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THE IMPORTANCE OF COACHING:

A PROGRAM EVALUATION OF THE AMERICORPS

COLLEGE COMPLETION COACHES PROGRAM

By

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A DISSERTATION

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THE IMPORTANCE OF COACHING:

A PROGRAM EVALUATION OF THE

AMERICORPS COLLEGE COMPLETION COACHES PROGRAM

ABSTRACT

As more students enroll than earn a post-secondary credential, persistence toward

completion and graduation have become issues in community colleges. This program evaluation

highlights the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program implemented across community

colleges in Ohio during 2012–2017 under the leadership of the Ohio Association of Community

Colleges (OACC). The program goal is to improve postsecondary credential obtainment by

increasing course completion and credit hour accumulation. This outcome is achieved by

providing coaching to at-risk students in community colleges across Ohio. This study sought to

discover the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program's best practices for student

support services and explored the program's goal of increasing college completion rates.

In studying the facets of the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program, two cycles

of descriptive coding were used, as it allowed for a comprehensive view of the program. Using a

descriptive coding process with a thematic analysis, three themes emerged from the desk review

program evaluation. The first theme was Interventions, which described the AmeriCorps College

Completion Coach program's strategy to improve student performance and increase a student's

persistence to completion. The second theme was At-Risk Students, which alludes to the

program identifying students enrolled in one of the following courses: remedial English or math;

first year experience; science, technology, engineering and math (STEM); or other college

gateway courses. The third theme was AmeriCorps, which described the commitment of a service member. This program evaluation contends that coaching can provide a focal point for a community college's efforts toward increasing completion rates. This study provides insight to build capacity and knowledge of coaches, aiming to increase the educational attainment of community college students. The study also provides recommendations for future action and future research, such as evaluating the long term effects of coaching.

Keywords: coaching model, community college, AmeriCorps, at-risk students, intervention, course-embedded model, and developmental and remedial courses.

University of New England

Doctorate of Education
Educational Leadership

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DEDICATION

To my husband, Isaiah, who has been a constant source of support and encouragement during the challenges of balancing graduate school, work, and family. Thank you for your love and wisdom.

To my daughters, Laila and Ilyssa, you have made me stronger and better than I could have ever imagined. I love you to the moon and back.

To my parents, Chester and Miriam Payne, who have always loved me unconditionally and have taught me to work hard for the things that I aspire to achieve. Thank you.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Community colleges are the most extensively growing sector of higher education (Aud et al., 2012). Community colleges continue to thrive in the 21st century with 1,155 institutions serving 41% of the nation's undergraduate student enrollment (American Association of Community Colleges, 2017). Student populations at two-year institutions make up over 41% of the total undergraduate student population in the United States, and total enrollment at community colleges is higher than at four-year institutions (Aud et al., 2012). While most students enter community colleges with the intention of attaining a degree, 38% never complete or transfer to senior institutions (Attewell & Monaghan, 2016). In Ohio, less than 10% of those seeking a certificate or associate degree earn one in the designated time to complete with an average time to degree of 4.6 years (Complete College America, 2016). While the national rate may vary, of the 6.1 million residents of working age (25–64) in the state of Ohio, only 35.5% of the residents have an associate degree or bachelor's degree (Lumina Foundation, 2013). Increasing educational attainment in Ohio could enable its citizens to compete economically both nationally and globally.

Community colleges have the opportunity to increase the educated, trained, and skilled members of the communities in which they exist (Karp, 2011). Community colleges serve students from backgrounds often correlated with low rates of academic success, including minorities, individuals who are academically unprepared, students with a lower income, and students whose parents have low levels of education (Karp, 2011). Nationwide, community colleges continue their original mission of increasing educational attainment for students, regardless of their socioeconomic status, educational disadvantages, and non-traditional background. The average age of community college students nationwide is 28, and the majority

attend school while managing working and family obligations (Lumina Foundation, 2013). While community colleges serve some of the nation's most vulnerable populations, fewer than half of those students earn a post-secondary credential (Lumina Foundation, 2013).

As more jobs require an academic degree, it has become increasingly difficult for workers with only a high school diploma to enter the middle class (Whitehouse, 2014). In response to the widespread college completion concern, former President Obama set two national goals: by 2020, the United States will have the peak proportion of college graduates in the world, and also by 2020, an additional five million students will graduate from community colleges (Whitehouse, 2014). However, community colleges nationwide have a harsh reality of unacceptably low success rates, dysfunctional practices, inadequate support services and disconnected employment preparation to meet workforce needs (AACC, 2012). The National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) released annual reports on higher education enrollment and student outcomes. In 2016, the NSC found that more than 38% of all community college students earn a credential (Attewell & Monaghan, 2016).

It is important for educational leaders to note that access without support does not equal opportunity. Supportive relationships with a supportive adult who is knowledgeable about postsecondary education have been shown to be paramount in helping students in their successful journey to higher education (Day, Edwards, Pickover, & Leever, 2013; Rios & Rocco, 2014). Further, it is imperative to create a culture of professionals and support people who instill the value of education and create a norm and expectation for education among youth (Wolanin, 2005). While in college, students should have opportunities to engage in programs that support their learning, such as tutoring, study tips, extracurricular activities, counseling, and social activities (Day, Riebschleger, Dworsky, Damashek, & Fogarty, 2012).

The decision to apply, enroll, attend, and graduate from college can be overwhelming for students. Studies show that students from both rural areas/small towns and poor students have the highest drawback regarding the opportunity to learn, and consistently evidence the lowest rates of college-going (Dunstan & Jaeger, 2015). While many factors impact college completion rates, fundamentally too few students are receiving the academic preparation necessary to be successful in college (Torres & Viterito, 2008). The expectations for youth to attend college has grown; as a result, professors have reported an increase of students being unprepared for postsecondary education. These reports show an increase in students having learning disabilities and overall reading, writing, and study skills (Torres & Viterito, 2008). Educators have an obligation to all students, including those who are unprepared. If students are not supported, they have a higher risk of failing (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008).

Student success requires institutional investment in structured and carefully aligned activities (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008). According to Engstrom, & Tinto (2008), students are often not included fully as valued members of their institution by providing them with the support to result in successful student departure. The Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE, 2014) found that most students, although they are aware of college support services and consider them essential, do not access these services at level. 75% of students surveyed nationally say that their colleges put quite a bit or very much emphasis on providing the support needed to succeed (Hill, 2016). However, 46% rarely or never use tutoring resources, 57% rarely or never use a skill lab, 32% rarely or never use academic advising, and 50% rarely or never use career counseling (CCSSE, 2014). It is essential for community colleges to supply sound support systems (i.e., health centers, counseling, career centers, community services, etc.) to reduce the likelihood of failure among students. College support services are aimed to encourage success among students or to intervene to prevent failure (Karp, 2011).

Ohio Community Colleges

Ohio's community colleges are relied upon to credential Ohioans with certificates, continuing education opportunities, and associate degrees. These credentials are meant to prepare individuals for the changing workforce; however, current completion rates, 38%, need to improve to support this demand for increased educational attainment (Attewell & Monaghan, 2016). To address the issues of support and low retention rates, in 2012 the Ohio Association of Community Colleges (OACC) placed 32 AmeriCorps members in 13 community college campuses throughout the state of Ohio. AmeriCorps is a national service program, in which volunteers support communities in ways that mesh with local efforts already underway through established community and educational organizations (Dwyer, Maki, & Snyder, 2015). While serving, members have the opportunity to gain valuable professional, educational, and life benefits, and the experience has a lasting impact on the members and the communities they serve. AmeriCorps member experiences are known to be transformative for themselves, and those they serve are given opportunities to learn skills during their service assignment (Dwyer et al., 2015). Furthermore, members are given opportunities to develop leadership qualities and to enhance skills such as time management and conflict resolution (Dwyer et al., 2015).

AmeriCorps College Completion Coaches

AmeriCorps members, known as AmeriCorps College Completion Coaches, pledge to serve and complete 1,700 hours of volunteer services over an 11-month timeframe. Coaches provide intensive support to students in reaching academic milestones (course completion) that are proven to increase their likelihood of success. Each semester coaches are assigned to approximately five-course sections, and the course-embedded model integrates coaching into the

course delivery. The course-embedded model incorporates coaching into course delivery (faculty engagement, the language in the syllabus, and course incentives). Additionally, the course-embedded service model recognizes that community college students "don't do optional," for instance, voluntarily accessing campus resources (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 51). Research agrees that students are more likely to be successful when they are required to obtain additional support on campus and in the classroom (Padgett & Pascarella, 2013). The deliberate embedding, or attachment, of a coach to a particular class, is meant to ensure the direct contact of the coach with students.

As AmeriCorps members, coaches are provided valuable training and professional development, networking, and support with careers and "Life After the Corps" goals. AmeriCorps members gain skills and experiences as a result of their training and service. Engagement in collaborative service projects and networking events are encouraged by the OACC. Networking opportunities help broaden the member's connections to the Corporation of National and Community Service and instill the value of lifelong citizenship and service. Members also engage regularly with community leaders and employers in order to build relationships that can be useful in progressing toward their Life After the Corps. Finally, AmeriCorps members have the opportunity to take advantage of learning opportunities on their assigned campus both through professional development and training opportunities provided by various departments.

Individuals who serve as AmeriCorps College Completion Coaches work one-on-one with a cohort of students in a way that college staff are unable to do, by being flexible and accessible. When interacting with students, AmeriCorps College Completion Coaches can speak from their experience as a community college-goer themselves or as a recent college graduate. AmeriCorps College Completion Coaches serve as a valuable link between the community and

the community college. AmeriCorps College Completion Coaches add value to existing services by providing in-depth, personalized assistance that relates campus resources and services in a cohesive, accessible, and meaningful way to students whose success rates are low. AmeriCorps College Completion Coaches join relationships among the services, resources, and opportunities both on campus and off, to ultimately connect students with what they need to complete their college plan and transfer to a university or move into their career.

The OACC tracks and monitors the performance of the program at least three times a year. The key outputs that are tracked include the number of meetings with students, completion plans developed, workshops planned and implemented, and service projects designed and executed. Collectively, 13 community colleges along with the guidance of the OACC identified specific courses or course sections in which the coaches would be placed. These classes include developmental English, Math, and First-Year Experience (FYE). Also, in the course-embedded model, coaches partook in the following (OACC 2016):

- Provided hands-on guidance and support to students taking courses identified by the college.

- Provided personal consultations with students throughout the academic year, in addition to group workshops.

- Created and monitored on-time completion plans with students within their cohort, ensured completion of remedial coursework, enrollment in gateway courses and helped to build momentum for students in completing college-level courses. If barriers appear, intervened with students to provide encouragement.

- Assessed student needs and ensured they were connected to the resources—on-campus or off—to address barriers.

- Developed workshops to help orient students with resources and services on campus, covering topics like civic engagement, financial literacy, financial aid, time management, etc. Workshops were replicated or opened up to a broader audience as deemed appropriate.

- Provided volunteer and community engagement opportunities to students and the community-at-large through the AmeriCorps days of service.

- Communicated regularly with students within the cohort through the various available methods: phone, e-mail, in-person while on-campus (OACC, 2016, p. 4).

In total, AmeriCorps College Completion Coaches were assigned to over 6,400 students for the duration of this program. Coaches were responsible for helping students achieve higher course completion and higher credit hour accumulation rates to progress toward attainment of a postsecondary credential (OACC, 2016). The program's goal of integrating AmeriCorps College Completion Coaches in courses was to provide an opportunity for community colleges and to help students capitalize on their strengths, address their weaknesses and be academically successful (OACC, 2016).

The Ohio Association of Community Colleges started this program with the belief that if students achieve certain milestones on a college-completion path, they will be more likely to finish their certificate or degree. The college completion path, as measured by the OACC, examined indicators of progress for college students in their first year, including successful completion of developmental coursework, corresponding college-level coursework, and general education courses with up to 24 college-level credit hours earned (OACC, 2016). The program also examined if the students received a career certificate or committed to return for the second year. Overall, the goal of the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach was to assist community

college students in persisting to completion by focusing on the needs of the student, their goals, and their capacity to be self-directed and agentic (OACC, 2016).

The AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program placed college graduates, preferably with community college experience, onto Ohio community college campuses to provide in-depth, hands-on guidance and assistance to students who need extra support on their college completion path. These coaches use a technique called "coaching," meaningful interactions to increase awareness of success strategies, including community and campus resources (OACC, 2016). Coaching contacts were also intended to be significant interactions with students to foster success and completion. Coaching contacts were presented in multiple forms and avenues. For example, coaches could make contact with students via email, phone, classroom settings, small group settings, and one-on-one interactions. It was expected that students served by coaches (via coaching contacts) would demonstrate higher credit hour accumulation, persistence rates, and completion rates compared to those not provided with completion coaching (OACC, 2016).

The AmeriCorps Completion College Coach program was designed to make an impact on Ohio community college students. While academic advisors focus on explaining degree requirements, counselors focus on mental health, and faculty focus on course content, coaches are the bridge that connects students to all available support services. Coaches also serve a unique role in connecting students with helpful community resources that help them overcome barriers outside of the classroom (OACC, 2016). Unlike existing faculty and staff, coaches may be perceived as less intimidating and neutral to students. In this capacity, coaches could build quick rapport with students and empower them to work with faculty and staff to troubleshoot and resolve issues before the student withdraws (OACC, 2016).

Statement of the Problem

The issues of college persistence and completion have moved to the forefront of conversation in higher education nationwide (Aylor & Claybrooks, 2016). Many community college students enroll in college but do not graduate. In Ohio, of the 6.1 million residents of working age (25–64), 35.5% hold at least a two-year or four-year degree (Lumina Foundation, 2013). By 2025, 44% of Ohioans are projected to have at least a two-year degree, according to a research study conducted by the Center of Workforce (Lumina Foundation, 2013). However, the state of Ohio needs 60% of its citizens to hold a degree to fill the projected number of jobs by 2025 (Lumina Foundation, 2013). With only approximately 35.5% of adults in Ohio having a postsecondary credential (Complete College America, 2016), an increase of college completion among Ohioans is needed. Given concerns surrounding college completion, if Ohio community colleges produce more graduates, the colleges may help brighten the economic future of the state and its citizens.

Purpose of the Study

Community colleges enroll the most diverse and complex range of students in all institutions of higher education (Bahr, 2010) serving approximately 46% of the college student population (Stalkis, 2010). In the U.S. only 12% of degree-seeking students who enrolled in community college following high school graduation completed their certificate or degree (Horn, 2010). In 2012, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) created *The Completion Agenda: A Call to Action,* aimed at raising educational attainment goals by challenging community colleges to increase the number of students obtaining a degree or other credential by 50% by the year 2020. The challenge is intended to address the *dismally* low completion rates across the nation, especially for minority students (McPhail, 2011).

This process program evaluation intended to provide research-based evidence useful for practitioners of coaching with respect to intervention services designed to improve student retention. Process program evaluations determine if program strategies and activities were implemented as intended (Posavac, 2016). The results of a process evaluation can strengthen a researcher's findings on a program and can be used as information to improve the program's future operations (Posavac, 2016). By extension, this study proposes to fill a void in understanding the most recent entrant to the menu of student services—coaching—and coaching's ability to connect students to services that may assist with their persistence toward completion, such as tutoring services, counseling, or advising. The study intended to inform educational policy in its support of the national completion agenda to increase the attainment of postsecondary credentials for American citizens in order to address the country's workforce demands (McPhail, 2011). Perhaps most important, the outcomes from this study to measure the coaching's impact may contribute to the current emphasis of states to tie higher education funding to student performance. Community college leadership may benefit from this study's outcomes in determining which student services have the most impact on student success for the benefit of the college and students alike.

Research Questions

To influence community colleges' student success, the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program placed AmeriCorps members (coaches) in thirteen Ohio community college campuses each year from 2012–2017, to provide coaching interventions for students. To further explore the mission and outcomes of the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program, this qualitative study addressed the following research questions:

1. How does the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program promote best practices for student support services?

