

4-1-2019

# Integrated Student Services: Exploring Integration On Community College Student Success

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INTEGRATED STUDENT SERVICES: EXPLORING INTEGRATION ON COMMUNITY

COLLEGE STUDENT SUCCESS

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A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Affiliated Faculty of

The College of Graduate and Professional Studies

at the University of New England

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Education

April 2019

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May 2019  
Educational Leadership

INTEGRATED STUDENT SERVICES: EXPLORING INTEGRATION ON COMMUNITY  
COLLEGE STUDENT SUCCESS

Abstract

Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) have become like hospitals where there are multiple offices in centralized locations. One of the areas that need further study is how to integrate these services effectively and efficiently to service students. Healthcare has developed the triage model and IHEs are starting to bring this model into the educational settings. This qualitative study of a community college's integrated student service model reviewed the impact of the model on student success of a specific student population. The overall problem was a lack of data about the impact of integrated student services on specific student population success. Two research questions were addressed through the study. In what way does an integrated student service model impact student academic and social success and retention? How do students perceive the effect of integrated student service model on their own academic and social success and retention? Participants were selected randomly from the study site. Two distinct populations were used: college work study students and veteran students. The data collected was from one-on-one interviews, which were transcribed and coded for themes. The interviews produced five specific themes: (1) integrated student services were not widely known, (2) Advising/Writing Center Support, (3) Accessible/Accommodating, (4) Location of Offices, and (5) Financial Aid/Records/Cashier Office – Integrated Student Services (ISS). Based on this data, there were

two specific recommendations: the first recommendation was that the institution should do further marketing related to on-demand services offered at other institutions and consider implementing an early alert system. Further study involving more participants and another site may be useful to generate a more in-depth analysis of student success related to integrated student services.

Keywords: *Higher Education, Integrated Student Services, One-Stop Shop, Student Success, Student Impact, Community College*

University of New England

Doctor of Education  
Educational Leadership

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate my dissertation to the people who have helped me get to where I am today in my life, both professionally and personally.

My “Big Brother,” Dr. Roger Henry, who has been there for me through countless hours of school work, personal situations, and everything in between. Even though he is not my real brother, he will always be a member of my family.

My Grandmother Janina and Aunt Karin—without you two, I would not have made it through some of my toughest times growing up. You two have shown me what it takes to be strong when the unexpected happens and how to find the joy in the littlest things. Now, you both have one more thing to add to your list to be joyful about every day.

All the family members who are no longer with us. We had multiple members leave us throughout the years, but I know they have been looking down on me to help me gather the strength to finish.

Finally, to my best friend and wife, Jennifer L. Scheetz and my amazing sons, Ian Ray and Colin Anthony—it has been wonderful to share my journey with all of you.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank my committee members for all their support throughout my program. First, Dr. Ann Lee Burch for her endless support of developing my topic from the beginning to end. We had constant emails and phone calls with lots of questions and answers, but we finally got it in the end! Second, Dr. Angela Young for her constant support of my draft updates and keeping my head straight when I thought I was doing badly. Thank you for giving me the support needed to keep going when I wanted to give up. It was great knowing that you went through the same process just a short time ago. Last, but certainly not least, Mr. Benjamin Rosenberger, who can also be put under the Dedication section as well. Mr. Rosenberger is not only a committee member, but a mentor. Without your valuable guidance throughout my career, I would never have advanced to a Director of Financial Aid. Your input to develop this dissertation is priceless; I have learned essential information for our career as well as valuable data that can be used throughout my continued career.

I want to thank Dr. Collay for the countless emails and phone calls regarding my topic, structure, and other miscellaneous questions that I had throughout the program. She was always willing to assist to find the answers needed to complete this journey!

I want to thank my professional colleagues that supported me throughout this journey and helped me get into this program. Especially, my student service colleagues for their endless support and assistance with my research throughout my program.

I want to thank Dr. Steven Siconolfi, for all his help with my entrance essay and countless hours of support determining if this was the right program for me.

I want to thank all the professors that I had over the course of my program. There were many that helped me develop my skills and learn about myself along the way. It would take



numerous pages to list all; however, to name a few: Dr. Ross helped me dive deeper into the ethical part of financial aid and student services; Dr. Parsons helped me learn more about my writing and research; Dr. Boozang helped me learn that there are always other ways to look at life situations, both professionally and personally. Each one had a profound impact on my Doctoral journey.

I want to thank Peggy Stum, for reviewing my dissertation and providing me with valuable recommendations.

I want to thank the study site for allowing me to do my Doctoral research there and the students who agreed to participate in the research. Without the study site and the student participation, the study would not have been able to be completed. The research was valuable and will, hopefully, be able to assist the institution for further research studies.

I want to thank Joshua Marburger, for his endless support through this program. We met as classmates of the cohort and have pushed each other to continue to do our best. The constant text messages to check-in on each other's progress each week and the occasional FaceTime rants about finishing the program. It is the text messages and calls that helped me get through the program. Thank you!

Finally, I would like to thank my research team. We have been through so much over the last year. The time has finally come for us to break apart. It is a bittersweet moment as I realize our group video chats are coming to an end. No more will we have to figure out who we will be waiting for on the call, what service will we be using, who will use video or voice only, and will I have the mountains or desert showing. I truly enjoyed all the time I have spent with all of you and learned much in the process. We will forever be known as Team FLOG.

“If you can dream it, you can do it. Always remember that this whole thing was started by a mouse.”– Walt Disney

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Higher Education is an investment in the future of one's personal and professional growth. As one matures and grows, there are many different investments that he/she may choose; however, education is one of the most valuable. Within education, there are many benefits to successful completion of various levels of credential attainment. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018), there is an increase in income in ascension from no high school diploma through attaining a professional degree. Their research displays the economic value of a degree broken down in the table below:

Table 1.1

*Weekly Earnings of Full-Wage and Salary Workers Age 25 and Older (median)*

Characteristic	Total Wages
Total, less than a high school diploma	\$554.00
Total, high school graduate, no college	\$726.00
Total, some college or associate degree	\$825.00
Total, bachelor's degree or higher	\$1,310.00
Total, bachelor's degree only	\$1,187.00
Total, advanced degree	\$1,512.00

In addition to the benefit of higher income, college graduates have lower unemployment rates, better health care coverage, more vacation time and increased job security. There is also the cost benefit analysis of obtaining a college degree. That is, the cost of obtaining the degree over many years outweighs the expense due to the potential earnings that one will make over a lifetime of employment. Having set up the value of education, the topic of student success and its relation to retention has become very meaningful to the student population wanting to better their overall quality of life.

For many, the lack of an opportunity for a college education is the limiting factor for pursuing a higher degree. This lack of an opportunity can stem from various reasons including the cost, location, transportation, personal, or even student determination. Upon careful review of higher education options, community colleges afford the best opportunity for most students. They most often supply open admission policies, lower tuition costs, quality student support services, smaller class sizes and flexible scheduling. Furthermore, community colleges tend to have a more diverse population. These populations often include first generation students, traditional/non-traditional students, at-risk students, and/or veteran students.

Due to the many unique characteristics of community college students, there is a great need for them to know how to navigate the various student services in place to assure student success. Many of these services that affect students starting at an institution are: admissions, financial aid, registration (registrar/records), student accounts, and/or academic advising. There are multiple other services that can also affect students' admission, success, and retention such as disabilities/accommodations, teaching/learning centers, and even student health centers; however, most of these offices are not part of integrated student services. Most institutions have these offices spread across their campus. This set-up has students needing to know where to go and how to understand the complexity of completing the correct documentation right away. Moreover, for the services to be accessible, offices need to have crossed-trained staff members. The staff need to know how to do multiple job functions of various offices not just their own. All these offices have a significant impact on students trying to navigate the entire first-year of school. As said by Swail (2014), "to be fair, understanding the labyrinth of higher education is a challenge for all, regardless of income or background" (p. 20). The labyrinth is an interesting concept as it relates to higher education and healthcare. There has been a plethora of information

written about integrated services in healthcare, but limited information related to higher education. As healthcare providers have begun to understand, patients are served better when there is a centralized area used as a point of direction as soon as they arrive at the hospital. For instance, when a patient arrives at an emergency department, there is a triage/intake nurse to determine the immediate needs of the patient. A determination is made as to who may need to see the patient and the extent of the injuries. The service happens instantaneously; there is no need to send the patient from one office to another. Similarly, an educational institution needs to provide a single structured key area for students in one specific integrated location that allows the student to gain access to all the necessary functions in an effective and efficient way.

When an institution's leaders need to determine the impact of services on student retention, they examine certain areas that can play a key role in increasing the retention rate. Two specific areas that focus on retention are Enrollment Management (EM) and Student Affairs. According to Kalsbeck and Zucker (2013), "EM, by definition and in practice, achieves enrollment outcomes through the intentional integration of institutional policies, organizational competencies, and professional practices" (p. 21). EM sets the main policy for the institution on admission of the student and the other offices would follow through with the student on any other concerns that may arise during enrollment. Whereas, Student Affairs typically handles the issues relating to student success. The department oversees academic achievement along with social and community engagement including counseling and learning advisement. Residential Life falls under Student Affairs as well. Kinzie (2015) discusses that research shows:

The need for student affairs professionals to stay current on research about growing student populations, maintain sensitivity to understanding these populations, attend to individual student needs, design inclusive environments, and implement programs and



services that make educationally purposeful practices inescapable to thereby ensure success for all. Even more, the increase in completion and success rates can be achieved only through greater collaboration between student and academic affairs. (p. 35)

Student engagement is one key factor that separates Enrollment Management from Student Affairs; EM handles the admission of the student, while Student Affairs handles keeping the students engaged throughout their time at the institution.

When determining the primary reason for this research, there are two specific purposes. One is to show the need to centralize services in an integrated student service center versus maintaining a diffused labyrinth of services to improve student success in higher education. There is a need for institutions to evaluate the quality of programs provided to students to promote their success. The second is to determine the factors that influence the decrease in retention rates at quality institutions. Retention and graduation rates have considerable room for improvement specifically in the community college setting. This study determined some of the reasons for any decreases in retention related to student service areas. It also gives a call to action and recommendations. The literature review addresses the importance of an integrated student service center, examines why retention is important, clarifies loan default rates, and analyzes the factors that affect the research.

### **Statement of Problem**

Higher Education institutions depend on student service offices to help students from the beginning of their college journey through graduation day. It does not matter if the institution is a community college or a traditional four-year school—a student service office still has the same responsibility. There are multiple offices that encompass student services including admissions, financial aid, records/registration, and student accounts. It is essential for enhanced student

service and support for leaders to integrate these into one location, known as an integrated student service model. This integrated model is defined by Sathiyaseelan (2014):

[Integrated]/One-Stop serves as the benchmark for service excellence; providing leadership and guidance for undergraduate and post graduate students on all matters. It offers a wide array of seamless and integrated student services in areas of academic services, exam matters, admission and matriculation services, replacement of cards, financial aid, accommodation, insurance and medical claims, issuance of certificate and certification letters, document verification, lost and found, career guidance, general enquiries, and all payment issues. Overall, it serves as a focal point for financial transactions and all student-related matters. (p. 43)

The integrated center incorporates all the main student service offices in one key location. According to Supiano (2011), one of the key impacts of integration is that "[it] brings together the offices of records and registration, student accounts, and financial aid" (p. 1) as well as admissions at some institutions. A common issue discussed amongst college leaders is the location of these offices. Students tend to have to walk to several buildings without getting the correct answer, without receiving services they need the first time, or hearing potentially conflicting answers from departments found throughout campus that do not communicate. An institution that begins to integrate these offices into one building, better yet, one office, is creating the atmosphere of an integrated student service model. Students should not have to complete an admissions application, go to another building to get help with financial aid, continue to another building to make a deposit/pay their bill, and then finish in a completely different building to register for classes. When it relates to online students, the integrated model needs to provide staff to answer the students' questions without transferring them from one

office to another. An online student will not have to go from location to location but a transferred call from one office to another can be just as frustrating due to unnecessary time spent on the phone or the chance of getting disconnected. Supiano (2011) states that "sometimes students get angry about being directed elsewhere" (p. 3). A frustrated student is one that would not want to enroll or continue from one semester to the next semester. Without integrated student services, a student can have a harder time determining his/her financial aid, registration, bill payments or admission paperwork. The impression of confusion by students can cause negativity within the student body, which can have a direct impact on retention. The main question by the institution's leadership could be: do students perceive that there is a link between integrated student services and their success?

