THE EXAMINATION OF PARTICIPATION IN A COMMUNITY COLLEGE

PEER MENTORING PROGRAM ON SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND ACADEMIC

SUCCESS OF FIRST-TIME STUDENTS

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BY

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the

dissertation entitled

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PEER MENTORING PROGRAM ON SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND

ACADEMIC SUCCESS OF FIRST-TIME STUDENTS

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a candidate for the degree of doctor of education,

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research study was to add to the body of knowledge on peer mentoring programs and aid college administrators in creating a successful learning environment. This investigation was guided by two conceptual frameworks: Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) and Student Involvement Theory (Astin, 1999). The study seeks to gain an understanding of what the experiences and perceptions of community college students are concerning peer mentoring programs as they seek to enhance retention of students.

This dual case study examined two Midwestern community colleges that were identified as having successful retention rates serving diverse populations. It explored responses from both peer mentoring program administrators and student participants regarding students' social and academic success. Data analysis was conducted from the responses, observational data and document data. From the data, themes emerged indicating there are particular characteristics of peer mentoring programs that administrators will want to include to implement a meaningful program that will both increase learning and student engagement in college.

The implications of this inquiry for application in higher education directly influence school leaders trying to create meaningful interventions to increase retention and completion rates in college. The findings in this study demonstrated successful mentoring programs include training for both the campus community and mentors in ways to build community, provide opportunities to reflect upon both personal and academic growth, and set expectations of accountability and leadership. The use of peers can enhance the academic performance of both the mentees and mentors if the right conditions are created throughout the mentoring program.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Background

Within recent years, the opportunity to pursue a college degree has been made available for all United States residents. This increase of student attendance is evident between 1999 and 2009, whereas the number of students attending a higher education institution grew from 14.8 to 20.4 million, respectively (U.S. Department of Education, National Center of Education Statistics, 2011). A major contributor to the growth is community colleges. These institutions provide access to diverse populations and serve more than 43% of all undergraduates in the higher education system. However, even with the increased numbers of students attending, completion rates remain relatively low. In 2011, 17.6 million of young adults were pursing some type of higher education, yet, less than half of them completed a certificate or degree within six years (U.S. Department of Education, National Center of Education Statistics, 2011).   Furthermore, those students who do receive a college degree are taking longer to complete. Specifically at two-year institutions, 27% of first-time, full-time students who enrolled in fall 2005 completed a certificate or associate's degree within 150% of the normal *time* required to complete such a degree (U.S. Department of Education, National Center of Education Statistics). Contrary to students who enrolled in 1999, where the completion rate was 29% (U.S. Department of Education, National Center of Education Statistics). Coupled with the student attribution rate at 50% for almost a century, the path students choose to access, pursue and obtain their degree is a major concern in higher education (Tinto, 1993).

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While community colleges are not the only institutions of higher education that struggle with completion rates, they may be the most dramatic example. In 2007-08, 42 % of first-year undergraduate students at public two-year institutions (typically community colleges) reported being required to enroll in remedial college course (U.S. Department of Education, National Center of Education Statistics, 2011). Consequently, retention and completion rates of colleges and universities have become a national priority; to this end, the United States Secretary of Education announced a national goal to increase the number of Americans with a college degree or certificate by 50% by the year 2020 (2011).

Similarly, the challenge of students completing a degree is exacerbated by the need to educate even more students with decreased funding. Since the fall of 2008, community colleges have seen enrollment increase 21.8% (U.S. Department of Education, National Center of Education Statistics, 2011) while funding for higher education has decreased during this same time (Oliff & Leachman, 2011).

Community colleges traditionally offer convenient locations, open access admission policies, and relatively low costs. Consequently, community colleges tend to enroll students who are more academically, economically, and socially disadvantaged than do other post-secondary institutions. For example, in 2005, compared with students attending four-year colleges and universities, higher proportions of community college students were older, females, and from low-income families, and lower proportions were white (Horn & Nevill, 2006, p. 9). Also, more than half of community college enrollments have been part-time students, a percentage generally at least twice that at public and private four-year colleges and universities (U.S. Department of Education,

2008). Therefore, the traditional community college population of first-time freshman, low-income, part-time, and minority students are typically less engaged on campus and pose higher risk of attrition in higher education (Astin, 1993; Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2008; Gardner, 1996).

Upcraft and Gardner (1989) and Tinto (1993) examined the challenges facing students enrolled in community colleges and emphasized the need for higher education personnel to assist in new students' transition through focusing on their academic, social, and personal environment. Tinto (1993) stated nearly half of the students entering college drop out before graduating, with first-year students being the most likely to leave, "While many students soon adjust, others have great difficulty either in separating themselves from past associations and/or in adjusting to the academic and social life of college" (Tinto, 1993, p. 163). Several researchers have argued the critical role peers play as an influencing force in student development (Astin, 1993; Gardner, 1996; Pascarelli & Terenzini, 2005). In particular, Astin stated the "amount of interaction among peers has far reaching effects on nearly all areas of student learning and development" (p. 12). While research has focused upon the difficulties students encounter as they entered their first year of college (Astin, 1993; Gardner, 1996; Kuh & Zhao, 2004; Noel & Levitz, 2009; Pascarelli & Terenzini; and Tinto, 1998), there is a need to examine practices to improve completion rates for students attending community college institution.

Conceptual Framework

Two conceptual frameworks guided this study: Student Involvement Theory (Astin, 1975) and Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977).While student persistence has often been viewed largely as a responsibility of the student and their decision-making

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(Gardner, 1996), the two conceptual frameworks for this study suggest that institutions can create positive student engagement opportunities ultimately resulting in high retention rates. Astin's (1975) involvement theory suggested student growth and learning occurs as a result of active participation on campus. Similar research has shown that a desire to commit, persist, and be involved was contingent upon social integration (Tinto, 1993). This perspective was partially included in Astin's (1999) theory of student involvement, where he argued the depth of connections with others was the key to student learning and retention.

For instance, one method of student involvement is peer mentoring. Bandura (1977) postulated that individuals learn effectively as a result of their involvement with others and the modeling that takes place. He suggested that modeling requires attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation, thus fomenting an opportunity to observe and imitate both negative and positive behaviors through both an academic and social lens. Furthermore, a peer mentoring interaction provides an opportunity for mentors to model successful collegiate behaviors and for mentees to observe other successful students. Bandura (2008) further posited that students should be self-reflective about their environment and experiences. "People cultivate their interests, enabling beliefs, and competencies" through modeling observed behaviors (Bandura, p. 99). Consequently, both the mentee and mentor have common experiences they are able to share in their learning.

Statement of the Problem

Student retention and persistence has been a continued concern for those in higher education (U.S. Department of Education, National Center of Education Statistics, 2011).

Post-secondary education provides numerous benefits to both individuals and society. The current economic times and tight employment market have raised the need for highly educated and skilled workers. Unemployment rates peaked in 2010 at around eight percent for baccalaureate degree holders. Conversely, the rate of unemployment and underemployment for high school graduates reached 21 percent; for high school dropouts, it peaked at 32 percent (Lumina, 2012, p. 5). Also, there is a correlation between higher levels of education and higher earnings for all racial/ethnic groups and for both men and women (Baum & Payea, 2010). Consequently, President Obama set an educational goal for the nation to graduate significantly more students by 2020. Based on the *Organization for Economic and Cooperation and Development (OECD) Report* in 2010, the United States has fallen behind other countries in the number of college graduates. As a result, post-secondary institutions - including community colleges - are being asked to respond to the increased expectations for quality, performance, and accountability. A crucial aspect among the expectations is the assessment and improvement of student retention and student learning.

In response to retention and completion concerns, educators have explored various programs and interventions to assist students in persistence and completion of their academic career. Educators need to continue to gain knowledge of the difference of the students who remained and persisted in school and those who did not. Since several researchers (Astin, 1999; Habley & McClanahan, 2010; Tinto, 1993; Upcraft & Gardner, 1989) reported most students leave college during their first year and most within the first six weeks, the integration and retention of new students is often the focus of college student success initiatives. Intervention programs that promote academic and social

engagement have received more attention recently (Bailey & Alfonso, 2005; Habley & McClanahan, Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). This is particularly true for community colleges. In 2001, community colleges began administering the *Community College Survey of Student Engagement;* additionally, in 2004, *Achieving the Dream* was created to assess and improve student retention at community colleges. One trend identified was the use of peer mentors (Habley & McClanahan). Findings revealed that students who received peer mentoring earned higher grades, re-enrolled, and graduated at higher rates than students who do not receive peer mentoring (Bourdon & Carducci, 2002). Consequently, examining such mentoring programs could result in a better understanding of how to retain students in community colleges.

Purpose of the Study

Higher education institutions are being asked to increase their first-year retention rates and graduation rates. If colleges are going to address the continued persistence and completion problems that have plagued them, they will need to assess different institutional intervention programs that promote academic and social integration. Peer mentoring programs have been identified as one of those interventions (Benjamin, 2004; Habley & McClanahan, 2010; Montero, 2009).The purpose of this study was to investigate how mentors, mentees, and staff within a community college perceived the impact of peer mentoring programs on students' social integration, student's learning, and first to second-year persistence.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the present study:

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1. How do program administrators perceive the effectiveness of the peer mentoring program to retain students?

2. What strategies do peer mentors use to assist mentees in their social and academic integration into the Community College environment?

3. What characteristics of the peer mentoring program do mentor and mentees perceive promote learning through academics, faculty, and peer involvement?

4. What characteristics of the peer mentoring program do mentor and mentees perceive promote social integration and engagement for students?

Design of the Study

This case study sought to understand the meaning behind students' experience in a student mentoring program in relation to their subsequent experience in the college (Creswell, 2003). Qualitative research is a flexible and responsive way of conducting a study based on emergent themes. "A qualitative case study is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance or social unit" (Merriam, 1998, p. 27). This type of research design highlights the use of observations, interviews, and focus groups of all levels of the organization to gain a thick description of differing viewpoints.

Qualitative research permits the researcher to gain in-depth knowledge and understanding of the thoughts, feelings, and emotions associated with the change implemented through data analysis. In contrast, quantitative research, a more deductive methodology, would only reveal the objective of testing and not describe the process of the organizational change or let the themes emerge from the data (Creswell, 2003, p. 125). In a qualitative research design, the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection. For the purpose of this dual case study, data were collected through

interviews, focus groups, rich descriptive field notes, observation, and document analysis. The data were then triangulated to strengthen the reliability and validity of the findings. The research design selected for this study was a dual case study. A comparative or collective-case approach is used when studying more than one case. A dual case study "involves collecting and analyzing data from several cases and can be distinguished from the single case study that may have subunits or subcases embedded within" (Merriam, 1998, p. 40). Using a dual case study expands the population and is a common strategy for enhancing the external validity of the research findings (Merriam, 1998).

Limitations and Assumptions of the Study

Limitations exist in any research design regardless of effort to ensure trustworthiness and rigor in the research. Utilizing the researcher as the instrument for data collection allows the flexibility to be responsive and "adapt to unforeseen events" (Merriam, 1998, p. 20). While having a human instrument allows the researcher to change questions during interviews based on the participant's responses, one must also recognize the limitations of such data collection. One limitation to the researcher's need to probe and pursue emerging themes is there were no set protocols or guidelines for eliciting information (Merriam, 1998). Also, using a human instrument allows opportunities to make mistakes and allow personal biases to appear in the study (Merriam, 1998). The researcher is a community college administrator; therefore, she must be aware of her positionality within the study and be attentive not to lead the participants toward her own biases and opinions.

Trustworthiness of qualitative research results depends on the researcher being disciplined, knowledgeable, and thoughtful, as "[a]ssessing the validity and reliability of

qualitative study involves examining its component parts" (Merriam, 1998, p. 199). The researcher followed the data analysis procedures and provided enough detail that the findings make sense. The ability to generalize to other settings is based on assumptions of "equivalency between sample and population" (Merriam, 1998, p. 207). Reliability and generalizability are major challenges for qualitative research designs. This design revolves around the social science atmosphere and cannot be generalized or replicated because "human behavior is never static" (Merriam, 1998, p. 207). "No matter how diverse the sample, it will by nature never be inclusive of everyone" (Heppner & Heppner, 2004, p. 340). Understanding this limitation of qualitative research highlights the researcher's need to focus on the thick, rich description and describe how a particular situation compares with others in the same class (Merriam, 1998).

<div align="center">**Design Controls**</div>

Despite the limitations of the study, the researcher attempted to ensure trustworthiness and rigor throughout the study. Researcher bias was controlled through triangulated data using "multiple sources of data or multiple methods to confirm the emerging findings" (Merriam, 1998, p. 204). The researcher engaged in member checks by having the participants review the results of the transcribed data to ensure accuracy and address internal validity and reliability. Data collection consistency was also enhanced using one researcher exclusively. The rich, thick description of the data collected allowed the researcher and the readers of the research to determine "how closely their situations match the research situations and whether findings can be transferred" (Merriam, 1998, p. 211). An audit trail of how the data were collected was

provided and can be used by other researchers in the future to determine if they could

replicate the account (Merriam, 1998).

Definition of Key Terms

Definitions were provided to give readers a clearer understanding of key concepts

and to establish a critical common language (Bruffee, 1999). The following terms were

identified as being important to the understanding of the investigation.

Academic and Social Integration: Academic and Social Integration occur when students

engage themselves in the social and academic life and become committed to graduate and

the institution (Tinto, 1975).

Attrition: Attrition happens when a student is no longer a member of the institution, most

often occurring by withdrawing from the school or not meeting standards (academic or

other).

Modeling: Modeling occurs when a student observes and imitates behavior. Bandura

(2006) suggested students may observe and imitate behavior as a form of social and

academic guidance.

Peer Mentor: Peer Mentor is a term generally given to upper-class students who serve as

both a friend and a role model who support and encourage a younger partner in his/her

academic and personal growth.

Mentee: A mentee is a new or first-year student participating in a Student Mentor

Program who is looking for assistance with his or her transition to college.

Persistence: Persistence refers to students' continuous enrollment in subsequent terms in

pursuit of their degree. This term is often synonymous with retention.

Retention: Retention is when a student maintains enrollment at the institution from year one to year two of their postsecondary education career (Habley & McClanahan, 2010). This term is often interchangeable with the term persistence.

Student Involvement: Student Involvement "refers to the quantity and quality of the physical and psychological energy that students invest in the college experience. Such involvement takes many forms, such as absorption in academic work, participation in extracurricular activities, and interaction with faculty and other institutional personnel" (Astin, 1999, p. 528).

Summary

Researchers (Habley & McClanahan, 2010; Horn & Nevill, 2006; Kuh & Zhao, 2004; Noel &Levitz, 2009; Tinto,1993; Upcraft & Gardner 1989) suggested student retention and completion rates for student in higher education have continued to be dismal. Social integration and student learning that could result from peer mentoring was important to the research regarding student retention because "the greater the contact among students, the more likely individuals are to establish social and intellectual memberships in the social communities… therefore more likely to remain in college" (Tinto, 1993, p. 118). This study was initiated to explore key aspects of peer mentoring models that could assist those trying to improve and enhance the knowledge base surrounding student retention.