2. How does the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program address the identified goal of increasing college completion rates?

Conceptual Framework

As more students enroll than earn a post-secondary credential, persistence toward completion and graduation have become priority issues for the nation's community colleges. Concerning completion rates, community colleges are positioned to turn crisis into opportunity through assessment of their effectiveness in championing student intervention services that remove student barriers to success (AACC, 2012). Given concerns surrounding college completion among community college students, the OACC developed the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program. The OACC's program is a statewide collaboration involving community colleges to help vulnerable students persist to completion through academic coaching (OACC, 2013). To explore the practices of coaching the researcher conducted a program evaluation.

Topical interest is a key element to a conceptual framework (Creswell, 2014) and this program evaluation continues to explore how coaching may be able to improve the college completion rates among community college students. Coaching in this context does not refer to anything related to athletics (Robinson, 2015). Research on coaching indicates that in higher education, coaches apply active listening and productive questioning techniques to empower students to explore, think critically, and solve problems (Barkley, 2010). The benefits for students working with coaches mirror the benefits students receive from working with mentors, tutors, advisors, and counselors concerning navigating college life, understanding campus culture, accessing campus resources, and becoming engaged with their communities (Brock, 2008).

Theoretical Frameworks

The theoretical framework for this study was guided by two theories used by the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program: action learning and the theory of student involvement. Those theories guide this study in its aim to examine the coaching program and how and whether these factors contribute to community college student success as evidenced by credit completion. Action learning theory focuses on changing students' thinking to impact behavior. Activities center on identifying problems, engaging personal reflection, developing positive identities, and building resiliency (DuToit, 2014). For the community college student, coaches can provide contextualization—making direct and explicit connections to the relevancy of course content to future credit-bearing courses and their long term (DuToit, 2014). This approach is designed to highlight solutions to challenges students face. Action learning theory has also shown to increase problem-solving skills among students (Devine, Houssemand, & Meyers, 2012).

Action learning theory offers students a continuous process of learning from experience through reflection and action. McGill and Beaty (1993) suggested that an action learning circle is intended to "help people to take an active stance towards life and helps overcome the tendency to be passive towards the pressures of life and work" (p. 11). The Theory of Student Involvement refers to the quantity and quality of physical and psychological energy students invest in the college experience (Astin, 1984). These theories complement each other: action learning examines the impact of learning by doing in regard to student success (Revans, 1998), while the theory of student involvement claims the more students are involved in college, the more the student will grow and learn (Astin, 1993). Blending action learning and the Theory of Student Involvement together supports students as they persist in the community college setting. Using

both theories enabled the researcher to consider the influence of the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program in regard to degree completion for community college students.

Scope

The scope of a study refers to the factors under which the study will be operated (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). This study examined the obstacles and uncertainty many community college students face that extend beyond classroom and program concerns, and unfortunately, results in a large number of these students never reaching their academic goals (Bailey, 2015; Coley, 2000; Bremer, et al., 2013). To address these concerns, the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program provides additional support (via coaching) to students to improve student outcomes. The scope of this program evaluation was to explore how the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program utilized coaching to contribute to community college student persistence and completion. This program evaluation also analyzed the methods and results of the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are ideas relative to the study that are presumed to be true, and from which conclusions may be drawn (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Given the matters of interest surrounding college completion, this program evaluation examined the operation of the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program and the techniques used to impact student outcomes. The primary assumption in this study was that Coaches can improve retention rates even when there are multiple barriers to student success and college completion. Research shows that among higher education institutions, community colleges serve a disproportionate number of students who are academically underprepared (Karp, 2011). While this study could not control external influences, it was assumed that college students served by the AmeriCorps College

Completion Coach program would ultimately demonstrate higher credit hour accumulation, persistence rates, and completion rates compared to those not provided with completion coaching.

Limitations

Limitations are probable weaknesses in a study that are out of the researcher's control (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Several limitations exist within this study. A limitation is having a small sample that does not represent all programs in the U.S. geared to improving student success. This particular study is an AmeriCorps program in Ohio. This limits the generalization of the findings, though similarly structured colleges may find similarities between the findings and outcomes. Also, the documentation (program self-assessments; pre- and post-assessments and summaries; direct service activity tracking data; program risk assessments; grant proposals; applicant feedback summaries; program performance measures; program plans; progress reports) provided by the OACC, which supports Ohio's community colleges, has limitations. The documentation does not represent a randomized or generalized representation of all student success programs in Ohio because the study is limited to the Ohio Association of Community Colleges' AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program.

Delimitations

Delimitations define the researcher's study and characterize the scope (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). This study examined data from one program that focuses on community colleges and their efforts to increase college completion rates. This study did not examine the role of other programs that support student success, such as TRIO programs or InsideTrack. This study did not consider the influence that national organizations have on students' degree attainment. In addition, this study is delimitated to qualitative data to assess the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program's outcomes. This researcher did not collect quantitative data to

explore measurable variables produced by the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program. This study focused on one program in Ohio that focuses on improving the retention rates of community colleges.

Significance

In Ohio, urgent action is needed to increase student completion rates (Ohio Board of Regents, 2011). Much like the nation, close to two-thirds of Ohio's jobs (59%) will require a career certificate or a college degree by 2020 (Complete College America, 2016). This program evaluation was designed to provide an understanding of how the OACC has used AmeriCorps College Completion Coaches to increase community college students' persistence to completion. This study is also intended to contribute to a gap in research by evaluating the AmeriCorps College Completion Coaches program, which is projected to improve student success within community colleges. This gap was explored further in the literature review in chapter 2. The goal of the program evaluation was to provide an underpinning (a theoretical lens) through which the coaching practice can be better understood and implemented in community college settings.

Underprepared for a college-level curriculum, many community college students need developmental courses (Lumina Foundation, 2013). To address this problem, the AmeriCorps Completion Coaches program has worked to make an impact in Ohio community colleges by serving a unique role on campuses. The AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program hopes coaches are perceived differently from faculty and staff and are less intimidating and neutral. As a result, coaches could build quick rapport with students and empower them to work with faculty and staff to troubleshoot and resolve issues before they lead to dropout. In education, one of the definitions for coaching is one-to-one conversations focused on the enhancement of learning and development (Neuhauser & Weber, 2011). Academic coaching is a process that enables individuals to set and reach goals. Also, coaches encourage individuals to do more than they

would typically do on their own; help individuals focus more quickly on projects at hand to produce results, provide tools and support, and assist with organization to achieve more (Bennett, 2006).

Definitions

- *Academic barriers*—The circumstances or situations that prevent students from reaching educational success (Coley, 2000).

- *AmeriCorps*—A national program administered by the Corporation for National and Community Service, providing grants to public and nonprofit organizations to support community service.

- *At-risk*—Used to describe students in danger of not maintaining or attaining academic goals (Coley, 2000).

- *Coaching*—A process that enables learning and development to occur and thus performance to improve. "To be successful, a coach requires knowledge and understanding of the situations in which coaching happens. This context consists of having familiarity with a range of skills, techniques, and styles that are applicable for assisting students" (Neuhauser & Weber, 2011, p.14).

- *Corporation for National and Community Service*—A federal agency that helps improve the lives of millions of Americans by fellow citizens giving back through service ("About CNCS," 2017).

- *Community college*—A two-year, higher-education institution that offers associate degrees and certificates as well as courses for general interest and personal development (Cohen & Brawer, 2008).

- *Credit hour*—A measure of student time in the classroom (Cohen & Brawer, 2008).

- *Developmental courses*—Courses designed to prepare students for college-level courses. By passing these classes, students do not earn credits toward their degree or certification. These courses are also referred to as remedial courses.

- *Grants*—A sum of money given by an organization, especially a government, for a particular purpose.

- *Ohio Association of Community Colleges*—A robust organization that is thoroughly committed to ensuring the continued prosperity and success of Ohio's community colleges and their students.

- *Program evaluation*—A process of carefully collecting information about a program or some aspect of a program to make necessary decisions about the program.

- *Postsecondary*—Education beyond high school.

- *Retention rate*—The percentage of students who entered college in the same semester and were still enrolled at the start of a later given semester, an indicator of education persistence.

- *Social economic status (SES)*—The level of financial, social, cultural, and human capital resources (Dobbin, Kalev, & Kelly, 2006).

- *Student success*—A holistic phenomenon that embraces the multiple dimensions of personal development and the various goals of higher education (Cohen & Brawer, 2008).

- *Student support services*—College services aimed at encouraging success or intervening to prevent failure (Karp, 2011).

- *College readiness*—The level of training a student needs to enroll and succeed without remediation (Karp, 2011).

Conclusion

As more students enroll in community colleges nationwide, persistence toward completion and graduation have become priority issues (Attewell & Witteveen, 2017). Furthering the concern, in coming years the number of jobs requiring at least an associate's degree is projected to double (Jones, 2016). To address this concern in the state of Ohio, the Ohio Association of Community Colleges (OACC) developed and implemented the AmeriCorps College Completion Coaches initiative to offer hands-on assistance to students who need in-depth guidance on their college completion path. To explore this further, chapter two provides a review of scholarly literature within the field of higher education to provide a summary of the findings significant to the components of the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program. The findings within the scholarly literature explores the role of the AmeriCorps College Completion Coaches and their possibilities for increasing a community college student's completion rates. Chapter three describes the research method that was utilized in this study. Chapter four presents the study findings and recommendations for action based on the conclusions. Chapter five offers an overview of the research and concludes with an interpretation of the results, implications of the study, recommendations for action, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of a literature review is to survey scholarly articles that are related to a particular researcher topic (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). This chapter, the literature review, presents the trends among student success services, developmental education, and coaching and mentorship. This chapter also identifies gaps within community colleges by scanning literature that addresses the opportunities and challenges facing students as they navigate college. In addition, the researcher explored the promising practices that increase persistence and completion in community college students. Furthermore, the chapter examines the current high impact and promising practices to situate the role of coaching within the context of broader student support services that help community college students overcome and thrive in community colleges. Specifically, this chapter examines the role of coaching and its possibilities for improving community college student persistence and completion. To begin, the researcher will present the history of community colleges, followed by a discussion of demographics within community colleges.

The Development of the Community Colleges

To fully understand community colleges requires a sense of the context of how the community college environment has developed. Community colleges, formerly known as two-year colleges or junior colleges, were created by the Morrill Act of 1862 (also known as the Land Grant Act). This Act extended access to public higher education. This development allowed for individuals who had been denied access to college an opportunity to have entree into higher education. In the current development of community colleges, the institutional concept is establishing a clear identity and contribution to the community in which it serves (AACC, 2017).

Table 1 below, adapted from the American Association of Community Colleges (2010), provides a historical snapshot of community college growth in the first 100 years.

Table 1

Community College Growth, by Decade, Through the 20th Century

Year	Number of Community Colleges
1901–1910	25
1910–1920	74
1921–1930	180
1931–1940	238
1941–1950	330
1951–1960	412
1961–1970	909
1971–1980	1,058
1981–1990	1,106
1991–2000	1,155

Many public community colleges began as two-year junior colleges or university extensions (Brawer & Cohen, 1996). In this capacity, the junior colleges were considered grades 13–14 and were under the jurisdiction of the public school district or university branches whose primary purpose was to transfer enrollments into the four-year academic institutions (Cohen, 1995). The introduction of technical colleges required a different pattern of educational services. Developed primarily for vocation-oriented students, the focus was not on academics but acquiring knowledge and skills that would be immediately useful and allow the student to enter a recognized occupation (Brawer & Cohen, 1996).

Community colleges are intended to bridge the gap between secondary schools and four-year colleges and universities (Drury & Mallory, 2000). When society began shifting from the industrial economy to the contemporary knowledge economy that we have today, a considerable

gap in education became apparent (Cohen, 1995). There are nearly 1,155 community colleges in America, enrolling more than 10 million students annually (American Association of Community Colleges, 2017). Community colleges stepped in to create an opportunity for those wanting a career change. A community college's mission is to offer access to postsecondary education programs and services that lead to stronger communities (Ayers, 2015). As community colleges work toward a mission that provides access, colleges may be able to improve their low persistence and completion rates.

Understanding Community College Students

Founded in 1920, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) is the primary advocacy organization for the nation's community colleges. The AACC's 2017 Fact Sheet is a comprehensive snapshot of community college student demographics and characteristics. The AACC (2017) provided the following information on each of these characteristics:

- Enrollment—Nearly half (41%) of all U.S. undergraduate students attended a community college (AACC, 2017).

- Income—Regardless of enrollment status, most community college students are also employed. Even so, 35% of all community college students received a Pell Grant, a form of federal financial aid reserved for students from low-income households (AACC, 2017).

- Diversity in Gender, Race/Ethnicity, and Age—Women represent 56% of community college students. Although community college students are diverse in ethnicity, nearly half (48%) are white, 23% Hispanic, and 13% black. Most (49%) students are 22 and up with an average age of 28 (AACC, 2017).

That only a limited number of students who enter community colleges persist to completion is primarily due to the fact that many more students enter college unprepared for the rigors of higher education (Aud et al., 2012). Community college students are often referred to as underprepared and underperforming because their academic skills are not fully developed when they enter college. Complete College America (2016) estimated that more than 50% of students who entered community college were placed in remedial classes. Furthermore, the longer it takes a student to progress through a development course sequence, the more likely the student will get lost along the way and drop out (Rath et al., 2013). This explains why community college students are less likely to engage in their college experience by becoming involved with study groups, meeting with faculty outside of the classroom, or joining school clubs (Coley, 2000).

Community colleges serve a variety of students, such as those in dual enrollment programs, those attending college following high school graduation, and a wide range of nontraditional students (Bryant, 2001). Nontraditional students are considered those who are academically underprepared, first generation students, or prior college graduates seeking specialized training (Provasnik & Planty, 2008). Students who may have been disqualified from postsecondary education for reasons such as financial restrictions or duties to work or family can find opportunity in a community college environment. Community colleges provide an opportunity in which nontraditional, underrepresented, low-income, and first generation students can take advantage of postsecondary education.

In summary, exploring the reasons why community college students do not complete college is essential to understanding how we can re-engage and retain them in community colleges. Those reasons include inadequate academic preparation, remedial education, student financial aid, lack of nonacademic skills, and competing obligations (Rath et al., 2013). In

response, strategies have emerged geared toward improving the success rates of community college students. An examination of these strategies follows.

Low Persistence and Completion

As community colleges will soon serve 50% of all higher education students, community colleges must find ways to increase the number of students who graduate in a timely matter (American Association of Community Colleges, 2012). While many efforts, such as creating Student Success Centers in community colleges, have sought to improve the educational experience and outcomes of community college students, barriers persist (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Barriers include a lack of academic preparation, unfamiliarity with the college culture, perceived value of education, and the inability to balance family, work, and school (Heisserer & Parette, 2002; Miller & Murray, 2005). While efforts to promote postsecondary education have been successful in past years, graduation rates have unfortunately not followed (Herman, Scanlan, & Carreon, 2017). America has already been slipping in terms of educational attainment; nationally, a movement has begun to prompt state leaders to seriously consider the educational system and how it prepares people to enter a new knowledge workforce and work to make necessary changes (WestEd, 2012).

Critical junctures exist within the transition to community college completion where students tend to lose momentum ("Student Voices on the Higher Education Pathway: Preliminary Insights & Stakeholder Engagement Considerations," 2012). WestEd (2012) discovered five themes from analyzed focus groups of current and former community college students that confirmed what many claim happens too often on community college campuses. The themes included:

- Lack of career knowledge

- The endless cycle of developmental education courses

- Unclear educational and career pathways

- Poor advising

- Lack of explicit coordinated programs and services.

Although there are studies suggesting that degree attainment is associated with gender, race/ethnicity, and or GPA, findings from WestEd (2012) suggest that critical connections need to be in place to help students be more successful: connections to information and support, connection to instructional services, and connection to career and/or career exploration. These themes represent institutional or external barriers that can prevent persistence to completion; originating student barriers exist as well.

