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**DO COLLEGE FACULTY IMPACT UNDERGRADUATE PERSISTENCE?
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPERIENTIAL ANALYSIS OF PERSPECTIVES
FROM UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS**

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of South Alabama
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctorate of Education

in

Educational Leadership

by

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December 2021

This dissertation is dedicated to Jesus, who has blessed me abundantly with life to the fullest, and to my best friend, rock, and wonderful husband of more than 11 years, Jeremiah Shane Giles, who has always loved and supported me.

I also dedicate this dissertation to my family, with special mention of my lovely grandmother, Karen Joan Strehlow, and late grandfather, Henry Robert Strehlow, who always believed in me.

Thank you.

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ABSTRACT

Giles, Rachel L., Ed.D., University of South Alabama, December 2021. Do College Faculty Impact Undergraduate Persistence? A Phenomenological Experiential Analysis of Perspectives from Undergraduate Students. Chair of Committee: Peggy M. Delmas, Ph.D.

This phenomenological study investigated the impact of instructors on undergraduate college students' intent to persist to graduation at their current university. College students, as stakeholders in higher education, possess relevant insights and viewpoints regarding faculty's role in their motivation to remain at their institutions until graduation. Seventeen undergraduate students enrolled at a midsized public university in the Southeastern United States participated in this study by completing an open-ended qualitative survey about their instructors' impact on their collegiate journeys. Experiential thematic analysis commenced with the steps proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The researcher became familiarized with the raw data, created codes, found emergent themes, reviewed the data and themes, and named and distinguished themes. Themes encompassed depictions of instructors' positive and negative qualities, behaviors, and characteristics divided into into subcategories with the words *care/cared*, *help/helps/ helped/helpful*, *feel/felt/feeling*, and *made/make*. Participants gave accounts of positive and negative experiences with instructors and perceptions of the impact of characteristics and behaviors of instructors on their college experiences. Findings indicated that students believed instructors influenced their intent to persist or leave their current institution.

CHAPTER I

OVERVIEW OF STUDY

Introduction

An abundance of literature has focused on the reasons for student attrition in higher education. Student attrition is a known problem in education (Derby & Smith, 2004; Howard & Flora, 2015; Jacobs & Archie, 2008; Tinto, 1993). Thousands of articles, studies, and scholarly works have addressed student attrition (Berger et al., 2012); however, there has been a lack of theoretical development in this area since the 1970s and 1980s (Dewberry & Jackson, 2018). The extant research appears to contribute to the retention theory, and scholars have continuously circled back to Tinto (1975, 1987a, 1993).

There is, however, an abundance of research on educators at other levels. Scholars have extensively studied the role of pedagogy in K–12 student learning (Commeyras & DeGroff, 1998; Kong et al., 2020; Lipman, 1998; Weeks & Harbor, 2014); in contrast, little scholarship is available on the effectiveness of higher education teaching pedagogy (De Vleiger et al., 2017). Academic researchers have addressed the links between student success and factors other than faculty, such as higher education student attrition and academic advisor–student relationships (Schwebel et al., 2012; Swecker et al., 2013), the relationships between student services administration and students (Schmidtke, 2016), and student–student relationships (Alman et al., 2012). This research has contributed to

the pool of retention studies and has provided greater knowledge of what contributes to student success. However, the extant research has not addressed the relationship between faculty and student retention and persistence to graduation.

Literature on student perspectives of faculty's impact on students' perseverance to graduate is limited. Research on the influence of higher education faculty pedagogy would undoubtedly contribute to existing retention studies; however, little research has focused on college students' interactions with faculty, including the impacts of teaching pedagogy, mentoring, and other relational aspects of instructors and students. Hempel et al. (2020) observed that administrators, academic advisors, and staff members usually deal with the issue of college student attrition. However, Hempel et al. noted, "The university classroom—specifically, the pedagogies and practices that are utilized there—is a largely untapped resource in our quest to increase student success and retention" (p. 45). Campbell and Campbell (1997) noted that faculty mentoring correlated with improved college student retention and academic success (Patrick & Wessel, 2013). According to Hempel et al., faculty and students come together for approximately 3 hours each week for college courses, and faculty can have a significant impact on student success during that time. Such research has indicated the value of faculty's impact on student success.

More scholarship is needed to address the factors that could have an impact on student retention (i.e., first-year students transitioning to their second year) and graduation rates (Seidman, 2012). Student success and the success of higher education intertwine (Millea et al., 2018). According to Seidman (2012), most higher education institutions have "front-loading" (p. 5) practices, in which they focus on retention

programs for first- and second-year students. Although front-loading could have successful outcomes, U.S. higher institutional leaders could benefit from investigating what occurs after the first years of college. Student success is key to the success of a higher education institution and greater society. Low student retention in colleges and universities results in a loss of tuition dollars, as students spend a portion of their money on incomplete college degrees that cannot provide a return on the investment.

Webb and Cotton (2018) maintained that since higher education institutions greatly depend upon student fees and costs for income, the attrition of learners leaves a fiscal void. Furthermore, this void can be significant. For example, as illustrated by Seidman (2012) if the cost of tuition and fees per student per semester is \$5,000, the withdrawal of merely ten of the students will be \$50,000. Three semesters would be \$150,000, seven semesters would be \$350,000, and so forth (Seidman, 2012). Per this illustration, the financial impact of the attrition of even a few students per semester can grow into a great sum over time. Student success is also the key to a higher education institution's overall academic performance, ranking, and reputation; these factors correlate with increased student enrollment, alumni and community donations, and financial support.

Additionally, an employee (i.e., a faculty member) at a financially unstable institution lacks job security. Low retention rates could result in less research funding and compensation (Delmas & Childs, 2020). Furthermore, institutional leaders under financial stress often choose retrenchment to save funds, which Paterson (2011) defined as “the reduction in faculty positions arising from financial exigency and/or the elimination of programs” (para. 1).

Higher education institutions' achievement is a primary concern for their leaders, who must lead the institutions to success. In addition to the importance of the success of the institutions, higher education leaders must also consider the individual and collective impact of student success. College student success is a critical factor in the success of higher education faculty, students, and society as a whole. Student success, student motivation to persist, and degree completion and attainment enable college graduates to enrich their lives. For example, college graduates typically live longer than nongraduates and are less apt to be impoverished, encounter banking or credit problems, or suffer imprisonment, divorce, or unemployment (Trostel, 2017). College graduates earn more money than individuals without degrees (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). College graduates also tend to lead more active lives and enjoy better health and are less likely to suffer severe disabilities than those who do not graduate college. Students who fail to complete their degrees suffer meaningless student loan payments, lose valuable time, and may feel discouraged about other educational endeavors, including work training for job skills (Seidman, 2012).

Additionally, the United States has a need for college-educated workers (Grawe, 2017). According to Grawe (2017), the United States must have an approximately 40% increase in degree production and completion to provide for the needs of the workforce in the upcoming years (p. 114). McMahon (2009) discussed the demand for highly skilled workers increasing more quickly than the number of college graduates in supply. According to McMahon, highly skilled workers earn more than those with fewer skills. Additionally, a successful college or university benefits local businesses because the students living nearby consume local goods. Local goods consumption correlates with the

success of local businesses, which then provide more jobs and contribute to the local economy. The greater societal benefits of college graduates and higher education range from civic duty, philanthropy, financial impact, and increased tax revenue to filling the need for college-educated workers and volunteers (Trostel, 2017).

Student motivation is an essential factor in student success; therefore, a need exists for research on students' motives to persist to graduation. Christophel (1990) examined teacher immediacy and student motivation, finding that motivation has two categories: trait motivation (a student's predisposition) and state motivation (a student's attitude toward a particular course). Regarding state motivation, Christophel also stated that instructors could be active vehicles in stimulating students' motivation to learn in educational settings. Teacher immediacy, the perceived psychological and physical closeness of a relationship between people, specifically instructors and students (Rocca, 2007), also positively correlates with student learning outcomes (Christophel, 1990). Christophel found that the instructor's communicative behaviors were a crucial factor in modifying student motivation and that "although students conceivably enter the classroom with predetermined levels of trait motivation, their state motivation levels are modifiable by teachers" (p. 339). Instructors impact their students' motivation to achieve.

Graduation rates are another critical factor in the success of higher education institutions. Students in higher education and society could benefit from research on student perspectives of faculty's impact on their intent to persist to graduation. Data that contain students' perspectives on how faculty do or do not contribute to their motivation to earn degrees could indicate how to improve graduation rates. Analysis of student views on faculty as active participants in student success may reveal the influence of faculty on

the success of students and higher education institutions. Scholars worldwide have studied student attrition rates. However, a need exists for research on faculty impact, student perspectives, and graduation rates. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has presented more challenges than ever to higher education, necessitating adequate student retention and graduation rates in institutions around the world. As stakeholders of their educational institutions, students possess crucial insights into how faculty members help them achieve higher graduation rates and greater success with higher education, society, and persistence. According to Tinto (2017),

Only when institutions understand how student perceptions shape decisions to persist and how their actions influence those perceptions can institutions move to impact those decisions in ways that enhance the likelihood of greater persistence while also addressing the continuing gap in college completion between students of different attributes and backgrounds. (p. 11)

Problem Statement

The problem addressed in this study was the need for higher education students' perceptions of faculty influence on student motivation to persist to graduation at their current institutions and an ensuing analysis of their themes. The problem under study is part of the greater overall problem of low graduation rates at U.S. higher education institutions. Additionally, student success in higher education is a factor increasingly measured by graduation and retention rates (Millea et al., 2018). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2020), retention rates show the number of first-time undergraduate college students who reenroll at their original institutions the following year. Graduation rates are the percentage of first-time undergraduate college students who have earned their degrees at their original institutions within a specific timeframe. Collecting accurate statistics of retention and graduation rates takes years.

Researchers take retention statistics from the time a student enrolls to the following year and graduation statistics from the time a student enrolls to the time the student either earns a degree or drops out of the institution. The problem of practice in this study affects both U.S. institutions with financial struggles and students attending college to obtain college degrees and join the workforce. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2017), in 2018, approximately 62% of college students in the United States earned bachelor's degrees at the institutions where they first enrolled. However, this statistic covered 6 years rather than the customary 4 years of college. Thus, more than a third of all enrolled students (approximately 38%) did not graduate from their original institutions within 6 years. Furthermore, the U.S. is lagging well behind numerous European peers, as their institutions' graduation rates depict at least half or more of their students earning college degrees (Grawe, 2017). As Grawe (2017) stated, while the U.S. once sat on top of the world regarding four-year college completion rates, other countries jumped ahead by the 2000s. U.S. college graduation rates stand at the average of countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (Grawe, 2017).

This study focused on the problem of practice with the understanding that the COVID-19 pandemic has had adverse effects on student enrollment (St. Amour, 2020) since March 2020. The full effect of the pandemic on graduation rates remains unknown, as the current and upcoming numbers will take months and even years to emerge in national databases. Leaders of state and private higher education institutions have already enacted furloughs and salary cutbacks for employees to address financial deficits, as faculty and staff salaries are the most significant disbursements of university expenses

(Copley & Douthett, 2020). Many college leaders have taken drastic measures to stop the spread of COVID-19, such as temporarily closing campuses, moving courses to online formats, quarantining, testing, and attempting to keep students safe amid diminishing enrollment (Hess, 2020). The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act provided billions to higher education institutions; however, college leaders had to use 50% or more of the funding for emergency student grants. Furthermore, not all institutions received CARES funding and the ones that did received amounts contingent on their numbers of enrolled Pell Grant-eligible students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore students' perceptions of faculty's impact on students' motivation to graduate and whether faculty have a positive or negative impact on student persistence. The fiscal crises in higher education, including years of financial struggles and the COVID-19 pandemic, indicate the vital need to study graduation rates. This study addressed the problem with an open-ended survey for students, student interviews, and analysis and interpretation of the resulting data. The goal of researching this problem of practice was to understand faculty's overall influence on student motivation from students' perspectives. As a result, this study could be a building block for further exploration of the link between students' perceptions of their motivation to persist to graduation and faculty's involvement in this endeavor. Additionally, the survey results could provide faculty members with valuable insight into their impact on student graduation rates and the success of their higher education institutions. Practitioners could also use this study's results to understand the factors

affecting student success when choosing institutional investments and programming (Millea et al., 2018).

The goal of this study was to contribute to the extant research with a qualitative analysis of higher education students' perspectives. The participating students discussed their perceptions of faculty's negative or positive influences on their motivation to persist at their institutions. Some studies have found student-faculty interactions linked to students' intention to persist in college; however, this topic requires further and more current exploration (Morrow & Ackermann, 2012; Tinto, 2006; Witt et al., 2014). Higher education administrators continually strive to develop new programs, models, instruments, and support methods to strengthen student retention (Derby & Smith, 2004; Howard & Flora, 2015; Jacobs & Archie, 2008; Tinto, 1993) because they have begun to receive less state funding (Blumenstyk, 2015). The funding reduction occurred because many individual state governments in the United States had extensive debt (Blumenstyk, 2015), even before the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, research on the factors that impact student motivation to graduate could be an aid for student success research and an vehicle for resolving higher education's financial crisis. This study could provide an understanding of the perceptions of undergraduate university students concerning faculty's roles in student motivation and graduation persistence.

Rationale and Significance

This study focused on undergraduate students' perceptions of the influence of college instructors on their decisions to persist at their institutions. Additionally, this study indicated whether the students considered faculty's influence positive (i.e., contributing to graduation persistence) or negative (i.e., causing students to state they

wanted to drop out or transfer colleges). Furthermore, the characteristics of the professors underwent examination for the benefit of faculty members wanting to learn more about influences on students and their graduation persistence. The influence of instructors cannot be a factor ignored in the quest to improve student persistence. As some scholars have stated, student perceptions are better predictors of student learning outcomes than others, including teachers' subjective views of their effectiveness or outsider observations (Fernández-García et al., 2019; Maulana et al., 2014).

Scholars have researched college retention, persistence, and graduation rates for decades; however, a need existed to explore students' perceptions of the influence of faculty on these factors. In this study, the data collection consisted of recruiting participants from a midsized university in the Southeastern United States with the goal of increasing graduation rates. This study commenced with the consideration and knowledge that factors outside of faculty control could have an influence on a student's persistence to graduate. Tinto (1987b) identified factors such as student issues and "academic difficulty, problems in adjusting to college life, lack of clearly defined goals, uncertainty about career aspirations, and unwillingness to make academic commitments" (p. 1). However, Fink (2013) stated, "Every year, in the United States alone, more than one million college teachers prepare to teach classes, and more than twenty million students come to learn" (p. 1). College educators who learn how to positively influence their students' motivation to persist in earning their degrees (without transferring) could help students achieve their academic goals. Simultaneously, such educators could boost the success of their institutions of employment.

