

Student Affairs Practices: Perceptions of Student Support Services and Retention

by

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Abstract

Student affairs and adult education professionals in colleges and universities are inundated with increasing demands on resources, placing stress on allocation of time, energy, human capital, and finances. Contributing to these difficulties is an unprecedented level of oversight from government and from families of students. “Helicopter” families want to ensure students are being fully developed as functional and employable citizens. Government wants to see measureable outcomes being met and reported. Demonstration of efficient resource allocations is increasingly important. This dissertation explored employee perception factors within specific high-research universities as they relate to student services spending as a mechanism toward graduation and retention. Twelve schools were identified from publicly available IPEDS data. These institutions exhibited above or below average spending on the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) variable “student services” and/or exhibited above or below average graduation and retention rates. These twelve universities were targeted for a focused survey exploring the perceptions of student services professionals and administrators on campus. Quantitative and qualitative analysis of the 130 responses provides insight into how student affairs professionals and administrators differ from each other within their own schools and across the overall sample.

Acknowledgements

Somehow it seems that I always cringe through others' "acknowledgements" so I debated leaving this section out altogether. Then I thought about those who have either supported me or have been patient with me through this process. They deserve a page or so.

Thanks mostly to Anna and the girls. I spent so many nights in class away from home and at the computer. I missed softball games, swim meets, movie nights, school plays, and God knows what else to finish this program. Thanks for your patience...even when I always just needed one more class. I'm done with classes...for now.

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By the time this document sees sunlight I will have been a part of higher education for the better part of 17 years. Thanks to my parents, Charles and Elaine, for pushing me to take that first job at the community college. Who'd have imagined I'd turn into a student affairs nut?

That's about all the acknowledging I can stand. Thanks, finally, to the wonderful staff all over campus at Auburn University (and universities everywhere for that matter). You are the unsung heroes that hold the front lines. You work harder for less praise than most will ever know. Keep it up; the rest of us can't do it without you.

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
List of Tables.....	vii
List of Figures	viii
Chapter One: Introduction.....	1
Statement of Research Problem	2
Purpose of Study	3
Research Questions	4
Significance of Study	6
Assumptions	7
Limitations	7
Definition of Terms.....	9
Organization of the Study	11
Chapter Two: Review of Literature	13
Relevant Trends and Issues in Student Affairs	16
Overview and History of Student Affairs and Student Services.....	19
The Impact of Technology	22
Serving the Online Student	27
Graduation and Retention as Outcomes	29

Measuring Student Success.....	31
Attrition through Dropouts and Stopouts.....	35
In-Class Engagement and Interaction.....	38
The Challenge of Diversity.....	39
Perceptions of the Roles of University Personnel.....	43
Relevant Theory Models.....	47
Student Services Expenditure Categories.....	50
The Future of Student Services as a Profession.....	51
Chapter Summary.....	53
Chapter Three: Methods.....	55
Research Design.....	58
Instrumentation and Validation.....	59
Participants.....	61
Data Collection and Procedures.....	62
Data Analysis.....	62
Chapter Summary.....	63
Chapter Four: Findings.....	65
Student Services and Retention/Graduation.....	68
Participant Demographics.....	69
Findings.....	71
Addressing the Research Questions.....	75
Chapter Summary.....	86
Chapter Five: Discussion.....	87

Discussion	90
Addressing the Research Questions	91
Implications	95
Reflection on Data Collection and Analysis	96
Further Study	98
Summary and Closing Remarks	100
References	102
Appendices	115
Appendix A: Full Survey Instrument	116
Appendix B: Institutional Review Board Information Letter	120
Appendix C: IPEDS (2014) Outputs	122
Appendix D: Research Question 3 SPSS Full Output	125
Appendix E: Full Open-Ended Responses	129

List of Tables

Table 1: Participant Response Rate	69
Table 2: Respondent Employment Range	70
Table 3: Respondent Role Range	70
Table 4: Initial Investigation into IPEDS Data.....	71
Table 5: High Spending/High Graduation.....	72
Table 6: High Spending/Low Graduation	73
Table 7: Low Spending/Low Graduation.....	73
Table 8: Low Spending/High Graduation	73
Table 9: RQ 1 – Descriptive Statistics.....	77
Table 10: RQ 1 - Significance	77
Table 11: RQ 2 – Descriptive Statistics.....	79
Table 12: RQ 3 - Significance	79
Table 13: School Groups by Spending and Graduation	80

List of Figures

Figure 1: Item Agreement by Role and Spending Group.....	83
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Chapter I

Introduction

The charge of student affairs services in higher education has long been two-fold (Seifert & Burrow, 2013). The first charge calls them to administer the daily logistics of handling relatively mundane tasks such as registering students for classes and managing advising. The increased use of technology over the last twenty years has reduced administrative pressures of these objective tasks as students are generally able to serve themselves through the use of the Internet (Shimoni, Barrington, Wilde & Henwood, 2013). This reduction in administrative workload allows for greater emphasis on the second charge to student affairs educator, which is student development.

Relatively abstract ideals such as engagement, developmental stages, general wellness, student satisfaction, and academic success have been thrust to the forefront of student affairs divisions (Seifert & Burrow, 2013). Meeting, measuring, and maintaining *these* goals amidst budget cuts and increased pressures to graduate students strains budgets and nerves. Student services offices must work to find efficient and effective combinations of practices to meet the needs of students. This study identified perceptions of employees at some of the most and least effective student affairs offices among high research institutions.

Rhatigan (2000) describes the situation plainly: “Practitioners do not enjoy the luxury of certainty. It is profoundly true that student affairs administrators must often proceed without knowing exactly what they are doing. We either act or step aside. This requires judgment and faith, the willingness to be vulnerable and to take risks” (p. 22). The uncertainty of student affairs work that Rhatigan comments on prompted this present study as it seeks to understand

more about how some institutions do not follow the generally positive relationship between student services spending and graduation/retention. Empirical data indicate that institutions that place greater emphasis on student engagement typically enjoy above average graduation and retention rates (IPEDS; Webber & Ehrenberg, 2010). Interestingly, Webber and Ehrenberg (2010) report that the correlation between student engagement and graduation gets stronger in colleges with higher numbers of Pell Grant recipients. James, Pate, Leech, Brockmeier, and Dees (2011) go on to suggest that student services allocations have greater impact on student success variables than more logical budget items such as instructional services, media, and even faculty salaries. Reasons for this may include increased availability of support and advising staff along with a broad spectrum of opportunities for students to get involved and invested in the school beyond their classwork. As students continue to develop socially and cognitively, the opportunity to identify with a faculty member, staff person, or even the school's brand has potential to affect their likelihood to return to classes from one semester to the next (Huesman, Brown, Lee, Kellogg & Radcliffe, 2014; Kalsbeek, 2013; Marsee & Davies-Wilson, 2014). This study explored colleges whose IPEDS data do not follow the general assumption that higher student services spending correlates with greater retention/graduation.

Statement of the Research Problem

Considering the continued scrutiny of co-curricular activities on college campuses, it is critical that institutions be able to demonstrate the effectiveness of such endeavors (James et al., 2011). Post-secondary education is facing unprecedented pressures to cut costs while maintaining competitive/affordable tuition rates and outcomes. Items such as student services do not directly generate funds for the institution. Therefore, it is incumbent upon student affairs professionals to be able to justify their efforts, personnel, allocations, and spending. This can be

done through the demonstration of effective and efficient practices in student affairs offices as mechanisms toward measurable outcomes such as graduation and retention.

The existence of these encumbrances regarding the most effective means of retaining students forms the basis for the need of this study. With the resources that go into student development areas, professionals must be able to indicate the value of their efforts. This study contributes to the body of knowledge on what makes student services efforts successful while building on the current epistemology of best practices in student affairs.

This first section has served to provide an overview of the dissertation that follows. Existing IPEDS (2014) data were used to target universities of interest. To maintain a balance of rigor and practical volume of data, student affairs professionals at no more than twelve specific colleges were prompted to complete an online survey through email invitation. Their quantitative and open-ended responses were analyzed in search of themes and trends. This empirical examination was used to address the identified research problem.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify perceptions at specific colleges that represent effectiveness or ineffectiveness toward retaining and graduating students. The study prompted student affairs professionals from identified colleges to provide feedback on why/how their college falls as an outlier in an examination of how student services spending relates to desired outcomes such as graduation and retention. The primary goal of the study is to provide answers to the research questions and provide information that may allow student services divisions to operate more effectively and efficiently.

Research Questions

The research questions listed below were used for this study:

1. What is the relationship between student services activities and student success outcomes in colleges that are spending well above or below the national average on their student affairs offices?
2. What are the perceptions of the role of student services among student affairs professionals in colleges that exhibit above/below average retention rates?
3. What factors provide the most significant contribution to desired outcomes such as retention in colleges that spend above/below the average amount on student services efforts?
4. What differences exist between the perceptions of student affairs professionals and college administrators regarding student services expenditures at targeted schools?

The Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) is a federal database managed and maintained by the United State Department of Education. Colleges receiving Title IV funding are required to report on dozens of variables such as enrollment, demographics, completions, spending, and personnel. IPEDS is made publicly available and was used for the first portion of this study. An examination of IPEDS data generally supports the literature in that there is a strong correlation between student services activities and desired outcomes such as retention and completion. Further analysis of IPEDS data; however, reveals outlying schools that do not follow the trend. These schools either spend less or more per student according to the very broad IPED variable, Student Services when compared with the larger sample. These outliers do not follow the trend in regards to student services spending and its relationship to graduation and retention rates. Despite reduced spending on student services activities, some

boast higher-than-average graduation and retention rates. Conversely, there are schools that spend several times the average on student services and student affairs yet apparently struggle with retention and graduation issues. This study began with a quantitative examination of graduation/retention data and expanded to a survey analysis of specific schools identified as outliers.

The second, more focused, portion of the study identified a sample group chosen specifically because of attributes their IPEDS data exhibit. It has been said that the perception of roles held by student affairs professionals has an impact on their efficacy as servants of the students (Gunduz, 2012; Kuk & Banning, 2009). Specifically, Gunduz (2012) reports that burnout in student affairs professionals can result in a lack of personalized service and attention to detail to students' individual needs. The absence of a personal touch through burnout, the online handling of logistics, or some other factor may contribute to student disconnection and attrition. Positions charged with overseeing areas such as health/wellness, student recreation, clubs/organizations, and involvement have become staples rather than luxuries for student affairs offices (Locke & Guglielmino, 2006). While these positions are certainly beneficial to have, questions remain regarding their benefit to measureable outcomes such as graduation and retention (Meyer, Bruwelheide & Poulin, 2009). The Meyer, Bruwelheide, and Poulin (2009) study goes on to suggest that there is more to the picture as they experienced nearly 100% retention in their online program. Meyers' (2009) program provided little or no opportunity for development beyond the classroom. To help explain this phenomenon, it has been suggested that direct motivation to persevere is most effective in retaining students. A study on the *Possible Selves* (2009) program also indicates that student activities are helpful. Those activities; however, should be activities specifically geared towards motivating and equipping students to

do well in classes. Little or no attention to developmental outcomes is provided (Hock, Deshler & Schumaker, 2011).

Data from community colleges also counter the general correlation between student development opportunities and student success. Community colleges focus almost exclusively on the first charge of student services mentioned earlier, the logistical handling of student processing. Engagement, recreation, activities, and involvement are often forced if present at all (Nguyen, 2011). Yet community colleges from the larger IPEDS sample in this study exhibit comparable graduation and retention rates to 4-year university averages. It is important to consider the sample population in any study including community colleges. The non-traditional student base typically found within community colleges does not always follow the same trends that may be expected of the typical undergraduate demographic. For this reason, community colleges were excluded from this study.

Significance of the Study

A number of factors contribute to the importance, relevance, and need of this study. Student affairs professionals continue to face strained budgets and pressures to perform (Gansemer-Topf & Schuh, 2006). Outcomes such as graduation and retention are increasingly emphasized (Evenbeck & Johnson, 2012). At the same time, student services offices are tasked with fostering ideals such as diversity experiences, cognitive/social growth, identity development, and academic progress (Schuh, Jones, Harper & Komives, 2011). This study aims to investigate the activities and perceptions of student services personnel at schools that exhibit counter-intuitive graduation and retention rates. Findings contribute to the body of knowledge from two perspectives.

Colleges that are spending higher than average amounts on student services activities but exhibit *lower* than average graduation and retention rates were examined to determine where inefficiencies may lie. Inversely, universities that report lower than average spending on student services efforts yet boast *higher* than average may also have something to add to the discussion on student services spending and desired outcomes. The study was designed to identify specific activities and perceptions of student services personnel at these colleges.

Assumptions

The following assumptions were identified:

1. The first portion of the study relies on IPEDS data. IPEDS is self-reported by institutions. Assumptions are made that these data are complete and accurate not only for the colleges identified for the second portion but for the entire initial sample group. Incorrect entries into IPEDS can skew the averages and standard deviations used to identify outlying schools.
2. The follow-up portion of the study makes use of an anonymous survey. Assumptions are made that a sufficient number of respondents are willing to participate completely and truthfully. It is possible that respondents will not be willing to completely respond to open-ended questions regarding student services and their perceptions of such.
3. This study operates on the assumption that graduation and/or retention is a desired outcome toward which students, faculty, and student affairs professionals are mutually seeking.
4. The approach assumes that there *are* outliers to be examined through survey-based analysis.

Limitations

The initial portion of this study was limited to institutions that fall into the realm of the United States Department of Education and report to IPEDS. Further, institutions self-report to IPEDS on an annual basis. It is important to keep in mind that there is likely substantial internal variance in the definition of “Student Services” among universities. There is typically no audit of IPEDS data that is reported. Some schools may include things such as office supplies and janitorial services in their overall student services spending while other institutions may not. This potential inconsistency has the ability to skew the initial data and affect the selection of target schools for the survey portion of the study. The second portion that follows were limited to no more than twelve specific schools identified as outliers from the initial data. Three schools from each combination of spending and graduation (high/high, low/high, high/low, low/low) were identified. It is possible, likely even, that schools not identified as outliers here have something significant to contribute toward answering the research questions. For the purposes of this study, only outlying schools had the opportunity to respond to the survey.

Another significant limitation to this study is the matter of student learning. While the effort aims to explore graduation and even development issues, learning itself is left largely unexamined. It has been suggested that engagement, faculty connections, and social experiences have positive influences on graduation rates but not necessarily learning itself (Arum & Roksa, 2011; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). These connections were considered as factors contributing to the expressed success variables (retention and graduation). Though student learning is obviously a desired outcome for students, its measurement has proven difficult for student affairs administrators and it is not reported to IPEDS (Shephard, 2009). Its measurement, therefore, is excluded from analysis in this effort.

Yet another limitation to the study is its extreme narrow focus. The first portion examined a large number of schools and produce results that may apply to a broad range of universities. The latter portion, however, narrowed the sample significantly to no more than twelve institutions. Further, these institutions were identified *because* they do not fit the larger group. It was difficult to generalize any results or findings from this study. Though useful, it was impossible to say that the discussion can apply to a broad range of schools. Rather the second portion of the study is likely to produce a discussion section similar to what a reader might expect from a series of case studies.

The nature of the study and its look into graduation/retention rates and their correlation to student services spending was not shared with survey participants. This information was not implied through the information letter or the call for participation. That said, student affairs professionals and administrators were likely aware of their own practices and statistics prior to the survey. Survey responders may have formed their own inferences regarding the nature of the study from the questions themselves. Though none objected directly through the open-ended comments, it is possible that results were skewed if participants took issue with the nature of the questions or the project as a whole.

At least one Likert rating from the quantitative portion asked respondents to which degree they agree with the statement, “My primary responsibility is to ensure that students’ logistical needs are met.” This item returned very high variance and significance ($F = 21.472$, $P < .001$). After review, it became apparent that the nature of the question might have created this variance with an ANOVA design that groups responses by role (professionals and administrators). Nevertheless, the item is included in the findings section here.

Finally, the schools identified from Phase I in the High Spending/High Graduation group were all from the University of California system. This was coincidental but perhaps warrants further study. Their responses in Phase 2 however, added quite a bit to the overall study.

Definition of terms

The following definitions of terms are furnished to provide, as nearly as possible, clear and concise meanings of terms as used in this study.

1. Academic Anchor – an ideal, goal, outcome, loyalty, or other intangible construct that causes a student to feel attachment to an institution of higher education (Brown & Mazzarol, 2009).
2. Cognitive Development – the continued process of increasing intelligence, and advanced thought toward enhanced decision making and problem-solving skills.
3. Completion Agenda – the largely political movement to push college students finish 4-year degrees as quickly as possible (Evenbeck & Johnson, 2012).
4. Dropout – a student that does not continue from one semester to the next (excluding summer).
5. En Loco Parentis – (latin) in place of the parent.
6. Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) – Note that this is sometimes referred to as full-time enrollment. The Full-time equivalent considers the total credit-hour production of the school divided by the number of students enrolled. This accounts for students who may be taking more or less than a “full time” load by dividing the total credit hour production by the number of enrolled students.
7. HBCU – Historically Black College or University

8. Identity Development – the development of a student’s sense of belonging to a particular group, groups, or entity through diversified experiences on campus.
9. IPEDS – Integrated Postsecondary Educations Data System
10. NASPA – The National Association of Student Personnel Administrators
11. PWI – Predominantly White Institution
12. Stopout – a student who pauses or takes a break from academics with expressed intentions on returning at some point (Fain, 2013).
13. Student Affairs – the organizational unit within a college or university that serves to meet the logistical needs (registration, scheduling, etc.) as well as organize co-curricular activities such as clubs, recreation, involvement, health/wellness, and Greek life.
14. Student Engagement – the notion student participation and personal investment in co-curricular activities.
15. Student Graduation – the completion of an undergraduate degree.
16. Student Learning – the retention of knowledge by students as a result of classroom activities.
17. Student Retention – the return of a student from one semester to the next.
18. Title IV - a term that refers to federal financial aid funds. Federal regulations state that any federal funds disbursed to a student's account in excess of allowable charges must be delivered to the student (or parent in case of an undergraduate PLUS loan).

Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the study with the problem statement, purpose, research questions, limitations, and closes with this summary.

Chapter 2 consists of the review of literature related to (a) graduation and retention, (b) student

services and co-curricular activities, (c) perceptions of the role of student affairs professionals, (d) student engagement, (e) spending allocations in the area of student services/student affairs, (f) cognitive and social development, (g) identified correlations between student services activities and graduation/retention rates. Chapter 3 describes methods including the research design, instrument, sample population, data collection process, and analysis of data. Chapter 4 details the analyses and findings of the study. Chapter 5 presents conclusions, implications, personal reflection, and recommendations for future research. A list of works cited and appendices follows.

Chapter II

Review of Literature

The charge of student affairs services in higher education has long been two-fold (Seifert & Burrow, 2013). The first charge calls them to administer the daily logistics of handling relatively mundane tasks such as registering students for classes and managing advising. The increased use of technology over the last twenty years has reduced administrative pressures of these objective tasks as students are generally able to serve themselves through the use of the Internet (Shimoni, Barrington, Wilde & Henwood, 2013). This reduction in administrative workload allows for greater emphasis on the second charge to student affairs educator, which is student development.

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done through the demonstration of effective and efficient practices in student affairs offices as mechanisms toward measurable outcomes such as graduation and retention.

The existence of these encumbrances regarding the most effective means of retaining students forms the basis for the need of this study. With the resources that go into student development areas, professionals must be able to indicate the value of their efforts. This study contributes to the body of knowledge on what makes student services efforts successful while building on the current epistemology of best practices in student affairs.

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3. What factors provide the most significant contribution to desired outcomes such as retention in colleges that spend above/below the average amount on student services efforts?
4. What differences exist between the perceptions of student affairs professionals and college administrators regarding student services expenditures at targeted schools?

Relevant Trends and Issues in Student Affairs

The concept of *en loco parentis* is somewhat diminished with contemporary students, parents, and educators (Bowden, 2007; Henning, 2007). Shifts in culture and political climates have nullified much of the accountability that students once felt towards college faculty/staff. It has become more difficult for student affairs professionals to monitor/maintain the progress of students as the entitlement of the millennial generation took hold (Pullan, 2010). Some say that this is a welcomed change. Others argue that the entitled student now has become too transient and is not be willing to stick with a university long enough to finish a degree program. D'Amico, Dika, Elling, Algozzine and Ginn (2014) suggested that this is due at least in part to a lack of social integration on campus. Students often transfer in search of a college that meets their social needs first with academics being a secondary consideration. The aim of these students is

not necessarily academic success but emersion in the traditional college experience. With this transient nature, students may feel less connection to their faculty advisers and less brand loyalty to the University itself. Each transfer provides an exit point for students and potential dropout for the university.

Adam Peck (2011) is the Dean of Student Affairs at Stephen F. Austin State University. He worked to develop an involvement advising initiative aimed primarily at first-generation students. The program makes use of an involvement center that Peck likens to an everyday job fair. It allows students to browse involvement opportunities in a low-stakes environment. Though it is a relatively new initiative, early outcomes are encouraging. Peck (2011) reports that retention rates among this high-risk population have begun to climb as the students are finding more anchors to keep them in school. His work supports the idea that student engagement and connection can be factors in student success. It is interesting to see if this type of effort is replicated in some way in schools examined by the focused portion of this dissertation.

Peck's (2011) findings are important because student affairs divisions are faced with unprecedented pressure to encourage college completion within the expected four to six-year timeline. While certainly possible to complete a four-year degree within four years, it often means that the student has little or no time for extracurricular activities. Ironically, the literature suggests that engagement outside the classroom has a positive impact on student retention and graduation; however, a balance is required. While student affairs professionals want to take advantage of the time they have with students to ensure a well-rounded individual, it is also critical to ensure that standards of academic progress continue to be met despite a surplus of non-academic distractions on campus such as clubs, employment, sports, and various other involvement opportunities.

Webber and Ehrenberg (2010) report that, over the last two decades, spending on academic and instructional items grew at a slower rate than spending on items such as research, public service, academic support, student services, and scholarships. This suggests that colleges either see the value in non-academics as a tool toward desired outcomes or that spending on academics is deprioritized as more tangible and public projects are funded. The Webber and Ehrenberg (2010) study goes on to test the correlation between student services spending and first-year retention rates. Strong relationships are found between the two. This is especially true in colleges with lower admissions standards. That is to say that students who are more at risk benefit the greatest from student services spending. Interestingly, Webber & Ehrenberg (2010) found that there is also positive correlation between admissions standards and student services spending. The most selective universities are spending the most to graduate and retain students. Conversely, colleges with lower admissions standards are negatively impacting the circumstances of their high-risk students by spending lower than average amounts on the student services areas found to be most helpful in retaining and graduating those students. The work of Webber and Ehrenberg (2010) is particularly relevant to the topic of higher and adult education as it strongly supports the positive correlation between spending on student services efforts and student success.