Community colleges work to respond to students by aligning systems, process, and policies with the developmental needs of students (American Association of Community Colleges, 2012). An example of aligning with a student's developmental need is providing courses that assist students with being prepared academically for college-level content. Unfortunately, the college culture can often exacerbate barriers to the implementation of programs and activities if students don't receive support (Miller & Murray, 2005). The college experience is a substantial period and students who have not embraced this culture often suffer from cultural shock and the discomfort that comes from not fitting into cultural norms, even at the community college (Herman et al., 2017). This lack of engagement can have an impact on the student's success.

Student Success and Engagement

Educational theories and promising practices regarding coaching show notable impacts on increasing retention, persistence, and completion. Allen et al. (2013) noted the high value of student engagement on the retention and academic success of students. A theory that looks further into this is engagement theory, which suggests that students must be implicitly engaged

in learning activities through collaboration with others and critical responsibilities (Kearsley, 1997). Research has linked student engagement in educational activities to outcomes such as grades and persistence (Astin, 1984; Kuh, 2008; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Many studies (e.g., Padgett, Keup, & Pascarella, 2013) show that many students who left college prematurely were less engaged than their counterparts who persisted.

Student Success Courses

First-Year Experience (FYE) courses are designed to support relationship building among new students, faculty, and staff. Most FYE courses have emerged as part of a student-centered approach to orienting students to the college's culture. These courses are designed to promote student development and success (Padgett, Keup, & Pascarella, 2013). Many schools structure their first-year seminars or other similar programs around using small groups. These groups consist of students and faculty brought together on a regular basis for discussions (Padgett et al., 2013). For community college students, First-Year Experience programs can serve as a platform and lay a foundation for expectations of collegiate life for students not often exposed to those before their matriculation.

Academic programs (for example FYE) that promote community college student success have dedicated faculty, emphasize access and excellence, have a unique culture that fosters cohesion, and provide academic advising (Nitecki, 2011). These courses highlight topics such as study and time-management skills and bringing awareness of campus facilities. In addition, courses explore matters that promote support services to help students develop essential skills that can lead to success in college (Nitecki, 2011). Acevedo-Gil and Zerquera (2016) suggest if First-Year Experience courses are required there may be a possibility for students to complete their courses, earn better grades, have higher overall GPAs, and obtain degrees.

Student Success Services

To help students navigate the physical environment of the campus as well as the services and supports available, new student orientation provides an overview of valuable information for new students. While this practice can vary in duration, program, and activities, typically orientation is an experience that helps students become comfortable before classes begin. Research has shown that orientation services lead to higher student satisfaction, more excellent use of student support services, and improve retention rates among students (Finley & McNAir, 2013; Kuh, 2008). Student orientation has the potential of serving as a springboard for community college students to build their social and academic capital to persist through college completion.

In terms of student success, support services can help students see the value of their education. According to Alemedia et al. (2017), it is essential to help students define their goals and understand how a college credential can help them reach their goals. Community college students, in particular, require assistance navigating the unfamiliar community college landscape (Savitz-Romer et al., 2009). If students receive aid, it may help students understand that a college degree is integral to gainful employment, along with workforce development programs. In a study of effective strategies for student service programs at community colleges, it was recommended that institutions offer more enhanced student services (Summers, 2003). Such programs would then be linked to other services, but also integrated into existing campus-wide reform strategies, thereby allowing student services to be offered, in a coordinated fashion and over an extended period of time (Summers, 2003).

Because many students encounter ongoing challenges throughout their academic career related to academic, social, and financial needs, it is imperative to offer students linked and sustained services in all areas of the college. Student success services is an educational program

that provides first-generation students with opportunities that help them successfully complete their degrees/credentials, offering academic development, counseling, financial guidance, and career development opportunities (Summers, 2003). Research suggests that student support services play a role in promoting successful outcomes for community college students. The desired outcome for student success centers/departments is to improve student success outcomes (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Student Success Practices

Support programs and services could help students navigate the various resources available to them, encourage them to ask for help, and increase their classroom participation. It is within the implementation of student support services where coaching may have a transformative role in community college student (McPherson & Schapiro, 2006). In Finley and McNair's (2013) study, research questions considered the impact of practices on underserved students and the cumulative effects of these practices. Findings showed that underrepresented students who engaged in multiple high impact practices (e.g., enrolling in FYE courses, utilizing tutoring) exhibited gains in learning.

Finley & McNair (2013) stated, "the effects of engagement in multiple high impact practices, both across and within different groups of students, provide strong evidence for the need to ensure that all students encounter several high-impact experiences during college" (p. 13). Educators are working to increase graduation and retention rates; increasing evidence shows what works to enhance students' education and success (Finley & McNair, 2013). Studies have shown that students need support in familiarizing with the rigors of the college experience and managing the transition into the academic life (Astin, 1984; Bean, 1990; McPherson & Schapiro, 2006). Coaching practices in education may be used as a tool to improve college

completion rates. Exploring the impact coaching may have in academics requires further investigation into how coaching is practiced.

Mentoring vs. Coaching

In educational settings, the terms mentoring and coaching can intersect (Kennedy, 2009). However, mentoring is not coaching. Mentors are assumed to have superior knowledge and experience that will be passed on to mentees (Kennedy, 2009). Mentors typically exert control and define the relationship dynamics. On the other hand, coaches value a partnership approach, allowing students to contribute to the relationship equally (Kennedy, 2009). Coaching focuses on helping students prioritize studies, plan how they can be successful, and identify and overcome barriers to success whether inside or outside the classroom (Bettinger & Baker, 2014). The most prominent difference between coaching and mentoring is that coaching is formal (scheduled, structured, frequent) while mentoring is informal (flexible scheduling, less structured conversation, less frequent) (Perez, 2014).

Mentoring

A mentor is defined as a loyal, caring, and trusted person who forms a one-on-one relationship with someone in need (Dondero, 1997). Perez (2014) explored the perceptions and experiences of students participating in either mentoring or coaching programs. Perez found differences between academic coaching and academic mentoring practices. Mentoring meetings offered more flexibility regarding structure, time, and place, and took place in settings such as over lunch or at worksites with contact via phone or text, whereas coaching meetings were more frequent, took place in classroom settings, and held in pre-set times. Students in Perez's study opined that mentoring and coaching sessions should happen consistently—every other week—to have the most influence on student success. Students perceived mentors as role models and coaches as task-oriented with a focus on academic goals.

According to Kennedy (2009), due to mentors being considered experts, mentors are assumed to have superior academic knowledge and experience that may be passed on to mentees. Mentors typically exert control and define the relationship dynamics. On the other hand, coaches value a partnership approach, allowing students to contribute to the relationship equally (Kennedy, 2009). Fishman (2013) explored mentoring from the student's point of view. The study confirmed that students perceived mentoring as beneficial and useful, especially in the areas of confidence building, caring encouragement, coaching for success, and role modeling. An ideal mentoring relationship is one that is reciprocal, whereby both mentor and mentee contribute to and benefit from the relationship (Beltman & Schaeben, 2012).

Mentoring is as an example of a nonacademic intervention strategy. Through mentoring, a more experienced person helps a less-experienced person succeed by providing guidance. Mentors are usually older, focus on political or networking skills, encourage self-development, and advise on career next steps (Perez, 2014). Mentoring, tutoring, advising, and counseling are by no means the only strategies used by community colleges to assist students toward academic persistence and completion, but their examination is useful given their similarities with academic coaching (Perez, 2014). The study found that students perceived coaches and mentors as role models who motivated and empowered them to become involved and engaged on campus and in their communities (Perez, 2014). An article in *Management Mentors* (2013) identified 25 ways coaching differed from mentoring. Among the differences, coaches were task-oriented, short-term focused, and performance driven while mentors were relationship-oriented, long-term focused, and development driven (Palen, 2012).

Coaching

The term *coaching* has diverse meanings and interpretations and is used in a variety of contexts. Fundamentally, it is a relationship designed to support the achievement of specific

personal or professional goals (Berg & Karlsen, 2007). However, it is often interchanged with *mentoring*. Feldman & Lankau (2005) explained that mentoring typically seeks to improve or facilitate overall development as opposed to the achievement of a particular outcome (for example, passing a specific course). Definitions of coaching abound (Grant & Stober, 2006) and Anderson and Kampa-Kokesch (2001) explained that defining coaching is a challenge because coaches range in expertise and are influenced by a variety of disciplines. The definition of coaching continues to evolve, and some scholars and practitioners agree that although there has been an increase in research, there is still no agreement on the definition of coaching (Whybrow, 2008). According to Parsloe (1995), "coaching is defined as a process in which a student's performance improves due to coaches preparing students for learning and development" (p. 10). To be successful, a coach requires knowledge and understanding of the process (Parsloe, 1995).

Coaching and mentoring are distinct activities from one another (Ellinger, Ellinger, & Keller, 2003). Mentoring is an experience in which the mentor provides advice as a result of having experienced a similar trajectory as the student or having some shared interests or knowledge. Coaching does not require specific content knowledge, shared interests, or similar experiences to support students. Coaches must be skilled at facilitating learning and helping students reach their goals (Lubin, 2013). Coaching is not akin to counseling; the former focuses on uncovering and addressing problems, the latter focuses on solutions to the issues. The difference draws upon work in which coaching can help students—but also holds them accountable for reaching their pre-stated goals (Lubin, 2013).

In education, coaching is described as one-to-one conversations designed to enhance learning and development, and to increase self- awareness and personal responsibility through a process of questioning and active listening (Neuhauser & Weber, 2011). Coaches provide the linkage between the academic and student affairs of the campus and work together with faculty

and staff for the student's benefit (Neuhauser & Weber, 2011). Coaching enables students to set and reach goals, encourages students to accomplish more than they normally would on their own, helps students focus more quickly on projects to produce results, and provides the tools, support, and assistance from within the organization to achieve more (Bennett, 2006).

The concept of coaching was introduced to higher education at the turn of the 21st century when community colleges and community college stakeholders began to focus on initiatives to increase student success (Gahagan & Robinson, 2010). In the context of community college student success, coaching may foster healthy relationships among students where the goals are to facilitate both academic achievements and enhance a student's ownership and dispositions to learning, improve performance and competence, and create lifelong learners as the long-term goal. Evidence suggests (Gahagan & Robinson, 2010) community college students face a number of academic and nonacademic (i.e., interpersonal competencies) issues as they transition into the college and academic environment. The benefits for students working with coaches mirror the benefits students receive from working with mentors, tutors, advisors, and counselors with respect to navigating college life, understanding campus culture, accessing campus resources and becoming engaged with their communities (Barkley 2010; Brock 2008; Kennedy, 2009). Practicing coaching in education may be used as a tool for improving college completion rates. This study will examine how coaching is practiced by understanding the difference between coaching and mentoring.

Coaching Practices in Education

The study of coaching in education has gained momentum and is used to assist various populations of students (Graham et al., 2008; Grant, 2001). According to Robinson (2015), Academic/Success Coach (or "Coach") is a term used to encompass "academic coach," "academic success coach," and "success coach" (p. 9). Coaches focus on academic and the

overall collegiate student experience. Coaching in this context does not refer to anything related to athletics (p. 11). According to Webberman (2011), academic coaching is the newest subsection of life and business coaching, coming to fruition over the past decade. Coaches partner with students to facilitate life transformations by helping students deepen their learning, take responsibility for their actions, improve their effectiveness, and consciously create their outcomes in life (Webberman, 2011).

The concept of coaching in higher education gained popularity in the early 2000s. One literature review (Brock, 2008) traced the emergence of higher education coaching to the 1960s (Barkley, 2010; Kennedy 2009; Webberman, 2011). Research indicates that coaching is emerging in higher education as a promising practice to help students navigate the college experience, to support adult learners, students with learning disabilities, and students with low SES, and to increase student success overall (Barkley, 2010; Bettinger & Baker, 2014). According to Griffiths (2009), "coaching provides a natural fit for educators. Not only does it combine an array of learning theories within its process, but it also serves to deepen and accelerate learning" (p. 4). Coaching may contribute to the need for increasing student performance.

Definitions of coaching occasionally refer to more than learning. According to Patton (2017), "Coaching for learning integrates context, purpose, relationships, processes, and performance that lead to change, growth, and co-learning between coach and learner" (p. 178). Qing's (2013) study on coaching for learning suggested that learners want a balance between the teaching elements and coaching elements, which makes this approach different from executive coaching and life coaching. Qing contributed to the understanding of learning relationships and development of learning power and suggested that understanding coaching from a learning perspective can influence positive learning outcomes for students (2013).

Coaching may be used as a tool to unlock students' potential to maximize their performance. Keiner (2010) suggested that "when educators work to provide more experiential learning, effective feedback, and collaboration, they are more closely employing a coaching model and making teaching and learning more public. All educators should constantly question and investigate their practice" (p. 73). Lubin (2013) sought to further delineate best practices in coaching, suggesting that coaches focus efforts assessing the student's life outside of school. These extracurricular activities have become the leading influence on student persistence and completion. Topics such as personal time commitments (work scheduling), caregiving responsibilities, and financial obligations are typically discussed during a student-coach interaction. These types of student success topics are presented in developmental courses (such as First-Year Experience courses). The researcher will explore the concept of developmental education in correlation with coaching.

Coaching and Developmental Education

For a variety of reasons, coaches are sought out for assistance in developing professional and personal goals (Scott-Clayton & Rodriguez, 2012). Fundamentally, coaching in the context of student support is a relationship designed to support the achievement of specific personal or professional goals of a student. Research suggests that coaching could be a powerful practice to help support learning and development for students, teachers, school leaders, and their educational establishments (Devine, Houssemand, & Meyers, 2012). Scott-Clayton & Rodriguez (2012) argued that coaching is a multifaceted, holistic approach to learning and change.

Coaching may be a promising practice for students in developmental education; coaches can help motivate students, direct them to resources to quickly move through developmental courses, and provide tools to students to encourage them to preserve. In a study on the topic of developmental classes, Scott-Clayton and Rodriquez (2012) posited three permeating elements

operating within developmental education: (a) Student discouragement (b) Student diversion away from college-level courses, and (c) Skill improvement that helps students become more academically successful. In testing these elements, results of the study found that although there were no adverse effects on community college students in general, there was a definite result found among students placed in developmental English (Scott-Clayton, & Rodriquez, 2012). Scott-Clayton and Rodriquez's (2012) research suggested that when students felt confused and frustrated about placement in developmental courses, attrition is likely to occur. While accelerated development education efforts seem promising, they require extensive resources and more evaluation of the practice on differing student profiles taking developmental education (Scott-Clayton, & Rodriquez, 2012).

Community college administrators continue to explore and implement policies and practices designed to move the student through developmental education quickly to help students move to college-level courses (Edgecombe, 2011). Students are allowed to take developmental courses for modified periods of time, increasing opportunities to place out of courses (Edgecombe, 2011). Colleges also enable students to take classes concurrently with credit-bearing courses, decreasing the social and cultural stratification taking place. These courses are sometimes referred to as remedial courses (Edgecombe, 2011). Developmental courses are intended to prepare students for college-level courses.

Research suggests that students who start with development education classes in their first term are more likely to complete their developmental sequence than those who do not (Flink, 2017). Understanding different learning processes can be advantageous to those who are coaching students considered at-risk or enrolled in developmental courses. For example, in working with a student who struggles in a particular class, a coach can help the student connect classroom content to real-life experiences to increase relevancy by applying action learning

theory. This theory can add to a coach's toolbox for assisting students to reach their academic goals. To further understand this concept, the researcher will explore two learning theories intended to improve learning for students.

