Hispanic, and low-income students complete at lower rates than White middle-class students do (Bailey, 2012). Low-income, first-generation students, who are more likely to enroll in public two-year colleges than other types of postsecondary institutions, are also challenging to retain (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Six years after enrolling, 43% of low income, first generation students have left college without completing a degree, and 60% of this group departed after their first year (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Additionally, community college students are more often employed, more likely to have young children, and more likely to have fewer financial resources than students at four-year institutions (Bailey, et al., 2015). These student enrollment patterns put community colleges in an especially vulnerable position when it comes to developing strategies to retain students and support them through graduation.

An additional retention factor for community colleges is the number of underprepared students who are admitted and must enroll in developmental education courses. According to the Center for Community College Student Engagement, 68% of entering community college students require at least some developmental education (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2016). These students face a host of obstacles on their paths to graduation, including enrollment in non-credit bearing courses, more complicated degree pathways, and additional time and money spent to obtain a credential. Research shows that the longer a student stays enrolled in college, the less likely he or she is to graduate (Complete College America, 2011). A 2006 study using data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study found that only 28% of students who take one or more remedial course go on to complete a college degree within 8.5 years (Attewell, Lavin, Domina, & Levey, 2006). Students who must extend the time
they spend in college to complete developmental education requirements are less likely to be retained and to complete their degrees.

To address these challenges, community colleges have adopted institutional strategies demonstrated to increase student retention. Typical programs include counseling, advising, and student support services to help students navigate college and persist in their programs (Bailey, 2012). Performance-based financial aid is another practice gaining traction to improve student retention rates (Miao, 2012; Scott-Clayton, 2011). Institutions are recognizing the need to use campus-level data to identify and address retention problems and to prioritize student retention for all campus stakeholders (Bailey, et al., 2015; Goldrick-Rab, 2010; Siegel, 2011). In the past, student support services staff traditionally managed student retention programs; however, retention efforts are now expanding to involve other campus stakeholders, including faculty.

Faculty’s ability to influence student retention positively is well documented (Kinzie, 2005; Kuh, 2008; Tinto, 2012; Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005). Faculty have regular contact with students. In addition, they set expectations and assess student progress. Faculty frequently advise students in their academic disciplines, developing ongoing relationships with them. As a result, faculty are individuals on campus who are in a position to recognize whether or not students may depart—and they are also in a position to intervene by creating a learning climate that fosters retention or by connecting students with services on campus that can help them persist. Faculty actions in the classroom, particularly at colleges with high percentages of commuter students, become even more significant, since classroom time may be the primary contact students have with the institution (Tinto, 2000). With only a quarter of U.S. two-year colleges offering on-campus housing, community colleges must capitalize on students’ time in the classroom to reach their retention benchmarks (Stinson, 2016).
George Kuh’s (2008) High Impact Practices have been adopted by many college campuses, and studies demonstrate their ability to increase student retention (Jackson, Stebleton, & Laanan, 2013; McClenny & Waiwaiole, 2005; McCormick & Lucas, 2014; Ryan, 2013). The faculty role is at the center of High Impact Practices, which include first-year seminars and experiences; common intellectual experiences; learning communities; writing-intensive courses; collaborative assignments and projects; undergraduate research; diversity/global learning; service and community-based learning; internships; and capstone courses and projects (Kuh, 2008). These types of initiatives are examples of the strategies faculty are being encouraged to participate in and employ.

The importance of faculty collaborating with institutions in student retention initiatives cannot be overstated. According to Tinto (2006):

Though it is true, as we are often reminded, that student retention is everyone’s business, it is now evident that it is the business of the faculty in particular. Their involvement in institutional retention efforts is often critical to the success of those efforts. Regrettably, faculty involvement is still more limited than it should be. (p. 5)

In 2011, the Community College Research Center identified that to reform community colleges, faculty needed to engage more intensively in the mission to support student success (Bailey, 2012). Without faculty participation, it is unlikely that institutions will be able to create effective and lasting student retention initiatives, particularly at community colleges where the classroom is the setting in which students’ decisions about departure are so often influenced.

Despite the central role faculty play in retaining students, motivating faculty to engage in institutional retention efforts poses challenges. Faculty may view retention initiatives as a passing trend that will ultimately phase out or feel that retention is not an important part of their
role as instructors (Bailey et al., 2015). O’Banion (2014) explained that, despite the fact that faculty are key stakeholders who must be engaged, some faculty have become “cynical and worn out by initiative fatigue” (O’Banion, 2014, p. 4). According to Chaden (2013), “Most often, individual faculty participate in such innovations and initiatives according to their interest rather than as part of an institution-wide approach to improving retention and graduation rates” (p. 91).

An additional complication regarding engaging faculty at community colleges is the prevalence of contingent (part-time and adjunct) faculty. Contingent faculty teach approximately 58% of all community college classes (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2014). With less support from institutions, fewer opportunities to interact with students outside of class, and little in the way of job security, contingent faculty may be less likely to incorporate High Impact Strategies to engage and retain students (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2014). The combination of these factors leaves administrators and retention professionals in the difficult position of finding ways to motivate faculty in lasting and meaningful ways.

**Statement of the Problem**

Engaging faculty members is imperative in creating effective and enduring retention programs at community colleges (Braxton, Bray, & Berger, 2000; Chaden, 2013; Tinto, 2006). Although faculty members invest in the success of individual students, not all faculty link this commitment to institutional retention rates. As data-driven retention strategies such as Kuh’s (2008) High Impact Practices are being translated into day-to-day classroom activities, faculty are being advised about what teaching strategies to employ, what data to consider, how to design curriculum and assessment, and what their course policies should include. But how do faculty, themselves, perceive their roles and responsibilities in institutional retention initiatives?
To date, the majority of research about the role of faculty in student retention has considered the topic from an external perspective—examining which faculty behaviors and practices support student retention (Braxton et al., 2000; Kinzie, 2005; Kuh, 2008; Perez, McShannon, & Hynes, 2012; Tinto, 2000; Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005). Bensimon (2007) reported that in a multidisciplinary review of the literature on student success conducted in 2006, 175 out of 192 articles reviewed used quantitative methods. This indicates a gap in the literature as far as understanding faculty’s lived experiences related to student success and, by extension, student retention. Faculty perceptions of their experiences with student retention represents an area of study that, if better understood, could help institutions improve the effectiveness of their retention initiatives.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this phenomenological case study was to explore how full-time community college faculty perceive their role in student retention and to understand what motivates and deters faculty participation in institutional retention initiatives. Bensimon (2007) pointed out the “invisibility of practitioners in the discourse on student success” (p. 443), suggesting that there is a “lack of scholarly and practical attention toward understanding how the practitioner—her knowledge, beliefs, experiences, education, sense of self-efficacy, etc.—affects how students experience their education” (p. 444). If postsecondary leaders could better understand faculty perceptions of student retention, more effective partnerships might result.

**Research Questions**

This study sought to better understand faculty perception of their role in student retention and identify what motivates and deters their participation in institutional retention efforts. The central questions that guided the study were:
• How do full-time community college faculty members perceive and describe their role in student retention?
• What experiences do faculty describe as motivating their participation in institutional retention initiatives?
• What experiences do faculty describe as deterring their participation in institutional retention initiatives?

Conceptual Framework

A review of the major theories informing the last four decades of student retention research indicated that faculty have an influential role in students’ decisions to persist in or depart from college (Astin, 1985; Bean, 1980; Kuh, 2008; Spady, 1971; Tinto 1975). Therefore, much of the student retention literature related to faculty focuses on what types of behavior faculty can employ to encourage student persistence. In fact, Bensimon’s (2007) multidisciplinary review of the literature on student success in 2006 revealed that the majority of the articles (175 out of 192) relied on quantitative methods. This indicates a gap in the literature as far as understanding the lived experiences related to student success.

Building on Astin’s (1999) emphasis on engagement, Kuh (2008) established High Impact Practices, pedagogical strategies demonstrated to increase student retention. Many institutions have adopted High Impact Practices such as learning communities, first year experiences, undergraduate research, and service learning as student retention initiatives. However, for these initiatives to succeed, institutions must engage their faculty as partners (Bailey et al., 2015; Braxton, et al., 2013; O’Banion, 2013). In this study, Kuh’s (2008) High Impact Practices were used to define the retention initiatives in which faculty are typically asked to participate. The definition of student retention strategies also included early alert/warning
programs, faculty use of attendance policies, new student orientation programs, block scheduling, advising and counseling programs, and performance-based financial aid (Bailey, et al., 2015; Miao, 2012; Siegel, 2011). These strategies represent typical student retention efforts, including those employed at the site of the study.

In order to understand what motivates and deters faculty participation in student retention initiatives, Herzberg’s (1959) Motivation-Hygiene Theory and Deci and Ryan’s (2008) Self-Determination Theory were used as a framework to consider data gathered from faculty interviews. Herzberg’s (1959) motivation factors (responsibility, recognition, the work itself, achievement, and advancement) and hygiene factors (supervision, salary, work environment, organizational policies, and interpersonal relations) were used to identify the workplace factors that may affect faculty participation in institutional retention initiatives. Deci and Ryan’s (2008) theory helped explain the individual differences that may inform faculty’s views on participating in institutional retention initiatives.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Scope

Case study research presents some inherent limitations, and single-case studies are particularly limited in scope. However, as explained by Stake (1955), the case study is still valuable method of conducting research because “we will have a research question, a puzzlement, a need for general understanding, and feel that we may get insight into the question by studying a particular case” (p. 3). Because it investigated a single, unique case, this study also contains unique assumptions, limitations, and scope.

One assumption for the study was that all faculty participants would possess a clear understanding of the term retention strategies and would have used at least one retention strategy during their tenure as full-time instructors at the site. To ensure that faculty possessed this
understanding, participants were provided with a list of items defined as retention strategies for the purpose of the study (See Appendix A). A second assumption of the study was that all participants answered questions honestly. To encourage this, faculty volunteered to participate and were informed that their interview responses would be kept confidential. A third assumption was that faculty were aware of what motivates and deters their participation in institutional retention initiatives and were able to identify and describe those factors.

The limitations and scope for this study naturally arose from its single-case design. Case studies examine bounded systems. According to Merriam (2009) a bounded system is “a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries” which could be “a single person who is a case example of some phenomenon, a program, a group, an institution, a community, or a specific policy” (p. 40). The study was conducted at a single rural community college campus, which is one of a seven-campus public community college system. The sample for the study consisted of eight individuals. Because of this, findings are not generalizable to other community colleges, but are limited to case, itself.

A second limitation of the study was the potential reluctance on the part of some faculty participants to fully and honestly answer questions posed by the researcher, who was also a full-time faculty member at the site. Participants may have been hesitant or unwilling to express views that contradicted existing institutional expectations regarding faculty’s responsibilities for student retention at the college. Furthermore, participants may have been reluctant to express their views honestly to a colleague given the small, interdependent nature of the campus. The researcher, however, is not in a position of authority over any of the study’s participants, which may have tempered participants’ worry about expressing their views openly and honestly. Peer-
to-peer discussion about student issues is common at the site, and the study was, in some ways, an extension of this type of communication.

A third limitation of the study was its exclusion of contingent faculty. By focusing only on full-time faculty, the study did not fully represent the faculty experience within the case. However, selecting full-time faculty did represent the majority of faculty within the case. The 35 full-time faculty members at the study site deliver the majority of courses and credits for the college. During the 2016-2017 academic year, when the study was conducted, full-time faculty delivered 976 credits (75% of credits offered) versus contingent faculty, who delivered 319 credits (25% of credits offered). Limiting participants to full-time faculty reflected the demographics of the case.

**Significance**

This study has the potential to address the gap in the literature identified by Bensimon (2007) by adding practitioner voices to the literature on student success and retention. Much of the existing literature about faculty role in student retention focuses on faculty behaviors that support increased retention (Braxton, et al., 2000; Kinzie, 2005; Kuh, 2008; Perez, et al., 2012; Tinto, 2000; Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005). This study approached the topic from the aspect of faculty’s lived experiences of student retention, examining specifically how faculty view their roles and responsibilities, as well as what factors might motivate or deter their participation in student retention initiatives.

A better understanding of faculty perception may help administrators and student success professionals more effectively engage faculty in student retention work. Faculty engagement is crucial to create sustained change in pedagogical practices (Feldhaus et al., 2015). As retention and completion become increasingly important to institutional success, both financially and in
terms of demonstrating student outcomes, engaging faculty as partners is likely to become more necessary. Attempting to gain faculty support without fully understanding their perceptions is unlikely to garner the support needed for significant progress in retention and completion. The focus on student retention is not a passing trend; rather, the shift toward accountability for student outcomes represents a shift in culture in higher education (Bailey et al., 2004; Chaden, 2013; Siegel, 2011). In light of this shift in culture, understanding all stakeholders’ perceptions of student retention efforts—including faculty’s—is imperative.

Definition of Terms

**High Impact Practices:** undergraduate practices designed to increase student retention, as defined by Kuh (2008), which include first-year seminars and experiences; common intellectual experiences; learning communities; writing-intensive courses; collaborative assignments and projects; undergraduate research; diversity/global learning; service and community-based learning; internships; and capstone courses and projects

**Institutional Retention Strategies/Initiatives:** practices designed to increase student retention including High Impact Practices, early alert/warning programs, the use of attendance policies, new student orientation programs, block scheduling, advising and counseling programs, performance-based financial aid, and similar strategies employed a campus-wide basis (Bailey, et al., 2015; Miao, 2012; Siegel, 2011)

**Retention Strategies:** see Institutional Retention Strategies/Initiatives

**Student Retention:** continuous enrollment at an institution after matriculation into a program of study (Habley, Bloom, & Robbins, 2012)

**Student Success:** student achievement of educational goals, as demonstrated by continued progress toward degree completion (Habley, et al., 2012)
Conclusion

As the American community college system continues to shift its focus from access to completion, the emphasis on student retention is likely to grow. As institutions adopt and implement student retention strategies, faculty will become valuable partners in reaching retention and completion benchmarks. Creating and mandating student retention practices without fully understanding faculty’s perceptions of them, however, is likely to result in ineffective or short-lived initiatives. By understanding faculty’s perception of student retention initiatives as well as what motivates and deters their participation in them, colleges can begin to design strategies that may be more meaningful to faculty and, therefore, more enduring.

The following chapters further describe the study and explore its findings. Chapter 2 presents a review of the relevant literature, situating the study in the existing scholarship about the faculty role in student retention. Chapter 3 describes the methodology and how the study was conducted. Chapter 4 explains how interview data were interpreted and presents the findings of the study. Chapter 5 discusses the implications of the data, recommends actions based on the findings, and indicates potential areas for further study.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Since undergraduate student retention became an area of study in the 1930s, the focus on what determines a student’s decision to stay at or depart from an institution has changed. Initially, researchers examined student demographics and characteristics in an effort to identify what departing students had in common. As the field evolved, attention shifted to the relationship between the student and the institution, seeking to understand how the interaction between the two might result in departure. More recently, there has been an emphasis on institutional strategies to increase student retention. Presently, student retention stakes are high; increased accountability for student outcomes and a tenuous funding environment have prioritized retention for postsecondary institutions (Bailey, et al., 2015; Braxton, et al., 2013; Burke, 2002; Harris & Goldrick-Rab, 2010; Immerwahr & Johnson, 2010). Consequently, retention approaches have become more holistic, attempting to account for all of the factors that contribute to students’ decision to persist or depart (Tinto, 2006). Colleges are developing collaborative models (Grubb, 1999; McClenney & Waiwaiole, 2005; McCormick & Lucas, 2014; Siegel, 2011) to address the question: once students are admitted, how can postsecondary institutions retain them?

Responding to this question requires an understanding of how each stakeholder perceives student retention efforts. Although research is beginning to identify the “what’s” that promote student retention—what characteristics, what behaviors, and what systems—there has been limited study of the lived experiences behind that data. One group of essential stakeholders in student retention initiatives is faculty. Umbach and Wawrzynski’s 2005 study “Faculty Do Matter: The Role of College Faculty in Student Learning and Engagement” asserted that faculty members’
influence is visible, both inside and outside of the classroom. They concluded that faculty “behaviors and attitudes affect students profoundly, which suggests that faculty members play the single-most important role in student learning” (Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005, p. 176). Given their influence on students, faculty must be actively involved for institutional retention strategies to succeed.

To date, the majority of research about the role of faculty in student retention has considered the topic from an external perspective, examining which faculty behaviors and practices support student retention (Braxton, et al., 2000; Kinzie, 2005; Kuh, 2008; Perez, et al., 2012; Tinto, 2000; Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005). There is less research, especially at the community college level, about the topic from an internal perspective—how faculty, themselves, perceive their role in institutional retention efforts and what motivates and deters their participation in them. Bensimon (2007) reported that in a multidisciplinary review of the literature on student success in 2006, 175 out of 192 articles reviewed used quantitative methods. This indicates a gap in the literature as far as qualitative research that seeks to understand the lived experiences of faculty related to student success and, by extension, student retention. The purpose of this study was to address that gap, adding practitioner voices to the discourse on student retention by examining faculty experiences and perceptions about student retention.

As retention strategies are translated into day-to-day practice, faculty are advised about what teaching strategies to employ, what data to consider, how to design curriculum and assessment, and what their course policies should include. But how do faculty perceive their roles and responsibilities in institutional retention initiatives? Bensimon (2007) pointed out the “invisibility of practitioners in the discourse on student success” (p. 443), suggesting that there is a “lack of scholarly and practical attention toward understanding how the practitioner—her
knowledge, beliefs, experiences, education, sense of self-efficacy, etc.—affects how students experience their education” (p. 444). If postsecondary leaders could better understand the faculty perception of institutional retention strategies, including what motivates and deters their participation in them, perhaps more effective partnerships could be created.