A factor that Human-Vogel and Rabe (2015) call self-regulation also comes into play here. The term, self-regulation, includes issues other than academics that influences students. In their study, as much as 54% of students struggled with issues such as fluency, identity construct, relationship management, and general motivation. These items are in addition to the more commonly explored items such as study skills and time management. Human-Vogel and Rabe (2015) indicate that the compilation of all of these factors can drive a student to give up and

default back to a more predictable set of circumstances (for example, part-time work and familiar home). The researchers go on to indicate that, at the universities explored, the lack of student support services was a major factor in attrition. As students began to realize the difficulties and struggles associated with being a first-year student, the lack of support left them with few options to mitigate their circumstances. For many, dropping out is the most attractive of their few choices.

Overview and History of Student Affairs and Student Services

The founding of Harvard College in 1636 brought about the introduction of the term *en loco parentis*. Academic advisers at the time were given the very broad task of overseeing the general activities, academic or otherwise, of students in their charge. This was more of a supervisory role than what we might expect to see today. College personnel truly did act in place of parents with comprehensive oversight on academic, discipline, moral, and developmental concerns (Cook, 2009). The relative small size of colleges and universities in the 1600s also allowed the president direct interaction with students. This aligned with the familiar headmaster/principal scenario that students would have been familiar with from their secondary education. The earliest schools were not concerned with retention. Most were focused on economic survival and few operated long enough to actually see a graduating class (Siedman, 2012). It was two hundred years before faculty began to assume the role of student academic advising and supervision (Cook, 2009), setting a precedent that many colleges and universities still follow. It was another one hundred years before “student services personnel” became a standard term in institutions. Student services personnel were tasked not with academic oversight but the psychological and vocational support of college students. Though not necessarily very well defined in the beginning, the attention paid to developing the whole student

was already showing signs of success toward increased graduation and retention rates (Cook, 2009). Retention was now a major factor of concern and student services administrators needed methods for ensuring that students remain in school from one semester to the next.

The first extended orientation sessions were aimed toward incoming freshmen and appeared around 1920 (Gordon, 2004). The initiative sparked a series of similar programs across academia as school officials experienced great success early on. Orientation systems covered topics ranging from academic expectations, books, supplies, study habits, campus navigation, and even social behaviors, and were generally accompanied by a campus handbook. These programs were initially overly complicated and difficult for young adults to take in all at once. Nevertheless, successes during these orientation sessions greatly relieved college personnel from addressing concerns on a per-student basis. With everyday logistics and information being handled by the orientation programs, student affairs workers were able to address larger issues and long-term goals. The most effective student support initiatives incorporated some sort of small-group sessions. These cohorts were designed to allow students to make personal connections on campus. Breaking out of intimidating large assemblies and into smaller groups allowed students opportunities for real engagement. Administrators realized that these engagements served as anchors to student retention (Gordon, 2004).

For Eaton (2014), the publication of *Student Personnel Point of View* (SPPV) in 1937 was the event that created the field of student affairs. The piece, generated by the General Council on Education Studies, sought to more clearly define a role that had become little more than policing the extracurricular activities of undergraduate students. This came about following a shift in the role of the university itself. The earliest colleges and universities placed less emphasis on specific majors or specialties. The aim was to develop the “whole” student (Eaton,

2014). As job requirements in fields such as engineering and chemistry became more specific, universities shifted to a “two by two” system. This arrangement consisted of two years of general studies along with two more years of more focused coursework in one’s field of interest. This shift is important because it meant that colleges and universities were now placing emphasis on academics rather than overall development. The earliest colleges/universities were tasked with developing the whole student toward greater societal prosperity (Eaton, 2014). This was a very broad approach toward creating a generally more educated/functional society. As institutions shifted their focus toward more specific academics, less emphasis was placed on the overall student development. Student affairs personnel are warned against this in the piece from the Conference on the Philosophy and Development of Student Personnel Work in College and University, & American Council on Education (1937). Though dated, the themes in SPPV are still relevant to contemporary student affairs professionals. Student affairs offices are tasked with helping students find their individual balance between academic preparation, and co-curricular activities. Even the co-curricular programs and other college-supported diversions have value to students’ overall growth and development that are certainly not as objective as assignments in a course.

Finally, the point of holistic student learning to include not only academics but also developmental outcomes is solidified by *Learning Reconsidered*. Published in 2004 by Richard Keeling, the work suggests that the entire resource of the Academy should come together for the holistic instruction of each student according to his/her individual needs and learning styles. This obviously includes curricular outcomes but most certainly includes intangible objectives such as cognitive development, social development, identity development, and problem-solving fundamentals (Keeling, ACPA, & NASPA, 2004). The current dialogue, therefore, generates

questions surrounding student affairs practices. Specifically, it is important to understand how student affairs offices are affecting students.

Those involved with student advising, registration logistics, engagement, extracurricular activities, or other areas of student affairs will continue learn lessons past administrators. Key to learning were efforts to retain proven strategies while developing fresh approaches to grapple with shifting political landscapes, new technologies, and untested generations of undergraduate students. The history of the profession indicates ever-changing expectations and goals. Societal, technological, and generational migrations will certainly continue to shape the role of the student affairs professional.

The Impact of Technology

The use of technology in student affairs work has grown from novelty to necessity over the last two decades (Moneta, 2005). The years between 1995 and 2015 saw the emergence of cellular telephones, email, the Internet boom, an instant gratification culture, video calls, YouTube, Facebook, Google, and the revolutionary smartphone. These are just a few of the technologies that freshmen experience early in their lives. This was paired at least initially with a generation of student affairs workers who went through their own schooling using manual typewriters and cassette tape-based answering machines. Obviously, there was and is a disconnect of generations. Nevertheless, student affairs work quickly caught up with trends as new and exciting tools for reaching and serving students continued to flood the profession. Email offered unprecedented opportunities, allowing contact to students en mass immediately with little or no cost. Mass marketing meant rolls of stamps and returned mail before. Further, email offers history, tracking, forwarding, linking to important web pages, and conversation threads. These advances were not without problems.

Moneta (2005) reports that personnel cost initially increased significantly. Many clerical positions had to be upgraded to jobs requiring “technical and computer ability.” This was not yet being taught in schools so computer use was a highly specialized skill. Further, new generations of college students were leaving high school with moderate computer experience. They were accustomed to immediate feedback, typing rather than writing, “searching” for what they needed online. Many were actually able to type notes faster than they could write them out with pen and paper. Colleges found themselves in a predicament since level funding did not always allow for training or new hires. A new approach to technology for student affairs personnel was needed (Heiberger & Harper, 2008; Moneta, 2005).

Astin’s (1984) theory of college student involvement suggests and expenditure physical *and* psychological energy (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Contemporary students often invest this psychological energy through technical avenues. Heiberger and Harper (2008) suggest that Facebook meets a need that technology itself has created. Facebook allows for social interaction, ease of use, relative anonymity, and unparalleled access. Originally designed as a virtual social hub (Zuckerberg, 2007), the tool has become a mass advertising tool. Depending on its users, Facebook may be an online garage sale forum, political soapbox, or a very effective means of allowing faculty to connect with students (Heiberger & Harper, 2008; Kivunja, 2015). Using a tool like Facebook is a great example of how student affairs work (and its workers for that matter) has adapted to cope with an ever-changing student population with an ever-changing plethora of distractions at their disposal. Obviously, there are two main arenas in which technology influences contemporary learners. The online revolution of the last two decades has certainly changed the way distance education is considered, however technology influences

students from within the classroom, as well. Educators welcome some of these influences more than others, however.

Voelkel & Bennett (2014) explore productive uses for smartphones in the classroom. At least part of their study includes the concession that students are going to bring mobile electronic devices with them regardless of the rules. With electronic textbooks and phone-based course management systems (CMS), students have more reasons than ever before to have device with them in the classroom. That same device is the source of major distractions such as text messaging and social media updates. Jaschik (2013) reports that around 35% of students use their cellular phones up to three times per day during class for non-class purposes. Further 86% of that use is for texting another student. Fifteen percent of students admit to “checking their phone” up to thirty times per day during class for something not related to academics. From a student engagement and involvement perspective, it is important for student affairs personnel to keep in mind these constant distractions to students. Professors occasionally institute a “no screen” policy that prohibits phone/laptop use altogether. With the affordability of electronic textbooks, however, instructors need to make allowances here. It is nearly impossible and certainly impractical to police what students are actually doing when they look down at a screen of some sort. Charles (2012) suggests that rampant rule breaking makes it impossible to enforce cell phone usage policies in higher education. His approach does not include a policy of any sort on the matter. Rather, he relies on student grades to reflect their efforts and attention levels in class. Students distracted by technology are largely only distracting themselves.

Not all types of technology are within students’ realm of control inside the classroom. Instructors have access to tools such as projection devices, response devices, touch boards, document cameras, and mobile devices that can work to engage students. One study found that

using “clickers” or instant response devices in the classroom provided multi-faceted benefits. Students seemed to enjoy the engagement and the activity of using an electronic device. At the very least, the activity serves to break up the class session with a productive distraction. Instructors were able to tailor lessons around student responses and revisit areas that seemed to need more attention. Some applications of clickers allowed them to be used as an electronic roll call. This passive accountability seemed to help attendance, engagement, test scores, and general student participation (Vaterlaus, Beckert, Fauth, & Teemant, 2012).

Another promising trend is the hybrid or blended classroom. These sessions make use of some online CMS such as Instructure Canvas, Desire2Learn (D2L), Blackboard, or even the free and open-sourced Moodle platform to facilitate out of class discussions and engagement. Researchers found that students who may be reluctant to speak out in a live classroom environment actually have relevant ideas to contribute when allowed the opportunity to participate in an online forum (Mokoena, 2013). Mokoena (2013) also suggests that the opportunity to fact-check, and edit one’s comment plays a role in fostering such participation. There are secondary benefits here. Out of class activities through some CMS allow the instructor to engage students between class sessions, distribute materials such as syllabi, link to helpful web pages and other documents, facilitate collaborations, save class time by testing online, and handle classroom logistics such as announcements and scheduling. Before the online revolution and even before course management systems came into play, students enjoyed a relative break or reprieve from class work between in-person class sessions. With no way to submit homework outside of the classroom, it was simply due at the next class session. With the CMS, however, students may find tests, quizzes, assignments, postings, and other items due at all times of the week. The CMS is capable tracking when things are turned in, sending reminders, keeping up

with grades, and providing statistics on all of these items automatically (McGee, Carmean, & Jafari, 2005). Taken further, CMS options can generally be used to help organize and handle logistics for any number of student groups and organizations. Again, items such as scheduling, communications, file maintenance, and surveys can be facilitated online. This makes engagement opportunities easier to browse and join. Given the value of student engagement and involvement in college groups and clubs, it can be said that course management systems have begun to play a significant role in the retention of students (Senhouse, 2008; Unal & Unal, 2008). There is even at least one study that suggests that Facebook can serve in place of the more formal CMS. Its group management, communication, and discussion tools are quite robust and handle a variety of tasks using a platform with which students are often already familiar (Wang, Woo, Quek, & Lang 2012). Chen (2012) actually suggests that the course management system as it is used today is nearing the end of its life cycle. Its replacement was some form of social networking service such as Facebook. Interestingly, Facebook was originally designed specifically for college students at Harvard University as a social connection tool. Obviously, it was quickly commercialized making its creator, Mark Zuckerberg owner and CEO of a very lucrative business (Zuckerberg, 2007). The platform has now come full-circle evidently as it has made its way back to the university in a different role.

There is no doubt that technology will continue to play a role in student involvement both directly and indirectly. From managing the daily logistics of online and traditional courses to facilitating various engagement opportunities across campus, the CMS and other emerging technologies will provide both opportunities and challenges for student affairs personnel at colleges and universities. The appropriate use of such technologies and trends were left to the professionals to determine.

Serving the Online Student

As numbers of non-traditional students continue to increase, providing student support services to this demographic has become a growing challenge (Kretovics, 2015). Online education has distorted long-held conventions and best practices for training adult learners. Ideals once considered to be foundations were shaken by the emergence of unprecedented new communication tools. These tools demanded the attention of students and instructors on a schedule that did not conform to the traditional face-to-face meeting. This meant that students were submitting assignments and asking questions at all hours of the day. Faculty were no longer put on the spot with student questions in person. Responses to questions and discussion postings could be thought out, edited, deleted, time stamped, and even checked for accuracy in real time. Farnsworth and Bevis (2006) explain that the earliest “online classes” were simply a web page version of an instructor’s proven in-person class. Down to the same syllabus and schedule, the first web-based classes were little more than Internet versions of in-person classes. It was not until educators realized a sharp rise in attrition with online classes that they began to cater online learning specifically to this new genre of student. That is, a different approach was needed to reach a group of students with a completely new mindset toward learning. In some cases, effective instruction required an instructor with specialized training (Shattuck & Anderson, 2013). As online course management systems (CMSs) became more feature-rich, specific training became necessary in 2 areas. Instructors needed to first know how to functionally operate the software. Secondly, they needed to be trained on how to translate their proven teaching abilities to an online format. Many found that this required much more than “putting the course online.” Activities, discussions, grading plans, rubrics, quizzes, and interaction strategies were needed. Instructors and students alike quickly found that online

education was not the easier option. For many, the only true benefit realized from online learning (besides the learning itself) was the relaxed time constraints allowed with the asynchronous format. Considering retention and graduation, though, the lack of accountability associated with asynchronous learning generated grade distribution problems for program chairs. Administrators began to realize that not all students are prepared to take classes online. Some colleges found that they needed to filter students before allowing them to register for online classes. High-risk students that self-placed into online classes proved to be a bad combination for retention-minded student affairs personnel (Wankle & Blessinger, 2013).

Some of the ideals mentioned earlier in this chapter are all but lost to the online student. Holistic education for the online student remains a paradox. These learners do not have the same opportunities for campus involvement and interaction. In fact, many of them are geographically isolated from the school in which they are enrolled (Stevenson, 2013). Further, face-to-face interactions with classes or advising sessions can seem contrived when a form of videoconference or tele-presence is used. Considering the increasing number of online options and students along with the increase pressure to provide holistic education to all students, steps must be taken to provide the same student development opportunities for all. Stevenson (2013) discusses the cost of hiring dedicated support personnel but argues that there is much greater cost in attrition and non-completion. Stevenson is a professor at a popular online-only university that caters to non-traditional students. Graduation and completion are a real issue for them as many students are lacking any sense of connection and engagement outside the classroom. Stevenson goes as far as to suggest that a potential approach to solving the problem is the establishment of online cohorts. With this, groups of students in a particular program would work through the curriculum together. Accountability, engagement, diversity, and study habits could be addressed

at least in part by the groups of students themselves. Being an online school, scheduling conflicts would be minimized and students could perhaps partially fill the role of student affairs personnel (Stevenson, 2013).

Fricke (2013) provides a case study in which a university is able to achieve nearly one hundred percent retention in their online programs after the implementation of dedicated personnel tasked with servicing online students. This success supports two main points: (1) online students can overcome tendencies to drop out and (2) student support services do affect retention. More research is needed in this area to determine the true value of the time that student affairs personnel spend with students compared against the cost of a student lost due to a lack of engagement.

Though relatively new as an area of concern, there are bright spots in the idea of providing holistic education to online and distance learners. Empirical evidence examined here suggest that such is possible but it will certainly require a more deliberate and focused approach than the methods to which student affairs professionals have become accustomed. Colleges and universities that reach out to non-traditional adult learners may be less concerned with the holistic approach as they focus on simple credit hour production. The notion of developing the non-traditional student is an emerging area of concern and is certainly deserving of more study.

Graduation and Retention as Outcomes

More and more frequently we are reminded that colleges and universities must operate as businesses. Closely monitoring financial scenarios and planning for inevitable reductions in funding is a part of daily life for university administrators. Some argue that this inescapable truth fuels constant pressure to increase enrollments and recruiting (Radford, 1997; George, 2008). One method toward increased enrollment numbers is to relax admission selection criteria.

This allows admission of more (albeit less prepared) students. The opposite approach to admissions selection is direct admissions. In this case, the college or university specifically chooses students to admit based on extremely high selection criteria. These schools, however, enjoy unprecedented public funding toward the development of a few individual students and are not generally found in the United States (Yuan, 2005). IPEDS data suggest a correlation between higher first-year headcounts and lower admission requirements. Correlations also exist between lower admission requirements and longer time to degree. So a balance is required. On-time completions can be affected at least somewhat by the selectivity of admissions offices. College business offices must help administrators to determine the most lucrative rates of admissions to completions to ensure that funding meets the university's needs currently and looking ahead.

For the higher education and adult education administrator, the topic of balance is relevant for this reason. Colleges, universities, and other institutions of higher learning are bound to have overhead costs. Even those that may be staffed by volunteers will have operating costs. The continued operation and the value of the product delivered is going to be a function at least in part of the revenues generated.

Selectivity in admissions is also critical to ensure diversity among the student/participant body. Other sections of this chapter speak to the value of a diverse population. Understanding that one of the major charges of the institution is to educate the whole student, providing diverse engagement opportunities is critical. This often begins with admissions. Finally, the institution is tasked with providing a service to the community. This is often handled directly through outreach projects and continuing education efforts. It is handled indirectly by educating the population. An educated population is less prone to crime and more capable of earning a high income. Well-paid individuals will likely spend their higher income locally to create local

jobs. For these reasons, it is critical to keep the machine that is higher and adult education running and profitable.

Measuring Student Success

Conversations on student success must begin with a description of the successful student. It generally makes logical sense to define success for the college student as mere graduation. That seems to be the most tangible and objective goal. As previously examined, however, there is much more to the complete college experience than simple program completion. Rather, graduation should be the celebration of a comprehensive battery of challenges including academics, social growth, cognitive development, problem solving, health/wellness, and perseverance. Measuring abstract ideals such as social/cognitive development, however, is not as objective as credit hour production and GPA calculation. This section will examine why and how these items are just as important in consideration of overall student success.

Mullin (2012) outlines the dangers of using “counts” as metric for student success. It is relatively easy to count/track numbers of graduations or retentions. The author points out, though, that students may be counted twice in some cases. Students earning multiple certificates in addition to a diploma may be counted a “completer” for each award. Likewise, enrollment in multiple programs may skew admissions headcounts. Mullin (2012) does not completely discount the use of quantifiable objectives as measurements for success, though. Obviously, access to numbers of degrees conferred, completion times, and even demographic information is valuable data toward program growth, recruitment, and quality enhancement. Researchers maintain, though, that there is a wealth of data to pull from less objective measures. Student affairs administrators strive toward outcomes such as student development, problem solving skill, social skill, cognition levels, professionalism, writing ability, and soft skills (résumé

building, interview comfort level, dress level, etc.). These items are seldom measured outside the classroom and almost never have to be demonstrated before a student may be considered successful (Dzakiria, Wahab & Rahman, 2012; Mullin, 2012; Prevatt et al., 2011). Further complicating the matter is the issue of public funding. As mentioned previously, federal funds are often allocated according to quantifiable objectives such as completers. Though the value of other ideals is understood, their measurement is difficult. Undergraduate admissions decisions almost never consider student developmental factors. With this, it can be difficult to measure just how much improvement (if any) occurred over the career of a student. It is important to note here that the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is considered the standard instrument for measurement of the outcomes. While these data may be accessed for program development, comparison, and institutional improvement, they are seldom used as justification for receipt/request of public funds.

We should be reminded here that college is not capricious. A series of conscience decisions accompanies by deliberate actions, commitment, and often no small amount of personal resource investment is required for one to become a college student in the first place. Therefore, college students (or their parents/supporters) are inclined that students remain classified as such until some measure of success or completion is met. One's level of persistence through the inevitable obstacles to success will often be throttled by motivation toward whatever measure of completion on which the student is operating (Seidman, 2012). Seidman (2012) also points out that actual retention data does not always follow the generally accepted convention of higher academic preparation equals greater retention rates. In fact, there are numerous other factors that come into play even more than academic performance. Some say that college does so well at leveling the field that academic preparedness (measured by SAT/ACT scores) for

freshmen is actually a relatively small factor in predicting overall student success (Ewing-Cooper, 2013; Houser & Avila, 2013). Rather, relatively abstract factors such as participation in academic cohorts, engagement in and out of the classroom, identification with the university, connection with an administrator or faculty member, and motivation to succeed generally outweigh preparedness scales (Seidman, 2012). In *Academically Adrift*, Arum and Roksa (2011) point out that the use of standardized test scores for college placement does students a bit of a disservice. Operating as a sorting mechanism, placement scores work to put the most disadvantaged students together, perhaps reinforcing less productive learning habits. Certainly there are appropriate times for remediation. However, academic sorting too often exhibits a disturbing correlation to demographic sorting in classes. This can also work to hinder healthy study habits (Hughes & Nelson, 1991). In 2015, ACT dropped the heavily used COMPASS placement test for college admissions. A study in 2012 found that the test placed nearly a third of students into incorrect courses based on academic preparation. A spokesperson for ACT at the time explained that placement tests should be “multidimensional.” He went on to say that college admissions should consider on some level an applicant’s non-cognitive skillset into admissions and placement. The move by ACT marks a movement toward more holistic admissions considerations and supports the notion that college student success can’t be defined so simply as pass/fail (Fain, 2015). In another study, researchers examined retention in engineering students. They found through their empirical effort that commonly valued indicators such as math ability and even education levels of parents are not always a reliable predictor of student ability or tendency to stay in school. In fact, Honken and Ralson (2013) found that first-generation students from their small sample size were slightly more likely to finish their degree than those whose parents completed college. They found the same for math and science

preparedness among their sample group. Respondents reported that lack of time was almost as likely as preparedness to be the reason for dropout or transfer.

Some will argue that educating the whole student can only begin with holistic advising. Undergraduate advisers are often responsible for hundreds of students across myriad of programs and degree options. With an infinite number of potential personal situations, it can be difficult for advisers to keep up and make a personal connection with their charges. In fact, many advising offices allow simple fifteen-minute appointments with students. This certainly does not give the adviser time to engage the student or get to the root of any issues that may exist. A longer session might require an appointment, but students aren't likely to plan well enough for such. Much like we intend to educate the whole student, we must advise students on more than academic issues. Choosing courses toward degree completion is relatively objective and is becoming more easily handled by online program audit applications. Students are in the most need of support rather than help with choosing courses. Museus and Ravello (2010) saw this first hand in their student on student advising toward retention. Issues such as time management, financial budgeting, complex social circumstances, and often culture shock prove more daunting than choosing courses for most. An earlier section of this chapter covers the history of higher education and speaks to the value of educating the whole student. This approach certainly provides the specific knowledge required for a profession, but it also develops the person into a functional contributor to society (Pérez, 2012).