Theoretical Framework

The emergent literature explored in this review provides a foundation for two theoretical lenses through which this study is viewed. Two theories drive this study: action learning and the theory of student involvement. According to Astin's (1984) Theory of Student Involvement, the more students are involved with their college experience, the more likely they are to be successful in an academic environment. Within this theory, coaches help to connect students to opportunities on campus that will increase the students' likelihood to get involved. Action learning is considered to be a problem-solving tool that at the same time builds successful leaders, teams, and organizations (Waddill & Marquardt, 2003). Within this approach, coaches aren't experts but are considered to be an assistant to students by helping them discover what needs to be done in order to be successful (Marquardt, 2004). These theories make a case to consider coaching and the influence of the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program, particularly the impact this program may have on students' persistence to college completion.

Action Learning Theory

Action learning is a theory that supports learners in applying skills to real-life problems. Groups work together to address complex issues. Students learn from other members of the group through taking action and reflecting on the outcomes (O'Neil & Lamm, 2000). A coach can then provide occasional guidance and assist students in solving problems. Learning occurs as students apply skills and knowledge to solving problems (Marquardt, 2004). Learning also occurs as students listen, reflect, and share their experiences—making decisions as to how and when to incorporate the skills and knowledge into their existing mind maps, a visual diagram.

The action learning cycle is the process of someone learning from action through reflection (Revans, 1998). Figure 1 below illustrates the components of the action learning process (Revans, 1998).

Figure 1. Action learning process.

Action Learning helps articulate the role that a completion coach can have when working with community college students. Action learning is a process that can be embraced by practitioners from various philosophical positions. Specifically, Waddill and Marquardt (2003) linked action learning to these five theoretical orientations of learning, which is inclusive of the constructs presented in this research:

- Cognitive: humans can make meaning, gain insight, and acquire knowledge through a mental process of reflecting on experiences.
- Behavioral: humans can learn (change behavior) through the external control of the environment.

- Social Learning: humans learn through interactions and observations of others in social settings.

- Constructivist: humans construct meaning and reality through context.

- Humanistic: Humans can become self-actualized, understanding and pursuing their learning (Waddill & Marquardt, 200, p. 417).

In an action learning context, the coach helps participants focus on what they are achieving, what they are finding difficult, what processes they are employing, and the implications of these processes (Marquardt, 1999). Facilitators use educational (instructional) rather than psychological (emotional) means to develop intrapersonal and interpersonal domains. Some facilitators push for a deeper understanding of assumptions, values, and beliefs that contribute to the way in which individuals and systems have come to understand them (Marquardt, 1999). An action learning facilitator must have the wisdom and self- restraint to let the participants learn for themselves and from each other (Waddill & Marquardt, 2003). Action learning provides the framework and the process that coaches may use to help community college students navigate complex problems academically, socially, and financially. As colleges seek to increase the number of students who persist to completion, a college may also look into how student involvement can likewise be an essential link to student success.

Theory of Student Involvement

Astin is a renowned higher-education theorist who studied the determiners that most influence a student's progress through school. Astin found that student involvement can play a role in a student's persistence to college completion (Astin, 1984). Student involvement refers to the value and amount of psychological and physical energy students devote to the college experience (Astin 1984). Involvement has many aspects, including the amount of time a student devotes to academic work, participation in extracurricular activities, time spent on campus, and

interaction with faculty and other institutional personnel. According to Astin (1984) and Kun (2008), student involvement has different facets and it conceptually overlaps with the related concepts of integration and engagement (Astin 1984; Kuh, 2008). According to the Theory of Student Involvement, the higher the student's involvement in college, the greater the student's learning and personal development (Astin, 1984).

Astin (1984) acknowledged that students attending two-year schools are less involved and interact less frequently than students attending four-year schools because they typically work and live off campus and attend classes taught by part-time faculty with limited availability (Astin, 1984). Shinde (2010) used data from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and examined the relationship between types of student engagement. Shinde (2010) defined student engagement as on-campus activities in which a student is involved. Shinde (2010) noted that if students are engaged at an institution, they are more likely to remain and graduate from college. Shinde (2010) identified student engagement as any activity in which students participate.

According to Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), the influence of college is fundamentally determined by individual effort and involvement in the interpersonal, academic, and extracurricular opportunities on campus. Students who engage in meaningful interactions with campus personnel—institutional agents—tend to have better academic outcomes than those who don't (Chan & Wang, 2016). The Theory of Student Involvement shows that the more frequently students are involved with activities, faculty, and peers, the more likely they are to thrive. For the purpose of this study, the Theory of Student Involvement also serves as a theoretical lens to assess whether the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program's methods relate to student success and ultimately a student's persistence to college completion.

Conclusion

The intent of chapter two is to provide a scholarly foundation for this program evaluation. These academic findings are used to situate the program evaluation of AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program, in addition to looking into how coaching can contribute to community college student persistent and completion. To understand the potential of coaching, the researcher examined the current landscape and context of community colleges in Ohio and across the nation. The AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program administered by the Ohio Association of Community Colleges (OACC) is building a strong foundation for effective practice as it closely ties coaching to the academic content. More studies need to be organized to develop coaching as a practice for community college student learning.

Chapter three provides a description of the research method that was utilized in this study. Chapter four presents the study findings and recommendations for action based on the conclusions. Chapter five offers an overview of the research and concludes with an interpretation of the findings, implications of the study, recommendations for action, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Research shows that among higher education institutions, community colleges serve a disproportionate number of students who are academically underprepared and students from underrepresented minority groups with low socioeconomic status (Karp, 2011). Too few of those students are successful in earning a postsecondary degree or certificate (Karp, 2011). Unfortunately, in the state of Ohio the educational attainment of its residents is categorically low. According to the Lumina Foundation (2013), by the year 2025 44% of Ohioans are projected to have at least a two-year degree. If Ohio community colleges produce more graduates by following best practices for student success, the two-year institutions can potentially brighten the economic future of the state. To address the situation, the AmeriCorps College Completion Coaches program placed AmeriCorps members on community college campuses in Ohio. Through coaching interventions, AmeriCorps members promoted awareness of college programs, but also empowered students to use the resources by coaching them in goal setting, self-management, self-awareness, and other success strategies, all to increase the students' self-efficacy.

The intent of coaching interventions was to support completion of coursework and ultimately completion of expected credit hours to progress toward earning a post-secondary credential. Coaches provided intensive support to students in reaching academic milestones that are proven to increase their likelihood of success. Each coach was assigned to approximately five-course sections per semester, and the course-embedded model integrates coaching into course delivery (faculty engagement, the language in the syllabus, and course incentives). Coaches worked closely with community college goers who were registered for specific courses or course sections identified by the community college (e.g., developmental English, Math, and

First-Year Experience [FYE]). Studies showed students are more likely to be successful when they are required to access additional support on campus and in the classroom (Attewell et al., 2011). The deliberate embedding, or attachment, of a coach to a particular class ensured the direct contact of the coach with students.

Coaches provided coaching contacts intended to foster success and course completion. Coaching contacts are referred as meaningful interactions with students in the form of email, face-to-face, small group, classroom settings, and via phone. Coaching can be delivered in numerous forms. Face-to-face was the traditional form of delivery as it benefits the coach's ability to read body language. However, it was also the most challenging to arrange, given the scheduling demands of both the student and coach. For convenience, intervention via telephone could be more popular with the disadvantage being the coach's inability to gauge body language. Online coaching via e-mails, group discussions, chat rooms, and visual tutorials may save time and offer flexibility. Overall, coaching contacts were designed to monitor students' progress toward completion of a certificate or degree. Table 2, adapted from the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program's grant proposal (2016), explains the contacts coaches completed:

Table 2

AmeriCorps College Completion Coach Programs' Student Contact Breakdown

Type	When	Goal
Contact 1	Beginning of semester	Focuses on student goals, behavior, and acclimation to college.
Contact 2	Mid-semester	Focuses on progress and performance.
Contact 3	End of semester	Focuses on finishing the semester strong and preparing for the next semester.

Additional coaching contacts were provided based on student needs. The primary methods of contact for coaching were in-person, via e-mail, and phone as viable options to connect with busy community college students. Coaching contacts were conducted one-on-one,

during classroom visits, or in small group discussions. Using coaching contacts provided coaches with the opportunity to continually build momentum in students.

This qualitative study collected data via a program evaluation. A program evaluation provided a structured technique for examining, collecting, and using the information to answer questions about systems and programs, particularly in regard to the program's effectiveness and organization (McNamara, 2006). The approach of this program evaluation was to analyze the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program. The evaluation also provided an underpinning—a theoretical lens that the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program uses, known as coaching practices. According to Gowins (1981), the intent of program evaluation was to assist in piecemeal improvement to the process of social systems, not by dictating a decision, not by valuing the program, but by assisting "members of the policy standing of a program, a social problem, or the decision making machinery itself" (p. 85). An evaluative inquiry raised questions, produced clarifications and provided alternative views that were otherwise to emerge.

Research Questions

The researcher's intent of conducting a program evaluation was to demonstrate the outcomes of the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program. The goal of the program evaluation was to bring awareness of promising practices in student success and higher education programs. To understand and carefully examine the processes of AmeriCorps College Completion Coaches programs, this study addressed the following questions:

1. How does the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program promote best practices for student support services?

2. How does the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program address the identified goal of increasing college completion rates?

Setting

The Ohio Association of Community Colleges (OACC) is an organization that works with community colleges and their students to keep them informed on policy-making issues that directly impact them. The purpose is to ensure that these community colleges and their students continue to be successful and prosper. This organization was founded in 1993 as a result of college trustees and presidents recognizing the value and benefit of coming together in the belief that every person should have access to a high-quality college education ("Our Story," 2017). The OACC provides strategic direction and leadership for Ohio's community and technical colleges. The OACC represents its associate colleges at the national and state level, provide opportunities for trustee advancement, and facilitates the exchange of information and ideas. In addition, the OACC promotes the benefits of community colleges to Ohioans.

In the state of Ohio, there are 23 community colleges that are members of the Ohio Association of Community Colleges (OACC). The OACC is a centrally located advocacy office that brings the colleges together to exchange ideas and information with the goal of developing and executing a strategic direction for community colleges in Ohio. The OACC serves as a resource to its member institutions by advocating at the state and national level for the advancement and implementation of sound policy and initiatives to increase success for hundreds of thousands of students who attend Ohio's community colleges ("Our Story," 2017). The OACC supports the mission of these colleges to provide programming in technical, lower division baccalaureate, developmental, and continuing education because it is rooted in the belief that every Ohioan should have access to a high-quality college education.

OACC believes that every community college student is capable of achieving his or her educational aspirations. Recognizing that challenges exist that prevent both students and colleges from making this a reality, the OACC is committed to explicitly focusing on improving student

retention and student success outcomes for students in all demographic and academic preparedness categories. To that end, OACC is committed to the implementation of policies and practices that advance the seven core values outlined below, not only having a positive impact on community college students, but also our local communities.

In 2012, OACC implemented a new initiative and hired AmeriCorps College Completion Coaches to provide intensive support for students in reaching academic milestones that are proven to increase their likelihood of success. The Coaches Program is Ohio's statewide initiative for student success. Coaches were placed in thirteen community colleges across the state to offer hands-on assistance to students who need in-depth guidance on their college completion path (OACC, 2016). Coaches engaged in "coaching contacts" throughout the academic year to help students adjust to college life, identify and remove barriers to their success, and problem solve. Coaching contacts were targeted toward students who are considered "at-risk." The program defines at-risk as students registered for developmental (remedial) courses. In Ohio, 58.5% of those entering a 2- year college are enrolled in remediation courses. Underrepresented students fare the worst—68.6% of low-income, 75.8% of African Americans, and 67.4% of Hispanics are enrolled in remedial courses. Less than half (48.1%) of those enrolled in remedial courses complete the series to register for subsequent college-level coursework (Complete College America, 2016). This study looked at the inner workings of the program to present a clear picture of how the program approaches its initiatives.

Participants/Sample

The researcher conducted a desk review of the program's documents, which provided an impression of how the program operates. A desk review identified key factors of the program, helping to determine the overall scope and objectives of the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program. It also helped identify important information that may have not been addressed

by other student support services. While conducting the desk review, the researcher de-identified

the participants and the sites. The reviewed documents consisted of the following:

- *Progress Reports*—An assessment used to convey what subgoals have been

  accomplished, what resources have been used, what problems have appeared, etc.

- *Program Self-Assessments*—Self-assessment describes the capacity to develop and

  support a high-quality AmeriCorps program. The assessment highlights the strengths of a

  program as well as areas requiring targeted support and resources.

- *Program Plans*—A report that simplifies and connects the who, what, where, when, how

  and why of the program.

- *Grant Proposals*—The initial stage of requesting grant funds (from the Corporation for

  National and Community Service) for hiring AmeriCorps members.

These documents provided comprehensive and historical information, utilizing five years of

documentation. Reviewing the existing documents helped to understand the history, philosophy,

and operation of the program and how the organization operates (McNamara, 2006). There were

no human subjects for this program evaluation; instead, it was a desk review of archival data.

While the Ohio Association of Community Colleges (OACC) owns the internal documents, the

researcher was given access to the documents scrubbed of identifying information.

Data

This study used existing documents containing information on the AmeriCorps College

Completion Coach program. These documents belong to the Ohio Association of Community

Colleges and were based on the coaching program from 2012–2017. The OACC used these

documents to report on program performance to funders and community college partners. This

program evaluation repurposed the documents from the OACC to further explore the practice of

the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program. As the program manager, the researcher

had regular access to the documentation, which collectively made up the dataset utilized for this study. The president of the OACC granted permission for the researcher to access the existing documents to answer the research questions for this study (see appendix). With access granted, the researcher reviewed the documents. The researcher used the data collected to provide knowledge about the factors that contribute to the success of the AmeriCorps College Completion program. Also, the researcher omitted personal information of students and participating community colleges to protect the anonymity of students and colleges.

Through the use of a program evaluation, the researcher was able to understand the program more clearly by carefully collecting information about the program (McNamara, 1998). For this dissertation, the program evaluation was designed to provide an understanding of the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program by evaluating the program's methods and results. The program evaluation was conducted in a 4 step process: (a) the researcher obtained permission (written consent) from the OACC to conduct research, (b) the researcher developed a program evaluation plan and collected the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program's documents, (c) the researcher coded the materials received, and (d) the researcher reported the findings.

Analysis

The analysis of the data presented a picture of the program, its purpose, and the ways of carrying out its mission. In studying the features of the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program, the coding method, particularly the descriptive coding, was useful as it allowed for a comprehensive view of the facets that makes this program unique, and offered a picture of how these facets contributed to the program methods and results. After reviewing the existing documentation, the researcher began the coding process. Through coding, the researcher organized and sorted the data. Common concepts and categories were highlighted by recurrence

and relevance to the program evaluation. The codes served as a way to label, compile, and organize the data. Coding summarized in a word or short phase the primary topic of a passage found with the qualitative data.