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to show if students perceived that integrated student services impact their academic success and contributed to their retention. Research focused on retention, specific student services offices that have integrated offices, and loan cohort default rates due to the direct impact on student success. Students that maintain constant enrollment from one semester to another for the length of one carryover year (i.e. fall/spring or likewise grouping) participated in the interviews. All participants matched specific criteria. The list of participants came from the college Registrar. The researcher documented the ways that the students' perception of the integrated student service model had an impact on their academic and social success as well as retention.

### **Research Questions**

The study focused on an integrated student service center at a specific institution of higher education (IHE). Based upon the purpose of the study, the main research question was:

- In what way does an integrated student service model impact student academic and social success and retention?

A second question below offers a deeper insight into the main research question.

- How do students perceive the effect of an integrated student service model on their own academic and social success and retention?

### **Conceptual Framework**

One of the most critical issues an Enrollment Management (EM) professional deals with is the retention of students. Retention is directly related to student success— so EM professionals must collaborate directly with Student Affairs professionals. This study looked specifically at the impact of an integrated student service center on student’s perception of success. If students fail in their course of study, retention as well as graduation rates decrease. These rates in return can decrease revenue for the college and affect faculty and staff turnover. By surveying and interviewing students on their perception of an integrated student service center, the study determined the impact that the center had on their success.

A key goal of Enrollment Managers is to retain students. Vincent Tinto is one of the leading researchers in Enrollment Management. He was the child of immigrants and believed he was required to get a formal education, unlike his parents. Tinto studied physics all through his doctoral program at the cost of isolation from his peers. He never completed the physics program as he made the choice to join the Peace Corps. It was here that he “discovered the joy of community, of being a valued member of a community of people with similar ideals of service” (p. 1). Tinto later went back to complete his education doing work in educational studies which led to his extensive experience in Enrollment Management. His educational career can be

credited to William Spady, a fellow doctoral student that Tinto heard at a seminar. Spady's seminar focused on:

. . . a paper describing how an application of Durkheim's theory of suicide, of intellectual and social integration and lack thereof could be applied to the phenomenon of college dropout...Community matters and one's exclusion from community underlie a range of behaviors, including those leading to college dropout. [His] writing and research path was set. (p. 2)

He eventually went to work for Syracuse University and concentrated on the improvement of student life in the educational community (Tinto, 2013).

Higher education professionals nationwide study his research as it relates to Enrollment Management and retention. Tinto (2006) noted that one aspect of retention is "that involvement matters and that it matters most during the critical first year of college" (p. 3). This is one of the key reasons it is important to have an integrated student services model for students—often where the first impression of the institution occurs. The first impression happens routinely when a student either visits the campus for a tour or to complete an application for admission. The institution's leaders want to make processes simple and less cumbersome for the students as soon as they arrive on campus, whether it is the first time or at graduation. As the integrated model becomes implemented, Tinto (2006) makes a supporting statement as "though it is true, we are often reminded, that student retention is everyone's business" (p. 5). All the offices around campus need to focus on providing services to the student. By integrating those services into one location, students are more likely to complete their paperwork on the first visit and be successful academically and socially. Tinto's theory of retention is that it is everyone's business and integrating the offices is essential to improving students' success.

Tinto's research also addresses two different types of systems at a Higher Education institution. According to Meeuwisse, Severiens, and Born (2010), "Tinto considers the educational institution to consist of an academic system and a social system and makes a distinction between academic and social integration" (p. 529). Each of these systems are separated by two distinct definitions developed by Tinto himself. Meeuwisse et al. (2010) continue to state, "Academic integration is now seen as academic achievement (formal academic integration) and interaction with the faculty (informal academic integration). Social integration refers to extracurricular activities (formal social integration) and contact with peers (informal social integration)" (p. 529). It is important to classify and keep each one separate for the students—each student needs to have a sense of academic integration as well as social integration at an institution to feel welcome and comfortable. This is a sense of feeling one belongs to the institution and that feeling has a direct impact on recruitment, retention, and success of the student.

Additionally, there is the pressure of getting a college degree—the main reason for this research was to determine if an integrated student service model has impact on student academic and social success. There are multiple ways that student services can become integrated depending on the institution; one key way is to integrate the admissions, financial aid, and student accounts offices into a "welcome center" or "one-stop shop" area on-campus. It was the goal of this researcher to gather the views of students at a community college about their experiences with integrated student services in relation to academic and social success.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Limitations for this study include the limited number of participants selected for the study. The study had a total of five participants, but the researcher expected to have at least eight.

Due to the limited number of participants, another potential limitation can be the number of questions that participants chose to answer. If participants chose not to answer all the questions, the overall data generated is affected. No participant was required to answer every single interview question; any participant could withdraw from the study at any time. This agreement can, theoretically, sway the data of the full study due to the number of participants and data expected.

### **Assumptions of the Study**

As a current professional in the Higher Education field, it is hard for the researcher not to have a biased opinion when it comes to this topic. The researcher has worked in the field of student services for over 15 years. The career of the researcher has been in one of the offices involved with integrated services. However, it is important to understand that the experience of the researcher also limits biases. He is able to view both the importance of integrating the offices together as one, but also understand the reasons each office should stand alone for the benefit of student services. After a thoughtful review of the purpose of the study, the assumption was that both the students and administrators would agree that an integrated student service model significantly impacted student academic and social success. It should be determined that an integrated student service center enhances the service and has a positive outcome on retention. Furthermore, the researcher assumed that administrators would take pride in knowing that the location of the student service offices are a major reason for the increase in retention and graduation rates if that was the outcome. This review of the literature led to a rationale for the study: that when exploring students' perceptions, the researcher expected to find that the participants perceive the integrated service center as a positive impact on their success.

## Significance

Student service has become the key focus of Higher Education institutions as they try to determine new strategies on how to entice students to attend the institution as well as retain them to continue from one semester to the next semester. One of the variables that can make a significant difference is the service given when the student first arrives on-campus. Bean and Eaton (2001) mention that students “while interacting with the college environment and its many different features, [they engage] in a series of self-assessments...[that] help connect particular experience they have had at the institution with their general feelings about the college” (p. 75). This service level is directly related to the offices that the student must go to for admission, financial aid, registration, and payment. Typically, these offices are in different locations throughout campus; however, it is becoming the norm to have these services in one key location or area. In those institutions that do not have the integrated student service model set-up, students can become irritated or frustrated due to multiple detours or difficulties. The development of an integrated service center allows students to complete all the functions in one key location and get the answers they need instantly. Additionally, this concept helps with keeping students focused on the important aspects to their enrollment (class registration, bill payment, and financial aid). Furthermore, it is important to understand the need for the on-demand attention that students seek in a community college setting. An important example of this is when students are at the front counter and a phone call comes into the office, in-person students come first. A centralized location emphasizes the importance of services for students who are face-to-face even though there are online students that need services as well. Therefore, more research needs to be done to understand the impact that an integrated model has on all student service and their academic and social success overall.



### **Definition of Terms**

For the purpose of this study, the following terms are defined.

*Admissions Office:* It is tasked with identifying, recruiting, and enrolling a desired number of total new students, as well as meeting goals associated with academic quality, gender balance, racial diversity, and socioeconomic mix of the student population. (Hossler & Bontrager, 2014, p. 37)

*Cohort Default Rate:* A cohort default rate is the percentage of a school's borrowers who enter repayment on certain Federal Family Education Loan (FFEL) Program or William D. Ford Federal Direct Loan (Direct Loan) Program loans during a particular federal fiscal year (FY), October 1 to September 30, and default or meet other specified conditions prior to the end of the second following fiscal year. (Official Cohort Default Rates for Schools, 2017)

*Community College:* Community colleges, formally called junior colleges, provide the population of their surrounding communities with a higher education opportunity. These colleges provide associate degrees, certificate programs, developmental courses, vocational programs, distance learning opportunities, flexible scheduling, childcare, veteran resources, counseling, and employment for the communities they reside in. (Darby-Hudgens, n.d.)

*Enrollment Management:* Uses marketing research methods to identify opportunities for expanded outreach and market position as well as for assessing an institution's brand image. It uses business modeling to analyze enrollment capacities or the costs and benefits of enrollment growth in specific programs. Also, it coordinates important functions related to recruitment, retention, and graduation of students. (Hossler & Kalsbeek, 2008; Schuch, Jones, & Torres, 2016)

*Financial Aid Office:*” To provide timely communication offers of federal, state, and institutional financial aid...to influence student persistence and campus retention efforts”

(Hossler & Bontrager, 2014, p. 38).

*Integrated Student Services:* An integrated office consisting of multiple administrative offices that may include admissions, financial aid, registrar, and/or cashiers/student accounts.

*Registrar/Records Office:* The most important function of a registrar’s office is to enable students to register for classes and to make sure that a sufficient number of courses are being offered at the right time and place. Also, the office connects to academic policy development and implementation. (Hossler & Bontrager, 2014, p. 39)

*Retention:* refers to an institution’s goal for students to continue their enrollment to the following term or successfully complete their program (Schuch, Jones, & Torres, 2016, p. 253)

*Student Affairs:* Encouraging an understanding of and respect for diversity, believing in the worth of individuals, and supporting students in their development are just some of the core concepts of the student affairs profession. (Student Affairs Resources & Continued Education, 2018)

*Student Success:* Retaining, persisting, and academically succeeding by program completion

*Student Accounts:* The Student Accounts Office is responsible for maintaining student account information, issuing tuition bills, receiving payments for tuition and fees, and collecting on delinquent accounts. (Student Accounts, 2018)

### **Conclusion**

Providing an integrated student services center is becoming the norm at institutions due to the potential to improve enrollment and enhance student services. It is true that budget savings

and student services enhancements are known by integrating student services; however, the time needing for institutional planning can be extensive. There are two specific reasons for not making the switch to an integrated student service center. First, is the added training that the staff needs to service the students. Typically, staff in an integrated student service center are cross trained on multiple functions. A specific example of this are front-line staff members who can process registration paperwork but also answer basic financial aid questions. Second, is finding a location where all the office can be co-located. These are key reasons for this study; it examines the importance of an integrated office not only on student success but also the other factors that relate to having an integrated center at the college (retention, academic, service, etc.). It allows the student to complete everything at once, but also allows for a personal connection between the staff member(s) helping the student. The research suggests there is a significant correlation between an integrated center and the students' perception of their success. This is documented students' perceptions of the influence of integrated services on their academic and social success.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### **Importance of Higher Education and Integrated Student Services**

One thing that a student can never lose is the knowledge gained from education. This is one reason education is important, and there are multiple other reasons. One primary reason is that it is the best type of investment that a person can make in his/her future. As stated by Chen & DesJardins (2010), “investment in higher education is beneficial to individuals and society and it promotes economic development” (p. 179). A person makes multiple investments over the course of a lifetime including a house, cars, or other luxuries, but an education is one of the most important investments of them all. Another reason is that, typically, people with a higher education degree make a higher income. According to Rothwell (2016), “among the employed, the median college educated worker earns 84% more than the median worker with a high school education. Even those with just some college and no degree or an associate degree earn 16% more” (The Economic Benefits of College Section, para. 1). This is the primary reason counselors encourage all students to attend a community college or technical school after completing their high school education.