Many researchers have identified the need for student retention for the success of higher education institutions and higher education as a whole (Derby & Smith, 2004; Howard & Flora, 2015; Jacobs & Archie, 2008; Tinto, 1993). Thus, the success of educators' institutions directly impacts their career success and job security. The overarching purpose of this study was to increase knowledge of faculty's influence on students' motivation to persist at their institutions. The data collection occurred at a mid-sized university in the Southeastern United States. This study's findings could benefit the institution under study as well as colleges and universities with similar goals and contribute to their student success efforts. Additionally, faculty members could use this research to consider their impact on the college experience and students' motivation to persist at their institutions.

Research Questions

The study had the following primary research question: What are undergraduate students' perceptions of the impact of faculty on their motivation to persist to graduation at their current institution?

The goal of the four subquestions was to contribute to the understanding of the participants' experiences and perceptions in relation to the primary research question:

1. How do participants describe their experiences with instructors?
2. How do participants describe whether instructors have made them feel encouraged or discouraged from persisting at their current university?
3. What experiences with instructors did participants perceive as positive?
4. What experiences with instructors did participants perceive as negative?

Overview of Methodology

The most suitable methodological approach to fit the purposes of this study was qualitative. Experiential qualitative research was most appropriate for validation of the “meanings, views, perspectives, experiences, and/or practices expressed in the data” (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 21). The proper qualitative method to answer the research questions of this study was phenomenological, as this method focuses on people’s collective, subjective experiences and the ways people perceive and discuss events and objects (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Participants of this study, undergraduate students enrolled in physics courses at a university, partook in an open-ended survey in Qualtrics format upon receiving a link to the survey distributed via secure university email. The participants answered open-ended questions which gathered their perceptions of whether instructors influenced their motivation to persist at their current institution, descriptions of their experiences with instructors, and accounts of what caused students to deem experiences with instructors as positive, negative, encouraging or discouraging (see Appendix A). The researcher then conducted a phenomenological experiential analysis of the raw data by becoming familiarized with the data, coding, generating themes, and synthesizing scholarly literature with themes and meanings found in the data. The themes and meanings obtained in the data provided the findings of the study and answered the study’s research questions.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher was to create research questions based on a problem in higher education; collect, code, and analyze data; remain cognizant of bias; present results; offer discussion; and provide suggestions for future research. The researcher was

a doctoral student who had periodically instructed undergraduate courses as a part-time faculty member at the institution where the study occurred. As a part-time instructor and graduate student, the researcher has taught hundreds of students in the participants' setting. At the time of this study, the researcher was not teaching at the university; therefore, there was a reduced or eliminated imbalance of power.

Definitions of Terms

Convenience sampling. “A very common way of sampling, where participants or data are selected based on accessibility rather than some other criterion” (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 331).

Data set. “All the data items collected for a particular study or analysis” (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 331).

Field notes. “Notes written very soon after (or during) data collection which record commentary about, and reflection on, the data collection section as well as ideas for analysis” (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 330).

Graduation rates. The measurement of the portion of first-time undergraduate college students who have finished their degrees at the same higher education institution within a particular time frame (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020).

Immediacy. The perceived psychological and physical closeness of a relationship between people, specifically instructors and their students (Rocca, 2007).

Instructor. For this study, an instructor is any teaching faculty member at a college or university.

Instructor-Leadership. “Defined as a process whereby instructors exert intentional influence over students to guide, structure, and facilitate activities and relationships” (Balwant, 2016, p. 21).

Mentoring. “Traditionally a process in which an experienced person (the mentor) guides another person (the mentee or protege) in the development of her or his own ideas, learning, and personal/professional competence” (Klinge, 2015, p. 160).

Methodology. “Theory of how research proceeds, including consideration of such things as methods, participants, and the role of the researcher, ethics, and so forth” (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 333).

Midsized university. A university with between 5,000 to 15,000 students (CollegeData.com, 2019).

Motivation. “To be motivated means to be moved to do something” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 54).

Negative experiences with instructors. For this study, negative experiences with instructors are those experiences that cause students to state they would like to drop out or transfer colleges.

Perception. “Process by which we select, organize, and interpret stimuli to make sense of our world” (Weintraub et al., 2015, p. 30).

Positive experiences with instructors. For this study, positive experiences with instructors cause students to state that they plan to graduate at their institutions.

Purposeful sampling. “A mode of sampling typical of qualitative research; involves selecting participants or data on the basis that they will have certain characteristics or experience” (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 335).

Qualitative survey. “A method of qualitative data collection consisting of a series of open-ended questions that participants write responses to” (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 335).

Retention rates. The measurement of the portion of first-time undergraduate college students who have re-enrolled in the same higher education institution the ensuing fall semester (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020).

Retrenchment. “Retrenchment is the reduction in faculty positions arising from financial exigency and/or the elimination of programs” (Paterson, 2011, para. 1).

Student success. For this study, student success is students’ persistence to graduate at the institution where they enrolled.

Theme. “Patterned meaning across a dataset that captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, organised around a central organizing concept” (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 337).

Delimitations

The delimitations of this study included data collection during a summer semester. The summer semester provided less opportunity than the fall or spring semester when more students from a variety of disciplines come to campus and the timing of the COVID-19 pandemic made securing interviews less predictable than it would otherwise have been. Therefore, one academic department, the Department of Physics, provided the opportunity to survey undergraduate college students for this study. Despite the participation of Department of Physics students, this was not a physics-focused study. Instead, the study focused on undergraduate students’ perceptions of faculty’s impact on their intention to persist to graduation. The participants came from lower-level courses

(i.e., PH 114L Alg-Trig Based Physics I Lab, PH 202L Calculus-Based Physics II Lab, and PH 202L Calculus-Based Physics II Lab).

This study also focused on undergraduate university students and did not indicate whether the participants were transfer students, as the study focused on student graduation rates at the institution. Also, the study occurred where the researcher was a former faculty member and current student. Therefore, the study could have had some inherent biases, although there was the most minimization possible, as evidenced in Chapter III. This study only offered student perspectives. This study did not include the perspectives of faculty, staff, administrators, and other members of the campus community.

Assumptions

This study had some assumptions for successful completion. First, an assumption was that the participants would complete the survey as honestly and openly as possible. The second assumption was that the participants believed and understood they would experience no negative repercussions for sharing their confidential opinions of faculty members at their institution. The third assumption was that there was a likelihood that the participants would reveal that they believed that faculty influenced their persistence, whether positively or negatively. Finally, an assumption was that the participants in the sample of undergraduate college students enrolled in science courses provided opinions and perceptions representative of other undergraduate students at the same college and other colleges.

Summary

This chapter presented the study's problem of practice, purpose, research questions, overview of methodology, role of the researcher, and definitions of relevant terms. Chapter II is a robust review of the scholarly literature relevant to the topic of this study. Chapter III presents the study's methodology, including data collection, participants, and phenomenological analysis of the participants' responses using open coding. Chapter IV includes a discussion of the qualitative results. Chapter V provides conclusions and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter presents the scholarly literature related to the focus of this study. The literature review indicates the current state of student retention and attrition, as well as student retention's correlation with faculty retention. Next, the chapter includes attrition as a contributor to higher education's financial crisis and the literature on student retention in conjunction with college personnel and faculty and student success. There is a discussion of student motivation, including intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, as factors of student success. The review also presents the literature on mentorship and education, including the impact of student perceptions of faculty as caring and pedagogy and its influence. Finally, the chapter has the study's conceptual framework, with transformational leadership used to explore faculty's impact on influencing students as followers.

Student Retention and Graduation Research

According to popular wisdom, insanity is repeating the same action and expecting a different result each time. Undeniably, a need exists to make changes to address the poor graduation and retention rates and financial standing of higher education institutions worldwide. The first challenge for students in academic achievement is remaining

enrolled in college; thus, higher education institutions often focus on the retention of first-time students as a metric for institutional success (Millea et al., 2018). Indisputably, higher education leaders have continuously grappled with attrition (Fishman & Decandia, 2006). Student retention rates vary significantly at different institution types. For example, 4-year public institutions in the United States had an overall retention rate of 81% in Fall 2017. However, the least selective public institutions (i.e., those with open admissions policies) had a retention rate of 63%. In contrast, the most selective public institutions (i.e., those with a less than 25% acceptance rate) had a 97% retention rate (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). Additionally, most students (65%) who leave do so by choice due to nonacademic reasons (Morrow & Ackermann, 2012). Thus, it is necessary to study the factors in student retention, including students' perceptions of the influence of faculty and faculty interactions on their motivation to finish college. College leaders have created and expanded student retention strategies and initiatives for academic advising, learning centers, student services, counseling, and disability services. However, the numbers of students who fail to obtain degrees, withdraw altogether, or gradually disappear from the university remain “alarmingly high” (Fishman & Decandia, 2006, para. 10).

Organizational initiatives are a critical aspect of dealing with organizational decline (Moran, 2016), though college administrators, advisers, and staff members are the stakeholders frequently expected to address student attrition (Hempel et al., 2020). Thus, an abundance of research has focused on student success and retention in relation to advisors and other higher education staff (Gravel, 2012; Lynch & Lungrin, 2018; Richardson & Radloff, 2014; Roberts, 2018; & Swecker et al., 2013). However, academic

advisers alone cannot maintain student retention rates (Nutt, 2003). A need exists to explore the impact of college staff, administrators, and faculty on student success and persistence. Foundational higher education retention research has shown that the quantity and quality of student interactions with peers, staff, and faculty significantly affect student persistence and retention (Astin, 1993; Nutt, 2003). Early higher education retention research has also found that the quality of interactions with faculty, staff, and peers had a significant impact on student persistence and retention (Astin, 1977, 1993; Nutt, 2003).

The extant research has indicated the value of researching the factors of student retention in higher education. According to Fishman and Decandia (2006), the more students actively engage with faculty, staff, peers, and course subjects, the greater the likelihood of persisting in college and reaching higher levels of achievement. For example, Shelton (2003) found that nursing students who persisted throughout their program perceived significantly greater psychological and functional faculty support than students who withdrew. Faculty members who care about students and their success create learning environments conducive to academic success and persistence. Student perceptions of faculty support include the behaviors they find beneficial and the sufficiency of the support they receive.

Administrators, faculty members, and staff members invested in their institutions should consider student perspectives to address how they may effectively impact student success. Universities have success when their students succeed. Furthermore, productive retention initiatives require continuous faculty and institutional commitment (Nugent et al., 2004). Studying and implementing strategies to improve student retention and

persistence could enable university and college leaders to bolster their success rates and increase student enrollment, tuition and fees, alumni and community donations, and positive recognition.

Student Demographics and Retention and Graduation Rates

Many components influence the retention and graduation rates of first- and second-year university students, including demographics, student behavior, institutional environments, academic ability and performance, and socioeconomic status (Millea et al., 2018). Siblings' or parents' level of degree attainment could also have an influence on college student success. Some programs provide focused assistance to students of specific demographics, such as racial minorities (Aragon & Perez, 2006), nontraditional students (Wyatt, 2011), and first-generation students (Inkelas et al., 2007). This study focused on undergraduate college students aged 18 and older. However, there are many demographics to consider in retention and graduation rate research, including race, nationality, international or transfer student status, native language, gender, nontraditional student standing, disability, religion, first-generation status, number of children (if any), familial support, marital status, employment, financial status, and age. For example, members of racial minorities have many additional factors to consider for retention and graduation persistence. Mosholder et al. (2016) focused on the promotion of Native American recruitment and persistence in higher education. They found that Native American students' persistence increased when they felt welcomed and valued along with their communities and had the opportunity to take activities and classes related to culturally aware career decisions.

Black students, in particular, have faced hurdles and challenges in higher education. In addition, higher education institutions still lack robust efforts to improve the persistence of Black students (Goodwyn, 2019). According to Credle and Dean (1991), retaining and recruiting Black students is the key to creating balance at predominantly White institutions. The members of the entire higher education institution must cohesively help Black students. Furthermore, according to Aragon and Perez (2006), a “disappointing proportion” (p. 81) of Black students graduate and ultimately pursue professional or graduate degrees. Institutional obstacles for Blacks are various, including

(a) lack of orientation toward the culture of Black students; (b) lack of awareness of the needs of Black students; (c) the inability to respond to the needs of Black students; (d) inappropriate academic standards for Black students; (e) inability to help Black students survive in the complex systems of the institution; and (f) negative attitudes toward Black students by faculty, staff, and administrators. (Credle & Dean, 1991, par. 5)

Although many Black students enter higher education institutions, few enroll in research-oriented institutions (Aragon & Perez, 2006). The authors offered helpful suggestions for recruiting and retaining Black students at predominantly White institutions:

(a) to examine the basic philosophy and mission of the institution, (b) to assess the institution’s ability to work with Black students, (c) to assess Black students’ academic and social readiness, (d) to improve communications through campus visitations, (e) to establish rapport with Black students, (f) to help Black students work within the organizational structure, (g) to develop an ongoing mentoring program, (h) to assist Black students in career exploration, and (i) to help Black students prepare for the world of work beyond the institution. (Credle & Dean, 1991, par. 7)

Credle and Dean indicated the value of researching how to improve the retention of various demographics in higher education.

Finances and Student Attrition

The significant fiscal pressures at higher education institutions have shown the value of student persistence and retention (Delmas & Childs, 2020). Universities and colleges as a whole have financial struggles (Bonevac, 2015), and student attrition contributes to these crises. As colleges are plainly troubled by about the diminishing numbers of their students, the swift increase of financial aid models depicting high-aid and high-tuition depict that the economic life of many higher education institutions is ever more dependent upon full-pay students (Grawe, 2017, p. 3). Aside from the problems caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, student retention and graduation rates have been serious concerns of higher education institutions worldwide for many years (Dewberry & Jackson, 2018). Student attrition results in fiscal challenges and the loss of tuition and fees at higher education institutions.

Henry et al. (2001) noted that many college students live on the precipice of financial disaster and lack the information and knowledge needed to manage their money. In addition, Bonevac (2015) reported that costs in higher education had increased more than three times the rate of inflation. Additionally, higher education funding has had cuts of 10% or more since 2007 (Jacob & Gokbel, 2017). As many as 175 colleges have attendance costs of more than \$50,000 per year, and the total U.S. student debt has increased to more than \$1.2 trillion, which is higher than the total amount of U.S. credit card debt (Bonevac, 2015). Denneen and Dretler (2012) studied the financial status of 1,692 public and private colleges and noted the rising liquidity dilemma in the whole sector of institutions. Millea et al. (2018) investigated retention and graduation rates and found that small class sizes and students with fewer financial struggles had greater

student success. Retention and persistence efforts can significantly contribute to higher education's funding, reputation, and success. Faculty buy-in and commitment to such endeavors are means of strengthening this contribution. Scholarly research that provides helpful information, such as faculty's impact on students' motivation to persist to graduation, could enable those invested in education to improve retention initiatives and tools to change higher education's financial climate.