Provided in this chapter are the background and purpose of the study as well as an overview of the effect of the retention and completion issues facing higher education. Provided in Chapter Two is a review of related literature relevant to the present study, while outlined in Chapter Three is the research design and methodology undertaken for

the study. Presented in Chapter Four is an analysis of the data collected. Finally, Chapter

Five will discuss the findings, conclusions drawn, implications, and areas for future

study.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

The researcher focused on general research surrounding student retention and

attrition rates for colleges and universities, focusing specifically on community college

students. This literature review included five major areas, each of which was explored

more in depth in order to provide an underpinning for this inquiry. The purpose of this

research was to gain an understanding of what the experiences and perceptions of

community college students are concerning peer mentoring programs as they seek to

enhance retention of students. The first section of this literature review explores the

importance of retention and persistence of college students in higher education and

includes an examination of the research on first-year experiences of students. Next,

several conceptual models related to organizational learning and learning communities in

higher education are discussed, including work by Nonaka (1994) and Nonaka and

Takeuchi (1995); Cross, (1998); Gabelnick, Macgregor, Matthews, and Smith (1990);

and Tinto's (1975, 1993, 1995, 1998, 2003) model of student departure. The last section

includes a comprehensive examination of social learning theory (Bandura, 1977, 2006,

2001, 2008) and student involvement theory (Astin, 1975, 1993, & 1999). These works

provide the conceptual basis for this research. Each section seeks to support the focus of

this research as to what is needed for understanding retention of students in a community college setting.

Importance of Retention and Persistence

Student retention and attrition rates are a concern for all colleges and universities. Tinto (1993) highlighted that over half of all entering students will leave the academy before they complete their first year of college, a statistic that unfortunately remains today. In the most recently released statistics, for first to second year students in two-year public school, the retention rate is 53.7% (Habley & McClanahan, 2010). In addition, according to Habley and McClanahan (2010), which tracked annual data from 1989 to 2009, the percentage of first-year students who returned for a second year has changed very little. Furthermore, researchers have indicated that retention may be a significant indicator of institutional quality and impact (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Therefore, developing retention strategies to increase student retention and persistence to graduation continues to be one of the most important issues facing community colleges.

Habley and McClanahan (2010) argued that students who are less engaged in the campus are at the greatest risk of dropping out. Specifically, traditional age, first time, low-income students are considered the least engaged students (CCSSE, 2009, p. 6). Typical community college students often fit this description and have an especially difficult time feeling connected on the college campus (Gardner, 1996). One misconception regarding student attrition is that students leave due to academic deficiency or institutional dismissal policies. However, according to Tinto (1975), less than one-quarter of student attrition is the result of involuntary dismissal due to academic deficiencies. A student's reasons for persisting almost always include one element: a

strong connection to someone at the college. To this end, "relationships with faculty members, advisors, staff members, and students play a critical role in engaging students and encouraging them to stick with their studies" (CCSSE, 2008, p. 5). Consequently, Noel, Levitz, and Saluri (1985) argued retention intervention strategies are designed to keep students at the community college long enough for them to realize their educational goals. Furthermore, research suggests that establishing engagement opportunities and fostering student success early in the first year is the most significant intervention an institution can make toward student persistence and academic success (Gardner, 1996; Noel & Levitz, 2000; Tinto, 1993).

Importance of the First Year Experience

Habley and McClanahan (2010) reported that over 60% of community colleges indicated a person on their campus was responsible for the coordination of retention programs. A growing body of literature (Astin, 1999; Gardner, 1986; Pascarella & Terenzizi, 2005; Tinto, 1995) revealed the significance of the student's first-year experience as a determining factor in a student's success. Most colleges and universities have embraced this research and have integrated it into the strategic plan for the institution to increase retention. In Noel and Levitz's (2009) study of student retention practices, 92% of four-year schools and 68% of the two-year schools reported having a program specifically designed for first-year students. The original goals of such programs were to decrease attrition rates from first to second year (Gardner, 1986). The research on the impact of these first-year seminars revealed a significant increase in retention rates, higher interaction with faculty outside of the class, increased usage of campus resources, and improved academic performance (Crissman & Schreiber, 2002; Gardner, 1986).

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Conversely, while the first-year seminars are abundant on college campuses, Tinto (1995) contended that colleges and universities have not taken retention programs seriously, noting "[t]hey have done little to change the overall character of the college, little to alter students' educational experiences, and therefore little to address the deeper roosts of student attrition" (p. 1).

Organizational Learning

As noted earlier, the experience of involvement within the school culture leads to positive gains for students towards success (Tinto, 1993). One strategy that is becoming increasingly common is the creation of learning communities as a way to facilitate knowledge creation and sharing among students to help facilitate their engagement in school (Angelo, 1997). Knowledge creation has been described as the ability of organizational leaders to tap into the knowledge of their most valuable resources: their people. Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) posited, "organizational knowledge creation is a continuous and dynamic interaction between tacit and explicit knowledge" (p. 70), while Baumard (1999) suggested the knowledge creation process is "visible and invisible, tangible and intangible, stable and unstable" (p. 2). Specifically, the foundation of knowledge creation theory rests on the sharing of tacit or personal knowledge, which can be converted into explicit knowledge and operationalized by all within the organization. Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) stated in a simplified overview:

> When organizations innovate, they do not simply process information from outside in, in order to solve existing problems and adapt to a changing environment. They actually create new knowledge and information from the

inside out, in order to redefine both problems and solutions and… re-create their

environment (p. 56).

In order to have an organization that creates new knowledge regarding student

engagement and retention, employees must be given time and processes by which to

share tacit knowledge. Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) denoted this process as the four

modes of knowledge conversion: "Our dynamic model of knowledge creation is anchored

to a critical assumption that human knowledge is created and expanded through social

interaction between tacit and explicit knowledge" (p. 61); this process can be extremely

complex and iterative. The modes include socialization, externalization, internalization,

and combination. In effect, the modes represent a process beginning with shared mental

models and spiraling through different conversions to become knowledge that is

explicitly stated and used in everyday operations (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995).

The best management can do, according to Nonaka (1991), is to provide opportunities for

self-organizing groups or teams to engage in constant dialogue in order to integrate their

diverse perspectives into a new, collective perspective. The process does not go without

occasional dissension, but according to Nonaka, "it is precisely such conflict that pushes

employees to question existing premises and make sense of their experience in a new

way" (p.104).

In a knowledge creating team, making an individual's personal knowledge

available to others is the central activity. It is through this process, the spiral of

knowledge, that personal knowledge is transformed into organizational knowledge and

becomes valuable to the institution as a whole. As Nonaka (1991) summarized, "To

create new knowledge means… to re-create the company and everyone in it in a nonstop process of personal and organizational self renewal" (p. 97).

Similarly, Donaldson (2008) asserted cultivating relationships and "learning though the interpersonal domain" (p. 54) can mobilize your team and determine success. Teams facilitate organizational learning by "creating knowledge for its members, for itself as a system, and for others" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 253). Morgan (2006) offered a brain metaphor to highlight the importance of how these teams are developed. Viewing the organization as a brain, the metaphor enables the analyst to capture where organizational learning is occurring and to identify factors promoting or inhibiting learning. Morgan posited these groups must have the "requisite skills and abilities to deal with the environment in a holistic and integrated way" (p. 109). Teams utilizing single-loop learning will use negative feedback from their environment as a stimulus for the organization to self-correct (Morgan, 2006). However, the brain metaphor emphasizes the importance of going further with the concept of "double-loop learning whereby organizations continually question fundamental assumptions, procedures, and operating norms to create new ways of thinking and increase performance" (Morgan, 2006, p. 111.) Such double-loop learning can positively impact organizations by engaging participants to look for and implement continuous improvement opportunities (Scribner, Cockrell, Cockrell, & Valentine, 1999). This allows greater flexibility for the team to approach a task with creativity and autonomy while fulfilling a basic human resources strategy by addressing individual needs and desires through empowerment (Bolman & Deal, 2003).

Mezirow (2000) referred to organizational learning as "the process by which we transform our taken-for granted frames of references to make them more… capable of

change and reflective so that they may generate beliefs that will prove more true or justified to guide action" (p. 8). This learning allows people at any level to own their impact on the way things are in the organization. Moreover, creating cross-divisional teams promotes conversations and "initiate us into thought" (Bruffee, 1999, p. 133). As educational institutions focus on student engagement, learner outcomes, and increased assessment efforts, creating learning communities can prove to be very useful (Thompson, 1998) By engaging in the double-loop learning practices of questioning norms and procedures, these communities model the type of critical thinking colleges want and need. Thus, teams sharing both implicit and explicit knowledge can come together to understand the knowledge collectively; while feeding off each other's ideas, knowledge is thus created to solve problems such as student engagement and retention (Nonaka, 1994).

Consequently, change can only happen when conflicting ideas and values are identified, understood, and addressed by team members. Mezirow (2000) asserted, "learners become more aware of the context of their problematic understandings and beliefs, more critically reflective on their assumptions and those of others, more fully and freely engaged in discourse, and more effective in taking action on their reflective judgments" (p. 31). Creating an effective learning environment for the team requires everyone to actively participate in deep critical evaluation of thoughts and actions, expand their contextual understanding, and engage in collaborative conversations. Senge (2006) described the importance of allowing your assumptions to be accessible to question and observation not only by yourself but also by others. Suspending one's assumptions means "being aware of your assumptions and holding them up for

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examination" (p. 226). Dialogue can begin when everyone can collectively see their own assumptions clearly and can be contrasted with each other's assumptions (Mezirow, 2000).

Learning Communities

Learning communities in higher education have been defined in a myriad of ways in the literature (Cross, 1998; Gabelnick, Macgregor, Matthews, & Smith, 1990). Cross broadly defined them as "groups of people engaged in intellectual interactions for the purpose of learning" (p. 4). Conversely, Gabelnick, MacGregor, Matthews, and Smith defined the purpose of the learning communities more narrowly as to "purposefully restructure the curriculum to link together courses or course work so that students find greater coherence in what they are learning as well as increased intellectual interaction with faculty and fellow students" (p. 5). Tinto (1998) cautioned that learning communities go beyond a cohort of students enrolled in the same courses with the same assignments. Tinto further argued that learning groups share a common purpose, social interaction, and pursuit of individual and group learning opportunities. Similarly, Thompson (1998) defined a learning community as follows:

> The learning community is intertwined with the academic program and serves as a process of shared decision-making between faculty and students. The purpose of the community is to provide a safe environment for trust building so that students and faculty serve as instructors of one another. Additionally, the community provides opportunities for peer coaching and a resource network. (p. 3)

Angelo (1997) added that learning communities use collaborative methods and emphasize cross-course and cross-disciplinary learning.

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As a response to the need to increase retention in higher education, Tinto (1998) recommended that nearly all learning communities, regardless of their focus, should be organized around a shared or integrated body of knowledge so that students can interact and share as a community of learners. Tinto (2003) substantiated this recommendation in a study in which he found students who participated in learning communities persisted "at a substantially higher rate than did comparable students in the traditional curriculum" (p.12). This contrasts from earlier learning communities that focused on the student and faculty relationship (Gabelnick, MacGregor, Matthews, & Smith, 1990). In addition to shared knowledge, Tinto (1998, 2003) introduced the idea of shared knowing. Shared knowing occurs when students enrolled in the same set of courses cooperate and collaborate in learning the content. By asking students to construct knowledge together, "learning communities seek to involve students both socially and intellectually in ways that promote cognitive development as well as an appreciation for the many ways in which one's own knowing is enhanced when other voices are a part of that learning experience" (Tinto, 1993, p. 6). Learning communities also develop shared responsibility. Students collaboratively participate in a way that requires them to become mutually dependent on one another for learning to occur. Kuh and Zhao (2004) posited having a community focused around academic content "allows [students] to further develop their identity and discover their voice as well as to integrate what they are learning into their worldview and other academic and social experiences" (p. 117).

Furthermore, learning communities provide a context for learning that includes a social component. According to *Powerful Partnerships: A Shared Responsibility for Learning* (The American Association for Higher Education, American College Personnel

Association, and National Association of Student Personnel Administrator, 1998),

learning involves social interactions among individuals. "Learning is fundamentally

about making and maintaining connections: biologically through neural networks;

mentally among concepts, ideas and meaning; and experimentally through interaction

between mind and the environment, self and other, generality and context, deliberation

and action" (p. 5). Tinto (2003) noted that participating in learning communities "seemed

to enhance the quality of student learning" (p. 12). More so, Kuh, Pike, and McCormick

(2010) found learning communities were indirectly linked to student learning: "The

positive relationships between participating in a learning community and student

engagement, coupled with the well documented positive associations between student

engagement and learning outcomes, suggest that learning community membership is

indirectly related to student learning" (p. 314). Thus, relationships are the foundation of

learning communities at the collegiate level as students connect more closely with fellow

students, faculty, and academic material.

Peer Mentoring

Peer mentoring is regarded as an effective intervention to ensure the success and

retention of at risk students. Mentoring programs that offer support and encouragement to

students with academic deficiencies and adaptation problems during their freshmen year

have seen increases in their retention and graduation rates (Campbell & Campbell, 1997;

Mee-lee & Bush, 2003). While peer mentoring is widely accepted, there are discrepancies

with the definition and implementation of peer mentoring. Within the context of higher

education, the absence of a consistent definition of mentoring is repeated in the literature

(Crisp, 2009; Jacobi, 1991). Brown et al. (1999) and Murray (2001) broadly defined

mentoring as a one on one relationship between an experienced and less experienced

person for the purpose of learning or developing specific competencies. In other cases,

researchers did not provide an operational definition of mentoring (Bordes &

Arrendondo, 2005; Rodger & Temblay, 2003).

Terrion and Leonard (2007) described two different kinds of mentoring models. A

traditional mentoring model is one "in which an older more experienced person serves

one of two main functions; a task-related or career related function; or a psychosocial

function" (Terrion & Leonard, p. 150). Peer mentoring, on the other hand, is unlike

traditional mentoring because "mentors and mentees who are roughly equal in age,

experience, and power provide task and psychosocial support" (Terrion & Leonard, p.

150). Consequently, successful peer mentoring programs often means matching mentors

and mentees by race and gender. Some studies show matching meets the career-related

and psychosocial needs of under-represented or marginalized groups, thus increasing

satisfaction levels in the program (Bova, 2000; Bowman & Bowman, 1995; Johnson-

Baily & Cervero, 2004).

Nora and Crisp (2007) comprised a mentoring concept using four major domains:

(1) psychological and emotional support, (2) support for setting goals and choosing a

career path, (3) academic subject knowledge support aimed at advancing a student's

knowledge relevant to their chosen field, and (4) specification of a role model.

Psychological and emotional support involve listening, providing moral support, and

providing encouragement. The second domain, goal setting and career paths, includes

assessment of the student's strengths weaknesses and abilities to identify and set

academic and career goals. The third domain, academic subject knowledge support,

represents the "idea that a mentoring experience involves providing students with someone who supports their academic success inside the classroom" (Crisp, 2009, p. 539). The fourth and final domain, the existence of a role model, focuses on the ability of the mentee to learn from the mentor. The emphasis is sharing, disclosing feelings and life experiences.

Tinto's Student Departure Model

Tinto (1975) believed that student retention was related to: (1) students' background; (2) goals and commitment to education; (3) experiences at the institution related to interactions with academics, faculty, and peers; (4) external commitments while in college; and (5) integration both academically and socially. Tinto's (1975) integration model, also referred to as the student departure model, contributes greatly to understanding the process of student persistence or withdrawal from higher education. Tinto (1993) posited that students are more likely to remain enrolled in an institution if they become connected to the social and academic life of that institution. Additionally, students who become integrated into a college by developing connections to individuals, participating in clubs, or engaging in academic activities are more likely to persist than those who do not engage in such activities (Astin, 1993; Gardner, 1986; Pascarella & Terenzizi, 2005; Tinto, 1998). Similarly, a study using 2004 *National Survey of Student Engagement Data* (NSSE) found "learning community participation was positively and significantly related to student engagement, both for first-year students and seniors" (Kuh, Pike, & McCormick, 2010, p.300).

