

A CASE STUDY OF PERCEPTIONS OF VALUE FOR STUDENTS AT A PRIVATE,
LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGE IN THE MIDWESTERN UNITED STATES

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by
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LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGE IN THE MIDWESTERN UNITED STATES

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and herby certify that, in their opinion, it is worth of their acceptance.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my father, Stan Scheer, who has always demonstrated the most important quality of personal and professional leadership: service to others.

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ABSTRACT

Large amounts of quantitative data can be obtained by means of the National Survey for Student Engagement (NSSE). However, can a 15-minute survey truly provide an institution with enough relevant data to adequately understand a student's perception of value in order to help inform strategic changes that will affect future levels of engagement? Harper (2007) suggests that quantitative assessment has overwhelmed significant qualitative research efforts, limiting potential insights gained from a student's valuable first-hand experience. Whereas student success can be measured at the end of a semester, school year, or educational career, qualitative measurement of a student's perception of value reflect how their learning experience evolves over the course of their entire college experience. This qualitative bounded case study examines the perceptions of value for students at a private, liberal arts college in the Midwestern United States.

SECTION ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE DISSERTATION-IN-PRACTICE

The intensely competitive environment of higher education requires administrators to understand the current college student's perception of value in order to communicate distinctive benefits to prospective and current students in an exceptional, compelling and sophisticated way (Newman, Couturier, & Scurry, 2010). Economic conditions and increased competition among colleges have heightened the expectation to provide students with the greatest value (Longmire Study, 2013). An organization's value proposition justifies the cost of the product to the customer. The student's value proposition, or level of college experience satisfaction, directly impacts their loyalty (Carvalho & de Oliveira Mota, 2010). The effective understanding and communication of student loyalty is needed for higher education institutions (HEIs) to attract prospective students, retain current students, and engage alumni (Carvalho & de Oliveira Mota, 2010). A college student's value proposition is developed over the course of their multi-year undergraduate experience. A college's value proposition for a student is realized through many forms of engagement including: academic challenge, enriching educational experiences, faculty and student interaction, access to collaborative learning, and support systems on campus (Kuh, 2003; Coates, 2005).

To quantify student engagement, over 600 4-year institutions annually collect data during a student's first year and senior year by means of the National Survey for Student Engagement (NSSE, 2014). This 15-minute survey measures levels of engagement in academic and non-academic settings (Kuh, 2001). The convenience and relatively low NSSE survey expense of approximately \$3.50 per student, makes quantitative data

readily accessible for participating institutions. The NSSE provides valuable quantitative data because engagement has been proven to be the leading indicator of student success (Kinzie & Kuh, 2004). In addition to archival NSSE data, there is an opportunity for small, private liberal arts colleges to utilize qualitative data to further understand a student's perception of value and how that might change over time.

Statement of the Problem

Large amounts of quantitative data can be obtained by means of the NSSE. However, can a 15-minute survey truly provide an institution with enough relevant data to adequately understand a student's perception of value in order to help inform strategic changes that will affect future levels of engagement? Harper (2007) suggests that quantitative assessment has overwhelmed significant qualitative research efforts, limiting potential insights gained from a student's valuable first-hand experience. The Longmire Study (2013), which surveyed 34 institutions deduced that the "determination of value is highly personal" (p. 1). Merriam (2009) suggests that this type of personal information can be obtained through qualitative methods such as focus groups and interviews. In combination with the NSSE data, the qualitative data obtained from these methods will provide a more comprehensive view of the student's perception of value at an HEI.

Why should student engagement and perceptions of value matter to HEIs? Markwell (2007) suggests engagement is required for positive interaction with faculty and the development of learning. Values are inherent in the learning process, which in turn is valuable to the student (Amey, 2006). NSSE Data shows quantitative levels of engagement, but it does not provide a student's perception of value. Project DEEP (Documenting Effective Educational Practices) evaluated 20 NSSE schools with

extensive qualitative research. However, their findings only pointed to student success and not specifically to perceptions of value (Kinzie & Kuh, 2004). Whereas student success can be measured at the end of a semester, school year, or educational career, qualitative measurement of a student's perception of value reflect how their learning experience evolves over the course of their entire college experience.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to fill the gap in research that currently exists in the perception of value for college students at small, private liberal arts colleges. Value is defined as the difference between the consumer's perception of benefits and the cost associated with relationship continuation with the service provider (Sirdeshmukh, Singh, & Sabol, 2002). This study aims to understand the perception of value for a college student (consumer) in relation to the college (service provider). Hossler, Ziskin, Moore, and Wakhungu (2006) encourage further inquiry of student engagement combined with contextual consideration. A qualitative case study will provide institutional context. Qualitative research will supplement the archival quantitative data already obtained through the NSSE. In the past, the Trust, Value, Loyalty framework (Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002) has not been used in combination with the NSSE data to comprehensively evaluate perceptions of value for students at private liberal arts colleges.

Research Questions

Creswell (2009) states that a research question should address the complex factors that accompany a central process or group of individuals. This qualitative study will also include the use of sub-questions. The sub-questions will simplify the complex factors of the study by narrowing down the research question. The overarching research question

guiding this case study is: What are the perceptions of value for students at a small, Midwestern private liberal arts college? For the purpose of this study, the school that is being studied will be called Midwest College. Additional sub-questions to support the research question in understanding perceptions of value at Midwest College include:

- How do students qualitatively define NSSE engagement indicators at Midwest College?
- How do levels of engagement affect a student's perception of value at Midwest College?
- What are the similarities and / or differences between the perceptions of value between first year students and seniors at Midwest College?
- What engagement moments, experiences, or triggers change a student's perception of value during their time at Midwest College?

Merriam (2009) encourages the researcher to ask qualitative questions about what the respondent feels or believes. Research shows that positive beliefs and attitudes correlate to a student's increased rate of persistence in college (Kahn and Nauta, 2001).

Theoretical Framework

According to Merriam (2009), the theoretical framework is the "scaffolding" or underlying structure of a qualitative study (p. 66). The theoretical framework both guides and validates the study. The researcher should use the theoretical framework as the basis of the study. The outcome of the theoretical framework will be the generation of the problem that the study intends to address (Merriam, 2009). The Trust, Value, Loyalty framework, developed by Sirdeshmukh et al. (2002), will be used in this study. The Trust, Value, Loyalty framework was originally developed to quantitatively assess and

understand the practices of service providers that build or break down consumer trust. This framework, built on the tenets of social relationships, marketing principles, and inter-organizational dynamics are all important for consideration when understanding student perceptions of value at a private liberal arts college (Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002).