Retrenchment and Outsourcing

The 2020 COVID-19 pandemic caused significant and rapid changes in higher education and rapidly increasing unforeseen expenses. For years, nonprofit and public higher education institution leaders have outsourced campus commodities, such as dining services and bookstores (Marcus, 2021). Outsourcing consists of “temporary or permanent utilization of expertise from an outside organization to perform a specific set of tasks” (Powers, 2019, p. 18). However, the pandemic resulted in the transformation of outsourcing. Due to COVID-19, outsourcing has increased by 79% (or 300 new agreements) between for-profit online programs and higher education institutions (Marcus, 2021). A public-private partnership, or P3, is “a more complex version of outsourcing often with an extended (e.g., decades) timeframe and large infrastructure commitment from the private partner, and both parties benefit from the partnership” (Powers, 2019, p. 18). Higher education institution leaders have increasingly begun using P3 in the face of the pandemic.

In-house management (i.e., the use of current and available staff and employees) is the ideal first choice for institutions because their leaders have already accounted for personnel salary expenses (Powers, 2019). However, the COVID-19 pandemic presented

the challenges of coping with the loss of students and the sudden need to change critical university functions drastically. Institution leaders had to create and implement online classes, online advising formats, online recruitment methods, and much more. College and university leaders had to spend tens of billions of dollars to hire for-profit companies to activate and run services (Marcus, 2021). The professionals from for-profit companies have begun reformatting housing, classrooms, parking, labs, information technology, and other activities previously managed in-house.

Robinson and Maitra (2020) offered advice for institutional leaders struggling to find ways to handle fiscal problems, including retrenchment. They suggested modest cuts for research and teaching faculty, as well as hiring freezes. The next recommendation was reforms by removing or consolidating low-performing academic departments. After this, Robinson and Maitra recommended spending cuts for nonacademic services and programs. Increasing outsourcing and utilizing other strategies to handle the pandemic has been necessary in many cases; however, these strategies also present concerns (Marcus, 2021). William Tierney, the founding director and professor emeritus of the Pullias Center for Higher Education at the University of Southern California, stated, “What’s the university about when we outsource everything?”

Retaining Students Aligned With Retaining Faculty

Many higher education institution leaders have strategically paired student retention efforts with faculty retention initiatives, seeking to align the two goals (Patton, 2017). Employees, like students, interact with one another, need to be retained, and require motivation to impact their institutions. Engaged employees usually experience a vivid sense of meaning and purpose in their jobs and apply their unique skills for the

success of organizational goals and objectives (Paul, 2012). Similarly, Soliday and Mann (2013) suggested that higher student engagement correlates with high student morale and learning. According to Fishman and Decandia (2006), the more college staff actively engage with students, supervisors, and colleagues, the greater the probability of gaining feelings of achievement, responsibility, value, acknowledgment, contribution, and higher job satisfaction. Employee retention is not currently a significant issue for most institutions. In fact, retention of more than 80% and as high as 90% indicates room for growth due to changing workplace demographics and strong competition for talented employees (Patton, 2017).

Additionally, finding good talent can be a challenge. Human resources professionals who align goals with employees enable employees to envision the overall picture of the institution's goals and feel validated in their importance as business partners. Such a strategy is a means of retaining the valuable talent needed for an institution's purpose and future (Patton, 2017). Higher education institution leaders must retain talented, highly qualified employees and students to succeed. Turner, Vice President of Human Resources at Eastern Michigan University, achieved successful faculty retention via employee diversification. Turner stated that the school's leaders analyzed the diversity profile of the student body, as well as faculty and staff and desire to achieve alignment. Thus, the retention of students and faculty relate to the satisfaction of the other. A need exists to understand the correlation between student and faculty satisfaction and retention to benefit higher education as a whole.

Faculty Relationship to Student Success

Pedagogy

The term pedagogy originated from the description of a leader, specifically the Greek word *paidagogos* (Entz, 2007). Dissected, the word is *paidos*, which means a *boy*; *gogos*, which means *leader*; and *agein*, which means *to lead*. In modern times, *pedagogy* is “the dynamics of teaching and learning” (Yelland et al., 2008, p. 197). The quality of the classroom environment and student experience impacts student engagement (Millea et al., 2018). In education, immediacy is a form of pedagogy linked to student motivation, enhanced learning outcomes, and student satisfaction (DellAntonio, 2017). Immediacy behaviors correlate with improved physical and psychological closeness with others (Wendt & Courduff, 2018). DellAntonio (2017) investigated the impact of instructor immediacy on student success and retention rates in online RN-to-BSN programs, finding a positive relationship between retention, academic success, and instructor immediacy. Additionally, instructor immediacy had an impact on retention. DellAntonio stated that instructors’ immediacy behavior has an impact on academic success and retention.

Rocca (2007) described two types of immediacy behaviors: nonverbal and verbal. Nonverbal immediacy behaviors include gestures, smiles, walkarounds of the classroom, relaxed posture, appropriate touch, and vocal variety. Verbal immediacy behaviors include using inclusive pronoun references, engaging in unrelated casual conversation, providing feedback, and calling students by their names.

While learning and professional success are invaluable teaching outcomes, retaining students is necessary for those outcomes to be fully realized. French and Westler (2019) conducted quantitative research to determine the characteristics of the

courses that related to course completion. They found higher attrition in courses with “heavily structured classes” and a “weaker but still significant” (p. 318) relationship between lower attrition and active learning and showing videos in class. Hanks and Coelho (2020) investigated the effects of a pedagogical exercise by studying the participants of three cohorts through graduation and into the workplace. The researchers found that utilizing a pedagogical exercise enabled the students to improve in the areas of capability and readiness for practice, employability, and lifelong learning. Miller and Mills (2019) stated that higher education leaders must take pedagogy seriously if they want to engage and motivate students to learn.

The creation and use of high-quality, high-impact pedagogical practices require faculty buy-in and institutional support (McNair, 2012). Hempel et al. (2020) maintained that “careless language can be devastating” (p. 52). In fact, pedagogy has so much importance that education leaders must ask important questions before choosing high-impact practices: “Who is or is not succeeding in the existing educational environment,” followed by the subquestion “Why or why not,” and, “Why a particular high-impact practice is the right choice based on the academic and developmental needs of these students” (McNair, 2012, para. 5). McNair (2012) also noted that faculty should have a personal motivation to encourage creativity, engagement, and problem-solving in education and a focus on learning that extends beyond the classroom and into the rest of students’ lives.

Faculty as Mentors

Mentoring is a retention strategy known to have a positive impact on students’ academic outcomes, social assimilation, and self-esteem (Chelberg & Bosman, 2019;

Collings et al., 2014). According to Noel et al. (1985), the individuals who are regularly face-to-face with students can offer affirmative growing experiences for those students. However, a need exists for evolved and more robust mentoring theories. For example, Roberts (2020) noted mentoring theories remain unfinished in a significant area: the behaviors and characteristics of mentors needed to nurture and encourage positive relationships with protégés. Goddard et al. (2001) found that K–12 schools with greater levels of trust had greater student success as well. Additionally, the students who trusted their instructors were more likely to take risks required to learn new things. Roberts (2020) also expounded upon the three benefits of trust in faculty-to-student mentorships:

When trust is present, the protégé gains at least three benefits during the meeting. First, consider the situation where protégés are struggling with their logic model or suppose they are lacking some expert knowledge about research methods. If they trust their mentors, they know that mentors will ask the right questions to help them reinforce their logic model and that mentors will direct them to the correct resources to fill the gaps in their research methods knowledge. A second benefit that occurs when trust is present is that students know that they can try out their unconventional, out-of-the-box ideas. When trust is present, protégés know the mentors will not cut them off or ridicule them, but instead will welcome new ideas and encourage further exploration. Another benefit that occurs when trust is present is that students are allowed to fail and, if they fail, the trustworthy mentors will encourage protégés to pick themselves up and try again. (p. 33)

Chelberg and Bosman (2019) indicated that giving students access to formal and informal mentorship is also now a national priority, as indicated by the growing number of mentoring programs at colleges (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). An added benefit of faculty mentoring is the provision of guidance for first-generation students. Many first-generation college students have incomplete knowledge and information of higher education and may lack the ability to handle the demanding requirements of college (Chelberg & Bosman, 2019). Furthermore, using mentorship as an intentional part of pedagogy to tackle vital student success factors is a way to create an environment of

support and foster students' learning, confidence, and motivation to attain their degrees (Chelberg & Bosman, 2019; Jackson et al., 2003).

Faculty Behaviors

The foundational research has presented students' perceptions of psychologically supportive faculty behaviors. Psychologically supportive faculty members communicate respect and confidence in students, understand and care about students, remain approachable and encouraging, have realistic expectations of students, show interest in listening to students, remain honest and open to varied points of view, remain nonjudgmental, and desire student success (Bergman & Gaitskill, 1990; Brown, 1981; Hanson & Smith, 1996; Hughes, 1992; Mogan & Knox, 1987; Nehring, 1990; Reed & Hudepohl, 1983; Schaefer & Schaefer, 1993; Shelton, 2003; Sieh & Bell, 1994; Thurber et al., 1989). Additionally, students consider functionally supportive faculty behavior to include giving clear and reasonable communication of expectations of students, offering helpful feedback and fair evaluations, assisting students with problems, acting as role models for students, and aiding students in planning their futures (Bergman & Gaitskill, 1990; Brown, 1981; Coleman & Thompson, 1987; Hanson & Smith, 1996; Hughes, 1992; Mogan & Knox, 1987; Nehring, 1990; Reed & Hudepohl, 1983; Schaefer & Schaefer, 1993; Shelton, 2003; Sieh & Bell, 1994; Thurber et al., 1989).

The Impact of Student Perceptions of Faculty as Caring

Scholars have conducted an abundance of research on the value of teachers who care about their students; however, the majority of such research has focused on K–12 rather than higher education (Dallavis, 2014; Miller & Mills, 2019; Teven, 2007; Teven

& Hanson, 2004). Some scholars have doubted that nurturing or caring should be a faculty focus because they consider nurturing in opposition to professionalism in higher education (Miller & Mills, 2019; Varallo, 2008). However, some faculty members are not opposed to caring. Other faculty members may see themselves as caring but feel concerned that efforts to increase the caring of student environments could be a means of infantilizing students and adding work to faculty's already heavy workloads (Chory & Offstein, 2017; Miller & Mills, 2019). For example, Fink (2013) wrote,

The question that all faculty face is this: "Should I spend the time and effort to learn about and implement new ways of teaching?" Essentially all faculty members feel more than fully loaded already with all their present teaching, research, and service obligations. So, suggesting that faculty members take on a substantial new task aimed at their own professional development is no small issue. (p. 9)

However, Fink (2013) heavily emphasized the value of faculty and caring about students, subject matter, instruction, and learning. The researcher included the following two factors in the five requirements for a successful course: "Have teachers who care—about the subject, their students, and about teaching and learning" and "have teachers who interact well with students" (pp. 32–33). Research has shown that college students who perceive faculty as caring interact more in class, have more motivation, and are more likely to evaluate their instructors as credible (Chory & Offstein, 2017; Finn et al., 2009; Miller & Mills, 2019; Slate et al., 2011). Miller and Mills (2019) studied the impact of faculty perceived as caring by interviewing students. They found that caring had a direct correlation to students' motivation to learn; this included a comment from a student in a focus group who stated, "If they don't care, I don't care" (Miller & Mills, 2019, p. 82). The students also reported having more motivation and working harder when they

perceived their faculty as caring. The students identified a caring professor as having the traits of relatability and approachability (Miller & Mills, 2019).

Student Motivation

Motivation is a factor important in learning and student success (Christophel, 1990). Christophel (1990) found that students who perceived teachers as nonverbally and verbally immediate had higher motivation for class. Additionally, highly motivated students observed highly motivated instructors. Research has shown the positive link between students' academic success in higher education and student motivation (Allen, 1999; Eppler & Harju, 1997; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002; Pintrich, 2004; Trolan et al., 2016; Zimmerman et al., 1992). Broad definitions of academic motivation in connection with success in higher education have focused on students' effort, aspirations, desire to succeed, and persistence (Allen, 1999; Brouse et al., 2010; Eppler & Harju, 1997; Guiffrida et al., 2013; Pascarella et al., 2004; Trolan et al., 2016). Guiffrida et al. (2013) found valuable relationships between college student motivation and academic success. Students are more likely to succeed when professors and administrators make an effort to motivate and encourage students, which results in improved student motivation to persist.

As Ryan and Deci (2000) stated,

Most everyone who works or plays with others is, accordingly, concerned with motivation, facing the question of how much motivation those others, or oneself, has for a task, and practitioners of all types face the perennial task of fostering more versus less motivation in those around them. (p. 54)

Of course, no one person in any job can take sole responsibility for motivating someone else; however, instructors can present learning in stimulating ways, provide opportunity, align with student interests, and leave room for development (Christophel,

1990). Ryan and Deci (2000) defined intrinsic motivation as carrying out a particular activity for its satisfaction instead of for a separate result or consequence. Students with higher intrinsic motivation act because of their need to act. Intrinsic motivation exists within a student's drive and determination to accomplish a goal. However, Ryan and Deci (2000) also suggested that educators can foster and encourage intrinsic motivation. For example, positive performance feedback is a way to increase intrinsic motivation (e.g., Harackiewicz, 1979; Ryan & Deci, 2000), while negative performance feedback correlates with reduced intrinsic motivation (e.g., Deci & Cascio, 1972). Alsharif and Qi (2014) and Deci et al. (1991) also found a relationship between students' innate motivation to learn and instructor enthusiasm. Extrinsic motivation is also a facet of student success. Ryan and Deci (2000) suggested that extrinsic motivation, unlike intrinsic motivation, is "a construct that pertains whenever an activity is done in order to attain some separable outcome" (p. 60). Those with extrinsic motivation do not act for the sake of acting or to manifest self-driven and defined goals. Others can influence, enhance, or grow the intrinsic or extrinsic motivation of individuals.

Conceptual Framework

Transformational Leadership

Weaver and Qi (2005) stated that "the professor typically 'leads' the class, defines what is to be learned, identifies the activities and readings students are to undertake, and determines how student performance will be evaluated" (p. 573). As an instructor leads groups of students in their collective goal of learning certain subject matter, the instructor's role fits the definition of leadership given by Northouse (2007), who stated:

“leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (p. 3). The college instructor must operate successfully as a course leader to guide students to successful learning. Utilizing Yukl’s (2006, p. 3) definition of leadership as “a process whereby intentional influence is exerted by one person over other people to guide, structure, and facilitate activities and relationships in a group or organization,” Balwant (2016, p. 21) formed the following definition of instructor leadership as “a process whereby instructors exert intentional influence over students to guide, structure, and facilitate activities and relationships.”