These issues work together to make up what we can consider a successful college student. While tangible objectives such as GPA and completion rates will continue to fuel reports, it is critical to keep in mind the value of abstract ideals mentioned here. As the notion of

holistic education continues to move toward the forefront, adult and higher education administrators will need to develop effective means of measurement and assessment.

Attrition through Dropouts and Stopouts

In academics, attrition is generally the term used to refer to a gradual loss of students over time. Operating on the directive of minimizing attrition, student affairs administrators and staff can take steps to ensure that students remain in school from one semester to the next (Winograd & Rust, 2014). One of the most effective and proven means of doing so is making sure that students have ready access to support services. Universities invest an average of about \$3,500 per student per year on the IPEDS (2014) variable “Student Services.” This is a considerable investment considering the ever-increasing size of freshmen classes at larger institutions. Considering these things, it is imperative that colleges work out effective methods of retaining these students. Assuming that continued retention eventually leads to graduation, the university may eventually count the student as a “completer.” Completers can be factored into justification for public fund requests and allocations (Phillips & Horowitz, 2013). So it is important to minimize the loss of students by various means.

Students may drop out altogether or simply stop college only to return at a later time. Certainly there are limitless individual factors that can play into why a student may not return from one semester to the next. Issues such as academic performance, substance abuse, financial strains, pressure from family or peers, burnout, and even delayed development can play a role. Ready and available student support services are proven to be helpful but may not be as effective if students are not aware of how to use them. Further, it is important that students have some contact with these support services before an issue prevents itself. That is, undergraduates need to know the name and location of counseling and/or support personnel before there is some crisis

to handle. Left to their own, the handling of a crisis may mean leaving college. Interactions with support personnel can help to stem this attrition and perhaps keep students on track for an on-time graduation (Thompson & Gregory, 2012). This concept is so critical that it motivates much of the activity within student affairs divisions. These efforts are manifested generally in the form of some first-year orientation for incoming freshmen. The programs and their requirements are varied, as are their results, but data generally suggests their value (Li, Nokes-Malach & Cheong, 2013).

Freshmen orientation programs may be criticized for the lack of academic rigor in their content, but proponents maintain that there is more at work in these sessions than a simple transfer of information (Vlamiš & Gass, 2011). Researchers suggest that the true value in these programs are the gains in student development through engagement, connection with peers, adjustment to college life, and establishment of career-long counseling and support contacts (Vlamiš & Gass, 2011). By requiring that students make contact with advisers and counselors during these earliest semesters, student services administrators can help to ensure students know where to go when there are problems. Further, these courses are helpful in making students aware of health/wellness support services, crisis support, public safety, and other critical services. Vlamiš and Gass (2011) hold that it is this gradual adjustment to changes in social and academic life that is key to retention. Certainly the content of orientation sessions is important, but academic rigor should give way to true engagement and real student development.

Research in this area is somewhat limited, however. It does not give full account to social, cultural, and technological changes that have taken place over the last two decades. Contemporary efforts are needed in this area as current generations of students grapple with complex social circumstances, entitlement, identity development issues, ever-changing

technology, unprecedented distractions, and increasing parental over involvement. These items and others will certainly continue to fuel the discussion on the value and content of freshmen orientation programs toward retention and graduation.

Change in major can certainly play a role in delayed graduation, but researchers cannot say that it contributes to dropout rates. As universities receiving Title IV funds are required to report to IPEDS their “on-time” completions (four to six years), it is important to be mindful of how public fund allocations and other trending topics steer student affairs divisions at colleges and universities. As every transition (academic major change, life event, etc.) provides a potential exit point for undergraduates, it is ever more important for student affairs professionals to be in touch and available for that population of students. Support through difficult times, academic or otherwise, is critical to the continued enrollment and retention of students.

There are other factors in play with individual students themselves. Matters such as student employment off campus, total credit hours taken, pressures from home, and residency location can play a role in resilience and retention. Off campus and/or ambitious employment opportunities for students empower them to drop out of college to pursue income faster. We know that college graduates are bound to earn as much as a million dollars more than those without 4-year degrees over a career. For many students, earnings come faster when they go straight to work. Undergraduate who find themselves in these situations are at particular risk of drop out. In addition, college graduates are less than half as likely to be unemployed (Hu & Wolniak, 2010). Not only is student engagement and connection with student affairs personnel critical to the retention and graduation of students, but at least one study found that students who were more involved and engaged with social activities during their time in college also enjoyed higher earnings after graduation. Hu and Wolniak (2010) found statistically significant increases

in earning potential among students who participated in activities such as community service, meeting with faculty members, campus involvement, meeting with other students, and even fraternity/sorority involvement. The study gives credence to the argument that student affairs efforts continue to be critical to the success to students and the university. The Hu and Wolniak (2010) effort suggests that the combination of social ability and academic mastery work together to improve one's marketability and perhaps even salary-negotiating skill.

In-Class Engagement and Interaction

Parallel to the discussion on student engagement as a method toward retention is the topic of *in-class* engagement and interaction. These are the activities that take place during class times and are generally excluded from the discussion on student development. Abu, Adera, Kamsani and Ametepee (2012) address the matter from the classroom first. The authors make the argument that many classrooms have become too large to be effective in generating true engagement and continued student development. With this, much of the accountability associated with one-on-one interaction is lost. The researchers propose that faculty may combat this lack of interaction by having students complete a short biography. This serves multiple purposes. Obviously, it can serve as an icebreaker of sorts and allow students to share their story. It also provides to the instructor some idea as to the students' writing and cognitive abilities. Even for a very large classroom, this information can be helpful in identifying students who are perhaps not on track with the rest of the class developmentally. The technique is not new (Stofferahn, 2009). Teachers have been using student writing of themselves as an engagement tool for many years. Including the mindset of retention toward graduation is a fresh concept, however. College faculty are under new pressures to help develop the whole student rather than simply teach the content of the course. Keeping student graduation and completion at

the forefront, rather than simply the course at hand, is key (Haynes, 2006). Haynes (2006) goes on to suggest that the issue becomes more critical with higher-functioning students. Those who perform well academically tend to spur faculty toward higher academic standards but not necessarily higher student development goals. As faculty and administrators continue to strive toward truly holistic education complete with rigorous academics and well-rounded cognitive/social development, it was ever more important to explore new methods and technologies for engaging students at every level.

Attrition through dropout and stopout provides a constant challenge with which college administrators must contend. Student affairs professionals will need to develop ever-changing approaches toward retaining the modern student if they are to remain competitive, efficient, marketable, and effective in contemporary college settings.

The Challenge of Diversity

At its origin, formal higher education beyond primary and secondary school deemed necessary by the state was an extreme luxury. Few students had the financial and time resources at their disposal to attend college. Webb (2006) explains that domestic responsibilities (tending to farms and families) almost always took precedence over attending college. The result was a very homogeneous student body. It consisted primarily of wealthy, white men. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the original idea behind higher education was to foster a better-rounded individual. This largely excluded specialized training outside of medical and legal fields as almost all students received the same curriculum. This worked to further reduce diversity. Almost all college students at the time were young white males simply learning more about the world in which they lived (Webb, 2006; Leake & Stodden, 2014). Diversity was not a priority or even a matter of importance for college personnel. So the challenge of fostering diversity is

relatively new, as is the understanding of its real value. Karkouti (2015) speaks to the student affairs professionals' ever changing perception of how diversity impacts college climates and attitudes. The author goes on to suggest that white culture dominates all areas of the institution. Whether it exists or not, the mere mindset of a "white culture" is enough to generate racial tensions says Karkouti (2015). These tensions in many cases are enough to foster higher attrition rates. This is especially impactful among those populations sought after to help encourage and grow diversity on campus (O'Keeffe, 2013; Bentley-Edwards & Chapman-Hilliard, 2015).

Bentley-Edwards and Chapman-Hilliard (2015) found that black students within a Historically Black College or University (HBCU) experienced less racial tension than black students at Predominantly White Institutions (PWI). Obviously the racial balance on campus comes into play here. There is more to learn from this study, however. Students at the HBCU are more likely to connect and engage with other black students than black students at the PWI. This seems to indicate that there is something within the context of the PWI that causes minorities to disconnect from students of all races, not just those that match their own. Certainly this is problematic for the student affairs personnel that understand the value of student engagement and involvement on campus. As discussed earlier, higher-risk students and those with lower GPA benefit the most from campus involvement, campus engagement, and general buy-in to the campus climate (Museus & Ravello, 2010). Colleges that are not fostering these, especially in minority populations, are doing a disservice to the group within their student population that is at the greatest risk for failure (Bentley-Edwards and Chapman-Hilliard, 2015). Given what student services professionals already know about the value of engagement and personal connection, it becomes even more apparent that student affairs divisions need to reach out to these pockets of diversity on campus. Allowed to self-segregate and disconnect from

student activities and opportunities for involvement, these students become the most likely to drop out or stop out (Campbell, 2010). This is especially true in universities with few or no minority faculty members and/or support personnel. Considering the personal connection that is vital to student retention and engagement, mentors from one's own race/background seems fundamental (Goodrich, 1978; Taylor & Miller, 2002).

Not only is higher and adult education becoming accessible for increasingly diverse populations of domestic students, international students are quickly realizing the benefits of an education in the United States. Often non-native speakers of English, international students present their own set of challenges to student affairs professionals. As the college continues to strive toward providing holistic education and engagement options for all of its students, they sometimes find that the shock of sudden immersion into a new culture for international students is too great. They often have a tendency to self-segregate into groups and clubs centered on culture and ideals familiar to them. This counters the intended effect of generating diversity on campus. Rather than experiencing the documented benefits of a diverse campus climate, pockets of culture across the university can be found creating their own, isolated, sanctuaries (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Martin & Hevel, 2014).

The complete conversation on diversity extends well beyond the observable differences in students. O'Brien (1998) suggests that experiential diversity affects students as much as race and gender. One's dedication to the program, perceptions of performance, and commitment to the status quo can impact the performance and actions of others. The author maintains that it is important that the student body be represented by a comprehensive range of abilities, backgrounds, and cultures. If the institution is to truly reach all students equally, all areas of diversity must be considered. If recruitment and selection practices focus on fostering diversity

based on thinks like religion, race, or cultural background, they are excluding those majority students that may have some unique background to contribute. After all, universities are training professionals to live and work in an increasingly multicultural society. It seems critical that students have experience working with and for the widest range of backgrounds, races, cultures, and ideals possible (Williams, 2001).

The discussion on diversity on college campuses stirs thoughts of the student body by default. Popular discussions focus on the ideal of diversity and efforts to achieve it (Luther, Seeberger, Phelan, & Simpson (2011). The reality is that a diverse faculty base is important as well (Hon, Weigold, & Chance, 1999). University professors generally vote internally for promotion and tenure. That is, one's peers decide his/her fate within the professoriate. Hon, Weigold, and Chance (1999) suggest that tendencies of self-segregation can lead to departments that are quite homogeneous. This is a deterrent to a diverse student body. Given the research on the value of student engagement with faculty and how it affects desired outcomes such as retention and graduation, it is imperative that universities demonstrate a commitment to diversity among its faculty base (Shen, 1998). The topic is certainly worthy of its own study as colleges continue to grapple with the dialogue on professor tenure, student interaction, teaching loads, and research/publication requirements.

So the real challenge of managing diversity on campus is complex and ever-changing. Understanding the value of a diverse student body, student affairs professionals are tasked with meeting the diverse set of needs that accompanies that student body. With limited time, finances and personnel resources, student services workers must find a workable balance. This all must be done while navigating the increasingly profound influence and watchful eyes of the

government and the media who seem to scrutinize and question every aspect of public expenditures.

Perceptions of the Roles of University Personnel

One key, yet relatively unexplored, factor to consider when discussing student success is the individual perceptions that student affairs personnel hold relating to their own roles and positions relative to student achievement (Stamatakos & Rogers, 1984). Bonfiglio (2000) suggests that negative perceptions regarding the “staff” member can generate tensions between faculty, students, and other employees at the institution. Traditional perceptions hold student affairs workers to a standard of service rather than counseling, advising, motivation, challenge, or engagement. Bonfiglio (2000) writes about how he was able to shift these perceptions as he took his position as Vice President of Student Life and turn it into something that was rewarding for him, productive for faculty, and helpful to students. The key to his plan was working with faculty directly. This helped to do several things. It changed the long-held negative perception held by faculty of “student services” positions at the university. It gave students a safe and approachable place to go for student services needs, which included administration, counseling, and academics. Bonfiglio realized that a certain amount of openness to the uncertainty of the target demographic (18-24 years old) was important too. Finally, his process encouraged the staff toward better attitudes about “thankless” tasks and improved overall customer service on a daily basis. It seems critical, then, that students and faculty alike see student services offices as a place of ready access to both academic and personal support (Bolton, 2005).

Interestingly, an effort to train nurses in Australia struggled with completion rates in the same way that traditional students might. West, Usher, Foster, and Stewart (2014) found that even though participants in their case study were learning in their home environment, the lack of

a structured support system promoted attrition. The learners fell victim to a lack of accountability and encouragement to persevere through difficult parts of the curriculum. The primary recommendation from the West et al. (2014) study was to implement some sort of education support personnel with the specific task of monitoring and tracking these students. The case study findings are relevant to the traditional college because they provide some insight into the nature of the student while controlling for the college environment. That is, it seems that many students who are given curricular tasks without some level of academic support or accountability are bound to fail regardless of their context. This supports the argument that student affairs personnel and their initiatives to involve/engage students are critical to the continued sustainability of the university.

Blake (2007) suggests the following:

Responsive staff will recognize they do more teaching in their offices, in the residence halls, and in the student unions than they ever realized. Even a discussion with a student about a professor or course can be turned into a teaching experience if it consciously seen as raising the student's academic performance and the amount of time spent on learning (p. 59).

Blake (2007) goes on to indicate that student services, done correctly, require a shift in thinking. The profession is much more than handling student administration. Certainly items such as registration, fee payment, parking services, residence handling, disciplinary committees, and other day-to-day activities are part of the job. Also part of the job is ensuring continued student development and learning. Two areas in which individuals who work in student affairs can continue to improve are becoming professionals and thinking creatively.

Becoming professional just means coming to an understanding that one is working in direct personal contact with the most impressionable population at a college or university. The interactions that these students have with student affairs workers shape not only their own growth but also their perception of the university itself. Blake (2007) holds that it is critical for these workers to accept the responsibility of performing in a professional and academic manner in every interaction with students and co-workers. Administration and staff must take advantage of opportunities to go beyond simple student service. Every encounter between students and college employees is an opportunity for learning. Seizing those opportunities is the role of the effective student affairs professional.

There are many things that occur on college and university campuses outside the classroom and even outside normal working hours. Residential campuses take responsibility for students during all hours of the day. They also take responsibility for students far beyond learning outcomes specified in course syllabi. With these increased responsibilities (housing, laundry, police, parking, conduct, compliance, curfews, etc.) comes a great deal of opportunity for students to have some interaction or encounter with student services workers that either encourages or discourages college completion. Dreher (2010) outlines his experience as a residence monitor and how student experiences in residence halls can contribute to their cognitive and social development. Distracting or taxing leisure activities can affect academic performance when not kept in check. The responsibility and role of the student affairs professional here has never been clearly defined, however (Dreher, 2010). It has been suggested that the notion of student engagement outside the classroom falls to faculty even in residential life. McCluskey-Titus (2005) indicates that involving faculty in all aspects of student growth, learning, and development is critical toward the ultimate goals of retention and graduation, but

Browne, Headworth, and Saum (2009) hold that faculty are much opposed to the notion of getting involved in the personal affairs and extracurricular activities of undergraduate students. There is a separation of sorts between academics and non-academics. McCluskey-Titus (2005) suggests that an integration of the two is important and even necessary. One of the biggest hurdles to overcome here is not the disconnect between students and faculty. Those groups are already working together and have functional relationships in one way or another. The biggest hindrance to faculty integration into non-academics is the residential life staff and professionals. This group has been largely separated from academics and a shift in thinking is needed if they are to work with faculty on collaborative efforts. These efforts may get the students involved in residential cleanup and maintenance projects as part of a course or practicum requirement. Efforts may include having student life professionals host some seminars on residency, housing, administrative procedures, architecture design, dining logistics, or transportation. There is a wealth of learning and engagement opportunity on residential college campuses of which faculty have only begun to take advantage. Again, a shift in thinking is required to make full use of these options as factors toward retention and graduation of undergraduate students.

Regardless of where one falls within various hierarchies and bureaucracies, perceptions of roles and self-worth as an motivator toward graduation and retention are key. Individuals need to understand that student affairs divisions are generally a system of workers on all levels with each having a part to play in continued student development. From high-level decision making to daily administration, each interaction with students is an opportunity to either inhibit or foster healthy/productive habits, attitudes, perceptions, and goals. Nichols (2010) indicates that it is notoriously difficult to pinpoint the reasons for college dropout and suggests that student perceptions of available support services play a role. Improving and maintaining the perceptions

of student affairs professionals and those of students will continue to be a challenge for student development offices in colleges and universities.

Relevant Theory Models

Holistic education theory suggests that a complete set of student development objectives be integrated into academic programs. This may include spiritual ideals along with health/wellness, political, social, cognitive, problems solving, and cultural wellbeing. Keller (2011) points out that the trouble here is that changes are required throughout the education system for holistic education to work. The ideal is more complicated than mandating a curriculum for teachers to follow. Further, Purpel (1992) suggests that teachers charged with providing holistic education to students tend to give their individual versions of the approach. They may inadvertently focus on areas such as spirituality or politics that they deem to be more necessary or in greater need while overlooking other areas. Put simply, holistic pedagogy requires wider structural change (Purpel, 1992). We cannot simply require holistic education in the classroom without implementing change within administration first. If we consider education on a continuum, true holistic education theory would certainly be an extreme ideal. It is relevant here as student affairs professionals, faculty, and administrators search for the most effective balance of academic rigor and thorough student development.

Human Capital Theory views people as resources or even commodities. The view tends to view individual's expendable, tradable, and even inhuman. Considering the sheer volume of college students, faculty, staff, and administrators it can be understood how quantity sometimes overrides quality (Friedman, 2007). Certainly there are some that subscribe to the Human Capital Theory in regards to student services. They may suggest that the students they are called to serve are little more than customers to be processed. Difficult cases are allowed to "fall

through the cracks” in these cases (Friedman, 2007). The Friedman piece goes on to explain that rapid advances in technology over the last decade have allowed businesses of all types (universities included) to reach far greater numbers of students. In The World is Flat, Friedman (2007) outlines how this continued trend would allow most businesses accept higher tolerances in quality control knowing that the losses were made up in pure quantity. In fact, we see this happening through the mass global imports of products to the United States. There is a paradox, however, when the model is applied to education. With phrases like “No Child Left Behind” dominating conversations on general education, it becomes increasingly difficult to work within some acceptable measure of student attrition. Student affairs offices need to at least appear as if they are striving toward 100% retention. Again, special and non-standard cases make this extremely difficult. This is often reinforced when third party groups survey universities and post-graduation/retention rates on web pages with titles such as “10 Colleges where Freshmen Like to Come Back.” Over half of the schools in this particular piece by Delece Smith-Barrow (2015) boast a retention rate over 98%. Surely they are reaching greater numbers of students, but they must also be retaining greater numbers of students. The average from the total sample in the Smith-Barrow (2015) piece was 75%.

Perez, Cromley, and Kaplan (2014) indicate that student buy-in to expectancy value theory contributes to their tendency to be retained or lost during their earliest years as an undergraduate. Their empirical work suggests that undergraduate students are constantly making conscience and subconscious decisions regarding the values of their current situations. Values of items such as perceived worth, time expenditures, financial expenditures, social interactions, academic achievement, and student development come together to motivate an individual to make decisions to either continue with the current situation and path or perhaps look for an

alternate path (dropout). Considering this, it is increasingly important that there is also buy-in from the student services staff and administrators. They must take opportunities to reinforce the value of college, the return on the investment, and the overall benefits to completing the degree. When this is lost to the student, motivation to continue can suffer. This is especially true during times of stress or struggle according to O'Neill & Thomson (2013).

One idea on how students are best retained approaches the issue from the perspective of student engagement (Quaye & Harper, 2014). Specifically, it suggests that Adult Learning Theory and Socialization Theory works in combination with each other. That is, we must meet the needs of the adult learner. Specifically, with freshmen, we must foster problem-solving skills, independence, time management, schedule adjustments, study-skills, accountability, responsibility and all of the things typically associated with a successful academic. This must be done, however, without neglecting the broadened social horizons new students are bound to encounter. Quaye and Harper (2014) suggest that this stage of development is key. In addition to the good habits acquired through Adult Learning Theory, it is important for students to continue to learn how to manage relationships make distinctions between healthy and unhealthy relationships while continue to learn more about their role/responsibilities in various social situations.

Rodgers (1990, p. 27) describes student development as “the ways that a student grows, progresses, or increases his or her developmental capabilities as a result of enrollment in an institution of higher education.” It has been established that there is much more going on with college and universities than what happens in the classroom. Student Development Theory (Garner, 2009) holds that there is a transition point called the “Early Adult Transition” that occurs between the ages of 17 and 22 years old. This critical point encompasses the time when

an individual transitions from adolescence to early adulthood. Life-long decisions are often made at this point. When paired with the new experiences of on-campus life, unprecedented freedom, and increased responsibilities, this crucial time in a person's development that their support often falls directly to the student affairs professionals. It is during these four critical years that students will solidify things such as their social, racial, and gender identities, career paths, and psychosocial skillset. It is important that these those who find themselves in contact with students in such a volatile juncture be equipped to foster healthy and productive decision-making skills. Other skills that undergraduates must quickly acquire include managing finances, mature relationships, and emotions. Students must develop and demonstrate integrity, purpose, autonomy, and identity. This is in addition to their academic requirements, reduced accountability. Research indicates that providing ready access to strong support systems for students during this time is absolutely critical to their success and continued enrollment in college (Arum & Roska, 2011; Astin, 1984; Garner, 2009).

Student Services Expenditure Categories

While student services and student affairs as ideals may seem a bit abstract, specific attention to student support areas can yield benefits for students. This specific attention works to more clearly identify the intentions of student affairs personnel by outlining overall goals, intermediate objectives, plans for achievement, and measurement of success. In fact, such approaches are effective in improving retention rates of first-year students (Intermediate Institutional Impacts, 2013). The Intermediate Institutional Impact (2013) report indicates great value in mandatory first-year student success programs in which connections are made, identity is developed, deficiencies in helpful habits are identified, and the student is made aware of support services on campus. Further, improved resource allocation has allowed student services

personnel to cross-train their staff and create one-stop options for students in need of assistance. That is, students need not visit individual offices or make separate calls for matters concerning financial aid, registration, general advising, and admissions. A cross-trained staff person, or a competent student worker even, can assist a student for all of these needs. This obviously can help the student to feel that the staff person has an interest in their success (Intermediate Institutional Impacts, 2013). Conversely, many universities have isolated departments for areas such as financial aid, admissions, registration, etc. Though certainly would be of greater expense to fully train a division of staff people in this way, empirical evidence and real-world case studies suggest the true value in demonstrating commitment to student success in this way (Intermediate Institutional Impact, 2013).