For this study, the researcher chose to use descriptive coding. According to Saldaña (2016), "Descriptive Coding is appropriate for virtually all qualitative studies, but particularly for beginning qualitative researchers learning how to code data, ethnographies, and studies with a wide variety of data forms" (p. 70). Tesch (1995) differentiates that "it is important that these [codes] are identifications of the topic, not abbreviations of the content. The topic is what is talked or written about. The content is the substance of the message" (p. 119). Descriptive coding summarized in a word or noun the basic topic of a passage. The researcher conducted two rounds of coding. While coding, the researcher took notes to find connections among the data collected. During the coding process, the researcher reviewed a volume of data; as a result, the researcher created subcodes to organize the data better. Gibbs (2007) explains that the most general code is called the "parent" while its subcodess are the "children"; subcodes that share the same parent "siblings" in a hierarchy (p. 74). Figure 2 below illustrates the different concepts and categories that are created throughout the coding process (Saldaña, 2016).
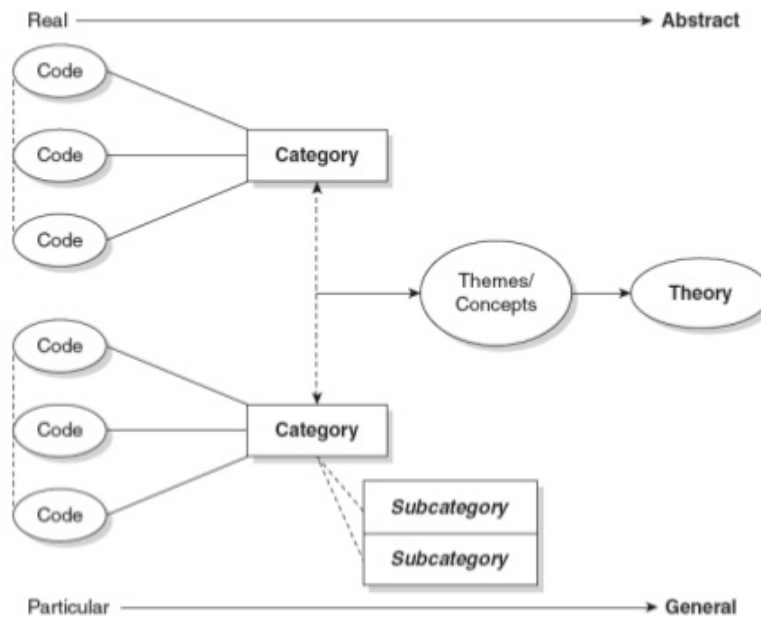
Figure 2. Streamline codes-to-theory model.

The description of the codes was the foundation for qualitative inquiry, and its primary goal was to assist the reader in seeing what the researcher saw and to hear what the researcher heard (Wolcott, 1996). Descriptive codes from data collected across various time periods and charted in matrices are also essential for assessing longitudinal participant change (Saldaña, 2016). Descriptive coding identifies themes within data that may be relevant to the researcher's topic (Wolcott, 1996). These themes illustrate patterns across data sets that may be important to a specific research question. To further explore the themes discovered, the researcher conducted a thematic analysis. The goal of a thematic analysis was to identify themes (i.e., patterns) in data that were important to addressing the research topic (Clarke & Braun, 2013). A thematic analysis is much more than merely summarizing the data; it interprets and makes sense of the data (Clarke & Braun, 2013). This form of coding and analysis assisted with categorizing the data at a level that provided a clear way for the researcher to understand and grasp the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program.

Integrity and Validity

On the aspect of validity, this research study employs internal and external validity. Internal validity refers to the ability to determine cause and effect relationships within a research study (Trochim, 2006). The internal validity for this research study examined the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program and the impact (relationship) the program can have on community college students' completion rates. External validity is understood as the generalizability of the research findings to other populations, in other settings and over time (Trochim, 2006). The external validity for this research study was demonstrated (via the program evaluation) in how the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program may be applied to other student success effectors among community colleges nationally.

According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), "data are the particulars that form the basis of analysis" (p. 117). To have a study that is comprehensive, it is essential to look at the data with integrity and respect. To maintain the integrity of the program, data was gathered through desk review. To analyze the data, the themes were examined for their relevance to college coaching, and gained a quality sense of the strengths and weaknesses of the program. The analysis of the data presented a picture of the program, its purpose, and the ways of carrying out its mission. In studying the features of the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program, the coding method was particularly effective, as it allowed for a comprehensive view of the facets that made this program unique, and offered a picture of how these facets contribute to the program methods and goals. This study took into account the "full variety of evidence" presented (Yin, 2009).

Participants' Rights

There were no human subjects in this study. The identifying information of the students and the community college sites were removed. The researcher received written consent from the Ohio Association of Community Colleges (OACC) and the administrators of the AmeriCorps

College Completion Coach program. This consent gave the researcher full access to documentation related to the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program. At any time, the OACC had the right to request that the program evaluation be discontinued. Documents maintained by the researcher were on an encrypted, password-protected computer. Paper documents were stored in a locked file cabinet.

Limitations

Limitations are matters and occurrences in a study that arise that could not have been predicted. As a result, the limitations that occurred within the study were not in the researcher's control. There is a possibility that paper trails over the years of the existence of the program could have been missing, this may have resulted in the researcher having access only to certain documents and data that were kept over time by the program. In addition, the researcher served as the program manager of the Ohio Association of Community Colleges' AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program. The resarcher is responsible for the implementation and continuous improvement of the programs initiatives.The researcher oversaw the daily operations and performance of the program, including recruitment, selection, training, and supervision of the coaching staff with regular access to program data.

The researcher was cautious of personal bias and the influence that could have had on the study. According to Norris (1997), a consideration of self and the researcher's relation to the topic of the research is a necessity for handling bias. The researcher's peers frequently reviewed the study to minimize such bias and influences. These reviews helped the researcher identify gaps in the research and provide affirmation that the research study was sound and reasonable. Furthermore, according to Norris (1997), colleagues and critical friends can assist researchers with exploring their preferences for interpretations and explanations, certain kinds of evidence, consider alternatives, find blind spots and errors, and examine judgments. A critical aspect of

this research study was to be transparent when presenting the limitations. The research was committed to ensuring that outcomes from this study were qualified against the backdrop of current research. The researcher was qualified to conduct this study given the primary access and proximity to the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program and its dataset.

Conclusion

The intent of chapter three was to provide a description of the research method that was utilized in this study. This study aimed to present a program evaluation of the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program. This program supports the national agenda of increasing the attainment of postsecondary credentials in support of the completion agenda (McPhail, 2011). The researcher continued this program evaluation by looking into to the program in depth in two additional chapters. Chapters four presents the study findings. Chapter five offers an overview of the study and concludes with an interpretation of the findings, implications of the study, recommendations for action, and recommendations for future research. Community college leadership may benefit from this study's outcomes in determining which student services have the most impact on student success for the benefit of the college and students alike.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

This program evaluation was intended to provide research-based evidence with respect to student support services that are designed to improve student retention for coaching practitioners. Additionally, an object of this study was to inform educational policy and support the national completion agenda. The purpose of this agenda is to increase the attainment of postsecondary credentials for American citizens in order to address the country's workforce demands (McPhail, 2011). Furthermore, this qualitative study was a program evaluation of the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach Program. Program evaluations provide a structured approach for examining, collecting, and using the information to answer questions about systems and programs, particularly in regard to the program's effectiveness and organization (McNamara, 2006). The approach of this program evaluation was to analyze the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program by addressing two research questions:

1. How does the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program promote best practices for student support services?

2. How does the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program address the identified goal of increasing college completion rates?

This chapter summarizes the results of the study. The results were derived by the researcher reviewing existing program documents to gain a broader understanding of the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach Program. The reviewed documents provided an impression of how the program operates. These documents also illustrated comprehensive and historical information. Reviewing these documents helped to access the history, philosophy, and operation of the program. There were no human participants and only program documents were

collected. Overall, three core thematic patterns with connected elements developed out of the data analysis method and interpretation process. The following themes were identified:

- interventions for student success

- identifying at-risk students

- the role of an AmeriCorps member.

The results are interpreted with implications and recommendations for future research in chapter 5.

Background Profile of the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach Program

A desk review, reviewing a program documents to gain a broad understanding, was conducted to evaluate the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program. The documents and reports reviewed are shown in Table 3. The desk review was intended to help build a good understanding of the program. Reviewing these documents aided in uncovering long-term student support services trends, discovering the purpose and goals of the program, and informing recommendations for future interventions. The information and findings of the desk review were integrated with the data and findings from the data collection and analysis. The description of these documents and reports is shown in Table 3. The study comprised published documents between the years of 2012 and 2017. The documents provided the history, philosophy, and operation of the program. These documents were created by the Ohio Association of Community Colleges as supporting documents or required documents to receive and maintain grant funding.

Table 3

Background Profile of Documents

Name of Document	Document Description
Progress Reports	An assessment used to convey what sub-goals have been accomplished, what resources have been used, what problems have appeared etc.
Program Self-Assessments	Self-assessment describes the capacity to develop and support a high-quality AmeriCorps program. The assessment highlights the strengths of a program as well as areas requiring targeted support and resources.
Program Plans	A report that simplified and connected the who, what, where, when, how and why of the program.
Grant Proposals	The initial stage to request grant funds (from the Corporation for National and Community Service) to hire AmeriCorps members.

Analysis Methods

In studying the features of the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program, the researcher employed descriptive coding to organize and sort the data. This being the researcher's first time coding, the researcher chose descriptive coding because it is suitable for nearly all qualitative studies, but mostly for starting qualitative researchers learning how to code data, and for studies with a varied range of data forms (Saldaña, 2016, p. 70). Through descriptive coding the researcher summarized in a word the basic topic of the passages presented in the documents being reviewed. Descriptive coding also allowed the researcher to summarize and synthesize findings in the data. In linking data collection and interpretation, coding became the basis for developing the analysis. Saldaña (2009) stated that "Coding is primarily a hermeneutic (or interpretive) act that represents the transitional process between data collection and more extensive data analysis" (p. 4). The description of the codes was the foundation for qualitative inquiry, and the primary goal was to assist the reader in seeing what the researcher saw and to hear what the researcher heard (Wolcott, 1996). Coding allowed the researcher to summarize and synthesize what is happening in the data.

The researcher conducted two rounds of coding; a first cycle and second cycle coding method. Saldaña (2013) defines first and second cycle coding as a strategy to move from "codes to themes or categories to theory" (p. 71). The first cycle coding methods are preliminary and serve to organize the raw data. First cycle methods explored the interrelationships across multiple codes and categories to develop a coherent synthesis of the data (Saldaña, 2016). While coding, words and phrases related to the research questions were highlighted, and a list of categories, or themes, were developed and grouped to form a shared idea.

Second cycle coding methods were a more advanced way of reorganizing and reanalyzing the data coded through first cycle methods (Saldaña, 2016). In the second cycle, the data was recoded to make the findings more refined. The researcher again highlighted words and phrases related to the research question. The researcher then compared the codes from the first and second cycle and rearranged and reclassified the codes into categories. Second cycle coding served to develop a sense of thematic, conceptual, and theoretical organization and coherence from the first cycle codes. In the second cycle, codes served to label, compile, and organize the data to protect anonymity and maintain organization of the data throughout the collection, analysis, and reporting process. This form of coding and analysis assisted the researcher with categorizing the data at a level that provided a clear way to understand and grasp the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program. Identifying information was removed and will not be accessible for future study uses.

Descriptive coding summarized the data collected across the 2012–2017 AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program years, essential for assessing changes that may have been acquired throughout the program's existence (Saldaña, 2016). Descriptive coding also helped to drive themes within the data that were relevant to the research topic (Wolcott, 1996). These themes illustrated patterns across data sets and were linked to a specific research question. To

further explore the themes discovered, the researcher conducted a thematic analysis to discover these patterns. The goal of a thematic analysis is to identify themes, or patterns, in data that are important to addressing the research topic (Clarke & Braun, 2013). A theme is the result of coding, analytic reflection, and contemplation, interpretive categorization, not something that is "coded" as such (Saldaña, 2016, p. 12). Generating themes involved a higher order of data analysis. The process consisted of inspecting, cleansing, and modeling the data collected to discover useful information geared to answering the research questions. A thematic analysis is much more than merely summarizing the data; it interprets and makes sense of the data (Clarke & Braun, 2013). The interpretation of the data derived from the themes across data sets associated with the research question.

Emergent Themes

After completing the first and second cycle of coding, three main themes and eight subthemes were discovered. The three main themes are:

- interventions for student success

- identifying at-risk students

- the role of an AmeriCorps member.

From these, the researcher discovered the following five subthemes:

- coaching

- course-embedded model

- students in remedial courses

- underrepresented students

- service commitment.

The subthemes of interventions for student success included coaching and the course-embedded model. The subthemes of identifying at-risk students were students in remedial courses, and

underrepresented students. The subtheme of the role of the AmeriCorps member was service

commitment. Table 4 shows each main theme with its corresponding subthemes and the

exemplars, which were derived from the coding and thematic analysis.

Table 4

Summary of the Main Themes and Subthemes

Main theme	Subtheme	Exemplars
Interventions for student success	a. Coaching	Coaching contacts/interactions
	b. Course-embedded model	AmeriCorps College Completion Coach's role in the classroom
Identifying at-risk students	a. Students in Remedial Courses	Developmental Courses
	b. Underrepresented Students	Minority students Low-income students Academically underprepared
The role of an AmeriCorps member	a. Service commitment	1700 hours of service 11- Month commitment

Although themes and subthemes were found in most documents and reports, some

documents and reports did not present the themes. From years 2012 to 2017 the program model

of the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program evolved as the program continued to

develop and find areas in which to improve. This resulted in some themes and subthemes not

being present in all documents and reports. Table 5 provides an overall grouping of all the

themes that emerged from this study, illustrating the main themes and subthemes discovered via

the descriptive coding process. Through coding, the researcher organized and sorted the data.

While reviewing a volume of existing program documents (Table 5) from the AmeriCorps

College Completion Coach program generated between the years of 2012 and 2017, which is the

full duration of the program's existence, common concepts and categories were highlighted by

recurrence and relevance to the program evaluation. Table 5 shows the themes that were

discovered after the completion of the coding process. The table also illustrates the themes that

were developed over time as the program continued to flourish and mature.

Table 5

Overall Themes and Elements with the Documents and Reports (2012–2017)

Main themes and connected themes	Documents and Reports																							
	Program Self-Assessments						Progress Reports						Program Plans						Grant Proposals					
Program Year	-12	13	14	15	16	17	12	13	14	15	16	17	12	13	14	15	16	17	1	13	14	15	16	17
Interventions for student success	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
1a. Coaching model	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
1b. Course embedded model			x	x	x	x			x	x	x	x			x	x	x	x			x	x	x	x
Identifying at-risk students	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
2a. Students in Remedial Courses			x	x	x	x			x	x	x	x			x	x	x	x			x	x	x	x
2b. Underprepared students	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
The role of an AmeriCorps member	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
3a. Service Commitment	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

Theme 1: Interventions for Student Success

The AmeriCorps College Completion Coaches provides students with three forms of intervention:

- Personal consultations throughout the academic year to discuss success strategies that will lead to an increase in persistence and completion.

- Workshops throughout the year orienting students to resources and services on campus as well as covering topics including civic engagement, financial literacy, and financial aid.

- Volunteer and community engagement opportunities through the AmeriCorps days of service.

These interventions were used by the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program as a strategy to improve student performance and increase a student's persistence to completion. The Ohio Association of Community Colleges (OACC) (2012) stated, "AmeriCorps members are

particularly suited to plug into the equation of moving students through successes as concerned

citizens who can freely act as a connecter between students and the community, through

structured interventions and community service engagement opportunities" (Grant Proposal,

2012, p. 11). Coaches assist students within the college and help students engage with their

community.

In the first intervention, the AmeriCorps College Completion Coaches provide intense

guidance to community college students registered for developmental, first-year experience

(FYE), STEM or other gateway courses with low success rates. One of the intents of coaching

interventions is to support completion of coursework and ultimately completion of expected

credit hours to progress toward earning a postsecondary credential. Each coach is assigned a

cohort of students per semester and is embedded in development/remedial course sections.

Members provide coaching interventions (as known as coaching contacts) that are meaningful

interactions with students with the intent to foster success and course completion.