Each leadership style has a unique approach; as a result, styles have a wide range of outcomes for followers and organizations. The transformational leadership model focuses on growth, transformation, and learning for both the leader and followers to positively impact the leader and followers of an organization. Caldwell et al. (2012) defined transformational leadership as “an ethically based leadership model that integrates a commitment to values and outcomes by optimizing the long-term interests of stakeholders and society and honoring the moral duties owed by organizations to their stakeholders” (p. 176). Kovach (2019) called transformational leadership a stimulus in achievement, as it is a means of improving academic performance, test scores, student motivation, trust in leadership, and student commitment. Thus, an instructor’s leadership style could significantly affect students, student outcomes, and higher education institutions. Included in this discourse is the influence that a college instructor can have when embodying transformational leadership. Bolkan and Goodboy (2009) sought to determine the impact of instructors as transformational leaders in college classrooms. They found that transformational leadership positively correlated with perceptions of

instructor credibility, student participation, and student outcomes. They also found that transformational leadership correlated with increased student satisfaction, effort, and effectiveness in classrooms, indicating that transformational leadership positively links to student behavior and traditional student outcomes. In addition, followers view transformational leaders as better performing, more revered, and more skilled at performing tasks than nontransformational leaders (Bolkan & Goodboy, 2009; Conger et al., 2000; Hater & Bass, 1988).

Scholars have noted that higher education institutions are organizations of knowledge and learning and foundational places for solving problems, creating realistic visions, and developing skilled leaders (Al-Mansoori & Koç, 2019; McNamara, 2010; Uhl & Anderson, 2001). According to Balwant (2016), transformational leadership applies to higher education instruction or transformational instructor-leadership. Balwant examined transformational instructor-leadership in higher education teaching and found that transformational leadership was helpful in teaching. Balwant also found transformational instructor-leadership positively correlated with students' motivation, satisfaction, affective learning, cognitive learning, academic performance, and perceptions of instructors' credibility. Employers and employees have different relationships than faculty and students; however, both scenarios have leader and follower roles. Walls (2019) maintained that transforming the future workforce requires supporting education via effective leadership. Transformational leadership is an effective leadership method, as it results in content, loyal, and dedicated followers (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Transformational leadership is a traditional leadership theory with a neo-charismatic theme (Delmas, 2019). Transformative leadership, conceptualized by Burns (1978) and further developed by Bass (1985), has four facets. Bass and Riggio (2006) indicated that transformational leaders embody four important qualities. First, a transformational leader must have idealized influence, consisting of trust, respect, and followers' admiration. Second, a transformational leader should possess inspirational motivation, consisting of motivating, encouraging, and inspiring followers by giving work meaning and an optimal amount of challenge. Third, a transformational leader provides intellectual stimulation with creativity and new approaches without public critiquing. Fourth, a transformational leader has idealized consideration, in which they mentor each follower and pay attention to followers' needs while accepting individual distinctions among them (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Transformational leadership has a transforming effect on both the leader and followers and consists of creating a collaborative, inspirational, positive culture for growth (Green, 2017).

A transformational leader transforms followers by providing dynamic interaction. Higher education faculty members must influence student success, inspire student motivation, create stimulating intellectual course content, and consider students as individual parts of a whole. Transformational leaders can motivate and encourage followers to accomplish more than they had planned or imagined (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Transformational leaders solve problems diplomatically with guidelines and boundaries. Additionally, transformational leaders have effective communication skills, a vision for the future, and the ability to engage their followers and get them to comprehend the importance of reaching organizational goals (Green, 2017). Transformative leadership in

the college classroom could result in productive conversations and comfortable classroom environments with transformational learning and creative ideas.

The goals of teaching are to inform, lead, and inspire students to succeed. In this vein, transformational or significant learning focuses less on teaching abstract concepts and more on a collaborative process of coaching learners while they tackle real-life problems and build capability across multiple dimensions (Bonwell & Eison, 1991; Fink, 2013). A professor who is a transformational leader could be a mentor and an inspirational example who encourages and motivates students to succeed. Furthermore, self-awareness is a factor crucial in leadership. According to Delmas (2019), “Self-aware leaders know how they are perceived by others” (p. 25). Thus, the perceptions of instructors’ followers, their students, are a valuable asset to faculty as classroom leaders. Faculty must be innovative thinkers and active participants in student retention to improve the higher education financial crisis, and transformational leaders embody these traits.

Summary

Chapter II presented the scholarly research relevant to the study. There was a discussion of the relevant literature, including the state of student retention and attrition, student retention in alignment with faculty retention, attrition as a contributor to higher education’s fiscal problems, student retention and college personnel, and faculty and student success. The chapter also addressed student motivation, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, mentorship, the impact of student perceptions of faculty as caring, and pedagogy. The chapter concluded with a conceptual framework of transformational

leadership for faculty as leaders for student success. Chapter III presents the study's methodology.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter presents the study's methodology, including the research setting, participants, instruments, procedures, and data analysis. The qualitative research method was appropriate to explore undergraduate college students' perceptions of their experiences with instructors on their motivation to persist at their institutions. An experiential analysis commenced to determine whether students perceive faculty to have a primarily positive or negative influence on their intentions to persist until graduation. The analysis of these included rich descriptions of experiences with instructors. The student perceptions revealed the value of the influence of instructors traits and qualities impact on students.

The purpose of this study aligned with Creswell and Poth's (2018) criteria for a qualitative study, which included (a) the need for an intricate grasp of the issue, (b) an aspiration to empower people, (c) a contextual understanding of the participants' circumstances, and (d) a warranted adaptable, literary reporting style. Thus, the research was an experiential phenomenological study. The data collection occurred via the distribution of an online, open-ended qualitative survey. The survey instrument (see Appendix A) contained questions designed to address the study's research questions and participants' views of whether their instructors influenced their plans to stay at their

college and positive and negative experiences with instructors. The participants were students enrolled in the following Summer 2021 courses: PH 114L Alg-Trig Based Physics I Lab, PH 202L Calculus-Based Physics II Lab, and PH 202L Calculus-Based Physics II Lab. All students enrolled in these courses received invitations to participate in their study from their instructor via email (see Appendix B). The participants were the students who took part in the online survey and responded to the questions and prompts.

Research Design

Phenomenology

Qualitative research consists of general assumptions combined with interpretive frameworks (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A qualitative researcher seeks to achieve a multifaceted, specific grasp of the issue at hand. The qualitative methodology has numerous benefits. For example, the investigative, organic, and open nature of qualitative research is adaptable to accommodate developments in the research, such as unforeseen participant thoughts or feedback (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Furthermore, according to Larkin et al. (2019),

Qualitative work can have an effect upon the world at many levels. For example, it can adopt an advocacy role, where the voices of participants raise our awareness of an experience. It can highlight processes of marginalisation or identify contexts in which people are misunderstood. Some participatory projects may generate assets and capacity within local communities. Other projects may have an impact through their effects on theory or the ways in which policy is discussed. (p. 183)

Creswell and Poth (2018) indicated that qualitative research enables a researcher “to empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices” (p. 45). Qualitative researchers must allow participants to expound upon their stories without trying to

achieve preexisting expectations based on the extant literature. Phenomenology, conceptualized by Husserl and resulting in the dialectical and existential philosophy by Merleau-Ponty and Sartre (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015), differs from other popular qualitative research methods (e.g., discourse analysis). The purpose and ideology of phenomenological research have remained relatively steady since the design's conceptualization (Gallagher, 2012). At its core, the definitions of phenomenology present it as "the study of human experience and of the ways things present themselves to us in and through such experience" (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 2). Phenomenological methods may vary, but "broadly speaking, it is concerned with understanding people's subjective experiences" (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 334). This study focused on the participants' perceptions and experiences, an approach that aligned with phenomenology's basic premise. According to Brinkmann and Kvale (2015),

In qualitative inquiry, phenomenology is a term that points to an interest in understanding social phenomena from the actors' own perspectives and describing the world as experienced by the subjects with the assumption that the important reality is what people perceive it to be. (p. 26)

Creswell and Poth (2018) outlined the phenomenological procedures used as this study's theoretical framework. First, a researcher must decide whether the phenomenological method is an appropriate fit for addressing the research problem. Phenomenological research requires the desire to study and understand people's shared or common experiences of a particular phenomenon. Next, the researcher must find a phenomenon to explore and describe by investigating various emotional states or social constructs. The researcher must specify and differentiate among the assumptions associated with phenomenology, bracketing and set aside personal perspectives and experiences as much as possible.

The phenomenological data collection should include collecting data from participants. Creswell and Poth (2018) recommended asking five to seven open-ended questions with plenty of space in between to elicit participant responses.

Phenomenological data analysis entails generating themes by analyzing significant participant statements. A researcher must find “clusters of meaning” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 79) in these significant statements and create themes, then make structural and textual portrayals. Finally, a researcher must create and report a composite description to capture the “essence” of the phenomenon under study, known as the “essential, invariant structure (or essence)” (p. 80).

The key features of a phenomenological study are (a) the desire to investigate a phenomenon through those who have personally experienced it, (b) philosophical discussion and discourse of the phenomenon, (c) phenomenological reflection, (d) data collection, (e) data analysis, and (f) robust conversations about the phenomenon the participants have described encountering and experiencing (Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to Amos (2016), a qualitative researcher should portray accounts of human-lived experiences to produce a sense of understanding for the reader. This study focused on students’ perceptions of their experiences and motivations; therefore, it required a greater depth of expression of student viewpoints and perceptions than statistics alone. Larkin et al. (2019) reported,

Often, a given group’s perspective is missing from the literature, or else it is present but misrepresented. For example, there is an extensive qualitative literature on the experiences of careers and family members of people with learning disabilities. By comparison, the literature exploring the experiences of people with learning disabilities themselves is sparse. In such situations, the value of standard designs in “giving voice” to a particular perspective far outstrips the caution required by the requisite sampling strategy. (pp. 184–185)

This study used an experiential qualitative methodology because the approach “validates the meanings, views, perspectives, experiences and/or practices expressed in the data” (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 21). In this context, interpreting the participants’ perceptions consisted of accepting and prioritizing their views instead of using them as a base for analyzing other phenomena. The experiential qualitative approach was the method chosen instead of the critical qualitative approach. The critical qualitative approach has an interrogative attitude for critical qualitative research for the implications or meanings of the experiences depicted in the data, which a researcher uses to investigate another phenomenon; accordingly, the “analyst’s interpretations become more important than participants” (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 21).

Research Setting

This study occurred virtually via a qualitative online survey. All the participants were undergraduate students enrolled at a midsized university in the Southeastern United States. Interviewing students in person or observing classroom interactions was not appropriate due to the COVID-19 pandemic. At the time of this study, social distancing was a strongly encouraged practice, and the course delivery methods at the institution varied. Because of this, a survey with open-ended questions was the instrument used to collect the data for interpretation, coding, and thematic analysis of the data.

Participants

The participants were 17 individuals having experience with the same phenomenon (Polkinghorne, 1989). A goal for the study was to have a minimum of eight participants for rich data collection. However, Patton (2002, p. 244) stated, “There are no

rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry.” Qualitative studies require fewer participants than quantitative studies (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Of note, researchers may use only one text or participant for analysis in a qualitative study (Crossley, 2007, 2009). Financial and geographical limitations necessitated using convenience sampling to recruit the participants.

In this study, convenience sampling commenced to recruit the most accessible individuals fitting the study’s inclusion criteria. Participant selection occurred based on the participants’ availability and willingness to participate during the summer semester. The participants also had to fit the inclusion criteria of being undergraduate students at the Southeastern university. Using the students’ college email addresses, their instructor distributed the qualitative surveys with open-ended questions in a structured format. Participants were previously unknown to the researcher to reduce bias and avoid selecting individuals based on personality or other personal preferences.

Demographics

The interested participants completed the surveys, providing information about their characteristics. All the participants were aged 18 years or older. Tables 1, 2, and 3 present participant demographics. Millea et al.’s (2018) research, which suggested that demographics influence retention and graduation rates of first- and second-year university students, supported the beneficial range of varied demographics amongst the participants of this study. The respondents had the option to reveal their ethnicity with a multiple-choice question: Ethnicity (please choose one): American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, African American, Hispanic or Latino, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, or Other/Prefer not to disclose (see Table 1).

Table 1. Participant Ethnicities.

Ethnicity	Number (<i>n</i>)	Percentage (%)
American Indian or Alaska Native	0	0
Asian	1	5.88
African American	2	11.76
Hispanic or Latino	2	11.76
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0	0
White	11	64.71
Other/Prefer Not to Disclose	1	5.88

The participants had a blank space to provide their gender (see Table 2).

Table 2. Gender Demographics.

Gender	Number (<i>n</i>)	Percentage (%)
Male	7	41.18
Female	10	58.82
Prefer not to say	0	0
Other/filled in blank space	0	0

College classifications (see Table 3) showed there were participants representing each of the four levels of undergraduate academic classifications: first year, second year, junior, and senior.

Table 3. College Classification.

Level of academic classification	Number of participants (<i>n</i>)
Freshman	3
Sophomore	3
Junior	5
Senior	6

Instrumentation

Qualitative surveys were the data collection method utilized in this study.

Researchers who use qualitative surveys may choose to locate or draw participants from a single site; however, they do not have to use just one site (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The most important factor is that the participants taking the survey have experience with the phenomenon under investigation to describe their shared lived experiences (Van Manen, 2014). This study's survey aligned with the criteria for a qualitative survey, as the participants came from a single site and had experience with the phenomenon of attending college and interacting with instructors. Thus, the researcher distributed open-ended questions in a survey format via secure email (see Appendix A). The creation of the survey occurred with the use of the specialized online software, Qualtrics. The researcher provided a link to the survey included in the invitation email sent to participants by their instructor (see Appendix B). The email notified the participants of the voluntary nature of participation which included that identities would remain confidential except to the researcher.

Per Creswell and Poth (2018), a phenomenological researcher must “distinguish the type of interview by determining what mode is practical and what interactions will net the most useful information to answer research questions” (p. 165). Planning and conducting in-person interviews with students was an increasingly difficult and impractical task due to COVID-19 restrictions. Thus, virtual surveys occurred in place of the interviews. A significant benefit of a structured interview format with written responses is that “guessing at what the person said is absolutely unacceptable” (Patton, 1987, p. 140). Written responses to the survey's open-ended questions provided the

opportunity to receive the participants' specific wording of answers to questions with certainty. The structured, open-ended survey questions enabled the participants to write down any feelings, beliefs, and perspectives related to the topic of study. The questions were designed to garner responses related to the research questions of this study (see Table 4).

Table 4. Correlation Between Research Questions and Interview Questions.