The Future of Student Services as a Profession

It can be difficult to speculate on the future directions of student affairs. The field is so greatly impacted by issues already talked about in this chapter. Certainly emerging issues began to draw on time, energy, and financial resources as well. Current trends, however, do provide some insight on what student services professionals can expect to see.

Technology will surely continue to be a significant factor. The next generations of student affairs workers, faculty, students, and administrators will have to be willing/able to adapt to an ever-changing technological landscape. In decades past, technology evolved slowly enough that a worker's career was shorter than the current trend in technology. Modern advances come so quickly, though, that student services workers will have to be able to learn methods that may have not been considered previously (Barbatis, 2014). Technology will require a shift in thinking much like the introduction of cellular telephones to the classroom has.

Students have the ability to communicate like never before. An effective student affairs office works to stay ahead of this curve.

Achieving diversity has proven to be a very abstract goal indeed for student affairs personnel. Looking forward, campuses will continue to become more diverse not only in traditionally considered forms of diversity such as race, culture, and religion, but student experiences as well. A diverse body of faculty and student affairs personnel was required as well. This is more difficult than simple recruiting as it ties into a complex web of human resources considerations. Given the value of a diverse climate on campus, it's a topic that cannot be overlooked (Piercy et al., 2005).

Perhaps one of the most uncertain areas to consider is the future role of parents/guardians. The notion of *en loco parentis* is all but depleted. Contemporary parents are more involved than ever in their children's affairs. This can make it harder for students to truly experience new ideas as they are so tightly tethered to the culture/societal norms that they have been used to. Further complicating the issue, parents concern themselves with logistical items such as registration, fee payment, advising, choice of major, personal finances, and engagement activities that some say are a critical part of the student's learning and development after high school (Pitts, 1980). Pitts' (1980) contribution to the *NASPA Journal* reaches back over two decades. Even at that point it was understood that the charge of student affairs professionals was to work toward developing the whole student. Technology has allowed parents to stay more "connected" than ever. Further, the entitlement of the millennial generation has pulled parents into disputes between the school and students. The result is a generation of students that lacks problem-solving and critical thinking skills (Thompson & Gregory, 2012).

Finally, laws and guidelines surrounding areas like Greek life and student activities are certain to shift. As societal norms demand increased accountability, student affairs workers will have to be able to develop new ways to meet legal requirements while continuing to serve the students to which they are called. State and federal oversight will likely continue to increase as the allocations of funds remains a topic for debate. News outlets and other forms of media make college operations more transparent than ever. For this, administrators will need to be ever mindful of how their departments are presented.

These and other areas will present both challenges and opportunities for improved student support. It seems that the crux of the argument surrounding the future of the student services profession is that an increased degree of flexibility was required on all levels (Herdlein, 2004).

Chapter Summary

The philosopher and poet Algernon Swinburn once stated, “All our past proclaims our future.” Certainly this is true for the college undergraduate. Their experiences through these critical years managed by the student affairs professional are sure to shape the rest of their lives. It is critical for the success of the student and the success of the university that the time and other resources spent together are spent wisely. From contemporary issues and technology to long-held theory models and approaches to pedagogy, it is ever more important for student affairs administrators, faculty, staff, and college administration to be mindful of the myriad factors that influence student learning and student development. The constantly changing list of issues are the tools with which students and student advocates must work to achieve even more abstract goals and ideals. Ultimately, it falls to the student to make the best use of the available skillset and toolset to achieve his/her own version of success. It is the role of the college employee to ensure that the student has ready access to these skills and tools.

Hot topics such as public funding, completion, diversity, and inclusion will certainly fuel conversations surrounding adult and higher education for generations to come. Certainly other pressing and controversial new ideals will become relevant as well. As technology continues to dictate what we are capable of doing, it will also dictate what we are responsible for monitoring. It might be said that outlets such as Facebook and Twitter are relatively mild compared with what the Zuckerbergs of the world have yet to devise. Younger generations will force further integration of technology/media into the college experience. Considering the uncertainty of these things, it is ever more critical that student affairs administrators be mindful of the future without forgetting what we've learned in the past. This chapter has explored numerous studies on the value of student services personnel and their interactions with students. There is limited information, however, on how resources are allocated most effectively. This study will examine the most and least efficient expenditures of student services offices toward the goals of retention and graduation.

Chapter III

Methods

The charge of student affairs services in higher education has long been two-fold (Seifert & Burrow, 2013). The first charge calls them to administer the daily logistics of handling relatively mundane tasks such as registering students for classes and managing advising. The increased use of technology over the last twenty years has reduced administrative pressures of these objective tasks as students are generally able to serve themselves through the use of the Internet (Shimoni, Barrington, Wilde & Henwood, 2013). This reduction in administrative workload allows for greater emphasis on the second charge to student affairs educator, which is student development.

Relatively abstract ideals such as engagement, developmental stages, general wellness, student satisfaction, and academic success have been thrust to the forefront of student affairs divisions (Seifert & Burrow, 2013). Meeting, measuring, and maintaining *these* goals amidst budget cuts and increased pressures to graduate students strains budgets and nerves. Student services offices must work to find efficient and effective combinations of practices to meet the needs of students. This study identified perceptions of employees at some of the most and least effective student affairs offices among high research institutions.

Rhatigan (2000) describes the situation plainly: “Practitioners do not enjoy the luxury of certainty. It is profoundly true that student affairs administrators must often proceed without knowing exactly what they are doing. We either act or step aside. This requires judgment and faith, the willingness to be vulnerable and to take risks” (p. 22). The uncertainty of student affairs work that Rhatigan comments on prompted this present study as it seeks to understand

more about how some institutions do not follow the generally positive relationship between student services spending and graduation/retention. Empirical data indicate that institutions that place greater emphasis on student engagement typically enjoy above average graduation and retention rates (IPEDS; Webber & Ehrenberg, 2010). Interestingly, Webber and Ehrenberg (2010) report that the correlation between student engagement and graduation gets stronger in colleges with higher numbers of Pell Grant recipients. James, Pate, Leech, Brockmeier, and Dees (2011) go on to suggest that student services allocations have greater impact on student success variables than more logical budget items such as instructional services, media, and even faculty salaries. Reasons for this may include increased availability of support and advising staff along with a broad spectrum of opportunities for students to get involved and invested in the school beyond their classwork. As students continue to develop socially and cognitively, the opportunity to identify with a faculty member, staff person, or even the school's brand has potential to affect their likelihood to return to classes from one semester to the next (Huesman, Brown, Lee, Kellogg & Radcliffe, 2014; Kalsbeek, 2013; Marsee & Davies-Wilson, 2014). This study explored colleges whose IPEDS data do not follow the general assumption that higher student services spending correlates with greater retention/graduation.

Statement of the Research Problem

Considering the continued scrutiny of co-curricular activities on college campuses, it is critical that institutions be able to demonstrate the effectiveness of such endeavors (James et al., 2011). Post-secondary education is facing unprecedented pressures to cut costs while maintaining competitive/affordable tuition rates and outcomes. Items such as student services do not directly generate funds for the institution. Therefore, it is incumbent upon student affairs professionals to be able to justify their efforts, personnel, allocations, and spending. This can be

done through the demonstration of effective and efficient practices in student affairs offices as mechanisms toward measurable outcomes such as graduation and retention.

The existence of these encumbrances regarding the most effective means of retaining students forms the basis for the need of this study. With the resources that go into student development areas, professionals must be able to indicate the value of their efforts. This study contributes to the body of knowledge on what makes student services efforts successful while building on the current epistemology of best practices in student affairs.

This first section has served to provide an overview of the dissertation that follows. Existing IPEDS (2014) data were used to target universities of interest. To maintain a balance of rigor and practical volume of data, student affairs professionals at no more than twelve specific colleges were prompted to complete an online survey through email invitation. Their quantitative and open-ended responses were analyzed in search of themes and trends. This empirical examination was used to address the identified research problem.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify perceptions at specific colleges that represent effectiveness or ineffectiveness toward retaining and graduating students. The study prompted student affairs professionals from identified colleges to provide feedback on why/how their college falls as an outlier in an examination of how student services spending relates to desired outcomes such as graduation and retention. The primary goal of the study is to provide answers to the research questions and provide information that may allow student services divisions to operate more effectively and efficiently.

Research Questions

The research questions listed below were used for this study:

1. What is the relationship between student services activities and student success outcomes in colleges that are spending well above or below the national average on their student affairs offices?
2. What are the perceptions of the role of student services among student affairs professionals in colleges that exhibit above/below average retention rates?
3. What factors provide the most significant contribution to desired outcomes such as retention in colleges that spend above/below the average amount on student services efforts?
4. What differences exist between the perceptions of student affairs professionals and college administrators regarding student services expenditures at targeted schools?

Research Design

This study focuses on examining the perceptions of student affairs personnel in specific colleges and universities. The colleges and universities were identified through an examination of existing Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) data. These data are self-reported to the United States Department of Education on an annual basis by schools receiving Title IV funding (IPEDS, 2015). As almost all schools enroll students through the government financial aid system, the IPEDS data are comprehensive and suitable for the purposes of this study. Data elements from IPEDS such as student services spending and graduation/retention rates were analyzed to identify no more than twelve specific schools as outliers. These schools exhibit student services spending patterns that are not in alignment with their expected outcomes regarding graduation/retention of students. The second portion of the study examined those

specific schools through a survey instrument. Findings from the initial analysis of IPEDS data were only be used to identify targets for the survey portion of the study. Responses and data from the survey portion were analyzed for trends and themes. This online survey was sent to student services professionals at targeted universities to collect data on activities and perceptions within their student affairs divisions. The survey itself is described in the following section. Four groups were identified. These were organized by their spending habits and their graduation/retention rates. The groups were labeled throughout this study according to the following format: High spending and high graduation (high/high), High spending and low graduation (high/low), low spending and high graduation (low/high), finally low spending and low graduation (low/low).

The broad category for “Student Services” in IPEDS (2014) covers a range of expenditures. These are described as expenses relating “activities whose primary purpose is to contribute to students' emotional and physical well-being and to their intellectual, cultural, and social development outside the context of the formal instructional program.” Such activities may include student activities, recreation, cultural events, student newspapers, intramural athletics, student organizations, supplemental instruction outside the normal academic program (remedial instruction for example), career guidance, counseling, financial aid administration, and student records. IPEDS provides a total for all of these categories and labeled “Student Services.” The current value for this variable was collected from the IPEDS data search tool for the purposes of this study.

Instrumentation and Validation

The second portion of this study makes use of an online survey instrument developed and distributed through Qualtrics. Qualtrics is a robust utility widely used in education for the

generation, distribution, processing, and storage of survey data. The survey instrument consisted of 25 questions spread over five sections. No existing instrument for the topic could be located for this study. For this reason, a simple online questionnaire was generated according to the guidelines specified by Hall (2008). The instrument began with a relatively standard information sheet outlining the respondent's protections under the Institutional Review Board. As recommended by Hall (2008), the tool was kept as short as possible and contains both pre-coded and open-ended response types. This scaled instrument operates on a five-point Likert scale. The five-point scale includes the following responses: 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=undecided, 4=agree, and 5=strongly agree. The first three sections made use of this scale with the fourth section being open-ended. A full list of survey items can be found in Appendix A at the end of this document.

Participants were asked to choose their role from a list of predefined options. They were not given the opportunity to submit their specific job title. Identifiable information from participants was not collected. The section on demographics also asked participants to choose their university from a drop-down list of institutions. With this, participants were able to see the other participating institutions. No information was shared regarding the spending or graduation groups, however.

Since the survey instrument was not adopted from a prior study or previously validated, a two-step validation/improvement process was deemed necessary. The first step included expert review. Upper-administration student affairs professionals located through the NASPA member database were contacted for feedback on the survey instrument. This expert review was completed by twelve officers ranging from associate deans to provosts of student affairs in schools across the United States. Their feedback helped to shape questions, eliminate repetitive

items, hone wordings, and generally shorten the survey to the form that is represented here.

After this initial expert review, a pilot study was completed.

The pilot study examined six schools identified from the initial survey of IPEDS data to have very similar characteristics with each other. They have similar student body sizes, spending per student, and graduation/retention rates. The goal was to present the survey to high-ranking officials in these schools with the expectancy that variance for question items would be low. Indeed, this was the case. With few exceptions, standard deviation and variance for the pilot study was minimal. IRB approval was not attained for the pilot study. Therefore, those data are not published here.

Participants

The purpose of this study is to identify perceptions at four-year universities that allow schools to counter the logical trend of graduation/retention. Because of this, certain categories of schools were excluded from the onset. Data from the publicly available IPEDS repository were used for the initial scan. The online IPEDS search tool allows users to limit their searches to data from public 4-year institutions. Community colleges and private colleges were excluded, as their student populations tend to exhibit different traits than those in traditional four-year schools (Lester, Leonard, & Mathias, 2013).

With thousands of colleges and universities making up the initial sample, it is likely that more than twelve met the criteria for the targeted survey. These criteria have been identified as graduation/retention rates well above or below the mean while maintaining student services spending rates within one standard deviation of the mean. The twelve schools that show the highest and/or lowest inverse correlation between student services spending and graduation/retention rates were selected to participate in the follow-up survey.

In some cases, the original contacts from the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) membership directory were not available or simply did not respond to the call for participation. In these cases, alternate upper-administrators within those same schools were contacted. After an initial contact and a single “friendly reminder,” an alternate participant was contacted at non-responding institutions. In all cases, no more than two of these cycles were required to get participation from each school.

Data Collection and Procedures

Data for the initial scan is publicly available through the IPEDS web site. It is readily available without prior approval. The resulting list of targeted universities were located in the NASPA membership directory. Administrators and student services professionals from these schools were contacted through a series of invitation emails. A total of 130 people responded to the survey. Roughly half of the responses were from administrators while the others were from advisors and clerical employees. Many respondents abandoned the survey and left it incomplete once they reached the open-ended response prompts. All of them did complete the Likert ratings portions, though. The open-ended responses ranged from single-word answers to full paragraphs providing in-depth reflection on the workings of the university. Close to 670 requests for participation were spread evenly over the 12 target schools. The response rate was approximately 19.5%.

Data Analysis

The survey data were collected and coded for input into Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) version 22.0. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed on the data from Section I to determine the frequency at which student services personnel interact with students on the telephone, face to face, through email, or some other means. As Sections II & III

aim to gather perceptions of extra-curricular or co-curricular functions, a rating scale has been developed. Likert ratings for each of the items returned data that can be imported to SPSS. One-way ANOVA was used here to identify trends and differences in responses. Frequency counts and average distributions from this section help to assemble a broad picture of how student services personnel view their own role as it relates to student success. For some sections, a multivariate analysis may be used to identify any areas in which significant variance exists between groups of schools and/or groups of role responsibilities among respondents. Section V contained open-ended and text-based response options that allowed participants to contribute their perceptions on the student affairs profession along with their own thoughts/ideals. Therefore, SPSS was not used to analyze data collected from Section V of the survey. Rather, these data were coded and organized into themes and trends using another analysis packaged called Atlas.TI. The demographic section at the beginning of the survey instrument was used to possibly identify any correlations that exist between data points, source schools, and respondent role.

Summary

This chapter presented the purpose of the study and research questions used to guide the study. In addition, it discussed the participants, instrumentation, and data collection procedures. Participants of the study consisted of student services personnel at colleges and universities exhibiting target traits regarding student services spending and desired outcomes such as graduation and retention. Study participants were obtained from the IPEDS database and then emailed an information letter and invitation to participate. A survey that consists of 25 questions separated into five sections was used for this study. Data collection is in compliance with the research guidelines as set by Auburn University Institutional Research Board (IRB). The

validation of this instrument was ensured by a two-part process. Expert review allowed for the feedback and input of student affairs professionals from major universities across the United States. The second part of the validation process was a pilot study. The data from the full study was coded using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22. The IRB approval/information letter is available in Appendix A of this document.

Chapter IV

Findings

The charge of student affairs services in higher education has long been two-fold (Seifert & Burrow, 2013). The first charge calls them to administer the daily logistics of handling relatively mundane tasks such as registering students for classes and managing advising. The increased use of technology over the last twenty years has reduced administrative pressures of these objective tasks as students are generally able to serve themselves through the use of the Internet (Shimoni, Barrington, Wilde & Henwood, 2013). This reduction in administrative workload allows for greater emphasis on the second charge to student affairs educator, which is student development.

Relatively abstract ideals such as engagement, developmental stages, general wellness, student satisfaction, and academic success have been thrust to the forefront of student affairs divisions (Seifert & Burrow, 2013). Meeting, measuring, and maintaining *these* goals amidst budget cuts and increased pressures to graduate students strains budgets and nerves. Student services offices must work to find efficient and effective combinations of practices to meet the needs of students. This study identified perceptions of employees at some of the most and least effective student affairs offices among high research institutions.

Rhatigan (2000) describes the situation plainly: “Practitioners do not enjoy the luxury of certainty. It is profoundly true that student affairs administrators must often proceed without knowing exactly what they are doing. We either act or step aside. This requires judgment and faith, the willingness to be vulnerable and to take risks” (p. 22). The uncertainty of student affairs work that Rhatigan comments on prompted this present study as it seeks to understand

more about how some institutions do not follow the generally positive relationship between student services spending and graduation/retention. Empirical data indicate that institutions that place greater emphasis on student engagement typically enjoy above average graduation and retention rates (IPEDS; Webber & Ehrenberg, 2010). Interestingly, Webber and Ehrenberg (2010) report that the correlation between student engagement and graduation gets stronger in colleges with higher numbers of Pell Grant recipients. James, Pate, Leech, Brockmeier, and Dees (2011) go on to suggest that student services allocations have greater impact on student success variables than more logical budget items such as instructional services, media, and even faculty salaries. Reasons for this may include increased availability of support and advising staff along with a broad spectrum of opportunities for students to get involved and invested in the school beyond their classwork. As students continue to develop socially and cognitively, the opportunity to identify with a faculty member, staff person, or even the school's brand has potential to affect their likelihood to return to classes from one semester to the next (Huesman, Brown, Lee, Kellogg & Radcliffe, 2014; Kalsbeek, 2013; Marsee & Davies-Wilson, 2014). This study explored colleges whose IPEDS data do not follow the general assumption that higher student services spending correlates with greater retention/graduation.

Statement of the Research Problem

Considering the continued scrutiny of co-curricular activities on college campuses, it is critical that institutions be able to demonstrate the effectiveness of such endeavors (James et al., 2011). Post-secondary education is facing unprecedented pressures to cut costs while maintaining competitive/affordable tuition rates and outcomes. Items such as student services do not directly generate funds for the institution. Therefore, it is incumbent upon student affairs professionals to be able to justify their efforts, personnel, allocations, and spending. This can be

done through the demonstration of effective and efficient practices in student affairs offices as mechanisms toward measurable outcomes such as graduation and retention.

The existence of these encumbrances regarding the most effective means of retaining students forms the basis for the need of this study. With the resources that go into student development areas, professionals must be able to indicate the value of their efforts. This study contributes to the body of knowledge on what makes student services efforts successful while building on the current epistemology of best practices in student affairs.

This first section has served to provide an overview of the dissertation that follows. Existing IPEDS (2014) data were used to target universities of interest. To maintain a balance of rigor and practical volume of data, student affairs professionals at no more than twelve specific colleges were prompted to complete an online survey through email invitation. Their quantitative and open-ended responses were analyzed in search of themes and trends. This empirical examination was used to address the identified research problem.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify perceptions at specific colleges that represent effectiveness or ineffectiveness toward retaining and graduating students. The study prompted student affairs professionals from identified colleges to provide feedback on why/how their college falls as an outlier in an examination of how student services spending relates to desired outcomes such as graduation and retention. The primary goal of the study is to provide answers to the research questions and provide information that may allow student services divisions to operate more effectively and efficiently.

Research Questions

The research questions listed below were used for this study:

1. What is the relationship between student services activities and student success outcomes in colleges that are spending well above or below the national average on their student affairs offices?
2. What are the perceptions of the role of student services among student affairs professionals in colleges that exhibit above/below average retention rates?
3. What factors provide the most significant contribution to desired outcomes such as retention in colleges that spend above/below the average amount on student services efforts?
4. What differences exist between the perceptions of student affairs professionals and college administrators regarding student services expenditures at targeted schools?

Student Services and Retention/Graduation

Based on data collected in the initial portion (Phase I) of the study through IPEDS, it can be said that graduation and retention rates generally show a positive correlation to student services spending. That is, not considering schools chosen for this study, additional dollars spent on contributors to the “student services” variable in IPEDS are generally accompanied by increased graduation/retention. This correlation does not implicate causation necessarily but it can be expected that additional expenditures on retention efforts in student services offices generates some sort of positive result. While this study examined those that did not follow this trend, it is important here to establish the trend from the larger dataset.

In the 68 “high research” schools from the original IPEDS (2014) sample, there was an average retention rate of 79% with a standard deviation of just 8.6%. There was a general

positive correlation between values reported to IPEDS for “student services” and reported graduation/retention rates.

Participant Demographics

The initial scan of NASPA membership provided email addresses of a single administrator from each school. Additional email addresses were garnered through online directories of each school. The response rate was typical of such efforts. Of the 664 people contacted, 130 (19.5%) completed the survey. The table below shows the breakdown of responses from each school. Note that 10 responses did not choose a school as part of their submission. These responses were excluded from analysis where school group was relevant.

Table 1: Participant Response Rate

Answer	Response	%
University of California San Diego	10	8%
University of California Davis	9	8%
University of California Berkeley	7	6%
University of Alabama at Birmingham	6	5%
University of Illinois at Chicago	9	8%
University of Hawaii at Manoa	10	8%
Virginia Polytechnic Institute	11	9%
University of Florida	10	8%
Purdue University	12	10%
University of Nebraska Lincoln	14	12%
University of South Florida	10	8%
Virginia Commonwealth University	7	6%
Other	5	4%
Total	120	100%

There were 83 (65%) female responses and 43 (34%) male responses. The survey asked respondents to indicate their education level and the majority (54%) held master’s degrees though several (28%) held doctoral degrees. The remaining (21%) held high school, associate’s or bachelor’s degrees. Almost all (94%) of participants were full-time permanent employees.

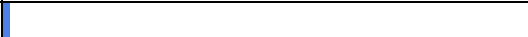



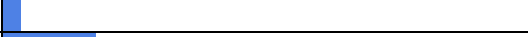
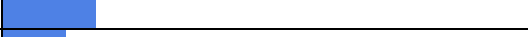
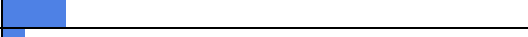
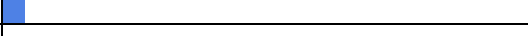
Respondents covered a range of years of employment with their universities. Data are in the table below.