Although research has identified the significance of the faculty role and the strategies that faculty can use to support retention, more investigation needs to be conducted about retention at community colleges and how community college faculty understand their role as retention partners. This literature review provides an examination of recent research about student retention challenges faced by community colleges, theories of student retention, faculty as student retention partners, faculty practices that support student retention, faculty perception of retention initiatives, engaging faculty in retention strategies, and faculty motivation. Following these sections is the theoretical framework for this study.

Student Retention Challenges Faced by Community Colleges

Community colleges are distinct from universities in their mission. According to Bailey, et al. (2015):

These open door institutions—which are expected to serve nearly anyone who wants to attend college—are a manifestation of our society’s commitment to educational opportunity, and they reflect a common understanding of postsecondary education as the foundation for economic growth and upward mobility. (p. 1)

However, providing access to a college education, which was once the central goal of the system, is no longer adequate. In light of the current financial climate and the increasing accountability for student completion, community colleges must better deliver on the promise made to admitted students. This notion is eloquently captured by Engstrom and Tinto’s (2008) declaration that
“Access without support is not opportunity” (p. 50). Retaining and graduating students is becoming the central concern of the two-year college system (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2010; Rutschow et al., 2011).

Community colleges face distinctive challenges in retaining students. One of these challenges is the enrollment pattern of community colleges (Goldrick-Rab, 2010). According to the American Association of Community Colleges, about 46% of all U.S. undergraduate students attend community colleges (American Association of Community Colleges, 2015). Community colleges are facing challenges in meeting the demands and expectations that have resulted from changing student demographics in higher education. Postsecondary institutions are enrolling a quickly growing number of students who face barriers to their success. Whether they are adult students, underprepared students requiring developmental coursework, students with income barriers, first generation students, students requiring accommodations, or students in need of retraining or improved workforce skills, they all have a desire to improve themselves, their lives, and their economic situations. Goldrick-Rab (2010) contended that:

The massive expansion of the community college over the last century substantially increased participation in American higher education, particularly among individuals with limited opportunities for education beyond high school because of academic difficulties, financial constraints, and other factors. But strides in increasing access have not met with much success in terms of matching students to credentials; in fact, efforts to broaden opportunities may have hindered efforts to increase completion rates. (p. 437)

Completion has gradually replaced access as a benchmark for institutional success, and increasing graduation rates begins with student retention.
Completion has become a focus of conversation among community college leaders. Bailey et al. (2015) argued that this shift in the conversation developed in response to the convergence of several factors. One factor was the publication of community college graduation rates. For many community colleges, the rate for first time, full-time students who graduated within three years was below 20% (Bailey et al., 2015). Another factor is the necessity of a college degree to be financially secure in the current economy. The importance of attaining a college credential is being emphasized to high school students, thereby increasing enrollment in community colleges as a pathway to baccalaureate degrees (Bailey et al., 2015). Given the inflation of college tuition rates over the last decade, the stakes are higher for students to complete their degrees in order to be able to service their student loan debt and see a return on their investment. The reality of the open-access nature of community colleges, however, means that completion is a difficult target to achieve.

Community colleges face the challenge of successfully graduating students who enter the system with characteristics that are associated with higher rates of attrition. Engstrom and Tinto (2008) reported that:

Recent data from the National Center for Education Statistics indicate that while an estimated 56 percent of high-income students who begin postsecondary education will earn their four-year degrees within six years, only about 26 percent of low-income students will do so. (p. 47)

With many of these students beginning their baccalaureate degree paths through the community college system, there is a need to implement institutional strategies that will support them, increasing retention and completion. Engstrom and Tinto (2008) identified that supportive
learning environments and strong connections among students and their peers and faculty members can provide this type of support.

Faculty composition at community colleges presents additional complications related to student retention. In an effort to contain costs and maintain access, the community college system has become heavily reliant on contingent (part-time and adjunct) faculty. In the past, community colleges hired contingent faculty to address enrollment spikes or to deliver content in areas of expertise. Now, however, contingent faculty teach approximately 58% of community college classes (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2014). With less support from institutions, fewer opportunities to interact with students, and little in the way of job security, contingent faculty may be less likely to incorporate High Impact Practices to engage and retain students (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2014). In a study using Integrated Postsecondary Education System (IPEDS) data, Jacoby (2006) found that “increases in the ratio of part-time faculty at community colleges have a highly significant and negative impact upon graduation rates” (p. 1092). While relying on contingent faculty is an efficient economic solution, it may not always support institutions’ student retention and completion goals.

Because community colleges are teaching institutions, faculty are central to successful retention strategies employed there. Faculty are in a position to influence students as they move from admission to graduation. As members of the campus community who come into regular, ongoing contact with students, faculty are in a position to identify students at risk for departure and connect those students with resources that may encourage them to persist (Tinto, 2006). Furthermore, faculty behaviors and attitudes have been identified as factors that influence
student retention (Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005). Faculty’s consistent inclusion in student retention theories reflects the importance of their role.

**Theories of Student Retention**

Undergraduate student retention is a relatively new field. In 1938, John McNeely conducted a groundbreaking study that examined student departure data from 60 colleges. McNeely sought commonalities among departing students’ demographic characteristics, social engagement, and reasons for departure. Published by the U.S. Department of Interior and the Office of Education, McNeely’s study formed the foundation for much of the student retention work done during the 1950s and 1960s. During these decades, student retention became significant as the result of two major shifts in higher education: (1) the two million veterans accessing higher education through the G.I. Bill, which prompted institutions to more closely monitor student enrollment and (2) the Civil Rights Movement, which prompted an examination of who could access higher education and who was completing college degrees (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011). Similar studies persisted through the 1960s, giving undergraduate retention its roots in enrollment management. By the 1970s, foundational models of student retention began to emerge.

**Spady Model (1971)**

In 1971, William Spady used longitudinal data from 683 first-year students in the College of the University of Chicago to test his theoretical model of student dropout. Spady’s sociological model is based on Heider’s (1946) balance theory (a motivational theory focused on attitude change), Durkheim’s (1961) suicide model, and dropout information available to him in 1971. Both Spady and Durkheim contended that individuals leave groups when their values do not align with the group’s values or when they feel unsupported by the group (Bean & Eaton,
Spady (1971) believed that “full integration into the common life of the college depends on successfully meeting the demands of both its social and academic systems” (p. 39). Spady’s (1971) model focused on the fit between the student and the institution.

Spady (1971) identified five variables that contributed to students’ integration and, as a result, influenced their decisions to leave school: academic potential, normative congruence, grade performance, intellectual development, and friendship support (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011). Spady’s (1971) study indicated that students’ ability to meet the demands of the formal academic system was the dominant factor for student retention. Spady’s (1971) model provided the basis for the development of Tinto’s (1975) Model of Institutional Departure.

**Tinto’s Model of Institutional Departure (1975)**

Student retention gained traction as a distinct field of study with the publication of Tinto’s model. Like Spady’s (1971) model, Tinto’s 1975 Model of Institutional Departure is a sociological model based on the concepts of Durkheim’s (1961) suicide model (Bean & Eaton, 2001). Because it is pervasive in the current literature and research about undergraduate student retention, Tinto’s model provides a valuable framework through which to view contemporary institutional retention efforts. Though it has seen several iterations since its publication, Tinto’s model has guided the understanding of and the research about student retention over the last forty years.

According to Tinto’s model, students who are admitted to college bring with them certain attributes: family background, skills and abilities, and prior schooling. Students also bring their intentions, goals, and commitments. Once they enter the academic environment, students encounter institutional experiences, including academic performance, interaction with faculty and staff, and extracurricular and peer group interactions. The combination of student attributes
and institutional experiences define students’ levels of academic and social integration. These forces work together to inform students’ ongoing goals and commitments, which ultimately determine whether they choose to depart from college (Tinto, 2012). Tinto’s model provided the foundation for thousands of studies, essentially launching undergraduate student retention as a widely-studied area of education (Berger & Lyon, 2005).

Since much of contemporary retention literature grows out of Tinto’s (1975) model, it is a useful lens through which to view the faculty role in student retention. Tinto (2006) found that one essential faculty contribution to retention is to provide clarity and consistency to students by matching formally expressed expectations to behavior, by guiding students through their academic programs, and by embracing their role as academic advisors. Tinto (2006) suggested that faculty, by setting and maintaining high expectations for students, are the most influential factor in determining the level of effort students put forth in college. He asserted that:

- there is good reason to believe that on average faculty do not consistently employ pedagogies, give assignments, provide feedback on assignments, and employ sufficient assessment tools (exams, classroom assessment methods, etc.) that lead students to spend more time on task. The net result is that students are placed in settings whose characteristics do not reinforce, indeed may sometimes run counter to, what the institution or faculty may say about what they expect of students. (2006, pp. 59-60)

This need for consistency indicates the central role of faculty in shaping culture and enacting the priorities institutions say they have for students.

**Bean's Model of Work Turnover to Student Attrition (1980)**

Based on a causal model adapted from employee turnover in work settings, Bean’s (1980) theory seeks to understand the causes of student attrition. Underscored by the assumption
that student attrition is analogous to turnover in the work setting, Bean explored how four variables—the dependent variable, dropout; the intervening variables, satisfaction and institutional commitment; the organizational determinants; and the background variables—influence student attrition (1980). Bean (1980) concluded that women and men leave institutions for different reasons. Although the most important indicator for dropout for both women and men was institutional commitment, beyond this first indicator, the factors varied by gender. For women, the second most important indicator was high school performance; for men, the second most important indicator was university GPA.

From his findings, Bean (1980) developed a list of the practical implications of his study. Two of his recommendations to decrease student attrition involved faculty members. Bean’s first recommendation was that faculty should be made aware that men and women leave university for different reasons. His second recommendation was that faculty “should realize that the perceived quality of the education the student is receiving is one of the most important variables for both men and women in influencing institutional commitment” (1980, p. 184). Institutional commitment (the degree of loyalty students feel toward membership at their institution) was the number one indicator of dropout for both men and women; therefore, it follows that Bean’s (1980) theory places faculty in an influential role regarding student retention.

Astin’s Theory of Involvement (1985)

Astin’s theory is based on the premise that students who are involved (those who spend time on campus, devote energy to schoolwork, participate in the school community, and interact with others on campus—are more likely to be retained than those students who are uninvolved—who neglect their studies, spend little time on campus, do not participate in the school community, and rarely interact with others on campus (Astin, 1999). Faculty fall into Astin’s
intermediate outcomes, which include academic involvement, involvement with faculty, involvement with student peers, involvement in work, and other forms of involvement (1993). Astin’s (1993) work highlighted “the critical importance to student development of frequent interaction between faculty and students” (p. 384).

Astin’s work informs much of the contemporary research about student engagement. Researchers have found that student involvement on campus has a positive correlation with academics and retention (Pike & Kuh, 2005). These findings have helped inform the types of institutional retention strategies adopted by universities and colleges. In the area of academic engagement, in particular, the work of Kuh (2008) has shaped the strategies postsecondary institutions are using to engage and retain students.

**Kuh’s High Impact Practices (2008)**

In terms of identifying pedagogy that supports student retention, the work of Kuh is pervasive in contemporary student retention literature. Kuh’s (2008) High-Impact Practices promote student engagement, success, and retention. These practices include first-year seminars and experiences; common intellectual experiences; learning communities; writing-intensive courses; collaborative assignments and projects; undergraduate research; diversity/global learning; service and community-based learning; internships; and capstone courses and projects (Kuh, 2008). Faculty are at the center of all of these strategies, whether it is in their decision to design courses to promote retention (writing-intensive; community-based learning) or in their participation in them (as instructors in learning communities or by inviting undergraduates to collaborate with them in research).
Faculty and Student Retention Theory

A common characteristic shared by all of these student retention models is that they identify faculty as influencers of student retention. Spady (1971) and Tinto (1975) identified faculty as one among many factors that influence students’ decision to depart. Bean (1980) and Astin (1985) identified the faculty role as more significant. Kuh (2008) sharpened the focus on the pedagogical strategies that faculty can use to engage and retain students. A review of student retention theories reiterates that faculty’s central role makes them valuable retention partners.

Faculty as Student Retention Partners

Faculty involvement is crucial for institutional retention strategies to succeed (Bailey et al., 2015; Braxton et al., 2013; Chaden, 2013). Umbach and Wawrzynski (2005) identified that faculty behaviors and attitudes are significantly linked to student outcomes and engagement. Moving from the position that faculty do matter to student success and retention, other authors have explored what role faculty can play as partners in institutional retention efforts (Braxton & Berger, 2000; Chaden, 2013; Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006). An emerging theme in the literature about student retention over the past ten years is that student retention does not happen by chance, and that all members of an institution must actively contribute to it (Siegel, 2011; Tinto 2006). Previously, retention was approached from a less holistic perspective. It was considered a problem belonging to the domain of student services offices, residential life departments, and remedial education courses and their supporting programs.

Siegel (2011) recommended that educational leaders think about retention as a by-product of a college’s culture rather than an end-product of specific initiatives. Siegel’s (2011) recommendations highlighted several roles that faculty can play. He emphasized the need for institutions to educate faculty through professional development efforts like common readings,
forums, and discussions. He described strategies by which faculty could support institutional efforts through the use of early alerts and interventions, the creation of learning-centered culture, and student advising. Without faculty investment, none of these efforts can effectively support the attainment of retention targets.

In recent years, faculty have participated in creating, assessing, and maintaining retention initiatives. This may be in response to the professional development experiences designed to educate faculty about their significant influence in retaining students. Data shows that effective retention initiatives must focus on enhancing student success in the classroom; achieving this may necessitate changes to curriculum and instructional design (Tinto, 2012). For example, faculty at Middle Tennessee State University attempted to increase faculty-student interactions through the use of attendance policies, early warning alerts, undergraduate research, and learning communities (McCormick & Lucas, 2014). Such efforts are typical of the type of support faculty can provide. As more of these interventions are planned and enacted, it is important to ensure that they encompass what research has demonstrated to be the best practices for faculty to support retention.

**Faculty Practices that Support Student Retention**

Much of the value that faculty can provide as retention partners stems from their classroom practices and interactions with students. Tinto (2006) stated that:

Though it is true, as we are often reminded, that student retention is everyone’s business, it is now evident that it is the business of the faculty in particular. Their involvement in institutional retention efforts is often critical to the success of those efforts. Regrettably, faculty involvement is still more limited than it should be. (p. 5)
The actions of faculty are a key factor in efforts to positively influence retention. Faculty have regular contact with students. In addition, they set expectations and assess student progress. Faculty frequently advise students in their academic disciplines. As a result, faculty are individuals on a campus who are in a position to recognize whether or not students may depart, and they are also in a position to intervene by creating a learning climate that fosters retention or by connecting students with other services on campus that can help them be successful (Braxton, et al., 2000; Tinto, 2000; Tinto, 2006).

**Classroom Practices**

Ample research has helped establish which faculty practices promote student retention. Kinzie (2005) analyzed data from two sources, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and institutional graduation rates, to identify what conditions promote student retention. Kinzie identified six conditions that matter to student success: living mission and lived educational philosophy; unshakeable focus on student learning; environments adapted for educational enrichment; clear pathways to student success; improvement-oriented ethos; and shared responsibility for educational quality and student success (2005). Within these conditions, Kinzie (2005) specifically identified faculty behaviors that support student retention: embrace undergraduates and their learning; set and maintain high expectations for student performance; clarify what students need to do to succeed; use engaging pedagogical approaches; build on students' knowledge, abilities, and talents; provide meaningful feedback; incorporate diversity into the curriculum; make time for students; hold students accountable for their share of accountability in learning. Kinzie concluded that by fostering these practices and this type of learning culture, faculty could have a direct, positive impact on student retention.
When effectively enacted, Kuh’s (2008) High-Impact Practices can become the cornerstone of a learning-centered culture, and they are effective, specifically in the community college setting. McClenney and Waiwaiolo (2005) described the comprehensive approach taken by the Community College of Denver to increase retention for students who faced significant personal and academic challenges as they pursued college educations. Specific strategies involving faculty included student success courses, learning communities, and advising and mentoring. In addition, McClenney and Waiwaiolo (2005) recommended that community colleges make pedagogy central to faculty selection and emphasize teaching practice in all stages of the hiring process.

Research investigating the effects of High Impact Practices continues to emerge. Ryan’s 2013 study examined the outcomes when faculty were involved in teaching a first-year seminar (a High Impact Practice) to their advisees at Midlands Community College. Ryan reported improved student retention when faculty members taught sections of a College Success course to their advisees. The study compared retention rates for an experimental group (in the “advisee sections”) to retention rates for a control group (students taking College Success from an instructor who was not their academic advisor). The goal of the project was to “improve students’ chances for academic success by focusing on academic advising during their first semester” (2013, p. 132). Measures of success included GPA, retention, and positive student feedback. Students in the experimental section earned a higher GPA than those in the control section and were retained at a higher rate. Ryan (2013) provided a realistic model that could be incorporated by other community colleges.

In another study of community college faculty, authors Perez, McShannon, and Hynes (2012) explored the role of faculty classroom behavior in community college student success.
Faculty in the study participated in professional development via the Gaining Retention and Achievement for Students Program (GRASP). GRASP was founded on the belief that good teaching drives academic achievement, but that faculty often do not use effective teaching strategies. This issue was compounded by the fact that faculty development regarding teaching practices tends to occur in one-day seminar style workshops. GRASP engaged faculty for one entire semester, combining observation with skill development and opportunities for practice.

To evaluate the success of the GRASP program, Perez et al. (2012) measured student achievement and enrollment one year later. The authors concluded that GRASP did have a positive impact on both faculty development and student learning. They recommended that administrators who want to see permanent change in their faculty members’ teaching behavior should invest in on-campus, ongoing initiatives like GRASP. By providing specific, employable strategies to individual community college faculty members, the GRASP program created a ripple effect. As Perez et al. (2012) asserted, “a single faculty member can increase the retention and achievement of hundreds of students over the course of their teaching career” (p. 385). Research such as this indicates that thoughtful attention to classroom practices at community colleges can have a powerful impact.