Tinto (1993) posited that student integration occurs along two dimensions, the academic and the social. Academic integration occurs when students become attached to

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the intellectual life of the college, while social integration occurs when students create relationships and connections outside of the classroom. While these two concepts are distinctly different, they also interact and enhance one another. To increase the likelihood of persistence, students must be integrated into the institution along both dimensions (Tinto, 1993).

Delving deeper into the student's interactions and experiences, Tinto's (2003) model asserted that there are five main conditions to support student learning and retention, "namely expectations, advice or feedback, support, involvement, and relevant learning" (p. 2). First, high expectations are a condition for student success. Students are more likely to persist and graduate in settings that expect them to succeed (Tinto, 2003). This is especially true to those who have been historically excluded from higher education. Hurtado and Carter (1996) portrayed the campus as a hostile climate as they described the impact of faculty's expectations for students. These researchers believed faculty expected little from their students and ask little of themselves in regard to learning (Hurtado & Carter, 1996). In addition, students are most likely to persist and graduate in settings that provide clear and consistent information about program requirements and advising for students regarding career goals (Tinto, 2003). Students need to understand what it takes for completion and how to use it to achieve personal goals. Furthermore, students are more likely to persist and graduate in settings that provide personal, social, and academic support (Tinto, 2003). This is especially true in the first year of college (Astin, 1993; Gardner, 1986; Pascarella & Terenzizi, 2005; Tinto, 1998). Some may require academic assistance, while others may need personal or social support as they find themselves confronting unfamiliar peers.

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Students are also more likely to persist in a setting that involves them as a valued member of the institution (Tinto, 2003). The frequency and quality of contact and involvement with faculty, staff, and other students is an important predictor of student success (Astin, 1999; 1993). Last, and most importantly, students are more likely to persist in a setting that fosters student learning (Tinto, 2003). Students who are actively involved in their learning are more likely to stay and graduate (Astin, 1993). Tinto insisted all of these conditions must be integrated into the first year of college "when student membership in the communities of campus is so tenuous" (p. 3).

Critics of Tinto's models have argued it is an attempt to classify and control student behavior rather than engage in institutional change (Bean & Metzer, 1985). Hurtado and Carter (1996) stated they thought the model marginalized the effect of student's wider socio-cultural and socio-economic circumstances. Another limitation of the model is it does not consider non-traditional students (Ozga & Sukhandan, 1998). Thus, the model is "characterized by assumptions about student conformity and adaptation to the institution which may be culturally specific and thus not transferable" (Ozga & Sukhandan, 1998, p. 132). In addition, this model's applicability to study student persistence at community colleges has been questioned by Ozga and Sukhandan (1998) because of the need in the framework for social integration. Generally, community college students are thought to lack the time to participate in activities that would facilitate social integration. Tinto (1993) even has questioned whether the mechanisms that encourage social integration in particular are relevant to community college commuter students.

Social Learning and Student Involvement Theory

Social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) is the idea that people learn most effectively when they interact with other learners about a given topic. Through social interaction and modeling (Bandura) peer mentors both learn and teach. Additionally, active student involvement, explored by Astin (1999), also impacted the learning for both the mentor and the mentee. Astin argued that student learning and retention are significantly connected to student involvement with the institution.

On the other hand, social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) emphasized the importance of observing and modeling the attitudes, and emotional reactions of others in learning by noting, "Of the many cues that influence behavior, at any point in time, none is more common than the actions of others" (Bandura, 2008, p. 206). In fact, peer mentoring provides a type of modeling that is consistent with Bandura's (1977) concept of social theory. Students can observe and model the positive behaviors of the peer mentor both socially and academically. Bandura suggested observing behavior is critical to the learning process:

> Virtually all learning phenomena resulting from direct experience occur on a vicarious basis by observing other people's behavior and its consequences for them. The capacity to learn by observation enables people to acquire large, integrated patterns of behavior without having to form them gradually by tedious trial and error (p. 12).

Bandura (2008) expanded on his theory to thrive in social systems stating "through social modeling and other forms of social guidance, they pass on to subsequent generations' accumulated knowledge and effective practices" (p. 101). Gabelnick, MacGregor,

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Matthews, and Smith (1990) further noted that peer mentors working through a learning community may enable a student to establish college success behaviors.

Consequently, the structure of creating learning communities provides increased and sustained interaction with both faculty and other students (Gabelnick, MacGregor, Matthews, & Smith, 1990). Therefore, there is an increased opportunity for social learning for both positive and negative behaviors. The visibility and central position of peer mentors can ideally mitigate some of the negative modeling that also may occur within the learning community.

Bandura (1977) posited there are four fundamental requirements for people to learn and model behavior: (1) attention, (2) retention, (3) reproduction, and (4) motivation. Attention involves concentrating on the topic or task or remembering the information for later use from multiple influences available. The behaviors one chooses to associate repeatedly will serve as the learned behavior. Retention requires the observer to organize and rehearse the modeled behavior, therefore committing it to memory so the behavior can be reproduced without the direction of the model. Reproduction involves taking coded or symbolic representation of the modeling behaviors and translating back into an action. Motivation is based on reinforcing the behavior through rewards, punishments, incentives, and repeat exposures. People tend to focus on and adopt behavior that results in desired outcomes. Regarding the failure to adopt a modeled behavior, Bandura (2006) assumed:

> The failure of an observer to match the behavior of a model may result from any
> of the following: not observing the relevant activities, inadequately coding
> modeled events for memory representing, failing to retain what was learned,

[and/or the] physical inability to perform or experiencing insufficient incentives

(p. 29).

Therefore, it requires more involvement than sole observation of a model to learn model behaviors.

Bandura (2008) suggested people make their own choices but learn and grow based on their environment and experiences when he argued "personal influence is part of the determining conditions governing self-development, adaptation, and change" (p. 87). Peer mentoring builds both leadership and self-reflecting capabilities for students. Bandura (2006) described the relationship between environmental influence and one's influence on behavioral outcomes and with four properties of human agency: (1) intentionality, (2) forethought, (3) self-reactiveness, and (4) self-reflectiveness. Humans have intentions that include plans and strategies for realizing them. This means fore-thought is needed to visualize goals and anticipate outcomes. Bandura (2008) noted, "forethoughtful perspective provides direction, coherence, and meaning to one's life" (p. 87). Agents are also self -regulating. People will make their own plans, but will also direct their course of action. Lastly, humans are reflective. They examine "their personal efficacy, the soundness of their thoughts and actions, and the meaning of their pursuits, and make corrections if necessary" (Bandura, 2008, p. 88).

Learning through observation and modeling can occur in different contexts including higher education. Astin's (1975, 1999) student involvement theory focused specifically on such action within the higher education setting. Involvement theory has five basic tenets that can be used to gauge the level of involvement in a particular experience. Student involvement is defined by referring to "the investment of physical

and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (Astin, 1999. p. 518). This includes both the general student experience as well as the academic requirements. In addition, "involvement occurs along a continuum" (p. 519). Students will invest varying amounts of energy in different objects at different times. Student involvement theory posited that time and effort in any activity that encouraged a student to spend time on campus becomes a contributor to success. This theory encourages educators to determine how motivated the student is based on how much time and energy the student is devoting to the learning process. Additionally, Astin suggested "involvement has both quantitative and qualitative features" (p, 519). Involvement is not only measured by hours and minutes, but by the depth of connections with people or academic content. Creating opportunities for involvement on campus serves as a way for colleges to increase student retention and success. Astin went further to argue, "The amount of student learning and personal development associated with any educational program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program" (p. 519).

Lastly, Astin (1999) suggested "the effectiveness of educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase student involvement" (p. 519). This is particularly important for those designing educational programs at community colleges where involvement of both faculty and students seems to be minimal. Institutions looking for ways to retain students can use involvement theory to engage their students. "Students' social integration through student organizations and friends at their institution predicts institutional commitment, thus, social integration predicts student's intent to return" (Heiberger & Harper, 2008, p. 29).

Astin's theory (1975, 1999) focused on the active participation of the student in the learning process by encouraging faculty to focus less on what they do and more on student engagement. Astin (1999) proposed three forms of involvement, which included involvement in academics, involvement with faculty, and involvement with peers. He suggested that without these three types of institutional involvement, students will become isolated and less invested in their educational experiences. Consequently, he found a positive relationship between student levels of involvement, personal development, and levels of learning. As Astin (1999) noted, "It is not so much what the individual thinks or feels, but what the individual does, how he or she behaves, that defines the involvement" (p. 519).

Astin (1993) furthered his research by studying the institutional impact on the development of students from 1,300 colleges and universities. Astin (1993) declared peer groups were the most influential source for values, beliefs, and goals. He postulated, "the student's peer group is the single most potent source of influence on growth and developing during the undergraduate years" (p. 398). He suggested that the impact on student learning and development likely will be strengthened by intentional use of peer groups. This is consistent with more recent research on generational characteristics. Current students, also known as Millennials, have been developing strong team instincts and tight peer bonds since early pre-school (Howe & Strauss, 2003). These team-orientated students use technology to build tight circles of friends and enjoy learning by group work. While this generational characteristic seems to merge well with the involvement theory, Howe and Strauss (2003) warn colleges that fail to create an exciting campus environment "will have difficulty recruiting and retaining good students" (p. 99).

While more recent studies show that positive educational learning outcomes are merely an indirect result of participation in a learning community, researchers did assert learning community participation was positively and significantly related to student engagement (Kuh, Pike, & McCormick, 2010). Astin (1993) also stated that frequent student-student interactions were associated with positive cognitive development. Similarly, Havnes (2008) and Juedes (2010) affirmed peers working together can expand a student's understanding and can promote thinking that is more creative.

Overall, reviews of literature have supported Astin's student involvement model. Pascarella and Terezini (2005) reviewed over thirty years of research and noted "student's academic involvement holds the greatest potential for fostering growth in intellectual skills…. interpersonal interactions with faculty and peers may influence growth by influencing a student's level of involvement in academic or intellectual experiences" (p. 149). Ultimately, social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) along with student involvement theory (Astin, 1999) served as the conceptual frameworks for this study.

Summary

In summary, a review of the literature revealed the retention problem in higher education remains unsolved. There is much work to be done to understand and implement successful retention interventions that will positively affect student persistence. However, the literature did provide existing theories that can assist in answering student attrition questions. Learning is about making in-depth connections with others and the academic content. Astin's (1975, 1993, & 1999), Bandura's (1977, 2006, 2008, 2009), and Tinto's

(1975, 1993, 1995, 1998, 2003) models provide the foundation on how to facilitate learning and create connections for students to the institution.

Further, the obligation of higher education to provide an environment of integration received substantial support from the literature. Social interaction and integration were key components known to facilitate student persistence (Heiberger & Harper, 2008; Ozga & Sukhandan, 1998; Tinto, 1993). The review of the pertinent research focused on the importance of intervention programs that promoted both social and academic integration, particularly within the first year of college (Gardner, 1986, 1996; Noel & Levitz, 1985; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993). Students are more likely to persist and graduate in settings that provide personal, social, and academic support. Peer mentoring programs were one of the student success intervention programs examined in this inquiry that provide both student involvement and a shared learning experience (Gardner, 1996; Habley, & McClanahan, 2010)

Provided in Chapter Three is a description of the context and methodology of the research design employed in this investigation. The content includes a statement of purpose, study questions, a description of the sample population, a description of data gathering methods, and a summary. Addressed as well are rationales for selecting a mixed-model research approach and support for the design. Presented and analyzed in Chapter Four are the collected data. In addition, Chapter Five provides a discussion of the findings and conclusions as well as recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Recent educational goals designed to increase graduation and completion rates in

higher education have sparked nationwide interest in initiatives focused on student

retention and student success (American Association of Community Colleges, 2011;

Lumina, 2012). The result has been an increased focus on student learning and

achievement by state departments and higher education administrators. However, a

review of literature revealed student attrition rates in community colleges at levels that

have remained at low levels over the last several decades (Astin, 1993; Gardner, 1996;

Habley & McClanahan 2010; Pascarelli & Terenzini, 2005; U.S. Department of

Education, National Center of Education Statistics, 2011). While research (Pascarella &

Terenzini) has focused on aspects of student retention, there is a need to further

investigate practices that have resulted in reducing student attrition. The researcher

utilized focus groups, interviews, observation, and document analysis in examining the

perceptions of stakeholders regarding student integration and student learning that occurs

in community college peer mentoring programs.

The United States Department of Education noted that in higher education student

retention and persistence is a significant issue (U.S. Department of Education, National

Center of Education Statistics, 2011). As a result, the United States has fallen behind

other countries in the number of college graduates. Thus, post-secondary institutions

including community colleges are being asked to respond and address the improvement

of student retention. Since the majority of these students leave college within their first

year of schooling (Upcraft & Gardner, 1989), examination of successful intervention programs that promote academic and social engagement (Bailey & Alfonso, 2005; Habley & McClanahan 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005) was the focus of this research. Habley and McClanahan revealed that students who participate in peer mentoring programs graduate at a higher rate than those who do not (Bourdon & Carducci, 2002). Thus, examining such mentoring programs could add to the body of knowledge resulting in a better understanding of how to retained students in community colleges.

The purpose of this study was to understand the practices related to increasing student persistence for students in community colleges. Accordingly, included in this chapter are the research questions, the rationale for and limitations of the use of a dual case study design. Additionally discussed are the description of the population and sample, data collection and instrumentation and methods of data analysis.

Research Questions

Addressed within the context of this inquiry, were the following research questions:

1. How do program administrators perceive the effectiveness of the peer mentoring program to retain students?

2. What strategies do peer mentors use to assist mentees in their social and academic integration into the Community College environment?

3. What characteristics of the peer mentoring program do mentor and mentees perceive promote learning through academics, faculty, and peer involvement?

4. What characteristics of the peer mentoring program do mentor and mentees perceive promote social integration and engagement for students?

Rationale for Use of a Dual Case Study

Qualitative research is a process of discovery in which researchers are motivated in understanding meanings through an interpretive research approach (Heppner & Heppner, 2004). The focus is on how others have made sense of their experiences and their world related to the researcher's inquiry. Qualitative research usually involves physically going to the people or sites to "observe behavior in its natural setting" (Merriam, 1998, p. 7). This enables the researcher to gain a rich, detailed understanding of the participants' experiences and culture. The research sites are "purposefully selected sites that will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research questions" (Creswell, 2003, p. 165). Specifically, understanding comes from the participants' perspectives, not the researcher's (Merriam, 1998). Consequently, due to the intense engagement needed from the participants and focus on context, qualitative research samples are primarily small and non-random unlike the larger more random samples of quantitative research designs (Creswell, 2003).

Because qualitative research is fundamentally interpretive, the researcher will interpret and analyze the data. "This includes developing a description of an individual or setting analyzing the data for themes, or categories, and finally making an interpretation or drawing conclusions about it meaning" (Creswell, 2003, p. 182). Therefore, it is important to be flexible and open to emergent themes and patterns as the study evolves. This interpretive process allows the researcher to gain new understandings based on the data (Merriam, 1998).

Furthermore, understanding the goal of this research and role of the researcher as the primary research instrument is important to qualitative research (Creswell, 2003). The

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human instrument is responsive and adaptive to the context and circumstance of the situation (Merriam, 1998). Other advantages for qualitative research are that the researcher can expand understanding through verbal communication as well as nonverbal clues. This allows for immediate clarification and the ability to check with respondents for accuracy of interpretation (Creswell, 2003). However, the researcher must be sensitive and seek to build rapport and credibility with the individuals in order to elicit reliable responses and identify any biases that might have an impact on the study. By identifying biased, one can monitor how they may be shaping the collection and interpretation of data (Merriam, 1998).