The OACC (2013) describes the first intervention as the AmeriCorps College Completion

Coaches ability to impact students:

> Coaches will engage students in meaningful interactions to increase awareness of
>
> success strategies including community and campus resources. Coaches will become
>
> immersed on the campus and become familiar with the academic advising office and
>
> students services offices, where they will depend on various staff to help them access the
>
> information they need to properly and effectively monitor their student caseloads. They
>
> will also become very familiar with other offices on campus, like career services and
>
> financial aid, as these will be resources they will connect students with regularly.
>
> (Program Self-Assessment, 2013, p. 23)

By building rapport with students, coaches can connect students with resources available to

them. An AmeriCorps College Completion Coach (2016) expressed interaction with a student as,

> I am working with a student who is back at the college for the third time. Previously, she
>
> has withdrawn or failed her courses due to lack of motivation and poor mental health.
>
> This is the first time where she is paying for her courses instead of her parents and she
>
> was excited to succeed. Throughout the semester, we spoke a lot about various study
>
> skills and test taking strategies. She had a lot of issues with time management and
>
> procrastination, so we spoke about strategies such as a calendar or planner. The student
>
> set up a calendar on her phone and she said it changed her life. She remembered when her
>
> assignments were due and when her meetings on campus were happening. We put these
>
> strategies toward the semester goal of receiving A's and B's in all her courses. Halfway
>
> through November, she has achieved these grades and is seeing a continuous
>
> improvement in her assignments. Finally, we got her assigned an academic advisor to
>
> speak with about future courses to take and what her options are. Since she was
>
> undecided, she took the career matching test we have and scheduled an appointment to
>
> meet with a career counselor. She is excited about figuring out her future and what it will
>
> take to get there. I'm happy that I was able to work with this student to support her in her
>
> college career. She already came to me extremely motivated and willing to learn, so
>
> together we were able to customize strategies and actions in order for her to succeed.
>
> (Progress Report, 2016, pp. 17–18)

In this example, the coach expressed how coaching intervention had an impact on a student's

success. Through interventions, coaches may be able to remove barriers that may impact a

student's success rate. Coaches be valuable in assisting students when they are facing hardships.

In the second intervention, coaches provide workshops for their specific caseload, introducing students to resources and services on campus, community partners, and topics such as financial literacy and financial aid. The workshop series served as candid group engagement opportunities to network with students as well as resources on campus and in the community. Throughout the academic year, workshops are offered and cover information about the college's academic, financial, and social support services, as well as information about the structure of the college and its classes. The OACC (2016) stated, "Workshops throughout the year orient students to resources and services on campus as well as covering topics including civic engagement, financial literacy, time management, study skills, goal setting and registration. Workshop topics are related to student success strategies" (Program Self- Assessment, p. 7). The intent is for a student who participates in these workshops to discover a greater use of student support services, and to improve overall success and retention rate of the student. Providing these workshops has helped students learn skills that can help them improve academically. An AmeriCorps College Completion Coach (2015) shared his experience with completing a workshop,

> During my initial meeting with an instructor, she asked if I would be comfortable giving a short presentation on "Diversity" in her classroom. It just so happened that my partnering with her class coincided with her scheduled lesson on "Diversity," and she felt that a) the presentation would be a good way for me to introduce myself to the class, and b) the students might want to hear from someone other than the instructor on this particular topic. I delivered my presentation to one section of her class; it was so successful that she asked me to present to all three of her classes that term. Word of the successful presentation also spread among faculty, and as a result, I was asked to develop the presentation into a workshop and to present it in several classes. This presentation

gave me access to students that I would have otherwise not been able to easily connect with. The overall effect of this successful series of presentations and workshops was that faculty got to see first-hand the value of partnering with an AmeriCorps College Completion Coach, and students were able to connect with me in the classroom, which made it all the easier for them to contact me outside of the classroom. The success of these presentations heightened the instructor's understanding of the value of AmeriCorps College Completion Coaches, and along with encouraging faculty to trust and respect me as an individual coach, these successes will likely influence instructors' willingness to work closer with coaches in the future. (Progress Report, 2015, p. 8)

Providing workshops gave coaches an opportunity to build rapport with students. By providing workshops focused on student success topics, students can learn skills and techniques that can increase their success. It is through these workshops that coaches have another avenue to assist students.

The third intervention provides an opportunity for students to participate in service projects alongside an AmeriCorps College Completion Coach. AmeriCorps members work with students to coordinate service projects, providing value by fostering a sense of volunteerism and paying it forward with students participating in the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program (Grant Proposal, 2014). The intent is to increase student engagement in the local area with vested community leaders and members (Grant Proposal, 2014). The service opportunity component of the program was designed to plant seeds for the sustainability of the program itself, by creating a sense of community among the students, and engaging vested community members who might serve as college coaches themselves in the future. According to OACC (2014),

As a component of the AmeriCorps experience, AmeriCorps College Completion

Coaches participate in service projects and encourage students to join them. Service

projects serve as a valuable link between the community, the community college, and a

coach who can join those relationships, and as well the relationships between the

services, resources, and opportunities both on campus and off, in order to ultimately

connect students with what they need to complete their college plan and move into the

workforce or transfer to a four-year college. (Grant Proposal, 2014, p. 4)

An AmeriCorps College Completion Coach described a service project:

In honor of Global Youth Service Day, the AmeriCorps College Completion Coaches

hosted a series of events centered around urban bee sustainability and conservation. Our

service project was created as a service-on-the-go "Save the Bees" initiative where

students, faculty, and staff had the opportunity to assemble a seed pod containing a peat

pot, soil, and black eyed susan seeds. This flower was chosen because it's native to Ohio

and is a favorite among pollinators. In addition to informational materials and the

physical service project, we wanted to showcase local businesses within the central Ohio

region that practice sustainable beekeeping techniques to show students that these things

happen close to home. With the amazing generosity of a farm, we were able to attract the

participation of many volunteers with raffle prizes that included honey, honeysticks, and

all-natural beeswax candles. Through working with the college, their donation was

accepted as a tax-deductible in-kind donation by the college. After 2 events, we had help

from over 42 students to assemble seed pods. After months of hard work and recognizing

all of the little details, we're pleased with the execution and outcome. I'd definitely

recommend this project to another Coach for Global Youth Service Day (Progress

Report, 2015, p. 13)

Service projects gave students and coaches the opportunity to serve their community. Through service projects, coaches worked side-by-side with students to give back to the community in multiple ways:

Providing food assistance. Students face many personal barriers to success outside of the classroom. Coaches can make connections between students and community to remove barriers. In partnering with the Ohio Benefit Bank, the Ohio Association of Community Colleges offers coaches online training to become Benefits Counselors. Upon completion of the training, coaches can help and make appropriate referrals. Through being a Benefits Counselor, coaches help students know if they are eligible for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) known as food stamps.

Job readiness training. Many students need employment while being enrolled in school. To assist students with job readiness, Coaches receive job readiness training to not only assist students with finding employment, but also how to stay employed. Job readiness training is intended to give coaches the tools to assist students with resume writing, interview skills, job search methods, as well as appropriate behaviors and attitudes to display in the workplace.

Beautifying the community. Community colleges were designed to aid the community in which they were placed. Beautifying the community that the community college serves gives students and other community members an opportunity to give back to their community. Partnering with Keep America Beautiful, one of the coaches' service projects, coaches, students, and other community members can create community gardens, plant trees, clean graffiti, and more—all of which result in a positive, lasting impact in their community.

Subtheme (1a): Coaching model. AmeriCorps College Completion Coaches provide interventions which are referred to as "coaching contacts" (Grant Proposal, 2015, p. 2). Coaching contacts are meaningful interactions with students, which foster success and completion.

Coaches conduct three coaching contacts, one at the beginning, middle, and end of the semester. Coaching contacts are as followed: Coaching contact 1 (beginning of the semester) focuses on student goals, behavior and acclimation to college. Coaching contact 2 (mid-semester) focuses on progress and performance. Coaching contact 3 (end of the semester) focuses on finishing the semester strong and preparing for the next semester. Contacts occur in different forms: one-on-one, during classroom visits, or in small groups. In-person coaching contacts last approximately 30 minutes. Additional coaching contacts are provided with the frequency and length determined by the student needs. The OACC (2015) explains further coaching contacts as:

> The first coaching contact should be focused on the students' goals, examining behaviors that will lead to or detract from completion, and creating a semester completion plan. The second coaching contact should be a mid-semester check in. The Coach should help students with an analysis of how they are performing at the college. The final coaching session should be designed to ensure that students prepare for exams. (Grant Proposal, 2015, p. 4)

Using these coaching contacts, coaches monitor students' progress towards completion of a certificate or degree.

The primary methods of contact for coaching are in-person, with e-mail, and by phone. These forms of communication are viable options to connect with busy community college students. Coaching topics include college survival tips related to: basic computers, time management, study skills, stress management, note-taking, registration, goal setting, critical thinking, career mapping, and referrals to campus/community resources. An AmeriCorps College Completion Coach (2015) shared their experience with providing coaching contacts demonstrated in one on one interactions with a student:

My second semester as a coach I was tasked to work with a reinstatement student. I was a

little worried at first because each reinstatement student is required to meet with a Coach.

This helps keep the students on task and gives them 1:1 assistance when needed. We

formed a plan for them to follow and expectations for the student to meet. In this plan, we

designed a week by week study schedule along with tutoring and study sessions added in.

Since they were a reinstatement student they were only allowed to take a few classes and

this was extremely helpful. It allowed the student to focus on classes which required

more effort. Every week this student would visit and we would discuss the difficulties

they had at home and on campus. I help them work their situations and connected them to

multiple resources on campus. Three semesters later and this student still meets with me

every week. They know I will support them in all of their endeavors. I gave them the

confidence they needed to speak with their academic advisor and ask questions so they

could understand their course schedules. Most students just need that extra person to

show them someone cares, someone will hold you accountable, and help them through

their struggles (Progress Report, 2015, p. 6)

Through coaching contacts, coaches are present to build momentum in students continually. By

meeting regularly with students, coaches serve as in-person early alert systems for students,

ensuring they are connected when necessary with the appropriate resources on campus that can

help them towards completion.

Subtheme (1b): Course-embedded model. The AmeriCorps College Completion Coach

program provides support for students in community colleges in Ohio. Coaches are assigned a

workload of 200 students per program year using a course-embedded model (coaches are

assigned approximately five course sections per semester). OACC (2017) embeds coaches in the

following courses:

- remedial English or math

- first-year experience (FYE)

- science, technology, engineering and math (STEM)

- other college gateway courses (foundational coursework with low success rates) (p.41).

This model integrates coaching into course delivery (faculty engagement, the language in the syllabus, and course incentives). The AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program recognizes that community colleges students voluntarily access campus resources. The deliberate embedding, or attachment, of a coach to a particular course ensures direct contact of the coach with students (OACC, 2017).

Coaches are provided a student roster through the course-embedded model, and access to those students' information in the campus designated tracking system. Coaches track interactions through a designated tracking system. According to the OACC (2014), "The course-embedded model harnesses the need to provide in-depth monitoring and support in order to see increases in two-year college retention and success, and creating an opportunity to plug engaged citizens into a solution" (Program Plans, 2014, p. 11). As a part of the embedded framework, colleges identified Faculty Champions. These Faculty Champions partner directly with AmeriCorps College Completion Coaches and are asked to include a statement about coaching in their course syllabus. An AmeriCorps College Completion Coach (2017) described their relationship with faculty:

> Throughout my coaching experience, I have developed a stellar working relationship with several instructors with whom I've worked over a period of several terms. This term, instructors and I have been very intentional about directly coordinating our interactions with students; this has include having joint conferences with students, where the instructor and myself meet with students together to discuss their issues. This partnership

has also extended to instructors allowing me to develop and present workshops as part of

their curriculum, and, in emergency situations, instructors have directly partnered with

me to stage academic interventions for students in scholastic crises. The development of

these close working relationships has resulted not only in better, more thorough service

for the students, but also instructors have gained a greater understanding of and

appreciation for the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach role. (Progress Report, 2017,

p. 20)

Building rapport with students allows the coaches to give an introductory speech on the program

along with other opportunities to connect with students in the classroom. It also creates

incentives that hopefully encourage coach/student interactions.

Theme 2: At-Risk Students

Coaching interventions are targeted toward students considered at-risk. The concept of

students at-risk is often associated with a shortfall view of students and thus it is key to insist that

so called 'at-risk students' have the ability to succeed or fail, depending on the type and level of

positive institutional support they receive (Bradley et al., 2008). In this regard, an AmeriCorps

College Completion Coach works to guide students to resources that may remove obstacles that

might get in the student's way. The AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program defines at-

risk as students registered for developmental (remedial) English or math, First-Year Experience

(FYE), Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) and other college gateway courses

(foundational coursework with low success rates) (OACC, 2015). In Ohio, 58.5% of those

entering a 2- year college enrolled in remediation courses (Lumina, 2016). The OACC (2012)

explained their intention with serving at-risk students:

The AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program provides intensive guidance for

students that might lead to higher success rates. This approach is to help at-risks students

to help increase retention rates. The program adopts the implementation of individualized

education plans to increase student engagement and retention. Students impacted by the

AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program should lead to greater use of student

support services; and improved success and retention for at-risk students. (Program self-

assessments, 2012, p. 7)

It is the intent of the program for coaches to directly influence students' intentions to persist in

college, as mediated through goal commitment. An AmeriCorps College Completion Coach

(2016) shared how they assisted at-risk students:

Over the past 8 weeks I met with a husband and wife that were in the same class. They

shared with me that they were experiencing trouble finding food and they couldn't eat

due to their financial situation and dietary restrictions. They also had several children at

home with similar dietary issues. I was not sure if any food cupboards in our area had

food that would fit their needs, so I let them know that I would let them know about any

resources as soon as I could. When they left my office, I went to the person that runs our

on campus food cupboard and asked if we had any food that fit these people's specific

dietary restrictions. Luckily, we do, so I took that information down. On top of that, this

staff member let me know about a website where people could look up the locations of

local food cupboards, and the types of food they offered there. I took all of this new

information I had gathered, and sent it to them in an e-mail. As the semester progressed, I

kept in contact with them, and they let me know the food problem was no longer

something that was holding them back. (Progress Report, 2016, p. 21)

Coaches serve as guides to help students set goals and become acclimated to the college while

developing successful strategies. It is the goal of the program for coaches to increase student

outcomes in areas such as student performance, intellectual and critical thinking skills, student

self-confidence, students' latent abilities, self-actualization, expectations, and future aspirations, grade point average, and persistence rates.

Subtheme (2a): Students in remedial courses. Many students who receive assistance from the AmeriCorps College Completion Coaches are enrolled in remedial courses (i.e., developmental education courses) based on results from college placement test scores in reading, English, or mathematics. Community Colleges use a student's performance on college placement exams (e.g., ACT or SAT) to determine if a student needs remedial placement. Remedial courses are intended to assist students identified as underprepared for the academic rigor of college-level coursework. After taking developmental courses, students must enroll in subsequent college-level courses if they are to stay on the path toward degree completion. The OACC (2014) explains their view of students enrolled in remedial courses:

> There is a rate at which students are ill-prepared for their next educational step, rendering too many students assigned to remedial coursework, which does not count toward a degree. The vast majority of first-time community college goers (most of whom need remedial coursework) has never participated in tutoring services, or any type of academic enrichment opportunities and are thus unfamiliar with both the level of rigor necessary for college-level courses, and with the services that may be in place to help students achieve passing scores in such coursework. With this in mind, the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program focuses on how to eliminate the many exit points when students may be struggling. (Program Plans, 2014, p. 13)

One goal of the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program is to ensure that students who are required to take remedial courses can successfully earn all their attempted developmental credits and to continue a path toward degree completion. An AmeriCorps College

Completion Coach (2013) explains how she assisted a student with completing his remedial courses.

> My great story is of a student I met who is in 2 classes I'm embedded into. One is Math 100 and the other is an English 100. He has a learning disability; the first few weeks he was completely lost. I sat next to him in both classes so I could explain or help. I took him to tutoring services, he now goes there every day for help. He finished both classes with a "B." In addition, he will be able to play basketball for the college when the season starts. (Progress Report, 2013, p. 4)

A reasonable expectation for students in the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program is that they complete the requisite number of credits to be on track for degree completion. The coaches' involvement (providing coaching contacts) serves to continually keep participating students accountable, encouraging them to stay the course, finish remedial series, and build momentum in completing college-level courses.