**Faculty-Student Interaction**

Faculty-student interaction is another area of research in student retention. Increased interaction between faculty, both inside and outside of the classroom, has been shown to promote student retention. Using Tinto's 1975 Model of Institutional Departure, Lillis (2011) explored the frequency and quality of student-faculty interaction and its impact on retention. Lillis defined student-faculty interactions as contact between students and faculty members outside the formal interactions required for in-class instruction, including contact during office hours, spontaneous
contact, and contact via technology. In addition to frequency of contact, Lillis considered the
influence of faculty emotional intelligence and its impact on student-faculty interactions. Unlike
previous studies, which tended to focus only on the quantity of interactions, Lillis considered
both the quantity and quality of student-faculty interactions. Lillis’s study indicated a new
direction in which retention research is moving. His findings suggested that faculty behavior,
alone, does not fully reflect how faculty can impact student retention (Lillis, 2011).

By focusing on how students perceived those interactions, Lillis (2011) highlighted the
importance of faculty attitude and how the tenor of student-faculty interactions affected
retention. Lillis found that increased student-faculty interactions reduced students’ intention to
depart at the end of the semester. Furthermore, Lillis discerned that faculty emotional
intelligence competencies such as influence, change catalyst, inspirational leadership, empathy,
and conflict management were positively correlated with students’ intention to persist. As such,
he recommended that faculty try to cultivate these competencies when interacting with students.
Lillis concluded that student-faculty interactions and emotional intelligence are one factor that
can promote student retention, but that institutions must adopt comprehensive retention strategies
that address multiple aspects of students’ experiences.

It is clear that, through their practices and interactions with students, faculty influence
retention. While research has begun to identify the behaviors that faculty can adopt to promote
student retention, there is less research about how faculty perceive these efforts. It is easy to
inform faculty about which strategies they should use with students, but more difficult to
motivate them to engage and persist with the use of these practices. A better understanding of
faculty perception of retention strategies could provide a starting point to more effectively
engage faculty as partners.
Faculty Perception of Retention Strategies

Lillis (2011) indicated that retention-promoting strategies adopted by faculty may not necessarily be behavioral, but that faculty characteristics such as emotional intelligence may influence student attrition. He identified that the lived experiences of stakeholders could provide insight into how students arrive at their decision to depart from an institution. What about faculty’s experiences? Some researchers have included discussions of faculty experiences as part of larger studies (Gaytan, 2015; Major & Palmer, 2006) while others have made faculty perceptions the focus of their studies (Jackson, et al., 2013; Paulson, 2012). The limited number of studies conducted to pursue this line of inquiry indicates that understanding faculty perceptions is a potential area of exploration in student retention research (Bensimon, 2007).

Establishing data about faculty perceptions would help educational leaders develop policy and professional development opportunities for faculty.

Gaytan (2015) sought to identify whether students and faculty had similar perceptions and, using this data, made recommendations to help online education professionals develop strategic plans to address student retention. Through the use of faculty and student perceptions, Gaytan (2015) created seven recommendations to improve retention in online education: faculty must deliver a comparable amount of instruction in online courses as they do in face-to-face courses; faculty must provide high quality feedback that indicates how students can improve their performance; institutions should ensure that students receive transfer credit for prior work, because receiving transfer credit is a predictor of student retention; institutions must be able to provide online student support; faculty must actively intervene to help ensure students are successful in online courses; faculty must participate in professional development about teaching online; and institutions should not deliver online courses unless the previous six
recommendations are satisfied. Gaytan’s (2015) study demonstrated that qualitative data could be used to develop student retention strategies.

Focused on the use of retention-promoting pedagogies from the faculty point of view, and through the lens of a learning initiative, Major and Palmer (2006) examined the process of transforming faculty pedagogical knowledge. During a three-year grant period, the authors gathered qualitative data to investigate how faculty members’ pedagogical knowledge changed as a result of implementing problem-based learning. At the conclusion of the study, Major and Palmer (2006) found that effective teaching improvement efforts are deeply rooted in institutional culture and in the environment created for faculty members. These findings echo the work of Bailey et al. (2015) and Siegel (2011). Major and Palmer’s (2006) study provided an examination of how faculty understand their role in the institutional change.

In a study of community college faculty perception of their role in student retention, authors Jackson et al. (2013) investigated whether faculty reported a benefit from participating in learning communities, one of Kuh’s (2008) High Impact Practices. Faculty responses indicated that there were four benefits to being instructors in a learning community: greater empathy for students, more authentic relationships with students, greater engagement in the larger campus community, and increased collaboration with other faculty members (Jackson et al., 2013). The authors noted that faculty participating in learning communities might require additional resources from their institution, including specialized training, flexibility to use innovative pedagogy, financial stipends, release time, and policies that support learning community activities.

Paulson (2012) similarly explored faculty perceptions. Paulson surveyed faculty at institutions involved in the Compass project. These institutions used five of Kuh’s (2008) High
Impact Practices—first year experiences, service learning, learning communities, undergraduate research, and capstone experiences—to reach mapped student learning outcomes. Faculty responses indicated that although faculty were beginning to incorporate High Impact Practices into their pedagogy, more professional development was needed to deepen faculty knowledge about their impact on student retention. Paulson (2012) recommended that future research “investigate the role of institutional support encouraging faculty to use data, make pedagogical changes, and whether such activities are rewarded by the promotion and tenure structure” (p. 28). A stronger understanding of faculty perceptions may provide useful information for institutions implementing High Impact Practices or other faculty-centered retention strategies.

Studies such as these demonstrate that, although the literature has identified practices that support student retention, there is a paucity of research exploring faculty understanding of these techniques and their value. Conducting additional, similar studies would help identify faculty perceptions of their role in student retention. Such findings could inform the design of retention strategies, creating initiatives in which faculty would be more likely to invest.

**Engaging Faculty in Retention Initiatives**

Despite the central role faculty play in retaining students, there is limited research about what motivates faculty to become engaged in institutional retention efforts. According to Bailey et al. (2015), engaging faculty can be difficult due to the nature of the typical relationship between faculty and administration. They observed that:

At the typical college, the relationship between faculty and the administration tends to be a reactive one; when a new challenge faces the college, the administration develops a proposal to meet that challenge, and the faculty reacts to that proposal…the vast majority of the college’s students, faculty, and staff, who are not involved in any particular
governing body remain disconnected from institutional discussion and decision making…the disconnection between administration and faculty is exacerbated by faculty mistrust, which in turn is rooted in a sense that the administration does not understand the issues and challenges that students and faculty face every day. (Bailey, et al., 2015, pp. 144-145)

This “us and them” mentality is a roadblock to engaging faculty in retention efforts. Faculty may believe retention initiatives are a passing trend that will ultimately phase out (Bailey et al., 2015). The reality, however, is that in the current climate of higher education, which is characterized by tenuous funding and increasing accountability for student outcomes, institutions will have to increase student retention rates to remain viable (Bailey et al., 2015; Braxton et al., 2013; Burke, 2002; Harris & Goldrick-Rab, 2010; Immerwahr & Johnson, 2010).

O’Banion (2014) posited that without the support of faculty, retention and completion initiatives would not be successful in community colleges. He noted:

Faculty are in charge of courses, curriculum, and classrooms; in our current structure of education, these are the places where learning takes place and is measured and cobbled together to create rates of retention and completion. Unless improvements occur in courses, curriculum, and classrooms—with leadership and involvement from faculty—nothing changes. (p. 4)

O’Banion went on to explain that, despite the fact that faculty are key stakeholders who need to be engaged, some faculty have become “cynical and worn out by initiative fatigue” (O’Banion, 2014, p. 4). This leaves administrators in the difficult position of finding ways to engage faculty in lasting and meaningful ways. A review of the literature indicates that data, scholarship, and accreditation may provide starting points to engage faculty in student retention initiatives.
Engaging Faculty through Data

Emerging research recommends strategies that can invest faculty in retention initiatives. One method is the use of local (campus and system) data. Dietz-Uhler and Hurn (2013) emphasized the ways in which faculty could use learning analytics data to personalize learning for students. Learning analytics data can help faculty identify more specifically how individual students engage with course materials and at what pace they learn. Faculty can then create learning opportunities tailored to an individual student’s needs and preferences. Laird et al. (2009) explored the differences between the ways that faculty informally assess student engagement and the ways that institutional researchers formally assess student engagement. Laird et al. (2009) defined four collaborative roles that faculty members could play in assessing student engagement data: faculty can act as a source of data; faculty can be an audience for data; faculty members with expertise can participate in data analysis; and faculty can be beneficiaries of data. Findings from studies by Dietz-Uhler and Hurn (2013) and Laird et al. (2009) promoted collaborating with faculty to reach institutional strategic goals, concluding that changes that occur at an institution involving curriculum and instruction hinge on faculty participation.

Engaging Faculty through Scholarship

Scholarship may be another entry point for faculty. Bensimon, Polkinghorne, Bauman, and Vallejo (2004) recommended investing faculty through the use of the practitioner-as-researcher model. The model encourages faculty to research questions that are meaningful to them and that fall within their scope of practice. In the practitioner-as-researcher model, “the roles of the researched and researcher are reversed to some extent. That is, practitioners take the role of researchers, and researchers assume the roles of facilitators and consultants” (Bensimon et al., 2004, p. 108). This model allows faculty to own, assess, and incorporate the practices they
researched. Similarly, Braxton and Lyken-Segosebe (2015) examined community college faculty engagement in scholarship through the framework of Boyer’s (1990) domains of scholarship.

Approaching faculty through scholarship is relevant, as it is way of engaging faculty that is less likely to be perceived as “top down”. These types of techniques and others are necessary to bring faculty into partnership with institutional efforts (Bensimon et al., 2004; Boyer, 2016; Braxton & Lyken-Segosebe, 2015). Faculty are more likely to participate meaningfully in student retention strategies that are also engaging for them, so creating opportunities around those things that faculty already value, making them important, and providing institutional support increases the chances for success (Chaden, 2013).

**Engaging Faculty through Accreditation**

External forces such as accreditation may also prioritize student retention for faculty and define it as central to how faculty perceive their role. Chaden (2013) articulated:

> At most institutions, faculty are rarely asked to think about their activities in light of institutional graduation rates…While many care deeply about the success of individual students, they typically have not been asked to consider what role they might play in improving institutional graduation rates, or what institutional impact coordinated efforts might have. (p. 92)

Chaden suggested that in order for faculty to better understand their role in student retention, institutions must make it a higher priority for them.

Chaden (2013) discussed the potential to use accreditation as a lever to garner faculty commitment to institutional retention efforts. She suggested that, “any significant improvement in retention and graduation rates will require an institutional commitment in areas such as hiring and promotion practices, faculty workload, use of technology, support services, and the like”
Chaden explored changes in the area of assessment that have resulted from it becoming an accreditation priority, and used this historical argument to suggest that through accreditation, institutions—and, by extension, faculty—will prioritize and improve retention practices.

Regardless of how institutions choose to engage faculty in retention strategies—through data, scholarship, accreditation or other means—it is clear that partnering with faculty is an essential element of an institutional retention plan. Including the use of retention strategies in the classroom as part of the faculty reward structure may ultimately provide the motivation faculty require to engage in student retention. Braxton and McClendon (2001) recommended that faculty be rewarded through tenure, promotion, and salary increase for incorporating pedagogy that promotes student retention. Since there are multiple pathways for faculty to engage in student retention strategies, understanding what motivates and deters their participation might help institutions design more appealing strategies from the outset.

**Conceptual Framework**

A review of the major theories informing the last four decades of student retention research indicated that faculty have an influential role in students’ decisions to persist in or depart from college (Astin, 1985; Bean, 1980; Kuh, 2008; Spady, 1971; Tinto 1975). Therefore, much of the student retention literature related to faculty focuses on what type of behaviors faculty can employ to encourage student persistence. In fact, Bensimon’s (2007) multidisciplinary review of the literature on student success in 2006 revealed that the majority of the articles (175 out of 192) relied on quantitative methods. This indicates a gap in the literature as far as understanding the lived experiences related to student success.
Building on Astin’s (1999) emphasis on engagement, Kuh (2008) established High Impact Practices, pedagogical strategies demonstrated to increase student retention. Many institutions have adopted High Impact Practices such as learning communities, first year experiences, undergraduate research, and service learning as student retention initiatives. However, for these initiatives to succeed, institutions must engage their faculty as partners (Bailey et al., 2015; Braxton, et al., 2013; O’Banion, 2013). In this study, Kuh’s (2008) High Impact Practices were used to define the retention initiatives in which faculty are typically asked to participate. The definition of student retention strategies also included early alert/warning programs, faculty use of attendance policies, new student orientation programs, block scheduling, advising and counseling programs, and performance-based financial aid (Bailey, et al., 2015; Miao, 2012; Siegel, 2011). These strategies represent typical student retention strategies, including those employed at the site for the study.

In order to understand what motivates and deters faculty participation in student retention initiatives, Herzberg’s (1959) Motivation-Hygiene Theory and Deci and Ryan’s (2008) Self-Determination Theory were used as a framework to consider data gathered from faculty interviews. Herzberg’s (1959) motivation factors (responsibility, recognition, the work itself, achievement, and advancement) and hygiene factors (supervision, salary, work environment, organizational policies, and interpersonal relations) were used to identify the workplace factors that may affect faculty participation in institutional retention initiatives. Deci and Ryan’s (2008) theory helped explain the individual differences that may inform faculty’s views on participating in institutional retention initiatives.
Faculty Motivation to Participate in Institutional Student Retention Initiatives

To secure faculty participation in student retention initiatives, administrators and retention professionals must design strategies that are likely to engage faculty and sustain their participation. Motivation theory provides a useful framework to understand the factors that motivate and deter faculty from participating in student retention initiatives. Two motivation theories informed the conceptual framework for this study: Herzberg’s Motivation-Hygiene Theory (1959) and Deci and Ryan’s (2008) Self-Determination Theory.

Herzberg’s Motivation-Hygiene Theory (1959)

One motivation theory that provided an appropriate framework for this study was Herzberg’s Motivation-Hygiene Theory (1959), which is has roots in Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (1954). According to Maslow (1954), humans are motivated to fulfill different types of needs. These needs are often depicted graphically as a pyramid, with lower-level needs forming the base of the pyramid and higher-level needs at the top. Lower level needs include physiological needs (food, water, sleep, etc.) and safety needs (security of employment, family, health, etc.). Maslow (1954) contended these basic needs must be met for individuals to pursue the higher-level needs which include love (friendship, family, and sexual intimacy), esteem (self-esteem, confidence, achievement, the respect of others), and self-actualization (morality, creativity, problem solving, etc.). Maslow (1954) believed that individuals have a desire to reach their highest potential, self-actualization, and that this ultimately motivates human behavior. Using Maslow’s (1954) theory as a foundation, Herzberg (1959) explored motivation in the context of employment.

According to Herzberg’s theory, motivation to work is influenced by factors in the workplace. He divided these factors into two independent sets, hygiene factors and motivation
factors. Hygiene factors correspond with Maslow’s (1954) safety and physiological needs. They include job context factors, or extrinsic factors, such as supervision, salary, work environment, organizational policies, and interpersonal relations. Though these needs must be met to avoid creating dissatisfaction, Herzberg believed that increased satisfaction came from motivation factors related to Maslow’s higher-level needs of love, esteem, and self-actualization. This set of job content factors, or intrinsic factors, includes responsibility, recognition, the work itself, achievement, and advancement (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1993). Employees’ perception of hygiene and motivation factors in the workplace determines their motivation and satisfaction.

Herzberg’s (1959) Motivation-Hygiene Theory has been used to study community college faculty, most pervasively in the area of satisfaction. Cohen (1974) and Wood (1976) conducted studies using Herzberg’s (1959) theory, which supported the usefulness of the Motivation-Hygiene Theory as a sound instrument for understanding community college faculty. Their work was extended by Diener (1983) whose findings indicated, like Cohen’s, that Herzberg’s (1959) theory accurately described community college faculty’s experience with job satisfaction. Hill’s (1986-1987) large-scale study of over 1,000 Virginia community college faculty members’ job satisfaction also concluded that Herzberg’s (1959) theory is a valid measure of job satisfaction. More recently, Truell et al. (1998), Castillo and Cano (2004), and Lane et al. (2010) have all used Herzberg’s (1959) Motivation-Hygiene theory to understand the perspectives of community college faculty on their work.

**Self-Determination Theory (2008)**

The second motivational theory used to provide a framework for this study was Deci and Ryan’s (2008) Self-Determination Theory. Deci and Ryan’s (2008) macro-theory examined the
types of motivation experienced by individuals and identified that motivation type, rather than motivation amount, has the strongest influence on predicting behavior and determining psychological well-being. Deci and Ryan (2008) defined two types of motivation: autonomous motivation and controlled motivation. Autonomous motivation includes intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation that has been internalized and integrated into the sense of self. Individuals acting from autonomous motivation do so willingly with a sense of volition and choice. In contrast, controlled motivation consists only of external regulation. Individuals acting in response to controlled motivation feel compelled by external forces or coerced into behaving a particular way. These two types of motivation interact with individuals’ basic psychological needs to produce psychological well-being.

Deci and Ryan (2008) identified “a set of universal psychological needs that must be satisfied for effective functioning and psychological health” (p. 183). These three needs are competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Competence describes the degree to which individuals feel they are doing well at the activities in their lives. Autonomy is an individual’s sense of control over life choices. Relatedness comes from meaningful contact and relationships with others. Evaluating the degree to which these three needs are satisfied provides a means of understanding how individuals are impacted by autonomous and controlled motivation and helps to explain why individuals find certain factors motivating.