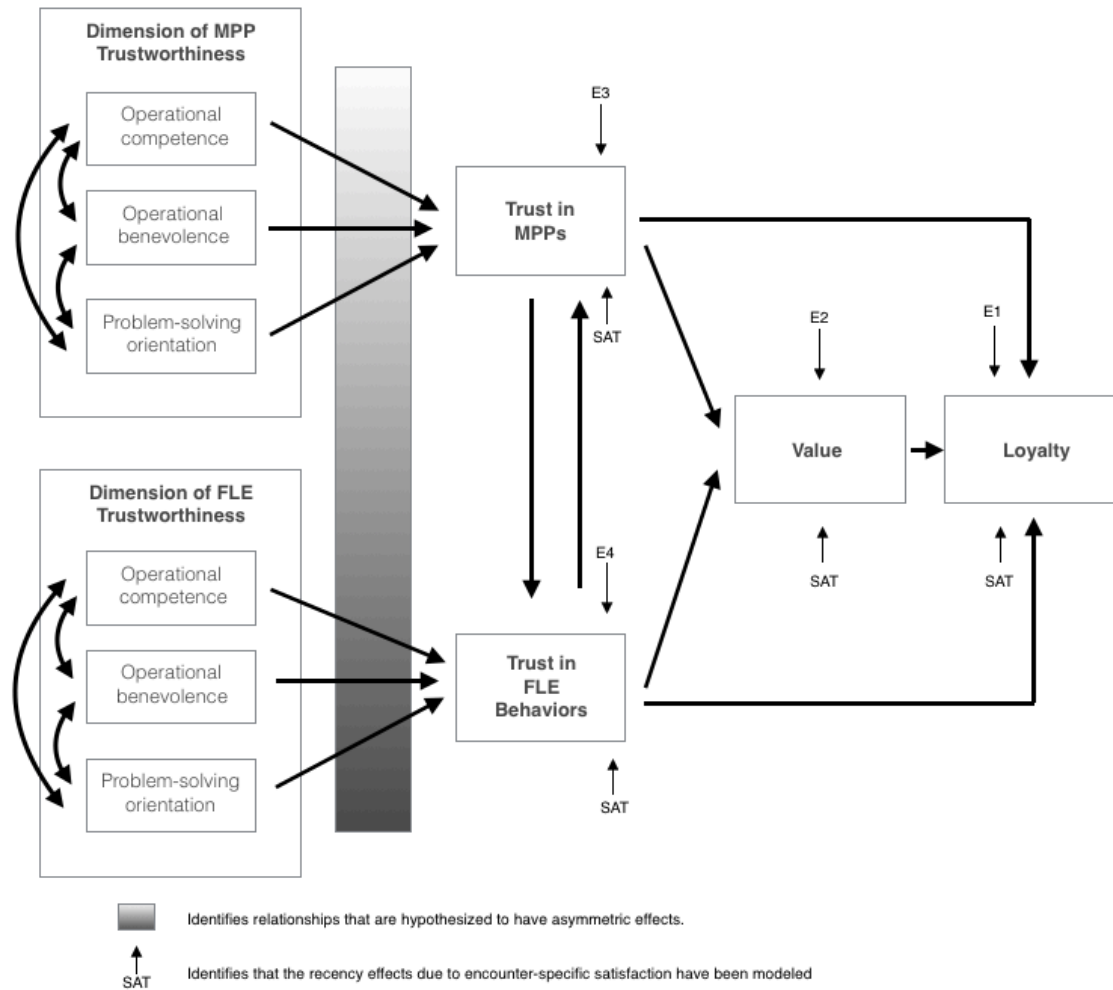


Figure 1: Trust, Value, Loyalty Framework developed by Sirdeshmukh et al. (2002) to quantitatively assess consumer trust in the retail and airline industry.

In the model, Sirdeshmukh et al. (2002) focus on frontline employees (FLE) and management policies and practices (MPP). “This focus is managerially useful because its pinpoints those frontline behaviors and management that likely are the key drivers of

consumer trust” (Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002, p. 15). E represents the specific elements of operational competence, operational benevolence, and problem-solving orientation.

Sirdeshmukh et al. (2002) posit that value is the superordinate consumer goal in relational exchanges and that consumers will not demonstrate loyalty toward the service provider if they do not perceive value in their relational exchange with that service provider (as stated in Carvalho & de Oliveira Mota, 2010, p. 148).

Another important element of the Trust, Value, Loyalty framework is the nature of the asymmetric relationship between a consumer’s trust to the provide base on experiences with FLE’s and MPP’s. Sirdeshmukh et al. (2002) “allow for the possibility that the trust-building effect of a unit positive change in performance on any factor of trustworthy behaviors/practices may not be equivalent to the trust depletion effect produced by a unit negative change in performance” (p. 15-16). In other words, consumer may lack trust in a specific area of operational competence when interactive with FLE’s. However, this does not necessarily deplete their perception of trust for the entire organization. In the context of higher education, this may mean that a student’s loyalty to the college may remain despite the fact they have a lack of trust an institutional MPP. Sirdeshmukh et al. (2012) found that value is “the consistent, significant, and dominant determinant of consumer loyalty regardless of the service category” (p. 32). This finding is especially important in the context of higher education as institutions develop strategies for ongoing engagement and retention.

The principles of the Trust, Value, Loyalty framework along with the NSSE engagement indicators will be considered for building the focus group and interview questions, a key component to gather qualitative findings. Several studies have been

conducted in higher education utilizing components of the Trust, Value, Loyalty framework. Ghosh, Whipple, & Bryan (2001) identified antecedents to trust in the context of higher education, Helgesen & Nettet (2007) explored the drivers of student loyalty, Hennig-Thurau, Langer & Hansen (2001) provide ways to manage student loyalty, and Ledden, & Kalafatis (2010) investigated the impact of time on a student's perception of value. Appleton-Knapp & Krentler (2006) assessed satisfaction in terms of managing student expectations. Finally, Carvalho & de Oliveira Mota (2010) used the trust, value, and loyalty framework to determine how trust is initially established and translated into a value proposition for a student by modifying the model of Sirdeshmukh et al. (2002). They identified the perceived value of a student in the context of an HEI by means of quantitative assessment.