Research question	Interview questions
Primary RQ: What are undergraduate students' perceptions of the impact of faculty on their motivation to persist to graduation at their current institution?	
RQ1: How do participants describe their experiences with instructors?	1, 6
RQ2: How do participants describe whether instructors have made them feel encouraged or discouraged persisting at their current university?	4, 5
RQ3: What experiences with instructors did participants perceive as positive?	2, 3
RQ4: What experiences with instructors did participants perceive as negative?	2, 3

Research Techniques

This study included the use of the research technique of memoing (Glaser, 2013) to make conceptual connections in the raw data for the constructs that show the research phenomenon in its context (Birks et al., 2008). From a study's conceptualization to the conclusions, a researcher can use memos to clarify ideas; articulate thoughts, assumptions, and subjective perspectives; and develop the research design (Birks et al., 2008). Glaser (2013) described the importance of memoing while conducting a

qualitative study, with memoing defined as freely writing down thoughts and ideas while they occur to avoid forgetting or losing them. According to Glaser, researchers engage in memoing to create a capital of intellect and concepts from the start of the research to its final steps. The conscious effort of memoing has value; additionally, memoing has less significance and vitality with the supposition that all researchers engage in memoing automatically (Glaser, 2013). In alignment with this statement, Groenewald (2004) noted that researchers might get absorbed in their data collection and neglect to contemplate and reflect upon the research process. Groenewald maintained that researchers should take memos to describe the process and document feelings, impressions, and intuitions. Glaser also encouraged new researchers to use memos. Memos can be written documentation and records of the ruminating of the researcher, both preconsciously and consciously, as the research grows with the researcher (Glaser, 2013).

Researchers must establish qualitative verification (Scharp & Sanders, 2019). According to Scharp and Sanders (2019), researchers can establish qualitative verification with dependability, a technique by which they disclose how they came to their conclusions. In this study, the researcher worked with a colleague to accomplish verification. Scharp and Sanders suggested how researchers can achieve dependability:

This might be accomplished with peer debriefing. Peer debriefing requires the researcher to provide detailed notes to another trained researcher. This researcher provides an external check to ensure that observations and interpretations of the data are valid on their face. Finally, confirmability requires researchers to detail their notes in a systematic way to illustrate a link between their data and findings. This is achieved by keeping an audit trail (i.e., notes that establish a connection between the findings and the original data, such as decision rules). (p. 118)

Procedures

Data Collection

The mechanics of conducting an interview pose challenges in the qualitative interview process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Creswell and Poth (2018) maintained that “undoubtedly, conducting interviews is taxing, especially for inexperienced researchers engaged in studies that require extensive interviewing, such as phenomenology, grounded theory, and case study research” (p. 173). Thus, a researcher must establish a protocol for creating and distributing surveys to guarantee organization and minimize error. Braun and Clarke (2013) indicated how to design and implement online surveys, suggestions the researcher used in this study. The first steps were to create an informative, clear title for the survey and give preparticipation information, defined as

Guidance on who is eligible to complete the survey; information about how the data from the survey will be used and about participants’ rights to anonymity, confidentiality and retrospective withdrawal; information about consent—e.g., a separate consent form or a declaration that completion/return indicates consent—the consent process needs ethical approval; a deadline for completing/returning the survey—make this as generous as possible but be realistic about your time scale” to provide instructions for completing the survey and answering the questions. (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 137)

Based on Braun and Clarke’s (2013) suggestions, the main body of the survey consisted of primarily open-ended questions, with the fewest number of questions as possible to avoid the participants experiencing “question fatigue.” The survey concluded with a “clean-up” question to allow participants to add further information unanticipated by the researcher. The survey also had a section related to the participants’ demographics. Finally, a completion page showed a “thank you” message for the participant and the researcher’s and researcher’s supervisor’s contact information for comments or questions.

According to Braun and Clarke, including questions about the participants' personal aspects (demographics) can appear threatening at the beginning of an online survey, as "people are more likely to answer these questions once they have finished answering the topic questions" (p. 135). Therefore, the survey presented the demographic questions at the end.

The distribution of the Qualtrics survey occurred according to the protocol (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The Institutional Review Board (IRB) provided approval to conduct the study before the data collection occurred (see Appendix C). Additionally, the study occurred in accordance with IRB rules for ethics and human participants. The researcher created and attached a link to the Qualtrics survey in an email message sent via the researcher's secure university email account to a colleague who taught physics courses at the university where the study occurred. The selection of the physics lab courses was due to availability, as the researcher knew the instructor. The instructor was able and willing to assist in recruiting participants. The instructor sent the link to the Qualtrics survey to students in three sections, each with approximately 20 students, for an approximate total of 60 survey recipients. This study did not require 60 participants for data collection; however, distribution occurred with the assumption that not all 60 students would complete the survey. The plan was to use purposeful sampling if there were a need for more respondents; however, the 17 responses received were a sufficient sample. Maintaining ethical research standards entailed the instructor directing students to respond to the researcher to protect their privacy.

The instructor did not see the responses of any of the completed surveys and made the participants and researcher aware of this. The instructor also offered students a small

amount of extra credit toward their courses if they completed the study. The students could also earn extra credit by writing a two-page paper with references on their favorite physicist. While the instructor knew which students submitted survey responses per the researcher to award extra credit points, the instructor did not know what information they entered into the online survey. Thus, the instructor knew which students completed the survey but did not know their survey responses. This careful process occurred to protect the participants' privacy and ensure that only the researcher obtained the survey responses without the instructor influencing participants' responses.

Minimization of Bias

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), many possible ethical issues can surface during several phases of the qualitative research process. Qualitative researchers must use interpretive lenses. They should avoid siding with participants, disclosing only positive results, and plagiarizing, falsifying, or disclosing information harmful to the participants. Researchers must avoid the natural tendency to use inherent biases to dictate their studies. A researcher must remain mindful of potential bias toward the personal perspectives of either an instructor or student to consider the participants' words fairly. Researchers must have such awareness to achieve ethical and honest results. Additionally, researchers should bracket their perspectives and experiences as much as possible (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Bracketing, also known as a phenomenological reduction, consists of taking previous knowledge of a phenomenon and mentally putting it aside (i.e., within brackets) to remain as unprejudiced as possible to arrive at the phenomenon's essence (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

The students participating in this study were volunteers who were informed that nothing they said would harm them in any way. Their private information was available to only the researcher. The participants understood their responses would remain safe and protected and that only the researcher would see their responses. Good interviewer behavior occurred by allowing the participants to share two sides of this aspect of college education as they deemed appropriate. The open-ended questions provided the participants with ample room to share their thoughts and feelings. The participants had total freedom to answer however they wished. Complete privacy included avoiding descriptions of students other than participant-provided demographic information. A personal laptop computer and a secure email account were the means of storing the participants' names and research information.

Data Analysis and Code Development

Experiential Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis in qualitative research is an approach used to analyze texts, such as interview transcripts and open-ended survey questions. Thematic analysis is “a qualitative method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within a data corpus” (Scharp & Sanders, 2019, p. 117). Researchers can use thematic analysis to create descriptive accounts of phenomena or certain facets of phenomena (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Per Braun and Clarke (2013), thematic analysis is a unique method when compared to other qualitative analytic methods, “in that it only provides a method for data analysis; it does not prescribe methods of data collection, theoretical or ontological methods” (p. 178).

Thematic analysis also provides accessibility and flexibility in theory useful for qualitative data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Other scholars have found thematic analysis useful, including Crotty (1998), Lincoln and Guba (2000), and Schwandt (2007). Braun and Clarke (2013), who identified the steps of thematic analysis, described it as “a method for identifying themes and patterns of meaning across a dataset in relation to a research question; possibly the most widely used qualitative method of data analysis, but not ‘branded’ as a specific method until recently” (p. 175).

Thus, thematic analysis, a method used extensively in research, was the data analysis approach used for this study. The versatility, accessibility, and applicability of thematic analysis showed it to be a useful approach for educational research as well. Thematic analysis has flexibility and usefulness as a research tool, as it provides a rich, detailed, multifaceted account of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The thematic analysis in this study occurred with the six steps by Braun and Clarke (2006; see Table 5).

Table 5. Phases and Process of Thematic Analysis.

Phase	Process
1. Become acquainted with your data.	Transcribe your data (if needed), read data, re-read data, write down thoughts during the process.
2. Create codes.	Code intriguing aspects of your data systematically throughout data set, collate data for every code.
3. Look for themes.	Collate your codes into their potential themes and group together all pertinent data for each potential theme.
4. Review themes.	Make sure your themes are working pertaining to your coded extracts and whole data set, create a thematic map of your analysis.
5. Name, describe, distinguish themes.	Continuous analysis to narrow down the specific details of every theme and the encompassing story the analysis is telling, creating clarity of names and definitions for every theme.
6. Generate the report.	This is the final chance to analyze. Choose striking, powerful, interesting extract examples, conduct final analysis of your chosen extracts, relate it back to your research questions and literature, generating a scholarly report of your analysis.

Adapted from *Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology*, by V. Braun & V. Clarke, 2006, p. 87. Copyright 2006 by Taylor & Francis.

Ideally, thematic analysis requires a small to moderate number of participants. Research questions based on the participants' experiences, such as those in phenomenological studies, require a participant pool "large enough to convincingly demonstrate patterns across a data set; small enough to retain a focus on the experiences of individual participants" (Braun & Clarke, 2013; p. 45). A particular strength of thematic analysis is its flexibility. In terms of practice, thematic analysis provides broad and general questions so that the participants can construct the meaning of a situation, a meaning typically forged in discussions or interactions with other persons. The more

open-ended the questions, the better, and a researcher must carefully observe the feedback given.

Summary

Chapter III presented the study's methodology. This chapter included the research design, an overview of qualitative research and phenomenology, a review of thematic analysis, and the study's research setting, participants, and instrumentation. This chapter also presented the study's procedures, data collection via a qualitative survey, the researcher's positionality, the means of minimizing bias, and the study's limitations.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore students' perceptions of faculty's impact on students' motivation to graduate and whether faculty have a positive or negative impact on student persistence. The primary goals of this study were to:

- Collect undergraduate college students' perceptions of the impact of faculty on their motivation to graduate at their institutions.
- Explore the perspectives of the participants.
- Determine the overarching themes in the participants' responses.
- Examine how the faculty had negative or positive influences via thematic analysis of the students' feedback.
- Provide information useful for institutions and faculty with the goal of improving student retention and graduation rates.
- Fill gaps in the literature on student perspectives of faculty's impact on graduation rates.
- Increase knowledge about faculty's influence on graduation rates.
- Offer insights that faculty members can consider (e.g., pedagogy, behaviors, attitudes, actions, mentorship) when discerning how they influence students' motivation to persist until graduation at their institutions.

Chapter IV presents the findings from the collected data. The following analysis aligns with the extant scholarly literature and presents new material for future studies.

Presentation of Findings

Familiarization

The first step of thematic analysis (see Table 5) by Braun and Clarke (2006) consisted of getting familiar with the data. Note-taking of initial thoughts occurred by reading and rereading the participants' survey responses. The survey questions produced rich, voluminous responses. The responses of the 17 participants who completed the survey provided the data used for the phenomenological thematic analysis. Thus, instead of the intended eight to 10 responses, the study included analysis of the data from 17 participants. The 17 participants provided ample raw data for the study's thematic analysis.

All 17 students who participated in the study indicated that instructors either encouraged their intentions to persist to graduation at their current institutions, discouraged their intentions to persist at their current institutions, or experienced a mix of encouraging and discouraging feelings relating to instructors' impact on their intentions to persist to graduation at their current institutions (see Table 6). Most significantly, the findings included zero statements indicating that instructors did not have any impact on students' intentions to remain enrolled at their institution. One of the survey questions was, "Describe whether your instructors have made you feel encouraged or discouraged to continue enrolling at this college." All student participants responded that that faculty did cause them to feel encouraged or discouraged in persisting at their university. Nine

respondents indicated that their instructors encouraged students to persist at the institution. For example, one participant said, “I have felt encouraged to continue learning and enrolling at school. The teachers, for the most part, do well in preparing students for their next classes and letting them know what to expect.”

Table 6. Instructors Encouraged Persistence to Graduation.

Statement	Responses	Sample response
Instructors encouraged students from intending to continue enrollment at current institution.	9	“Instructors have made me feel encouraged to continue enrolling at this college. I trust that the majority of instructors I would meet at this college would be helpful and welcoming and I don’t know how likely that would be anywhere else.”
Instructors discouraged students from intending to continue enrollment at current institution.	1	“Definitely discouraged due to their unfair grading and harsh treatment of students.”
Instructors’ impact on students’ intentions to continue enrollment at current institution were a mixture of encouraging and discouraging .	8	“Some are encouraging and others make me want to drop out.”
Instructors had no impact on students’ intention to continue enrollment at current institution.	0	N/A

Note. Descriptive words in **bold**.

Only one of the 17 participants reported feeling discouraged to persist by instructors. The student participant said, “[They] definitely discouraged [me] due to their unfair grading and harsh treatment of students.” Eight of the 17 student participants reported having a mix of encouraging and discouraging experiences with their instructors. For example, one participant said, “I think the great professors I have had have been very

encouraging to me, while the bad ones have really discouraged me.” Another participant expressed conflicted, strong feelings about the impact of instructors on enrollment, saying, “It’s really a combination [of feelings], some [faculty] make me wanna keep on pursuing my degree, but the bad ones make it almost unbearable to even continue to go to college without dropping out.”

Coding

Careful reading, rereading, interpretation of the survey data, and memoing occurred in order to create charts reflective of emerging themes, frequently used words, and strong statements. Lists of the survey questions and student answers underwent organization by student and type of response. The charts included the responses with positive or negative descriptions of faculty experiences or feelings toward faculty. The most noteworthy trend was the participants’ accounts of the connection between faculty’s behaviors, attitudes, and demeanors on their positive or negative perceptions of faculty. Further analysis of this finding produced themes and descriptions of the positive and negative qualities, behaviors, characteristics, and descriptions of instructors. Division of these qualities occurred into subcategories and included words such as *care/cared*, *help/helps/helped/helpful*, *feel/felt/feeling*, and *made/make*.

Generating Themes

Themes emerged from the survey responses in the form of frequently or repeatedly utilized words which participants used to express their thoughts and feelings about faculty. For example, although the survey included the word “made” only once as part of a question, it emerged in responses (“made” and “make”) a significant 31 times

(see Table 7). While the participants used the word in multiple contexts, its usage suggested that instructors *make* students feel a certain way. For example, student participant responses included, “My instructors have made me feel encouraged to continue enrolling in this college,” and “They have made me felt encouraged to continue.” The following student participant response shows how instructors “made” a student feel encouraged to persist and trust in and perceive the faculty as “helpful” and “welcoming”:

Instructors have made me feel encouraged to continue enrolling at this college. I trust that the majority of instructors I would meet at this college would be helpful and welcoming, and I don't know how likely that would be anywhere else.

Another participant described being “made” to feel a desire to persist:

The great professors I have encountered have made a lasting impact on me. As did the bad ones. You never forget how someone makes you feel. I wish the university would compensate the professors that go above and beyond for their students because of how much it truly does impact us and our education.