Subtheme (2b): Underprepared students. The causes for low success rates at community colleges are many, even though support exists on community college campuses. Students can still lack understanding of and familiarity with how the postsecondary education process works—placement tests, fees, and resources available on campus (i.e., financial aid). In the face of these factors, after students begin at a community college, many can stray from their educational and career goals—if any were ever established—and, as a result, end up not graduating. An AmeriCorps College Completion Coach (2014) described his interaction with an underprepared student:

> I met with a student who had transferred from a university after being overwhelmed and underprepared. She had been in a sheltering environment growing up and moving away to a college was too stark of a change. She came back home and was attending her first

semester at the college. We bonded over having similar sheltering childhoods, and she

spoke about not having any friends and the amount of stress she has. Additionally, she

was worried about the English II class she was taking because she didn't feel that the

English I she took at the university sufficiently prepared her. I encouraged her to speak

with her professor about these concerns so she can have as many resources as possible.

By the end of the meeting, we still hadn't made it to the goal setting form that was next,

but I felt that she had gained a lot from simply being listened to. She spoke about her

mental health issues to someone who was understanding her, and we began to set plans in

place for focusing on herself. I later discovered she did speak to her professor, helping

her be more prepared for the papers and giving the professor an understanding of where

she was at. She was very grateful to have an empathetic listener and I was grateful to be

in the position to help. (Progress Report, 2014, p. 11)

The incidence of underprepared students may be partially due to the fact that many students do

not participate in orientation and were unaware of the advising opportunities that existed. There

is also an overwhelming influx of students to community colleges and insufficient targeted

supports for the vast number of students who need additional attention.

The AmeriCorps College Completion Coaches assist underprepared students by

providing additional tools and guidance. Coaches serve to ensure underprepared students are

understanding and meeting their educational goals throughout the year. The OACC (2015)

explains their approach to underprepared students:

On-track indicators have been identified that help indicate whether or not the student is

on track for important milestones, such as enrolling in classes, attending full-time and not

part-time, dropping fewer than 10–20% of courses, registering for courses on time, and

maintaining an adequate GPA. By implementing formal on-time completion plans with

students, coaches can monitor stop out points, and encourage students to stay a particular

course. (Program Self-Assessment, 2015, p. 9)

Coaches can use on-track indicators as a tool for students to have a roadmap for completing their

educational goals.

To track the progress of the underprepared students, coaches utilize a tracking system to

monitor the content and quantity of coaching contacts. Coaches also administer a pre- and post-

survey to students at the beginning and end of the designated semester to collect data that is used

to evaluate the intended outcomes of the coaching interventions. The OACC (2016) explains the

purpose of their tracking system:

In order to track and report meaningful contacts, coaches will be required to use an Excel

tracking spreadsheet daily, utilize the program Pre- and Post-Coach forms regularly, and

submit a Direct Service Summary Report monthly. AmeriCorps members are responsible

to track student interactions and student progress. Tracking this data builds a

programmatic database. (Program Plans, 2016, p. 5)

The data from the tracking systems are used when the Ohio Association of Community Colleges

applies for continuation grants from Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS)

to continue to receive funds for the AmeriCorps College Completion Coaches program.

Theme 3: AmeriCorps

AmeriCorps College Completion Coaches serve as AmeriCorps members. These

AmeriCorps members gain valuable professional, educational, and life benefits, and the

experience can have a lasting impact on themselves and the colleges they serve. An AmeriCorps

College Completion Coach (2017) shared her experience of being an AmeriCorps member:

Before I joined AmeriCorps, I was unhappy, unfulfilled, and overall not a fun person to

be around. I was working at the time with a state political entity doing high-dollar

fundraising and, unfortunately, I didn't enjoy my work. After about a month of working, I

decided that it clearly wasn't for me—so I quit. Feeling defeated and experiencing the

lowest amount of self-confidence I've ever had in my life, I felt lost. I was looking for

anything and everything to have a means of making money. On a whim, I found myself

online looking at possible service opportunities in Ohio. Little did I know that me

clicking a button that said "Express Interest to this Opportunity" would give me quite

possibly the best job and time of my life. In my short time so far with AmeriCorps, I have

grown more as a professional, team member, and person than in any other opportunity

I've received. Working with my students has shined a light on a strength I didn't know I

had in me: the power of teaching, coaching, and mentoring. Every day, my students show

that I can make an impact by teaching them something that they can apply to the rest of

their lives. Ultimately, AmeriCorps has given back to me a great deal of self-confidence,

happiness, and ability to decide my own path. So, thank you OACC and AmeriCorps for

giving me the opportunity to become a well-rounded professional, as well as a better

human being. (Progress Report, 2017, p. 10)

AmeriCorps members are service-oriented volunteers; a clearinghouse of information, ideas, and

models; and capacity builders. Furthermore, they add value to community college support

services by providing in-depth, personalized assistance that relates campus resources and

services in cohesive, accessible, and meaningful ways for students whose success rates are

traditionally low. They also help community colleges tackle pressing problems (i.e., college

retention rates). The OACC (2017) looks for AmeriCorps members with a particular

background:

The ideal AmeriCorps member for this position is an individual who has experience at a

community college, whether the individual has graduated from a two-year school or

transferred on to a four-year school. It is ideal if members have traversed the community

college path themselves and have an understanding of the challenges and frustrations

community college students face in seeking a degree to elevate their circumstances. The

program will be attractive to those individuals who, having gone through the experience,

wish to help others navigate the barriers and succeed where they might not have.

(Program Plans, 2017, p. 21)

These AmeriCorps members are introduced to already established community

relationships and partnerships and are empowered to mobilize students and community

volunteers through mutually beneficial service opportunities. AmeriCorps members, deemed

AmeriCorps College Completion Coaches, work one-on-one with students in a way that college

staff are unable, by being flexible, accessible, and candid coaches who are able to speak from

experience as a community college-goer themselves, or a recent college graduate. These

AmeriCorps members serve as a valuable link between the community and the community

college. As a coach they can join those relationships, and as well the relationships among the

servces, resources, and opportunities both on campus and off, to ultimately connect students with

what they need to complete their college plan and move into the workforce or transfer to a four-

year college.

Subtheme (3a): Service commitment. As a full-time AmeriCorps member, coaches are

committed to fulfilling 1,700 hours of service over 11 months. 1700 hours is equivalent to 40

hours a week. Serving 40 hours a week allows coaches to be available for students during the

college's hours of operation. Accurate timekeeping is absolutely essential and necessary both in

fulfilling their service commitment and in complying with the federal AmeriCorps program

grant. The time that counts toward their service can occur on any day of the week and includes

actual service time, pre-service, and during service training and orientation, and professional

development. Training, orientation, and professional development, however, cannot exceed 20%

(340 hours) of their 1,700-hour commitment. AmeriCorps College Completion Coaches' hours

consist of direct service, training, and volunteer hours. Table 6 shows each category and the

exemplars of the service hours adapted from the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach

program description (2017).

Table 6

Definition of Service Hours

Type of Service	Number of hours	Exemplar
Training	230 hours	Any time spent at OACC's approved training sessions at OACC or professional development opportunities with a college/service site. Some webinars or online training opportunities can count, though these must be pre-approved by a site supervisor and will only be approved upon submission of a pre-approval form. Training hours should be between 10 and 20% of your overall time.
Direct Service	1,300 hours	Direct service hours are service hours spent at your service site. This includes time spent coaching students, planning workshops, or meeting with staff to discuss students you are assisting. Direct service should be between 80 and 90% of the overall time.
Volunteer	170 hours	Volunteer hours are added with direct service hours to meet the minimum requirement of hours. Volunteer service refers to service at any National Day of Service or other service project set up by the site supervisor.

Coaches serve from August 1 through June 30 to fulfill their 11-month assignment.

During their service year, coaches will participate in orientation, complete all initial documents,

complete training related to instructional techniques, administer assessments, provide services to

students, participate in service projects, and attend professional development opportunities.

According to OACC (2017), "It is our hope that your [the coach's] time and commitment to the

AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program will add value to your [the coach's] life and

future career aspirations while also impacting the lives of college students" (Program Self-

Assessment, 2017, p. 15). The OACC hopes AmeriCorps College Completion Coaches will gain the tools to prepare them for the next step in their career.

Summary of Findings

This chapter described the results and findings of a program evaluation of the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program implemented across community college campuses in Ohio under the leadership of the Ohio Association of Community Colleges (OACC). The OACC serves as an advocacy organization on behalf of the community colleges within the state of Ohio. The program was designed to improve the low completion rates among students within community colleges in Ohio. Coaches serve on Ohio community college campuses to provide in-depth, hands-on guidance and assistance to students who need extra support on their college completion path.

This chapter explained the themes that emerged from the program evaluation (via desk review) using a descriptive coding process with a thematic analysis is to identify themes. The following themes with related subthemes that emerged from the data analysis procedure were identified:

- interventions for student success

- identifying at-risk students

- the role of an AmeriCorps member.

The theme of inventions had two subthemes, including coaching model, and the course-embedded model. The theme of at-risk students had two subthemes, including students in remedial courses and underrepresented students. The theme of the AmeriCorps has one subtheme, service commitment. The next and final chapter presents the interpretation, implication, recommendations, and conclusions.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study evaluated the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program, which was designed to improve postsecondary credential obtainment by increasing course completion and credit hour accumulation by community college students. The study evaluated two fundamental aspects, the first being to understand how the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program addressed the identified goal of increasing college completion rates. The second aspect sought to comprehend how the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program promoted best practices for student support services.

Chapter 5 first presents interpretations of the themes developed in chapter 4 and offers conclusions based on a comprehensive examination of the findings. In addition, referring to the results defined in chapter 4, chapter 5 answers the research questions. It then suggests implications for theory and practice, the interpretation of the findings, contributions to the literature, and concludes with recommendations for future research.

Review of the Study

This study examined the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program at the Ohio Association of Community Colleges (OACC), an organization that focuses on advocating for Ohio's community colleges and values access to high-quality education for every student. The beginning of the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program completion was in 2012 when OACC was awarded funds by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) to support an initiative to provide coaching to community college students in Ohio. This study sought to examine practices utilized by the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program. The AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program combats issues of persistence and completion in Ohio's community colleges by providing hands-on guidance and assistance to

community college students on campuses in Ohio. The program expected that those served by an AmeriCorps College Completion Coach will demonstrate higher credit hour accumulation, higher persistence rates, and higher college completion rates compared to those not provided intensive college completion coaching. To explore this program in more depth, two research questions were developed:

1. How does the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program promote best practices for student support services?

2. How does the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program address the identified goal of increasing college completion rates?

Interpretation of Findings

The objective of this study was to elucidate the workings of the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program. The study may contribute to the practice of coaching by raising the level of awareness of how the principles and processes of coaching can be applied in attempts to improve student success. The findings of this study indicated that coaching can be an effective intervention tool that leads to improvements in student success. In studying the facets of the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program, two cycles of descriptive coding were used as this allowed for a comprehensive view of the features that made this program unique. When interpreting the data, emerging themes were identified by moving beyond the understanding of the codes and themes to extract greater meaning from the data (Creswell, 2014). Table 7 shows each main theme with its corresponding subthemes derived from the descriptive coding process.

Table 7

Summary of the Main Themes and Subthemes

Main theme	Subtheme
1. Interventions for student success	a. Coaching
	b. Course-embedded model
2. Identifying at-risk students	a. Students in Remedial Courses
	b. Underrepresented Students
3. The role of an AmeriCorps member	a. Service commitment

The themes of this study were outlined in Chapter 4. This section restates each of the research questions, summarizes the results, and aligns the themes to the two research questions.

Research Question 1

The first research question asked the following: How does the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program promote best practices for student support services? To understand the best practice for student support services, this program evaluation reviewed AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program's documents between the years of 2012 and 2017. The data showed the best practice the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program illustrated was the use of a coaching model and the course-embedded model. To recap, coaching was defined as a process that enables learning and development to occur and thus performance to improve (Neuhauser & Weber, 2011). Through the practice of coaching, students are accountable for their actions, they deepen their understanding, and increase their effectiveness. Helping students overcome the myriad barriers that mitigate persistence and completion can occur through effective coaching. Not surprisingly, successful integration into both the academic and social worlds of the college reduces the likelihood of student withdrawal (Kuhn, 2008; Lizzio, 2006).

At-risk students in particular, with lower levels of academic capital and consequently greater challenges in navigating college, are possibly at greater jeopardy of early dropout or failure if not aided with appropriate targeted, suitable support for a positive transition to college

life (Gale & Parker, 2012). Within this program evaluation, the data showed that students benefit in meaningful ways (e.g., courses completed and persistence) from the coaching model: coaching contacts. Coaching contacts are meaningful interactions with students in the form of email, face-to-face, small groups, classroom settings, and via phone. Thus, interventions with at-risk populations often have to involve an intentional invitation or outreach (King, 2008). Coaches conduct three coaching contacts, one at the beginning, middle, and end of the semester. Coaching contacts were designed to monitor students' progress toward completion of a certificate or degree. The findings showed that students contacted by coaches regularly developed a clear vision of their goals to guide them in connecting their daily activities to their long term goals, and help them build skills, including time management, self-advocacy, and study skills. In addition, students contacted by coaches were more likely to persist during a semester, and were more likely to attend college another year (Program Outcomes, 2017).

Furthermore, the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program integrates the coaching model into a course-embedded model (e.g., faculty engagement, the language in the syllabus, and course incentives). The course-embedded approach recognizes that having coaches immersed in the courses allowed coaches to build rapport with students and in turn link students to campus resources. Heisserer & Parette (2002) insist that a positive relationship with staff at a college remains an important element in foreseeing a student's choice to continue with their education. When required to access additional support, students are more likely to be successful socially on campus and academically in the classroom (Kuh et al., 2010; Lotkowski et al., 2004; Vander Schee, 2007). The deliberate embedding, or attachment, of a coach to a particular course ensures the direct contact of the coach with students.

Research Question 2

The second research question stated the following: How does the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program address the identified goal of increasing college completion rates? There is little debate regarding the value of postsecondary degree attainment. In Ohio, poverty rates are twice as low and annual earnings are 50% higher among individuals with a postsecondary degree, compared with individuals with only a high school diploma (Lumina Foundation, 2013). The data revealed that the AmeriCorps College Completion Coaches program identified the goal of increasing college completion rates in two ways:

- Provide extra support toward at-risk students (e.g., students enrolled in developmental courses) and underprepared students (e.g. minority students, low-income students, and academically underprepared students)

- Recruit AmeriCorps members to provide coaching services to these students.

Thus the program can successfully support students completing developmental education courses, and to stay on track toward degree completion by earning the expected number of annual credits. Goldrick-Rab et al. (2014) found that if students pass certain milestones on a college-completion path, they will be more likely to complete developmental coursework, subsequently enroll in and pass the corresponding college-level course, accumulate college-level credits in a timely fashion, complete general education courses, and return for a second year.

Community colleges usually have a number of first-generation college students, low-income students, and academically disadvantaged students. Unfortunately many of these students may be classified as underprepared and at-risk and face external challenges due to many factors. All of these elements lead to several community college students being deficient in nonacademic abilities about how the institution functions, how to start to direct the process, and what's expected of them (Cho & Karp, 2012; Karp, 2011; McKinney & Novak, 2012; Rath et al., 2013).

Many community college students do not know how to sequence their classes to move through a program and need support to build those skills and keep them on course (Rath et al., 2013). The AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program uses on-track indicators (e.g., enrolling in classes over the summer, attending full-time and not part-time, dropping courses, registering for courses on time, and maintaining an adequate GPA) to identify if a student is working toward college completion. Ensuring students have that plan and proactively coaching them through its completion is precisely what the AmeriCorps College Completion Coaches program does.

Implications

This paper sought to provide a program evaluation of the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program, a program that has identified specific barriers that prevent completion, and offers potential references for implementing enrichments to affect progressive change in completion rates and student success. It is through the use of a coaching model the program provides interventions. Coaching is credited with increasing student progress, retention, and completion (Bettinger & Baker, 2014). Though the practice is relatively new compared to such student support services as counseling and advising, colleges and universities across the country have executed coaching programs. Still, higher education practitioners and policy makers have much to learn about how this promising practice can advance the community college completion agenda. The implications of this study were drawn from the program evaluation based on the insights gathered from the desk review.