As it is important to invest in one’s higher education, it is essential to have an area to complete all the required paperwork. As noted in chapter one, students should be able to complete their admissions paperwork, financial aid application, register for classes, and pay a bill all in one location and/or office. When students need to see multiple offices for answers, it can cause disconnection or frustration (Walters, 2003). This could lead to a student not wanting to complete the paperwork or even continue enrollment at the college. One of the key recommendations to enhance student services and improve retention is the creation of an

integrated service center. These centers contribute to establishing an individual location for students to complete paperwork and obtain services needed as well as getting help with questions related to campus policies and procedures (Walters, 2003; Supiano, 2011)

## **Retention**

### **Definition**

Poor retention is one of the leading causes of loss of enrollment at higher educational institutions worldwide. It does not just affect enrollment in the United States. To understand how retention shapes an institution, one must first define retention. Retention is described in the goals that an institution sets related to enrollment—it pertains to students continuing enrollment from one semester to the next or finishing their program (Schuh, Jones, & Torres, 2016). For a higher education institution, it means to keep a student from one semester to next or one year to the next. Additionally, an institution may look at retention over multiple periods and/or years when determining strategic planning. Improving retention is a multifaceted challenge to institutions' success that multiple administrators and the campus community all need to take seriously.

### **Retention Research**

An institution may research and document retention in a variety of ways. One specific way is the separation of retention of first-year students as opposed to retention of upper-class students. The institution separates the data to look at first-year students in one data set and upper-class students in another data set. There is a different retention rate for each set of data. This allows the institution to focus on the two different retention rates and the factors that affect two different student groups. Moreover, the factors that influence first-year students usually are significantly different than those that impact students going into their senior year.

An institution must be sure to separate retention data from enrollment data of first-year students. The primary reason for the separation of the two is the need to have more research done to show why retention is important for enrollment. Routinely, the focus at institutions has been on first-year enrollment and less on the impact of one-year to the next. Furthermore, retention needs to focus on all students as well as those determined to be “at-risk.” “At-risk” students are best defined by Trott, Barrett, Ghezzim and Satterfield (2015) as:

First-generation and low-income students, referred to here as "at-risk students," have an increased risk of underperforming in a few key areas while in college. These areas are engagement, achievement, and retention. Many at-risk students are less academically and socially engaged than the typical college student: they are less likely to attend faculty office hours, to participate in peer study groups, to make use of campus support services, or to be involved in extracurricular activities. (p. 11)

All students can affect retention just as much as “at-risk” students do throughout the course of their education. One influential factor to remember, however, is that “at-risk” students do not change their behavior. These students tend to need academic support and counseling throughout their entire college career. Singell and Waddell (2010) support this statement through “suggest[ing] that students who are predicted to be at-risk based on their student attributes remain so throughout their college career” (p. 570). Due to being “at-risk” throughout their entire college career, both Enrollment Management and Student Affairs staff need to be committed to their success. The retention plan must include support for this student population due to the low chance of retention and a lower graduation rate. This population of students, “at-risk”, is one of the highest contributors to the percentage that causes low institution retention and graduate rates to decline.

### **Primary Reason for Research**

There are several reasons for research related to higher education and retention. Two of these reasons are the decrease in both the graduation and retention rates. Both rates may have an impact on institution statistics and how a student views the institution. The rates of these two characteristics are on most college reports including U.S. News and World Report Best Colleges and Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), which are both available to the public. Everyone on a campus community needs to commit to retention research; it takes the skillset of multiple administrators and campus partners. As suggested by Campbell and Mislevy (2013) the commitment can help by “making retention initiatives more accessible to the broader campus community: retention can be everyone’s business” (p. 490). Moreover, an institution needs to be aware of the overall retention rate of the US compared to other countries. As noted by Peterson, Kovel-Jarboe, and Schwartz (1997), “the percentage of adults between the ages of 25 and 34 completing higher education...is as follows: Canada (16.1%), Japan (22.9%), Germany (11.8%), France (12.3%), the UK (12.5%), Italy (6.8%), and the US (23.2%)” (p. 133). One interesting aspect to consider related to the research is the influence of student characteristics upon those rates. The research should focus on how students relate why they are not staying at the institution. One limitation is that institutions normally separate two year versus four year or public versus private institutions. Another aspect for the research is to determine the success of integrated student services at colleges. Throughout colleges nationwide, integrated student services vary significantly in organization structure. There could be two offices made up of just financial aid and student accounts or there could be multiple offices made up of financial aid, student accounts, registration, and even admissions. Each institution has diverse ways of setting up student services and the reasons for office structures; the important “piece of the

puzzle” is understanding the perception of the students and administration in relation to retention.

### **Decrease in Graduation Rate**

The impact on the graduation rate is directly related to students who are not retained from their junior year to senior year (at a 4-year school); however, the primary impact starts during their first year of education. A community college can measure its graduate rate based upon students who finish within a certain time by the number of associate degrees conferred. An integrated student service office consisting of multiple staff members can collaborate effectively, working together to identify these students early in their educational career. The implementation of early intervention/planning can enhance the chances of students reaching graduation. Tudor (2018) states that “early career planning with industry help is linked to better student retention, higher graduation rates and faster completion rates” (p. 74). Moreover, by having a staff member who is cross-trained on multiple office functions, one being academic advising for graduation, can significantly help increase the graduation rate. Fowler & Boylan (2010) further confirms this by saying, “a student’s relationship and interaction with the academic advisor and faculty can be the single biggest factor increasing student retention” (p. 3). Therefore, it is important for Student Affairs/Academic Affairs to have effective academic advisor training and accountability program for retention initiatives.

### **Decrease in Retention Rate**

A decrease in the retention rate begins as early as the first semester. Students who transfer after the fall semester of the first-year need their departure reviewed as to why they decide to leave the institution. This finding can have a significant impact on decreasing the retention rate. On average, an institution should have a 30-point difference between its retention



and discount rate for a healthy institution. According to Anderson (2015), “the discount rate is the amount of financial aid allocated as a percent of the gross tuition” (What is the discount rate section, para. 1). This means that if it has a discount rate of 50%, its retention rate should be 80%. Typically, this is not always the case, however. Institutions are struggling to keep retention within the 70 percentiles (B. Sliwa, Personal Communication, February 2017; September 2018).

### **Factors Impacting Retention**

#### **Financial Aid Office**

The financial aid office handles all aspects of administering institutional, state, and federal financial aid. At most institutions, the office is under the supervision of Enrollment Management; however, there are colleges where it is under Student Affairs or Finance. The financial aid office is one of the most important offices when it comes to aiding students’ success throughout their education. Financial Aid offices handle many different complexities including institutional policies, social aspects, and Department of Education regulations. The office deals with these more so than almost any other area throughout campus and needs a specific set of skills from the staff (Hossler & Bontrager, 2014).

As it is directly related to funding a student’s education, financial aid can contribute to a student’s decision about returning for the next semester. The cost of education is constantly increasing, and often students cannot find the finances to pay for the added expenses. When an institution reviews data on the retention of students according to financial aid, it tends to be a lower income student that has the higher risk; however, often their ethnicity plays a role as well. As reviewed by Chen & DeJardins (2010), “compared to Whites and Asians, African Americans and Hispanics are found to be more likely to drop out...low-income students also tend to have higher risks of dropping out than the other income groups” (p. 195). Thus, it is important for

institutions to evaluate all students as they enter the institution and continue to keep an interest in them throughout the college career. Every student admitted is important to support, not just those with diverse ethnic backgrounds but those with economic challenges as well. The financial aid office needs to be at the front and center of all college campuses. Many attempt to directly group their office with admissions and student accounts.

### **Student Accounts Office**

Whereas the financial aid office handles the awarding and disbursement of aid, a student accounts/bursar/finance office handles all the billing of tuition and fees. The office takes care of all the collection of payments on the student's account as well as helps the financial aid office with receiving financial aid funding. Students cannot be successful in their studies when they are worried about a tuition balance owed to the college. This office works in collaboration with the financial aid office as well as the offices under the Student Affairs umbrella to make sure that students are fully aware of their financial obligations. By having the integration model, it allows for better collaboration amongst the offices and a lesser chance of students getting anxious over unpaid balances. The two offices can communicate more efficiently and effectively in a proactive way to provide services to students.

### **Admissions Office**

An admissions office is one of the most important offices of any institution. It is the face of a college and needs to have the best staff and services that a student receives on campus. The office is, as said by Hossler and Bontrager (2014) "the institution's 'front doors,' and admissions counselors are the front-line employees...staff shoulders the responsibility for 'bringing in the class'" (p. 109). When students have an interest in the school, they contact the admissions office and a recruiter will gather the correct information. There are instances where instant admission

can happen, and the student should move along to the next office, that is financial aid, student accounts, or registration. On other occasions, it could be that the student needs more information but still needs to complete financial aid information or get class information. It is interesting to note that in the early years, admissions officers were the ones who were primarily responsible for only bringing in the students. There was very little involvement with outside offices such as faculty, financial aid, student accounts, or even student affairs. They were college ambassadors but not heard throughout the campus (Jonas & Popovics, 2000). These are two important reasons for an integrated office. The shorter the walk or the less a chance for a student to get confused, the better the chance for efficient and effective service.

### **Loan Default Rate**

Students attending community colleges vary in financial aid eligibility depending on the location of the college. The loan default rates (referred to as Cohort Default Rates or CDR) have been varied over the course of the last 10 years with some raising as high as over 30%. According to the Federal Student Aid Handbook (2017), The Department of Education regulations require that if a college's Cohort Default Rate is over 40%, the college ends up losing Title IV aid eligibility for direct loan programs. There are consequences when the default rate is at 30% for at least one year. The consequences are harsher if the CDR stays at 30% for the second and third year. If it is 30% for any year, a default plan must be put into place. If it happens in the next year, a revision is necessary, and the school may be placed on a provisional certification. When the school reaches its third year at 30% or higher in a row, it loses eligibility to participate in Title IV direct loan and Pell grant programs (Federal Student Aid Handbook, 2017). While it is important to understand the effect that a Default Rate can have on the school, it also has a significant consequence on the student. Students at community colleges tend to be

high borrowers. Some students borrow their loan funds without knowing the consequences or fully understanding the outcome it has on their overall borrowing. Hackett (2014) mention that students have:

. . . no choice but to take out loans for certificates and degrees in low salaries, such as day care . . . [plus] students already considered at-risk end up dropping out of school while earning wages that are insufficient to pay their debts, which results in defaults student loans. (p. 15)

Defaulting on a loan is a dangerous act that can affect the school, as mentioned above, but also the student. The Federal Government can take student tax refunds, garnish earned wages, send students to collections, make students ineligible for future financial aid and even stop Social Security Benefits (Hillman, 2014). Students have two different periods of time to achieve help from the Department of Education or their servicer before going into default on the loan and suffering the negative effects on the school and the student. Students have 270 days to make a payment on their loan until it goes into default; however, any past due payment after 60 days is in delinquency status. This was a key change made back in 1998 due to the higher rate of defaulted student borrowers (Hillman, 2014). It is important for schools to be aware of the CDR and student borrowing as mentioned by Hossler and Bontrager (2014): “The so-called ‘student loan default crisis’ has been widely reported in the media, leading to proposals to hold institutions more accountable for the default of their students (even though most institutions have relatively low rates of default)” (p. 206). Due to these regulations about cohort default rates and the impact it has on both the students and the institutions, the integrated student services approach can improve financial literacy and retention and reduce institution liability.

## **Increase Retention Rate**

### **Steps to take**

There are multiple steps that an institution needs to take to increase the retention rate. One of the major steps is to look at integrating their student services if they are not already integrated. According to Jones and Popovics (2000), “by combining the admissions, registration, financial aid...offices or departments, institutions could produce a unified front for marketing, recruiting, processing, enrolling, and advising students (e.g. so-called ‘one stop shopping)’” (p. 4). These offices are all important for the retention of students from year to year. Students need to have a sense of where these offices are to find more success. Making a student play a game of “cat and mouse” around campus can produce a negative outcome. Another aspect to think about is the training of staff members, since integrating student services requires the cross training of staff. Training staff will help with campus budget resources if they can improve retention, but it takes time for the staff to understand the other responsibilities that they will need to learn in their new job. Peterson and Otto (2011) note that “counselors are full-time professional staff with experience, skills, and expertise in registration, financial aid, billing, payments, and student records” (p. 41). This level of counselor would vary with the nature of the office structure as different campuses have different offices integrated. A fully integrated student service center would typically have the staff trained with skills of financial aid, student billing, and registration.