Two additional concepts in SDT also help explain why individuals respond differently to motivational factors: causality orientations and life goals. Deci and Ryan (2008) defined causality orientations as “general motivational orientations that refer to (a) the way people orient to the environment concerning information related to the initiation and regulation of behavior and (b) the extent to which they are self-determined in general, across situational domains”
The three causality orientations are autonomous, controlled, and impersonal. An individual’s orientation results from how well his or her basic psychological needs are met. A strong autonomous orientation is the result of ongoing satisfaction of all three needs; the controlled orientation comes from some satisfaction of the three needs; and the impersonal orientation results from a general thwarting of the three needs. Relatedly, each of the causality orientations has been linked to a state of psychological well-being: the autonomy orientation has related to positive psychological well-being; the controlled orientation has been related to diminished psychological well-being, and the impersonal orientation has been related to symptoms of psychological ill-being.

The second factor explaining individual differences in Self-Determination Theory is aspirations or life goals. Long-term goals fall into two general categories: intrinsic aspirations and extrinsic aspirations (Kasser & Ryan, 1996). Intrinsic aspirations relate to personal development; external aspirations include such things as wealth, fame, and attractiveness. An emphasis on intrinsic goals is associated with greater health, well-being, and performance (Vansteenkiste, Simons, Lens, Sheldon, & Deci, 2004). When the three basic psychological needs are met, individuals tend to develop internal aspirations; in contrast, when they are thwarted, individuals seem to develop external aspirations as substitutes.

In tandem, these theories helped provide a framework for better understanding faculty motivation to participate in institutional retention strategies. Herzberg’s (1959) Motivation-Hygiene Theory provided a lens through which to look specifically at the workplace factors that might motivate and deter faculty participation. Self-Determination Theory provided a larger scale view of motivation, taking into account how individual faculty members interact with the work environment.
Conclusion

Moving forward, community colleges will face a continually changing landscape. Retaining future students will require leaders to reflect deeply on their organizations from a cultural standpoint. Bailey et al. (2015) asserted that “to improve their outcomes on a substantial scale in an environment very different from the past, colleges must undertake a more fundamental re-thinking of their organization and culture” (p. 12). This re-thinking must begin with a clear understanding of all stakeholders’ current perceptions.

Faculty members’ consistent contact with students provides many opportunities to create a positive learning culture and to develop relationships that encourage student persistence. Tinto (2006) summed this up in his assertion that:

the actions of the faculty, especially in the classroom, are key to institutional efforts to enhance student retention. Though it is true, as we are often reminded, that student retention is everyone’s business, it is now evident that it is the business of the faculty in particular. Their involvement in institutional retention efforts is often critical to the success of those efforts. Regrettably faculty involvement is still more limited than it should be. (p. 5)

Community colleges, in particular, can no longer afford to make haphazard efforts at engaging faculty that result in limited involvement in retention strategies. Leaders need to motivate faculty to invest in initiatives that will tap their potential to positively affect student retention; however, without a richer sense of how faculty perceive their role, it will be difficult for leaders to do so. Exploring faculty perceptions of their role in student retention could provide the leverage needed to engage faculty as effective collaborators.
In summary, Chapter 2 explored the literature relevant to the study. Chapter 3 will describe the participants and setting of the study, identify the data collection and data analysis procedures for the study, present the strategies used to protect participants’ rights and explore the potential limitations of the study. Chapters 4 and 5 will present and analyze the data collected during the study.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This phenomenological case study explored how full-time community college faculty members perceive their role in student retention and what factors motivate and deter their participation in institutional retention initiatives. Student retention has become a priority in higher education, particularly in the community college system, where the focus of policymakers and leaders has turned to completion (Bailey, 2012; Braxton, et al., 2013; Kelly & Schneider, 2012). Student retention is frequently identified as “everybody’s business” on a college campus, and some researchers have found it to be particularly important business of the faculty (Chaden, 2013; Kuh, 2008; Tinto, 2000). Because faculty are in a position to influence students’ decisions about departure, there exists a significant body of research investigating what faculty behaviors and pedagogical strategies can positively impact student retention. There is less research, however, about the lived experiences of faculty members and how they perceive their role in student retention.

This qualitative study is best defined as an instrumental case study which, according to Creswell (2013), is designed “to understand a specific issue, problem, or concern” (p. 98). Stake (2005) explained that an instrumental case study is “examined mainly to provide insight into an issue” and emphasized that the case “plays a supportive role, and it facilitates our understanding of something else” (p. 445). Instrumental cases are studied in depth with a purpose of better understanding the external issue rather than the case, itself. In this instance, an instrumental case study provided a means by which to move beyond understanding faculty behavior in its relation to student retention to understanding how faculty experience their roles in student retention.
There is a paucity of literature addressing faculty’s perceptions of student retention, making it a research avenue worth exploring. Bensimon (2007) reported in a multidisciplinary review of the literature on student success conducted in 2006, that 175 out of 192 articles reviewed used quantitative methods. This indicates a gap in the literature as far as understanding the lived experiences related to student success and, by extension, student retention. Schmertzinger (2011) argued that acknowledging practitioner voices as both researchers and classroom experts was essential to improving teaching. He posited that researchers drawing on practitioner experiences “create knowledge that improves teaching and learning in their schools and makes a difference in the lives of the students and in the quality of teachers’ work. This is rewarding and empowering” (Schmertzinger, 2011, p. 12). Adding practitioner voices to the student retention conversation is one way in which this study added depth to the existing literature.

Because it relied most heavily on interviews as the method of data collection, analysis within the case was based on a phenomenological approach. Employing a phenomenological approach to data analysis was the most effective method to give faculty a voice in the student retention conversation because its “approach is to suspend all judgments about what is real…until they are founded on a more certain basis” (Creswell, 2013, p. 77). Existing research, which focuses mainly on faculty behavior, may overlook faculty perceptions of their experiences related to student retention. As a result, some retention strategies may be built on assumptions about what faculty think about student retention.

Phenomenological analysis of data gathered within the case afforded an opportunity for faculty to express themselves regarding their role in student retention, perhaps providing a clearer basis for developing institutional retention initiatives. One reason that faculty may resist participating in retention initiatives at the request of administrators is because they are being
asked to enact strategies that they either do not value or do not believe will persist (Bailey, et al., 2015; Chaden, 2013; O’Banion, 2014). Understanding faculty’s lived experiences as described in their own words might allow for the creation of retention initiatives that are more meaningful and, therefore, more apt to be engaging and long lasting.

**Setting**

The campus selected as the case for this study will be identified by the pseudonym Small Rural Community College (SRCC). SRCC is one campus of a public, seven-campus community college system. It is located in the northeastern United States, in a large agricultural county. SRCC serves about 1,100 students, the majority of whom are commuter students from the surrounding region. Students travel from as far as an hour away to access the campus. SRCC is a Title III designated institution which means that, according to Department of Education guidelines, it is an institution that has at least 50% of its degree students receiving need-based assistance under Title IV of the Higher Education Act, or has a substantial number of enrolled students receiving Pell Grants, and has low educational and general expenditures (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Geographic isolation, harsh winters, economic struggles, low aspirations, lack of family support, and lack of transportation combine to make accessing higher education a challenge for many of the students who attend the college.

SRCC is accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC). The college offers 29 certificate and associate degree programs in four areas: Arts and Sciences, Business Technology, Trade and Technical Occupations, and Nursing and Allied Health. SRCC’s programs are guided by over 250 advisory committee members. Credit-bearing programs are designed to prepare students to enter the workforce with relevant, current skill sets or to transfer to four-year institutions to continue their studies. More than 7,000 graduates are
now meeting employer needs throughout the state, the nation, and internationally. In addition to credit-bearing courses, SRCC offers professional and personal development classes through its Continuing Education division and community programming. The college strives to be an active contributor to the region by engaging local residents, businesses, and schools in education, campus activities, volunteer events, and workforce development.

SRCC is part of a statewide community college system focusing on student success and retention as part of its five-year strategic plan for 2015-2020. This state system, like many community college systems, is shifting its focus from access to retention and completion. This shift will require campuses in the system to identify and employ retention strategies that help students realize their educational goals:

Today 8,000 more students are enrolled each year in the [state system] than was true in 2003. However, that growth has been achieved on an extremely limited budget that has not allowed the colleges to put in place many of the supports necessary to help more students persist in their studies, complete a degree, and reach their educational goals. (Strategic Plan, 2015, p. 6-7).

While most community college faculty members invest in the success of individual students, not all faculty link this commitment to institutional retention strategies. Faculty must be meaningfully engaged in efforts to support the system-wide retention benchmarks, but before this can happen, there needs to be a clearer understanding of faculty members’ perception of their role in retention. The findings of this study could offer valuable insight to system leaders as they work to meet the goals and objectives outlined the strategic plan.
Participants

This study employed criterion sampling to identify participants. Criterion sampling ensured that participants had the experiences necessary to draw upon in discussing their perceptions of student retention. As described by Robinson (2014):

The rationale for employing a purposive strategy is that the researcher assumes, based on their a-priori theoretical understanding of the topic being studied, that certain categories of individuals may have a unique, different or important perspective on the phenomenon in question and their presence in the sample should be ensured. (p. 32)

The sample for this study was selected from among the 35 full-time faculty members employed at SRCC. Selected participants self-identified as having experience incorporating student retention strategies as part of their teaching practice.

Contingent faculty were excluded from the study. The rationale for interviewing full-time faculty members was that they were more likely than contingent faculty to be engaged in professional development on campus regarding student retention. Furthermore, as full-time employees, full-time faculty were more likely to have been exposed to the system and campus strategic plans and to have participated in identifying student retention goals and strategies. Full-time faculty were also more likely to have engaged in campus service that overlapped with retention initiatives, such as committee work or as part of the strategic planning process which happened during the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 academic years. Although SRCC’s contingent faculty are invited to participate in such activities, they typically do not; in contrast, full-time faculty are expected to participate and typically do. Finally, full-time faculty deliver the majority of courses and credits at SRCC. During the 2016-2017 academic year, when the study was
conducted, full-time faculty delivered 976 credits (75% of credits offered) at SRCC versus contingent faculty, who delivered 319 credits (25% of credits offered).

Faculty selected for the study must also have employed or participated in student retention strategies during their time at the college. For the purposes of the study, student retention strategies were defined as Kuh’s (2008) High Impact Practices (first-year seminars and experiences; common intellectual experiences; learning communities; writing-intensive courses; collaborative assignments and projects; undergraduate research; diversity/global learning; service and community-based learning; internships; and capstone courses and projects), participation in SRCC’s early alert program, or course design specifically intended to increase student retention (e.g. use of an attendance policy, incorporating low stakes/high feedback assignments early in the course, explicitly incorporating study skills into course content). The rationale for selecting faculty who had used student retention strategies was that they would have more knowledge and experience from which to draw interview responses.

From the sample of faculty who met these criteria, eight members volunteered and were selected for interviews. Creswell (2013) advised that a “general guideline for sample size in qualitative research is not only to study a few sites or individuals but also to collect extensive detail about each site or individual studied” (p. 157). Robinson (2014) recommended sample size should be influenced by theoretical and practical considerations. For research with an idiographic aim, such as this study, Robinson (2014) advised “a sample size that is sufficiently small for individual cases to have a locatable voice within the study” (p. 29) ranging from three to 16 participants. A sample of eight participants allowed for appropriate depth of understanding of participants’ experiences, made member-checking of transcripts manageable, and allowed for follow up interviews as needed.
In order to reach data saturation, the researcher collected rich and thick data. Fusch and Ness (2015) recommended that researchers differentiate between rich and thick data by thinking about “rich” as indicating the data’s quality and “thick” as indicating the quantity of data. Gathering data that is both rich and thick, as well as the use of triangulation, helps ensure that data saturation is reached. Mason (2010) recommended that for studies using phenomenological analysis, sample size could also help ensure saturation. Mason (2010) reported that Creswell (1998) recommended a sample size of five to 25 participants and that Morse (1994) recommended no less than six. The number of participants in this study fell within these guidelines.

**Data Collection**

Data was collected through semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with participants (See Appendix B). Merriam (2009) identified that “In all forms of qualitative research, some and occasionally all of the data are collected through interviews…The most common form of interview is the person-to-person encounter in which one person elicits information from another” (pp. 87-88). The semi-structured interview protocol as described by Merriam (2009) is more flexible than a structured interview, allowing the researcher to direct the interview by asking structured questions but respond to the situation at hand and adapt the interview in real time to best support the emerging data.

Prior to data collection, the researcher conducted two pilot tests to ensure that the semi-structured protocol and the researcher’s interview techniques were effective. According to Creswell (2013), pilot testing offers the researcher an opportunity to refine interview questions and procedures. Merriam (2009) similarly recommended the use of pilot interviews to determine whether or not interview questions are correctly ordered and will yield meaningful data.
Interviews were conducted during the Spring 2017 semester. Interviews took place in a conference room adjacent the SRCC library, a location that was more neutral than the offices of the participants or the researcher. Interviews were recorded using a LiveScribe Echo smart pen and the Voice Record Pro application for iPhone 5. The LiveScribe pen was used to capture the researcher’s notes about participants’ body language and paralanguage. The Voice Record Pro application was used to generate MP3 files for transcription. Files were transcribed by the transcription service NoNotes and provided to participants within four days of their interview for member-checking. All data was saved in password protected files and stored on the researcher’s laptop.

To ensure accuracy, transcripts were reviewed by the researcher and member-checked by participants. Merriam (2009) recommended member-checking as a means to ensure internal validity and promote credibility in qualitative research. Participants received their interview transcript in an editable Microsoft Word document via email. They reviewed the transcripts for accuracy and to confirm that they were comfortable with all of the statements being included in data analysis. This process both increased the credibility of the data and ensured that participant rights were not violated during the course of the study.

**Data Analysis**

The process for data analysis was based on Moustakas’ (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen (SCK) method of analysis of phenomenological data. Prior to working with interview data, the SCK method requires the researcher to obtain a full description of his or her own experience with the phenomenon being studied. Moustakas (1994) identified this practice as *Epouche* and described it as:
a preparation for deriving new knowledge but also as an experience in itself, a process of setting aside predilections, prejudices, predispositions, and allowing things, events, and people to enter anew into consciousness, and to look and see them again, as if for the first time. (p. 85)

_Epocha_ is a type of bracketing. Chan, Fung, and Chien (2013) described bracketing as an essential first step in phenomenological research because: “Our foreknowledge and suppositions limit our understanding of the participants’ perspectives because we already know a great deal about the phenomenon. This could inevitably introduce bias into the research” (p. 3). Engaging in _Epocha_ prior to data analysis increased the validity of the study.

According to Moustakas (1994), once the researcher has created a transcript of his or her experiences with the phenomenon, it should be analyzed using the following steps. Moustakas (1994) defined these steps as a modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of analysis of phenomenological data: consider each statement's significance; identify which statements are relevant; list non-repetitive, non-overlapping statements (the meaning units); cluster the meaning units into larger themes; and use the themes to create a description of the texture and structure of the experience of the phenomenon. This process was repeated for each participant’s interview transcript as it was collected. During the coding process, _in vivo_ codes were used to capture participants’ experiences in their own words (Creswell, 2013). Using _in vivo_ codes helped to ensure that participants’ own words were used during data analysis, capturing the essence of their experiences with student retention and emphasizing the voices of practitioners in the study.

**Participant Rights**

Participant rights were protected in several ways. Participation in the study was voluntary, and participants were informed about the nature of the study and the types of data that
would be gathered before signing consent documents. In addition, participants were made aware that they could opt out of the study at any time. Before the data was analyzed, participants reviewed and approved their interview transcripts, ensuring that they had time to reflect on what they shared and the opportunity to strike comments from the transcript if they felt uncomfortable with anything they said during the interview process.

To help ensure the confidentiality of the study, all materials were de-identified. The site and the participants were assigned pseudonyms. Once participants completed member-checking, only pseudonyms were used to identify transcripts. Interview transcripts and files were saved using pseudonyms and stored in a password protected file. Audio files were destroyed once the data analysis was completed.

**Potential Limitations**

The researcher’s role as a full-time faculty member at the study site introduced potential bias to the study. Furthermore, the researcher had conducted previous student retention research at the site and was a member of the college’s Retention Committee during the time of the study. To minimize bias, bracketing was used prior to data collection. In accordance with Moustakas’ (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of analysis of phenomenological data, bracketing was achieved through *Epoche*, as described in the previous section. In addition, participants member-checked their transcripts to help ensure the researcher understood interview material accurately.

Another potential limitation was the fact that the study topic overlapped with goals identified in strategic planning for the campus and the system. This could be identified as a conflict of interest for the researcher, since there could have been a vested interest in producing positive results. Participants may have assumed that findings would be used in a manner
associated with these plans and tailored their responses accordingly or omitted ideas from their responses as a result.

The researcher’s role also posed potential benefits to the study, because the researcher was familiar with the institutional context of the study and had prior knowledge of the campus’s retention efforts and outcomes. A second mitigating factor was that the researcher was conducting interviews with colleagues rather than superiors or supervisees. This helped to alleviate potential power dynamic issues.

In summary, Chapter 3 explained the methodology for the study, described the participants and setting of the study, identified the data collection and data analysis procedures for the study, presented the strategies used to protect participants’ rights and explored the potential limitations of the study. Chapters 4 and 5 will present and analyze the data collected during the study.
CHAPTER 4
RESULTS

This phenomenological case study sought to understand community college faculty perceptions of their role in student retention and to identify what motivates and deters their participation in institutional retention efforts. Eight full-time community college faculty members were interviewed in order to learn about their lived experiences with, perceptions of, and motivation to participate in practices that support student retention. The participants, who self-identified as using the retention strategies included in the scope of the study, were recruited from one campus of a community college that is part of a public, statewide, seven-campus system. During the period of the study, the system was enacting a strategic plan with goals focusing on student success and retention.