In another context, the word “make” did not indicate “force;” instead, it meant “create/save.” This participant strongly emphasized a belief in the impact of faculty on student success, saying, “I think your professor will make or break you in college.”

Although the survey prompts and questions did not include variants of the word “care,” variants of the word emerged seven times in the survey responses. The participants used the word to indicate their perceptions of instructors’ feelings toward students. For example, one participant said, “I have had really good professors who care about me learning the material.” Another participant emphasized the value of perceiving that instructors cared about their jobs as well as students. This participant described the instructors who did not appear to care as “terrible.” The participant said, “I have had some really good instructors so far, but I’ve also had some really terrible ones who

obviously don't care about their job or their students." In this case, the participant used the term "good" to contrast the instructors with the "terrible ones" whom the student perceived as uncaring about students or their teaching. Another participant indicated the value of believing that an instructor cares, stating, "It meant a lot to see the teacher care about the students and discuss what changes may need to be made."

Furthermore, the survey prompts and questions did not include any variation of the word "help"; however, 17 survey participants used the word "help" or a variant of the word a significant 19 times to describe instructors. The student participants repeatedly expressed the value of instructors whom they considered "helpful" or who "helped" them. For example, one student participant said, "I'm not sure if we can name instructors, but [professor] was the most helpful, kindest professor I have ever had." Another participant also described a positive experience with a professor who assisted with difficult concepts. Yet another participant noted instructors who did not appear to want to help, responding, "Some teachers do not seem to want to help students who reach out for help."

Variations of the word "feel" (e.g., "feel," "felt," or "feeling") emerged 20 times in the responses, although the survey prompts and questions did not include any variations of the word. The participants used this word in emphatic statements, such as, "I've had this professor and others make me feel very illiterate any time I've asked questions in class," and "I have had professors [whom] I could not stand and actually dreaded to the point of feeling sick walking back to their class." One participant described an instructor who appeared not to want any of his students to succeed. The student participants who used variations of the word "feel" made personal statements

similar to the following: “There was one professor I had where I constantly felt like she was targeting me. I felt like she was constantly bringing up the bad when I was trying so hard.”

Not all participants used a variation of the word “feel” to articulate negative emotions. One participant correlated an instructor’s efforts in teaching and overall kindness with students’ motivation to learn, saying, “Her efforts in teaching us, as well as the kindness she showed every single student in her class, made students feel motivated to learn.” Perhaps the most powerful and strongly stated response from a student participant was:

The great professors I have encountered have made a lasting impact on me, as did the bad ones. You never forget how someone makes you feel. I wish the university would compensate the professors [who] go above and beyond for their students because of how much it truly does impact us and our education.

One student participant used the word “impact” twice for emphasis, calling the professor who made a lasting impact “great.” This participant addressed the belief that one person can “make” another feel a certain way. This student participant also noted never forgetting the impact made by that person or instructor.

Table 7. Emergent Themes and Frequency of Use.

Emergent theme	Participant use
Care/cared	Found seven times in participant responses
Help/helps/helped/helpful	Found 19 times in participant responses
Feel/felt/feeling	Found 20 times in participant responses
Made/make	Found 31 times in participant responses

Some participants made firm statements about the influence and power of faculty on students' college experiences, such as, "Some [faculty] are encouraging, and others make me want to drop out." Another participant indicated feeling discouraged from persisting due to instructors' behaviors, remarking, "[Some faculty] definitely discouraged [me] due to their unfair grading and harsh treatment of students." Some participants provided less passionate responses to this portion of the survey (i.e., "Sometimes..."), while others made statements such as, "Instructors have made me feel encouraged to continue enrolling at this college," and "The vastly positive interactions from interesting conversations to learning in the classroom have encouraged me to continue enrollment."

Many participants of this study described instructor communication, behaviors, and pedagogy as being important to them (see Table 8), supporting DellAntonio's (2017) study of the influence of instructors' immediacy behavior upon academic retention and student success and that the quality of the course environment impacts student engagement (Millea et al., 2018). Nonverbal immediacy behaviors (such as gesturing, smiling, walking around the classroom, relaxed posture, appropriate touch, and vocal variety) and verbal immediacy behaviors (making unrelated casual conversation, giving feedback, and calling students by their names) (Rocca, 2007) were also valued by participants (e.g., "Having those few teachers who will flash you a smile or have an open office door can mean the world"). For example, one student stated: "Unfortunately when professors see common errors or low average grades and do not make an attempt to address the class in a proper manner (not using statements such as, 'work harder/faster,' 'you should know this by now,' 'this class should be easy,' etc.) student efforts often feel

futile.” Another student referenced pedagogical behavior and communication when they said: “I had a teacher arrange office hours with every student after a test to discuss their performance. . . .It meant a lot to see the teacher care about the students and discuss what changes may need to be made.” Statements emphasizing communication (e.g., “I very seldom have a problem with professors unless they are not good with communication”) support foundational research which showed that students considered supportive faculty behaviors to include clear and reasonable communication with students, helpful feedback and fair evaluation, assistance with problems, and helping students in planning their futures (Bergman & Gaitskill, 1990; Brown, 1981; Coleman & Thompson, 1987; Hanson & Smith, 1996; Hughes, 1992; Mogan & Knox, 1987; Nehring, 1990; Reed & Hudepohl, 1983; Shaefer & Schaefer, 1993; Shelton, 2003; Sieh & Bell, 1994; Thurber et al., 1989).

Table 8. Descriptions of Instructors.

Emergent themes	Participant data
Descriptions of instructors’ positive qualities, behaviors, and characteristics	<p>“Many teachers are empathetic, uplifting, and involved in their students’ time on campus. Having those few teachers who will flash you a smile or have an open office door can mean the world.”</p> <p>“I have had a few that has really just went above and beyond for their students.”</p> <p>“They both present what they are looking for and show ways to succeed.”</p> <p>“Dedicated to giving their students the best environment for educational growth. They have shown great interest in wanting to help and taking the time out of their days to help any way they can.”</p> <p>“Welcomed questions and gave me confidence/encouraged me because they helped me understand the concepts I was struggling with.”</p>

Table 9 (continued).

Emergent themes	Participant data
Descriptions of instructors' negative qualities, behaviors, and characteristics	“They are all kind, smart, and willing to work with you on various issues. ”
	“I’ve had a few professors that were very rude and made it clear they did not like their job. ”
	“When one of them constantly degraded the intelligence of the students. They were always quick to remind that the extremely intricate subject was ‘easy stuff,’ and made me feel very discouraged with my collegiate career, rather than encourage growth. ”
	“Some really terrible ones who obviously don’t care about their job or their students. ”
	“Most negative experiences I’ve had with instructors so far have stemmed from them being impossible to contact, not having any interest in their own subject matter teaching, being very rude to students on a daily basis, and not knowing what they’re even talking about most of us because they obviously would rather be somewhere else. ”
	“ Did not seem to care about the students at all. ”

Note. Descriptive words in **bold**.

The participants who considered their instructor experiences positive used the following words to describe the instructors and their behaviors: empathetic, uplifting, involved, going above and beyond for students, understanding, helpful, welcoming, kind, and pleasant. A descriptive theme that emerged repeatedly was positive experiences with instructors who appeared to care about students and felt “passionate” about their subject matters or jobs. The findings also revealed that participants felt motivated by their instructors’ kindness and perceived efforts in teaching (e.g., “Her efforts in teaching us as well as the kindness she showed every single student in her class made students feel motivated to learn”).

Alternatively, the participants described negative instructors with the following: a lack of clarity, perceived rudeness, a lack of helpfulness, a dislike for their jobs or the learning material, and those who “would rather be somewhere else.” The participants also described negative faculty experiences, perceptions, characteristics, and behaviors. These participants described some faculty as “not good with communication,” “[they] don’t care about their job or their students,” “transactional,” “[they] did not seem to care about their students at all,” and “obviously don’t care about their job or their students.” Likewise, the participants who described positive experiences or perceptions of instructors used words and statements related to their instructors’ personal characteristics and behaviors, such as “caring,” “invested,” “want [students] to succeed,” “went above and beyond for the students,” “passionate,” and “makes time for all of us.”

Participants also referenced financial and career concerns in relation to their college experiences. As Bonevac (2015) stated, the total U.S. student debt has increased to over \$1.2 trillion, amounting to more than the total amount of U.S. credit card debt. One participant of the study described overall experiences with instructors in relation to fiscal concerns as follows:

Very good because they understand that students have more classes than just their class and some students have jobs to pay for their education from the instructors and university. On the other hand, there are always a few instructors that assume every student's world revolves around them and their class, which will never be the case.

Another participant expressed valuing real-world career guidance as their most positive experience:

One of my instructors has given me a lot of guidance in scheduling, programs, and career paths. This one-on-one time with a professor that wants to see his/her students succeed is my most positive experience.

Still another participant offered concerns over the current economy, giving the following response when prompted to explain whether they felt motivated to enroll at their current university until graduating: “Yes, due to little to no options in the foreseeable future career-wise.” Another expressed a similar sentiment, stating that they would persist at their current university “Due to economic and degree progress purposes only.”

The data from the participants aligned with the concept that faculty members significantly impact students’ perceptions of their college experiences, their intentions to persist at their universities, and their feelings about their educational journeys.

Summary

Chapter IV offered the raw and coded data of the participants’ survey responses, which underwent thematic analysis. The chapter presented the phases and process of thematic analysis, including getting acquainted with data, creating codes, finding emergent themes, reviewing data and themes, and naming and distinguishing themes. The themes included descriptions of instructors’ positive and negative qualities, behaviors, and characteristics partitioned into subcategories with the words *care/cared*, *help/helps/helped/helpful*, *feel/felt/feeling*, and *made/make*. Analysis of the student participants’ meanings commenced by selecting powerful quotations from the participant responses. Discovery and analysis of the participants’ overall meanings followed, including the words they frequently used to express their feelings and their individual meanings.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this experiential phenomenological study was to investigate students' perceptions of faculty's influence on their intent to graduate at their current institution. This investigation included collecting, exploring, coding, and analyzing perceptions of students as stakeholders in higher education to determine the following: whether faculty influenced students' intentions to graduate at their current institutions, how faculty influenced student's intentions to graduate at their current institutions, and to provide beneficial information for faculty and institutions seeking to improve student retention and graduation rates. The analysis of the statements given by participants of this study suggest that faculty members do impact students' intentions to persist at their current university. Direct data from participants and recurrent themes and patterns from the responses collected suggest that faculty members encourage or discourage students on their educational journeys. The research sample used strong wording to express their feelings toward faculty as educators and individuals to whom they looked to for mentorship and guidance. All 17 participants who responded to the survey indicated that faculty members either encouraged or discouraged their intention to persist at their university. The existing literature centered on the value of educators who care about their students has been well covered, but much of such existing research has primarily

concerned K-12 education rather than higher education (Dallavis, 2014; Miller & Mills, 2019; Teven 2007; Teven & Hanson, 2004). This study's findings and analysis contribute to the pool of current research on factors influencing students' persistence to graduation.

Discussion of Findings

Significantly, all participants who responded to the survey indicated that faculty members either encouraged or discouraged their intention to persist at their university, with zero participants stating that no impact was made. While this study did not longitudinally measure the retention and graduation rates of the student participants, it garnered and analyzed participants' current perceptions of faculty's impact on their intent to persist to graduation at their current institution. These findings align with foundational higher education retention research which has indicated that in addition to factors such as peer and staff relationships with students, there is a significant relationship between the quantity and quality of student interactions with faculty and student persistence and retention (Astin, 1993; Nutt, 2003). The finding that there were zero statements indicating that participants believed that instructors did not have any impact on students' intention to continue enrollment at current institution aligns with Fishman and Decandia's (2006) earlier indication that when students frequently engaged with faculty, staff, peers, and course subjects, they were more likely to persist in college and achieve academic success. Data analysis revealed perspectives of both negative and positive experiences with instructors. While all participants indicated the influence of instructors over their college experiences, some descriptions were negative, some were positive, and some were a mixture of the two. Many participants had strong opinions regarding their

perceptions of faculty and shared them freely, suggesting that faculty impacted their desire to attend class, to learn, and to feel motivated in their pursuit of academic success.

There were five research questions, including four sub-questions, guiding this research to understanding participants' perceptions and experiences in relation to the impact of faculty on motivation to persist to graduation at their current institution.

**RQ1: How Do Participants Describe
Their Experiences With Instructors?**

The findings of this study indicate that instructors impact students' perceptions of their intentions to persist at their current institution, which, in turn, summons instructors to acknowledge the power that implies. Study findings revealed that participants' college instructors impact their overall college experiences and their intent to persist to graduation at their university. Participants of this study emphasized the influence of instructors upon their college experience. This aligns with early research by Noel et al. (1985) who stated that the people who are regularly face-to-face with students are the ones who can offer affirmative growing experiences for those students and aligns with Fink's (2013) emphasis on the critical nature of faculty's embodiment of leaders who care about students, subject matter, instruction, and learning.

**RQ2: How Do Participants Describe Whether Instructors
Have Made Them Feel Encouraged or Discouraged From Persisting
at Their Current University?**

After coding the raw data and studying emerging themes, further analysis brought descriptions of the positive and negative qualities, behaviors, characteristics, and

descriptions of instructors. Participants used strong wording (i.e., “The vastly positive interactions from interesting conversations to learning in the classroom have encouraged me to continue enrollment” and “the bad ones make it almost unbearable to even continue to go to college without dropping out”) to express whether instructors influenced their decisions to persist at their current university.

They attributed positive and negative impact of instructors upon their intent to persist to the instructor’s attitude and behavior, pedagogy, and communication. This aligns with Hempel et al.’s (2020) statement that “careless language can be devastating” (p. 52) and aligns with the previously mentioned value of psychologically supportive behaviors such as depicting an interest in students, listening to students, and showing a desire for students to succeed (Bergman & Gaitskill, 1990; Brown, 1981; Hanson & Smith, 1996; Hughes, 1992; Mogan & Knox, 1987; Nehring, 1990; Reed & Hudepohl, 1983; Schaefer & Schaefer, 1993; Shelton, 2003; Sieh & Bell, 1994; Thurber et al., 1989)

RQ3: What Experiences With Instructors Did

Participants Perceive as Positive?

In particular, participants discussed their perceptions of instructor behaviors and attitudes. This finding contests the postulation of previous scholars in higher education that faculty have doubted nurturing or caring as being worthy of the focus of faculty because they perceive that in higher education settings, nurturing and professionalism are in opposition (Miller & Mills, 2019; Varallo, 2008). Alternatively, some faculty are not opposed to caring and may already perceive themselves to be caring, they may also be concerned that efforts to increase environments of greater caring could infantilize their students and encumber their already heavy workloads (Chory & Offstein, 2017; Miller &

Mills, 2019). However, this study supports research (Chory & Offstein, 2017; Finn et al., 2009; Miller & Mills, 2019; Slate et al., 2011) which has shown that when students perceive faculty as caring, they have increased motivation, interact more in class, and are at a higher probability of evaluating their instructors as being credible.