As there are two recommendations for a retention strategy, there are two commitments that every institution needs when studying retention related to the impact on students. Tinto (2012), one of the primary researchers on retention, emphasizes two goals that effective retention programs must address to be successful. He states that “[e]ffective retention programs are committed to the students they serve. They put student welfare ahead of other institutional goals”

(p. 146). This is the first goal for an institution. Serving the students' needs should to be the number one priority. Often institutional leaders may forget that students are there to get an education and for exceptional service; it is more than a business decision. Tinto (2012) emphasizes that the second goal is “[e]ffective retention programs are first and foremost committed to the education of all, not just some, of their students” (p. 146). Institutions need to be committed to all student populations. Due to variations in academic preparation of a student, institutions have multiple populations. Student populations include all socioeconomic statuses as well as those that are academically advanced. For effective retention strategies, all students need to have the same service. As any grade level student is important, Dadgar, Nodine, Bracco, and Venezia (2014) state that “although students need support during their entire college experience, the first year is an especially important time...to learn how to navigate both the academic and nonacademic challenges of college” (p. 45). Institutions need to actively reach out to the student during the first year by finding any issues right away—an integrated student service model can help staff with this process due to having one staff member helping the same student for multiple functions.

### **Review Each Factor**

As an institution strives to increase the retention rate, staff will want to review each factor that was previously discussed. These factors include integrating the student service offices, financial literacy, and ways to lower the cohort default rate. One important aspect could be the development of financial literacy programs. The topic of financial literacy is one that varies from institution to institution. As mentioned by Kezar (2010), “if colleges want to improve low-income-student retention and graduation, things must change. Financial education...can teach students the concepts, services, and products that will help them make informed choices, avoid

costly pitfalls, and find trustworthy assistance” (para. 17). Financial literacy is one of the key components of any financial aid office. Kezar has illustrated an area that not only effectively helps retention but also impacts an institutions cohort default rate for Title IV funding. Financial literacy is easy to define by breaking down the two statements. Anderson, Conzelmann, and Lacy (2018) define financial literacy as “[l]iteracy means competency: the ability to read and write the language, or to understand to understand and act in a particular domain. Financial literacy then, means understanding money enough to act responsibly as a member of the economy” (p. 4). A financial aid office that has a strong financial literacy program is affecting the institution on both aspects: the retention rate and cohort default rate. It is also important to keep in mind that these are not the only factors that prompt a change in the retention and/or graduation rate; there may be others depending on the student or institution. Moreover, an institution needs to understand the overall change the factors can have on financial aid eligibility and staff resources.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Higher Education is becoming more important due to the pressures of changing job preparation to get a college education. The main reason for this research was to determine if an integrated student service model has a significant impact on the retention of community college students. Student Services integration depends on the institution and integration to a certain extent. There are integrated models that include financial aid and student accounts or others that have financial aid, registration, and student accounts. It is a goal of the research to determine if an integrated student services has a direct impact on the overall perception of customer service and success of students.

The commitment to higher education customer service has led to the importance of this research topic. Additionally, direct experience in multiple student service offices or not may guide the desire to research this topic more in-depth. Although there have been developments in integrated student services implementation, it is still in its infancy stage due to the cost, staffing resources, and training needed to successfully complete the transition. This research examined the need to have integrated student services at community colleges and how it is important for retention.

There are a variety of integrated service centers depending on the type of school and the location. The researcher sought to document whether the community college's move to an integrated model enhanced the perception of customer service. There are also other factors that affect the institution on the retention side. One of the factors is the cohort default rate. Colleges help reduce the CDR by implementing financial literacy plans and default managers. By introducing financial education, the college can help students learn important concepts and avoid financial mistakes along with finding trustworthy financial advising assistance (Kezar, 2010).

Another theory is that of Vincent Tinto that relates directly to Enrollment Management. Tinto (2006) specifically tells educators that "student retention is everyone's business" (p. 5). This theory supports the need for an integrated student service model. By integrating the student service center, it helps focus on retaining the student from the beginning of the process through graduation day. Students should not have to travel from one office to another and feel frustrated about how to complete paperwork or determining which building to go to. The research suggests that all offices should be in one central location to enhance providing students' services.



## Conclusion

There are several aspects of providing student services that an institution needs to research to understand why some students are not being retained from one semester to the next—integrating its student service center is one of the key factors. As said by Luke, Redekop, and Burgin (2014), “[the] intent to return is the most powerful predictor of actual return...if you want to reasonably predict whether [institution] students will return the following semester, ask them!” (p. 232). Another aspect is cross-training staff members to do multiple jobs. This allows the staff member to assist the student on multiple functions not just a single aspect such as financial aid, student accounts, registration, or advising. When it comes down to the bare bones, DesJardins, Ahlburg, & McCall (2006) state it best, as “the variables that affect enrollment are similar to those that affect application behavior: student quality, family characteristics, institutional preferences, tuition, opportunity costs, and the competitive environment” (p. 395). These factors can have a direct impact on the students’ perception of integrated student services along with assisting with their success.

### CHAPTER III

#### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this phenomenology study was to understand the impact of an integrated student service center. The researcher used an exploratory phenomenological study approach. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), “phenomenology is a study of people’s conscious experience in their life-world...[it] focus[es] on the experience itself and how experiencing something is transformed into consciousness” (p. 25). Due to the study revolving around the impact of integrated student services and the perception of the participants, this was determined as the best type of study. The study refers to impact as the status of student retention, academic success, and social success related to integrated student services as it provides services to the student. The services the student receives depend on the institution; however, most institutions include admissions, financial aid, records/registration, and student accounts. All the services may be under one director or there may be multiple directors, but the staff members need to know multiple functions to service the student exceptionally well. By studying the perceptions of students related to an integrated student center, an institution can determine the need to add services, subtract services, or to maintain the services that are already provided. Additionally, by answering the interview questions, there may be other factors not found by the two basic research questions below.

Interviews, that were recorded, supplied the first data needed for the research. These interviews supplied the researcher with the content needed and led to themes when transcribing the interviews and analyzing the data. There were no additional questions asked, based on the themes, to investigate factors that lead to the retention of the students. Raw data informed the

first review and analysis presented here, but the institution may request further data review of the transcripts once a there is a complete write-up of the study.

### **Research Questions**

The following research question was the focus of the study: In what way does an integrated student service model impact student academic and social success as well as retention? There was a second question, offering a deeper insight into the main research question. The specific population sets — work-study students, first generation students, non-traditional students, and veteran students were the groups for the study. There were two students from each of the specific population sets wanted for each interview. The second question was: How do students perceive the effect of an integrated student service model on their own academic and social success and retention? This question, along with the interview questions (Appendix B), influenced the data that was used for analysis. The researcher's goal was to identify corresponding themes between the expected four choice groups and student academic and social success and integrated student services.

### **Setting**

The study took take place at a two-year non-residential community college in Southeastern Pennsylvania. For this case study, the community college is referred to as a pseudonym known as Pennsylvania Southern Community College (PSCC). PSCC is an average size community college with one campus serving about 4,117 students with a mix between full- and part-time students. The college has a semi-integrated student service model. The financial aid, registrar, and cashier's office are together in one location. It also has a welcome center for all students to complete admissions paperwork as well as register for classes. Furthermore, there is an advising/counseling center for aiding students that have any trouble with college life. One

key advantage at PSCC is that all offices are in one building, although on multiple floors. As the location of the college is urban, without housing facilities on-campus, all the students are commuters. The socioeconomic status of the students makes them eligible for some form of financial aid. As the campus is in an urban area and has multiple buildings, it was determined that the findings of this study could document the actual perceptions of the students.

On-campus interviews was the direction of this study and the interviews were based upon the first research question. The researcher reviewed the interviews to find related themes. Multiple participants were interviewed, so the interviews happened over two visits to campus.

### **Participants**

The participants of this study included various students at PSCC. Initial participant selection came from population sets throughout the college:

- Work-Study Students (2)
- First-Generation Students (2)
- Non-Traditional Students (2)
- Veteran Students (2)
  - **And**
- 18 years or older
- Completed at least one semester of coursework
- Must be currently enrolled (registered for next semester)

With the help of the college Registrar's office, the researcher compiled the sample selection through random choice. The Registrar's office supplied the researcher with a list of all students registered for the following semester (retained) that fell into one of the population sets. Once the researcher received the lists, each student received a number. All the students went into a

computerized randomizer through random.org (Random, 2018) to limit the list to 25 students per population set. The 100 students (25 per population set) were sent an invitation to take part in the study (See Appendix D). The response about interest to participate in the study was due within a week. The students that wanted to take part received a random number based on the population sets and, from those numbers, two students were selected from each group. Due to the responses received, one group had two students and another group had three students. Unfortunately, the researcher only received responses from two of the four populations. Moreover, the students who volunteered for the study could agree or choose not to agree to take part in the study as an added layer of protection. Once consent was obtained (See Appendix A) from the five potential participants, they were asked the same interview questions (See Appendix B). As there were two diverse groups related to this study, it is important to limit the overall number of participants to avoid data saturation. Creswell (2015) supports the limitation of participants by telling that “the overall ability of a researcher to provide an in-depth picture diminishes with the addition of each new individual or site” (p. 208). He goes on to explain that “[b]ecause of the need to report details about the each individual or site, the larger number of cases become unwieldy and result in superficial perspectives” (p. 208). As such, the researcher limited the number from each population. This allowed for five participants; however, there could have been a different number depending on the responses to the first request to take part in the study. The study ended up with five total participants, two from Veteran Students and three College Work Study Students.

### **Data**

The data collection was one of the most important aspects of this study, as it was the way to gather the themes; furthermore, it was how the researcher determined the impact/perception of

integrated student services on student academic and social success. All interviews took place over the course of two days because of the participants' schedules due to class, work, and workload. The researcher was able to complete all student interviews within two-day period as transcribing and coding took most of the time and effort. The schedule for each participant was:

- Review Interview Questions
- Participate in Interview (45-60 minutes)
- Member Checking (Received from researcher within 5-7 days)
- Follow-up interview if needed (30 minutes)

All interviews took place on-campus at PSCC in an agreed upon location, which was in a conference room found in the Library. These interviews took place in the library conference room, allowing for maximum privacy for the students. The only person involved was the primary researcher. It was at an agreed upon time between the researcher and the participant for maximum use of the time allotted and scheduling.

An iPhone was used for all recording for the study with the basic voice memo application for recording. Each one was hand transcribed by using the Otter Voice Notes program (Otter Voice Notes, 2018). This program allowed for uploading of all the interviews for first round of transcribing. The researcher uploaded the interviews for initial transcribing and then reviewed all the interview transcripts for edits as necessary. The Otter.ai program allowed for a faster turnaround to the participants for member checking. Microsoft Excel was the program used for preliminary coding purposes needed to identifying themes amongst the participants' interviews. As it was important for data sensitivity and privacy, the data was stored on a password protected drive in cloud storage and each participant had a number rather than using their name. The

researcher was the only one who knew the identifier of the participants. The timeline for the study was as follows:

Table 3.1

*Timeline*

Action	Month
Proposal Draft/Site Approval	September/October 2018
Present Proposal	Early October 2018
IRB Approval/Site IRB Approval	November/December 2018
Requests sent to participate	January 2019
Interviews/Coding/Reviewing	Late January/Early February 2019
Follow-up (if needed)	February 2019
Data Analysis/Theme/Complete Submission	February/March 2019
Present Dissertation/Submission	Early April 2019

### **Analysis**

The following is the analysis of the data on the quality and quantity of the responses documented by the researcher. Once the interview was over, the researcher transcribed it within 5 to 7 days of the interview. After the primary transcription, there was time for member checking. Once the researcher received it back, the review for common themes begun. This process is known as coding, and “[it] involves the ‘constant comparison’ method that continues throughout the study” (Bloomberg, 2016, p. 191). For the interviews, the researcher looked for various levels of themes. Bloomberg (2016) notes that this is the actual definition of coding: “[it] is essential a system of classification—the process of noting what is of interest or significance, identifying different segments of the data, and labeling them to organize the information in the data” (p. 197). Participant responses went through the coding process thematically in relation to known integrated student services impacts, such as academic success, social success, retention, graduation, and other related subjects. The goal was to find whether there was a connection

between the integrated student service model and the impact on the student academic and social success. The researcher's goal was to determine if any of the themes relate directly to enrollment, retention, and Tinto's vision for why it was important for college staffs to focus on these topics.