Chapter 4 presents themes that emerged in response to the three central questions that guided the study:

- How do full-time community college faculty members perceive and describe their role in student retention?
- What experiences do faculty describe as motivating their participation in institutional retention initiatives?
- What experiences do faculty describe as deterring their participation in institutional retention initiatives?

Four themes emerged during data analysis: (1) faculty perceive relationships as central to student retention; (2) student retention is complex and is influenced by multiple factors, some of which cannot be addressed by the institution; (3) faculty’s ability to retain students is impacted by institutional practices and climate; and (4) faculty describe motivation to retain students as being
Participants

In January 2017, all 35 full-time faculty members at SRCC were invited to volunteer for the study. Department chairs extended invitations on behalf of the researcher via institutional e-mail. The eight participants who volunteered met the two criteria for the study: full-time employment status at SRCC and self-reported use of student retention practices as defined by the study. The participants, referred to by pseudonyms to protect confidentiality, represent three of the four departments at the college and offer diverse educational and professional backgrounds. The following section presents a composite description of the participants’ characteristics and an individual summary of each participant’s beliefs about student retention. Demographic information has been separated from descriptions about participants’ beliefs in order to provide additional confidentiality.

Tenure

The participants’ individual full-time tenures ranged from one to 27 years. The average length of participants’ full-time tenure was 11.5 years. Half of the participants worked as adjuncts at SRCC prior to being employed full time. Individual adjunct tenures ranged from one to three years.

Educational Background

All of the participants in the study held Bachelor’s degrees. Seven of the eight participants held Master’s degrees. Six of these Master’s degrees were in the faculty member’s discipline, and one was in higher education. In addition, three of the participants held professional licenses in their field.
Experience

Half of the participants in the study had professional experience in fields outside of education. Three participants had former careers in the programs that they were teaching in, and the fourth worked in a role parallel to her current discipline. Two of the participants emphasized the link between their professional careers and current teaching strategies, and a third discussed how professional expectations informed choices linked to program curriculum and design.

Seven of the participants had additional experience in education outside of SRCC. Three of the participants held full-time positions as teachers at other institutions and one held a professional role at another institution. Six of the participants held administrative roles in education at some point during their careers, with positions including program coordinator, principal, and department chair.

Professional Development

All of the participants reported that they had participated in professional development about student retention. The majority stated their professional development had occurred through SRCC, though none identified a specific event, workshop, or session geared toward student retention. Several participants discussed reading journals and books, attending conferences, and listening to podcasts that addressed student retention. Two participants described student retention information they had received during their Master’s programs.

Beliefs about Student Retention

Each participant expressed his or her beliefs about student retention during the interview sessions. All of the faculty members’ perspectives about student retention informed their teaching practice and beliefs. The following is a brief description of the main ideas expressed by
each participant during his or her interview. This information is separate from demographic information in an effort to increase participant confidentiality.

**Andy.** Andy personifies the term “lifelong learner,” and the way he discusses his students and his teaching practice reflects this attitude. Andy’s love of learning and teaching, as well as his passion for his subject and his students, were the predominant themes of his interview. He cares about the success of his students, both during their time at the college and beyond, as they move into their professional careers after graduation. Andy described building relationships with his students beyond the classroom and emphasized that advising and personal attention were central to student retention.

**Annie.** Annie has worked in education for her entire career. She views student retention through the lens of the individual student. Perhaps because of her experience in public education, Annie strongly believes that each of her students is unique in his or her potential as well as in the supports they require to be successful. Annie’s discussion of her students demonstrates how well she knows each one and how thoughtfully she approaches her teaching practice. Annie’s responses indicated that she is flexible in her practice, continually adapting to meet the needs of her students.

**Carrie.** Carrie has developed a holistic view of her students and emphasized the many responsibilities they must juggle as they pursue their educational goals. Carrie has a clearly defined view of how the faculty role supports students. She emphasized the importance of boundaries and connecting students with the services on campus that most appropriately meet their needs. Carrie highlighted the community nature of the campus and explained how she brings this community-minded attitude to her classroom, encouraging relationship building among students.
**Jack.** Jack emphasized the significance of faculty-student relationships during his interview. He stressed that the best student retention practices begin with relationships. Jack’s thoughtful efforts on behalf of his students demonstrate his respect for their educational pursuits as well as his concern for their success. He described how he continually redesigns his courses, incorporates student feedback, and consciously builds relationships with students in and out of class. Jack approaches his teaching practice as a service to his students.

**Paul.** Paul was the most community-minded of the participants. The way he described his approach to his students demonstrates his concern for them on multiple levels – their experience in his classroom, their ability to connect the many pieces of their education into a meaningful whole, their understanding of the larger goal of their education (completion, transfer, and employment), and their role in the larger community. He described his classroom as a community of equal and active participants.

**Susan.** Susan emphasized the importance of student ownership in retention. She articulated clearly defined beliefs about the role of the instructor, the role of the institution, and the role of the student in retention. Susan is keenly aware of the influence of student cohorts and the value of the faculty-student relationship. She described the importance of advising, faculty guidance, well-defined pathways, and providing clear expectations to students as means of helping them persist.

**Tricia.** Tricia closely associates the success of the students in her program with their ability to work in their field after graduation. She described the way that she and her colleagues shape their courses and program curriculum in a way that helps students develop these professional characteristics. She emphasized the importance of faculty’s sense of ownership in their department and a team approach to student retention, rarely discussing it as an individual
effort. Tricia emphasized how giving the students the tools they need to be successful is the key to retaining them.

**Wendy.** Wendy has developed a deep understanding of student retention through extensive professional development. She described how she uses proven strategies in her teaching. She identified the factors that influence student persistence and explained how she approaches her students as individuals, responding to them in ways that help mitigate those factors. Wendy emphasized advising and the role that counseling services can play in retaining students. She stated that feels connected to her students. Her comments demonstrated that she focuses a good deal of time and effort on supporting student success.

**Analysis Method**

For data analysis, the researcher employed Moustakas’s (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of analysis of phenomenological data. Prior to beginning interviews, the researcher engaged in Epoche by creating a written transcript of her own responses to the interview questions. This practice, in addition to writing memos throughout the coding and data analysis process, helped promote objectivity throughout the data collection, coding, and data analysis phases of the study.

Data were collected during the Spring 2017 semester. Face-to-face interviews lasting between 40 and 80 minutes were conducted in a conference room on the SRCC campus and documented using digital recording. The digital recording application Voice Record Pro was used to capture audio. In addition, a LiveScribe Echo smartpen was used to create a back-up audio file as well as capture the researcher’s impressions of participants’ body language and paralanguage. The professional transcription service NoNotes created transcripts of the interviews from digital audio files.
Via e-mail, participants received electronic copies of their transcripts in the form of editable Microsoft Word documents three to four days after their interviews. Participants reviewed their transcripts for accuracy and changed, deleted, or made additions to their transcripts, ensuring their transcripts fully reflected their experiences of student retention and that they were comfortable with the content of their interviews. Participants spent between two days and three weeks reviewing and amending their transcripts.

Member-checked transcripts were analyzed as the researcher received them. The researcher reviewed transcripts and considered each statement’s significance; identified which statements were relevant; listed non-repetitive, non-overlapping statements; clustered the meaning units into larger themes; and used the themes to create a description of the experience of the phenomenon. This process was repeated for each interview transcript.

The researcher read and listened to each transcript several times prior to beginning coding. NVivo 11 Pro for Windows, a qualitative data analysis software program, was used to code the transcripts and explore the data. Transcripts were formatted in Microsoft Word and imported into NVivo as they were approved by study participants and returned to the researcher. Open coding was used to create nodes (patterns and ideas that emerged from the transcripts). The nodes represented the non-repetitive, nonoverlapping statements identified during open coding. The first round of coding resulted in 42 nodes, displayed in Figure 1.
During the second round of coding, the researcher grouped related nodes into six categories, shown in Figure 2. These categories contained nodes that shared related content. They served as a means of organizing similar data and making connections among nodes.
The six categories of nodes formed the basis for identifying themes in the data. The researcher ran word frequency queries and code queries in NVivo to explore the four themes in
the data. Table 1 displays the themes and sub-themes identified during data analysis. The remainder of Chapter 4 is a presentation of results by theme.

Table 1

*Community College Faculty Perceptions of Student Retention: Themes and Subthemes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationships retain students</td>
<td>Faculty define their role in student retention as important and believe they help retain students by forming relationships with them</td>
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Presentation of Results

Theme 1: Relationships Retain Students

The most consistent theme expressed by faculty in the study was that developing relationships with students was the most important thing they could do to support retention. Faculty defined their role in student retention as a significant contributor to students’ persistence and described their role as grounded in relationships with students. Faculty described their relationships with students both in and out of the classroom as important. Building on this idea, faculty identified retention strategies that promote relationships, such as advising and learning communities, as being the most effective. In addition, faculty recognized that students’ peer relationships were a powerful force for retention. Of all of the themes in the study, that of relationships received the greatest amount of emphasis, and it often overlapped with the other three themes of the study.

Faculty’s role in student retention and the faculty-student relationship. In order to appreciate the faculty perspective, it essential to understand how faculty define and understand their role in student retention. All faculty participants described student retention as keeping students enrolled in college and progressing toward completion. Carrie explained that, “I think student retention is the college’s ability to keep…mission-appropriate students on campus and actively engaged in their classes.” Paul’s definition was slightly broader: “I would define student retention as making sure that students are able to achieve their goals and to make sure that they stay on the correct path.” Faculty members commonly cited completion as part of their definition of student retention. Paul continued to explain that his definition of the “correct path” included “allowing them [students] to make it to the workplace or also to be able to transfer to another
institution,” and Susan said that student retention meant, “keeping students here and having them successfully complete their degree program.”

When asked to describe the faculty role in student retention, all eight participants acknowledged that faculty are an essential component. Jack explained the faculty role as “probably the most important role. You're on the front line with the student.” Susan echoed these comments, stating, “I really think that faculty members should be the frontline defense against losing students.” Andy explained “retaining the student–it’s the biggest thing the teacher does” and went on to say that, “I think my relationship to the student is a more dependable avenue for retention, simply because they may relate to my efforts on their behalf.”

Faculty unanimously expressed need to build relationships with students in order to help them persist. Participants described these efforts as occurring both in and out of class, through encouragement and support of students. Jack’s comment summed up the significance of the faculty-student relationship:

I think for me the starting point for teaching and learning is the relationship. I’ve got to like my students and want to teach them. I’ve got to have a relationship with them so that when they struggle or get frustrated, they don’t disappear.

Wendy echoed these same sentiments in her comment that, “I feel like I'm really connected with a lot of my students, and I think they feel really connected to me.” Participants frequently described forming relationships with students through interactions in the classroom, particularly by encouraging their students.

Tricia described how encouraging students to experience success in the classroom could help them to persist in their program. She explained that faculty encouragement could come in the form of clearly expressing course expectations and:
helping the student meet those expectations. And it’s beyond the students’ expectations that they could even do that, and once they finish that course, they realize they were successful but yet they had a lot of structuring guidance. And it kind of gave them some success, and maybe that is encouraging them to continue on.

Carrie identified feedback through coursework and assignments as a means of providing encouragement to students in her classes:

I think providing timely feedback so students know how they’re doing in a course and feedback that’s encouraging, you know, reasonably encouraging, not you can get an A on this when that’s not necessarily true, but encouraging a student to keep coming in and to keep trying to guide them towards the appropriate services when necessary.

Participants most often cited the classroom as the venue for building relationships with students, although some also discussed making connections with students outside of class.

Faculty expressed that interacting with students outside of class allowed them to develop deeper relationships, which they perceived as beneficial to retention. Jack described experiences outside of class as a way to connect with students on a more personal level:

I think the activities that we do outside of class, taking them to climb the mountain or in the past I’ve if there’s an appropriate movie…I’ll take them and as a group we’ll watch it once it’s available. Outside of class things I think help to build camaraderie and relationships. I think if students get invested with each other and with the faculty member, they’re going to persist, kind of like a support there to hold you up.

Andy uses advising time as a way to deepen his relationships with students outside of class. He described how he gets to know his advisees during regular meetings throughout the semester:
I ask how your money situation is, how you’re getting along in your room? Are you alone in your room? You got an apartment? Financially? How’s your car working? … The first year students, I’m interested in their background.

Faculty described how developing relationships with students beyond the classroom was a way they could use their role to increase retention.

Several participants also cited respect for their students as being key to having good relationships. Faculty described how negative behavior toward students could damage the faculty-student relationship, perhaps to the extent that a student would depart. Andy described his approach when students are struggling in his courses:

You’ve got to deal with that student because in some ways the student is trying and you just don’t want to cut them off and say, “Hey you didn’t do the homework. You know, why don’t you get on the ball? How come you didn’t – well, do it next time.” Work with him a little better.

Carrie shared a similar sentiment:

I think a bad classroom experience can convince a student to leave. I think that’s definitely a reality. So, I think keeping faculty aware of the fact that these are human beings we’re dealing with…at the end of the day that missed assignment isn't the end of the world…there needs to be a standard, but I can see in certain situations where a student might decide to leave over a class issue.

Jack also felt that a negative classroom experience could break down the faculty-student relationship and result in departure. He described the danger of a faculty “response of, ‘I told you this is what it was. You should’ve paid attention. You ought to know this anyway.’ Bad attitude or critical attitude or dismissive” can result in a student feeling like “If that’s the way you feel,
that I should know it, then why should I struggle along in this class? Maybe I can’t do it. I’m getting out.” Faculty participants were aware of the impact their behavior had on students and, therefore, made an effort to interact positively and respectfully with students.

**Retention strategies that promote relationships are effective.** The value that faculty participants placed on student relationships is reflected in the retention strategies they identified as being the most effective. The strategies most often cited as being effective were advising, attendance policies, and learning communities. Of these three strategies, faculty participants identified advising as having the most significant impact on student retention. Carrie described the value of the advisor/advisee relationship:

There’s a natural relationship when you’re advising a student. It allows you to get to know that student and it gives the student a feeling that there’s an adult or someone on campus that actually cares about them. And I think that model, that sort of feeling like you belong, feeling like someone is looking out for you, might be enough to keep you somewhere.

Susan expressed that advising was so significant that ideally it would take place on a weekly basis:

In a perfect world, we would schedule weekly meetings with our advisors and our advisees. They would come to that meeting and we would sit down and talk about their challenges, their successes, and just their general idea of college.

Jack similarly voiced the importance of advising students and its significance in building meaningful relationships:

It [relationship building] comes in with the advising. That’s a big part of the relationship building. I think a faculty member needs to have an idea what [a student’s] program is,
where it’s headed. I always like the phrase I picked out of that book last month, guided pathway. Here’s where you want to go; I’m going to guide you along the way.

Participants viewed advising as a natural extension of the faculty-student relationship and a means of building deeper connections with students in a relevant, appropriate way.

The use of attendance policies was the second most commonly cited method of helping students persist in courses. Susan stated, “One of the biggest reasons why we do not retain students is because of lack of attendance…The ones who don't succeed usually are the ones who just don't come to class.” Annie described her attendance policy as a mechanism to initiate communication with students:

Come or don’t come, but when you miss the second class, I'm going to email you and we're going to talk. We're going to have a few minutes and I'm kind of pushy about it. I go to class and say so and so, can I talk to you just for a minute out here in the hall?

Hey, is everything okay? What's going on?

Paul explained using attendance as a way to keep track of students because faculty “can make sure we know which students are kind of falling through the cracks and making sure that we can catch it before they end up just disappearing.” Faculty generally viewed attendance as a tool to encourage communication and support the faculty-student relationship.

Several participants also cited learning communities as having a positive impact on retention. In their interviews, faculty referred both to formally organized learning communities and to the student cohorts that naturally occurred in major programs. When asked which retention strategy he believed to be most effective, Jack stated:

I’ll say learning communities…I think if a student is willing to work that’s the way because you’re always going to have students who have outside problems or aren’t fully
invested in going to college, you're going to lose those, there’s nothing you can do about it. But the ones who want to go to college and want to transfer, that learning community… I think is perfect.

Wendy, who also teaches in a learning community, stated that they are effective because “peers are the best retention tool that we have, to be perfectly honest with you.” Paul also expressed this notion in his description of the informal cohorts that develop among students in the same program of study:

I’ve actually found that the students who are part of a learning community like the trade students, when they do come into my classroom, I think that they’re kind of better prepared in the sense that have other people that they’re sharing the experience with and…they have more support there for them to succeed.

Susan described the natural cohorts that exist within some programs of study at the college:

Students are in class six hours a day, sometimes together for twice a week. So those are, that's the kind of block scheduling and learning community that just naturally exists…and I think that is a big help for retention and I think if we looked at the numbers across the board, that the retention numbers in that department would probably be some of the best retention numbers on campus. And it's because of that learning community.

The perceived benefits of learning communities overlapped with faculty’s belief that students’ peer relationships positively affect retention.

Supportive peer relationships. There was general agreement among faculty participants that students’ peer relationships were an important component of student retention. Andy described using collaborative projects with his first-year students to develop those peer relationships and to create “that cohesiveness that I want to see, and in that freshman year,
they’re together. The students who are better are helping the students who are poor. I don’t have to say anything.” Susan also identified the benefit of peer support:

It [student cohorts] is just the way of life here, and I think that has a lot to do with the retention because of the camaraderie that gets developed among that group of students when they are together, and everybody kind of wants to help everybody else succeed.

Wendy explained how peer relationships could be more compelling than faculty or staff relationships for students:

I mean, it's one thing for faculty to reach out. It's one thing for the counseling center to reach out. But it's another thing for somebody that you're in a class with to call you and say, “Where are you? I miss you. Do you need a ride? What's going on?”