Since this design builds concepts and theories rather than tests existing theory (Merriam, 1998), this researcher chose the qualitative design because of its emergent and inductive nature. Typically, findings inductively deduced from the data are in the form of themes, categories and concepts. Creswell (2003) posited, "Although the reasoning is largely, inductive, both inductive and deductive processes are at work. The thinking process is also iterative with a cycling from data collection and analysis to problem reformulation and back" (p. 183). Again, involving participants in all phases and using multiple sources of data enhanced the internal validity of the study and ensured the data collected and interpretations of findings were accurate. A dual case study design was selected for this inquiry to "allow more variation and compelling interpretation" in turn strengthening the "precision, validity and stability of the findings" (Merriam, 1998, p. 40).

In addition, qualitative research produces thick, rich detail as a result of the researcher being immersed in the environment (Creswell, 2003). Descriptions are used to

convey what the researcher has learned rather than using numbers. There are field notes from observations, interviews, and excerpt from documents. The quotes and excerpts contribute the descriptive nature of this type of research. The product provided thick, rich descriptions and is a comprehensive and holistic understanding from the participants' perspective (Merriam, 1998). The analysis of qualitative data can range from organizing a narrative description of the phenomenon, to constructing categories or themes that cut across the data, to building theory. The descriptive and interpretive nature of a case study can "illustrate the complexities of a situation," thus moving the researcher towards a deeper understanding to discover meaning (Merriam, p. 30).

Limitations of a Dual Case Study Design

One limitation of a case study is the amount of time it takes to collect and analyze the data (Merriam, 1998). Although a rich, thick description and analysis may enhance the understanding of the problem, the "results may be too lengthy and detailed to read or use" (Merriam, p. 42). Furthermore, documents needed for analysis may be difficult to gather. Poor availability and transparency of the documents may be determined based on the sensitivity of the subject being studied (Creswell, 2003).

The sample size of the population being studied is another limitation of this study. This researcher chose a case study approach to study small successful examples of peer mentoring with diverse groups of students. Small samples are often "selected precisely because the researcher wishes to understand the particular in depth, not to find out what is generally true of the many" (Merriam, 1998, p. 28).

Case studies are also limited by the "sensitivity and integrity of the investigator" (Merriam, 1998, p. 42). Using the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection

can allow for the researcher's biases and assumptions to interfere with the process. While

having a human instrument allows the researcher to change questions during interviews

based on the participant's responses, one must also recognize the limitations of such data

collection. One limitation to the researcher's need to probe and pursue emerging themes

is that there are no set protocols or guidelines for eliciting information (Merriam). During

data collection, the researcher must be highly sensitive to her positionality, assumptions,

and the context from which the data was collected (Merriam)

Furthermore, because the research occurs in the natural setting, the researcher

could be viewed as being intrusive and participants may not behave as they normally

would. The findings might be limited by a low rapport between the researcher and the

participants or if the researcher does not explicitly recognize her own biases. One way the

researcher could improve internal validity is to ask participants and other colleagues to

comment on the researcher's interpretations and findings to see if they are accurate

(Merriam, 1998).

Trustworthiness of the qualitative research's results depends on the researcher

being disciplined, knowledgeable, and thoughtful (Creswell, 2003). Studying through a

qualitative research paradigm highlights the change with rich detail and description while

allowing the researcher to adapt and be responsive to the participants. These attributes of

the qualitative design affect the rigor and credibility of the results. "Assessing the validity

and reliability of qualitative study involves examining its component parts" (Merriam,

1998, p. 199), and following the data analysis procedures, providing enough detail that

the findings make sense. The ability to transfer to other settings is based on assumptions

of "equivalency between sample and population" (Merriam, p. 207). Understanding this

limitation of qualitative research highlights the researcher's need to focus on the thick description and describe how the situation compares with others in the same class (Merriam). To address these limitations, the researcher used multiple methods of data collection including observations, interviews, focus groups, and document analysis to ensure validity and reliability (Creswell). Furthermore, the data were triangulated and the researcher utilized member checking to establish accuracy of the findings. Additionally, the researcher used a small specific sample in which to gather data to allow better rapport with the researcher, allowing for participants to give authentic answers (Creswell).

Participants

The researcher selected the use of a purposeful sample (Creswell 2003; Merriam, 1998) to examine social integration and academic success for students in a community college peer mentoring program. Specific subjects were selected to "best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question" (Merriam, p. 185). The population for this study included two community colleges in separate Midwestern states. Schools were identified based on their affiliation in the Region IV of the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators. Once the schools in this region were identified, the list was narrowed down to community colleges with diverse student populations based on their college research data and their National Center for Education Statistics website data. The researcher used the community college website to determine if a peer mentoring program existed at each of these institutions. Next, the researcher called the schools to see if the program had existed for more than three years, served more than 15 students, and had established any documented success in retention rates of first time students.

Once the two settings were established, two groups of students (peer mentors, peer mentees) and the program administrator were selected to be participants in the study based on their familiarity within the peer mentoring program. The first focus group consisted of students serving as peer mentors. Students must be enrolled at the college and meeting minimum criteria to apply for such a position as peer mentors. Furthermore, these peer mentors were trained to provide individual mentoring to participants in all areas that contribute to academic success.

The second focus group of students selected was the peer mentees or the participants receiving peer mentoring. These participants were first time students who have met the criteria of either first-generation, low-income, or other underrepresented population who have completed at least one semester of mentoring. These characteristics are congruent with students who are at risk of dropping out of school (Tinto, 1993). Additionally, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with the program directors of each peer mentoring program.

Data Collection and Instrumentation

This sampling plan was based on the dual case study. After receiving permission to conduct this research from the University of Missouri (Appendix E), permissions were requested from the administrative gatekeepers for the colleges' participation (Appendix A). Next, the researcher contacted the two directors by phone to explain the study, informed consent forms, and data collection techniques. Then the researcher emailed to the two peer mentoring program directors information as a follow up to the phone call. The letter of informed consent outlined the purpose of the study, the minimal risks involved, and consent sought from the participants (Appendix A). After the initial

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interviews and focus groups, follow-up email exchanges and telephone interviews were conducted to further explore emerging themes. Additionally, the researcher gathered documents to triangulate findings from both the schools such as handbooks, grant proposals, and internal forms.

Focus Group Protocol

The researcher collected data through focus groups, interviews and an analysis of documents to collect thick, rich description from the participants (Creswell 2003; Merriam, 1998). Structured focus groups with students were conducted using open-ended questions from protocols that were developed and administered in mock interviews to community college students as field tests prior to the study. The program administrator selected each participant for each focus group, based on his or her availability and the identified criterion. The focus groups occurred on campus at each site and lasted one and a half hours. The conversation of each focus group was audio recorded and transcribed by the research. The researcher allowed participants to review their transcripts of the focus groups to assure the researcher had accurately captured their words and what they intended to convey. This member checking is essential for the validity of the conversations (Creswell, 2003)

Social learning theory and social and academic integration guided protocol and question selection (Astin, 1993, 1999; Bandura, 1977, 2006, 2008; & Tinto, 1993, 1995, 1998). Mentors, mentees, and program administrator were separated for each of the focus groups. The purpose of separating mentors from mentee and the program administrator was to ensure that participants felt free to share their individual perspectives in the focus groups. Questions eliciting the students' perspectives on the peer mentoring program

overall, their experiences with social and academic integration, and impact on student learning was the focus. Used with each of the focus groups was the same protocol (Appendix B) with modifications due their role in the mentoring process.

Interview Protocol

The program administrator interview format also consisted of a semi-structured interview protocol including open-ended questions, probes, and follow-ups designed to elicit additional insight from subjects (Appendix C). The researcher contacted the program administrators to schedule the interview time and location. A letter of confirmation, the interview questions, and a letter of informed consent were emailed to each interview participant to provide time for the participants to review and reflect on the questions. Each interview was audiotaped and transcribed by the researcher. Member checking was conducted to ensure accuracy of the data. The researcher also took field notes during the interviews to record information not reflected on the audio-tapes. Triangulation of the information gathered from focus groups and interviews through rich, thick descriptions were utilized to strengthen internal validity and accuracy of the findings (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 1998).

Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis within qualitative research involves organization and examination of data for themes or issues to gain a deeper understanding of the data (Creswell, 2003). "A qualitative, inductive, multi-case study seeks to build abstractions across cases" (Merriam, 1998, p. 195). The data collected throughout the study must be detailed and contain thick, rich descriptions to conceptualize the data from both cases. As modes of inquiry interviews, observations, and document analysis were utilized. Furthermore, these

semi-structured interviews assisted the researcher in obtaining consistent information across interviews. Probes were used when the respondents failed to elaborate on a particular idea or when additional knowledge could be used to better understand the procedures or perceptions. During the observations non-verbal cues and behavior, and requests for additional communication were noted. Finally, document analysis assisted in gaining complete understanding of the organization and the peer mentoring program, as well as to assist in the triangulation of data.

Analyses of the data were continuous throughout the study, with an on-going comparative investigation of the data; patterns in the data were identified. After the transcription of all interviews and focus groups, the transcripts were read in their entirety to obtain a holistic view of the participants' perception and were coded for emerging themes. Equally important were the member checks by the subjects of the study to verify the accuracy of themes and descriptions (Creswell, 2003). Properties and characteristics of each category were created as the researcher became increasingly familiar with the data. Merriam noted that the devising of the themes is "systematic and informed by the study's purpose, the investigator's orientation and knowledge" (1998, p. 179). Additional coding of the data analysis of documents also occurred. As the researcher coded, she made notes of any additional topics that stood out but did not fit into the categories, for further inquiries.

Summary

The information presented in Chapter Three related to the design and methodology used to explore the perceptions of social integration and academic success of students and program administrator of community college peer mentoring programs.

Provided was a rationale for the use of a dual case study. Subsequently, presented were

the research questions. Also, provided was a description of the participants as well as data

collection and data analysis methods. Included in Chapter Four are the findings from the

analysis of data. A discussion of the findings, the conclusions drawn, the limitations and

implications of the study and recommendations for future research are provided in

Chapter Five.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

Higher education continues to experience expectations of greater accountability, shrinking budgets and growing enrollment (Lumina, 2012). Consequently, higher education professionals are continuing to explore high impact activities to decrease student attrition and promote meaningful learning. Given the recent decrease in funding some colleges are turning to their most abundant resource, students. The "student's peer group is the single most potent source of influence on growth and development during the undergraduate years" (Astin, 1993, p. 398). In addition to the influence of peers on personal development, peers can provide optimal learning environments and facilitate students' active engagement in the learning process (Bunting, Dye, Pinnegar & Robinson, 2012). Therefore, it is imperative educators understand how to facilitate learning among students by building community and attending to interpersonal relationships.

The purpose of this research study was to add to the body of knowledge on peer mentoring program and aid college administrators in creating a successful learning environment. Within Chapter Four, an overview of the study design, data collection methods, conceptual framework, research questions and analysis of data will be provided. The researcher will further present descriptive information on the participants and settings of each case study. In addition, themes that emerged will be synthesized through the use of qualitative data collection procedures of interviews, focus groups, and observations. The chapter concludes with a summary of findings.

Study Design

A qualitative dual-case study approach was used to explore social integration and academic success for students in a community college peer mentoring program. The community colleges were purposefully selected (Creswell, 2003) because of their regional location in the Midwest of the United States, diverse student populations, length and scope of the mentoring program. For this study, participants were chosen through criterion based sampling which included: their relationship and length of involvement with the program (Merriam, 1998). Within each case study, the program administrator, student peer mentors and peer mentees were interviewed individually or in focus groups and supporting data were collected.

Data Collection Methods

Prior to collecting data, the researcher secured permission from the gatekeeper at each college (Appendix A). After securing gatekeeper permission, the researcher completed the University Institutional Board application by providing information about the purpose and extent of the study. Following approval from the University of Missouri-Columbia (Appendix E), the researcher traveled to each site to begin collecting data. The researcher shared the Informed Consent detailing the participant's involvement and rights within the parameters of the research. All interviews and focus groups were audio-taped, and followed an interview or focus group protocol (Appendix B and C). To ensure accuracy, each individual was provided a transcript of his/her interview analysis of program documents (Appendix D). The process of member checking allowed the participants the opportunity to modify or clarify their recorded interview (Creswell, 2003).

Conceptual Framework

The study was viewed through both a student involvement lens (Astin, 1975) and social learning lens (Bandura, 1977). While not mutually dependent, together these frameworks suggest institutions of higher education can optimize learning environments by using social networks (Tinto, 1998). High levels of student engagement are associated with a wide range of educational practices and conditions, including collaborative learning and environments perceived by students as inclusive and affirming (Astin 1993; Kuh, Pike, & McCormick, 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Furthermore, student involvement and informal student groups are positively correlated with student learning and development (Astin, 1993), while student development is the process by which a student demonstrates cognitive and moral growth (Astin, 1999).

Bandura (2001) posited social learning occurs either "designedly or unintentionally from models in one's immediate environment" (p. 271). Students evolved capacity for observational learning enables them to expand their knowledge and skills rapidly through information (Bandura, 2008) as peers attend to cognitive factors by encouraging students to connect new knowledge and with prior experience and promote metacognition (Entwistel, 2000).

Research Questions

Based on the conceptual underpinnings, the following research questions were formulated:

1. How do program administrators perceive the effectiveness of the peer mentoring program to retain students?

2. What strategies do peer mentors use to assist mentees in their social and academic integration into the community college environment?

3. What characteristics of the peer mentoring program do mentor and mentees perceive promote learning through academics, faculty, and peer involvement?

4. What characteristics of the peer mentoring program do mentor and mentees perceive promote social integration and engagement for students?

Process of Data Analysis

Data related to the study were gathered from interviews, focus groups, and program documents. Two individual mentor programs located in different states participated in the study. The researcher conducted one interview with the program director and two focus groups consisting of three to eight participants per session. All interviews and focus group sessions were both audio taped and transcribed to ensure accuracy. Upon completion of both the interview and focus group sessions, the researcher transcribed all data and provided a written account for participants to review for accuracy purposes. Subsequently, the analysis process consisted of identifying common themes from triangulated data collected from interviews, focus groups, and observations (Creswell, 2003; Merriam 1998). The following codes were established for the program setting and participants: director participant 1 (D1), director participant 2 (D2), director participant 3 (D3), focus group 1 mentees 1 (FG-1), focus group mentors 1(FGM-1), focus group mentee 2 (FG-2), focus group mentors 2 (FGM-2). Transcripts and observations field notes were read and coded multiple times to ensure accuracy and consistency.

<center>**Settings**</center>

Site 1: Lakewood Community College (pseudonym).

      The first program selected for this qualitative case study was a medium sized public community college. *Lakewood* was set in a Midwest rural farming community and serves five counties with five small campuses. Total enrollment for all five campuses is currently around 3,900 serving predominately white students under the age of 25. The peer mentoring program was set on two remote campuses about 30 miles apart. The main campus was located on the edge of town with a population just over 6,000 and oversaw corn fields across the street. The second campus, similar in appearance, was located in the middle of a smaller town with a population just over 3,900. The main larger campus did have campus housing available. Each campus was comprised of multiple attached buildings make of brick, with the interior of both campuses having been recently renovated, creating a welcoming and inviting environment.

      The mentoring program itself was a part of a TRIO program. TRIO is a federally funded outreach and student services programs designed to identify and provide services for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds including low-income individuals, and first-generation college students (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). The mentoring program is a subset of the TRIO-Student Success Services program that serves over 6% of the student population totaling over 200 students each year. The mentoring program averages around 100 students each year with an expectation that the mentors meet with their protégé weekly throughout the semester. The program advisors provide an incentive if mentees meet with their mentor a minimum of 11 times a semester. Study skill lessons were embedded into the mentoring sessions as a foundation for conversation and

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learning. *Lakewood's* overall retention and graduation rates are significantly higher than the national average at 62% retention for full-time first time freshman in Fall 2011. The TRIO-Student Success Services program and mentoring program take the success even further with a 2011 Fall Retention rate of 69% and 94% respectively.