### **Participant Rights**

The researcher understands it was important to protect the rights and privacy of each participant. The study received approval from University of New England's Institutional Review Board as well as the Institutional Review Board of the site. The researcher supplied consent forms to each student (see Appendix A). Participation in the study was completely voluntary and each participant had the opportunity to consent to skip any question asked during the interview. Each one of the participants had protection from identity sharing by not having any of their information or answers shared with any of the other participants. All the participants got an explanation of the study, the reason for conducting the study, and the approval of IRB. Additionally, all the information of each participant was stored on a secure, online cloud system with numeral identifiers in lieu of names. Any participant, at any time throughout the study, was able to withdraw from participating. Furthermore, the act of participating had no effect on the student's standing at the college. All audio files are retained in a password protected file and will remain in the file period of a minimum of three years.

### **Potential Limitations**

There are several limitations with this study as mentioned earlier in Chapter 1. The main limitation was that the research was only compiled on one site. It was a limitation due to only having the experience of one institution, thus it would be difficult to apply to other colleges. Another limitation was the specific set of students due to the study done at one site. Although the



number of students was a limitation, it can also be a positive, as one does not want an abundance of participants for the study. Creswell states that “collecting qualitative data and analyzing those data takes considerable time, and the addition of each individual site only lengthens that time” (p. 208). By having a limited number of participants, the researcher focused on the participants, themes, and the specific study site. The study was limited to those that decided to participate—as it was determined that eight was the number of students the researcher was expecting to respond; a limitation was that six may only decide to respond. Since this was the case, the limitation was to the students who responded. Once again, it relates to the limited choice of participants and requests sent.

Another limitation was the conflict of interest/biases of the researcher related directly to the topic. The researcher has been in higher education for over 15 years in the student services field. It was difficult not to have biases towards the impact of an integrated student services model and how it can significantly help student success. The way the researcher combated these biases was by considering the research as well as the interview responses of the students. Additionally, the researcher needed to understand that this study required an open mind and without it, the study would not have been successful. Over the course of the last 15 years, there has been significant advancements in student services and the researcher had worked at multiple schools. This has given the researcher the opportunity to see different office structures and service levels—and led to a perception of an efficient and effective set-up related to an integrated model.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter explained the methods that the researcher used to gather data for this study. It included interviewing students based on the research questions first and then on the interview

questions (Appendix B). The data gathered from the interview questions were coded for themes related to student success and the integrated student service model. The analysis of the themes is discussed in chapters 4 and 5.

Now that the study is completed, it will be added to the existing literature on higher education related to enrollment management and student services. It detailed the importance of having an integrated student service center that will impact student academic and social success as well as retention. The data should help administration at higher education institutions make the decision as to whether they want to integrate their student service offices.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **RESULTS/OUTCOMES**

The purpose of this study was to determine if integrated student services had an impact on student academic and social success as well as the overall perception of the community college by a specific population of students. This study documented the perceptions of students about integrated student services, the office that the students thought had the greatest impact on them during their career, the positive and negative aspects of campus climate, and various information that the administration may find useful for future studies. One of the key findings, to be discussed in more detail later, was the realization that students are not familiar with the concept of an integrated student service center; this was an important finding that administration must focus on with marketing, advertising, and student outreach. All the data gathered from the student interviews related directly to the following research question: in what way does an integrated student service model impact student academic and social success and retention? The student population included in the study allowed the researcher to provide their insights into student services, using a second question that was: how do students perceive the effect of an integrated student service model on their own academic and social success and retention? The sample student population provided limited feedback for the questions; however, the researcher was able to determine general perceptions of integrated student services and how that office impacted the students' experience of the campus climate.

#### **Participants**

The study participants included five students who attended PSCC for the spring 2019 semester. A detailed email was sent out to 100 students (See Appendix D) requesting participation in the study. Unfortunately, only six students responded that they were willing to

participate in the study. One of the students subsequently declined due to inability to have a face-to-face interview; the student thought the interviews were going to be done by phone and/or video. Additionally, the researcher expected that there would be at least eight to ten students from each of the population sets selected. Unfortunately, first generation students and non-traditional students did not respond at all.

Each of the students were interviewed one-on-one and the interviews ranged in time from 15-25 minutes. All the students' identities were protected, and coded "names" were used throughout the study. Each student will be referred to as the following College Work-Study 1 (CWS1), College Work-Study 2 (CWS2), College Work-Study 3 (CWS3), Veteran Student 1 (VA1), and Veteran Student 2 (VA2). The following table, 4.1, shows the students that were selected for participation in the study and their demographic information that was gathered from the interviews.

Table 4.1

*Participant Demographics*

Participant	Gender	Age	Major
CWS1	Female	18-21	Business Administration
CWS2	Female	35-45	Culinary and Business
CWS3	Female	18-21	Physical Therapy
VA1	Male	21-25	Communications
VA2	Male	25-35	Health Care Transfer

Note. Demographics gathered from interviews.

The participants agreed to a specific time to meet the researcher for the interview at a confidential location on PSCC's campus. The centralized location was in a library study room to provide complete confidentiality for the student. Additionally, each participant signed a consent form agreeing to engage in the study.

## Methods

It was a concern of the researcher that there may not be enough participants to have a valid study. The researcher sent out a total of 100 emails to a specific group of students asking for participation but only received participant results from College Work-Study and Veteran students. There were no students who agreed to participate from First Generation or Non-Traditional groups. This outcome was a concern as it skews the data toward the groups that were represented. The lack of response may reflect the nature of community college students and their lack of checking email. A small response rate may tend to happen with a study as limited as this one. The students that agreed to participate, as shown above, were varied in age range and majors. Each one had a different story to tell when it came to their own success and perception of the community college.

The interviews were recorded on the researcher's iPhone and transcribed through automatic software. The software used was Otter.ai (Otter Voice Notes, 2018), which allowed the interviews to be uploaded and transcribed by voice. It was important to make sure each interview was transcribed accurately, so each interviewee reviewed their own interview by member checking. Please note that in all direct quotes, vernacular language is transcribed exactly to capture the genuine meaning of each subject (Corden & Sainsbury, 2006). The researcher, once they were transcribed, hand coded each interview using Microsoft Excel. Once the interview was finalized, coding/analysis was completed to determine the overarching themes amongst the interviews. Bloomberg (2016) uses this definition of coding: "[it] is essentially a system of classification—the process of noting what is of interest or significance, identifying different segments of the data, and labeling them to organize the information in the data" (p. 197). The researcher completed this organization in a three-step process. First, each

individual interview was coded to determine the themes that were present. Second, the codes were then incorporated into a master document. Last, the master list was analyzed for repeating themes amongst the interviews and how they relate to the research questions or the campus community. These themes, along with the two research questions, determined the results of this study.

### **Results**

The themes that developed from the interviews were not what was expected by the researcher when beginning the study. Each one of the themes are either directly related to one of the research questions or the campus. The most interesting finding from the interview was that no participants knew what a true integrated student service center was or how it was supposed to operate. The researcher was surprised by this initial finding as the study was designed to look at students' perception of their success based on use of the services provided by an integrated student service center. As the students did not know what the center was or how it functioned, the researcher used other questions to assist with gathering students thoughts related to services and the campus. The themes that were developed based on the interview coding are in table 4.2 below.

Table 4.2

*Themes from Participant Interviews*

Number	Theme
1	Integrated Student Services not widely known
2	Advising/Writing Center Support
3	Accessible/Accommodating
4	Location of Offices
5	Financial Aid/Records/Cashier Office - ISS

Each of these themes shown above relate to the students' experience at PSCC as well as their own individual success. The student participants shared their own viewpoints depending on their

own usage of the centers, the offices, or if they even knew what the interviewer was asking. It is important to remember that different aspects of the college support help different students in different ways.

As the themes are discussed in more detail, there are multiple factors related to student services and success. Students need to know what is available to them and how to use the services. Furthermore, as stated by Minnick, Nelson, Harrington, Tarkalson, and Furniss (2013), “many factors are associated with retention, including academic preparedness, commitment to educational goals and the institution, campus climate, social and academic integration and financial aid” (p. 10). All of these factors together can be considered a form of integrated services and campus climate – directly related to the five themes below.

### **Theme 1: Integrated Student Services Not Widely Known**

The idea of integrated student services can mean different things depending who is being asked or where it is being asked. Also, if one drops the term of student and just looks at integrated services, the term has a whole new meaning – it can relate to healthcare, non-profit, businesses, etc. For the purposes of this study, the researcher used the concept of integrated student services, which includes financial aid, records, cashier/student accounts, and may even include admissions. There are times where advising is included as well. At PSCC, the semi-integrated model is financial aid, records, and the cashier’s office. This office allows students to complete most college functions in one area.

Each of the participants were asked about their understanding of an integrated student service model. While some seemed to understand the concept a little, others did not grasp the idea. This could be due to the marketing of the center throughout higher education or it may be that integration of offices is just starting to be developed at institutions. The table below details

the results of the question: when I say, “Integrated Student Services” – what does this mean to you?

Table 4.3

*What does Integrated Student Services Mean*

Participant	Meanings
CWS1	Services that are offered here that help us do other things, instead of just doing things by ourselves
CWS2	A variety-a variety of different things
CWS3	Gathering information that would help students, they get involved for a that students can be active college
VA1	Helped me go through college with no student loans, pay everything that the VA doesn't cover
VA2	Integrated students, I don't know

The table above shows that each participant had a different viewpoint when trying to describe their understanding of integrated student services. It appears that the closest match was CWS1, who speaks about services for students. As the data highlights the variety in the meanings, it shows that marketing needs to be done to explain what integrated student services are and why these services are important for students. Moreover, it is important for students to know that support is available for them when many may not even know it is there.

## **Theme 2: Advising/Writing Center Support**

There are several services available to students at PSCC. When asked about what office had the biggest impact on their success, the Advising and/or Writing Center was mentioned the most during the interviews. Academic Advising can be considered an important office on any college campus. Minnick et al. (2013) explain that “Academic advising is much more than simply helping students schedule classes. Effective advising helps students clarify goals and plan their academic experiences to best support those goals” (p. 11). It is a primary reason that the participants were asked more detail after identifying the advising center as a resource related to



their success and the writing center helping students with writing a successful paper. When asked specifically about the office that had the biggest impact on their college career, CWS1 stated:

For me it was B209 because that's where my, actually where I went, to find out an advisor and to figure out what I wanted to study 'cause I didn't know what exactly. I was having an issue [because] I didn't know exactly what I wanted to study, but I knew kind of what I liked, and in B209 they send you to a specific person a career person, and they help you figure that out. And then also there they send you to your advisor. B209 is really the source place for everything for general questions instead of financial questions.

Based on this statement, students know that the Advising area is where they can go to get most of their questions answered. It also appears that they can go there even if they have other questions and will be directed to the right place. Being directed to the right place is supported by CWS2, as indicated over the course of several statements:

You get the most help from advising center. Advising Center. And if they can't help you they'll direct you to who can. The advising center because, like I said, if they can't help you then they'll direct you to somebody that can.

The writing center was highlighted by another student participant, CWS3. While the participant spoke about the advising center, the student specifically mentioned the writing center and how it helped with that student's college success. When asked about the writing center, CWS3 stated:

Oh, they, the writing center has helped me performance better writing skills and a better understanding of English language. No way that I can communicate with other people and that will help me a lot in the future here in college.

Both offices had a significant impact on the student participants. As each of the participants mentioned, the advising center had an impact on the students' success. Each one of the students continually visited the advising and/or writing center to get the support they needed. Young-Jones, Burt, Dixon, and Hawthorne (2013) support the use of advising by stating:

Meeting with advisor and advisor accountability contributed to student responsibility, student self-efficacy, student study skills, and perceived support; advisor empowerment also contributed to student responsibility, student study skills, and perceived support. The levels to which advisors are available to students, actually meet with them, and provide them with assistance and support are clearly linked to factors demonstrated to predict student success. (p. 15)

Each office provides its own level of support; however, there is a direct relation, based on the participant answers and the literature presented, to show that the centers have an impact on success.