Table 2: Respondent Employment Range

Answer		Response	%
0-2 Years		24	19%
2-5 Years		27	21%
5-10 Years		18	14%
10-15 Years		21	17%
15-20 Years		15	12%
20-25 Years		8	6%
25+ Years		14	11%
Total		127	100%

The demographics section of the instrument asked participants to report on their role within the institution. These data were used to create secondary groups and can be found in the following table.

Table 3: Respondent Role Range

Answer		Response	%
Janitorial		0	0%
Maintenance/Facilities		0	0%
Clerical		2	2%
Administrative Assistant		7	6%
Advising/Support		53	42%
Department Head/Chair		12	9%
Faculty/Professor		5	4%
Middle Administration		25	20%
Upper Administration		17	13%
Other		6	5%
Total		127	100%

These smaller groups of roles were aggregated into two larger groups. The first group is considered administrators and comprised of Department Head/Chair, Middle Administration, and Upper Administration from the survey options. The second group is considered professionals

and is made up of the Clerical, Administrative Assistant, and Advising/Support options. The Faculty/Professor and Other options were excluded in any analysis that grouped by respondent role.

Findings

PHASE 1.

The initial analysis of IPEDS (2014) data revealed approximately 2000 public degree-granting institutions receiving public funds. Of that large group, 512 had complete data for the 2014 variables of student services (reported as a dollar amount), graduation, retention, and full-time enrollment. The graduation and retention variables for the 512 participating schools were aggregated to a single value. This created an overall retention/graduation score by which schools could be sorted. The student services spending figure was divided by the full-time enrollment (FTE) figure to provide a per-student spending value. The per-student spending was then divided by the aggregated score of graduation and retention to create an efficiency ratio. These data are reported in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Initial Investigation into IPEDS Data (2014)

<i>Category</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Full-Time Enrollment	12,381	10,801
Graduation	49.01%	17.18%
Retention	75.36%	10.36%
Student Services Spending	\$22,520,620	\$22,783,350
Per-Student Spending	\$2,413	\$1,185

N=512

Note the high standard deviation on FTE and student services spending. This is due in part to the extreme range of values in these variables. The range on FTE was between approximately 1,000 students and 60,000 students. The range on student services spending was between \$502 and \$6,864 per student.

Dividing an individual school’s graduation/retention average by its spending per student yielded an efficiency ratio. The range on this ratio was between 6.31 and 135.08. A complete list of these calculations and their associated universities is available in Appendix C. The schools with high efficiency have lower ratios. Generally, higher spending on student services correlates with improved graduation/retention rates (IPEDS, 2014). Outliers, exist on the tails of the normal distribution that exhibit either very high or very low graduation/retention efficiently. These 12 outliers were identified through Phase I of the project to participate in Phase 2.

Student affairs professionals and administrators from the 12 schools were contacted with an invitation to participate in the study. A copy of the IRB information letter was provided at that time through email attachment (see Appendix B). Schools were aware through the demographic sections of the other schools being contacted though participants were sent individual emails. They did not have access to the other participants’ email addresses. Responses were not matched to email addresses and identifiable information was not collected. Finally, participants were not aware of the nature of the study and plans to examine outlying schools. Participants may have been inherently aware of their own graduation and spending trends but such data were not shared or suggested as part of the study.

Table 5: High Spending/High Graduation (HH)

School	Spending Per FTE	Graduation Rate
University of California – San Diego	\$4,451	95%

University of California – Davis	\$5,125	93%
University of California – Berkeley	\$6,864	96%

Table 6: High Spending/Low Graduation (HL)

School	Spending Per FTE	Graduation Rate
University of Alabama at Birmingham	\$3,482	48%
University of Illinois at Chicago	\$3,690	58%
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa	\$4,266	56%

Table 7: Low Spending/High Graduation (LH)

School	Spending Per FTE	Graduation Rate
Virginia Polytechnic Inst. and State University	\$700	93%
University of Florida	\$1,217	96%
Purdue University – Main Campus	\$1,294	56%

Table 8: Low Spending/Low Graduation (LL)

School	Spending Per FTE	Graduation Rate
University of Nebraska – Lincoln	\$955	65%
University of South Florida – Main Campus	\$1,291	57%
Virginia Commonwealth University	\$1,294	56%

PHASE 2.

A deeper look into specific outliers identified from the initial phase revealed

characteristics of behaviors at those schools. Statistics from the Likert ratings appear at first to be flat and inconclusive. Analysis through SPSS reveals significant variance in several areas. The following sections examine these items as they are relevant to the research questions for this study. Respondents also had the opportunity to contribute to their submissions through three open-ended response items making up Section V of the survey.

Responses from the open-ended Section V of the survey were grouped in two ways. First the comments were grouped by school. There were three questions in Section V and, like the Likert sections, themes emerged. Among schools that fell into the low graduation groups, many respondents praised their school's online advising tools. These tools relieve some of the pressures of scheduling and appointments by allowing students to monitor their progress on their own. These tools present a significant cost savings to the university over hiring additional advisors, but releasing students from required face-to-face meetings seems to come with unwanted side effects including reduced accountability general disconnection between students and staff.

The research questions were addressed in a later section but there are trends in the Likert data that should be described here. Schools from the low spending/high graduation group were 12.5% *less* likely to agree that their offices should provide more resources to student affairs offices to in order to be helpful to students. This perhaps is an indicator that the schools from the low spending/high graduation group have adapted to be more effective with less allocation. They do not seem to feel that they need additional resources to be more productive. This theme continued through the Likert data as respondents from low-spending schools consistently agree less than high-spending schools that additional resources would make them more effective. In the open-ended comments, low-spending schools suggest that initiatives that diminish face-to-

face interactions such as online advising and other self-service options for students are more likely to contribute to increase retention/graduation than additional spending on human resources. One respondent touted the use of advising through social media and similar tools that help to “accommodate” students’ busy schedules so they do not have to come in for advising.

Further, schools in the low spending/high graduation group agreed 16% *more* with the statement that “Student services spending efforts include initiatives to make me more efficient/productive in meeting student needs” than the other three. This supports the notion that workers in these schools feel that their student services divisions are adequately funded and/or they are employing high-impact/low-cost programs and tools to meet student needs.

This group also agreed 16% *less* that graduation/retention rates suffer because their schools do not spend enough on student services. This again supports the idea that workers in these areas feel that their own needs are being met in order to be effective employees.

Finally, schools from the low spending/high graduation group agreed 30% *less* than the other groups that “Our graduation/retention rates suffer because we do not hire enough student services employees.” Given that these schools are already spending below the average on student services, this may be an indicator that graduation/retention efforts are less affected by the total number of dollars but rather specific activities or even cultures within the departments regardless of their size/spending.

Addressing the Research Questions

SPSS was used to perform a reliability test on scale items. From this test, four items were determined to be unreliable and were removed from the overall dataset. The resulting reliability test produced a Chronbach’s Alpha score of .775 for the remaining 24 items. This indicates that only 22.5% of the variance in the scores is from error. A Chronbach’s Alpha score

> .600 is generally considered acceptable to proceed with further data analyses (Perera, Heneghan & Badenoch, 2011). From there, SPSS was used to process the remaining 24 items and address the research questions.

RESEARCH QUESTION 1: What is the relationship between student services activities and student success outcomes in colleges that are spending well above or below the national average on their student affairs offices?

For this question, all items on the questionnaire were considered in an attempt to determine any areas in which outlying schools identified in Phase I may have characteristics that correlate significantly with their spending. The 12 target schools were organized through SPSS into two larger groups for high spending and low spending. The following data are the significant effects found in SPSS and trends identified through Atlas.TI coding.

Levene's test for homogeneity of variance indicates homogeneity of variance for almost every survey item. From here, a one-way ANOVA was performed on all items to determine any areas in which the variance was statistically significant. Three of the items related to resource allocation exhibit homogeneity of variance. These were "I wish that my institution provided additional resources to its student affairs division in order to be more helpful to students" (Levene's = .930, $P > .05$), "Student services spending efforts include initiatives to make me more efficient/productive in meeting student needs" (Levene's = .458, $P > .05$), and "My student affairs office employs enough advisers and staff to provide time for meaningful and productive relationships with students" (Levene's = .128, $P > .05$). The high spending schools are represented as Group 1 in the SPSS outputs below.

Table 9: RQ1 - Descriptive Statistics

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
						I wish that my institution provided additional resources to its student affairs division in order to be more helpful to students.	1.00		
	2.00	59	2.9831	1.22463	.15943	2.6639	3.3022	.00	5.00
	Total	102	3.1947	1.20903	.11374	2.9693	3.4200	.00	5.00
My student affairs office employs enough advisers and staff to provide time for meaningful and productive relationships with students.	1.00	40	2.0000	1.17670	.18605	1.6237	2.3763	.00	5.00
	2.00	49	2.6327	1.16715	.16674	2.2974	2.9679	.00	5.00
	Total	89	2.3737	1.20022	.12063	2.1344	2.6131	.00	5.00

Table 10: RQ1 - Significance

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
I wish that my institution provided additional resources to its student affairs Division in order to be more helpful to students.	Between Groups	9.220	2	4.610	3.282	.041
	Within Groups	154.497	110	1.405		
	Total	163.717	112			
My student affairs office employs enough advisers and staff to provide time for meaningful and productive relationships with students.	Between Groups	9.384	2	4.692	3.418	.037
	Within Groups	131.788	96	1.373		
	Total	141.172	98			

Descriptive statistics indicate that the high spending schools are more likely to agree that their school should spend more on student affairs. The same group agrees less that their school currently employs enough advisers to make connections with students. Given the analysis of variance, we can reject a null hypothesis that the two groups agree on these items.

The open-ended responses were also divided into the same larger groups (high spending and low-spending). On the first question regarding the respondent's spending on student services, the high spending group consistently reported activities and efforts based on individual students. One-to-one advising and counseling sessions were the focus of the comments. The low-spending group commented largely on programs geared toward larger groups of students. The low-spending group consistently commented on the financial efficiency of these programs and initiatives. At least one respondent from each school suggested that the most cost-effective means of improving student outcomes would be to increase selectivity. One response from a low-spending school put it succinctly, "Selective admissions, strong reliance on peer-to-peer engagement and a clear expectation of student self-engagement." Likewise, responses from every school suggested that student services and academics are not binary. Neither is more important toward graduation/retention than the other.

RESEARCH QUESTION 2: What are the perceptions of the role of student services among student affairs professionals in colleges that exhibit above/below average retention rates?

For this question the responses were grouped according to respondent role. The smaller groups were aggregated into two larger groups that made up professionals and administrators. The goal was to examine the differences in perception among employees at schools with above/below average retention/graduation. In the following tables, the schools are groups by

graduation rate. Group 1 is the high graduation group and Group 2 is made up of the low graduation schools..

Table 11: RQ2 – Descriptive Statistics

	grad_group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Our Division of Student Affairs spends too much money on things not specifically geared toward graduation/retention.	1.00	49	1.5306	.86848	.12407
	2.00	53	1.9811	1.10053	.15117
Retaining students through to graduation (completion) is the primary role of my office.	1.00	51	2.4902	1.33225	.18655
	2.00	52	3.3269	1.38226	.19168
Our graduation and retention rates suffer because we do not hire enough student affairs personnel.	1.00	45	1.9778	1.33976	.19972
	2.00	48	2.5417	1.14777	.16567

Table 12: RQ2 - Significance

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	t-test for Equality of Means								
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Our Division of Student Affairs spends too much...	Equal variances	.000	.986	-2.283	100	.025	-.45052	.19737	-.84210	-.05894
Retaining students through to graduation...	Equal variances	.016	.901	-3.127	101	.002	-.83673	.26758	-1.36752	-.30593
Our graduation and retention rates suffer because...	Equal variances	1.717	.193	-2.184	91	.032	-.56389	.25819	-1.07675	-.05102

Three items provide significance from this analysis. The descriptive statistics indicate that schools with high graduation tend to agree less that their school is spending too much on

things not related to graduation. The high group also agrees less that their primary role is retaining students through to graduation. Finally, the high graduation group agrees less that graduation/retention rates suffer because of student services spending.

This research question also calls for a multivariate analysis that looks into differences that may exist between respondent roles within the graduation groups. No areas of significance were discovered from this multivariate analysis.

RESEARCH QUESTION 3: What factors provide the most significant contribution to desired outcomes such as retention in colleges that spend above/below the average amount on student services efforts?

The approach to this question used four smaller groups of three schools each as the independent variable for a one-way ANOVA. These were the original four groups of schools organized by spending and graduation rates. The groups are represented in Table 13 below. Homogeneity of variance and significance of variance was revealed on eight survey items. Survey item topics largely covered the role of the student services professional and spending within student services divisions.

Table 13: School Groups by Spending and Graduation

SPSS Group	Spending Group	Graduation/Retention Group
1	High	High
2	High	Low
3	Low	High
4	Low	Low

Interestingly, on the four items listed below, significant variance was discovered only between certain groups of schools. This was revealed through post-hoc tests. The full post-hoc output is available as Appendix D. A summary of the findings is provided here.

For the item (1), “I wish that my institution provided additional resources to its student affairs division in order to be more helpful to students,” significant variance was revealed between group 3 when compared against groups 1 and 2. The mean score for schools in Group 3 (low spending/high graduation) was 3.17 compared against the two high spending groups (3.76 and 3.37) respectively. The mean difference is small but the variance is determined to be significant ($F = 3.013$, $P = .034$). The low spending/low graduation group generally agreed less that their division of student affairs needed to provide additional resources for employees to be more effective toward retaining students.

The item (2), “Our graduation and retention rates suffer because we do not hire enough student affairs personnel,” saw significant variance between group 3 (low spending/high graduation) and all other groups. The mean for group 3 was 1.88 while groups 1, 2, and 4 were 2.65, 2.65, and 2.6 respectively. These variances were all significant with $P < .021$ in all cases.

“Our division of student affairs spends too much money on things not specifically geared toward graduation/retention” (3) saw significant variance between group 4 (low spending/low graduation) and the other three primary groups. Group 4 on this item generated a mean value of 2.27 compared to 1.63, 1.61, and 1.44 for groups 1, 2, and 3 respectively. Groups 1-3 did not show significant variance between them. With significance ($F = 3.947$, $P = .011$), the low spending/low graduation group agrees more than the other groups that their graduation rates suffer because of their spending habits. This item showed the highest F factor and the least

likelihood (1.1%) that the variance could occur by chance out of all of the items examined for this research question.

On the question, “Retaining students through to graduation (completion) is the primary role of my office,” variance ($F = 3.207$, $P = .026$) was revealed between groups 1 and 4. Group 4 (low spending/low graduation) agreed more that they perceived their own role to be primarily geared toward student graduation rather than engagement and student development.

Group 2 (high spending/low graduation) provided significant ($F = 2.751$, $P = .047$) variance between groups 3 and 4 which were both low spending. Group 2 agreed less (3.45 compared to 4.23) that their department realized the need for overall student development rather than simply handling student services logistics.

On the item, “Graduation/retention rates at my university would improve if the student affairs office had greater resources,” there was significant ($F = 3.614$, $P = .016$) variance between the two low graduation groups. Group 3 (high spending/low graduation) agreed less (2.62) than group 4 (3.56) that graduation rates could improve with increased allocations. This is despite indicators that schools in group 3 area already spending higher than average on student services.

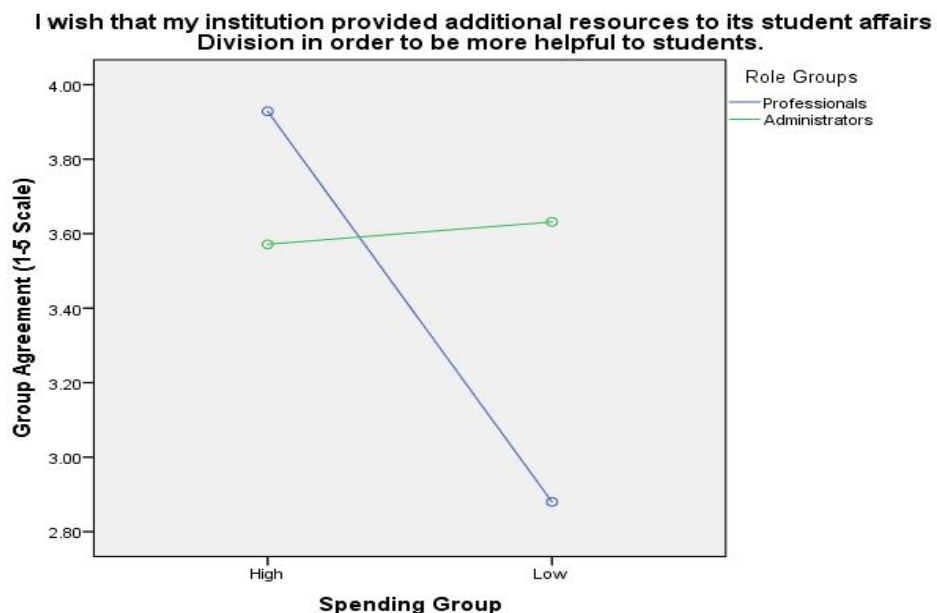
Group 3 (high spending/low graduation) produced significant ($F = 2.92$, $P = .039$) variance against the two high graduation groups. The question was, “My student affairs office employs enough advisers and staff to provide for meaningful and productive relationships with students.” The high spending/low graduation group agreed with this statement more (2.88) than groups 1 (1.9) and 2 (2.1).

The last item (4), “Our graduation and retention rates suffer because we do not hire enough student affairs personnel” between group 3 and all other groups. Group 3 agreed with this statement less (2.62) than groups 1, 2, and 4 (2.38, 2.43, and 2.63 respectively). With

significance ($F = 3.175, P = .029$) group 3 agrees less that the source of their graduation/retention rates is a lack of personnel.

Research Question Three called for the use of a multivariate analysis to consider the data by spending group (high/low) and respondent role (professional/administrator). This analysis provided just one item with significant variance. The survey item, “I wish that my institution provided additional resources to its student affairs division in order to be more helpful to students” provided significance ($F = 4.886, P = .030$). Student affairs professionals at high-spending schools agree the most that their institution should spend more on student services. Administrators at low spending schools agree with this statement the least. Student affairs administrators generally reported the same values across spending groups. The figure below outlines the findings on this item. Role Group 1 (green) is professionals and Spend Group 1 is high. It is important to note the range of values here. The Likert rating option was 1-5. Note that respondents were not aware of how they were selected for this study. It was not explained to them that they fell into groups based on their graduation and/or spending levels.

Figure 1: Spending Item Agreement by Role and Spending Group



Considering the open-ended responses, the schools that fall into the high graduation groups emphasize the importance of one-on-one relationships and student engagement. Schools in the low graduation groups have a tendency to applaud their online advising and scheduling tools. Colleges in this group also seem to believe that their current spending habits are appropriate and efficient toward student retention and graduation.

RESEARCH QUESTION 4: What differences exist between the perceptions of student affairs professionals and college administrators regarding student services expenditures at targeted schools?

Answering this question required an ANOVA based on respondent role. The groups were professionals (1) and administrators (2). The group of professionals was made up of respondents who self-identified as advisers, clerical staff, and others in direct contact with students. This group may be thought of as the “doers” who interact and engage with students daily, thus, serving as the face of the institution. Variance and homogeneity of variance was revealed on seven items.

Significance ($F = 5.816$, $P = .018$) was found on the item, “Divisions of student affairs should dedicate additional resources to non-academic activities.” The Group 2 mean was 3.7 compared to 3.2 for Group 1. The administrators (Group 2) agreed more that student affairs divisions should allocate additional spending on extra-curricular activities.

“It is possible to foster well-rounded individuals who are developed both socially and academically in the absence of non-academic options,” provided significance ($F = 5.302$, $P = .023$). The Group 2 mean was 1.86 against 2.45 for the Group 1 mean. Administrators agreed less that students can be fully developed without non-academic activities.

For the item, “The experiences that students are able to have through clubs, organizations, committees, and other groups are just as important to the whole person as the classroom activities,” the Group 2 mean was 4.2 compared to 3.8 for Group 1. Significance ($F = 5.262, P = .024$) exists in this variance suggesting that a null hypothesis be rejected.

The fourth item in this section is “My primary responsibility is to ensure that students’ logistical needs are met.” This item showed the greatest significance ($F = 21.472, P < .001$) of any item in this study. The Group 2 mean was much lower (1.56) than the Group 1 mean (2.81). This is likely due at least in part to the wording of the question itself. Group 2 agreed with this statement much less than Group 1. This might be expected, however as the ANOVA is designed to separate these roles.

“As part of my job I am concerned about the overall cognitive and social development of students with whom I work either face to face or by some other means” provided significant ($F = 4.166, P = .044$) variance between the groups of roles. Group 2 (4.1) agreed more than Group 1 (3.8) that part of their role included student development concerns.

Group 2 (administrators) agreed more than Group 1 (4.2 and 3.7) respectively on the item, “I feel that my department/division realizes the need to work toward overall student development rather than simple handling of logistical tasks. With significance ($F = 5.443, P = .022$) the group of administrators was more inclined to agree that their department already realizes the need for student development/engagement.

Finally, the item, “I feel an obligation to see that students grow in moral, social, and cognitive development during their time at my college” generated significant ($F = 5.991, P = .016$) variance. The Group 2 mean was 4.3 and the Group 1 mean was 3.9 suggesting that

administrators themselves felt an obligation to see to the development of students they encounter.

On the open-ended items, both groups agreed that student services and academics are equally important to overall student growth and development. Likewise, the groups agreed that the most efficient means to increase student retention is to be more selective in admissions. One respondent said: “The type of students that are recruited to the University. The higher the standards it is to get into an institution the higher the likelihood those students will graduate. These institutions take a lot of low risk students because of the admission standards are so high, so will naturally have a higher graduation rate.” This theme was consistent for the open-ended items as many suggested that the key to increased graduation and retention was as simple as “cherry picking” students for admissions. The open-ended item that asked about the respondent’s own school did provide some variance.

Administrators mentioned the efficiency of programs and initiatives. Professionals (Group 1) talked about their own face-to-face relationships with students. Engagement and personal connection was the theme for professionals. The two groups see their own roles with students very differently.

Summary

This chapter has served to outline and briefly summarize the areas in which significance was interpreted in the collected data. Therefore, many items found to be nonsignificant are excluded from this section for the sake of readability. A full output of analysis can be found in Appendix E. More exhaustive interpretation of these findings will continue in Chapter V.

Chapter V

Discussion

The charge of student affairs services in higher education has long been two-fold (Seifert & Burrow, 2013). The first charge calls them to administer the daily logistics of handling relatively mundane tasks such as registering students for classes and managing advising. The increased use of technology over the last twenty years has reduced administrative pressures of these objective tasks as students are generally able to serve themselves through the use of the Internet (Shimoni, Barrington, Wilde & Henwood, 2013). This reduction in administrative workload allows for greater emphasis on the second charge to student affairs educator, which is student development.