Jack echoed this in his description of a group of students with whom he works:

But with this group, it’s the support and it goes on in class as well as outside the class. I come to class, they're all there early just sitting around talking…they had the camaraderie thing going. Which helps them have a reason for coming here in addition to studying.

Across all of these comments about relationships, it is clear that faculty who participated in the study view them as the cornerstone for student retention, regardless of other strategies or institutional initiatives that might be in place. The value that faculty place on relationships is evident throughout the other themes that emerged from the study, as well, indicating it is of primary significance to faculty.

**Theme 2: Not All Student Retention Challenges Can Be Addressed by the Institution**

Faculty participants in the study described student retention as being complex and influenced by multiple factors. Although they acknowledged the significance of their own role in student retention, participants were also aware of other factors that influence student departure.
The most commonly discussed retention challenges included environmental factors influencing the campus, the life circumstances of some of the students enrolled at the college, and the lack of preparedness of some students admitted to the college. Faculty participants recognized that some retention challenges are beyond the institution’s ability to address; as a result, some students cannot be retained.

**Environmental factors.** SRCC is a small campus located in a rural area, and faculty perceived environmental factors as presenting significant student retention challenges for the campus. Faculty stated that the pool of potential applicants to draw from is dwindling in the area where this campus is located. This impacts student retention, as the college is competing not only with other institutions, but also with the economic necessities of the region when it comes to admitting and retaining students. Paul expressed the link between environmental factors and retention when he explained:

> I think a lot of times in a state like [State Name] where there’s a lot of the brain drain, where people end up leaving, I think a lot of times the people with the best GPAs and everything just coming out of high school, they’re going to leave the state or at least going downstate, so that’s part of the issue, too. I think if there were more to keep students in the area, then that might be a good way to get students to be more likely to complete.

Tricia identified that due to the rural nature of the county where the campus is located, students’ motivation to attend college might be driven by finances. She explained:

> I don’t know, sometimes I think it’s [dwindling enrollment at the campus] just in terms of our low census in [our] County. Or if people are pushed to go – sure there are initiatives
out there for people who probably weren't planning to go to college to be pushed to go to college.

These environmental factors were also identified as other faculty participants as complicating retention for the campus.

**Life circumstances.** All faculty participants acknowledged that some students are beyond the ability of the institution to retain due to their life circumstances. These factors included students’ financial situations, their families’ needs, or obstacles such as transportation. Faculty frequently described these factors as “other priorities,” and most participants acknowledged that these legitimate student needs might sometimes be more important than attending college. When asked to describe why she felt students departed from the college, Carrie stated:

> It seems to me like a lot of the students who disappear from my classes have a lot of other responsibilities. They're here, they're working full-time which I can't imagine with school full-time, and most of those students who are working full-time are doing it because they have kids at home.

Jack expressed the competing priority of financial stability and college attendance this way:

> There’s life circumstances. We live in a rural poor area of the country. I always thought…that the trouble we had in the trades would be to get one year under their belt giving about them enough knowledge get a job and they disappear.

Wendy identified finances as the most significant obstacle for students in terms of retention:

> A lot of our students as you well know, I mean, are working two and three jobs and trying to come to school and just have a lot going on, they’re parents, they’re, grandparents raising their grandkids…I think finances is a huge, huge piece.
Faculty went on to express the connection between financial obstacles and having families to support as being a contributor to student departure.

Carrie in particular empathized with students struggling to balance the demands of family and school. She described: “You see moms trucking little kids around and trying to work and do everything else, and I can’t help with this. I can’t imagine trucking my three-year-old around here or trying to go to classes or meet with a professor.” She went on to say:

I’ve often wondered a little bit about just to sort of globally are there things we could do here that would make it easier particularly for single moms to be successful because the ones that I’ve noticed struggling the most in my classes, their kids are sick or they don’t have daycare or they don’t have the resources to get themselves here every time.

Carrie was not the only faculty to identify the difficulty faced by students regarding family demands. Paul also labeled this as a significant departure factor: “I have sometimes students who just can’t afford to go to school full-time while working full-time, or students end up having a child and that becomes reason why they end up leaving and not coming back.” Students sometimes choose financial stability and their families’ needs when these priorities conflict with their education.

**Lack of preparedness.** Faculty felt there were also students who were difficult to retain because of lack of preparedness for college. Faculty viewed these students as not ready for college in some aspect, whether it be unrealistic expectations, lack of commitment to their field of study, or academic or emotional under-preparedness. Carrie explained that first year students sometimes have unrealistic expectations of what college will require. She stated that the departure of first year students could result from:
students who get here and this is their first college experience and they’re not ready for it yet. I see that a lot in my own classes, especially the sort of entry level classes…there’s a little bit of dissonance between what they expect our expectations are going to be and the fact that yes, this is actually college, and they need to do the work.

Paul also discussed the expectations that students may bring with them from high school:

Just coming in and it was very obvious right from the beginning that they assumed that they could show up and if they attended every class then they…would be able to be pushed forward. And I think that that’s something where it’s difficult to break those habits especially if they’re assuming that it’s going to follow the same format that it did for them previously.

Annie described students who lack an understanding of the commitment required to be successful in college:

that it's not the hour you’re sitting in class. It's all the rest of it too and how that impacts how much they think they can work…when you’re 18 you think you’re not going to get tired or you’re not going to get sick…and then it happens and they kind of lose.

Mismatched or unrealistic expectations can create obstacles for students which may result in departure. If students enroll in college believing that it simply an extended version of their high school experience or that they can succeed without committing time out of class to their studies, the struggles they experience may lead to departure.

Some students who enter the college lack clear career or educational goals. Annie stated: “I have some that come because they didn’t have anything else to do, because they were waiting for their boyfriend to finish his degree, because mama said to come.” Tricia described these students as “not really bought and sold into with the other direction that they are going.” Carrie
echoed these comments in her statement that, “I think the bigger retention issue may have more
to do with entering into a program that they suddenly discover is not for them.” Faculty
expressed that students who lack direction are more challenging to retain.

Faculty also perceived academically underprepared and emotionally underprepared
students as difficult to retain. Paul stated:

I think that their academic preparedness might be part of it too because I’ve had students
coming in saying, “I’ve never written an essay before,” or, “I’ve never had any research
project where I’ve had to do any outside research.” So I think those things are part of the
reason why some of those students end up leaving.

Susan also recognized that lack of preparedness could affect a student’s ability to persist,
particularly when combined with competing priorities: “Well, for students who do not persist,
the ones that I see mostly are simply not ready to be here, not prepared academically or maybe
emotionally to be in college. They have other priorities—work, life.” In addition to lack of
academic preparation, students who are emotionally unprepared for the demands of college are
also challenging to retain.

Wendy explained the difficulty students who are emotionally unprepared for college have
persisting:

They have unhealthy coping mechanism in place. And whether it’s that they just don't
know how to deal with stress in general, or maybe they're struggling with, you know,
psychological problems, maybe it's a substance abuse issue. I think that's a player at least.

Annie expressed her belief that this issue will persist and that colleges need to be ready to
address these types of student concerns more, rather than less, in the future. She stated:
I really think that the institution needs to look at what we make available outside the classroom that other supports are available because a lot of these kids coming in, they're not going to need the support in the classroom, they're going to need it for everything else, executive functioning skills and that kind of thing.

Overall, faculty participants agreed about the types of obstacles students faced in persisting to completion and that their campus faced in retaining students.

**Theme 3: Faculty’s Ability to Retain Students Is Impacted by Institutional Practices and Culture**

Participating faculty identified that certain institutional practices supported them in retaining students. Faculty expressed that the support offered by the counseling office was an important component in their ability to help students persist, that professional development was an avenue they were comfortable using to learn retention strategies from experts and each other, and that messages from administration regarding student retention were effective ways of engaging faculty. Participants also described institutional practices that hindered their ability to work in ways that retained students. They discussed lack of time and lack of institutional support (lack of professional development, campus data, and recognition) as being the most significant of these obstacles. Faculty indicated that these obstacles did not stop them from using student retention strategies, but that support in these areas would improve their ability to do so.

**Student support and counseling services.** Seven of the eight faculty participants identified student support and counseling services as a critical component in student retention. Faculty participants expressed appreciation for the services provided by the office. Carrie stated that she felt the counseling office filled an important need for students that was outside her own role:
I definitely don’t see a faculty member in a counselor’s role. I don’t think that’s appropriate at all, and I work really hard to maintain that boundary as a professional, but I’ve been really pleased with the services [SRCC] has so that I'm not put in that position.

Paul explained the value of the counseling office’s early alert program:

Doing the four-week grade warnings, I think that’s an important way that we can let [a student support counselor] know. That way she can contact them and also just keeping up with the students who do start to have a dip in the quality of their work or stopped showing up on a regular basis. Reaching out to them, I think it’s important.

Of another counselor, Annie stated:

Because what she said to me, and I was so impressed with it, was in an email. We were talking about this student and what we had done and we could do, and she said, “And don’t forget that if you have any student that you think would benefit from talking to me…” and I'm like, “Oh I do. Here, I’ll send her your way.”

Wendy explained how she used the services of the counseling office as an extension of her own efforts to retain students:

We have an awesome counseling office here that follows up with students; we have that early warning program, that four-week warning. And I know the counseling office does a really good job with that. So if I don't reach every single student, I know somebody is reaching out to them.

The faculty participants clearly valued the role that student counselors played in retention on this campus.

Several participants viewed the counseling office and their services as a somewhat limited resource. Susan stated:
I think the counseling office tries to do a good job to help intervene with those who are at risk, but there are only a few of them and there's a lot of our students…I don't really know how successful one person can be at really having a significant impact on our retention numbers.

In reference to counseling services such as the campus’s TRIO program and the system-funded Student Navigator, Wendy said, “I think the issue is that stuff is grant-funded, and if the grant money goes away then the service goes away.” For the faculty participating in the study, the loss of funding for these services would be detrimental.

**Professional development.** Faculty expressed the potential benefits of professional development as an avenue to learn specific retention strategies as well as raise awareness about student retention on the campus. Faculty viewed diverse types of professional development as being effective, whether formal administrative day presentations or informal sharing of best practices among colleagues. Paul stated that he would be more likely to employ a retention strategy if he received professional development:

> I think if there were, let’s say, a workshop on one of the administrative days that talked about here’s how we could use capstone courses or internships and I have a better handle on it, I think I would definitely be open to it.

Susan agreed, but stressed the importance of having professional development tailored to SRCC’s student demographics and the campus:

> If they could get some education and training on how to use those strategies and provide those opportunities at a convenient time during the work day. Like we're having a professional development day or lunch and learn. Give people the tools they need. Don't just say, “Well, you really should do some common intellectual experiences for retention,
that's going to help you.” It needs to apply to the real world, to what we're doing here at the community college. It's not about some pie in the sky university idea. These are real people that we're dealing with…Let's talk about what works for us.

Building on the idea of making sure professional development was appropriate to the campus, Jack discussed the benefit of sharing of best practices among colleagues:

I kind of like the lunch and learn things that we did. It drew a certain crowd, but I think if you get a group going and people hear good things about it, it attracts others. I think it can be done departmentally. We share in our department the things that work and don’t work. And often we’ve been in a session where we’ve heard somebody talk about what they do and we’ve said, “Wow, that’s a good idea. I want to try that, too.”

Formal or informal, faculty were supportive about receiving professional development about student retention.

Several faculty identified specific areas of professional development that would be helpful to them. Wendy said, “I see advisor training as something that we really need on this campus. I think a lot of our faculty don't know really or haven't ever been trained in how to advise a student.” Susan echoed the need for professional development around advising, particularly with colleagues who are new to the campus:

I think advising has a lot to do with it, and I think as faculty members that we are given no real guidance on how to advise. I mean there is a new faculty member in our department this year and I sit with him and I'm like, “Look, I know nobody has told you how to do this, but here's some ideas.” And he's like, "Yeah, I don't really know anything about this."
Andy expressed the desire for feedback about his teaching techniques and their potential effect on students:

- Somebody mentoring. Somebody come into my classroom…I am emphasizing the need for someone to assess my own performance in the classroom for some type of evaluation.
- It is possible that my technique could be abrasive or difficult on some students and in that way cause students to leave my curriculum.

The faculty who participated in the study were open to learning new strategies through professional development and building them into their teaching practice.

Messages sent by administration. Another area where institutional practices could support faculty’s involvement in student retention is through messages sent by the administration. Five out of the eight participants in the study discussed messages about student retention they received from the President during staff meetings. Others discussed hearing student retention messages from the Academic Dean or their department chair. The faculty in this study were highly attuned to messages sent by the administration about student retention.

Tricia expressed the value of communication about student retention: “Administrators – I think just having conversations about what the future – what they are thinking the future is looking like or what they are thinking – if they project that we’re going in the right direction. We need that leadership.” Carrie stated, “I definitely feel push from the administration to keep students here.” The faculty in the study were aware of the importance of student retention to the school’s administration.

When asked to discuss the obstacles faculty felt they faced in terms of retaining students or engaging in best practices for student retention, faculty identified the most significant issues as being lack of time and lack of institutional support. In considering the hypothetical reasons
why faculty may choose not to participate in student retention practices, the most common answer was attitude.

**Lack of time.** Faculty identified lack of time as the most significant obstacle to teaching in a way that best supported student retention. Wendy summed up this feeling in her comment that, “On this campus, I mean you know as well as I do, we wear a lot of hats. We run lean, you know, a lot of us do a lot of different things.” Carrie similarly stated that, “I feel especially like this semester NEASC, and conferences and various other things…I feel like we sometimes are being pulled in a lot of different directions.” This feeling of having too little time spilled over into participants’ perceived ability to effectively serve students.

Jack described the challenge of meeting students’ individual needs within the time constraints of his position:

If you’re overloaded with classes, you’ve got all you can do to do stagger from one to the next. So if there’s a flood of students asking questions, it’s going to be more difficult for you to back up and say okay. Or even respond to them individually with their concerns.

Andy described how High Impact Practices such as service learning, although valuable, require more time than traditional lecture and take away from his curriculum:

I can't finish all of the material I would like. It took us almost seven weeks to complete a community service project and so we were still doing book work but…the outside projects take up class time which can make it hard to fulfill the syllabus' intentions.

Faculty described time as a resource that they were constantly aware of having to manage to be effective in their role.
When asked what might improve time management and increase the chances of using best retention practices, the majority of participants felt a smaller course load each semester would be ideal. Paul stated:

Maybe I’m thinking maybe in an ideal world we could have fewer classes or teaching. So a smaller class load might help to put more focus on individual students…I can definitely understand that we have limited resources and so on, but that might help.

Smaller class sizes might also present a strategy for increasing time for faculty to best support students. Andy said of his program, “You know, if I had 18 students and trying to keep an eye on all of them, keeping it together, I think each student might feel less important.” Faculty generally expressed that they felt there was a relationship between the amount of time they had to spend with individual students and how successfully those students were retained.

**Lack of institutional support.** In addition to a lack of time, faculty perceived lack of support as an obstacle to their ability to retain students. They expressed a desire for additional tangible institutional support such as campus data and professional development. Participants also identified intangible support like recognition and collegiality as important. Faculty participants expressed that lack of institutional support hindered, but did not stop, their efforts to pursue ways to retain students to the best of their ability.

Participants discussed campus data as a meaningful way to understand student retention that could be provided to a greater extent. They were interested in data from the National Center for Educational Statistics provided to them during the interview process and several commented that having campus and system level data helped provide context for their understanding of student retention. None of the faculty members interviewed for the study were aware of the campus’s institutional retention rate, although most did remember being given information from
the administration regarding either retention or completion numbers. Participants referred to the most recent professional development session during the start-up of the spring semester, which occurred four to six weeks prior to interviews. More consistent discussion and use of data might provide more context for faculty, helping them to stay focused on student retention.

Faculty participants who were department chairs were familiar with data for their own programs, but were less aware of how they compared to the institution’s retention rate or the retention rates for other departments. Department chairs discussed the value of campus data to their work. Tricia explained, “I’m the one who has to write that report if we don’t have the student retention. So, I’m more aware and probably have more buy-in to it.” She went on to recommend that all faculty become more aware of retention data in their programs because it might provide more faculty ownership and, in turn, increase motivation to retain students. Tricia stated that providing motivation in the form of program data “might be intellectually stimulating versus if you think about why you have to do it [work to retain students] because of the contract.” Tricia recommended that programs:

- publish our program completions rates right on the websites. So I think encouraging all the programs to--that will be a goal to get most–if not all program to do that [because it]… gets you to think about it, because you have to actually look at exactly what's happening.

This echoed Jack’s comment related to the system plan, which was that reporting of retention data could have a positive impact on faculty by increasing their awareness about it.

Lack of professional development about student retention and best retention practices also emerged as a potential obstacle for faculty. All participants were asked whether nor not they had ever participated in professional development around student retention. Two faculty
participants described taking courses for their Master’s programs that contained content specific to student retention. Faculty most frequently alluded to professional development provided during administrative days during semester start up, but none could identify or speak to specific training or education about student retention or retention strategies. Susan stated:

I don't think I've been asked to do anything specifically to address retention. I think it's just kind of a talk about it. Oh, a counselor will talk to him. But nobody has ever said, "Here's a strategy you should employ because it will help retention." Nobody has ever said that to me.

Other faculty echoed this sentiment, some identifying specific areas where professional development could help them increase student retention such as advising and others discussing how having training would encourage them to use a particular practice.