### **Theme 3: Accessible/Accommodating**

A community college campus is one where a student, typically, attends for a few years to obtain an academic credential to enter the workforce or to transfer to another college to finish their education. The students interviewed for the study felt that PSCC was very accommodating and accessible based on the interactions of staff and faculty. This is a key factor when working with students. According to Minnick et al. (2013):

Cognitive factors refer to students' academic abilities and skills, including academic preparedness, critical thinking ability and study and time management skills. Social factors involve students' maturity, ability to form relationships, commitment to goals, coping skills and attitude toward learning. Institutional factors address how the college

helps students achieve the students' educational goals, including curriculum and instruction, academic and student services, recruitment and admission and financial aid. It is the institution's responsibility to get to know its students and provide these students with support according to their needs in an effort to balance these three main factors and help students succeed. (p. 10)

An institution needs to evaluate these factors to make sure that a student is fully accommodated and feels welcome; this is one of the key ways that a student can fully succeed. The three factors mentioned above - cognitive, social, and institutional - allow the student to feel fully immersed at the college. When it came to PSCC, there were several aspects that the student participants highlighted that made them feel comfortable on the campus. According to CWS1, "I didn't expect them but my comparing my experience here with other friends that go to a four-year school, it's more, I don't know, it's relaxed." The community college appeared to be more accommodating than a four-year school based upon the statement made by CWS1; the student participant explained that her friends who go to four-year schools don't feel as comfortable as she does at the community college.

The institution understands the needs of students for success, not only on the student service side, but also on the academic side. VA2 mentions that:

I like the classes a lot, pretty much, they're not too big. And every teacher is there for you. Every teacher is—they're trying to provide hope. Again, I don't think there's any way how someone can fail here. They have to try and fail. Everything is just there. All the support is there.

As supported here by VA2's statement, a college needs to have collaboration between all offices—both on the student service and the academic side. Without collaboration, not only does student service suffer, but the success of the student can suffer as well.

#### **Theme 4: Location of Offices**

One strategic planning aspect of integrated student service centers is the location of the offices. When one thinks about a healthcare facility and/or hospital, typically, the triage area is right when a patient walks into the office/hospital. This technique is starting to slowly make its way into the Higher Education sector. Colleges either do not have the space or budgetary dollars available to develop the appropriate offices. One of the questions asked of the participants was about the location of the offices at PSCC. Currently, as PSCC. Currently, the setup of the offices at PSCC includes a Welcome Center for admissions/tour information, a Financial Aid/Records office in the same area of the Cashier's office but run by different staff/directors, and an advising center located on a different floor in the same building. Students want to know where offices/services are located on campuses. According to O'Gara, Mechur Karp, and Hughes (2009), "Likewise, students said that just knowing where the services were on campus and who to talk to about particular issues that arose increased their level of comfort on campus" (p. 209). The participants were asked about the location of the offices and each one had a different answer. The analysis showed that several of the participants felt that the location was not a problem for the students. CWS2 mentioned, when asked if the location of the offices is a problem, "No, not really because the main offices that you really do need are all in [the main building]." Whereas, VA1 answered the question in an opposite way related to the same building. VA1 stated that "it's weird that the entire third floor is just professor offices and deans," and goes on to say that they "only have restrooms every other floor that can—that has

been a bit of an annoyance....” When it comes to the location of the offices, it is important for students to understand the reasoning behind where each office is located as they access them.

### **Theme 5: Financial Aid/Records/Cashier Office – ISS**

This theme is specific to the integrated student service of financial aid, records, and the cashier’s office. At PSCC, this is the set-up that the institution has for students to find out information about their financial aid, register for classes, get a transcript, or pay their bill. The offices can be considered a semi-integrated student service center. The reason for being semi-integrated is that there are several other student services spread out around the building, including admissions (the welcome center) and advising.

The student participant data suggests that these offices serve all the student populations well and provided information accurately, on-time, and with professionalism. It was important to determine if the service that the office was providing impacted the students at all; it was determined that this was not the case based on the results. Several of the students had very specific statements to make about the offices along with the frequency of the visits. The visits are important as it shows how important the offices were to each of the student participants. The table below shows an estimate, based on the student interviews, of how many times a semester the student visited the offices.

Table 4.4

#### *Financial Aid/Records/Cashier Office Visits*

Participant	Frequency (highest number used)
CWS1	8
CWS2	2
CWS3	4
VA1	4
VA2	4

Note. Frequency determined from interview data.

From the table above, one can see that the students visited the office an average of four times a semester. This shows that the offices were used about once every month throughout the semester. This data also shows that the visits were important for the students' continued success. When asked about the offices and why they were visited, each participant had a different reason. Most of the students would go for specific financial aid questions. For example, CWS1 went to the office:

. . . because I received a scholarship and I get loans so I had money left over in my account and I don't want to buy the money I can use that can go to the bookstore here. But I don't want to buy it from here, because you have to get it in a bundle and some of my professors only need a textbook or they only need an access code. So, I'm not going to spend more money than I need to. So, I was hoping to get that money now but I have to wait until March to get it.

Whereas, CWS2, went to the office for a totally different reason, "To get my schedule to register for classes, apply for the work-study position." Each student that was interviewed gave a different reason for visiting the office.

The students were asked about the office's accuracy, professionalism, and helpfulness. All the students' answers were the same, in that the office staff members provided the same answers and were always eager to help. There was one answer that spoke directly about the office and the work-study program. CWS1 stated that "the students are the work studies people you talk to, sometimes they don't know directly the answer which is fine. So, they go to a faculty person I would just maybe want the faculty to actually be there." It appears that CWS1 is stating that if the staff/faculty was there from the beginning, service may be better; however, this may not always be possible at all institutions. This is an important aspect of an integrated service

model—part of “triaging” the situation to make sure the student is getting directed to the right person. CWS1 continues to make an interesting statement regarding professionalism:

Sometimes they lack professionalism more because some of the younger ones, the work studies, [work in] the offices that I have to do with. A lot of them have the work studies so the bottom of the office with the bookstore and the financial aid area the cashier has work studies. [They’re] professional—sometimes the works studies are more professional than the specific faculty member that works there but also it's, it's not terrible it doesn't leave me feel bad, everybody has a bad day so sometimes it could be off but professionalism is pretty good.

Professionalism is a trait that takes time to learn, and as stated above about triaging students when they arrive, it may help solve some of the issues that students deal with day to day.

Unfortunately, with budgetary concerns and administration cut-backs, it is hard to staff offices with full-time staff. At PSCC, the front-line staff includes full-time staff but also work study students as it reduces the need for FT staff and creates a welcoming learning environment for students.

### **Summary**

This study was to determine the impact of integrated student services on student success; however, integrated student services, does not necessarily have the impact the impact on student success that the research may have determined from the study. The data and research determined there were five main themes developed:

Table 4.5

*Themes from Participant Interviews*

Number	Theme
1	Integrated Student Services not widely known
2	Advising/Writing Center Support
3	Accessible/Accommodating
4	Location of Offices
5	Financial Aid/Records/Cashier Office - ISS

Note. Themes developed from Coding of Interview data.

Each of the participants seemed to experience similar satisfaction with the college but had different viewpoints of what integrated student services really meant. The location of the offices did not seem to be an issue for any of the students; but several did mention that service/wait times can be an issue depending on when they visit the office or call. According to CWS3, the service would vary “depend[ing] on the person you’re talking to.” CWS2 goes on to state that:

I mean, sometimes it's a little wait, sometimes it's a long wait, it all depends on the time that you go in, if you go in, and then the beginning of the semester, they tried to get in and out. So, you are on time for your classes. But if it's in the middle of the semester, there's 30 kids lined up.

Efficiency appears to depend on when the student goes to the office. The college leadership could control the wait times or service depending on the time of the year; however, that would take more strategic planning and research.

Each of the themes highlights the importance of accessing services to being a successful community college student as well as a student overall. An imperative aspect of college life is the relationships that students form. According to Meeuwisse et al. (2010), “[f]or [most] students, informal relationships with peers are of considerable importance to their sense of



belonging” (brackets in original) (pp. 543-544). Students need to forge relationships along with having in constant contact with staff and faculty on-campus.

When it came to the overall findings, one of the most surprising data elements, no matter the student population, is that the student visited the semi-integrated office the same amount of times, no matter the reason. This is important because it shows that the offices are being used on campus even though a student does not understand the concept of an integrated model.

Additionally, each student understood their own track for success and why the college is important to them individually.

Chapter five will focus on the conclusions generated from the study data, recommendations for action, and recommendations for further research.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

This study focused on the impact of integrated student service centers on specific student academic and social success. Additionally, it documented individual student's specific perceptions of the community college on their own academic and social success. For this study to be completed, the researcher looked at the following main research question:

- In what way does an integrated student service model impact student academic and social success as well as retention?

Based on the information gained from the first question, a second question below was asked to provide deeper insight into the main research question.

- How do students perceive the effect of an integrated student service model on their own academic and social success and retention?

The researcher received permission from PSCC to interview students in four categories. These categories were: first-generation, veteran, work-study, and non-traditional. A total of 100 students were asked to participate in the study; however, only six students responded to participate. After confirming participation, one of the students had to drop out of the study. The total number of students involved in the study was five from two categories—veterans and work-study. There were two students from the veteran's category and three students from the work-study category. All the interviews were completed in a private room, recorded one-on-one, transcribed, and coded for analysis. Once the interviews were coded, five general themes were developed from the interviews. These five themes were:

Table 5.1

*Themes from Participant Interviews*

Number	Theme
1	Integrated Student Services not widely known
2	Advising/Writing Center Support
3	Accessible/Accommodating
4	Location of Offices
5	Financial Aid/Records/Cashier Office - ISS

Note. Themes developed from Coding of Interview data.

Each of the themes identified from the interviews had a different impact on student academic and social success or lack of success at the community college. This chapter presents the findings based on the themes identified, implications, limitations, and the researcher recommendations will end the chapter.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

The researcher developed five main findings from the interviews of the student populations. Each of these findings had a significant impact on the institution as well as future studies of Integrated Student Services. As noted previously, the field of healthcare begun this transition of triaging their patients and offering a combination of services in one location. This is a common practice that colleges and universities can. Benefit from as seen by the following findings.

#### **Finding #1: Integrated Student Services Not Widely Known**

The first finding related to Integrated Student Services being known amongst students on the college campus. Integrated Student Services, whether the office be called a “One-Stop Shop” or an “Integrated Student Service Center,” was a concept that students in this study did not understand. Each of the students interviewed had a different answer for the question about integrated student services. The researcher believes that the students should have a generalized

understanding of the student services offices as they, the offices, are integrated across PSCC's campus. According to CWS2, the student stated that integrated student services was "...a variety. That's the first thing that comes to mind that it's integrated. Yeah, that's you, a variety of different things. What works? What doesn't work?" While this is true to some extent due to an integrated student service center being a variety of offices, the student was not sure what offices were in the center or the responsibilities of the center. Another student, VA1, related the topic of integrated student services to a military background. The student, when asked the same question, stated:

Means that I am able to come here because of the benefits I get through as a member of the National Guard paying most of my tuition and fees that being just tuition. I'm on my own for fees.

The researcher can confirm that a part of integrated student services should be to help obtain benefits for college; however, this student related them directly to the military. An integrated student service center does more than just assist Veteran Students. Due to these specific student responses, along with the other interviewees, the researcher determined that there may be a generalized perception of an integrated student service definition not being widely known amongst students within the institution studied. Further studies with larger subject populations are recommended to generalize findings.

### **Finding #2: Advising/Writing Center Support**

There are many different offices that provide support to students to assist with their academic and social success. These offices provide academic, personal, or professional support throughout the whole college career. The researcher, during the interviews, wanted to highlight the integrated offices of financial aid, records, and cashiers as well as the welcome center;

however, through analysis of the interviews, the advising and writing centers were mentioned numerous times. The Writing Center at PSCC helped the students in their own individual way.