Carvalho & de Oliveira Mota (2010) found that:

This propensity to reward the HEI occurs because students perceive value in their relational exchange with the HEI and this perception of value is centered on students' trust that the HEI (reflected in both the HEI's personnel as well as the HEI's management/administrative policies and practices) is focused on increasing their ability to succeed in achieving their learning and degree goals and career objectives (p. 161)

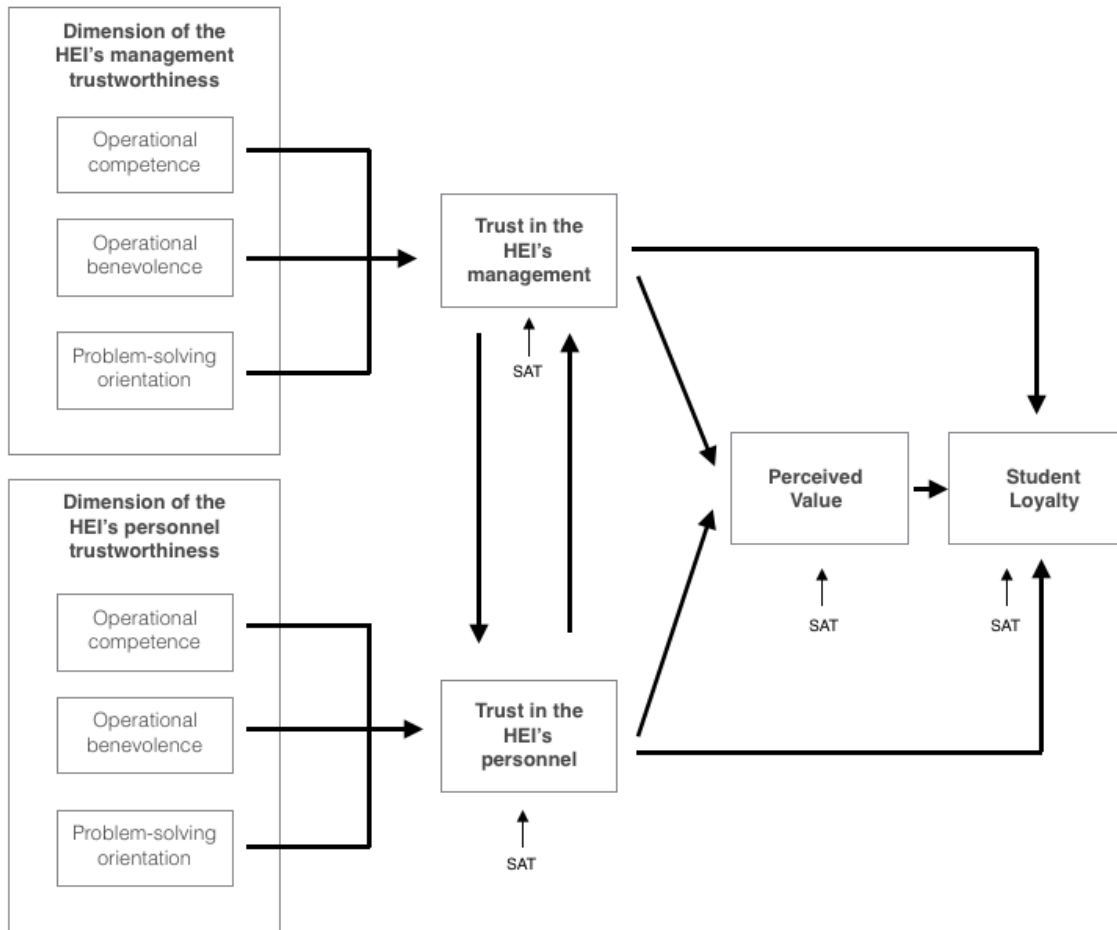


Figure 2: Modified version of the Trust, Value, Loyalty framework for assessment of how trust is initially established for students in an HEI (Carvalho & de Oliveira Mota, 2010)

Carvalho and de Oliveira Mota (2010) found that students not only value when an HEI demonstrates operational competence, operational benevolence, and problem solving orientation, they subsequently reward that institution with continual involvement, enrollment, and positive referral of other prospective students.

The researcher of the current study is building upon both of these models by adding qualitative data to the NSSE data to help inform the phenomenon of a student rewarding the HEI with their loyalty as a result of higher levels of trust and perceived

value. The qualitative interview and focus group questions were built using the NSSE engagement indicators in combination with the key components of the Trust, Value, Loyalty Framework. The proposed model is focused on understanding the perception of value of students and if / how this changes during their HEI career.