Relatively abstract ideals such as engagement, developmental stages, general wellness, student satisfaction, and academic success have been thrust to the forefront of student affairs divisions (Seifert & Burrow, 2013). Meeting, measuring, and maintaining *these* goals amidst budget cuts and increased pressures to graduate students strains budgets and nerves. Student services offices must work to find efficient and effective combinations of practices to meet the needs of students. This study identified perceptions of employees at some of the most and least effective student affairs offices among high research institutions.

Rhatigan (2000) describes the situation plainly: “Practitioners do not enjoy the luxury of certainty. It is profoundly true that student affairs administrators must often proceed without knowing exactly what they are doing. We either act or step aside. This requires judgment and faith, the willingness to be vulnerable and to take risks” (p. 22). The uncertainty of student affairs work that Rhatigan comments on prompted this present study as it seeks to understand

more about how some institutions do not follow the generally positive relationship between student services spending and graduation/retention. Empirical data indicate that institutions that place greater emphasis on student engagement typically enjoy above average graduation and retention rates (IPEDS; Webber & Ehrenberg, 2010). Interestingly, Webber and Ehrenberg (2010) report that the correlation between student engagement and graduation gets stronger in colleges with higher numbers of Pell Grant recipients. James, Pate, Leech, Brockmeier, and Dees (2011) go on to suggest that student services allocations have greater impact on student success variables than more logical budget items such as instructional services, media, and even faculty salaries. Reasons for this may include increased availability of support and advising staff along with a broad spectrum of opportunities for students to get involved and invested in the school beyond their classwork. As students continue to develop socially and cognitively, the opportunity to identify with a faculty member, staff person, or even the school's brand has potential to affect their likelihood to return to classes from one semester to the next (Huesman, Brown, Lee, Kellogg & Radcliffe, 2014; Kalsbeek, 2013; Marsee & Davies-Wilson, 2014). This study explored colleges whose IPEDS data do not follow the general assumption that higher student services spending correlates with greater retention/graduation.

Statement of the Research Problem

Considering the continued scrutiny of co-curricular activities on college campuses, it is critical that institutions be able to demonstrate the effectiveness of such endeavors (James et al., 2011). Post-secondary education is facing unprecedented pressures to cut costs while maintaining competitive/affordable tuition rates and outcomes. Items such as student services do not directly generate funds for the institution. Therefore, it is incumbent upon student affairs professionals to be able to justify their efforts, personnel, allocations, and spending. This can be

done through the demonstration of effective and efficient practices in student affairs offices as mechanisms toward measurable outcomes such as graduation and retention.

The existence of these encumbrances regarding the most effective means of retaining students forms the basis for the need of this study. With the resources that go into student development areas, professionals must be able to indicate the value of their efforts. This study contributes to the body of knowledge on what makes student services efforts successful while building on the current epistemology of best practices in student affairs.

This first section has served to provide an overview of the dissertation that follows. Existing IPEDS (2014) data were used to target universities of interest. To maintain a balance of rigor and practical volume of data, student affairs professionals at no more than twelve specific colleges were prompted to complete an online survey through email invitation. Their quantitative and open-ended responses were analyzed in search of themes and trends. This empirical examination was used to address the identified research problem.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify perceptions at specific colleges that represent effectiveness or ineffectiveness toward retaining and graduating students. The study prompted student affairs professionals from identified colleges to provide feedback on why/how their college falls as an outlier in an examination of how student services spending relates to desired outcomes such as graduation and retention. The primary goal of the study is to provide answers to the research questions and provide information that may allow student services divisions to operate more effectively and efficiently.

Research Questions

The research questions listed below were used for this study:

1. What is the relationship between student services activities and student success outcomes in colleges that are spending well above or below the national average on their student affairs offices?
2. What are the perceptions of the role of student services among student affairs professionals in colleges that exhibit above/below average retention rates?
3. What factors provide the most significant contribution to desired outcomes such as retention in colleges that spend above/below the average amount on student services efforts?
4. What differences exist between the perceptions of student affairs professionals and college administrators regarding student services expenditures at targeted schools?

Discussion

One interesting observation from the original data is that, generally, the higher a university's Full-Time Equivalent student enrollment (FTE), the less it spends per student on student services. Also, of the lowest performers in this study, a higher percentage of them were Historically Black Colleges or Universities (HBCUs). Each of these items raise further questions and certainly warrant more study.

It is likely that respondents picked up on the intent of this study through the wording of the questions. One respondent said made the point that their graduation/retention rates were exceptional so the concept of focusing on that outcome was lost. Colleges in this situation may find it easier to focus on student development and other less-objective outcomes. Respondents may have adjusted their answers defensively if they felt that their own graduation/retentions rates

and/or student services spending were being criticized through the study. Most likely the upper-administrators that were surveyed would be aware of such variables within their own schools. Nevertheless, there were no comments from respondents that were directly critical of the survey instrument or the overall intent of the study. The participants that took the time to provide open-ended feedback did seem to be genuine in their comments.

Addressing the Research Questions

For the first research question, the findings revealed two items with significance. These two items are consistent with each other. Group 1 (high spending schools) agreed more that their school should spend more money on student services. The same group agreed less that their school employs enough people to be effective at engaging and connecting with students. Perhaps the take-away point is that the Group 1 schools felt they needed to spend more despite already spending higher than average on student services. It is important to be reminded here that respondents did not know that they were *already* spending well above average on student services. Conversely, the Group 2 (low spending) schools agreed less on both items that additional resources would be helpful. Earlier investigation in Phase I of this study suggested that correlation generally exists between greater spending on student services and higher graduation/retention rates. Considering this correlation, the logical approach to low graduation/retention rates might be a simple increase in allocations. Many respondents from both groups of schools suggested that the most efficient means of increasing objective outcomes is to be more selective in admissions. This approach cannot be applied generally as many schools have been called to decrease selectivity and increase diversity on campus. While the challenge of diversity remains, there are many questions surrounding concepts such as inclusion, engagement, graduation and retention. In regards to the first research question, it can be argued

from the IPEDS analysis from Phase I that higher student services spending generally correlates to objective outcomes such as retention and graduation. Phase II data suggests that engagement and personal connections with students work to help retain students through to graduation. This suggests that increased selectivity is not a real option for schools that struggle with graduation and retention, a more focused effort on creating meaningful and productive personal connections with students might be pursued. For some schools, this may mean that their spending efforts need to be directed toward additional human resources rather than programs, initiatives, or software. Respondents in this study consistently report that live, face-to-face conversation is a critical factor to retention. This is perhaps due to a sense of accountability that may accompany an ongoing face-to-face relationship with an academic advisor or other mentor.

Research question two prompts us to look into the differences in perceived role between respondents at schools with higher and lower than average graduation/retention rates. Responses from schools in the high graduation/retention group suggest that respondents view their role slightly differently. They realize the need to engage and interact with students and tend to lean on face-to-face contact with students. Data relevant to RQ2 is consistent with findings for other questions. Respondents with high graduation tend to agree more on items related to spending more on initiatives toward graduation/retention. It seems possible, likely even, that this mindset has contributed to the high graduation rates that these schools enjoy. Further, respondents at high graduation schools agree less that their primary role is simply to retain students through to graduation. Open-ended responses suggest that administrators and professionals at high graduation schools emphasize ideals such as engagement and student development. Graduation and retention are consequential secondary outcomes rather than primary directives. This point is critical as it touches on the primary objective of this dissertation. As mentioned in Chapter IV, a

multivariate analysis of role group sub-divided by graduation group revealed no areas of significant variance.

Responses to items providing significance for research question three generally indicated that schools with low spending stood to gain the least from increased spending. That is, high spending schools agreed more that spending additional resources and increasing allocations would increase desired outcomes such as graduation and retention. As mentioned above, this mindset and general tendency toward spending or saving may be a contributing factor to the schools' observed graduation/retention rates. This would be especially true if such spending habits and culture extends into the history of the university. If so, stagnant spending patterns, traditions, and precedents may be restricting progress as additional resources are increasingly needed to boost graduation/retention rates. If stagnant spending is coupled with practices counter to in-person engagement, the effect may be compounded into the outlying low graduation rates observed here.

Question three also prompted the use of a multivariate analysis that explored differences as they may relate to respondent role *and* host school spending rate (high/low). Findings indicate that administrators from the two different spending groups (high and low) vary with significance ($F = 4.886, P = .03$). Those from high spending schools agree that they should spend more to improve graduation. Administrators from low spending groups agree less with this statement. Student affairs professionals from the high and low spending groups do not display significant variance as a role group in this area.

Finally, research question four looks into differences in perception between professionals and administrators. Administrators may be thought of as the “thinkers” who may not necessarily interact with students directly on a daily basis. Their roles involve more policy, budgeting,

decision-making, and planning. Analysis of the data revealed several areas with significant variance outlined in Chapter IV. The findings are consistent with those for other research questions.

Administrators place a higher emphasis on the extracurricular activities thought to contribute to student development. They were more inclined to agree with spending increases on these items and suggested that such spending would lead to outcomes such as graduation and retention. Administrators were less in agreement with the statement that students can be fully developed without the inclusion of non-academic activities. In fact, administrators agreed much more than professionals with the statement, “The experiences that students are able to have through clubs, organizations, committees, and other groups are just as important to the whole person as classroom activities.” The student affairs professionals, the “doers,” suggest that resources should be spent directly on student services initiatives aimed at graduation and retention. These included a wide range of expenditures from additional human resources to programs, and software tools. Administrators agreed more that their departments realized the need for overall student development as a mechanism toward graduation and retention. They also agreed with statements suggesting that workers have an obligation to see that students grow in “moral, social, and cognitive development.” These responses along with the open-ended options suggest that the group of professionals, the “doers,” embrace the task at hand much more than the administrators. Administrators, understandably, tend to consider the bigger picture, planning, initiatives, overall development, engagement, interaction, and the like. While professionals realize the need for these things, they agree more that their job is to handle logistical and objective tasks. They really see themselves as serving the student. A connection needs to be made, though. Students need to have issues such as advising, registration, fee

payment and such handled efficiently. They also need to make personal connections with people with whom they interact.

The first open-ended question asked respondents to list the ways they think that some schools are able to graduate/retain students despite spending very little on student services.

Many responded to this question with the concept of staff training. One respondent said:

“I think proper training plays a huge role. Most higher education jobs I have ever had involved me training myself. I think this is the wrong start for most staff. Also, we need to be more selective of who we hire for those roles. Staff and faculty need to be more approachable and understanding of student needs while allowing them to be more responsible for their educational decisions.”

This concept of professional development was apparent in several responses from student affairs administrators. More research is needed on the impact of staff training. At least in the case of the quote above, it seems that those in direct contact may have little/no training on how to interpret students’ needs effectively. Certainly internal training could contribute to more efficient and impactful student affairs offices.

Implications

This study was able to demonstrate that student affairs professionals are generally more concerned with the overall development and personal growth of students than they are with objective outcomes such as graduation and retention. This is especially true with schools that enjoy high graduation rates. The correlation suggests that a foundation of strong performance on objective outcomes allows for the exploration and expenditure on more subjective outcomes such as student development and activities. Further, schools that enjoy high graduation rates seem to have set graduation as a secondary outcome that generally presents itself as a result of achieving the primary outcome of engagement, involvement, accountability, and student development.

Through data analysis phase it became increasingly apparent that the high spending schools generally felt that they should spend more on various initiatives. The low spending schools generally agreed less that spending more money or allocating resources differently would result in higher graduation/retention rates. This suggests that perhaps a culture of spending or a culture of saving has perhaps shaped the mindsets of student services personnel. If so, such a culture could play into the overall effectiveness of various offices charged with serving students through to graduation. If, for example, an office is in need of additional staff but is inclined to find a more cost-effective approach, that office may make some software purchase or other non-human solution to the problem. As we have seen here, such approaches are not found to be as effective, thus adding to the original need for more staff.

Reflection on Data Collection and Analysis

The experience with instrument validation and review was generally encouraging. However, the use of an existing, previously validated, instrument and/or existing data would have been preferable. The lack of participant cooperation was not anticipated. It was, perhaps, consistent with or only slightly below typical social experiment response rates conducted through web survey (Bethlehem & Biffignandi, 2011). It would have been helpful if participants had been more responsive on the open-ended questions. These seem to provide the most genuine and practical feedback when perceptions are desired. Future projects may have these questions toward the beginning of the survey or perhaps spread throughout instead of lumped together at the end. It was a bit disappointing to see the participation levels of college administrators across the country. Most participants spent no more than eight minutes on the survey. Even those who provided comments only spent around ten minutes. More time and consideration from respondents would have greatly improved the study. With this, the number of respondents and

participating schools seemed appropriate. It was a manageable number that seems to have provided reasonably useful information.

Many of the target schools quickly responded to the survey. It was encouraging to data coming in without much fuss in the beginning. Other schools needed a reminder but eventually participated with no problems. The University of Hawai'i at Mānoa was the only school that was completely unresponsive. Some quick research revealed that there is a five-hour time difference between Hawai'i and Auburn, Alabama. Emails sent during the 8-10am productivity peak were arriving in Hawai'i at 3:00am. They were likely lost to a flood of emails by the time workers arrived at the office. An adjustment in the sending of emails produced results as the last of the 12 schools participated in the survey without further problems. This adjustment was a simple matter of timing emails so that they were received between 8:00 and 10:00am. Again, it is important to be mindful of the target schools' time zone. Auburn, Alabama operates in the Central Time Zone which is two hours ahead of at least half of the target schools for this study.

In reading the comments from respondents, it became apparent that some felt strongly about their opinions. Several provided paragraphs of comment/reflection on how their school was performing. The survey seemed to provide an opportunity for them to express concerns about effectiveness in their own offices. Though apparently cathartic for the providers, these responses only serve purposes for this dissertation and will never be aggregated into any type of recommendation or follow-up for the individual institutions.

Survey response rate was lower than expected. Roughly 20% of those contacted followed the link and completed the survey. There were dozens of incomplete submissions. About half of those that completed the Likert ratings went on to provide some open-ended feedback in the last section. Future survey efforts should make stricter use of the Total Design

Method (TDM) (Hoddinott & Bass, 1986). According to the authors, the TDM promises “guaranteed” 80% return rates for surveys. The logistics of initial contact, introductions, follow-ups, and tabulation is quite complicated but is perhaps worth the effort if the Method delivers on its guarantee.

Finally, despite validation and improvement efforts, at least one question seems to have suffered from poor design. The item, “My primary responsibility is to ensure that students’ logistical needs are met,” returned very high variance and significance when the ANOVA design grouped responses by role. Administrators agreed with this statement much less than the professionals. This provided significance but likely does contribute much to the research question.

Further Study

Additional work is needed in the area of high spending schools. This group of schools agreed more on almost every survey item that more spending would be beneficial despite already spending higher than average on student services. It would be helpful to know more about specific spending areas. That is, where and how should additional allocations be made? Many of the high graduation schools suggested that additional human resources would be beneficial.

An interesting dimension that went largely unexplored in this study was the matter of selectivity. Colleges that rank in the “high” graduation/retention groups also have stricter selectivity criteria. Those in the high spending and high graduation group admit an average of just 30% of applicants. Those with “low” graduation/retention rates admit over 70% of those who apply (IPEDS). The most efficient combination of variables seems to be with the low spending/high graduation group. They admit around 52% of those who apply, spend an average of \$1000 per student per year, and graduate 94% of those students. Further study is needed here

to determine the feasibility of a standard formula for maximum efficiency and effectiveness. As mentioned earlier, the concept of student learning is overlooked in this study and should be included in projects that consider college effectiveness.

Additional study is needed in the areas surrounding online and self-advising tools. These tools obviously allow students to self-serve in some ways. This may work well for self-directed students who are not at-risk. The trouble seems to come with the lack of intervention. Without required sessions and proactive advisors, the online tools seem to remove one of the factors most respondents report as being key to graduation and retention. In fact, many respondents suggest that face-to-face advising and interaction with students is critical to graduation and retention efforts. Replacing this critical component with the anonymity of an online advising tool seems counterproductive in terms of graduation/retention. The question of outcomes remains. If the objective is to cycle a maximum number of student through the system, then perhaps an online tool is best for reducing the number of expensive student services personnel. This study finds that graduating and retaining students continues to rely on engagement and interaction through face-to-face accountability between advisers and students.

This study looked into the perceptions of student affairs personnel, and one research question specifically compared groups of student affairs professionals against student affairs administrators. Further study is needed to determine the perception that one group may have *of* the other group. That is, how do professionals view administrators and vice versa when it comes to items discussed here such as student services, retention initiatives, programs, student development, involvement, non-academic activities, resource allocation and personnel commitment? It is possible that there is some amount of contention between the two groups that has yet to be explored.

There were multiple indicators of what seemed to be complacency from several schools. Low spending schools explored here tend to agree the least that more spending would improve graduation and retention outcomes. This was especially true of the low spending/low graduation groups. There is perhaps further study needed on burnout, professional development, sense of purpose/meaning, and general ethic among low graduation schools. There may be some factor within the campus culture, student body, administration, or elsewhere that leads workers to become disconnected from the student engagement and activity demonstrated to contribute to higher graduation/retention rates. These schools seemed to report satisfaction in their institutions' spending habits despite having below average graduation/retention rates. It is important to remember here that the schools did not know as part of this study that they fell into a category of low graduation.

Multiple respondents from the low graduation group mention the use of online and computer-based advising tools. These utilities take the place of in-person advising sessions. Though cost effective over hiring additional personnel, more research is needed on the efficacy of serving students in this way. Given what this study was able to determine about the value of meaningful and actual relationships, it may be more effective long-term to hire additional staff over installing software applications.

Summary and Closing Remarks

This project has been able to empirically demonstrate the value in student development outcomes such as involvement, engagement, and face-to-face interaction with students. When considered as primary outcomes, these factors can lead to larger results such as graduation. It is inefficient, apparently to consider graduation as the primary outcome as focusing on this correlates to higher attrition and higher spending. Findings here indicate differences in the

perceptions of employees from the four different school groups. Further, there is additional variance within school groups among different types of employees. Administrators and professionals (thought of as “thinkers” and “doers” respectively) view their roles in different ways. Administrators tend to consider the big picture, programs, initiatives, student engagement, and student development. Administrators are quicker to suggest additional spending is needed. Professionals are more likely to view their role as a service capacity. They concern themselves with the logistical tasks of handling student services without as much consideration for non-academic functions. Though they seem to realize the value in extracurricular activities (groups, clubs, organizations...) they agree less that these things are critical to graduation and retention.

Schools from the high spending groups tend to agree more that additional spending is needed. That is, they are already spending higher than average but suggest that spending even more would serve outcomes such as graduation and retention. Conversely, schools from the low spending groups agree less that spending more would improve outcomes. Schools that spend less were more likely to agree that they are already properly staffed and equipped. As mentioned in a previous section, more research is needed in the area of campus culture as it relates to current and historical spending habits.

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Appendices

Appendix A
Full Survey Instrument

This first section is not numbered and covered demographic items. No identifiable information is collected for this study. Table One lists the items found in this section.

Demographics

1. I agree and wish to continue with the following survey.
 2. Please choose your institution from the list below.
 3. Please select your gender.
 4. Please select your own education level.
 5. Please select your role at your institution.
 6. How long have you been with your current institution?
 7. Which selection best describes your employment status?
-

Section One contains items that cover student services personnel perceptions of extra-curricular activities and how those activities play into desired outcomes such as graduation and retention. The items from Section Two can be found in Table Two below.

Section I of Survey: Perceptions of Extra Curricular Activities

1. I communicate with students more frequently through email or phone call than face-to-face.
 2. I prefer to work with students through email than on the phone or face-to-face.
 3. I feel that I am more helpful to students through email than on the telephone or face to face.
 4. I wish that my institution provided additional resources to its student affairs Division in order to be more helpful to students.
 5. Students who approach me face to face get more individualized attention.
 6. I feel that student services spending and efforts at my university are aimed at retaining students through to graduation.
 7. Our graduation and retention rates suffer because we do not hire enough student affairs personnel.
 8. I am often distracted from an in-person meeting when the telephone rings.
-

Section Two addressed the self-reported perception of the roles of student affairs personnel as they relate to desired outcomes such as graduation and retention.

Section II of Survey: The Role of The Student Affairs Professional

1. Extra-curricular activities (sports, clubs, organizations, etc.) are important to a student's progress toward graduation and completion.
2. A properly educated student receives a balance of academic and non-academic challenges.
3. Divisions of student affairs should dedicate additional resources to non-academic activities.
4. Our Division of Student Affairs spends too much money on things not specifically geared toward graduation/retention.

5. Providing solid academic instruction to students is the most important aspect of a university's charge.
 6. Retaining students through to graduation (completion) is the primary role of my office.
 7. It is possible to foster well-rounded individuals who are developed both socially and academically in the absence of non-academic options.
 8. School-supported non-academic functions are a distraction from classroom activities and should be restricted in order to encourage on-time graduation.
 9. The experiences that students are able to have through clubs, organizations, committees, and other groups are just as important to the whole person as the classroom activities.
-

Section Three contains Likert ratings to capture perceptions of student affairs administrators and professionals of their own roles in the university.

Section III of Survey: Perceptions of the Direction of Student Services as a Profession

1. My primary responsibility is to ensure that students' logistical needs are met (registration, account management, processing, financial aid, etc.).
 2. As part of my job, I am concerned about the overall cognitive and social development of students with whom I work either face to face or by some other means.
 3. I feel that my department/division realizes the need to work toward overall student development rather than simple handling of logistical tasks.
 4. The efficiency of my office plays a part in student graduation and/or retention rates at my college.
 5. I feel an obligation to see that students grow in moral, social, and cognitive development during their time at my college.
 6. Student services spending efforts include initiatives to make me more efficient/productive in meeting student needs.
 7. I make a point not to be concerned with the personal affairs of students.
 8. I do not feel that my job responsibilities include factors beyond the simple processing of student needs (registration, account management, etc.).
 9. My office almost never gets involved in the personal affairs of students.
-

Section Four collects information on student services spending.

Section IV of Survey: Student Services Spending

1. My university does not spend enough on student services to properly meet student needs.
2. Graduation/retention rates at my university would improve if the student affairs office had greater resources.
3. My student affairs office is properly equipped to handle online students.
4. My student affairs office ensures that allocations are made to meet the developmental needs of all students.
5. My student affairs office employs enough advisers and staff to provide time for meaningful and productive relationships with students.

6. I feel that student services spending and efforts at my university are aimed at retaining students through to graduation.
 7. Our graduation and retention rates suffer because we do not hire enough student affairs personnel.
-

Section Five collects open-ended responses on three items.