CWS3 mentioned that:

Oh, they, the writing center has helped me performance better writing skills and a better understanding of English language. No way that I can communicate with other people and that will help me a lot in the future here in college.

The writing center seemed to be an essential aspect to the success of a student at PSCC. This center helped the student with not only writing skills but also to complete many other aspects of class work as well. According to CWS2, the center assisted with a class project. The student discussed that:

I had to do my last semester, I had to do a PowerPoint presentation for my business class, and I am 40 years old. So, when I went to school, we weren't computer literate. So, I had to go to the writing center to learn how to literally download pictures and make the things move and do what I wanted.

Those responses are just related to the writing center; however, there were additional statements made related to the advising center as well. CWS1 spoke about a specific advisor:

Yes, after I was dealing with it on my own with the professor. But I realized that it was still affecting my education, my academics wise, I was afraid that it wasn't effective. So that's what I brought it to my advisor, but by that, by me mentioning it to my advisor, my professor, kind of fixed the issue herself before it could go further, which was good. And so, it was resolved, but now I just know not to take that teacher again. But yeah, my advisor did help. She was, she said, that it seems that I should not take her because I was going to take again until this issue arise. And I was, no, I can't do it. So, she helped, and

she was very accommodating. She, she helped me with two classes to—I came here ahead of college like classes. So, she helped me waive into classes. And she was very, she made sure that I was actually ready for the classes that I was taking, she didn't just sign me off. And then it's, oh, you can go—she talked it through with me. Just very nice. Advising played a very important role in student's success just as much as the writing center did for academic coursework. However, for advising to have an impact on the success of a student, there needs to be active advising as well as effective advising. This is supported by Woods, Richard, Park, Tandberg, Hu, and Jones (2017) as they stated “[e]ffective advising is essential because of the positive impact it can have on educational outcomes” (p. 292). The researcher surmised that these two centers, based on these student statements, may have provided the necessary support for success.

### **Finding #3: Accessible/Accommodating**

This finding related to how well the college can accommodate a student as well as how accessible it may be for a student. Accommodation/Accessibility can be a simple task as helping the student getting accustomed to the college atmosphere or it can be for students with disabilities. It also has to do with the way the college atmosphere is relayed to the student. The researcher believes that there is a strong possibility that a positive atmosphere is directly related to student success. This can be supported by that statement from CWS2:

So, they, they make you felt very, very comfortable they, they try to make, make it as easy as possible. And it wasn't just my program that at all, everybody telling me every time you walk around the whole college it's always a smile and it's kind of contagious. So, it's, it's a very warm atmosphere around.

A college that makes one feel comfortable, welcoming, and at ease can help the student succeed as it reduces the stress for the student. The researcher, as a student service professional, understands the direct impact that unfamiliarity of a college campus has on student potential.

Another aspect of PSCC that was important for students was that it was accommodating for all students—inclusive. This may be a key factor to keep a student at a school and help with enrollment as well as retention. One of the student interviews highlighted this subject, the fact that PSCC was diverse. Student CWS3 mentioned that:

Yeah, there's different ethnic groups, people understand each other. There's not—the school doesn't allow my racism or anything that would offend people's culture and other stuff like that. I like the fact that the school is really diverse.

Both aspects, having a comfortable atmosphere and being diverse, may have a significant impact on the student deciding to continue at an institution or transfer out to another institution. It was accurately stated by Benson, Heagney, Hewitt, Crosling, and Devos (2014), “[a]lthough university staff cannot influence all the factors that contribute to perspective transformation, they can assist students to overcome personal and structural barriers to success” (p. 26). Additionally, it can have an impact on the academic success of a student as well.

#### **Finding #4: Location of Offices**

A fourth aspect that may have an impact on the success or retention of a student could be the location of the student services offices. Institutions of Higher Education (IHE) have offices in different areas depending on their building structures and institutional philosophies. As mentioned earlier, healthcare has begun to develop the triage system along with implementing “one-stop” areas. IHEs have developed these areas to assist students with all their needs including Admissions, Financial Aid, Advising, Cashiers, Testing, Registration, and even

Alumni Offices. However, there needs to be one intake person that directs the student to a representative or starts with the student—such as with the Healthcare model.

The specific location of offices at PSCC was not portrayed as a problem, but was mentioned in the interviews amongst the student populations. PSCC has the Welcome Center and Information desk in one area, the Financial Aid/Records/Cashier Office in another area, and the Advising Office on another floor. The offices are semi-integrated as PSCC does not have a fully Integrated Student Service Center. As the students were asked about the location of the offices and if it impacted any of the students, several of them had valuable responses to the question. CWS3 mentioned, when asked about the location of the offices of PSCC and if they caused any negative issues:

I don't think so. I think it is fine how it is because when you need help, you don't have to like know where it is and they make sure that you know where to find help. On campus they get involved with a student's life and their expenses, they help them with their furniture needs.

CWS3 may have been speaking directly about the financial aid, records, and cashier's office. The student possibly was speaking about how the financial aid office assists students with finding funding to help with additional expenses and needs outside of the classroom.

The researcher did find a wide range of answers from each of the student participants. Each one had a different reaction to the question; there were some that were even mixed between good and bad. An example was the response from CWS1:

No, I think it's nice that financial aid, I think where they are is good because usually people need financial aid, it's direct. It's like we need help with money now so it's on the lower floor easy and advising is upstairs which is pretty nice because there are a lot of



advisors in there, a lot of students so [if] you would have it downstairs it just be really crowded and it's not, it wouldn't be good. The Welcome Center is a little, that's the one office that I was like, weird placement, because it's so you come in and it's right there but you don't really see it. The first thing you see is the security desk but, and now they just added a Information Desk on the other side so it's a little weird that placement. I would like try to switch it up where the security guard [is], maybe have the Welcome Center there but you can't move it because it's a full thing but just that. But everything else is fine.

The location of the offices, in general, cannot be changed easily. It takes an extensive planning period from the administration to move office locations. Furthermore, there can be a significant budgetary cost to any type of office relocation. Even with the planning and cost involved with change the location of the offices, it may be beneficial to do so for the enhancement of student service.

#### **Finding #5: Financial Aid/Records/Cashier Office – ISS**

The last finding related directly to the Financial Aid/Records/Cashier Office (ISS) at PSCC. These offices, as mentioned before, are *semi-integrated*. The reason the offices are considered semi-integrated is because there are other offices including the Welcome Center and Advising that are in other areas of the building. For the office to be considered a fully Integrated Student Service Center, all services should be in one location and/or area. It would be ideal for the Welcome Center and Advising Center to be in the same location as the Financial Aid/Records/Cashier Office. Even though this is not the case at PSCC, several of the students believed that the office played a valuable resource in their continued success. One of the students, VA1 stated that:

Oh, I visit there often. I need to stop by every if you're going to get any kind of a work here, you're required to have a copy of your schedule on you. So if you're getting a parking pass, you need to stop by and get one of these things printed. Basically, everything requires a go through. So, if you have one of these on you at all time, basically.

For this student, the frequency of visits was often due to needing help with schedules or getting help with other services on campus. The offices seem to be the go-to office for all aspects of the college access. Another student, CWS3, mentioned the extra attention that the office pays to student needs—this is important for the population of students that PSCC serves daily. CWS3 stated:

They do have, they have, they have, a big opening on Saturdays, they help students with their FAFSA and financial aid all that. So, it's not really a place that you visit 24/7, if you haven't do. If you have a balance, you can talk to one of them about that, then they will provide you with the best service.

The additional Saturday hours, during the start of the semester, allows another time for students to be serviced by staff. This is not only an advantage for the students but adds another layer to enhanced service.

### **Implications**

The researcher identified several implications based on the findings of the study; however, there was one implication that impacts the institution, students, and community the most. This implication was related directly to the marketing of the integrated student service model. As seen by the data gathered from the student interviews, none of the students had a solid idea of what an integrated student service model was or why it was needed at an institution. This

may be because of marketing or that there was not a true integrated model at PSCC. As mentioned by Sathiyaseelan (2014), “[t]he ultimate vision of [integrated student services] was—and is—to drive transformational change by serving as a catalyst for the elimination of gaps between processes and by allowing customers to access the Centre for all general services” (p. 46). The Integrated Student Service Center allows the student to access all the offices in one location at one time and it needs to be marketed that way. If the institution provides limited marketing, students may not know about the center, and lack of knowledge will also hinder the use of services that are provided to all students.

### **Limitations**

The researcher had limitations for this study due to the site location as well as the population size. The study was completed at one location only, which means that it was hard to generalize the study’s findings for other locations with integrated student service offices. If multiple locations were studied, more data may have been collected for analysis. Another limitation was the small sample size. Originally, the researcher was hoping to interview ten students, but dropped the sample size down to eight students. Unfortunately, the study was completed with five students. The small sample size may reflect the decision to complete the study at one location. Another factor related to the small sample size is that there were only participants from two of the four categories. The study should have been completed with students from each of the categories; however, only students from work-study and veterans’ populations responded to the email request. The findings can’t be generalized based on the data and results concluded; this was more of a pilot study, for the institution, with a further study needed to acquire more in-depth results.

### **Recommendations for Actions**

The researcher recommends that PSCC do further marketing on the on-demand services offered at PSCC as something to differentiate it from other institutions. Several of the students who were interviewed were not sure about the different functions of the offices and/or how to define an actual Integrated Student Service Center. PSCC has a modified center with the Financial Aid/Record/Cashier Office, which provides more of an on-demand service to students. A typical Integrated Student Service Center may not provide the same type of on-demand service that PSCC provides—this may be one of the reasons that the student participants were not familiar with the definition of Integrated Student Services. Students also need to know the location of each office on campus as several of the students were not sure that this message is getting around to all the students when they first arrive on campus. Providing this information when the student first arrives on campus, not years after they arrive as a student, could increase perception of the community college.

Another recommendation for PSCC is to create an enhanced early alert system. Once an integrated student service center develops, there can be a better system in place to track and predict student retention. One key function that is needed is an increased tracking of why students choose to withdraw; there should be a better system in place than there is now at many institutions. Campbell & Mislevy (2013) discuss that “identifying students early in the first year who are at greater risk of leaving an institution might give an institution more opportunity to intervene and ultimately retain these students” (p. 489). As noted, an early intervention, before the students even start, can prepare the students for a first-year seminar class that enhances their study skills and transition to college. An early alert system will be able to identify students before they get to the point of withdrawing. In addition, earlier intervention may address the

factors that lead to students not being retained. Problems leading to attrition could have been resolved if a student was identified as “at-risk” during initial enrollment or at least during the first year. Early intervention needs to be a collaborative task done by staff throughout the institution. It is a creative process by the enrollment and student affairs’ teams. Both teams can work and collaborate better together by integrating the teams in one location—admission, advising, registration, financial aid, student accounts, etc.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

A further study can be done on the impact of Integrated Student Services later; however, there are several aspects the researcher would change before completing the study again. One aspect would be the gathering of the sample size. The gathering of the sample size with this study only allowed for email contact. If this study was completed again or a further study was done, the researcher would reach out to students by other communication methods. Students look at other sources of media other than email. It is important to reach out multiple times; the students need a personal touch. This also will increase the subject pool and possibly provide better data for analysis. Another recommendation would be to possibly look at another institution that is of comparable enrollment and location as PSCC. If there were two institutions on which this study was completed, the data would likely be more accurate, and a better analysis may be able to be completed on the student population overall. One last recommendation would be to enlist the assistance of additional staff members at the institutions to reach out to students that they know who may be able to assist. If the staff member knows the student on the list, they can assist with asking the student to participate. It is another aspect to the personal touch.