Participants also connected positive experiences with and perceptions of instructors with their own academic motivation. This aligns with previous research which showed the link between academic success in higher education and student motivation (Allen, 1999; Eppler & Harju, 1997; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002; Pintrich, 2004; Trolian et al., 2016; Zimmerman et al., 1992). The statements from participants also indicated the importance of instructor enthusiasm and involvement in learning. This supports the research of scholars such as Alsharif and Qi (2014) and Deci et al. (1991) who maintained that there was a link between the innate motivation of students to learn and instructor enthusiasm.

RQ4: What Experiences With Instructors Did

Participants Perceive as Negative?

Students attributed negative experiences with instructors to include perceptions of instructors having a lack of clarity, perceived rudeness, a lack of helpfulness, a dislike for their jobs or dislike of being in the classroom. The participants also described negative faculty experiences as involving negative perceptions of instructor characteristics, behaviors, and pedagogy. In contrast to the successful outcomes of transformational leadership (Bolkan & Goodboy, 2009; Conger et al., 2000; Hater & Bass, 1988, Kovach, 2019), participants described less positive experiences with instructors by using terms such as “transactional” (i.e., “Transactional; we come in, we make the grades, never

communicate again”). The negative descriptions of experiences with instructors also included reports of faculty as poor communicators who are perceived as uncaring. The participants’ references to pedagogical behaviors of their instructors (i.e., “Many of them create a learning environment that is interactive and holds student attention” and “They both present what they are looking for and show ways to succeed”) is supported by Miller and Mills’s (2019) stance that higher education leaders should value pedagogical factors if they hope to engage and motivate students to learn.

Limitations

This study had several limitations. One limitation occurred due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, which did not allow planning or implementing face-to-face interviews or classroom observations during the pilot study or primary study. Absence of face-to-face interviewing could have affected the rapport between the researcher and participants. Lack of interest on the part of survey participants may have been due to “Zoom burnout” or “Zoom fatigue” during the pandemic, described by Samara and Monzon (2021, p. 1) as a phenomenon formed from increasingly required Zoom sessions which took “an enormous toll” as a result of “the need for attentiveness to nonverbal cues and the constant awareness of what a person is doing while the Zoom camera is on.” Another limitation of this study was that it was impractical for the researcher to longitudinally track the graduation rates of the participants to examine the outcomes of students in 4 to 6 years. The students also self-reported their motivation, which some scholars could consider a limitation. According to Weintraub et al. (2015), “Since perception is a cognitive process that helps us to understand our experiences, how we receive, filter, and interpret behaviors and conversations may not be the same as how

someone else will complete the process” (p. 30). The results of all students who participated in the study indicated that instructors either encouraged their intentions to persist to graduation at their current institutions, discouraged their intentions to persist at their current institutions, or experienced a mix of encouraging and discouraging feelings relating to instructors’ impact on their intentions to persist to graduation at their current institutions. Another limitation was the pool the participants were chosen from—various physics courses—which could be considered atypical.

Recommendations for Practice

Educational leaders and faculty members could use this experiential thematic analysis to understand faculty’s impact on students, how students may perceive them, and their impact on students’ educational journeys. Perhaps the most significant pattern in the finding of this study was the participants’ statements linking faculty behaviors, attitudes, and demeanors on their positive or negative perceptions of faculty. The findings indicated that students were impacted by their perceptions of instructor behaviors. Self-awareness is key in all leaders, including instructors as leaders of groups of students, and as Delmas (2019) maintained: “self-aware leaders know how they are perceived by others” (p. 25). Based on the findings in this study which showed that faculty behaviors and characteristics impacted students perceptions of their intent to persist, a practical way for instructors to improve their influence upon students could include workshops designed to operationalize how faculty may depict caring for students. While instructors naturally have varied personalities, intentions, and characteristics and, like all humans, are unique individuals; instructors can learn, adapt, and improve characteristics, behaviors, approaches, and pedagogy with effort. While certain behaviors may come more naturally

to some personality types, others can be enacted with thoughtful intention on the instructor's part (e.g., "The most appreciated aspect of an instructor for me is when they show students basic human respect and kindness"). Certainly no one educator can take complete responsibility for the motivation of all students; however, per Christophel (1990), instructors may work to present education in a way that is stimulating, aligns with student interests, and leaves room for greater development. The thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and perceptions of an instructor's followers—their students—is an important tool for faculty as course leaders. An instructor who is a transformational leader could also lead the classroom via mentorship and inspirational example, which would encourage and motivate students to succeed. For higher education to recover from financial crises, everyone in academia must be a part of the recovery process. If university leaders desire the success that occurs when students persist and graduate at their institutions, they must note that the granular interactions students have with faculty throughout their college experiences can impact these statistics. Faculty have influence over students, and thus should explore innovation and active participation in order to positively influence student retention and graduation rates. The findings of this study support Nugent et al.'s (2004) indication that for retention initiatives to succeed, they will require steady institutional and faculty commitment.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are many potential ways to advance these findings through further research. One beneficial pathway for future research could consist of a longitudinal study over the course of four to six years to investigate whether students who participated in the study persisted to graduation at their current university and whether their perceptions changed

throughout their academic careers. Extended studies could also incorporate faculty personality types or faculty pedagogical methodology in relation to student perceptions of learning and retention graduation rates. A future study with open-ended questions to probe findings on care and helping could also add to the current findings, perhaps at a time when face-to-face interviews are more feasible. Additionally, further research centered on professional development for faculty in these areas could benefit higher education faculty. Data could also be garnered from varied participant pools such as students in numerous courses, colleges, locations, or at the graduate level. For example, possible avenues for study in relation to this research could be to gain the perspectives of solely international students, transfer students, or student athletes.

Another recommendation for further research is to focus on the critical demographic features that affect student retention and graduation, including race, nationality, international or transfer student status, native language, gender, nontraditional student standing, disability, religion, first-generation status, number of children (if any), familial support, marital status, employment, financial status, and age. Demographics are highly relevant data that can significantly affect student perspectives, experiences, and academic success. Investigating these important facets and their impact on the college student population could contribute to the extant research and literature. In this study, the raw, coded, and thematically analyzed data were the means used to draw conclusions. The phenomenological experiential analysis in this study suggests that students perceive that faculty have a significant impact on students' college experiences, intentions to persist at their universities, and feelings about their educational journeys.

Chapter V synthesized the findings of this study with relevant literature. This study contributed to the literature centered on retention and graduation rates by collecting and analyzing the perceptions of college students as stakeholders in higher education, particularly as their perceptions pertained to faculty's impact on their intent to persist at their current university. The findings showed that students perceived that faculty impacted their intention to persist at their current university and suggested that faculty behaviors and attitudes were a significant factor in whether students felt encouraged or discouraged to continue their college educations.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Qualtrics Survey

I voluntarily choose to participate in this survey.

- Accept
- Decline

1. How would you describe your experiences with instructors so far?
2. Describe the most positive experiences you have had with instructors so far.
3. Describe the most negative experiences you have had with instructors so far.
4. Describe whether your instructors have made you feel encouraged or discouraged to continue enrollment at this college.
5. Do you feel motivated to enroll at this university until you graduate?
6. What would you like to add about the faculty that you have encountered throughout college and their impact on your college experience?

Please provide your current academic status:

- First-year student
- Second-year student
- Junior
- Senior

Age (please choose one):

- 18 years of age or older.
- Younger than 18 years of age.

Gender: _____

Declared major (if Undecided, write N/A): _____

Ethnicity (please choose one):

- American Indian or Alaska Native

- Asian
- African American
- Hispanic or Latino
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- White
- Other/Prefer not to disclose

Your name and email address (completely confidential and for the researcher only):

I would like to participate in a Zoom interview to share more perspectives on what I, as a student, think about this subject:

- Yes, I'd like to participate.
- No, I would not like to participate.

Voluntary submission of survey:

- Please record my answers.
- Disregard my answers.

Closing:

We thank you for your time taking this survey. Your response has been recorded. If you have questions or comments, here is the contact information of the researcher and her supervisor:

Researcher: Rachel L. Giles Email: rlg1221@jagmail.southalabama.edu

Supervisor/Dissertation Chair: Dr. Peggy M. Delmas

USA Institutional Review Board Approved: IRB Number: 21-190/1760466-1 06/07/2021

Appendix B: Recruitment Materials

The following was sent to students/potential participants by their instructor, Ms. Melanie Cochran.

Dear Students,

There is an opportunity for you to earn five extra credit points by completing a survey that has been developed by Rachel Giles. If you wish to earn the extra credit without completing the survey, you may instead write a two-page paper on your favorite physicist, references required. There are no wrong answers. Only Mrs. Giles know how your respond to the questions in the survey.

They will be kept confidential by the researcher, Mrs. Giles, a doctoral candidate at the College of Education and Professional Studies, and answers to the survey will be used for her doctoral dissertation with the possibility of future scholarly publication with the understanding that your name will never be revealed to anyone besides Mrs. Giles.

While you will be awarded five extra credit points for participating, please remember that this is completely voluntary, and the extra credit is unrelated to any answers you give in the survey. You do not have to participate in this or any other study to earn additional credit. An Information Sheet from the researcher has been attached to this email for your perusal.

If you agree to participate for extra credit, please see the survey at the following link:
https://qfreeaccountssjc1.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_bCbClbeyUAXYUR0

—Mrs. Cochran

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Appendix C: IRB Approval



INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

June 7, 2021

Principal Investigator: Rachel Giles
IRB # and Title: IRB PROTOCOL: 21-190
[1760466-1] Do College Faculty Impact Graduation Rates? A Phenomenological Analysis of Perspectives from Undergraduate College Students
Status: APPROVED Review Type: Limited Review
Approval Date: June 7, 2021 Submission Type: New Project
Initial Approval: June 7, 2021 Expiration Date:
Review Category: 45 CFR 46.104 (d)(2): Research that only includes interaction involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording):

iii. The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can be readily ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by 45 CFR 46.111(a)(7)

This panel, operating under the authority of the DHHS Office for Human Research and Protection, assurance number FWA 00001602, and IRB Database #00000286 or #00011574, has reviewed the submitted materials for the following:

- 1. Protection of the rights and the welfare of human subjects involved.*
- 2. The methods used to secure and the appropriateness of informed consent.*
- 3. The risk and potential benefits to the subject.*

The regulations require that the investigator not initiate any changes in the research without prior IRB approval, except where necessary to eliminate immediate hazards to the human subjects, and that **all problems involving risks and adverse events be reported to the IRB immediately!**

Subsequent supporting documents that have been approved will be stamped with an IRB approval and expiration date (if applicable) on every page. Copies of the supporting documents must be utilized with the current IRB approval stamp unless consent has been waived.

Notes:

There are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of data

Appendix D: Information Sheet

Do College Faculty Impact Graduation Rates? A Phenomenological Analysis of Perspectives from Undergraduate College Students

Rachel Lee Giles
rlg1221@jagmail.southalabama.edu

You are invited to voluntarily participate in a research project because you are enrolled in a Summer 2021 physics course. This study focuses on how faculty members impact student perceptions of their motivation to persist to graduation.

The purpose of the study is to gain your valuable insight into how faculty members have impacted your motivation to persist to graduation at your current institution. Participation will take no longer than 45 minutes (and probably much less). Participation will remain confidential. I will save your names on a separate sheet from your survey so that your instructor can give you extra credit without knowing your response.

Participation requires filling out an online survey. You have the right to refuse to answer any questions that you do not wish to complete or answer.

After you have completed the survey, you will have the opportunity to participate in an interview to share additional perspectives. You can share your contact information in the survey. The interviews occur later in the semester.

Your important views as a student may be a powerful tool for educators and higher education institutions. Through participation, you can assist other students like you and raise awareness of how faculty members impact students either negatively or positively in their efforts to graduate from college.

There is no cost to participate.

I will store all answers separately from your name after completing the research. I will use your information only for research purposes. To the best of our knowledge, the risk of harm and discomfort from participation is no more than what you would experience in daily life.

You can withdraw at any time without consequence. Please contact me at rlg1221@jagmail.southalabama.edu or the Institutional Review Board at University of South Alabama at (251) 460-6308 if you have questions about your rights as a research subject.

If you agree to participate for five extra credit points, please take the survey by clicking on the following link:

https://qfreeaccountssjc1.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_bCbClbeyUAXYUR0

Otherwise, you can earn extra credit by writing a two-page paper with references on your favorite physicist.

Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,
Rachel L. Giles
Doctoral Candidate

Appendix E: Qualitative Responses

Table 10. Research participants' qualitative responses.

Open-ended question	Responses
How would you describe your experiences with instructors so far?	<p>Student 1: “The majority of my instructors have been okay. I have had a few that has really just went above and beyond for their students and unfortunately quite a few that did not seem to care about the students at all.”</p> <p>Student 2: “Very good, I very seldom have a problem with professors unless they are not good with communication.”</p> <p>Student 3: “Great, I have had many more good experiences with professors than bad experiences.”</p> <p>Student 4: “Typically very good because they understand that students have more classes than just their class and some students have jobs to pay for their education from the instructors and university. On the other hand, there are always a few instructors that assume every student’s world revolves around them and their class, which will never be the case.”</p> <p>Student 5: “Almost every instructor at USA has been helpful and welcoming to me.”</p> <p>Student 6: “I have had really good professors who care about me learning the material. I have also had professors who I have not learned much from.”</p> <p>Student 7: “I would say my experiences have been mostly positive and they have all been helpful.”</p> <p>Student 8: “So far I have gone to South for all three years of my undergrad degree. And, so far, I have not had a “bad” professor. Most professors seem very passionate about their subject, and want students to feel the same way. They are invested in their students, and want them to succeed. Many of them create a learning environment that is interactive and holds student attention. Very positive experiences.”</p>

Table 11 (continued).

Open-ended question	Responses
	<p>Student 9: “My experiences so far with my instructors would be a positive way of thinking. They both present what they are looking for and show ways to succeed.”</p>
	<p>Student 10: “Great. I’ve loved all of my instructors at South.”</p>
	<p>Student 11: “Highly satisfied with the instructors I’ve had so far! My first semester at South would have been a much more difficult transition without the professors I had.”</p>
	<p>Student 12: “Transactional; we come in, we make the grades, never communicate again.”</p>
	<p>Student 13: “Depending on the courses, traditional lab professors offer less room for error, which is expected since students are supposed to apply what is being taught. Unfortunately when professors see common errors or low average grades and do not make an attempt to address the class in a proper manner(not using statements such as, “work harder/faster,” “you should know this by now,” “this class should be easy,” etc.) student efforts often feel futile.”</p>
	<p>Student 14: “I enjoy how my Physics instructor teaches and how he makes time for all of us to ask questions when we are completely lost.”</p>
	<p>Student 15: “Very good”</p>
	<p>Student 16: “Pleasant”</p>
	<p>Student 17: “I have had some really good instructors so far but I’ve also had some really terrible ones who obviously don’t care about their job or their students.”</p>

Table 12 (continued).