Site 2: Normal Community College (pseudonym).

The second site for this dual case study was a public suburban community college sharing boundaries with the greater metropolitan area in a neighboring Midwest state. The campus was set in the middle of a bustling suburban area of over 88,000 and was surrounded by office buildings. *Normal Community College* was a large single campus serving almost 10,000 students and had a more diverse population with 65% White, 14 % Black, 7% Asian, 6% Hispanic and 5 % reporting to be two or more ethnicities. The campus was comprised of multiple connected buildings only some of which had been recently updated. The retention rate for the campus is slightly above the national average at 55% for first time, full time freshman.

The mentoring program is available to everyone on campus, but primarily serves first time freshman, returning adults, and new ESL students. The program served about 50 students each year. The mentors go through extensive training before school starts and meet each week as a group. While mentors are required to meet with their protégés once at the beginning of the semester, they are not required to subsequently meet or be in contact with their mentee on a regular basis. *Normal Community College* measures the success of the mentoring program with student satisfaction surveys and had a high rating of satisfaction with both mentors and mentees who completed the surveys.

Participants

To explore the perceptions and beliefs associated with the research focus, two programs with a total of twenty-one participants (*N=21*) were included within the study. The program directors from each site participated and had been with their respective programs for more than three years. Participants represented a diverse mix of individuals and experiences, providing a varied viewpoint.

Program Administrators.

The first participant, Pete Quincy, (pseudonym), a male in his thirties has been the Director of the TRIO programs at *Lakewood* for over three years. Prior to his tenure at *Lakewood Community College*, he served as academic counselor and Coordinator of Leadership Development for four years where he taught, developed, and supervised a mentoring program as part of a class focused on character building and multiculturalism. He recently completed his doctorate in Counselor Education.

The second administrator, Kaley Cost, (pseudonym), a female in her thirties has been working as a counselor at *Normal Community College* for over eight years and has been with the mentoring program for the same amount of time. She is a co-advisor of the program with the third administrator, Pat Harold (pseudonym), a male in his fifties. He has worked with the mentoring program since he began working at *Normal Community College* over thirteen years ago. Prior to his tenure at *Normal Community College*, he worked as a counselor at a community college in a southwestern state. In addition to their leadership of the mentoring program, both program administrators serve as academic and personal counselors at the college.

Students.

The range of participants for the student focus groups varied at each site. At *Lakewood*, a group of six students participated (*N=6*) in the focus group, three males and three females. All six were planning on transferring to a four-year university and were currently serving as a mentor in the program. Five had prior experience as a mentee as well. One female student was a returning adult student working a full-time job and raising a family. The second focus group at *Lakewood* included two current mentees (*N=2*) both males. Both students were first time freshman and started the mentoring program at the beginning of the academic year.

At *Normal Community College*, two male individuals participated (*N=2*) and were mentees in the program. Both individuals were returning adults working full-time jobs and supporting families. One student was in his first year of the program and the other had graduated from the community college at semester and wanted to return to share his experience as a mentee. The second focus group consisted of 11 individuals (*N=11*), including seven males and four females. Nine of the students were current students serving as current mentors in the program. Two individuals were participating to share their previous experience as mentors in the program. The age, life experiences and time of participation in the program varied in this focus group.

Themes

From this study, themes emerged that were synthesized from data collected and predetermined codes. These themes included 1.) *Building Community with subthemes of a) Personal Support, b) Knowledge Development, and c) Opportunities*; 2.) *Learning through Modeling and Self-Reflection; 3*.) *Increase in Personal Accountability;* and 4.)

Increase in Confidence with subthemes of a) Transitions, and b) Leadership. These

themes provided a basis for understanding the impact of peer mentoring programs on

students' social integration and student learning.

***Building Communit*y**.

In this study, there was an overwhelming sense of community between the

mentors and mentees. The first and most obvious characteristic of both programs was

they were inherently building relationships between the mentor and mentee. Moreover,

the additional unintentional outcome was the intergroup communities created throughout

the mentoring participants. This building of community was supported by Tinto (2003)

in which he argued that students who participated in learning communities persisted at a

higher rate (p.12). One student explained the mentors group as a family, "It's created like

a family… atmosphere that you're just hanging out there."

During the focus groups, a great deal of time was spent by the participants

discussing the strong friendships the students made, with both mentees and mentors

discussing the importance of having a conducive environment to cultivate these

relationships. Ultimately, the planned and purposeful mentoring sessions created an

important stress free atmosphere to establish these critical relationships. One mentee

explained the difference between his mentoring setting and the campus as a whole:

> They have the stress-free environment, like in the cafeteria there is the pressure
>
> of who you're sitting with. There is none of that stuff here. It is like easy going
>
> and laid back.

Another mentor described the importance of having a positive atmosphere to student success, "I think it's just more interaction of having that one-on-one time and being able to benefit where there are always positive attitudes."

Furthermore, the separate relaxed environment allows the students to open up and create friendships. There was acknowledgement that creating these relationships takes time and was not instantaneous. One mentor described the process he went through both as a mentee and now as a mentor, "You build on it. You feel like you can open up because it is a one-on-one thing. You get to know them on a more personal level. They pretty much become a friend." The friendships and community revealed by the discussion of the participants are grounded in the following subthemes that helped sustain a positive and conducive learning environment.

Personal Support. All of the participants identified that the mentors were in a unique position to identify a student's needs and offer personal support. While they noted they were not trained as personal counselors and were encouraged not to engage in such behavior, they provided guidance with common pitfalls of first year students trying to manage new responsibilities and an increased workload. One mentee described her experience: "I know I get the stress management discussion a lot, and it helped. I was really stressed this last year." This sentiment was reiterated by another mentee discussing her session with her mentor:

It just took the edge off. I mean, I stressed about classes. I didn't so much that I had a mental breakdown like some people do. I know some people that just broke down and having [*the mentor*] is just another support for you.

The mentors had the same perspective and enjoyed the support, having served as both a

mentee and mentor:

> I like having someone there to talk to if you have problems or like they can relate
>
> to you. You always have someone to go back and rely on. It benefits you, so you
>
> know what to expect for the semester and the year.

The *Lakewood* administrator spoke to the institutional benefit of the peers' personal

support system. He discussed how they are uniquely positioned to serve as a rich, reliable

early alert system:

> We do get some information from professors, but professors can only give us so
>
> much. The mentors give us why the students are not in class. They often know
>
> what is going on at home or with their families. The mentors understand that
>
> some stayed up until four o'clock at night or they've been home with friends.

This kind of information is valuable as the mentors can then inform the counselors who

can intervene for more serious issues. Kuh, Pike, and McCormick (2010) posited

intervention during the first year is a high impact practice critical to student success.

Another mentor discussed how the power of creating a community for support can assist

students to stay in college and be successful:

> I think the program as a whole, being part of a new college experience, makes you
>
> more successful; makes you more apt to stay and go on. It's all geared towards a
>
> positive education. If you need help we'll get it for you. If I can't help you, I'll
>
> find someone who will.

    Knowledge Development*.* All of the mentors noted that they provided support in

many ways, including being a resource to learn more about the process to become a

successful student, what resources are available at the college, and how to approach the college culture. As Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) argued in order to create new knowledge, time and processes must be provided by which to share tacit knowledge because knowledge is created and expanded through social interaction. Several students, both mentees and mentors, focused on the process to becoming a student and finding financial support for their education. The knowledge building community permeated beyond the mentoring program itself when one mentor spoke about his brother who was not in the program:

> There are people that come in and have no idea, so we need to show them. Me and my brother were first generation students. Somebody thinks we should know all of the facts, but we don't when we've never done that before. Scholarships, you've got to just teach them stuff like that and teach them the options.

> Becoming accustomed to the college norms and understanding new processes was very important for the mentees as well. Two adult mentees described similar scenarios when they were overwhelmed by the idea of going back to college. Both students were assisted by mentors, teaching them how to navigate the college and its procedures. One returning adult mentee described the process of learning about the college and how his mentor assisted him. The assimilation to the college provided by his mentor helped him feel more comfortable, therefore enabling him to focus on his goal of completion:

> He helped me get reacquainted, and that helped. It's overwhelming. Most of the kids are young, and I am such an old man. So many times I wanted to leave, but I got so far into it and each step is a little bit easier. You get more information. You get more opportunities. You get more experience. You meet more people. You

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don't want to leave. Now I'm going with the flow. I would like to finish my degree.

Similarly, the connections the students made through the mentoring program created social learning communities for cultural understanding. The mentors in both schools discussed how the experiences of other mentors or their mentees changed the way they understood their own world. One mentor described having a mentee from Korea:

> I learned a lot about his culture. In fact, there was a lot of integrating the cultures. We were just opening doors, our minds, to all of these other wonderful possibilities. That was one of the neatest friendships that I created through this program.

Equally, another mentor explained about how their ideology of others changed through the relationships and exposure to the students experiences:

> You teach them about the campus itself and give them strategies, but we also talked about different cultures and different experiences. Maybe they weren't a great student in high school, or maybe they are in school for different reason than you are. You learn a little bit about other people and their viewpoint.

When asked what the most valuable thing the participants gained from the program, several students discussed the new knowledge they had gained about the school and how to be successful in the environment. One mentor explained, "Probably just knowledge, as far as opportunities. That's a good word for it, Opportunities, opportunities in the school and opportunities beyond the school."

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Opportunities. In addition, the participants in this study displayed experiential learning throughout the focus groups. One approach used to demonstrate their learning was the way they used the knowledge gained from the mentoring program to improve their position at the college or take advantage of opportunities to further expand their educational experience. An adult mentee at *Normal Community College* shared how the mentoring program opened other doors for his personal growth:

> My mentor helped me as far as scholarships or volunteering helping me better my education with things other than school. I think that being connected is probably the biggest part. That will just open up doors for other opportunities.

This is supported by Astin's (1999) argument that an important part of increasing student engagement is getting involved on campus to increase your commitment to the school through campus activities. Furthermore, the mentoring program served as a gateway for participants to get involved in other leadership activities at the college.

> I think it [mentoring] gets you more involved in your college. Before I started the program, I basically came to school and went home. I've got a lot of different responsibilities than they do and stuff, but since being a part of mentoring I find myself doing more things out here.

Consequently, highly involved students demonstrate higher persistence; often a result of learning life and time management skills. This was displayed as a mentor expressed how she was too involved in many activities, and the mentoring program helped her create balance, "It helps me with how much I'm involved with. Mentoring is not the only thing that I'm involved in. I have to be committed to my other priorities."

Learning through Modeling and Self-Reflection.

The mentors in the study often spoke about the purpose of the mentoring program. They illustrated the need to not only create a connection for students on campus but the importance of learning something in the process, as one member of the *Lakewood* mentoring focus group purported when discussing her goal for the program, "Making sure your mentees walk away learning at least something."

The mentors also shared examples of how to improve their mentee's academic skills, but noted that they were often discussing the need to understand and assimilate to the college culture as well. A *Normal Community College* mentor verbalized. "Basically, I mean we just try to teach them everything they need to know to get through college. At least here anyway for all the proper things to do."

During their discussion of classroom content, the mentors noted that the mentoring sessions created a platform for common language to be established and helped mentees learn through metacognition. One mentor explained it simply, "We've had a lot of opening up and then just understanding stuff." A mentee provided an example of the transformation in attitude towards their academics based on the mentoring sessions:

I had a really bad attitude and then in one of the session about essay writing, I finally got it. You learn it in class, but it's not like you comprehend it. It's just another subject. Doing the mentoring session, I'm actually talking about it. I actually got it, so I write essays ...better and I am better at time management.

Similarly, this same kind of transformative thought process was used to think about themselves as people and where they were headed in life. One mentor shared how the program has changed her perspective, "It helps broadens your horizons to different stuff. It's also made me think more about being a teacher." This necessary self-reflection about

one's environment and experiences has been supported in the research by Bandura (2008). The mentoring sessions also lead to improved communication skills and critical problem solving. The mentors acknowledged they often struggled with how to help some students and needed to use each other or think differently to help solve the problem. As illustrated by one mentor, "I changed my wording to explain it better; if one method doesn't work… I'll be okay. Let me think about this in a different way so you can understand better."

While the premise of most mentoring programs is the more experienced student leads by example and teaches the less experienced student how to improve, during this study the researcher found examples where knowledge creation happened both as a mentee and mentor. One student mentor reflected on not having his own mentor and how his current experience is assisting in his learning, "I think that not ever having a mentor, when I go to this stuff with them even I'm learning it, too. It has helped me." The peer mentors in this study were intentionally positioned and trained to serve as positive role models, but this data set demonstrated this was not always the case. Bandura (2001) asserted observing others' behaviors and the subsequent consequences of those behaviors results in learning. A *Normal Community College* mentee reflected on how his mentor was currently not doing well, and this gave him the confidence to persist:

> It was actually really helpful because I saw someone who was not doing very good, but… was going to keep going. They haven't been discouraged, and that was encouraging. You can make a mistake and you can have a bad semester, but life goes on and you'll be okay.

Increased persistence manifested itself in the form of self-reflection when the students

compared their own personal stress and situation to another student. One mentor shared

how he was ready to quit school until he met his mentee:

> I felt like I was at peak capacity. Then I met my guy. It was his first time in the
>
> U.S., has a full time job, has three kids, and was trying to learn English just to get
>
> whatever degree he was going to get. I thought to myself, alright, I can do this.

The students' reflection of their own experiences against the experiences of someone else

increased their self efficacy. This sentiment was reiterated when one peer mentor shared

her experience of failure and modeling persistence:

> I was a four time failure at this school. Once I became a peer mentor, I also
>
> became an honor roll student. I think it was that it very quickly put things into
>
> perspective. We do work with people that have seen and experienced life that we
>
> can't even fathom. It impacted me so much.

Increase in Personal Accountability.

A fundamental requirement of a successful mentoring program is that student

mentors are responsible and are expected to role model positive behaviors for the new

students. The *Lakewood* Administrator explained how he set this as a requirement to

being involved in the program, "We hold them accountable. You have to take this serious

if you want to be involved in it. We are not going to have you be a mentor if you don't

buy into what we are trying to do." Similarly, the *Normal* Administrators mentioned the

quality students who participate in the program to begin with, "They are motivated

students. People who want to give back and who want to help and who want to make a

difference in that way, so those are neat people to work with." The student participants of

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the study discussed the importance of being responsible when it came to their academics. One mentor shared how she addressed the significance of being accountable in college with her mentees:

> You're responsible for your actions; you're responsible to get your work done. It's not a job; you might want to treat it like a job because if you don't go, you're not going to do well, so you're not going to make it.

Arguably this increased mentee academic engagement was supported by Astin (1999) when he pointed out that mentees needed increased support and opportunities for knowledge development. Another *Lakewood Community College* mentor conveyed the importance of modeling positive behaviors and providing support to mentees success:

> I think (*the mentees)* kind of pay attention more, knowing they've got someone who can help them understand the material they're going over. I think they pay attention a little more and if they don't quite understand it right then they're like… now they can come to us and figure it out.

From the focus groups, the researcher's data indicated that many of the students considered a renewed sense of accountability an essential characteristic in being a successful college student. One mentor purported the benefits of the program and how the mentoring program helped him increase social learning and self efficacy:

> It was probably one of the best decisions I have made college-wise because you have to take responsibility. You are teaching, but you are also learning from your mentors and mentee, to be quite honest. You see their viewpoints, and they learn from yours.