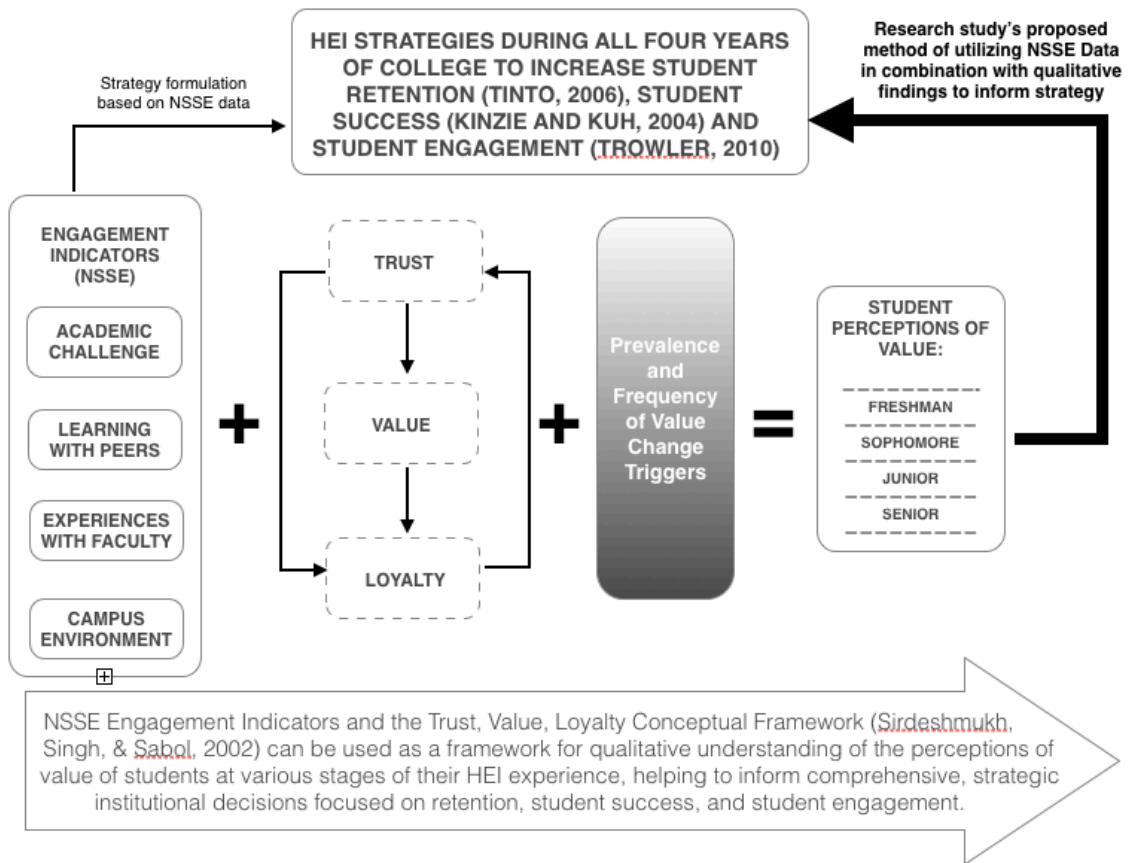


Figure 3: Qualitative perception of value framework developed by researcher

Conceptual Underpinnings

To further explore the theoretical framework, this study will investigate a college student's perception of value through the following conceptual underpinnings: student engagement, student retention, and student success.

Student Engagement

Significant research has shown a correlation of student engagement to many

positive outcomes including: higher student satisfaction, improved persistence rates, and better social interaction (Trowler, 2010).

Student engagement is concerned with the interaction between the time, effort and other relevant resources invested by both students and their institutions intended to optimize the student experience and enhance the learning outcomes and development of students and the performance, and reputation of the institution (Trowler, 2010, p. 2).

There are many dimensions to student engagement. Mann (2001), Krause (2005), Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, and Gonyea (2008), Coates (2005), and Manning and Kuh (2005) help to provide a definition and critical components of student engagement. Fredericks, Blumenfield, and Paris (2004) unite behavioral, emotional and cognitive components of engagement into a multidimensional spectrum and are key researchers in defining the purpose of student engagement. Graham, Tripp, Seawright, and Joeckel (2007), Pascarella, Seifert, and Blach (2010) provide research on the purpose of engagement while Bensimon (2009), Strange and Banning (2001), and Rush and Balamoutsou (2006) give insight into the effects of student engagement. Finally, Busted's (2015) work connects high levels of student engagement to long-term success.

Student Retention

College student retention is another important concept that has garnered significant research attention. Vincent Tinto and John Braxton have been prolific researchers in the area of student retention. Tinto's (1999, 1987, 2006) research areas of focus have included learning communities, causes of attrition, and policy considerations. John Braxton has co-authored many articles addressing the influence of active learning

(Braxton, Milem & Sullivan, 2001), social integration through institutional policies and practice (Braxton and Mundy), and strategic retention initiatives (Brier, Hirschy, & Braxton, 2008). Hossler et al. (2008) added to the body of retention research with a study focused on policy “levers” such as student orientation and faculty advising (p. 5). The impact of increased retention has a significant implication for HEIs. In a comprehensive study of 1669 colleges and universities Raisman (2013) states the average cost of attrition for a private university is over \$8M per year.

Raisman (2013) found that 84% of college student attrition could be attributed to one of four reasons: lack of care from the college, poor service to the student, lack of value, and scheduling conflicts. Nguyen and LeBlanc (2001) studied an institution's reputation, or the ability of the organization to live up to the expectations of their constituents, and found that it plays a key role in retention. Nguyen and LeBlanc (2001) studied 395 freshman and seniors in a business school and found that extrinsic factors such as price and service led to increased perception of reputation and subsequent loyalty to the institution.

Student Success

Student success is often defined with one of five categories: background of the student, institutional characteristics, influence and interaction of faculty and staff, the students perception of learning and group environments, and the effort or grit that a student puts forth (Kuh et al., 2008). Student success is most commonly found at academic institutions where students, faculty and staff have an authentic and intentional focus (Kinzie & Kuh, 2004). Manning and Kuh (2005) also support the notion that a concerted effort on the part of the institution is necessary for consistent student success.

Student success is measured in terms of grades, attendance, persistence, and placement rate. Because student success relies on the entire institution, it is often difficult to accurately measure the specific initiatives (Selingo, 2015). Therefore, archival quantitative NSSE data combined with qualitative interview and focus group data will provide a measurement for the factors that lead to student success through the Trust, Value, Loyalty framework.

One measure of student success is persistence, or the rate in which a student moves from their first year in college to graduation. Kahn and Nauta (2001) found that persistence is heavily influenced by academic performance and social integration in the college community. Manning and Kuh (2005) conducted the Project DEEP study in response to the alarming fact that, according to the Department of Education, 25% of students don't persist through their first year of college (as stated in Kahn & Nauta, 2001). Selingo, Carey, Pennington, Fishman & Palmer (2013) found that HEIs must have a centralized vision of what student success should look like to maximize effectiveness. Innovating and scaling quickly can work for colleges and present students with an opportunity to be actively involved in both their success and the college's success (Selingo et al., 2013).

Assumptions

According to Creswell (2009), research participants and the researcher introduce biases, values and their personal backgrounds to the study. The researcher has several assumptions about the qualitative case study. It is assumed that students have varying perceptions of value based on the levels of engagement at Midwest College. It is also assumed that the perception of value changes over time as a result of triggers or

engagement events. Finally, it is assumed that the perceptions of value will provide a different and possibly lower level of engagement than the quantitative NSSE results from the 2014-2015 school year.

Limitations

The aforementioned biases, backgrounds and values also create limitations to the study. These confounding variables, which Creswell (2009) asserts are not easily assessed while the study is taking place, and could affect the questioning strategy of the researcher. A sample size of four focus groups and multiple interviews may not accurately reflect the entire student population. The researcher has chosen to focus on one HEI which impacts generalizability, or the ability to apply the results to other colleges (Creswell, 2009). Another limitation may result from the interpersonal dynamics of the focus groups. The students may not fully share their perception of value because of the influence of other focus group participants and the fact that the researcher works at the College. Finally, qualitative data will be obtained from freshmen, despite the fact that their quantitative perceptions are not reflected in the 2014-2015 NSSE data.