Two participants expressed the need for additional development around education in general. Both Andy and Annie expressed the challenges faced by community college faculty who may not be entering the institution with backgrounds in education. Andy explained that, “I think we could expand on that [professional development provided at the beginning of each semester] and make a better development for us…As a person in the trades for 40 years coming into academics, that was a big change.” Annie echoed the need for this type of broad educational training for faculty in order to help them better retain students:

There needs to be a really clear understanding of the learner and the process of learning. Everybody measures other people by their own yardstick and the first thing that professional educators really need to get is that there is a diverse way, there's lots of ways to be smart and there's lots of ways to figure out if that person knows what you think you’ve taught them. We're still very narrow on what that looks like.
The participants in the study acknowledged that additional professional development was one way the college could support their efforts to retain students. Some participants discussed lack of recognition and lack of collegiality as obstacles to their desire to participate in campus initiatives, including student retention initiatives. Several participants expressed that recognition might be a worthwhile motivator for faculty. Of faculty efforts toward student retention, Annie stated, “There's not a lot of ‘attaboy.’ There's not a lot of ‘good job.’ There’s not a lot of even, I don't know, recognition.” She went on to say that, “We’re not very connected here…There’s not a lot of collegiality and there’s not a lot of push for that.” Susan stated, “It's very easy to walk in your classroom, close the door and forget about it and kind of not come out until four o'clock. Yeah, if there was more of an opportunity to interact.” Andy would like to see professional development as a way for faculty to connect and share best practices: “I would appreciate a professional development to be a panel discussion of how you grade and what you grade.” Although the connection between these intangibles and faculty’s ability to retain students may be less direct than the tangible support they discussed, they did arise as a topic of discussion for most of the participants in the study.

**Theme 4: Faculty Describe Motivation to Retain Students as Being Primarily Intrinsic**

Faculty participants emphasized intrinsic motivation when asked why they used strategies to support student retention. Faculty most frequently connected their desire to retain students to their personal and professional values and the beliefs developed in response to their life experiences. Extrinsic sources motivation, including accreditation, financial incentives, and student feedback were also described by participants, although they were frequently labeled as secondary reasons for being motivated to retain students. When asked about the reasons that might prevent other faculty members from participating in institutional retention strategies,
participants indicated that unwillingness was derived more from internal factors than external factors.

**Intrinsic motivation.** Faculty reported being motivated to retain students because it aligned with their personal and professional values and the beliefs they developed in response to life experiences. Faculty unanimously discussed their care and concern for their students and their desire to do their jobs well as motivators to retain students. Annie expressed this as a desire to help all students succeed in her courses:

> They have just as much a right to be successful, and some of these kids coming out of high school that haven’t had that. This is their chance. This is their chance to shine who they are out there. I really want to give everybody that chance.

Carrie expressed a similar sentiment, describing how she structured her teaching approach around her students’ needs:

> I take a really student-centered approach as an instructor. I really, despite my desire to sometimes disconnect a little bit, I find myself really caring about my students and wanting them to do well, and I think it’s from that empathy and that desire to see them succeed that I will continue throwing strategies at them until either I find something or they walk away on their own.

Faculty’s belief that relationships promote retention may underscore their intrinsic motivation to help students persist. Care and concern for students is a natural extension of the relationships they have developed.

> Beyond the value they place on their relationships with students, several faculty connected their desire to retain students to larger systems of personal values. Andy expressed
this as related to religious values. For him, approaching teaching and learning was linked to a larger philosophy about life:

There’s a verse in Proverbs, the scripture, and it says a wise person makes learning a joy, that’s the translation from the Hebrew…And I take that to heart…I want it to be a joy for me. I want that to spread.

Annie related her desire to retain and support students to the larger community and its future:

I think older generations owe it to younger generations for all of the stuff that we're screwing up in the world. There needs to be a balance and here I can help. This might make things better, and you’re only going to be as strong as your people. Each individual person should be educated to the best of their ability…

Carrie also connected her efforts to the larger community, stating that working in education was “one of the few things I can do to sort of help on a larger scale.” Most participants discussed how their desire to help students persist was connected to their personal values.

Faculty also identified professional values as intrinsic motivators. Jack explained that his desire to retain students was an extension of the way he defined his role as a teacher:

That’s what you’re supposed to do as a teacher. You care about your subject, you want your students to learn. Student-teacher is a relationship like any other relationship in life…I think it’s an important part of who we are…good teaching and learning starts with a teacher who knows their subject, wants to pass it on, and is humble enough to accept the fact that this idea didn't work or it didn't work even this time, and therefore what can I do to make it work for this particular group of students.
Paul also linked his motivation to engage and retain students to his professional role, describing how part of his responsibility as an instructor is to create a positive atmosphere in his classroom that will help retain students:

I think it’s important because the students who are not likely to be retained are also the students that tend to create sort of a bad atmosphere in the classroom in general. So if you have students who aren’t engaged, that’s going to be pretty contagious and you’re going to see other students in the class that might otherwise be engaged kind of also follow the lead and maybe also sort of disengage from the class…I think that if you can bring more of those people that might otherwise be disengaged into the group of students who are more active participants then that can help to create a better class for everyone.

Tricia described her professional values toward student retention as coming from working with her colleagues: “I think seeing the passion in other people or department chair you sometimes have the attitude or that modeling.” Participants’ professional values clearly contributed to their motivation to retain students.

Several participants linked their motivation to retain students to beliefs that stemmed from their life experiences as employees, parents, and as students. Andy described the work environment of his professional career, and his motivation to translate that experience into an environment that would help retain the students in his program. He explained that as a supervisor at work: “I brought them [his employees] coffee and donuts at nine and a milkshake in the afternoon on special days… just to bring that cohesiveness together and fun. And I wanted to do that in the classroom.” Tricia also described the efforts she took to help her students acclimate to the expectations of their future professional roles, seeing it as an essential aspect of helping students persist and succeed in her program.
Annie’s experience as a parent partially informed her motivation to support and retain students. She explained:

I would really like to tell you it’s because I was so professional, but the truth is coming up through and with our own children, we had kids who didn’t think like their peer group. I kept seeing kids being marginalized… they are not pushed away, but they don’t fit anywhere. It’s the kid that somebody looks at the class picture and goes, “Who is that? Were they in our class?”

Annie’s empathy with individual students and her desire to help them persist reflects these experiences. Other participants mentioned that being a parent and participating in the education system from the outside informed their role as faculty, indicating that it allowed them to make choices that better supported students.

Four of the faculty who participated in the study described their motivation to help students came partially from their own experiences as students. Andy reflected that he was the first member of his family to attend college, a trait common among many of the students at SRCC. Wendy described her own educational background and its relation to her desire to retain students:

I just know the difference that an education makes as opposed to you know what stopping out or dropping out means for people. And you know I have personal experience with that so I’m personally, you know, motivated to do whatever I can to help students get through and succeed. And it’s hard when you’re in the middle of it and like I said, it took me 10 years to earn my Bachelor's Degree because I was working full time and a mom. So I totally identify with a lot of what our students have going on, but on the other end of it, I’m so glad that I stuck with it you know? And so, so like I said, having lived through
the struggle and then being able to appreciate what's on the other side of it I think is what really motivates me to help students or to you know, encourage them to hang in there even when things are hard.

Jack and Annie recalled experiences they had as first-year college students and how retention was presented to them. Jack described that as an undergraduate:

I had a professor who announced he wanted people to do certain things and I think it had to do with writing or whatever, and he said, “If you can’t do this, maybe you don’t belong here.” And I remember it just kind of shocked me. Not that I thought that I couldn’t do it but I thought, wow that’s pretty stark, right? If I can’t toe this mark maybe I should be doing something else. Can I toe that mark? And it was motivation but you could see the discouragement.

Annie similarly described a first-year class she took with over one hundred students in a room called “the fishbowl”: “There were 108 of us and when we finished there were 32…I remember thinking even at the time, where did they all go?” These life experiences created lasting impressions for Jack and Annie, who seem to have been motivated to use different approaches to retain their own students.

**Extrinsic motivation.** The extrinsic motivation described by faculty included financial concerns, accreditation and system initiatives, and student feedback and data. The most commonly cited extrinsic motivation for faculty was the college’s financial security. Regarding the financial consequences of failing to retain students, Jack stated, “I think the message is out there, only in the broadest sense that if we don't keep them [students], we're going to be letting people off and shutting the doors. I think everybody gets that sense.” Annie similarly stated, “These are your consumers now and you better be meeting them where they are and you’re going
to work yourself out of a job if they don’t care. If they leave then in the end that’s you losing out.” To some degree, all faculty in the study expressed the link between student retention and the financial security of the college.

Other extrinsic motivators for faculty included program accreditation and system initiatives. Tricia stated that meeting the retention percentages outlined by the accrediting body for her program was “absolutely important. We know it’s critical…if you’re going to be accredited that’s one of the things you have to do.” Carrie and Jack expressed how their work on the campus’s upcoming NEASC accreditation had raised their awareness about student retention. Jack explained:

In the strategic plan, I’ve read it a number of times and I can't remember of the top of my head about specifics, but they’ll [the system will] have a mandate. Every campus will report on such and such retention rate.

When asked if that type of awareness would help faculty better manage student retention, he stated “I think it would if we were more aware of what was in the system’s strategic plan and if it’s built into our strategic plan.” External initiatives do provide motivation for some faculty, particularly if it has a direct impact on their department or program.

Finally, student feedback and campus data were another type of external motivation that faculty described as being significant to how they work to retain students. This external motivator connects with faculty’s internal values of professionalism. Paul discussed how using data influences his choice of retention strategies:

I think just having the research to know what does work and what has worked at other institutions. I think one of the good things about being on the retention committee is that
we do find out some data that shows this is actually, by implementing these certain strategies, it’s actually improving the retention numbers.

Annie explained that she solicits data from students, which she keeps “from year to year to year. I actually make changes based on that feedback and I think that’s useful for everybody.” Jack defined the ability to understand an incorporate student feedback as essential to his role as an instructor. He stated, “It’s being able to accept they’re not getting it and trying to figure out why they’re not getting it.” These faculty use data and feedback as a way to adjust their course design and practice to better retain current and future students. The practice of using student feedback to modify their teaching practice reinforces faculty’s belief that their ability to connect with students and present content in meaningful ways is central to their role in student retention.

Unwillingness to participate. When asked why some faculty might be unwilling to participate in retention-promoting practices or campus initiatives, participants described this attitude as being influenced more by intrinsic motivation than external factors. Participants described faculty attitude as having a negative effect on retention on both the classroom level and the institutional level. Jack described some faculty as unwilling to participate because they don’t:

- want to invest the time and sometimes people get kind of cynical about what they’re doing. “Why should I do this? They’re always coming up with a new idea. This is a fad, it’ll pass…” I suppose for some it’s more work. For some it’s “I’m doing a good job what I’m doing. You’re not going to tell me what to do.”

Paul expressed a similar perception:
I think people get stuck in their ways and I think it, I’m assuming that almost all of those instructors who do that have been doing it one way for their entire career and then it’s sort of a hesitation to pick up a new way of doing things.

Susan felt that resistance could come from “some of the people who have been here quite a while and you know, just are a little jaded.”

A second commonly cited perception about faculty unwillingness to participate in retention initiatives was a lack of understanding about retention strategies. In terms of not adopting new strategies, Annie stated, “Maybe they don’t understand that there is a correlation and that this is for a reason.” Wendy shared, “I think the resistance comes from faculty who, number one, may not see that as a directive coming from administration without necessarily making the connection that this really is a retention strategy.” Tricia felt unwillingness could come from a lack of belief that a particular initiative could yield increased retention. She stated this in terms of faculty’s overall disbelief that there is a connection between their own actions and student retention: “It may be not believing that that’s they’ve got any control over that… or maybe they feel like they’re powerless or maybe they feel like it’s not their responsibility.”

When asked whether extrinsic motivators such as stipends or recognition would increase the likelihood that unwilling faculty would participate in student retention strategies, participants acknowledged that extrinsic motivation is helpful but might not be enough to change behavior. Wendy explained:

I think you have the faculty that are going to do it anyway, and I don't know maybe the people who aren't going to do it, aren't going to do it regardless of what you do whether it's incentivized or not.

When asked about external motivators including financial compensation, Jack stated:
I think that might help. It’s got to be correctly applied because you just don’t want to throw money out there because people will just become cynical and some of them may take advantage of it maybe…I wanted to say recognition but then people get cynical about that too.

Paul said, “I don’t think it is completely a money issue because I think that if people really wanted to do it for its own sake they would already be doing it.” While faculty participants generally agreed that some type of reward system might encourage faculty use of retention strategies, none seemed to indicate it would be the deciding factor for them personally, or for some of their colleagues, regarding participation.

**Summary and Conclusion**

The goal of this study was to understand community college faculty’s perceptions about student retention, how they define their role, and what motivates or deters their participation in retention initiatives. The findings indicate that faculty believe they play an important role in student retention, most notably through the relationships they create with their students. Faculty acknowledged that some student retention challenges are beyond the ability of the institution to address. They also indicated that institutional practices make a difference to faculty’s perceived ability to retain students. Finally, faculty emphasized the importance of intrinsic motivation in their desire to retain students, identifying that extrinsic motivators might encourage but would not ultimately guarantee their participation in retention initiatives. The findings suggest that faculty have moved beyond needing to be persuaded that they are important to student retention to recognizing the value of their role. They are willing to participate in student retention strategies that align with their values, particularly if they feel supported by their institution. Institutions can encourage faculty to participate by offering release time, reduced teaching loads
or smaller class size, professional development, and recognition. By creating a culture that values student retention, institutions can better engage faculty and benefit from their focus on student retention.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this phenomenological case study was to gain a better understanding of how community college faculty members defined their role in student retention and to identify the factors that motivate and deter their participation in institutional retention strategies. A phenomenological approach was used to capture the perceptions of eight full-time faculty members through semi-structured, face-to-face interviews. The faculty who participated in the study self-identified as using one or more of the following student retention practices: Kuh’s (2008) High-Impact Practices (first-year seminars and experiences; common intellectual experiences; learning communities; writing-intensive courses; collaborative assignments and projects; undergraduate research; diversity/global learning; service and community-based learning; internships; capstone courses and projects), early alert programs, attendance policies, or student advising. Participants described their role in student retention, the retention strategies they used and why they selected them, and the factors they perceived as motivating or deterring their participation in retention initiatives.

After participants had member-checked their interview transcripts, open coding in NVivo 11 Pro was used to identify 42 nodes of data. These nodes were combined into six content-related categories, from which four themes emerged: (1) faculty perceive relationships as central to student retention; (2) student retention is complex and is influenced by multiple factors, some of which cannot be addressed by the institution; (3) faculty’s ability to retain students is impacted by institutional practices and climate; and (4) faculty describe motivation to retain students as being primarily intrinsic. Each theme contains three or four sub-themes.
Chapter 5 contains a discussion of these themes in the context of the study’s three overarching questions:

- How do full-time community college faculty members perceive and describe their role in student retention?
- What experiences do faculty describe as motivating their participation in institutional retention initiatives?
- What experiences do faculty describe as deterring their participation in institutional retention initiatives?

Following an interpretation of findings from the study is a discussion of their implications. The chapter concludes with recommendations for action and suggestions to guide future research about the faculty perception of their role in student retention.

**Interpretation of Findings**

This study sought a better understanding of faculty perceptions regarding student retention. To date, the majority of research about the role of faculty in student retention has considered the topic from an external perspective—examining which faculty behaviors and practices support student retention (Braxton, et al., 2000; Kinzie, 2005; Kuh, 2008; Perez, et al., 2012; Tinto, 2000; Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005). There is less research, particularly at the community college level, about the topic from an internal perspective—how faculty, themselves, perceive their role in institutional retention efforts and what factors motivate and deter their participation in them. Bensimon (2007) reported that in a multidisciplinary review of the literature on student success in 2006, 175 out of 192 articles reviewed used quantitative methods. This indicates a gap in the literature as far as qualitative research that seeks to understand the lived experiences of faculty related to student success and, by extension, student retention. The
The purpose of this study was to address that gap, adding practitioner voices to the discourse on student retention by examining faculty experiences and perceptions about student retention.

**Faculty Perception of Their Role**

Faculty participants unanimously agreed that they played a central role in student retention. They described student retention as part of their professional obligation to the college and to their students. Faculty stated that their consistent contact with students allowed them to recognize if students might be at risk for departure, and felt it provided them with opportunities to intervene. They described being aware of students who stopped coming to class, appeared to need academic support, or seemed to be struggling to adjust. Faculty perceived that reaching out to those students, through email or face-to-face contact, was a primary aspect of their role in student retention. They also saw connecting students with campus resources, such as counseling and academic services, as part of their role.

Faculty most frequently described the efforts they made toward student retention in the context of developing relationships with students. Several participants expressed the importance of getting to know students well, both in and out of the classroom, and some participants also discussed the importance of letting students get to know them beyond their role as teachers. Most faculty described their relationships with students as valuable tools for retention, explaining that having a good relationship allowed them to communicate with students and express concern in appropriate and meaningful ways that might encourage students to persist. Participants highlighted the importance of treating students with respect and fostering relationships that did not make students feel belittled or patronized.

Faculty also felt that they could support student retention by responding in real time to their students’ needs. Faculty discussed how they used measures like student performance and
feedback to adapt their courses either during the semester or for future semesters. Faculty also expressed the value of campus and national data in informing their pedagogy. There was a sense among participants that they could better retain students by presenting content and conducting assessment in ways that encouraged students and supported their success. Relatedly, faculty described student engagement as part of their role.

Faculty felt that the most effective retention strategies were those that developed their relationships with students. Faculty discussed the value of student advising as a strategy that fell within their role and supported student retention. Faculty also described how attendance policies and learning communities helped promote student retention. These student-centered, classroom-based practices reflect the culture of the study site. SRCC is a small campus where faculty know their students as individuals, but opportunities to connect happen primarily in the classroom due to the high number of commuter students. Faculty’s support of strategies like advising, attendance, and learning communities reflects not only their effectiveness but also their practical value. Beyond their own relationships with students, faculty discussed the significance of students’ peer relationships and the ways in which learning communities and student cohorts promoted their development.