## **Conclusion**

This study focused on the impact of integrated student services on student success. It looked at the student's perception and how they felt about the integrated student services model and asked to describe their impact on their own success. The data showed that there was a perceived impact from the integrated student service centers and from other services on campus as well. The researcher interviewed students from two different population sets, college work-study and veteran students. Each of the populations had different viewpoints on the questions asked of them. Research questions were used to focus on the perceptions of the students and how the integrated services center related to their own success. They also described the supportive college atmosphere. As the analysis was completed, five specific themes were discovered related to PSCC; the themes were discussed in detail based on the student interviews. The researcher identified implications as well as recommendations for further action—one being that there needs to be enhanced marketing of the Integrated Student Service model. Lastly, the researcher identified what would need to be done if the study was replicated. These recommendations included a more robust study population size, adding another location, and more of a personal touch.

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## APPENDIX A

### University of New England

#### Consent for Participation in Research

**Project Title:** Integrated Student Services Impact on Student Success

**Principal Investigator(s):** Charles M. Scheetz, Doctoral Student, UNE, Cscheetz@une.edu.

**Faculty Advisor:** Ann Lee Burch, PT, MPH, Ed.D Lead Advisor, UNE, 480.219.6061, aburch1@une.edu.

#### **Introduction:**

- Please read this form, you may also request that the form is read to you. The purpose of this form is to provide you with information about this research study, and if you choose to participate, document your decision.
- You are encouraged to ask any questions that you may have about this study, now, during or after the project is complete. You can take as much time as you need to decide whether or not you want to participate. Your participation is voluntary.

#### **Why is this study being done?**

- The purpose of this study is to identify if students perceive that integrated student services (admission, financial aid, cashiers' offices) impact their success as well as retention. The study plans to show that the students' perception of the integrated student service model had an impact on their success.

#### **Who will be in this study?**

- There will be a total of approximately 8 participants in the study.
- The participants will have completed at least one semester of study.
- The participant must be classified as one of the following by selection from the Registrar's Office:
  - A Veteran student
  - A First-Generation Student
  - A Non-Traditional Student
  - A Work-Study Student
- You must be at least 18 years of age to participate.

#### **What will I be asked to do?**

- You will be asked to attend a 45-60 minute in-person interview.
- The interview will take place on-campus in a private room for confidentiality.
- You will be assigned a random number based upon the total number of participants using random.org.

- During the interview, basic demographic questions will be asked as well as more in-depth questions related to your experience at the college.
- The interview will be transcribed by the researcher with assistance from the automatic transcription software, Otter AI.
- Once transcribed, it will be returned to you in electronic format for review (member checking).
- You will be asked to review the transcripts within 72 hours to verify that the researcher has accurately recorded your statements.
- Once reviewed, it is asked that you return to the researcher with your approval for use in the study.
- There is no compensation for participation in this study.

#### **What are the possible risks of taking part in this study?**

- There are no reasonably foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study.

#### **What are the possible benefits of taking part in this study?**

- There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study. There may be a benefit to the researcher and the institution.

#### **What will it cost me?**

- There are no costs to participate in the study other than your transportation to get to and from campus.
- There is a possibility that the interviews may happen when class is not in session, as such, you may be asked to come to campus at a time when you are not scheduled for class sessions.

#### **How will my privacy be protected?**

- You will be provided a number during the study. The only one who will know the association of the number to your name is the researcher.
- The interview will take place in a private room on campus for confidentiality.
- The study will be published due to the researcher's goal of obtaining a Doctorate degree. The institution may ask for a copy of the study once completed, but no identifiable information will be supplied.

#### **How will my data be kept confidential?**

- You will be given a random number that will be used throughout the entire study. Your name will be available to the researcher but not be made public at any time.
- This study is designed to be anonymous, this means that no one, can link the data you provide to you, or identify you as a participant.
  - *NOTE: anonymous means that no one (including the researcher) can link data to an individual. Researchers should not promise complete anonymity, especially in the case of research conducted via the internet.*
- The interview will be recorded on the researcher's phone that is password protected.
- It will be recorded using the Voice Memo application that is standard on all iPhones.
- All data that the researcher collects will be kept confidential.

- The researcher follows all standards set forth by University of New England.
- Research records will be stored on a password protected computer and online account that is accessible by the researcher.
- Data will be coded using Microsoft Excel using the number of the participant and in a password protected file.
- No personal identifiable information will be collected (PII).
- All information collected will be kept for a minimum of 3 years from completion date of the study.
- Please note that Regulatory agencies, Dissertation advisors, Research team, and the Institutional Review Board may review the research records.
- A copy of your signed consent form will be maintained by the researcher for at least 3 years after the project is complete before it is destroyed. The consent forms will be stored in a secure location that only members of the research team will have access to and will not be affiliated with any data obtained during the project.
- All audio recordings will be kept on the secure computer as well as secure “cloud” drive of the researcher.
  - The recordings will be made, if needed, available, to members of the committee.
  - The recordings will be kept for at least a minimum of 3 year after the project is completed before being destroyed.
- If you would like to request a copy of the research findings, please contact Charles M. Scheetz, Doctorate Student, at cmscheetz@icloud.com after May 31, 2019.

#### **What are my rights as a research participant?**

- Your participation is voluntary. Your decision to participate will have no impact on your current or future relations with your institution. Furthermore, your decision to participate will not impact your standing as a student at your institution.
- You may skip or refuse to answer any question for any reason.
- If you choose not to participate there is no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive. You are free to withdraw from this research study at any time, for any reason. If you choose to withdraw from the research there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive.
- You will be informed of any significant findings developed during the course of the research that may affect your willingness to participate in the research.

#### **What other options do I have?**

- You may choose not to participate.

#### **Whom may I contact with questions?**

- The researcher conducting this study is Charles M. Scheetz. For questions or more information concerning this research you may contact him at 610.698.7734 and/or cmscheetz@icloud.com. You may also contact the student’s faculty advisor Dr. Ann Lee Burch, 480.219.6061, aburch1@une.edu.

- If you choose to participate in this research study and believe you may have suffered a research related injury, please contact Dr. Ann Lee Burch, 480.219.6061, [aburch1@une.edu](mailto:aburch1@une.edu).
- If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you may call Olgun Guvench, M.D. Ph.D., Chair of the UNE Institutional Review Board at (207) 221-4171 or [irb@une.edu](mailto:irb@une.edu).

**Will I receive a copy of this consent form?**

- You will be given a copy of this consent form.

---

**Participant's Statement**

**I understand the above description of this research and the risks and benefits associated with my participation as a research subject. I agree to take part in the research and do so voluntarily.**

---

Participant's signature or  
Legally authorized representative

---

Date

---

Printed name

**Researcher's Statement**

**The participant named above had sufficient time to consider the information, had an opportunity to ask questions, and voluntarily agreed to be in this study.**

---

Researcher's signature

---

Date

---

Printed name



## APPENDIX B

### Interview Questions for Student Participation

#### Demographics

Gender

Male            Female            No Answer

Age

18-21   21-25   25-35   35-45   45-55   55-65

Major/Degree

---

#### Interview Questions

1. How long have you been a student at PSCC?
2. What are your career plans after you graduate?
3. When I say, “Integrated Student Services” - what does that mean to you?
4. Tell me how was your experience the first time you arrive at PSCC?
5. As a student, what do you like the most about PSCC?
6. As a student, what do you like the least about PSCC?
7. If you have a question, do you know where to go for them?
8. As a student who has been here at least one semester, what do you hear about PSCC from other students?
9. Can you share an example of a time you were trying to get something done at PSCC?
  - a. Was the support you received – Excellent    Fair    Poor
  - b. How would you improve the support you received?
10. What is “the most helpful place” on the campus of PSCC?
11. As a student, have you visited the “Welcome Center” lately?
  - a. If so, for what?
  - b. Was the center helpful?
  - c. What would you change?
12. As a student have you visited financial aid/records/cashier?
  - a. If so, for what?
  - b. Were they helpful?
  - c. What would you change?
13. Tell me about your experience in the offices:
  - a. Wait/Response Time

- b. Helpfulness
  - c. Accuracy
  - d. Professionalism
14. What would make your experience/interaction with the offices better for your overall success as a student a PSCC?
15. How do you perceive the “integrated student service centers” helping you through your college career?

**Any other information important about your PSCC experience?**

## APPENDIX C

### Permission to Use Interview Questions

Sent to Dr. Johannes on August 31, 2018 at 2:43 pm:

Dr. Johannes:

Hello! I would like to take this opportunity to reintroduce myself--my name is Charles M. Scheetz and I am a Doctoral Candidate at the University of New England-Online. The topic of my dissertation is: *The Impact of Integrated Student Services on Student Perception*. During the course of my research, I found your dissertation titled: *One stop student services: a student perspective*. After a review of your dissertation, I read that you used 1:1 interviews to support your research. Furthermore, you included the research questions as part of the documentation in your dissertation. A difficult part of dissertation work is creating solid interview questions due to the validity of them; however, your questions prove to have been through the process already. I would like to ask for permission to reuse your questions for my study. This may involve rewording the questions to fit my target population or topic. In addition, would you be willing to assist with questions that may arise from the review of your dissertation upon further review?

Thank you for your time and I look forward to hearing from you,  
Charles M. Scheetz  
Doctoral Candidate, University of New England-Online

“Stay hungry. Stay foolish.” - Steve Jobs

Received from Dr. Johannes on August 31, 2018 at 3:49 pm:

Charles –

Please, call me Cheri.

Please use this email as my written consent to utilize the research questions from my dissertation, referenced below.

I would also be more than willing to answer questions as they arise.

Good luck with your proposal and data collection. I would love to see your dissertation to see what you discovered!

Cheri

## APPENDIX D

### Email to Students

Dear First Name:

My name is Charles M. Scheetz and I am currently a Doctoral Candidate at the University of New England Online. As part of my coursework, I am conducting a study to understanding how students view integrated student services (admissions, financial aid, student accounts, advising) impact on student success. PSCC's Institutional Review Board reviewed my request and approved my study titled: Integrated Student Services Impact on Student Success. For the study, I am requesting participants that are one of the following populations:

- A Veteran Student
- A First-Generation Student
- A Non-Traditional Student
- A Work-Study Student
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Additionally, you must have the following criteria to participate in the study:

- 18 years of age or older
- Completed at least one semester of coursework
- Must be currently enrolled (registered for the next semester)

All the information about the study will be explained in a consent form that you are asked to sign before your participation in the study. All interviews are planned to between 45-60 minutes and will be recorded using an iPhone. The recording is done for accuracy and transcription purposes. Once the recording is completed it will be transcribed using audio transcription software; you will be assigned a number to your recording to keep you completely anonymous throughout the study. After the transcription is reviewed and edited by the researcher, you will be emailed a copy of the transcript for review. The process of reviewing the transcript is for your benefit; it is important that your words are accurately recorded.

**Please note:** a response to participate does not mean you will be selected—all responses will be randomly selected until the required number of participants are reached.

If you would like to sign up to take part in this study, please contact me directly by email no later than **Friday, January 11, 2019** at [cscheetz@une.edu](mailto:cscheetz@une.edu) or by phone at 610.698.7734.

Thank you for your consideration,  
Charles M. Scheetz

**APPENDIX E****UNE IRB Approval**

Institutional Review Board  
Mary DeSilva, 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: Charles Scheetz  
Cc: Ann Burch, Ed.D.  
From: Lliam Harrison, M.A., J.D.  
Date: November 28, 2018  
Project # & Title: 18.11.28-005 Impact of Integrated Student Services on Student Success

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects has reviewed the materials submitted in connection with the above captioned project, and has determined that the proposed work is exempt from IRB review and oversight as defined by 45 CFR 46.104(d)(2).

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

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

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Liam Harrison", is written over a light gray rectangular background.

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

IRB#: 18.11.28-005  
Submission Date: 11/26/18  
Status: Exempt, 45 CFR 46.104(d)(2)  
**Status Date: 11/28/18**

## APPENDIX F

### Site Study IRB Approval

**From:** Robin

**Subject:** Dissertation

**Date:** January 2, 2019 at 2:36 PM

**To:** cmscheetz

Charles,

I am pleased to let you know that the IRB has approved your dissertation research on our campus. Please note that it is the expectation of the IRB that you will follow your research plan. If your research plan changes you will need to re submit your IRB application for approval of those changes.

I wish you the best of luck in your research.

Robin