Similarly, a mentee reinforced the transformational learning and accountability as a
critical component of the mentoring program:

> Talking with other kids helped me realize you need to buckle down and be more
> responsible because your responsibilities change. I know it changed for me from
> the time I first got out of high school and went to college.

The mentors increased accountability did not initially occur based on the commitment to
their own success, but because they felt responsible for someone else's success. When
asked how they were changed since they became a peer mentor, many discussed an
increased sense of responsibility to their mentee. One mentor posited:

> It just made me more committed to my work, kind of like time to focus. The most
> valuable thing was commitment. Just being committed to work and then if one of
> the mentees needs help at an actual time and I don't show up. I am possibly
> ruining their grade.

Similarly, the researcher found this sense of commitment to others extended past their
mentee and would often improve their commitment to their own work. As another
mentor noted, "Since I did the mentor thing, I've become more committed to my work,
more into doing my work and making sure I get stuff done."

Increase in Confidence

> *Transitions*. The increase in commitment to the students' academics also came

with an increase in confidence. The students in each of the schools perceived that their
involvement in the peer mentoring program increased their ability to assimilate to the
college culture, therefore creating increasing self-assurance. One mentee posited, "it

helped ease the transition from the high school state of mind to the college. It makes it so you're more serious and everything."

Mentees and mentors at both schools described the nervousness and stress they experienced when they initially entered college. Research has revealed the first few weeks of school to be a very tenuous time for student retention at the institution (Astin, 1993; Gardner, 1996; Habley & McClanahan 2010; Pascarelli & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1995). The researcher found the students in this study did consider leaving the institution in the first days of classes because of the stress and doubt of whether they could be successful in a college environment. A mentee at *Normal Community College* described her experience and benefit of the peer mentoring program: "I came into college not knowing anything. It's just a valuable experience. I got really stressed out, and doing the mentoring session leveled me out. I actually know what to do now, and it helped out a whole lot."

Furthermore, many participants in the study described how the peer mentoring program decreased anxiety of students transitioning to the college environment. While peer mentors teach their students about the college, they also encourage them to get involved, study more efficiently, and improve academically. The personal support that is provided by the mentors and the program advisors was demonstrated through several stories of success. A *Normal Community College* administrator discussed the importance of the relationship to student success even when the students are not meeting regularly:

> They get together; they pull apart. As long as they are present in the mind of the
> mentee, then when they really need them, say during finals or something, then
> their presence makes it so they will turn to them if there are problems. That

person knows that there is one person on campus who is a student, who cares about me, and I can go to them, even thought I haven't talked with them for a while.

One mentor expressed emotion as she shared her evolution into a successful college student:

You are probably alone unless you came with some friends from high school. You feel like a statistic or a number. For me that went on for three semesters. I really wish I had joined a group like this earlier. Once I was involved, it felt like this is my high school. I see friendly faces, and it becomes a more real experience. The comfort level to come and ask for help becomes a whole different issue, a non-issue. Once people get to know you, they want to help you. It is an exponential difference.

Leadership. Creating peer enhanced learning environments increased the opportunity to model behaviors of peers. The student's mentors encourage other students to become involved on their campus, increase time and energy in their academic experience, and model social group learning. Mentees and mentors at both schools separately shared how the mentoring program gave them the confidence and the idea to create their own study group outside of mentoring. One mentor discussed how the study session was set up and why they worked together to help them, "We give them confidence. Today we asked them questions and they'll answer."

Moreover, the increased confidence to be actively involved in the students' own learning was demonstrated in and out of the classroom. In additional to creating external study groups, the students felt more confident to ask questions, engage instructors and to

take ownership of their education. A mentee acknowledged his confidence when asked the most valuable thing he had gained from the program, "I am not afraid to raise my hand anymore." Similarly, a mentor shared the sentiment, "You get better at asking questions, taking initiative and ownership of the place."

The *Lakewood* advisor discussed his perceived correlation between the mentoring program and student success:

> If you have a young student who is struggling, I found that young student will also struggle in their ability to access assistance from their instructors or knowing how to ask for help from outside resources like tutoring or advisors. If a mentor is there from the beginning, or very near beginning, then they will drag their student wherever that student needs to go to get whatever help they need to.

The *Lakewood* advisor further discussed how this intrusive intervention builds on the confidence of the mentee to further engage in the college to receive assistance. One mentor expanded on this by sharing her transformation:

> You've got a question you might be afraid to ask the teacher because they're too scary, and asking someone else that's just gone through the class; they might help explain it in a way that you can understand it better.

When asked the most critical outcome of the mentoring program, *Normal Community College* administrator explained simply, "leadership. Leadership and helping skills." The mentors benefited from the mentoring experience in a unique way as they were also able to develop personal leadership and communication skills for mentors by leading groups and mentoring sessions. One mentor explained:

I'm a nervous guy and super shy. We've had three interviews or so through doing

what you're doing and talking one-on-one. It makes it more open. Then, you can

go to class, get up in front of the class and talk to people.

Another mentor acknowledged her apprehension to originally take a leadership role and

how the mentoring program developed this skill for her: "I am supposed to know all of

the answers so it's hard for me to go to other people, but it is a lot easier now."

Summary

The study design, data collection method, conceptual underpinnings, research

question, and process of data analysis were discussed in Chapter Four. In addition, a

description of each school and the participants were presented. Within Chapter Four,

social learning and student involvement lenses were used to explore students and

administrators perceptions in regard to their experiences with peer mentoring programs.

Discussed in Chapter Five are the findings and conclusions based on the data analysis. In

addition, presented in Chapter Five are the implications for practice and

recommendations for future study.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

Introductions

This qualitative, dual case study explored the perceptions of students and staff within two successful Midwest community college mentoring programs regarding the programs' impact on students' social integration, student learning, and student retention. The researcher utilized both a social learning and student involvement theoretical frameworks to view the effectiveness of peer mentoring on increasing student learning and student commitment especially for community college students. Data were collected and triangulated through interviews, focus groups, observations and historical artifacts (Creswell, 2003). To ensure credibility, the researcher used member checking, which provided the participants an opportunity to review transcribe data and offer feedback (Creswell). From the data, four themes emerged: 1.) *Building Community with subthemes of: a) Personal Support, b) Knowledge Development,* and c) *Opportunities;* 2.) *Learning through Modeling and Self-Reflection* 3.) *Increase in Personal Accountability* and 4.) *Increase in Confidence with subthemes of: a) Transitions*, and b) *Leadership.*

A summary of the findings and conclusion based on the data analysis will be discussed in Chapter Five, as well as the implications for practice conclusions and recommendations for future study. A qualitative approach provides the opportunity to "…understand the contexts or settings in which participants in a study address a problem or issue" (Creswell, 2003, p. 40). For the purpose of this research, a dual-case study was selected to expand the perceptions of community college stakeholders.

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Summary of Findings

The overarching question guiding this study was, "how do school leaders create peer mentoring programs that help community colleges address issues of student retention and success?" The study was viewed through a dual lens of social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) and student involvement theory (Astin 1999). Research consistently demonstrated student persistence to graduation is enhanced by peer interaction and support (Astin, 1993; Pascarelli & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1995). According to Bean and Metzner (1985), peers exert more influence on student persistence than all other social agents on campus, including faculty members. When students experience social integration and are involved on campus and in their learning they are more likely to stay in college and complete their degree (Tinto). Additionally, peers can have a powerful impact on student learning. Research (Astin, 1999; Juedes, 2010; Kuh, Pike, & McCormick, 2010) suggested when students assist others; both the peer teacher and peer learner make significant gains in learning. Furthermore, when peers interact with each other while learning, it was found they achieve higher levels of academic performance and are more likely to persist. Within the context of this study, as derived from the conceptual underpinnings, the researcher sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How do program administrators perceive the effectiveness of the peer mentoring program to retain students?

2. What strategies do peer mentors use to assist mentees in their social and academic integration into the Community College environment?

3. What characteristics of the peer mentoring program do mentor and mentees perceive promote learning through academics, faculty, and peer involvement?

4. What characteristics of the peer mentoring program do mentor and mentees perceive promote social integration and engagement for students?

Findings

How do program administrators perceive the effectiveness of the peer mentoring program to retain students?

Over the course of the data analysis, program administrators found the peer mentoring programs to have a positive influence on student retention and student learning. There was a consensus that the peer mentoring programs created a shift in students' attitudes when it came to how to approach school. Peer mentors' involvement in the respective programs requires more than a passive investment of time and energy into the experience. The mentoring programs position the mentors to be regarded as models of successful college students (Bandura, 1977). The *Lakewood* mentoring program administrator specifically spoke about how the modeling of the mentors increased the retention of both the mentors and the mentees:

> It is a good way to go through college; having someone that will guide you, specifically someone who is where you want to be. Students who are coming here for the very first time and have no idea how hard it is. Having someone there who has been there for a while, who know the route, the ropes, the tests and all of the little nuances; it is invaluable. I think it does help our retention, not just in our program, but for the college. I also think it helps something we don't talk a lot about, behavior, role modeling behavior by our mentors.

Similarly, the *Normal Community College* program administrator shared how the modeling in behaviors changes mentors and mentees awareness about their role at the college:

> I think we all know it is supposed to be a retention promoter, the social aspect because they step out of their busy classroom, studying lives and step into a different type of environment here. We are more casual and supportive but can still talk about classes or problems with other students. It is a shift in their awareness and identify for that part of the day.

As discussed in the review of literature, participation and energy investment produce positive results in student learning and personal development (Astin, 1999). In participating in a structured event, either social or academic based, the student mentors contributed to building a community, and therefore, created more opportunities for involvement. These events also allowed opportunities for the mentors to model successful college behaviors for the students to observe which is important to the experience of social learning (Bandura, 1977). Furthermore, program administrators discussed how the training for the mentors is set up to facilitate a positive social learning environment for both academics and extra-curricular activities. The *Lakewood* administrator explained their training:

> Fairly early in the year the mentors, as part of the training, are talking about things like drinking, drugs, study skills, note taking, test taking skills, reading, test anxiety, things that might hamper their academic performance, but also things that would keep them from being safe or have a positive social experience.

The training and social programming were held specifically with the intended

goals of establishing and reinforcing academic performance and student engagement.

Modeling of behaviors and self reflection are two important components (Bandura, 1977)

to the student increasing the energy and time devoted to the college (Astin, 1999).

Similarly, the *Normal Community College* program administrator discussed the

unintended outcome of the training that she thought was a key component of the

program's and ultimately the students' success:

> We will do exercises that have them work on their skills, for instance, listening or
>
> empathy, and this is designed to prepare them for their first interaction with their
>
> mentee. That takes some self-awareness, so we do some activities about who they
>
> are and what they are doing in school. Students then think about the mentors they
>
> have had in their lives and what they have contributed to them. Thinking about
>
> their motivations for wanting to be a mentor helps the students.

The same *Normal Community College* program administrator discussed how this program

created such a strong connection to the students and the institution (Gabelnick,

MacGregor, Matthews, & Smith, 1990; Heiberger & Harper, 2008), yet while successful,

some mentees had trouble moving on, "a lot of students really develop a fondness and

loyalty to the place, and it's really hard for them to leave at the end."

What strategies do peer mentors use to assist mentees in their social and academic

integration into the community college environment?

In the review of literature, Bandura (2008) emphasized the need to model

behavior requires attention and motivation; often imitating negative and positive

behaviors through both an academic and social lens. The mentors mentioned a wide

variety of individuals who influenced their roles. They discussed the instructors who recommended them for the program; faculty/staff that helped them learn to do their jobs as mentors. The mention of their own participation and engagement is consistent with the tenets of involvement theory (Astin, 1999). Recognizing their own motivation to model the instructor's behavior possibly led them to undertake greater investment of time and energy in their college experience by taking on the peer mentoring positions and modeling the behavior for the mentees.   A mentor from *Normal Community College* posited:

> The advisors do a great job of giving us the tools so that we can lead by example. How can you expect to be a peer mentor if you don't have the tools yourself? Another mentor discussed how the job of being a peer mentor increased his sense of responsibility.

Modeling behaviors meant demonstrating positive behavior and consistency each week. He suggested, "it gives you a sense of responsibility. At first, I was like oh, I have a mentee, but then I actually met my mentee. I have this person I have to meet once a week. I was learning from the experience."

In addition to modeling positive academic and social behaviors, the sessions included themes and activities to facilitate discussions about improving study skills. This learning through interaction and self reflection supports the theory of social learning (Bandura, 1977). The mentoring sessions create opportunities to observe, model and reflect on academic content and social behaviors of others. One *Lakewood* mentor described the strategy of integrating study skills with the mentoring sessions:

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Every session has activity with it that once you do the activity, then you build

upon the different things that you can do to improve it and what not to do. That

way next time you do it, like in class or something, you remember exactly how

we did it in the session. Then, you can apply it like that.

When asked about the greatest need of incoming students and how they address

them for their mentor, the majority of mentees discussed the importance of knowing and

connecting new students to the people and resources on campus as the students'

transition. A *Lakewood* student who had been a mentee and was now serving as a mentor

shared his experience with the transitions and how important the sessions are to the

transition:

In high school you pretty much think "oh, it's just college." You go in there and

it's just going to be like high school, but obviously it's not. You're on your own

and doing those sessions really helps.

Research in the review of literature ascertained that the first year of college,

specifically, the first six weeks were critical to the success and retention of new students

(Astin, 1999; Gardner, 1996; Habley & McClanahan, 2010; Tinto, 1993). Speaking to the

greatest need of incoming freshman, a *Normal Community College* mentor discussed how

critical connecting students with campus resources and offering stress management,

organization and time management skills were to the success of the college and students:

For me, you can't just throw students in here and go. That shouldn't be the goal of

an educational system is to through them into class and just be done. We need to

say ok, we have a tutoring center here. Counselors are available everyday. Just

informing them this is what you need to do and all you have to do is ask. I am

terrible with time management; my study skills were good but not great. I think

overall the skills they have you talk about week to week it goes a long way, and

every week is something different. They don't force it upon you, but they talk

about it and how it would make more time in the day, how to reduce stress, how

you can help other people.

What characteristics of the peer mentoring program do mentor and mentees perceive

promote learning through academics, faculty, and peer involvement?

Interpersonal communication and cultivating relationships is imperative to

successful learning (Donaldson, 2008). The peer mentors in each program espoused the

importance of groups in increased learning at the college. The *Lakewood* mentors and

mentees created study groups external to the mentoring session after experiencing the

value of the mentoring sessions. One mentor explained the benefit of study groups, "it

helps to get you really set up… In that kind of area it's kind of nice to have other people.

You have people; there are four or five of us and we're part of the team." Peer mentoring

learning was demonstrated both by skills learned and knowledge gained. Mentors cited

increased communication, leadership, and an increase in accountability as skills they

obtained due to becoming a mentor. While few students spoke of an increase in

knowledge of any specific academic discipline due to mentoring, several did

acknowledge an increase in overall academic performance. One *Lakewood* mentor simply

explained, "I do better at my classes, and I'm more socially connected."

It appeared that the one on one mentoring sessions created an opportunity to have

discourse and reflection about many topics for both mentors and mentees. As Mezirow

(2000) asserted, learners have a deeper understanding and are more reflective if they are

able to learn in groups and engage in discourse. Since the mentoring sessions in both

programs were set up as one on one and focus on specific study skills to discuss as

conversation starters, this allows for the deeper understanding and reflection that

Mezirow noted. A *Normal Community College* mentor affirmed the mentoring session's

impact on her overall learning rather than specific academic content, "You teach them

about the campus itself and give them success strategies but we also talked about

different cultures and different experiences." Similarly, a *Lakewood* mentee discussed

how the combinations of having a mentor to talk about academic skills with improved his

overall academic performance:

> My grades are better because I have someone. When you go there you get
>
> something to focus on. That way when you're on your own studying or writing a
>
> paper, you can remember that you've already done some of these things in the
>
> mentoring program.