Open-ended question	Responses
Describe the most positive experiences you have had with instructors so far.	<p>Student 1: “The most positive experience I have had with an instructor so far happened just recently. I was worried about a class I have not been excelling in. When I expressed my concern to my professor, they assured me not to worry about the letter grade because we will work that out and that their main concern was that I learn the material needed to carry me further in my degree. I feel like if every instructor’s primary focus was that the students learn the material and not just giving them impossible tests and curving it for them to pass them out education system as a whole would be so much better.”</p> <p>Student 2: “Most positive experiences I have had so far is how nice the instructors are when it comes to students sometimes needing rounded grades.”</p> <p>Student 3: “I had a teacher arrange office hours with every student after a test to discuss their performance. I did not do well on the test but it got me motivated to do well on the next test where I received a 106. It meant a lot to see the teacher care about the students and discuss what changes may need to be made.”</p> <p>Student 4: “The most appreciated aspect of an instructor for me is when they show students basic human respect and kindness.”</p> <p>Student 5: “Every time I have seen an instructor during scheduled office hours they have done their best to answer any questions I have, even if it doesn’t pertain to the course.”</p> <p>Student 6: “This past Spring, I had a professor who was very clear and straight forward when explaining concepts and answering questions. He was always available to answer questions or give us extra problems to work on. He was also very understanding with my schedule and would work with me if I had a schedule conflict. He cared about how well I understood the material.”</p> <p>Student 7: “When I was going through some mental troubles my teachers understood and allowed me to take my time to get through it.”</p>

Table 13 (continued).

Open-ended question	Responses
	<p>Student 8: “One of my instructors has given me a lot of guidance in scheduling, programs, and career paths. This one-on-one time with a professor that want to see his/her students succeed is my most positive experience.”</p>
	<p>Student 9: “The most positive experience for me so far, has been looking at the lab format for typing the paper. When comes to papers, I struggle to find what all they are wanting in the paper. This format guide helps me and focuses on what exactly the instructor is looking for.”</p>
	<p>Student 10: “They are all kind, smart, and willing to work with you on various issues.”</p>
	<p>Student 11: “The most positive experience I’ve had with an instructor was with my English professor last semester. Specifically, throughout my research paper process. She helped me process the emotional connection I had to my topic that got me an A and was also extremely therapeutic.”</p>
	<p>Student 12: “Some teachers go out of their way to check up on students, often those who will be in that same department for the next few years.”</p>
	<p>Student 13: “Having professors who prioritize physical/mental health/family issues and are willing to make accommodations from day 1. Having a professor is is part time or summer term taking time off the clock to meet with students to ensure their success in the class.”</p>
	<p>Student 14: “When I was out for contact tracing and COVID I had one instructor who would plan Zoom meetings privately and she would (in her free time outside of South) teach me the lessons I missed.”</p>
	<p>Student 15: “Not going to class”</p>

Table 14 (continued).

Open-ended question	Responses
Describe the most negative experiences you have had with instructors so far.	<p>Student 16: “When they go out of their way to help you understand something. My Cal 2 professor would always be willing to answer questions judgement free after class.”</p>
	<p>Student 17: “The most positive experiences I’ve had with instructors is when they are very understanding of crazy times were in and reach out to students who need help or offer bonus/extra credit when students need it most.”</p>
	<p>Student 1: “I’ve had a few professors that were very rude and made it clear they did not like their job. I went to meet with a professor to try to actually learn the homework and not just cheat on it (I voiced this to him) and he still said he would not help me because he “wasn’t going to do the homework for me” and that he would show me how to do it after it was due. So he wanted me to just fail all of the homework’s and then get him to show them to me after they were due. I’ve had this professor and others make me feel very illiterate any time I’ve asked questions in class.”</p>
	<p>Student 2: “One negative experience I had was freshman year when the power went out in the dorms and I had a letter signed from housing to the professor and she still did not allow me to submit the exam.”</p>
	<p>Student 3: “Some teachers have failed to provide a sufficient learning experience for students while a lot of the classes have been moved to remote learning. They either do not teach enough of the subject or they do not make themselves available to be reached easily enough.”</p>

Table 15 (continued).

Open-ended question	Responses
	<p>Student 4: “One instructor emailed me on a Saturday at noon to send me a redo exam and let me know it was due the same day at 2:00 pm. When I said I did not get off work until 3:00, he said to submit it at 4:00, giving me an hour to do an exam redo that ended up taking me 3 hours to complete. Again, let me reiterate this was done on a SATURDAY and could have easily been mentioned during class time or sent in an email earlier than 2 hours before the initial due date. It is also worth mentioning that the reason he did not have my exam yet graded and decided to email me my exam corrections during the weekend while I was at work was because he forgot to send my exam to the SDS office, which resulted in me taking my exam late. This experience ultimately boils down to the instructor having no regard for students or their time.”</p>
	<p>Student 5: “I think some instructors in 100 level courses tend to over exaggerate the difficulty of courses and make new students stressed by increasing the workload of those courses.”</p>
	<p>Student 6: “My professor read off of slides and did not write on the board to work out problems. He also talked very fast and expected you to fully understand the material after he went over it for a couple minutes. I essentially had to either memorize exactly how he worked out problems for test or learn the concepts through YouTube or other resources.”</p>
	<p>Student 7: “The most negative experiences I have had is when the teacher would not communicate with the class and would make it extremely difficult with everyone.”</p>
	<p>Student 8: “Directly I have had no real negative experiences. It is troublesome, though, when instructors are unclear with deadlines or have courses setup in a way that makes it difficult to access provided resources.”</p>

Table 16 (continued).

Open-ended question	Responses
	<p>Student 9: “The most negative experience so far with my instructors would be in the lecture. When it comes to solving the equation to find the unknown variable, there are times when it would be helpful to fully work equations to find the value. I seen [<i>sic</i>] where times the plugging in is not to challenging but there can be times when the instructors has left some gaps and solving would be helpful.”</p>
	<p>Student 10: “I have yet to have a negative experience.”</p>
	<p>Student 11: “The most negative experience I have had with an instructor so far was when one of them constantly degraded the intelligence of the students. They were always quick to remind that the extremely intricate subject was “easy stuff,” and made me feel very discouraged with my collegiate career, rather than encourage growth.”</p>
	<p>Student 12: “Instructors not checking emails, not properly informing students of class/assignment expectations. Not being considerate of physical/mental/family circumstances.”</p>
	<p>Student 13: “Professors who will not put in grades until the last moment required by staff. Professors who openly do not want to teach courses, but do it for extra grant money or to pay off student debts (some professors explain being pushed into the “academia pipeline,” studying a field so niche that instruction/research for corporations and universities is the only way they’ll make a livable salary.”</p>
	<p>Student 14: “There was one professor I had where I constantly felt like she was targeting me. I felt like she was constantly bringing up the bad when I was trying so hard and honestly doing quite well in the class. I had COVID once and I was contact traced once and those four weeks she would literally interrogate me like I had made it up when I was deathly ill.”</p>
	<p>Student 15: “Inaccurate and unfair grading habits”</p>

Table 17 (continued).

Open-ended question	Responses
Describe whether your instructors have made you feel encouraged or discouraged to continue enrolling at this college.	<p>Student 16: “My prior physics professor would take personal offence if questions were asked or wed ask him what the material on the test was.”</p>
	<p>Student 17: “Most negative experiences I’ve had with instructor so far have stemmed from them being impossible to contact, not having any interest in their own subject matter teaching, being very rude to students on a daily basis, and not knowing what they’re even talking about most of us because they obviously would rather be somewhere else.”</p>
	<p>Student 1: “I think the great professors I have had has been very encouraging to me, while the bad ones have really discouraged me.”</p>
	<p>Student 2: “My instructors have made me feel encouraged to continue enrolling in this college. The work load can sometimes be stressful depending on the amount of classes you are enrolled in and the workloads for those classes.”</p>
	<p>Student 3: “I have felt encouraged to continue learning and enrolling at school. The teachers, for the most part, do well in preparing students for their next classes and letting them know what to expect.”</p>
	<p>Student 4: “Some are encouraging and others make me want to drop out.”</p>
<p>Student 5: “Instructors have made me feel encouraged to continue enrolling at this college. I trust that the majority of instructors I would meet at this college would be helpful and welcoming and I don’t know how likely that would be anywhere else.”</p>	
<p>Student 6: “I felt both. One professor told me that Bs were humbling for students and that no one makes As in his class. It made me feel like he didn’t want any of us to succeed. Other professors, welcomed questions and gave me confidence/encouraged me because they helped me understand the concepts I was struggling with.”</p>	

Table 18 (continued).

Open-ended question	Responses
	<p>Student 7: “They have made me felt encouraged to continue.”</p>
	<p>Student 8: “The vastly positive interactions from interesting conversations to learning in the classroom have encouraged me to continue enrollment.”</p>
	<p>Student 9: “The instructors I have at this time, have made me feel encouraged to continue enrolling at this college. Overall, they are providing a great environment for learning and seeking help when situations arises.”</p>
	<p>Student 10: “Always feel encouraged.”</p>
	<p>Student 11: “My instructors have made me feel encouraged for the most part!”</p>
	<p>Student 12: “Not completely discouraged, but definitely avoidant of certain instructors or departments.”</p>
	<p>Student 13: “Again depending on the department, many teachers are empathetic, uplifting, and involved in their students’ time on campus. Having those few teachers who will flash you a smile or have an open office door can mean the world. Teachers who are often in STEM or highly analytical studies often are condescending under the guise of “tough love,” stand-offish, and have a higher failure rate, without the department making valid attempts to address it.”</p>
	<p>Student 14: “Sometimes, but the good outweighs the bad. If the professor is honestly that bad, I would try to transfer classes or make sure I do not have them again.”</p>
	<p>Student 15: “Definitely discouraged due to their unfair grading and harsh treatment of students”</p>
	<p>Student 16: “Both, largely encouraged but there’s still a few bad ones.”</p>

Table 19 (continued).

Open-ended question	Responses
Do you feel motivated to enroll at this university until you graduate?	<p>Student 17: “It’s really a combination, some make me wanna keep on pursuing my degree, but the bad ones make it almost unbearable to even continue to go to college without dropping out.</p>
	<p>Student 1: “Yes, I do.”</p>
	<p>Student 2: “Yes, I do.”</p>
	<p>Student 3: “Yes, I do.”</p>
	<p>Student 4: “Yes, due to little to no options in the foreseeable future career-wise.”</p>
	<p>Student 5: “This should hopefully be my last semester here at the University so I am quite motivated.”</p>
	<p>Student 6: “Yes!”</p>
	<p>Student 7: “Yes.”</p>
	<p>Student 8: “I do, and possibly for a graduate afterward as well.”</p>
	<p>Student 9: “Yes, I do feel motivated to be enrolled at [University] until I graduate.”</p>
	<p>Student 10: “Yes.”</p>
	<p>Student 11: “Absolutely!”</p>
	<p>Student 12: “Only because I am so close to graduating.”</p>
	<p>Student 13: “Due to economic and degree progress purposes only. Unless a very beneficial job or postgraduate opportunity arose after graduation, I would most likely consider another institution.”</p>
<p>Student 14: “Absolutely.”</p>	

Table 20 (continued).

Open-ended question	Responses
<p>What would you like to add about the faculty you've encountered throughout college and how they have impacted your college experience?</p>	<p>Student 15: "Yes."</p>
	<p>Student 16: "Maybe, I might transfer or stay idk yet."</p>
	<p>Student 17: "I do feel motivated and raw at this university until I graduate because I am comfortable with the campus, it's close to home, and all my family lives around here. Sometimes however, I don't care how much tuition I have to pay, I wish to leave this university."</p>
	<p>Student 1: "The great professors I have encountered have made a lasting impact on me. As did the bad ones. You never forget how someone makes you feel. I wish the university would compensate the professors that go above and beyond for their students because of how much it truly does impact us and our education."</p>
	<p>Student 2: "I have nothing to add."</p>
<p>Student 3: "The majority that I have come across actually care about the students and want them to learn. However, some teachers do not seem to want to help students who reach out for help."</p>	
<p>Student 4: "I'm not sure if we can name instructors, but Dr. Selvi was the most helpful, kindest professor I have ever had, and she honestly deserves an award. She had a genuine care for her students and did everything under the sun to help us understand Calculus 3. Her efforts in teaching us as well as the kindness she showed every single student in her class made students feel motivated to learn. The university needs more instructors like her."</p>	
<p>Student 5: "Again, faculty have been great and welcoming. I would add that faculty can be quick to get rid of students when they have research due dates coming up and that for most instructors, they should be more open about how busy they are."</p>	

Table 21 (continued).

Open-ended question	Responses
	<p>Student 6: “I think professors make all the difference when enjoying material. I am very blessed that the professors for the department I am in are very good.”</p>
	<p>Student 7: [No response]</p>
	<p>Student 8: “I would also like to note that a lot of the professors/faculty have good senses of humor. Always lightens up a classroom.”</p>
	<p>Student 9: “The faculty overall based on my experiences through the years are dedicated to giving their students the best environment for educational growth. They have shown great interest in wanting to help and taking the time out of their days to help any way they can.”</p>
	<p>Student 10: “The faculty are great here. They have high standards and show genuine interest in my education.”</p>
	<p>Student 11: “I appreciate most of them very deeply. I will always be grateful for the connections made.”</p>
	<p>Student 12: “Experiences with my instructors have discouraged me from seeking work in the field of academia.”</p>
	<p>Student 13: “Interacting with faculty throughout my college experience is a crash course in self-advocacy and building community among peers. To the faculty that are open enough to communicate with their students besides grades and instruction, it gives us perspective that instructors deal with the pressures their higher-ups place on them. To ensure student success, safety, and well-being, institutions need to look at the structures and environments they have created campus wide and within each department. Faculty that is supported will support students, pitting students and non-administrative faculty among each other to save face will continue the trend of lower enrollment.”</p>

Table 22 (continued).

Open-ended question	Responses
	<p>Student 14: “I think your professor will make or break you in college. I have had professors that I loved and just because of their personality I genuinely enjoyed their class. On the other hand, I have had professors that I could not stand and actually dreaded to the point of feeling sick walking back to their class.”</p>
	<p>Student 15: “Nothing”</p>
	<p>Student 16: “The faculty have largely been very pleasant and helpful.”</p>
	<p>Student 17: “Most faculty are alright, but they tend to act like pompous jerks who are better than everybody around them. I get that they are instructors but even they don’t know everything and they need to get off their high horse.”</p>

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