Delimitations

The researcher will gather qualitative data from students who have spent the majority of their college career at Midwest College. The study will include students who are 18 years old or older and who are enrolled in the 2015 / 2016 academic school year. The NSSE data will be from the 2014-2015 school year. The researcher has chosen to make this study a point-in-time as opposed to a longitudinal study. In order for the entire student body to be represented, selection of the research participants will be facilitated by the Dean of Students at Midwest College.

Definition of Key Terms

Value – the value proposition justifies the cost of the product to the consumer. A student’s value proposition, or level of college experience satisfaction, directly impacts their institutional loyalty (Carvalho & de Oliveira Mota, 2010).

Student Engagement – Shulman (2002) states that student engagement “measures individual intrinsic involvement with their learning” (as stated in Coates, 2007, p. 122). Examples of student engagement include: discussing classroom topics outside of the class with faculty members, creating content with a diverse perspective, working with teams to create a measurable outcome (Kuh, 2003).

Student Retention – percentage of students who return to the college, commonly measured at the start of the third semester. This is typically referred to as first-to-second-year retention rate (Kuh et al., 2011).

Student Success – Manning and Kuh (2005) state the following conditions are needed for student success: “Living mission and lived educational philosophy, unshakeable focus on student learning, environments adapted for educational enrichment, clear pathways, improvement-oriented ethos, and shared responsibility” (p. 1).

Student Persistence – the time it takes for a college student complete their degree. Tinto (1975) developed the Student Integration Theory that connects persistence with the level and quality of interactions between students and faculty (as stated in Kahn and Nauta, 2001).

National Survey for Student Engagement – the NSSE is a quantitative assessment administered to college freshmen and seniors focusing on the following engagement indicators: “academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty

interaction, enriching educational experiences, and a supportive campus environment” (Kuh, 2003, 29).

Design of the Study

A qualitative bounded case study will be used to answer the research question. A bounded case study requires the researcher to collect information in various ways during a specific period of time (Creswell, 2009). For this study, the bounded case will be the students who attend Midwest College. The unit of study must be bounded in order for it to be a case (Merriam, 2009). The researcher aims to analyze highly descriptive information through the lens of the Trust, Value, Loyalty theoretical framework. The challenge of any case study is found in generalizability, since the research will focus on one organization (Merriam, 2009). An additional challenge for any researcher is to minimize bias. The researcher aims to minimize bias by taking into consideration differences in the collected qualitative data (Merriam, 2009).

Data Collection – Focus Groups

Collection of qualitative data for this bounded case study will include focus groups. Focus groups help the researcher understand the perspectives in that organization (Krueger, 2009). The focus groups will take place in the natural setting (Creswell, 2009) of Midwest College. The field researcher will collect important notes, including: first impressions, significant findings according to the participant, and how those findings become significant to the researcher (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). The researcher will use simple and open-ended questions in order to gather the maximum amount of qualitative data for the focus group (Krueger, 2009). Krueger (2009) recommends conducting three or four focus groups consisting of five to eight participants for each

participant group. To fully understand the perceptions of value for students at Midwest College the researcher will conduct at least four focus groups, one for each current cohort, including freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors.

Data Collection - Interviews

Gathering data with multiple methods is important for a researcher in order to improve the validity of the study (Creswell, 2009). Interviews will provide an additional qualitative research method. The researcher will conduct a minimum of two interviews for each freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior cohort. Good interviews require the asking of good questions (Merriam, 2009). Engagement indicators from the NSSE will inform the interview questions. Reflective notes and demographic information are important to help fulfill the interview's observational protocol (Creswell, 2009). The researcher will recruit participants for the focus groups and interviews through the Office of Student Life at Midwest College. In order to provide the best research database (Merriam, 2009) for the case study, the researcher will digitally record all focus groups and interviews for transcription purposes.

Data Collection - Procedure

All interviews and focus groups will be recorded and transcribed by rev.com, a professional transcription service. Students information will remain confidential and their names will be replaced with pseudonyms. Interviews and focus groups will be conducted until data saturation is reached. Creswell (2002) states that data saturation is "the state in which the researcher makes the subjective determination that new data will not provide any new information or insights for the developing categories" (p. 450). Research participants will not be invited to provide perspective on the theoretical framework or

conceptual underpinnings. Rather, as Moghaddam (2006) suggests, “grounded theory is not their voice; it is a generated abstraction from their doings and their meanings that are taken as data for the conceptual generation” (p. 59).

Archival NSSE Data

The researcher will evaluate archival NSSE summary data for freshman and seniors taken during the 2014 / 2015 school year. The researcher will obtain IRB approval from Midwest College before obtaining NSSE data.

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) documents dimensions of quality in undergraduate education and provides information and assistance to colleges, universities, and other organizations to improve student learning. Its primary activity is annually surveying college students to assess the extent to which they engage in educational practices associated with high levels of learning and development (NSSE Annual Report, 2014, p.1)

Midwest College used the NSSE as an engagement instrument for both freshman and seniors. There are five specific benchmarks that the NSSE uses as categories: academic challenge, collaborative learning, interaction between students and faculty, enriching educational experiences, and supportive campus environments (McCormick, Gonyea, & Kinzie, 2013).

The NSSE, which relies solely on quantitative student feedback, originated in order to identify engagement indicators of how students actually use student resources, resulting in a more accurate representation of college quality (Kuh, 2001). "Although no questionnaire is perfect, the psychometric qualities of the NSSE instrument demonstrate that it is a valid tool for research on student engagement in educational practices

associated with high levels of learning and development" (Kinzie et al., 2006, p. 68). The NSSE is often the only accurate source of student engagement information for HEIs (Kuh, 2001). Shulman (2002) states that measuring student engagement allows for the institution to understand how the student is intrinsically investing in their learning (as stated in Coates, 2005). Pike and Kuh, after extensive study of many HEIs who participated in NSSE, developed seven types of engagement: "diverse but interpersonally fragmented, homogenous and interpersonally cohesive, intellectually stimulating, interpersonally supportive, high-tech but low-touch, academically challenging and supportive, and collaborative" (as stated in Trowler, 2010, p. 15).