Section V of Survey: Open-Ended Responses

1. What do you think are some of the most low-cost/high-impact tools or programs that your office employs? What makes these programs so effective?
 2. Do you think retention/graduation allocations at your university should focus primarily on improving student services or academics?
 3. What do you think are the main reasons that some institutions have high graduation/retention rates despite spending below average per student each year on student services?
-

Appendix B

Institutional Review Board Information Letter



AUBURN UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATIONS, LEADERSHIP AND TECHNOLOGY

(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS IRB APPROVAL INFORMATION WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN ADDED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

INFORMATION LETTER

For a Research Study Entitled:

“Student Affairs Practices: Perceptions of Student Support Services and Retention”

You are invited to participate in a research study to assess student affairs personnel perceptions of their role as a mechanism toward graduation and retention. The study is being conducted by Adam McGhee, Coordinator of Distance Education, College of Agriculture at Auburn University, under the direction of James Groccia, PhD, Professor in the Auburn University Department of Education. You are invited to participate because you are member of student affairs administration or staff that either directly or indirectly works with students and are age 19 years of age or older.

What will be involved if you participate? Your participation is completely voluntary and anonymous. If you decide to participate in this research study, you will be asked to complete a web-based survey designed to capture data on your perceptions of your role as it relates to student retention and graduation. The survey consists of common demographic questions, a series of Likert ratings and open-ended response items. Estimated time to complete is 5 minutes.

Are there any risks or discomforts? There is no risk or discomfort. At any point you may exit the survey without completing. The survey does not collect any identifiable information.

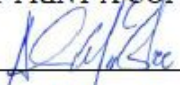
If you change your mind about participating, you can withdraw at any time by closing your browser window. Your decisions about whether or not to participate or to stop participating will not jeopardize your future relations with Auburn University or the College of Education.

Any data obtained in connection with this study will remain anonymous. We will protect your privacy and the data you provide by presenting only aggregate data. Information collected through your participation may be published in a dissertation, professional journal, or presented at a professional meeting. No personally identifiable information is collected through this survey.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact Adam C. McGhee at (334) 740-2423 or adamc@auburn.edu.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Auburn University Office of Research Compliance or the Institutional Review Board by phone (334) 844-5966 or e-mail at IRBAdmin@auburn.edu or IRBChair@auburn.edu.

HAVING READ THE INFORMATION ABOVE, YOU MUST DECIDE IF YOU WANT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT. IF YOU DECIDE TO PARTICIPATE, PLEASE CLICK THE LINK BELOW. YOU MAY PRINT A COPY OF THIS LETTER TO KEEP.


____ June 8, 2016

The Auburn University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from June 13, 2016 to June 12, 2019. Protocol #16-206 EX 1606
4036 Haley Center, Auburn, AL 36849-5221; Telephone: 334-844-4460; Fax: 334-844-3072

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Appendix C
Full IPEDS (2014) Output

IPEDS (2014) Data from Phase 1

Institution Name	ss spend	ss per stu	fte	grad	ret	avg	ratio
Arizona State University-Tempe	\$89,034,000	\$2,311	38,530	58	86	72	32.09
Colorado State University-Fort Collins	\$32,928,230	\$1,524	21,605	63	85	74	20.60
Florida State University	\$51,665,740	\$1,644	31,434	75	92	83.5	19.68
Georgia Institute of Technology-Main Campus	\$37,845,815	\$2,641	14,329	79	96	87.5	30.19
Georgia State University	\$43,123,113	\$1,954	22,069	51	81	66	29.61
Indiana University-Bloomington	\$53,478,657	\$1,619	33,030	75	89	82	19.75
Iowa State University	\$36,421,611	\$1,339	27,208	71	86	78.5	17.05
Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College	\$31,965,040	\$1,366	23,400	65	85	75	18.21
Michigan State University	\$59,591,105	\$1,582	37,663	79	92	85.5	18.51
Mississippi State University	\$19,624,883	\$1,257	15,613	58	80	69	18.22
Montana State University	\$31,679,016	\$2,572	12,318	49	76	62.5	41.15
North Carolina State University at Raleigh	\$30,634,789	\$1,290	23,751	71	93	82	15.73
North Dakota State University-Main Campus	\$32,132,197	\$2,849	11,279	53	80	66.5	42.84
Ohio State University-Main Campus	\$98,567,448	\$2,292	43,006	82	94	88	26.04
Oregon State University	\$29,575,287	\$1,430	20,678	61	84	72.5	19.73
Purdue University-Main Campus	\$35,641,186	\$1,182	30,147	70	92	81	14.60
Rutgers University-New Brunswick	\$92,368,000	\$2,613	35,343	79	92	85.5	30.57
Stony Brook University	\$51,547,221	\$3,089	16,686	70	89	79.5	38.86
SUNY at Albany	\$21,034,482	\$1,672	12,582	64	81	72.5	23.06
Texas A & M University-College Station	\$84,415,249	\$2,071	40,765	80	90	85	24.36
The University of Tennessee-Knoxville	\$54,212,459	\$2,637	20,562	66	87	76.5	34.46
The University of Texas at Austin	\$68,700,565	\$1,869	36,762	79	94	86.5	21.60
University at Buffalo	\$34,387,140	\$1,622	21,194	71	88	79.5	20.41
University of Alabama at Birmingham	\$35,173,214	\$3,482	10,102	48	83	65.5	53.16
University of Arizona	\$49,597,000	\$1,585	31,287	61	82	71.5	22.17
University of Arkansas	\$29,749,945	\$1,481	20,088	60	83	71.5	20.71
University of California-Berkeley	\$190,601,707	\$6,864	27,768	91	96	93.5	73.41
University of California-Davis	\$134,670,513	\$5,125	26,276	81	93	87	58.91
University of California-Irvine	\$85,392,883	\$3,395	25,154	86	92	89	38.14
University of California-Los Angeles	\$145,211,338	\$4,929	29,459	92	97	94.5	52.16
University of California-Riverside	\$68,979,005	\$3,792	18,191	66	90	78	48.61
University of California-San Diego	\$111,374,652	\$4,451	25,024	86	95	90.5	49.18
University of California-Santa Barbara	\$84,258,261	\$4,214	19,995	80	92	86	49.00
University of California-Santa Cruz	\$65,353,911	\$4,130	15,825	74	89	81.5	50.67
University of Central Florida	\$57,235,735	\$1,268	45,138	65	88	76.5	16.58
University of Cincinnati-Main Campus	\$62,124,509	\$2,818	22,044	62	86	74	38.08
University of Colorado Boulder	\$47,181,410	\$1,870	25,229	68	84	76	24.61
University of Connecticut	\$64,397,727	\$3,529	18,248	82	93	87.5	40.33

University of Florida	\$39,567,000	\$1,217	32,501	85	96	90.5	13.45
University of Georgia	\$46,573,423	\$1,846	25,232	81	94	87.5	21.09
University of Hawaii at Manoa	\$58,082,701	\$4,266	13,614	56	79	67.5	63.21
University of Houston	\$39,492,536	\$1,500	26,324	46	86	66	22.73
University of Illinois at Chicago	\$58,587,868	\$3,690	15,877	58	80	69	53.48
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign	\$116,859,897	\$3,373	34,642	84	93	88.5	38.12
University of Iowa	\$37,201,000	\$1,831	20,316	70	86	78	23.48
University of Kansas	\$37,825,087	\$2,041	18,537	64	80	72	28.34
University of Kentucky	\$41,106,456	\$1,985	20,712	58	82	70	28.35
University of Louisville	\$32,198,000	\$2,307	13,958	52	81	66.5	34.69
University of Maryland-College Park	\$56,382,725	\$2,133	26,438	82	96	89	23.96
University of Massachusetts-Amherst	\$64,758,413	\$2,829	22,891	70	90	80	35.36
University of Michigan-Ann Arbor	\$101,823,000	\$3,633	28,025	91	97	94	38.65
University of Minnesota-Twin Cities	\$118,891,570	\$3,400	34,964	73	92	82.5	41.22
University of Missouri-Columbia	\$41,514,616	\$1,647	25,213	71	86	78.5	20.98
University of Nebraska-Lincoln	\$17,172,777	\$955	17,982	65	84	74.5	12.82
University of New Mexico-Main Campus	\$30,194,761	\$1,553	19,437	45	79	62	25.06
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill	\$41,734,546	\$2,287	18,246	89	97	93	24.59
University of Oklahoma-Norman Campus	\$30,792,000	\$1,635	18,838	66	85	75.5	21.65
University of Oregon	\$41,327,333	\$2,058	20,082	67	87	77	26.73
University of South Carolina-Columbia	\$62,736,722	\$2,565	24,461	72	88	80	32.06
University of South Florida-Main Campus	\$36,869,469	\$1,291	28,565	57	89	73	17.68
University of Utah	\$30,139,000	\$1,394	21,624	59	89	74	18.83
University of Virginia-Main Campus	\$52,567,299	\$3,323	15,819	93	97	95	34.98
University of Washington-Seattle Campus	\$50,400,301	\$1,699	29,673	81	94	87.5	19.41
University of Wisconsin-Madison	\$119,226,673	\$4,180	28,522	82	95	88.5	47.23
Virginia Commonwealth University	\$28,147,811	\$1,294	21,755	56	86	71	18.22
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University	\$17,579,946	\$700	25,117	83	93	88	7.95
Washington State University	\$36,652,279	\$1,688	21,708	67	80	73.5	22.97
average	\$57,287,765	\$2,413	24,192	70.06	88.30	79.18	30.30
SD	\$33,664,941	\$1,185	7,855	12.22	5.60	8.67	13.64

Appendix D

Research Question 3 Post-Hoc Analysis

LSD

Dependent Variable	(I) v2School_group	(J) v2School_group	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
I feel that student services spending and efforts at my university are aimed at retaining students through to graduation.	1.00	2.00	-.08696	.29214	.767	-.6663	.4924
		3.00	.12202	.27264	.655	-.4187	.6627
		4.00	-.45217	.27457	.103	-.9967	.0924
	2.00	1.00	.08696	.29214	.767	-.4924	.6663
		3.00	.20898	.27264	.445	-.3317	.7497
		4.00	-.36522	.27457	.186	-.9098	.1793
	3.00	1.00	-.12202	.27264	.655	-.6627	.4187
		2.00	-.20898	.27264	.445	-.7497	.3317
		4.00	-.57419 [*]	.25372	.026	-1.0774	-.0710
	4.00	1.00	.45217	.27457	.103	-.0924	.9967
		2.00	.36522	.27457	.186	-.1793	.9098
		3.00	.57419 [*]	.25372	.026	.0710	1.0774
Our graduation and retention rates suffer because we do not hire enough student affairs personnel.	1.00	2.00	.00000	.37190	1.000	-.7376	.7376
		3.00	.81346 [*]	.34708	.021	.1251	1.5018
		4.00	.05217	.34953	.882	-.6410	.7454
	2.00	1.00	.00000	.37190	1.000	-.7376	.7376
		3.00	.81346 [*]	.34708	.021	.1251	1.5018
		4.00	.05217	.34953	.882	-.6410	.7454
	3.00	1.00	-.81346 [*]	.34708	.021	-1.5018	-.1251
		2.00	-.81346 [*]	.34708	.021	-1.5018	-.1251
		4.00	-.76129 [*]	.32300	.020	-1.4019	-.1207
	4.00	1.00	-.05217	.34953	.882	-.7454	.6410
		2.00	-.05217	.34953	.882	-.7454	.6410
		3.00	.76129 [*]	.32300	.020	.1207	1.4019
Our Division of Student Affairs spends too much money on things not specifically geared toward graduation/retention.	1.00	2.00	.02767	.29067	.924	-.5492	.6045
		3.00	.19192	.27994	.495	-.3636	.7475
		4.00	-.63030 [*]	.27359	.023	-1.1732	-.0874
	2.00	1.00	-.02767	.29067	.924	-.6045	.5492
		3.00	.16425	.27657	.554	-.3846	.7131
		4.00	-.65797 [*]	.27014	.017	-1.1940	-.1219
	3.00	1.00	-.19192	.27994	.495	-.7475	.3636
		2.00	-.16425	.27657	.554	-.7131	.3846
		4.00	-.82222 [*]	.25856	.002	-1.3353	-.3091
	4.00	1.00	.63030 [*]	.27359	.023	.0874	1.1732
		2.00	.65797 [*]	.27014	.017	.1219	1.1940

		3.00	.82222 [†]	.25856	.002	.3091	1.3353
Retaining students	1.00	2.00	-.78261	.40433	.056	-1.5849	.0197
through to		3.00	.05745	.38586	.882	-.7082	.8231
graduation		4.00	-.82309 [†]	.38285	.034	-1.5827	-.0634
(completion) is the	2.00	1.00	.78261	.40433	.056	-.0197	1.5849
primary role of my		3.00	.84006 [†]	.38586	.032	.0744	1.6057
office.		4.00	-.04048	.38285	.916	-.8001	.7192
	3.00	1.00	-.05745	.38586	.882	-.8231	.7082
		2.00	-.84006 [†]	.38586	.032	-1.6057	-.0744
		4.00	-.88054 [†]	.36328	.017	-1.6014	-.1597
	4.00	1.00	.82309 [†]	.38285	.034	.0634	1.5827
		2.00	.04048	.38285	.916	-.7192	.8001
		3.00	.88054 [†]	.36328	.017	.1597	1.6014
My primary	1.00	2.00	-.37273	.42746	.386	-1.2225	.4770
responsibility is to		3.00	.15000	.41889	.721	-.6827	.9827
ensure that		4.00	-.55833	.41889	.186	-1.3911	.2744
students' logistical	2.00	1.00	.37273	.42746	.386	-.4770	1.2225
needs are met		3.00	.52273	.40837	.204	-.2891	1.3345
(registration,		4.00	-.18561	.40837	.651	-.9974	.6262
account	3.00	1.00	-.15000	.41889	.721	-.9827	.6827
management,		2.00	-.52273	.40837	.204	-1.3345	.2891
processing,		4.00	-.70833	.39940	.080	-1.5023	.0856
financial aid, etc.).	4.00	1.00	.55833	.41889	.186	-.2744	1.3911
		2.00	.18561	.40837	.651	-.6262	.9974
		3.00	.70833	.39940	.080	-.0856	1.5023
I feel that my	1.00	2.00	.50000	.33601	.140	-.1671	1.1671
department/division		3.00	-.27622	.32282	.394	-.9172	.3648
realizes the need to		4.00	-.33117	.31750	.300	-.9616	.2992
work toward overall	2.00	1.00	-.50000	.33601	.140	-1.1671	.1671
student		3.00	-.77622 [†]	.32282	.018	-1.4172	-.1352
development rather		4.00	-.83117 [†]	.31750	.010	-1.4616	-.2008
than simple	3.00	1.00	.27622	.32282	.394	-.3648	.9172
handling of		2.00	.77622 [†]	.32282	.018	.1352	1.4172
logistical tasks.		4.00	-.05495	.30351	.857	-.6576	.5477
	4.00	1.00	.33117	.31750	.300	-.2992	.9616
		2.00	.83117 [†]	.31750	.010	.2008	1.4616
		3.00	.05495	.30351	.857	-.5477	.6576
Our graduation and	1.00	2.00	-.04762	.37869	.900	-.8001	.7048

retention rates		3.00	.75595 [*]	.36667	.042	.0274	1.4845
suffer because we		4.00	-.24868	.35704	.488	-.9581	.4607
do not hire enough	2.00	1.00	.04762	.37869	.900	-.7048	.8001
student affairs		3.00	.80357 [*]	.36667	.031	.0750	1.5321
personnel.		4.00	-.20106	.35704	.575	-.9105	.5084
	3.00	1.00	-.75595 [*]	.36667	.042	-1.4845	-.0274
		2.00	-.80357 [*]	.36667	.031	-1.5321	-.0750
		4.00	-1.00463 [*]	.34426	.004	-1.6887	-.3206
	4.00	1.00	.24868	.35704	.488	-.4607	.9581
		2.00	.20106	.35704	.575	-.5084	.9105
		3.00	1.00463 [*]	.34426	.004	.3206	1.6887

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Appendix E
Full Report on Open-Ended Items

<p>We have a practical decision making workshop that students are assigned for decision making related conduct violations. It's a low outlay program but provides students with the opportunity to explore their decision making based on their process and incident. The program is effective because the curriculum guides the student to explore their own process and figure out how that process affects them.</p>	<p>At my campus, we are putting significant resources into supplemental instruction and student success coaches. These resources are designed to provide one-on-one and small group coaching and instructions that students normally don't get while at a large University. I like this focus because it helps to instill time management, responsibility, and accountability. You could call it a combination of student services and academics.</p>	<p>Just because a campus spends a smaller amount of money per student doesn't necessarily mean the student is receiving a detriment. A campus with a lot of students will likely have a lower average per student amount due to enrollment than a smaller campus. But the larger campus will likely provide more opportunities. There's also the individual student's personal motivation. A student can persist and graduate on their own motivation for being at the institution independent of per student spending.</p>
<p>(a) Student Employment - provide direct access to students and the opportunity to identify and achieve learning outcomes that will benefit students in their future pursuits / (b) Student Leadership Opportunities - provide opportunities for student engagement resulting in student development and experiential learning</p>	<p>There has to be a balance between the two. Much of what we do in student affairs is triage for the damage done in the classroom by insensitive academics who are unaware of the nuances of identify development students are experiencing. If we could get faculty to attend some of the professional development workshops student affairs provides on issues of diversity, we would all be better off, and have less struggles with student retention. We could actually all be on the same page, and work together cohesively. However, as it stands, student affairs personnel tend to have to 'pick up the pieces' when students feel they have been slighted/insulted/made to feel less than in a classroom space.</p>	<p>High touch, personalized, culturally relevant services to at risk student populations. / Interventions are available to identify a student in academic distress before they actually fail a class. / A sense of safety and community on campus for all students. / Connections made between academics and career goals (internships/service learning opportunities). /</p>
<p>Accessibility. I don't believe it's so much the programming at all but the availability of PEOPLE (staff) to talk to other PEOPLE (students) and invest in them, personally.</p>	<p>Both. Students need access to the required courses to be able to graduate on time but they also need the support to be able to do so. Additionally, our goal isn't just to get them to graduation. We want them to find meaningful employment (either immediately or after further education). As any new grad can tell you, to get an entry level job you need to have had an internship and to get an internship you have to have had student leadership or volunteer activities.</p>	<p>They may have students from wealthier families who have more support so they need less from the school. They may have a much more formulated program offering fewer choices so they are able to be more efficient. Their reputation as a tough school may discourage high need students from applying.</p>
<p>Advisors and in-person 1:1 meetings with students.</p>	<p>Student services should include not only registration, record keeping, etc. but also financial aid, academic support, counseling, disability support, housing, transportation, etc. Adequate student services and strong academics should help improve retention and graduation.</p>	<p>Connection with students, probably on an individual basis and proactively.</p>
<p>Alcohol assessment questionnaire for student conduct cases which teaches students about the student conduct code, specifically as it pertains to alcohol. A lot of students won't change their alcohol consumption behaviors solely because of the health effects of alcohol, but rather with the risk of getting into trouble.</p>	<p>Both are important. The right balance must be achieved between the two.</p>	<p>It is difficult to answer this question, as each institution is different. Having said that, there are a multitude of factors that may impact graduation rates/retention rates --- among them environmental or external factors including student personal life circumstances, age/maturity of the student; also there may be differences in the type(s) of academic programs offered.</p>
<p>Assessment and on-going training of professional staff. / / proof of program output and understanding the changing student needs.</p>	<p>Student services</p>	<p>Selecting the right students for admittance. Making decisions that are focused on the success of all of their students, not just those on the fringes.</p>

At the moment, our advising center does not have any programming efforts. We do have staff that provide presentations in the classroom related to career development, but that is the extent of it. Our outreach has increased the number of students attending career fairs, but we have not measured any impact beyond attendance at that event.	Retention is shared by both areas. There are things that both areas could improve at. Resources are needed to help at risk students and the academic side shouldn't enjoy being difficult to be difficult. We have some academic areas that prides themselves in failing students. WE all must work together to find the right combination of programs and services to meet the needs of our students.	Some may be more restrictive in admitting students and don't admit at risk students. / Some may do a better job of orienting their students to college life. / The type of school may play a role. A school that has a high focus on math, engineering and science may have a more difficult time retaining students due to the rigor of the academic programs. / There has to be a focus that places a high value on graduation and retention with a goal that it is everyones responsibility.
Cohort-style programs monitor student progression and essentially force full-time enrollment, therefore contributing to successful four-year graduation rates. The schedules do not provide students with flexibility or allow for many options in terms of part-time work opportunities, but they ensure students stay on track in terms of course progression.	VCU needs to improve in both.	Top tier academic schools - the Ivy's - can retain on reputation.
Face to face advising and meeting with students or student organizations. The ability for students to meet with staff and get connected on campus supports a sense of belonging to the community and that is vital for retention and persistence to degree.	I think more should be done to have both sides promote the services provided by the others. For student affairs to promote academic resources, or incorporate them into programming, and for academics to encourage career services, counseling and psychological services, etc.	Student population, quality/ dedication of staff
First year experience; class is combined with advising duties so no extra cost.	Student services	Smaller staff to student ratio.
Fostering student - Advisor contacts through required meetings.	It absolutely has to be a blend. We need strong academic programs and instructors to help keep students engaged and wanting to do well in their courses. But all of the additional items outside of academics are incredibly important to balance out the rigorous academic commitment. You can't have one without the other.	Could be pressure students face, no time to do the extras or effective use of resources to provide services without spending a lot of money.
Google Forms, Social Media (Facebook, Instagram), e-mail, youcanbookme / / Google Forms and youcanbookme allow us to provide services or collect information in a flexible way that accommodates students schedules. Social Media & e-mail function in a similar capacity in regards to information sharing.	It should be a combination. Currently my institution and students primary identity is academics, and I would like to see more effort put towards student services and affairs.	N/A
Highest impact with the lowest cost would be to have an open door policy.	Both.	The type of student makes a difference. You need to structure the school environment based on the needs and interests of the students you serve.
I do not think we employ high impact tools or programs.	I think resources need to address both equally: student services including advising, and academics including academic supports such as tutoring	I wish I knew the answer!!!!
I don't know much about costs, but our degree audit software system is a great aid in keeping us in touch with our students and keeping students and advisors on top of progress toward graduation. / /	Both, they go hand-in-hand.	Cherry pick students, financial resources, healthy collaborations among faculty/staff/community.
I don't really know of any yet since I am not involved in programming.	i think both are important. academics are important because students need to know what is required of them to fulfill graduation requirements. however, student services is important because we need to support the whole student, not just their academics.	i think if the curriculum is clear cut and straight forward, student can graduate in a timely manner. if students are not given many options for classes and if all classes are available each semester when a student needs it, a student can graduate in a timely manner.