In support of this engagement and resultant discourse, Senge (2006) suggested

people need to be able to act together for learning to occur and that doing so allow

members to learn and grow more rapidly. The peer mentoring sessions positioned both

the mentor and mentee to learn from each other in a collaborative way. They engage in

social activities, therefore enhancing dialogue about academic skills. Mentees and

sometimes mentors begin to model behaviors observed and discussed. A mentor shared

her thoughts on how self-discovery and modeling enhanced the program:

> I think it is not only the social, but the other activities that we do. We learn how to
>
> take notes, how to deal with your time, or children. We also do this wheel

(discovery wheel). We find out which areas we are lacking like money, house, etc. It brings it to our awareness, and those are things we share with our mentees.

An important characteristic of engaging in social learning is having it done by peers. This allows learning via observation and discourse among students' themselves rather than relying solely on instructors. Bandura (1977) stated, "Knowing that a given model's behavior is effective in producing valued outcomes or in averting punishing ones can improve observational learning by increasing observers' attentiveness to the model's actions" (p. 37). One mentor suggested her position and participation in the program increased her commitment to school and subsequently her mentors' commitment:

> It makes you want to work harder. I mean you are already working hard to get into the program, but once you are in there, your mentee can see that you are dedicated to doing what you are supposed to be doing.

 Peer mentors did not directly reference observing or learning from other current mentors but did share their experiences and how they applied the experience in their own lives. A *Lakewood* female mentee shared her learning experience from the mentoring sessions over learning in the classroom:

> When you take it in class then it's all… you feel like you've heard it before so you don't really pay attention, but when it's coming from another peer, I feel like you pay attention more, and if they say that it's helped them, you can relate better.

What characteristics of the peer mentoring program do mentor and mentees perceive promote social integration and engagement for students?

Involvement theory (Astin, 1999) focused on active participation by student in their learning experience. "The amount of student learning and personal development

associated with any educational program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program" (Astin, p. 519). Both mentoring programs studied were built with the intentional use of peers and structured activities to promote social connections and student involvement. The mentor training is where this culture of community began for each program, allowing the mentors to build a bond with the program administrators and other mentors. The creation of trust and friendship occurred and allowed the mentees to join an already cohesive network in which they would ultimately model within themselves. When asked how the peer mentoring program impacted their social experiences at the college, *Normal Community College* mentor shared the training experience and implications of the program on her college engagement:

> For me, it was nice to go on the retreat and bond with the other mentors. You meet them and you meet their friends. You meet more people and you become closer with the counselors. It is easier to go in to the counselor's office and get help. Also, doing well has helped me get in to Phi Theta Kappa. You become more involved.

While building strong and trusting relationships seems like a natural component of the mentoring program, the program administrators conceded the social value was intentionally set up through training sessions, planned events, and activities.

Over the course of the data analysis, consensus emerged among many of the participants that the social groups formed in the mentoring program were vital to the persistence and success of students at the college. Regardless of other obstacles many participants discussed, one thing was certain, the relationships both the mentees and the

mentors established were critical to providing support and helped them cope with those obstacles. Moreover, the desire to encourage similar experiences for other students was also a constant that permeated the responses of the participants. When describing the most important aspect of peer mentoring, a *Normal Community College* mentor focused on the relationships:

> Relationships with the other mentors, relationships with the mentees, it is the trust and knowing you have the support there and you will be there when they need you to support them. It is the relationships you form.

Mentors in the study explained how opportunities for learning occurred when peer mentors participated in impromptu study groups as a result of the mentoring space. When one mentee was asked about the most important aspect of the program, she described the value of the mentoring space,

> Creating a space where you can meet with your mentor: I think I spent two hours in the mentoring room just hanging out with people talking. You have one on ones with your mentee, but they'll get all of us talking in a big group one time or something, and then you just kind of start talking to them from then on whenever you see them.

> Finally, the data revealed an increased self-confidence and motivation in the mentors. Peer mentors frequently mentioned an increased self-efficacy as an outcome of the situation they found themselves in as peer mentors. Being placed into leadership positions provided the opportunity to gain confidence and recognize they had the ability to be successful and help others. A *Lakewood* mentor explained how his communication skills were improved, "I think it made me more up to talking to different people. I never

really talked until this year." Another mentor echoed the belief, stating, "it makes it more open. I can get up in front of class and talk to people. I am not afraid to raise my hand anymore."

Conclusions

A qualitative study was chosen to analyze the students and administrators perceptions' of peer mentoring programs at the community college setting. Merriam (1998) defined "a qualitative case study as an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit" (p. 21). This research design allowed the researcher to discover and interpret, rather than prove or disprove a hypothesis.

Within the qualitative methodology, the dual-case study approach was chosen to gain a deeper understanding how peer mentoring may impact social and academic development of students on a community college campus. This approach expands upon exploring an issue in one static setting by using more than one case to gather data from various sources and "study it to achieve as full an understanding of the phenomenon as possible" (Merriam, 1998, p. 28). Qualitative research is predicated on the idea that meaning is constructed by individuals' perceptions and interactions with their world; therefore, there are multiple interpretations of the reality. Accordingly, the following conclusions are based on the study's finding of the perceptions of community college students and program administrators regarding their personal experiences of a peer mentoring program, and how their experiences throughout the program may have impact social integration and academic success.

Building Community

Finding ways to build community among the students was the first overarching theme identified by analyzing the data. Three subthemes were also identified as important components of building community: Personal Support, Knowledge Development, and Opportunities. It was determined that strong relationships matter when building a strong community on campus. Subsequently, students learn more and at a deeper level when they are exposed to learning socially and academically with their peers (Tinto, 2003).

As outlined in the literature review, higher education institutions continue to struggle with how to retain and graduate students at a high rate (Habley & McClanahan 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). To this end, all institutions, particularly community colleges who primarily serve large at-risk populations, must increase opportunities to build communities that engage in academic and personal support. Each of the participants reflected on how the peer mentoring program provided opportunities to increase student involvement on campus. These opportunities led to an increase in friendships the students used to provide support when they found the transition to the college culture difficulty or when academic challenged them beyond their limits. Therefore, it can be concluded the culture of support provided by the peer mentoring programs, for these students both with other students and staff provided a safe learning environment.

Learning through Modeling and Self Reflection

Learning through modeling and self reflection was the second overarching theme identified using the data set. As indicated in the literature review, self reflection and modeling are important components of learning and human agency (Bandura, 2008). The participants in the study shared how modeling the behaviors of their peers attributed to their

own success. The demonstrated behaviors of positive attitudes and resilience permeated the entire peer mentoring group. Through the perceptions of the participants, the opportunity to reflect on their own experiences and challenges were beneficial in changing their own behaviors. The social behaviors and attitude toward school are a result of the modeling and self-reflection that occur during the training for mentees, or the group's activities structured into the mentoring sessions.

This self-reflection also increased their awareness of their own learning (Bandura, 2008). The metacognition of student's academic studies based on the dialogue with either advisors or peers were valuable not only to increased performance but also increased understanding of the content. Astin (1999) suggested student's success would be a directly related to the level of active involvement in the school. These examined peer mentoring programs provided structured meaningful opportunities to engage in thoughtful discussion about the academic content and how it is relevant to the students and their peers. From the results, it can be concluded these participants increased their personal efficacy, though their thoughts and actions, as an outcome to the experiences the peer mentoring program.

Increase in Personal Accountability

An increase in personal accountability was a third overarching theme identified in the study. Peer mentor comments clearly indicate that they experienced social learning (Bandura, 1977) through their observations of and interactions with other peer mentors. The peer mentors discussed problems and strategies on how to work with their mentees personal challenges or their own. Some of the behaviors were modeled and some were not based on the interaction of other students. Ultimately, this social learning occurred for both mentors and mentees alike.

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Furthermore, the students discussed an increased commitment to their academic studies as a result of the observations of other students. Mentors particularly began to recognize their role as models to be observed for learning purposes (Bandura, 1977). The mentors cited improvements in their own commitment to learning and conducting themselves as appropriate models for the students. Their self identified as role models and took the responsibility very seriously as they discussed conscious, intentional behavior choices like studying instead of socializing. Thus, it can be concluded that the peer mentoring programs allowed both the mentor and mentee to engage in social learning that resulted in increased personal accountability and commitment.

Increase in Confidence

The last theme that emerged from the data was an increase in confidence with subthemes of transition and leadership. The purposefully constructed role as a peer mentor provided opportunities to engage in training and situations to practice the skills learned. While peer mentors came to their job as involved students, they also reported further benefits described by Astin (1999) as they discussed their improvement in areas such as leadership and interpersonal skills. The participants shared in and out of classroom examples of how the skills learned throughout the mentoring program increased their confidence and involvement in the college. The improved interpersonal skills such as communication and leadership lead to an increase in confidence among the participants. Therefore, it can be concluded that when a peer mentoring program training process is designed to allow mentors to engage in practicing the skills the interaction between mentor and mentee is increased. This interaction results in increase confidence and involvement for both the mentor and mentee.

Limitations

Limitations of the study help define the ways in which college personnel can use the results of the study. The conclusions were framed within the following limitations. Heppner and Heppner (2004) posited, "all studies have limitations" (p. 340). However, attentiveness to the limitations is critical in order to design a rigorous case study. One limitation of this study was the external validity as it focused on two small samples from the Midwest. Merriam (1998) asserted that qualitative research was not intended to generalize the findings, but to interpret the events. External validity of the study could have been enhanced with a larger population with a more diverse geographical area. However, a larger sample size was not practical to the scope and timeframe of the study. Additionally, Merriam (2002) asserted, small samples are often used to understand the depth rather than find out what is generally true.

The use of interviews and focus groups as the essential mode of data collection method posed certain limitations. Participants may be reluctant to share negatives experiences in a group setting rather than in an individual interview. Additionally, it could be argued that the dual-case study could be an oversimplified situational account. Case studies can simplify or overstress a situation, leading the reader to flawed conclusions about the actual state of affairs (Merriam, 1998). Morgan, Krueger and King (1998) encouraged the use of an assistant moderator for note-taking and debriefing of focus groups. The researcher did not have an assistant for the focus groups. It would have been valuable to have another individual present to further confirm interpretations and to capture to a greater degree the non-verbal communication during the focus group.

Merriam asserted "the researcher must be sensitive to the context and all the variables within it, including the physical setting of the people, the overt and covert agendas, and the nonverbal behavior" (p. 21)…and any personal biases the researcher may have that may influence the research. The investigator must demonstrate sensitivity and integrity throughout the study and pay close attention to the non-verbal cues the subjects are presenting. To control for this limitation, the researcher had received prior formal training in focus group facilitations, observation and interviewing techniques and has had practical experience in higher education over the last 8 years.

Furthermore, to control for researcher bias, the researcher identified her own bias as it related to her positionality as an administrator currently working with similar peer led programs. According to Merriam (1998), identifying one's biases and theoretical orientation at the onset of the study increases the chance that the study can be replicated at another site.

Implications for Practice

The implications of this inquiry for application in higher education directly influence school leaders trying to create meaningful interventions to increase retention and completion rates in college. The study findings indicate there are particular characteristics of peer mentoring programs that administrators will want to include to implement a meaningful program that will both increase learning and student engagement in college. The use of peers can enhance the academic performances of both the mentees and mentors, if the right conditions are created throughout the mentoring program. The findings support the emphasis by Astin (1999) Bailey and Alfonso (2005) Kuh, Pike, and McCormick (2010) of the need for student involvement to include both social and

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academic relevance. Moreover, it is important for the mentoring program to provide for opportunities for students to reflect on how their attitudes, values, and experiences impact their learning both in and out of the classroom, which in turn encourages personal and intellectual growth. This may mean that collegiate personnel should create specific spaces for group meetings or structured times when this dialogue is encouraged between individuals. The students discussed how the ability to be in a room together let to rich discussion of what they were learning in and out of the classroom with both mentees and mentors.

The study findings also suggested the importance of establishing strategies and tools to identify ways to build community and team building, therefore increasing social learning to a great degree. Organizations can create a climate for endorsing inclusion through campus activities and events. Providing access to individuals whose experiences are different builds the capacity to develop a more comprehensive, insightful understanding of relationships in their current systems. To this end, peer mentors need to have planned, structured interactions in order to maximize their learning. Peer mentors need training so they are able to facilitate dialogue that is reflective and meaningful. Providing this peer support will enhance growth and learning when other mentors or mentees are presented with thoughts and experiences that challenge them.

Meaningful learning happens when students are exposed to situations that diverge from their previous experiences and challenge them personally and academically. The research findings suggested that institutions should not only provide support to those students experiencing and analyzing their new diverse environment, but should establish responsibilities for mentors to increase accountability and ultimately self-efficacy that can be modeled for mentees. Peer mentors discussed the value of having structured

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discussions intertwined with academic success skills. The ability to build a bond around relevant academic content was important to not only building a relationship with others but improving students' academic performance.

Recommendations for Future Study

This study provides insight into community college students' experience with peer mentoring programs at two Midwest institutions. However, the sample is limited in scope and therefore should not be generalized to the overall community college students. Yet, there remains a lot to be learned about the experiences of community college students in higher education particularly with regard to retention and mentoring.

The findings indicate a need for further inquiry into the development of relationships for different populations with perhaps replication of this study with more institutions and different populations. Additionally, this study focused on the characteristics and outcomes found specifically with peer mentoring programs for first time students and do not provide insight into long term effects of persistence, academic performance, social engagement, campus involvement, and graduation. Eventually, such a comprehensive study could serve as an impetus for requiring positive peer based interventions in higher education institutions to increase student success. Furthermore, comparing different populations of students including second year students could be beneficial to understanding the impact level among different student cohorts on learning outcomes and success measures.

Additionally, gender and racial differences of student experiences and perceptions need to be examined. Moreover, in response to an increasingly diverse population, further studies may examine the specific cultural needs of specific at-risk populations, such as transitional issues, cultural identity, and socioeconomic concerns. The resultant information could prove invaluable in determining how to best commit institutional resources toward high impact student success practices.

Finally, the results from this study suggest significant learning occurred during the mentoring experience for both the mentor and the mentees when there was purposeful context within meaningful interaction of peer mentors and mentees. Providing a greater understanding to the characteristics and structure of the impactful interactions between individuals involved in the mentoring program will help administrators design and implement successful programs.

Concluding Overview

The purpose of this dual-case study was to explore the perceptions of college program administrators and participants to determine the most critical components of increasing student success and learning of a community college mentoring program. Through a qualitative study, mentoring participants were analyzed using the conceptual frameworks of social learning and student involvement. These theories provided a framework to explore learning and social development of students on a community college campus. The findings of this inquiry suggested a need to integrate academic content into building social community to maximize the effectiveness of the mentoring program. Building relationships that are grounded in the purpose of learning at the college provided a

greater understanding of the academic content but also provided a network of intellectual and personal support when obstacles were presented.

Finally, based on the findings, to address the original question of how do school leaders create peer mentoring programs that help community colleges address issue of student retention and success; higher education administrators will need to commit resources to address the retention concerns. Astin (1993) posited the level of involvement is the physical and psychological energy the student exerts is directly related to the level of student success. The data revealed the need for program administrators to incorporate both a physical space to build community and intentional opportunities to be reflective as critical components to the mentoring program. The characteristics of these successful mentoring programs included training for both the campus community and mentors in ways to build community and opportunities to reflect on both personal and academic growth and set expectations of accountability and leadership. The mentoring program itself allows for the newest members of the college campus to model the positive behaviors and expectations set by others.