Data analysis will consist of reliability, validity, and generalizability. Creswell (2009) suggests several reliability techniques to analyze qualitative findings including: checking for mistakes on the transcripts, verifying consistency in the coding, and recording as many steps in the coding process as possible. The theoretical framework will influence the categories for the findings. Categories of data should relate directly to the purpose of the research and be "conceptually congruent" (Merriam, 2009, p. 187). The researcher will use descriptive language when reporting on the interview and focus findings. The researcher will also triangulate the findings from the interviews and focus groups with the archival NSSE data to ensure validity (Creswell, 2009). Yin (2003) encourages the researcher to generalize the findings to a broader theory in order to minimize qualitative challenges associated with generalizability. For example, findings in this study may relate to broader theories of student engagement, retention, or value.

Significance of the Study

Since no two students and no two institutions are the same, the value of a current student's experience may vary widely at the same college. A recent study by the Lawlor Group (2015), a leading market research group for higher education, found that for smaller colleges under 4000 students, there is more variance within an institution for student engagement than there is between institutions (Lawlor Group, 2015). Therefore, understanding the specific qualitative components of a student's perception of value at a small liberal arts college in addition to comparing quantitative engagement indicators data is important for targeted student recruitment and retention strategies. The practical significance of this research will enable Midwest College to understand at a qualitative level the perceptions of value for their students to supplement existing quantitative NSSE data. Since no research has been found that examines qualitative perceptions of value for students at a small, private liberal arts college in combination with archival NSSE data, the findings will add to existing body of work focused on engagement, retention, and student success.

Summary

The competitive landscape of higher education justifies intentional focus on recruitment and retention for Midwest College. A thorough understanding of a student's perception of value by means of a theoretical framework based on trust, loyalty, and value will supplement existing archival quantitative NSSE data for Midwest College. The implications of this research are important for all stakeholders at Midwest College. Students are the primary stakeholder at the College. Since the qualitative findings will

determine a student's perception of value of the institution, the admission, academic, and advancement offices at Midwest College will primarily benefit from the findings.

SECTION TWO

PRACTITIONER SETTING FOR THE STUDY

The setting for this qualitative case study is Midwest College, a private higher education institution situated in the central region of the United States. With a full-time undergraduate population of 1060 students and a one to eleven faculty to student ratio, Midwest College is considered a small, private college (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). Midwest College, a nationally ranked liberal arts college, values students experiences, faculty interaction, academic rigor, and the accountability of community (Strategic Plan Retrospective 2015). Midwest College has been recognized by Colleges of Distinction (2015), an organization that highlights schools where students have the greatest opportunities to "learn, grow, and succeed."

The setting for this specific study was chosen because price and value are important for families considering an annual tuition cost of over \$30,000 per year. There are many benefits for students attending smaller liberal arts colleges. Seifert, Pasarella, Goodman, Salisbury, and Blaich (2010) state that research has empirically shown that liberal arts colleges have a positive effect on cognitive and non-cognitive elements of long-term success for students. "Liberal arts colleges seem to provide the greatest exposure to good practices in undergraduate education as it relates to in-class academic experience" (Seifert et al., 2010, p. 18). These in-class academic experiences engage students in the learning process directly. Astin (1999) states that for years, small, private liberal arts colleges have been considered ideal educational environments to encourage cognitive growth for students (as stated in Pasarella, Wang, Trolan, & Blaich, 2013). In fact, students at liberal arts colleges had greater access to 80% of the good practice

indicators compared to all other four year higher education institutions (HEI's).

Compared to students attending research universities or regional institutions in the United States, American liberal arts college students in our sample reported significantly greater overall exposure to clear and organized classroom instruction and significantly more higher-order, reflective, and integrative learning experiences (Pascarella et al, 2013).

Good practice indicators include: high quality interaction with faculty, academic challenge, influential peer interaction, diverse experiences, and collaborative learning (Seifert et al., 2010). Hart Research Associates cite that 94% of employers are highly supportive of a liberal arts education (as stated in Simon, Perkins, & Crabtree, 2014).

History of Organization

Midwest College, founded in the mid-1800s is one of the oldest colleges west of the Mississippi River (Colleges of Distinction, 2015). The College was originally founded to uphold the spiritual heritage of the state's religious convention. For years, this relationship guided many of the curricular and programmatic direction of the college. The formal ties with the state's religious convention have since dissolved. (Midwest College Website, 2015). The separation from the state's religious convention in the early 2000s marked an important moment in the College's history towards a more accepting and comprehensive philosophy of faculty, students, and staff.

Used as a fort during the Civil War, the school slowly built academic and athletic programs in the late 1800's (Liberal Arts Colleges History, 2015). Originally built as an all male school, Midwest College welcomed females under the same admission terms in 1920 (Liberal Arts College History, 2015). Today, the college is made up of more

females than males. The vast majority of majors and minors are designed for undergraduate students. There is currently only one graduate level course of study and one post-baccalaureate bachelor's degree program. All other courses of study are Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science programs.

Although Midwest College is a liberal arts college, not all of academic majors are considered liberal arts in the strictest sense of the term. Midwest College offers many majors outside of the traditional humanities, social sciences, mathematics, and natural sciences. Some of these majors include: business administration, nursing, civil engineering, nonprofit leadership, physical education, elementary education, secondary education, economics, and recreation and sport. This is in response to increased questions about the relevancy of a traditional liberal arts education. "The undiluted liberal arts experience is battling the pressure of escalating costs, rising tuitions, and increasing demands for career training as a primary component of undergraduate study" (Lang, 1999).

As with many liberal arts colleges, Midwest College requires students to complete a core curriculum. The core, which is made up of 35 credit hours distributed over all four years of a student's educational experience, incorporates classes into a comprehensive path of study as opposed to simply offering general education requirements that are not related to the academic major or minor. The goal of the core curriculum is to prepare students of all disciplines to think, speak, and write critically in order to solve some of this world's greatest problems (Core Curriculum, 2015). Elements of the core curriculum, combined with hands-on, experiential learning opportunities can be completed for a second academic major (Strategic Plan Retrospective, 2015).