Motivation to Participate in Institutional Retention Initiatives

Faculty discussed both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation for their use of retention strategies and participation in institutional retention efforts. Intrinsic motivators included faculty’s personal and professional values and the beliefs they had developed in response to their own life experiences. Extrinsic motivators included the financial viability of the college, accreditation, and student feedback. Faculty participants expressed that, although extrinsic motivators provided incentive to participate in student retention strategies, faculty willingness to
engage in retention-promoting behavior ultimately rested with their intrinsic motivation to help students persist.

Faculty expressed that willingness to participate in student retention initiatives was primarily intrinsically motivated. When asked why they made efforts to help students persist, faculty described how supporting students aligned with their overall system of personal values. Several faculty linked their motivation to the desire to give back to the larger community, describing education as a positive force in society that could lead to lasting benefits. Faculty also explained how helping students persist was a way to help individuals attain a better quality of life (intellectually, emotionally, and financially). These statements indicated that faculty in the study believe that education is an important service to individuals and the community. By linking their actions at the college with individual students to the ongoing development of the local and national community, faculty demonstrated the degree to which they value education on both the micro and macro levels.

Professional values also motivated faculty to focus on student retention, and most participants defined retaining students as one aspect of fulfilling their commitment to the college with integrity. Participants viewed retaining students as part of their job, linking it to an underlying sense of work ethic. In fact, for some participants, helping student persist was so central to their perception of their role that they had acted beyond their job descriptions to encourage students. Faculty recalled instances of making exceptional efforts on behalf of students in order to help them persist. Faculty described simple acts such as buying students coffee at the campus store, devoting class time to teaching basic skills (reading textbooks, taking tests) outside their content area, and incorporating community building events like lunches or special workshop days into their classes. Others described volunteering to advise student clubs,
organize campus events, and chaperone student trips without compensation, simply to be able to connect with students outside of class. These faculty members put in long hours – both during and outside of work – to fulfill their perceived responsibilities as instructors.

Almost all participants also connected their motivation to retain students to beliefs developed in response to their own life experiences. Some participants described how their experience as parents influenced their attitude toward student retention. Having participated in the education system in a different role gave them a broader understanding of how to support students. Several participants also discussed their own experiences as college students, describing how their experiences with instructors affected them. Participants commonly described the departure experiences they witnessed among their college peers as creating lasting impressions. As a result, participants described wanting to create a more supportive atmosphere for their own students.

Extrinsic motivators were more powerful for some participants than others, depending on which department they taught in as well as their role. Some of the faculty participants also held roles as department chairs at the college, which increased their discussion of extrinsic motivators such as accreditation and program data. Faculty with administrative roles were more likely to think about student retention beyond their classrooms, increasing their awareness of student retention benchmarks. Faculty recognized the importance of external motivators to different extents; however, they suggested that although incentives like financial stipends or recognition might encourage participation, ultimately the faculty who were motivated to retain students would participate with or without extrinsic motivation.

Most participants reported student feedback as an external motivator, describing how they used student performance to adapt practices during the semester and student evaluations to
improve courses for future students. These faculty described ways they sought student feedback beyond the institution’s end-of-semester surveys. Participants also stated that they appreciated having data about retention strategies and how they have worked on other campuses. Similarly, faculty felt that if there were presented information about a particular strategy through professional development, they would be more likely to employ it in their practice.

**Deterrents to Participation in Institutional Retention Initiatives**

Faculty most commonly described obstacles to their participation in institutional retention initiatives as related to job structure and institutional practices and culture. It is important to remember that all participants self-reported that they chose to use student retention strategies in their pedagogy. Perhaps for this reason, participants did not view the identified obstacles as being insurmountable. Rather, they describe the obstacles as resulting in less than ideal conditions. Interviewing faculty who self-identified as being unwilling to participate in student retention initiatives would likely have yielded different findings. Perhaps those faculty would have described such obstacles as impossible to overcome, unlike the participants in the study. The obstacles identified by participants are still likely to be typical for all faculty; however, the responses they elicit from faculty is perhaps dependent on their attitude.

Faculty most frequently identified lack of time as the greatest obstacle to their use of practices that best support student retention. The base teaching load at SRCC is fifteen credits per semester, and several faculty participants were teaching or had taught overload classes. In addition to teaching, faculty described serving on committees, attending workshops and conferences, advising students, organizing campus events, and overseeing student groups as part of their regular responsibilities. Faculty described time as a scant resource and acknowledged that serving students was sometimes challenging in light of other responsibilities. Some
participants also discussed class size, stating that smaller classes resulted in personal attention for each student, which they perceived as being beneficial to retention. Finally, faculty discussed finding the balance between the amount of content they were required to cover in the curriculum and the time they could devote to High Impact Practices like community-learning projects. Participants felt that a teaching load of twelve credits per semester (which is typical of the state’s university system) would better allow them to engage in activities to increase student retention; however, they also acknowledged that a reduced teaching load was probably not practical for SRCC.

Faculty also described obstacles related to the institution’s practices and culture. All the faculty participants stated that they had participated in professional development through the college, but several expressed a desire for additional support in this area. Participants specifically identified advising as a topic for additional professional development. Others felt that professional development specifically labeled as “student retention strategies” would help. Some participants also expressed the need for professional development around education as a discipline and about pedagogy, specifically. Overall, faculty seemed open to and in some cases, were seeking additional professional development.

Campus data including institutional and program retention rates was another area identified as useful to faculty but underutilized at this campus. Faculty participants seemed generally unaware of institutional retention numbers—though, paradoxically, all described meetings where they received such data. Despite an overall awareness of student retention on the campus, participants expressed an interest in receiving more campus data. Some of the participants in the study held administrative roles as department chairs, which afforded them access to data that not all faculty had. This access seemed to increase these faculty members’
understanding of the institutional student retention situation. All faculty expressed a desire to know more about their program’s data. Lack of data could be an unidentified obstacle for faculty’s motivation to engage in student retention work at an institutional level. Although a lack of data would not prevent faculty from engaging in retention practices, having more information could be motivational. If faculty members knew how their program’s retention rate compared to others at the college could encourage them to focus on reaching retention benchmarks, particularly if their program’s retention rate was lower than others were. Identifying programs with the strongest retention rates could help faculty seek out best practices and open dialogues with their colleagues. Even classroom-level retention data could help faculty reflect on their practices and continually adjust courses for the purposes of increasing their retention.

An unexpected finding regarding obstacles was the role culture plays in faculty’s motivation to participate in campus initiatives. Several participants stated that a perceived lack of collegiality deterred them from feeling invested in the college’s larger student retention (and other institutional) efforts. Faculty described lack of recognition for their efforts, lack of connection to their colleagues, and lack of opportunities to work as a team as detrimental to campus initiatives. Some participants described feeling isolated and disconnected from other departments on campus.

This feeling was juxtaposed with several participants’ expressed desire for more sharing of best practices and opportunities to learn from one another about effective teaching strategies. Several faculty described how much they valued their colleagues’ expertise and appreciated the collegiality within their department. Participants described discussing common students at department meetings to help strategize ways to support them, and described hearing their colleagues discuss their teaching strategies and deciding to try similar ones in their own classes.
These experiences were described as meaningful, perhaps because they afforded opportunities for faculty to share their successes and struggles, and work together to address shared challenges. Although there seems to be comradery among pockets of faculty on the campus, particularly within departments, a perceived lack of overall unity among the faculty body may deter engagement and participation in campus initiatives.

Finally, faculty discussed why, hypothetically, other faculty might refuse to use practices shown to support student retention or to participate in campus retention initiatives. Faculty felt that lack of motivation came from attitude and in some cases on length of tenure. Participants perceived that faculty who were close to retirement might be less invested in campus initiatives. They felt others might resist using best practices because it involved too much work or change. Several participants expressed that faculty might be deterred due to a lack of understanding about the data supporting some practices or a general lack of belief that they could influence student retention.

**Implications**

Findings from this study indicate that faculty recognize the importance of their role in student retention, often describing themselves as being on the “front line” with students as is frequently stated in the literature (Braxton et al., 2000; Tinto, 2000; Tinto, 2006). The understanding that faculty played a significant role in student retention was validated by Umbach and Wawrzynski’s (2005) study and has been explored extensively by Tinto (2000; 2006; 2012). The findings from this study indicate that faculty accept their significance in student retention and identify it as part of their professional role. This recognition provides a starting point for partnerships between institutions and faculty; this common ground could form a strong
Faculty described their relationships with students as being central to their role in student retention. Their perceptions aligned with Kinzie’s (2005) analysis of data from two sources, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and institutional graduation rates, to identify what faculty behaviors promote student retention. Faculty participants discussed all nine of the behaviors that Kinzie (2005) identified as supporting student retention: embrace undergraduates and their learning; set and maintain high expectations for student performance; clarify what students need to do to succeed; use engaging pedagogical approaches; build on students’ knowledge, abilities, and talents; provide meaningful feedback; incorporate diversity into the curriculum; make time for students; hold students responsible for their share of accountability in learning. Community colleges emphasize teaching as being faculty’s primary responsibility; as a result, faculty may naturally embrace retention-promoting behaviors because they are part of the culture of their institution.

In addition, faculty described their pedagogical approaches, including some of Kuh’s (2008) High Impact Practices, which increase student retention (McClenney & Waiwaiole, 2005; Perez, et al., 2012; Ryan 2013). Faculty extensively discussed the importance of advising and learning communities to student retention, which reflects their emphasis on the importance of faculty-student relationships. However, they also expressed the need for additional professional development about specific retention strategies, most often advising. Paulson’s (2012) study of Compass project campuses gathered feedback from faculty using High Impact Practices. Paulson (2012) found that faculty were beginning to incorporate High Impact Practices, but expressed a need for more professional development to deepen their knowledge about specific retention
practices. The faculty in this study were seeking the same support; they expressed the value of and their use of the practices but sought additional understanding of them. Institutions that plan to incorporate student retention initiatives across their campuses must recognize the role that professional development plays in supporting and engaging faculty.

The use of data is another way to engage faculty in student retention initiatives (Dietz-Uhler & Hurn, 2013; Laird et al., 2009; Paulson, 2012). Paulson (2012) specifically recommended the use of data to increase faculty understanding of High Impact Practices. Faculty voiced the desire for additional data about student retention, particularly campus and program data, to increase their understanding of student retention practices. Providing such data could help faculty link their efforts with individual students to institutional or system retention benchmarks. Faculty participants who were Department chairs had heightened awareness of retention in their programs and described its value to their understanding of curriculum and program design. Increasing access to program and campus data could extend this benefit to all faculty, encouraging them to increase their ownership in program outcomes and better understand how their work relates to larger initiatives.

In terms of faculty motivation, the findings suggest that faculty perceive their motivation to increase student retention as more intrinsic than extrinsic. Therefore, it may be worthwhile for institutions to employ retention strategies that align faculty’s professional values. Initiatives that emphasize student success may result in higher faculty engagement than those relying on external motivators such as accreditation. These findings align with Herzberg’s (1959) Motivation-Hygiene Theory. Herzberg (1959) linked increased work satisfaction to intrinsic factors that he labeled motivation factors. These motivation factors included responsibility, recognition, the work itself, achievement, and advancement. Faculty in the study most often
discussed their motivation to retain students as connected to the work itself, describing their efforts as born from concern for students as individuals. There was also discussion about responsibility, and the ways in which student retention efforts aligned with faculty’s professional values of effectively educating their students. Recognition was a motivation factor that faculty discussed as being important to them, as well, though none of the participants linked their efforts toward student retention directly to recognition. The fact that faculty described their motivation in terms that reflect Herzberg’s (1959) intrinsic factors could indicate that work satisfaction is an important foundation for faculty motivation to participate in retention initiatives.

Extrinsic factors, which Herzberg (1959) termed hygiene factors, were identified by participants as being helpful but perhaps not ultimately effective. Herzberg’s (1959) hygiene factors include supervision, salary, work environment, organizational policies, and interpersonal relations. Faculty discussed factors such as financial stipends (salary) and messages from administration about the financial implications of student retention (supervision) as encouraging participation in student retention initiatives, but not being powerful enough to persuade unwilling faculty to participate.

The finding that extrinsic factors may not effectively motivate faculty to participate in retention initiatives runs counter to the recommendations of Chaden (2013), who suggested that accreditation could act as an external motivator to ensure that faculty prioritize student retention. Some faculty participants did describe accreditation as a motivator, and accreditation does help ensure that programs will meet retention benchmarks. However, other faculty discussed their preference to approaching retention from a student success perspective. In light of their emphasis on intrinsic motivation to retain students, perhaps using retention strategies that align with faculty’s values would produce longer-lasting and more effective results. If faculty engage in
retention initiatives, they are more likely to create a campus culture that supports student
retention (Siegel, 2011). Institutional culture may be a means by which faculty can be motivated
to participate in campus initiatives, as discussed in the following recommendations section.

**Recommendations for Action**

Findings from this research suggest several recommendations for institutions seeking to
engage faculty meaningfully in student retention initiatives. First, engage faculty at the outset of
student retention initiatives. The faculty in this study expressed preferences and interest in
particular retention strategies (notably advising and learning communities) that they felt were
manageable, effective, and addressed the needs of students on their campus. Since faculty
already have some buy-in and experience with these strategies, they represent a good starting
point for developing larger-scale initiatives. Involving faculty in the planning stages of retention
initiatives also increases the chances that selected strategies will align with their values and
increase their participation over the long term. Rather than a “top down” approach, soliciting
faculty support and building on faculty’s existing perceptions could encourage faculty ownership
and increase motivation to participate.

Second, once institutions have identified appropriate strategies for their campuses, they
should use professional development and campus data to engage faculty. Faculty in this study
expressed an expectation for guidance through professional development. Bringing experts to
campus for workshops as well as providing ongoing support for retention initiatives would help
faculty gain expertise and confidence in using retention strategies. Faculty in the study described
the benefit of both formal and informal professional development, with an emphasis on learning
from their colleagues. Formal professional development should be followed up with activities
like lunch and Learns, panel discussions, voluntary peer-to-peer classroom observations, or
sharing of best practices. An organized, ongoing effort to provide professional development about a single strategy over one or two academic years would be more likely to produce a culture shift benefitting student retention than an isolated workshop recommending strategies to faculty. In tandem with professional development, providing data is a way to invest faculty. Data about retention and completion rates at the system, institution, program, and classroom level would help faculty participants connect their individual efforts to larger goals. In this way, coupling professional development and data can both motivate and support faculty efforts.

Finally, administrators need to recognize the role that institutional culture plays in campus initiatives. Faculty in this study were highly attuned to messages from administration. Administrators have the opportunity to set the tone and create a culture that supports student retention, particularly among full-time faculty on small campuses, with whom they have regular contact and established relationships. Findings indicate that faculty are receptive to administrative messages; it is important that the culture of the institution consistently aligns with these messages. If faculty were provided recognition for their student retention efforts, additional professional development, stipends, or release time, the actions of their institution would support the messages they are receiving. This could create a culture of value around student retention work. In addition, faculty participants described feelings of isolation and disconnection among departments. Asking faculty to work within and across departments on student retention initiatives may also have a positive effect on institutional culture that encourages faculty engagement.

**Recommendations for Further Study**

Four areas were identified as having value for further study. First, similar explorations of faculty perceptions at other institutions would provide a broader perspective. This might include
large, urban two-year institutions and university settings. Are there lessons faculty from different institutions could learn from one another about student retention? Do faculty at community colleges and university faculty perceive their role as being similar? Answering these questions could identify best practices that could be implemented across settings. In addition, as a greater number of campuses employ retention initiatives such as High Impact Practices, large-scale studies about faculty perceptions would yield valuable insights into what engages faculty and how they experience them.

Second, an understanding of how contingent (adjunct and part-time) faculty perceive their role in student retention is crucial. This study focused on how full-time faculty perceive their role because of the high number of full-time faculty at the study site. However, contingent faculty make up a significant and growing number of faculty at community colleges, and their experiences are typically different from those of full-time faculty members. An understanding of contingent faculty perceptions is essential for institutions as they address their student retention needs.

Third, further study about the impact of campus culture, collegiality, and faculty’s willingness to invest in student retention strategies may help institutions as leaders plan large scale initiatives. An understanding of how administrators can foster a climate of collegiality among faculty could help institutions implement student retention strategies. There has been much study about the classroom and program level practices that support student retention, but a large-scale view of how institutions can encourage faculty to consistently use and value those strategies may be equally significant.

Finally, it would be worth exploring how faculty can use system, campus, program, and classroom retention data to inform their pedagogy. Knowing which data faculty find valuable
and how it could be incorporated into their course design and delivery would help institutions gather and disseminate useful information. As institutions move more toward incorporating learning management software and data analytic tools, providing faculty with data about their students could be a powerful way to engage and motivate them. Faculty who are aware of their classroom, program, and department retention rates and how those compare with institution and system rates would have more context for their efforts toward student retention. Providing data to faculty would raise awareness and could become a motivational tool. Data is one means of providing feedback to faculty and encouraging their ownership of institutional retention.

**Conclusion**

This phenomenological case study sought to capture faculty perceptions about their experiences with student retention. While there is a growing body of literature about which practices increase student retention, there is a paucity of research exploring how faculty, themselves, perceive these practices and their role in them. Faculty understand the value they bring to institutions’ ability to retain students and, because they care about the success of their students, strive to incorporate practices that support student retention. Institutions can enhance faculty’s ability to retain students by incorporating practices that encourage rather than deter faculty’s motivation to participate in student retention initiatives. This study explored faculty’s perceptions of what those institutional practices are, and adds to the existing literature about student retention at community colleges.
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Appendix A: Retention Strategies Included in the Scope of the Study

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

Demographic Questions:

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

Retention Questions:

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

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

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