<p>I don't think I'm the right person for this survey. I'm an Assistant Professor of Practice and my office (the Department of Statistics) doesn't do this work.</p>	<p>I'm not sure that i'm your perfect target audience here. I act as a recruiter, and while I do think my role has a lot of responsibility in selecting good students who can be successful, we want everyone to persist and graduate on time.</p>	<p>i think students are their own worst enemies in not graduating/graduating on time. We see students drop classes and not stay on track with the plan. Some students have never learned time management skills or how to efficiently study. We do reach out and try to intervene, but it ultimately is the students' task. We provide free tutoring and classes, and have mentors available.</p>
<p>I think any of the programs where we collaborate across offices are the most effective. Utilizing professionals on campus in our programming keeps costs low and also allows students to connect with other offices.</p>	<p>I think both are important. Students are here for an education. However, learning to use their in-class experience outside of the classroom is important. Application is important. Job skills and people skills are important. Most of student affairs helps with real world experience, personal and professional development, and networking. Students also receive personal support and develop connections on campus.</p>	<p>Committed personnel and sometimes underfunding fuels creativity. The stress comes when one staff person has to work 60 hour weeks regularly without any compensation, recognition, acknowledgement or support.</p>
<p>I think tutoring centers and ready access to academic advisors are both important investments.</p>	<p>Student services</p>	<p>The type of students that are recruited to the University. The higher the standards it is to get into an institution the higher the likely hood that students will graduate. These institution take a lot of low risk students because of the admission standards are so high, so will naturally have a higher graduation rate.</p>
<p>I work in a Division of Student Affairs that has a clear sense of purpose/outcomes (Aspirations for Student Learning) that help create alignment across functional areas.</p>	<p>I don't think that it's an either/or question. Student Affairs and Academic Affairs should collaborate.</p>	<p>Could be the that the student possesses the intellectual and academic skills (time management, study skills, etc.). Could be a commuter campus where most students take classes and work or have other aspects of their lives that are on campus.</p>
<p>I work in an academic affairs office. I believe that software like Microsoft Excel, when combined with our data management software, provides telling information about student performance. We also use an institutionally-built software for note-keeping. I cannot answer questions that are specific to student affairs because that is not the function of this office.</p>	<p>Student services</p>	<p>Prestige of graduating from a well-known institution.</p>
<p>I'm the advising coordinator in a large academic department, so there is a lot of opportunity for students to get excellent research experience with our faculty that is required for grad schools and health professions fields over half our graduates go into. Our Psyc Club for any majors or minors provide opportunities for interactions on campus and in the community. The related honor society for those eligible helps students progress to the next level. Our Transfer and Freshman Orientation programs give new students a sense of belonging and security in their major choice before they begin their education here.</p>	<p>Personal connections</p>	
<p>Individual meetings with students during which we ask questions about their connection to the University; provide information about ways to get involved or academic resources or counseling services, occasionally meet with students more than once as a means to offer support</p>	<p>student services</p>	<p>depends on their historical infrastructure, university mission, and resources</p>
<p>Individualized, face to face interactions helps students feel valued, heard and better prepared to address issues and challenges.</p>	<p>It should be a balance, and both services should be integrated more.</p>	<p>I'm not sure. What is high graduation rate and what is average spend per student?</p>

Learning Communities, Freshman Orientation courses, degree four year mapping tool, lots of clubs and extracurricular organizations		I don't think it is about the quantity of student affairs professionals, I think it matters how the division is organized, the job responsibilities and priorities for the people in these roles, and the resources they are provided to ensure they can be successful.
Mandatory advising sessions minimally every semester before registration with faculty advisors that include answering/discussing areas of concern outside of the classroom, per se. Faculty advisors are trained annually and ongoing to improve their skills & knowledge. Both student and advisor are held accountable for communications and follow-through.	Needs to be a mixture of both as retention results from quality instruction through faculty and high quality services outside of the classroom.	Focused and strategic efforts that target the students most in need. Shared values of student success and retention across the campus.
Multiple opportunities to connect with students and their families at Move-In, Open Houses, New Student Orientation	I believe resources at the university need to be carefully targeted and coordinated to support those students who might struggle the most in their time to degree. often these students are coming to us from low income backgrounds and first generations families. I think that BOTH student services and academic support are important to achieving strong retention rates and well paced time to degree for all students.	Some of this may be connected to the populations of students being admitted to the institution, their background (i.e. socio-economic), educational preparation and family support may all contribute to strong retention rates. Students who are coming to our institutions who have to worry about financial resources, working, or are under-prepared academically will need more support both academically and interpersonally.
my office is both an academic and student affairs office. we oversee academic advising in addition to student affairs/activities. one thing we do for students is require mandatory academic advising. this requires students to see an academic advisor. during this appointment each semester, the advisor not only talks to the student about their academic plan/registration, but also about involvement in campus or outside of campus with internships/research. the advisors also engage students and ask how they are doing personally. they form a relationship with students so students feel comfortable coming to them in the future for assistance.	Key! Improve services to align student needs through an evaluative mechanism. Too many practitioners lack the training or expertise to develop a true evaluation mechanism.	Research drive, data-informed and proper assessment models to decipher between coincidences and actual occurrences among student populous.
N/A	Our graduation and retention rates are exceptionally high, so it not something I spend a great deal of time on.	The quality of the students coming not just academically but with the drive in the belly to succeed. We have over 1/3 of our students first gen or low income and they succeed well academically. There challenges tend to be more interpersonal/personal.
N/A	Both should be included	Students are better prepared for college at some institutions
One on one interactions with students	Experiences that promote "relationships and belonging" are most critical and these transcend academic/student affairs boundaries.	They are able to create and "relationship infrastructure" that fosters commitment and meaning within and among students.
Online appointment scheduling - makes it easy for students to schedule times to meet with advisers based on their academic interests	Need to do both.	The institutions have a campus climate that engages students and encourages a sense of community in spite of inadequate resources.
Our college offers quite a few student organizations that are discipline specific, which helps students get real-world application of the ideas/concepts they are learning in their classes.	I don't think that this is an either/or situation. Data should be collected to determine why students aren't being retained and graduated and then the appropriate support should be aligned. This looks very different at different institutions.	I think that this often has to do with the caliber of student who is being admitted. The stronger the academic background and skills of a student body, the higher the graduation rate should be regardless of interventions and support. The culture of a campus also plays into this. Schools must align spending to their priorities and data should help determine these.

<p>Our office has an online-orientation for new students, creating online resources on our website and how-to videos (using technology in advising), an intentional Academic Probation Recovery Program, and we do our best to hire qualified/motivated staff who have the students' best interest in mind. All of these things are intentional programming designed to support and meet the needs of our students.</p>	<p>Academics, by far. As I like to say, if Aristotle were teaching on the faculty, students would live in tents just to take his class.</p>	<p>Perceived prestige/value of the degree. Everything being equal, Harvard would always have a higher retention rate than, say, Valdosta State.</p>
<p>Our small class size allows each faculty to interact closely with all students. Regular academic advising, while not mandatory, are strongly recommended to ensure progression through the curriculum. Computerized student record system is available to authorized advisors.</p>	<p>i do not perceive this to be a binary, either/or proposition. if the academy and student affairs works in concert students benefit. both are necessary and needed for holistic student development and student success.</p>	<p>we have seen incredible gains in graduation rates at my institution during my 15 year tenure. some of this has been related to student affairs initiatives (e.g., more on campus housing, enhanced services for students of color, increased mental health services, etc.) and some has been related to academic initiatives (e.g., formation of a university college, a first year writing program with smaller classes and a cohort that is together two semesters, increased professional academic advising, etc.). there has been a institutional focus and will on retention and graduation that permeates all that we do. i imagine these characteristics are similar at other institutions regardless of \$ spent on student services.</p>
<p>Partnership programs with Career Services and advising- so students can see how the 2 parts fit together and benefit their development.</p>	<p>academics</p>	<p>better advising, doing a better job of admitting well-qualified students, better student services for students needing academic support, having fewer students who need to work while they are students</p>
<p>Peer Advising is a low cost/high impact too. It is a way to reach many more students.</p>	<p>I think they go hand in hand. I am a scholar, I teach, I think academics are the main business of higher ed, but this can't be done in a vacuum, technocratically. You need to meet with and get to know students and you have to get involved with their lives, especially in teacher education, maybe. As I write I am dealing with two people in crisis. This is a regular event for me. Can't avoid it. Wouldn't want to.</p>	<p>I think they creat better personal relationships one way or the other with students. They create an engaging academic situation that puts a priority on student relationships, keeps a strong support/safety net for students, and doesn't ignore the social scene.</p>
<p>peer counseling opportunities, decal classes designed by students with student interests in mind, leadership opportunities around the campus from outreach to RA type experiences. The allow students to pick up and enhance their soft skills that make them more marketable.</p>	<p>Student services can prioritize academics but that is not the "whole student." A "whole student" should be mindful of their social interactions among peers and community.</p>	<p>Some institutions provide a support system for students that students feel they can readily access. No student should feel judged or scrutinized when they elect to use any service (e.g. tutoring, mental health counseling, etc.).</p>
<p>Peer mentoring and entry level staff who can work individually with students</p>		
<p>Programing that involves social networking are effective and low cost. Offering free coffee once a week, for example allows for students to congregate in our center and in the process make social connections over a cup of coffee. We have also had more structured social events inviting students to take a break from the academics and watch a movie, or eat some ice cream, or have some hot cocoa with marshmallows.</p>	<p>Both</p>	<p>Student affairs professionals are able to provide low-cost and high-impact programs to students</p>
<p>programs and services that entail personal contact with students - the development of these relationships assists in shrinking the university for students and providing them with a point of contact for support, questions, mentoring. / / provision of on campus housing / / opportunities for membership in student organizations, leadership opportunities, student work opportunities in the division</p>	<p>It needs to be a combination of both, they both have their purpose in student development.</p>	<p>Personalized attention that is genuine, thoughtful, direct and accurate.</p>

Research, evaluation, and assessment - applying theoretical and applied research rather than pursuing anecdotal ideas of staff. Integrating research-based findings that can help enhance local models towards understanding causality, effective and efficient practices.	I believe there needs to be balance between both. However, since the University of California, Davis is a Tier I research institution it can be easy for funding to remain focused on improving academics because traditionally this is where a lot of the revenue comes from. Faculty and staff on the academic side of the institution need to better understand that the student experience includes experiences that occur outside of the classroom.	I think that institutions of higher learning come in different flavors. Differences in curriculum, size, academic focus, funding streams, public vs. private, and diversity of of the campus are some reasons for the disparity in retention rates and student spending.
Student activities help students get connected and want to stay in school.	I think both. It is not an either/or situation. People go to school, not a segmented part of a person. You need to feed the whole person for success.	The type of students that they attract naturally will lead to them graduating.
Student Check-In meetings the first 3 weeks of classes	Retention requires that students feel connection to their institution and supported by the offices/people at their school- a balance between academics and student services is needed. Wrap around services for students are essential- full staffed counseling centers, case management for students and disability support services.	Faculty and staff who are engaged and committed to the success of their students. Wrap around services are available to support students- to help them deal with the stressors of college- also includes helpful financial aid offices that can counsel and support students in that area as well.
Student development and leadership training for our student employees. (Over 800 per year) / Intramural programs serve large numbers and students view it as an important way to get connected and be involved.	I think it should be a combination of both, but at the end of the day a student can graduate without being involved but has to have the degree. Finding ways to create dynamic relationships between student services and academic through FYS courses, etc. creates buy-in and support for both sides.	
Student employment opportunities, which allow students to gain work experience, transferable skills, and development alongside academic work.	academics as there is a lack of classroom and lab space. Students are not able to take many classes due to the lack of space.	They are probably spending more of the allotted money on classroom and lab space as well as technology
Student orientation programs for EOP/first-generation students. / Student Resource Centers (Cross Cultural/LGBTQIA/etc)		I think it often has to do with external factors about a student population - SES, commuter-status, work-school balance, and other non-school related responsibilities.
Student teams allow for more intimate working relationships between students. It helps them to stretch their leadership skills and provides a supportive environment.	Student services at our institution continue to suffer financially and we are required to continually advocate for our programs and services even when the research and reports indicate the impact student affairs has upon retention and graduation.	Administration is willing to listen and validate the important work done in student affairs, which improves the moral. /
Targeted tutoring for courses in students majors. funding comes from outside resources. the FREE aspect for students makes it successful as well as students that were tutored come back to tutor for other students.	I think there needs to be a balance between the two, and that universities need to encourage a sense of collaboration between academic and student affairs, rather than competition for funds and resources.	For some institutions, it may be the size of the campus and the types of students who are admitted. Highly selective institutions with a smaller campus population will often have higher graduation/retention rates, but also coincide with higher tuition costs. Public institutions have a different purpose and population than these small, private institutions. / Many of our student have to work in order to afford to live in our city, as well as commute to campus, which affects their overall experience and often makes it difficult to graduate in four years. Because of the location of our institution, many students experience culture shock during their first year, or see a year at our campus as a cultural experience before returning to their home state for their "real college" experience. It is often difficult to compare institutions due to the different factors students face. What works at some institutions will not be applicable to all campuses.

The move to online appointment scheduling has reduced some of the barriers to getting students into advising appointments.	Academics - specifically availability of classes.	Students are able to form a relationship with a peer, advisor, professor who can provide some of the same information that student services would.
The opportunity for students to move and play.	Both; they are equally important to keep students at an institution and to prepare them for whatever their next step. It's almost impossible to graduate "complete" students if the institution doesn't balance services and academics well.	If they're mainly a commuter institution or an online institution, there is far less need for student services. If they're a brick-and-mortar campus, I can't imagine students want to stay if there aren't services available to support their academic work. / / Totally unrelated: Happy to see my alma mater (UNL) on the list of institutions you're including in your study. :-)/
The use of well-trained peer mentors further expands our reach and scope and also provides leadership opportunities for the mentors. Using online videos, blogs and materials also has high impact.	The focus of your questions relate a lot to retention. I would say our organization sees that as important but really focuses on building a better college experience for all students.	The campus is focusing on improving the out of the classroom contact between students and faculty. It is now a part of the tenure track criteria.
Transfer Orientations (program): we are utilizing current programming (orientations) with current staff to support the advising needs of our transfer students in a systematic and welcoming way. Having a good first impression with advising is important for building a strong foundation for future impact. Although there could be improvements to the process, students get personalized advising assistance from the first advising touch they receive. It's not as rushed and it's not generic. It's helpful so they aren't starting off behind or on the wrong foot when they get to our school.	it's both. there has to be a balance between social and academics for a student to be successful at college and beyond. if there are students that get all "A's" and have not been socially active, they are less likely to be a contributor to society.	Degree of difficulty in a specific major. If a popular yet hard program admits large numbers and then filters out the best and the worst, what benefit did that do for the student that was not successful? Other programs at that college then get students that did not qualify for their first choice and that delays graduation. students that were admitted to their first choice may not have been qualified to begin with, but were still accepted to sill weed out the competition.
Tutoring Services, Learning Teams for math and science classes.	I would say both but mostly making sure the university's Academic Advisors are valued and appreciated and understanding how important their role is at the university to help with student success and retention.	Quality of student population and students being admitted along with advisors and other student services staff who really care about their students and want to help them be successful.
We are a very tradition based school So, having the students building on previous programs keeps the ball rolling.	Both	Individualized attention.
We are implementing a "sibling" program wherein upperclassmen volunteer to mentor incoming freshmen in my department. Students seem enthusiastic about this.	At the moment, I feel it needs to be on improving our services. Advisors are not paid high salaries in comparison with advisors throughout the reason. We often lose the best advisors due to lack of pay increases that are comparable with their educational level and expertise. If we could find ways to professionalize and incentivize student services, we could see an increase in retaining of strong employees who in turn can work on retention and graduation improvement. We do have a lot of programs /efforts geared toward these areas at our university, however.	Selective admissions, strong reliance on peer-to-peer engagement and a clear expectation of student self-engagement.
We do Restorative yoga in partnership with the Student Health Center. It is very low cost, but has had incredibly positive reviews. this program aids in helping students with a number of mental health disorders which is a rising group of students.	I think a little of both are needed. Everyone should always try to keep improving. Students need support from a variety of people and units. We all need to work together to meet a common goal.	I think it depends on the quality of the student who is admitted. Some students who are more prepared for higher education will reach graduate sooner and easier than a student who is less prepared.

<p>We engage students in our Aspirations for Student Learning and along with our university motto, "that i May Serve" provide a framework for our students and employees to strive to make themselves the best they can be and the world a better place.</p>	<p>At our university, academics are pretty solid I feel, and student services could always be improved no matter how good they already are.</p>	<p>It really depends on their entrance requirements and the institution's mission. Public universities and community colleges are going to have lower rates because their accessibility is so high. Private institutions may have crappy student services but for some reason students want to go there and they only accept those that are likely to graduate.</p>
<p>We have a Persistence Committee made up of interdepartmental units. We are using a case management approach to address students of concern by leveraging the staff who are in closest proximity to the students to intervene in the most appropriate way, place, and time. This allows us to be strategic and effective in our work.</p>	<p>Currently, there is already a big push to improve academics and I think there needs to be a push for improving student services to match it. In the case of the advising office where I work, our student population has grown substantially over the past 4 years and the staffing of the advising office has not kept up. I feel like we need more student services to support the increased enrollment numbers.</p>	<p>My first guess would be the nature of the incoming student in terms of admissions standards. Are incoming students better prepared academically at some institutions compared to others? Obviously, that aspect is impacted by the primary/secondary school system in that state and the recruitment targets of the institution.</p>
<p>We mainly just meet with students 1:1 or talk to them online 1:1. No special tech tools or programs.</p>	<p>I think there needs to be a dedicated focus on both.</p>	<p>Many of us in education have learned how to effectively do more with less, because funding never seems to be superfluous. Those who are creative, resourceful, and innovative can come up with ways to improve graduation/retention rates without necessarily employing more electronic tracking resources or hiring more advisors/staff.</p>
<p>We offer special courses to help students struggling with courses. It is an effort to help increase student success and retention. Advisors are asked to teach this course during their regular working hours. These programs are effective because it provides an additional area where students can ask questions and get the support they need.</p>	<p>Both</p>	<p>Addressing students holistically - acknowledging that the non-academic often impacts the academic</p>
<p>We provide workshops, programming, involvement opportunities that are pretty cost-effective most of the time. We also work to support marginalized students, provide education, outreach, programming and advocacy. We have a peer mentor program, a speakers bureau, etc.</p>	<p>There needs to be a focus on providing individualized attention on students. We are a large university that needs to feel smaller. Additionally, we need more resources for staff that have access to students but need the time to build meaningful relationships. Some advising units are so overworked that students are lucky to get a 10 minute session. This is not enough time to implement appreciative advising techniques.</p>	<p>They have realigned their priorities so that the work, communication, and organization are arranged in a strategic way to meet graduation and retention goals. This allows for efficiency in the work, freeing up time to do the work that makes an impact.</p>
<p>We use an interface by starfish we call "MyPLAN". I don't know how much it costs to operate, but it certainly has become a key element to our student affairs retention efforts with students. We can put session notes and other information out for the student and other support staff to see in order to aid in communicating our efforts for each student.</p>	<p>Academics</p>	<p>Admit the best and brightest; more selective admissions.</p>
<p>We use online tools to help students self service. For example, we have mental health resources so stressed students can exercise self care allowing the mental health professionals to serve students in distress.</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>campus culture-I think an institution that is more targeted to first year students versus transfer/commuter students will have an impact on graduation/retention.</p>
<p>Welcome Days - gives students an opportunity to see resources for the college and get a planner. Organization fair - exposes students to all of the RSOs</p>	<p>It is not an either-or scenario. Both aspects need to be strong and consistent with an eye toward improvements and continual renewal.</p>	<p>It could that they admit high-ability students that happen to require less intervention effort per student. It could be that they have very small student-faculty ratios that feature many opportunities for in-and out of class learning.</p>

<p>Women's Center, Bridge-to-Hope, Student Parents At Manoa, SEED Unit. / / Focus on student recruitment and retention of underserved populations by seeking external resources to ensure the services we believe are relevant and working are funded and continue to be provided to our students.</p>	<p>Until there's more clarity and specificity about the goals of non-curricular activities for students, I think these allocations will and probably should continue to focus on academics. Other student affairs entities can continue to provide non-curricular opportunities for students, outside the "retention/graduation" goal set.</p>	<p>I have no idea how common this scenario might be, but assuming there are such schools, I would imagine they've found a way to provide advising/mentoring/instruction that's more responsive to the individual student, helping them stay engaged.</p>
	<p>No; not really-- at least not for all departments. Recently, in an effort to increase retention rates, a new advising platform was purchased; however, it's not a tool/resource that fits all the advising structures that exist on our campus. Primarily, allocations are spend with one department in mind and everyone else has to make it work. That one department through which all allocations seems to be filtered doesn't even advise upper-classmen or do other administrative tasks such as graduation applications. It doesn't make sense.</p>	<p>There are so many factors: student resilience, socioeconomic status of the students and their families, more second-generation students rather than first generation students. However, I would think that those institutions are educating students how to advise themselves and giving them the tools rather than taking control of all advising and admin work. They probably also have more simplified processes, procedures and policies which make it easier for students to navigate and advocate for themselves. (This is just speculation, though.)</p>
	<p>Yes, it makes sense to me to use funding within academic affairs to improve retention. It also makes sense to me to be very clear about the vision of one's office so that everyone knows how their role impacts students and the office as a whole.</p>	<p>Everyone understands the mission of the institution and how they fit into that; there is stability in the leadership of the institution; both student and academic affairs staff are priority.</p>
	<p>Student Services. A majority of students will struggle during their time here for various reasons. Academics are important, yes, but this generation is decidedly lacking in coping skills, attention span, and how to operate outside of college. You will benefit the student's most by affecting the most students and the gifted are few.</p>	<p>The dedication of student services staff</p>
	<p>I believe both are critical and should work in conjunction. However, bottom line if I had to choose - I'd say academics.</p>	<p>Investment in the PEOPLE low advisor/student ratios and TIME. Also, a major part is how accessible the faculty/staff are as well as how advising is 'counted' in faculty P&T processes.</p>
	<p>Improving student services. We have a high volume of International Students who have a difficult time adjusting to the academic environment as well as the climate which can directly affect academic performance.</p>	<p>I think proper training plays a huge role. Most higher education jobs I have ever had involved me training myself. I think this is the wrong start for most staff. Also, we need to be more selective of who we hire for those roles. Staff and faculty need to be more approachable and understanding of student needs while allowing them to be more responsible for their educational decisions.</p>
	<p>This question is above my pay grade. I answered "not applicable" to several questions since "unknown" and/or "neutral" were not options. / This was a frustrating survey to take. :}</p>	<p>This is a fascinating idea. I don't have an answer for it.</p>