Accomplishments since 2007 include a center focused on sustainability and service to the community, established in response to the formal need of communicating the College's commitment to social, economic, and environmental justice (Strategic Plan Retrospective, 2015). Community service is a significant part of the College's culture and strategic initiative. Students accomplished over 80,000 hours of service in 2015, with many participating in global initiatives (Strategic Plan Retrospective, 2015). In the past eight years, the percentage of diverse students increased from 6% to 21%, indicating a strategic focus on increasing diversity programs and opportunities for students (Strategic Plan Retrospective, 2015).

In 2012, the College made a decision to move from the National Association for Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) for athletics. This strategic move was intended to increase brand recognition and improve the overall experience of the 20 different athletic teams. All major sports are represented at the College including: basketball, softball, baseball, tennis, volleyball, golf, swimming, track, and football. Over 40% of the students enrolled at Midwest College are NCAA Division II athletes (Strategic Plan Retrospective, 2015). More recently, construction was completed two years ago on a donor-funded, \$15 million learning space focused on access, creativity and collaboration. This building has become a curricular and social hub for the campus, in addition to being a new front door to the 166-year-old quad.

Midwest College believes strongly in staying ahead of technology trends in order to remain relevant in the eyes of the student and to best prepare them for life after college, regardless of their career choice. In addition to the recently built creative commons building, Midwest College is an Apple Distinguished School that provides an

iPad for every student. The iPad is not intended to just be a device incentive. Rather, it is primarily intended to create a common platform for communication and curriculum. With many elementary, middle, and high schools now providing devices to their students, what was once thought as a value add to the student experience is now expected from incoming students and leveraged by faculty for enhanced learning.

To supplement the academic experience the College endorses over 70 different student organizations including Student Government, Nonprofit Leadership Association, Campus Union Activities, and many others. An active Greek life enables students to pledge their second semester of the freshman year. Students are commonly involved in multiple co-curricular or extracurricular organizations due to the accessibility of resources and strong peer connections on a small college campus.

Organizational Analysis

In their study of 17 four-year colleges and universities, Pascarella et al. (2013) found that the level of cognitive engagement at liberal arts colleges as a result of personalized, deep learning experiences was statistically significant. The small faculty to student ratio enables engagement opportunities both inside and outside of the classroom. All students at Midwest College are assigned a faculty advisor who helps with scheduling, graduation planning, and as a liaison to other offices on campus depending on the level and type of support a student needs.

Market Challenges

Although the benefits of a liberal arts education for students are many, the institutional challenges are significant. "About one-third of private institutions missed their goals for the incoming class for the fall of 2015 based on several key metrics: net

revenue, total headcount, international students, yield, and full-pay students" (Selingo, p. 5). Higher education faces major changes as a result of financial concerns of families, technological innovation, and increased competition in the industry (Selingo, 2015). "Over the next decade, the number of high-school graduates will decrease, and some regions— particularly the Northeast and the Midwest— will experience significant declines, according to the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (Selingo, 2015). The next decade will see a decrease in the number of graduating seniors, including the region in which Midwest College's primary market is situated

Some additional and significant challenges that higher education is facing includes an expectation from parents and students for increased student success, more institutional accountability, and access to top-rate educational experiences for low to no cost (Noel Levitz, 2009). The continual struggle and opportunity for private, liberal arts colleges is to clearly define, communicate and execute the value proposition that is most relevant to the needs of the student. The biggest challenges for Midwest College are first year student recruitment and third semester student retention. Since 2007, the total number of enrolled students has gone down by 100. For a small, private liberal arts college, the financial impact of declining enrollment to the organization is significant (Strategic Plan Retrospective, 2015). Student retention also has a significant impact on the bottom line, with current third semester retention rates hovering in the 80 percent range.

In light of increased competition in higher education, Midwest College is currently facing the challenge of differentiating itself among the sea of college options for high school students. Even the mission statements of colleges sound similar to each

other. A recent Gallup poll of 50 HEI's found very little difference in the mission, vision, and purpose statement (Dvorak and Busteed, 2015). The study goes on to say that very few of the colleges communicate tangible outcomes to prospective and current students. Kuh states that many scholars agree that clear and positive career outcomes result from out-of-classroom experience (as stated in as stated in Simon, Perkins, & Crabtree, 2014).

Bolman and Deal (2012) state that company presidents who only thought of their companies in terms of the structural frame were found to be ineffective, which suggests a more comprehensive utilization of the four frames is necessary. A college campus is a complex community with an abundance of intellectual, physical, and monetary resources. Effectively managing the interplay of those resources takes continual management of all key stakeholders. Bolman and Deal's (2012) political frame is also necessary in HEI's to cultivate numerous strategic partnerships with community organizations and constituents both on and off campus.

From an operating structure and strategic planning philosophy standpoint, some common silos that exist within a college include: admissions, fundraising, student life, academics, facilities, and athletics. Enrollment and student success are not challenges to be overcome only by the office of admission and the office of student life at HEI's (Noel Levitz, 2009). Rather, the entire campus community must collaborate in order to effectively recruit, retain, and propel students from a healthy campus community to a world that needs their leadership and energy.

Organizational Outcomes

King et al. (2007) provides the seven dimensions for the outcomes of a private liberal arts education: effective reasoning, lifelong learning, well-being, intercultural

effectiveness, leadership, moral character, and integration of learning (As stated in Pascarella et al., 2013).

Compared to students attending research universities or regional institutions in the United States, American liberal arts college students in our sample reported significantly greater overall exposure to clear and organized classroom instruction and significantly more higher-order, reflective, and integrative learning experiences" (Pascarella et al., 2013).

The reflective and higher-order outcomes enable liberal arts graduates to apply a problem-solving mindset to their careers, even if it is not completely in line with their original course of study. For example, one Midwest College alumni who studied Honors History is now president of global digital solutions for a fortune 500 tax preparation company. He attributes his success to the problem-solving mindset developed during his time at Midwest College.

Midwest College consistently receives accolades such as being listed in: U.S. News and World Report of top liberal arts colleges, Princeton Review's Best 378 Colleges, Forbes Magazine's America's Best Colleges, and Washington Monthly's Colleges that Contribute to the Public Good. Additionally, the town in which Midwest College is situated was recently listed on Money Magazine's Ten Best Places to Live (Colleges of Distinction, 2015). The close proximity to a major metropolitan Midwestern City enables a setting that is rural in nature with urban benefits such as access to research opportunities, healthcare facilities, internships, and careers.