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APPENDIX A

Informed Consent

Gatekeeper Permission for Educator Participation Letter

Letter of Informed Consent - Participant

Gatekeeper Permission for Participation Letter

< Name of College>

Dear <Title> <First Name> <Last Name>

I would like to request your permission to invite applicable principals in your school district to participate in a research study entitled: *The Examination of Participation in a Community College Peer Mentoring Program on Social Integration and Academic Success of First Time Students.* I am examining the perceptions of students and staff regarding their experience and the mentoring program's impact on learning and retention new students. The information gathered should be beneficial to educational leaders responsible for bolstering the achievement levels and completion rates of students at community colleges. This study is part of my dissertation research for a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis from the University of Missouri-Columbia.

For the study, peer mentoring programs that have existed more than a year and serve more than 15 students were selected. I am seeking your permission as the Gatekeeper administrator of the *< Name of District >* Community College to contact the following individuals(s)_____ for the purpose of inviting peer mentoring program members to participate in this study. The selected peer mentoring mentors and mentees from your school will then be asked to participate in a one and a half hour focus group, along with interviewing the director of the program and to review any documents that the director gives me permission to examine. A copy of the focus group and interview protocol and the informed consent forms are attached for your review.

Participation in the study is completely voluntary. The participants may withdraw from participation at any time they wish without penalty, including in the middle of or after completion of the interview or focus group. Participants' answers and the college's identity will remain confidential, and separate from any identifying information. The researcher will not list any names of participants, or their corresponding institutions, in her dissertation or any future publications of this study.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns about participation either by phone at (816)560-0812 or by electronic mail at karen.goos@mcckc.edu. In addition, you are also welcome to contact the dissertation advisor for this research study, Dr. Barbara N. Martin, who can be reached at 660-543-8823 or by email at bmartin@ucmo.edu.

If you choose to allow me to contact participants from your college regarding participation in this study, please complete the attached permission form. You should retain a copy of this letter and your written consent for future reference.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Karen Goos

Doctoral Candidate
Administrative Permission for School Participation

       I, _____, grant permission for the director of the peer mentoring program at my college to be contacted to identify and contact students willing to participate in the study *The Examination of Participation in a Community College Peer Mentoring Program on Social Integration and Academic Success of First Time Students* conducted by Karen Goos, doctoral candidate at the University of Missouri-Columbia.

By signing this permission form, I understand that the following safeguards are in place to protect those choosing to participate:

> All participation is voluntary, and may be withdrawn at any point before culmination of the study.
> All responses will be used for dissertation research and for potential future journal publications.
> All identities and affiliations will be kept confidential in all phases of the research.
> Any consent or refusal to participate in this study will not affect the employment or student status of the participants in any way.

Please keep the consent letter and a copy of the signed consent form for your records. If you choose to grant permission for educators and students at your college to participate in this study, please complete this *Administrative Permission for School Participation Form*, seal it in the enclosed envelope, and return to Karen Goos as soon as possible.

I have read the material above, and any questions that I have posed have been answered to my satisfaction. I grant permission for educators and students at my college to be contacted and invited to participate in this study.

Signed: _____   Date_____

Title/Position:_____

School: _____

Please return to: Karen Goos, 2201 SE Hemlock Blue Springs, MO 64014
Cell Phone: 913-707-0017
Email: Karen.goos@mcckc.edu

Letter of Informed Consent

Dear Participant:

Thank you for considering participation in a research study titled, The

Examination of Participation in a Community College Peer Mentoring Program on Social

Integration and Academic Success of First Time Students. This study is part of my

dissertation research for a doctoral degree in educational leadership and policy analysis

from the University of Missouri. The research gathered should be helpful in for those

responsible for bolstering the achievement levels and completion rates of students at

community colleges. Your participation has been approved by your Administrator.

RESEARCHER: Karen Goos, University of Missouri Doctoral Candidate,
karen.goos@mcckc.edu, (913)707-0017.

ADVISOR: Dr. Barbara Martin, 4015 Lovinger Hall, University of Central Missouri,
(660)543-8823, bmartin@ucmo.edu.

PROJECT BACKGROUND: This project involves gathering data through focus groups
and interviews. The data will be collected for analysis and may be published. You must
be at least 18 years of age to participate.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this paper is to examine peer mentoring's impact on student
learning and retention.

PARTICIPATION: Focus group participation is voluntary. You may refuse to answer
any question or choose to withdraw from participation at any time without any penalty or
loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

PROCEDURES: You have been invited to participate in a one and a half hour focus
group interview comprised of ten open-ended questions. The focus group will be
informal. You are free to answer the questions you choose and pass on those you do not
wish to answer. The focus group interview will be recorded and then transcribed verbatim
for use by the researcher. Students in this study must be at least 18 years of age to
participate.

BENEFITS: Your participation in this research project will enrich the

information base. The research gathered should be helpful in providing insight into

characteristics of a peer mentoring program that would increase student success and

completion rates at community colleges.

RISKS: This project does not involve any risks greater than those encountered in everyday life.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Tapes and transcripts will remain confidential, anonymous, and separate from any identifying information. While the nature of a focus group makes it impossible to provide complete anonymity, your confidentiality will be maintained by the evaluator during future reporting of the evaluation results. Your name will not appear in any reports or written documents beyond those used by the evaluator. You will have the opportunity to verify the transcribed interview for accuracy of what was stated and what was intended. Edits, deletions, and clarifications will be made immediately to the transcript to comply with your right to voluntarily release data. Only the researcher and the dissertation supervisor will have access to the identifiable data. Collected data will be kept locked and will be destroyed three years after completion of this study.

INJURY: The University of Missouri does not compensate human if discomfort eventually results from the research. Nonetheless, the University of Missouri does have medical, professional and general liability self-insurance coverage and provides its own medical attention and facilities if participants suffer as a direct result of negligence or fault from faculty or staff associated with the research. In such unlikely event, the Risk Management Officer should be contacted immediately at (573)882-3735 to obtain a review of the matter and receive specific information. Related ethical guidelines about Protection of Human Subjects set forth in the Code of Federal Regulations "45 CFR 46" will be upheld. This statement is not to be construed as an admission of liability.

This research has been preauthorized by the Institutional Review Board—IRB of the University of Missouri. If you have further questions regarding research participants' rights, please contact the University of Missouri Campus Instructional Review Board at (573)88-9585 or visit http://www.research.missouri.edu/cirb/index.htm or http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/humansubjects/guidance/45cfr46. For inquiries about the focus group or your participation, please contact the researcher, Karen Goos, by phone at (913)707-0017 or by e-mail at karen.goos@mcckc.edu. You may also contact the dissertation supervisor, Dr. Barbara Martin at (660)543-8823 or by email bmartin@ucmo.edu.

If you have questions regarding your rights as a participant in research, please feel free to contact the University of Missouri Campus Institutional Review Board at (573)882-9585.

If you choose to participate in this study, please complete the attached consent form. A copy of this letter and your written consent should be retained by you for future reference.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Karen Goos

Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX B

Participant Focus Group Protocol

Focus Group Protocol: Peer Mentors

Focus Group Protocol: Peer Mentees

Focus Group: Peer Mentors

Date: Start Time:

Introduction:

    Welcome. Thank you for taking the time to discuss your experience in the peer mentoring program. My name is Karen Goos, and I will serve as the moderator for today's focus group. The purpose of today's discussion is to get information from you about students' social and academic success.

    Please remember, there are no right or wrong answers but rather differing points of view. Feel free to share your point of view even if it differs from what others have said. If you want to follow-up on something that someone has said, you want to agree, disagree or give an example, feel free to do that. I want this to be more of a conversation among yourselves, so don't feel like you have to respond to me all of the time. I am here to ask questions, listen and make sure everyone has a chance to share. I am interested in hearing from each of you. Please speak up and remember only one person should talk at a time.

    Our session will last about an hour, and we will not be taking a formal break. Feel free to leave the table for any reason if you need to. While the nature of a focus group makes it impossible to provide complete anonymity, your confidentiality will be maintained by the evaluator during future reporting. No names will be included in any reports. Let's begin by going around the room and finding out more about each other.

Questions	Information
1. Tell me your name and how long you have been a peer mentor.	Learn about participants
2. How would you describe the mentoring program as a whole? Probe: What do you hope to accomplish as mentors? What are the benefits, if any, of having a peer mentoring program?	Transition Question Q3 & 4.

3. What experience(s) have had the most impact on your stay here at the college? Probe: Have you ever thought about leaving the college? If so, did the influence your decision to stay? How?	Q2, 3, 4
Describe how mentoring has impacted your social experience at the college? Probes: What activities have you done with your mentee? How often do you and your mentee visit? In what ways have you and your mentee connect socially?	Q2 & Q4
5. Discuss how your peer mentor role has had an impact on your academic success?	Q2 & 4
6. How have you changed since you've been a peer mentor? Probe: What was the most valuable thing you have gained from being a peer mentor? Were there any negative aspects of being a peer mentor? Explain.	Q3 & 4
7. What are the greatest needs of incoming students and how do you help address those needs as a peer mentor?	Q2 Q3 Q4

8. Describe the most important aspects of the peer mentoring program that help new students adjust to college?	Q2
9. How, if at all, does the peer mentoring program influence how new students learn? Probe: Do you think students grades are better as a result of peer mentoring? Explain how or how not?	Q2, Q3
10. What would you like to add to the discussion you feel is important that I did not ask about?	Q2,3,4

Thank you for your time and participation.

Focus Group: Peer Mentees

Date: Start Time:

Introduction:

        Welcome. Thank you for taking the time to discuss your experience in the peer
mentoring program. My name is Karen Goos, and I will serve as the moderator for
today's focus group. The purpose of today's discussion is to get information from you
about students' social and academic success.
        Please remember, there are no right or wrong answers but rather differing points
of view. Feel free to share your point of view even if it differs from what others have
said. If you want to follow-up on something that someone has said, you want to agree,
disagree or give an example, feel free to do that. I want this to be more of a conversation
among yourselves, so don't feel like you have to respond to me all of the time. I am here
to ask questions, listen and make sure everyone has a chance to share. I am interested in
hearing from each of you. Please speak up and remember only one person should talk at a
time.
        Our session will last about an hour, and we will not be taking a formal break. Feel
free to leave the table for any reason if you need to. While the nature of a focus group
makes it impossible to provide complete anonymity, your confidentiality will be
maintained by the evaluator during future reporting. No names will be included in any
reports. Let's begin by going around the room and finding out more about each other.

Questions	Information
1. Tell me your name and how you felt when you first arrived to the college?	Learn about participants
2. How would you describe the mentoring program as a whole? Probe: How did the peer mentoring program change how you felt the first day of college to now? What are the benefits of having a peer mentor?	Transition Question

3. What are the greatest needs of incoming students and how does the peer mentoring program help address those needs? Probe: Explain how the peer mentoring program does or does not help new students adjust to college?	Q2 Q3 Q4
4. Describe how mentoring has impacted your social experience at the college?	Q2, Q4
5. Discuss how having a peer mentor has had impact, if any, on your academic success?	Q2, Q3
6. What was the most valuable thing you gained from the mentoring program? Were there negative aspects of having a peer mentor? Explain.	Q3 & Q4
7. What experience(s) have had the most impact on your stay here at the college? Probe: Have you ever thought about leaving the college? If so, did mentoring influence your decision to stay? How?	Q2, 3, 4
8. When thinking about the mentoring experience, what were the most beneficial aspects of the program? Probe: Did you mentor discuss any worries you had about your studies? Did your mentor discuss any concerns about your personal problems?	Q2, Q3, Q4

9. Explain in what ways the mentoring program has or has not helped you with your studies and academic success? Probe: Do you think students grades are better as a result of peer mentoring? Explain why or why not?	Q2
10. What would you like to add to the discussion you feel is important that I did not ask about?	Q2, Q3, Q4

Thank you for your time and participation.

APPENDIX C

Participant Interview Protocol

Program Administrator Interview Protocol

Date: Start Time:

Introduction:
Good afternoon. Thank you for taking the time to answer my questions focusing on your
experiences with the peer mentoring program. The purpose of today's discussion is to get
information from you about students' social and academic success. My name is Karen
Goos, and I will be conducting the interview. In order to ensure accuracy, I will be audio
taping the interview.

Remember, there is no right or wrong answers. If you want to follow-up on a question or give
an example, feel free to do so. I want this to be more of a conversation between professionals.
Our session will last about one and a half to two hours and we will not be taking a formal
break. Please let me know if you need to leave the table for any reason. Let's begin by
finding out more about each other.

Questions	Information
1 Tell me your name. How long have you been involved with the peer mentoring program? 2. Have you had any previous experiences with peer mentoring? If so, at what level and for how long?	Learn about participants
3. Please describe the peer mentoring program as a whole? Probe: What are the most critical components of the program to help retain students?	Q1 and Q2
4. What are the most important outcomes of the peer mentoring program?	Q1
5. How do you to measure whether the college has been successful in achieving the above?	Q1

6. How does the program impact the academic experience of the mentors and mentees? Probes: How do you see the program helping students complete their program of study? How do you see the program impact the retention and grades of students involved?	Q1 & Q2
7. How do you see the program helping first time students adjust to college? Probe: How do your mentors address the needs of first time students?	Q1 & Q2
8. How does the program impact the social experiences and campus engagement of the mentors and mentees?	Q1 & Q2
9. Please describe what training and ongoing support is provided to mentors?	Q1 & 2
10. Is there anything else you would like to share with me that I have not asked?	Q1 & Q2

Thank you for your time and participation.

APPENDIX D

Document Review Form

Name of Document _____

Document # _____

Date Procured _____

Document Received From _____

      Notes:

APPENDIX E

Your human subject research project entitled <u>The Examination of Participation in</u> <u>a Community College Peer Mentoring Program on Social Integration and Academic</u> <u>Success of First Time Students.</u> was APPROVED as "Exempt" and the approval expires on November 15, 2013. Your approval is contingent upon your agreement to annually submit the Annual Exempt Form to maintain current IRB approval.

Please submit the form 30 days before the expiration date to provide enough time for review and avoid delays in the IRB process. Failure to timely submit the certification form by the deadline may result in automatic expiration of IRB approval. (Login to eIRB to complete the Annual Exempt Form: http://irb.missouri.edu/eirb). The form is located under START IRB FORM on the main menu.

If you wish to close or withdraw your project, please complete the Completion/Withdrawal Report.

Please be aware that all human subject research activities must receive approval by the IRB prior to initiation, regardless of the review level status. If you have any questions regarding the IRB process, do not hesitate to contact the Campus IRB office at (573) 882-9585.

Campus Institutional Review Board

VITA

Karen Goos was born in Fairbury, Nebraska to Sally and Ron Fink. She graduated in 1995 from Crete High School in Crete, Nebraska. In 1999, she received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Elementary/ Middle School Education from Doane College in Crete, Nebraska. She later earned a Master of Science in Exercise Science from Central Missouri State University in 2001, followed by a Doctorate in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis from the University of Missouri – Columbia in 2013.

Karen began her career as a track and field coach and part time physical education instructor at various Midwest colleges for over five years. She has spent the last eight years at Metropolitan Community College as a recruiter, Registrar, Enrollment Manager, Associate Dean and currently serves as the Dean of Student Development and Enrollment Management. Research interests include social and student development theories as they pertain to best practice success models in high education specifically for at-risk students.

Dr. Goos currently reside in Blue Springs, Missouri with her husband, Nick Goos, and their three children, Kierra, Jackson and Maya.