Implication #1: Building Rapport and Personalizing Support

The first implication in this study is using a coaching model to build rapport and personalize the support student are receiving. One of the most noteworthy contributors to retention and success in college is the founding of constructive relationships between students and faculty and staff (Nutt, 2003).A coaching model is an essential part of building rapport with

students and helps coaches meet the needs of students on a personal, emotional, social, and academic basis. According to studies, it is considered good practice within student support services to tailor coaching encounters to student circumstances, characteristics, and education level (Clark, & Kalionzes, 2008; Kennedy & Ishler, 2008). This technique can be used by academic advisors as well. Academic advisors at community colleges and 4-year institutions need to be prepared to advise students on a comprehensive set of advising functions.

By tailoring services to the needs of students individually, advisors or coaches can assist students in connecting their academic, career, and life goals and make considered choices in their major or program of study. AmeriCorps College Completion Coaches personalize their approach to each student to ensure they are addressing the needs of the student. Coaches provide personalized consultation to students, focusing on success strategies that will lead to an increase in persistence and completion (Grant Proposal, 2012). An AmeriCorps College Completion Coach reflected on his use of personalized consulting by stating, "I'm happy that I was able to work with this student to support her in her college career. She already came to me extremely motivated and willing to learn, so together we were able to customize strategies and actions in order for her to succeed" (Progress Report, 2016, p. 18). Advisors can use this technique to provide students with the proper guidance needed.

Implication #2: Completion Efforts in College Courses

The second implication of this study is that course completion efforts can be applied in all college courses, not just developmental or remedial courses. Community colleges are considered democratizing institutions (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2014) because of the many students enrolled who are underrepresented (e.g., low income, ethnic minority) or considered at-risk. Unfortunately, research shows that students who begin at a community college are less likely to earn a baccalaureate degree. Students are more likely to get lost along the way and drop out, and

the students who enroll in remedial and/or developmental courses are even more likely to fail to persist (Rath et al., 2013). Further, students in developmental classes are frequently affected by the lack of academic readiness and financial obstacles. These students are also facing hurdles regarding nonacademic skills and competing responsibilities. By completing developmental courses early, students are likely to demonstrate higher achievement in college (CCSSE, 2014). In this study the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program provides services to students solely in developmental courses. Incorporating the strategies of the program in all courses may increase completion rates at a higher level. For example, there is a possibility that other populations of students who may struggle with persistence, such as nursing students, may benefit from the strategies offered in the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program.

Implication #3: Community Improvements and Development

The third implication of the study is the use of AmeriCorps members in efforts to improve communities. The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) encourages people to serve in national and local nonprofits, schools and universities, faith-based institutions, and public agencies (CNCS, 2008). Service opportunities are offered for individuals to become full-time or part-time AmeriCorps members. As a member, individuals can address dire community needs in education, economic opportunity, disaster services, healthy futures, environmental stewardship, and with veterans and military families. As a full-time AmeriCorps member, coaches are committed to fulfilling 1,700 hours of service over 11 months. It is in this way that AmeriCorps College Completion Coaches contribute to community development. The "concrete" benefits of community development come through local people changing attitudes, mobilizing existing skills, improving networks, thinking differently about problems, and using community assets in new ways (Kenyon, 2012). Community development improves the situation of a community, not just financially, but also as a solid active community. It is by contributing to

their community that community members rethink problems and expand contacts and networks, building social capital (Christenson & Robinson, 2013). They learn new skills, building human capital and they can improve their environment (Kenyon, 2012). During these 11 months of service, AmeriCorps members address the local community needs of low completion within their community colleges. Increasing the completions rates in community colleges is expected to have a positive impact on the community in which the college is placed.

Implication #4: A Sense of Purpose and a Chance to Give Back

The fourth implication of the study is that a coaching model can provide individuals an opportunity to find a sense of purpose through serving and giving back to their country. Throughout an AmeriCorps member's service commitment, members experience a great sense of accomplishment through their contribution to the community and individual service recipients (CNCS, 2008). Generally, one can think of community engagement as an activity that provides personal satisfaction as well as one that makes a contribution to the community; in fact, Day et al. (2013) list it as one area in which people can find "purpose." This focus on both personal and greater good separates purpose from more general goal setting behavior. In fact, it echoes the very definition of civic engagement offered by Deloitte (2008), who described it as a series of activities in which people participate in actions that benefit themselves as well as the community as a whole. An AmeriCorps College Completion Coach expressed their sense of accomplishment by stating, "Ultimately, AmeriCorps has given back to me a great deal of self-confidence, happiness, and ability to decide my own path" (Progress Report, 2017, p. 10). This reflects the capacity of AmeriCorps to strengthen existing beliefs in and commitments to civic engagement and community service, and to awaken new ones.

Recommendations for Action

The findings and conclusions offered in this study imply that additional empirical research is needed as it relates to increasing college completion rates among Ohio's community colleges. Unfortunately, many community college students are unprepared to take college-level courses. The reasons vary, but the main culprits tend to be academic, financial, familial, and interpersonal. The Ohio Association of Community Colleges created a program in which coaches utilize best practices in coaching to support students. The OACC hoped the program would provide a tremendous opportunity for community colleges to help students capitalize on their strengths, address their weaknesses, and be academically successful. After evaluating this program, the researcher offered six recommendations regarding how the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program can improve their outcomes. These recommendations are as followed.

Recommendation 1: Evaluating the Quality of Advising Services

Given the essential role that academic advising is thought to play in degree attainment (Lubin, 2013), an important step in closing the gap in educational achievement of students who begin at community colleges is to improve the quality of academic advising by recognizing, understanding, and addressing the unique advising needs of students. In this study, the researcher examined the use of an AmeriCorps College Completion Coach to increase student success rates. However, it was most common among community colleges to use an academic advisor as a tool to support college students (Nitecki, 2011). Like coaching, academic advising is a developmental process to assist students in clarifying their life/career goals and developing educational plans to help realize those goals (Perez, 2014). In this regard, it is essential for colleges to consider the quality of their academic advising services. Examining the quality of this service should be done before and after students experience transitional challenges (Hood, Hunt, & Haeffele, 2009).

Recommendation 2: Recognize Culture Differences and Needs

While the data revealed the coaching model is highly effective at the population level (e.g., at-risk students), attention should be paid to possible gaps among economic, gender, and racial groups. Cultural competence is the capacity to effectively support students who come from cultures other than our own (Diller & Moule, 2005). It involves developing certain forms of cultural knowledge and developing particular personal and interpersonal awareness and understandings (Diller & Moule, 2005). When applied to education, cultural competence consists in having the skills and expertise to serve students from various cultures effectively. A student's socioeconomic status, family structure, parent level of education, culture, technology usage, race, spirituality, and crime rate near the home may all have an impact on a student's academic success (Banks et al, 2011). These are the factors can be imprinted on the student and characterize them in their own way (King et al, 2007).

The AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program should consider what could be contributing differences. It may be that some students are less likely than others to engage with coaches. Alternatively, it may be that coaches are less likely to engage with some types of students. It may also be that the coaching model cannot eliminate demographic achievement gaps that exist in higher education. Achievement gaps are generally defined as the variances in academic performance among groups of students of different backgrounds and have been recognized with respect to students' nationality, race, gender, disability, and socioeconomic status (Bischoff & Reardon, 2011). The data in this evaluation was incapable of addressing these issues. The AmeriCorps College Completion Coaches program should realize its ability to change student outcomes that lead to individual and state-wide prosperity when the program can reduce achievement gaps that fall along demographic lines.

Recommendation 3: Recognize Long Term Effects

Although students in the AmeriCorps College Completion Coaches program are more likely to complete developmental education courses and are more likely to earn their expected number of annual credits successfully, it is unclear whether enough students are progressing into college-level courses after their first-year experience. A lack of data contributed to this issue. Further research is necessary to measure the long-term effects of students who were impacted by the program. Future research may explore the following:

- The academic outcome of coached students upon graduating from college

- The success rates of coached students who enroll in college-level courses

- Trend outcomes of coached students who transfer to complete a bachelor degree, and the college resources offered to them at the 4-year institution.

Recommendation 4: Create an Alert System

Technological tools can play a role in providing access to data. For example, the early alert system is an online communications and data system institutions use to put into place a timely identification of and intervention for students who exhibit attrition risk factors (Simons, 2011). The early warning system is critical because it allows immediate access to information, which supports early interventions and clear communication with students. In essence, an early alert system can include any arrangement that provides feedback on a student's situation—academic, social, or otherwise—that allows faculty and staff to intervene before more serious consequences occur, such as course failure or withdrawal from the institution (Simons, 2011). Staff members and administrators report that the tools allow completion coaches and others on campus to monitor students' progress relative to completion from beginning to end. Coaches then track all students they contact throughout the year to document and monitor whether students have enrolled, reasons for not enrolling, interventions to mitigate barriers, and progress

toward completion. Respondents said that these data help coaches and the institution better understand who students are and what they need.

Recommendation for Future Study

Nationally, underprepared students are continuing to enroll in community colleges (Quint et al., 2013). The number of incoming first-year students who test into developmental courses nationally has also increased (Zachry, 2010). This population of students struggle much more than do their college-ready counterparts. In this study, the researcher examined the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program, a program designed to address factors that impede college retention rates and persistence. The coaching model and course-embedded model can be duplicated at other institutions across higher education institutions.

It is recommended that further studies be administered on the Ohio Association of Community College's AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program, to dig deeper into the program. Table 8 suggests questions for future studies.

Table 8

Suggested Research Questions

Research Question	Data Gathering Strategy
Were coached students more successful than non-coached students?	Quantitative: Collect institutional research data: • Comparison of students enrolled in sections with and without an assigned coach.
What differences, if any, in student success by demographic groups?	Break by demographic subgroups: • Age • Gender • Race/ethnicity • Institution/geographical location • Major Qualitative: *Focus Groups/Interviews*. Success stories shared by coaches, instructors, site managers, students, and interviews with OACC stakeholders

What specific skills did students report acquiring?	Quantitative: Break down the number of coaching contacts Qualitative: *Focus Groups/Interviews*. Feedback of specific skills acquirement by coaches, instructors, site managers, and students.
What do students report as the relationship between coaching and their academic success?	Quantitative: Analyze of key items from the Pre and Post Coach results. Qualitative: Focus Groups/Interviews. Feedback of specific skills acquirement by coaches, instructors, site managers, and students.

Given concerns surrounding college completion and the growing popularity of coaching programs, future studies can conduct a quantitative analysis to explore the practice of coaching, coaching factors, and how those factors influence student outcomes.

Higher education institutions have an obligation to meet their students where they are and to provide an environment that encourages and equips them with the resources they need to reach their highest potential. A part of that commitment to help students reach their potential will require institutional leaders to address the comprehensive needs of all students. There should be established processes to examine and identify factors that impede student success, followed up by interventions designed to address those factors. Based on the outcomes of this study, the Ohio Association of Community College developed an intervention to address a problem in way that leads to improved student success. Their coaching program can be scaled up and duplicated by other institutions.

This study served as an introduction and an example of how coaching program can impact and influence community college students in one state system. Yet the research focus of this study was limited to examining the impact of coaching on students in developmental (remedial) English or math, First Year Experience (FYE), Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) and other college gateway courses. However, some directions for future

research could include examining the impact of student coaching initiatives on other populations of students who typically struggle with persistence, such as nursing students, first-generation students, African American males, and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

Conclusion

The open-access nature of community colleges allows students to pursue higher education without concern for a student's ability to persist toward completion. While open-access may ensure equal opportunity, it comes with institutional responsibilities. According to Engle and Tinto (2008),

> Access without support is not opportunity. That institutions do not intentionally exclude students from college does not mean that they are including them as fully valued members of the institution and providing them with support that enables them to translate access into success. (p. 440)

With respect to completion rates, community colleges are positioned to turn crisis into opportunity through assessment of their effectiveness in championing student intervention services that remove student barriers to success (AACC, 2012).

This study advances the understanding of how coaching can contribute to community college student persistence and completion. The motivation for this study was based on a desire to find resources that would increase academic success. Through a program evaluation of the Ohio Association of Community Colleges' AmeriCorps College Completion program, this study was intended to bring awareness of how coaching can be a key competency of faculty and staff across the community college community— and that coaching can be integrated into evidence-based high-impact practices.

Considerable attention was directed to various theories and constructs related to student success that informs the use of effective coaching practices. These constructs and theories are not exhaustive. However, they provide a convincing argument supporting the promise of coaching community college students. High-quality coaches can increase the impact and outcomes of student success. The strength of this study is its potential to enhance the success rates of community college students through an effective coaching program. The researcher found that the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program has contributed to the college's efforts at retaining its students. However, it also finds that coaching is a link of many efforts, with a system of supports, process, and people, all of which add to the college's goal of increasing retention rates.

Moving forward, it is important to understand the evolution of the coaching field and the discourse among academicians and practitioners seeking to move the field forward. Coaching is emerging as a popular practice to increase student success, yet little is known about the practice of coaching, including the frequency, nature, and contact methods with students engaged in an academic coaching program (Lubin, 2013; Perez, 2014; Webberman, 2011). The AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program administered by the Ohio Association of Community Colleges is building a strong foundation for competent practice as it closely ties coaching to the academic content. This study suggests the potential to build capacity and knowledge of coaches to help students increase the educational attainment of community college students.

This program evaluation highlighted outcomes of the AmeriCorps College Completion Coaches program implemented across community college campuses in Ohio under the leadership of the Ohio Association of Community Colleges (OACC). Within this program evaluation, it was discovered that coaching can provide a focal point for a community college's efforts in increasing completion. While most students enter community colleges with the intention of

attaining a degree, 38% never complete or transfer to senior institutions (Attewell & Monaghan, 2016). The findings suggest that students can benefit in meaningful ways from a coaching model; however, research needs to be done to build coaching as a practice for community colleges in an effort to increase student persistent and completion.

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APPENDIX A

Permission Letter

ΘACC

Ohio Association of Community Colleges

February 6, 2018

Dear Institutional Review Board:

The purpose of this letter is to grant LaToya Rolle, a graduate student in the University of New England's online Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership, permission to conduct research at The Ohio Association of Community Colleges. The qualitative study is entitled A Program Evaluation: AmeriCorps College Completion Coach Program. It entails of a desk review of the program's documents that provide the history, philosophy, and operation of the program. There will be no human subjects for this program evaluation.

I, Jack Hershey do hereby grant permission for LaToya Rolle to conduct a program evaluation of the AmeriCorps College Completion Coach program at The Ohio Association of Community Colleges.

Sincerely,

Jack Hershey
President & CEO
Ohio Association of Community Colleges
175 South Third Street, Suite 560
Columbus, OH 4321

APPENDIX B

IRB Exemption

UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND

Institutional Review Board
Olgun Guvench, Chair

Biddeford Campus
11 Hills Beach Road
Biddeford, ME 04005
(207)602-2244 T
(207)602-5905 F

Portland Campus
716 Stevens Avenue
Portland, ME 04103

To: LaToya Rolle, M.S.Ed.

Cc: Brianna Parsons, Ed.D.

From: Lliam Harrison

Date: March 28, 2018

Project # & Title: IRB 20180328-021 A Program Evaluation: AmeriCorps College Completion Coaches
                     Program

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects has reviewed the above
captioned project and has determined that the proposed work is not human subject research as defined
by 45 CFR 46.102(f).

Additional IRB review and approval is not required for this protocol as submitted. If you wish to change
your protocol at any time, you must first submit the changes for review.

Please contact Lliam Harrison at (207) 602-2244 or wharrison@une.edu with any questions.

Sincerely,

William R. Harrison, M.A., J.D.
Director of Research Integrity

IRB#: 201803028-021
Submission Date: March 28, 2018
Status: Not Human Subject Research, 46 CFR 46.102(f)
Status Date: March 28, 2018