Current Student Engagement Strategies

Lepre states that a large percentage of first year students are undecided, leading to

a higher level of stress to start the college journey (as stated in Simon, Perkins, & Crabtree, 2014). In response to this phenomenon, Midwest College developed a specific program called the First Year Experience, which includes orientation, student mentors, a formal leadership opportunity, and an introduction to career mentors. The four-year residential policy ensures that students experience college in the context of community and accountability. As students stay longer on campus, their opportunities to lead and provide direction for younger students are available. Students also take part in decision-making and accountability process for the school including formal participation of the honor code committee and the academic affairs and student life committee of the Board of Trustees.

Merging curricular and co-curricular activities such as internships, research projects, study abroad experiences, and community service, is an important distinction of effective liberal arts colleges (Simon, Perkus, and Crabtree, 2014). Midwest College has embraced this philosophy as a pedagogical strategy in hopes of maintaining relevancy and improving student retention. Midwest College provides all students with a \$2000 grant for internships, research opportunities, international conferences, or studying abroad. The program is intended for the student's junior year and is sponsored by a faculty member. A reflection component is required once the grant experience is complete (Midwest College Grant, 2015). Additional strategies to enhance the student experience within the context of a liberal arts HEI include: collaboration among departments, encouraging faculty both inside and outside of the classroom, integrating co-curricular resources into the advising process, doing an environmental scan of competing colleges in order to inform relevant best practices, leveraging specific

programs such as study abroad experiences and capstone courses, and realizing that the marketing of programs to prospective and current students is an ongoing challenge and opportunity (Simon, Perkins, & Crabtree, 2014).

Strategic Plan

Midwest College has been diligent in providing a clear plan for the next several years. Midwest College developed a 10-year strategic plan in 2007 and has over 100 outcomes it measures every year. This plan has been the North Star for both short term and long-term initiatives (Strategic Plan Retrospective, 2015). As a nonprofit organization, the College interacts significantly with many key stakeholders including: the federal government, state government, local government, private sector vendors, students, parents, and staff. Policy analysis and reform are vital for the long-term sustainability of the institution. Bardach (2012) provides a necessary policy framework for consideration. Some critical topics that Midwest College has focused on their strategic plan align with Bardach's (2012) recommendation including: clarifying the mission, understanding the external and internal environments, focusing on performance measurement, commitment to service-delivery technology, efficiency in production and delivery process, supporting front line workers and middle managers, formally supporting the work culture, navigating politics, strong leadership, and managing change. The ten-year strategic plan (Strategic Plan Retrospective, 2015) that was developed by Midwest College in 2007 has several key areas of focus including: increasing academic rigor and subsequent student success, strengthening of housing and social experiences for student resulting in a richer community experience, and improving assessment and accountability mechanisms to provide relevant feedback for future improvement.

Leadership Analysis

The leadership of Midwest College consists of the Board of Trustees, College president, and presidential cabinet. The faculty of the College spans over 40 academic majors and serves in a governing role for curriculum and educational policy. A staff of over 150 is led by the administrative council, which consists of managers in traditional college departments including student life, admissions, facilities, athletics, advancement, college relations, food service, registrar, financial aid, business, library services, and human resources. (Midwest College website, 2015). A bi-weekly meeting of all administrators enables a continual dialogue for issues ranging from academic calendars to the newly instituted campus-wide tobacco-free policy.

Organizational Chart

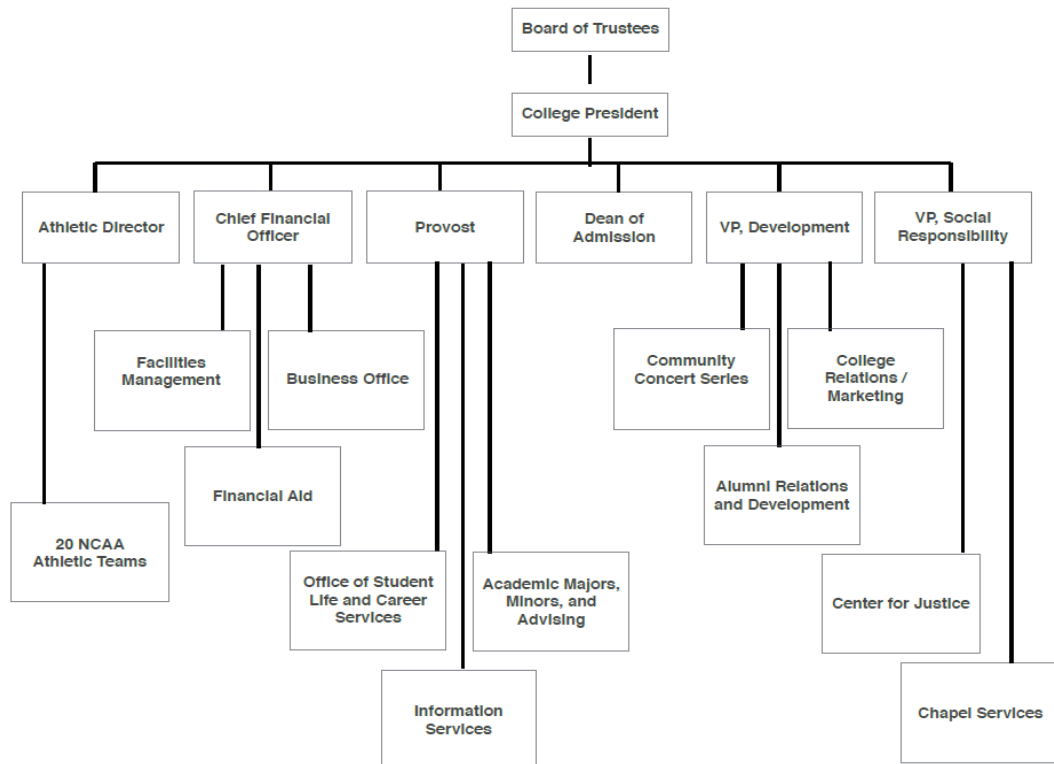


Figure 4: Midwest College Organizational Chart

Kotter (1998) suggests that leadership is primarily about facilitating change through the process of vision casting, networking with strategic partners, and building relationships with key organizational constituencies (as stated in Bolman & Deal, 2012). O'Toole (1996) states that trust is the most powerful tool a leader has to shape the strategic direction of the organization (as stated Landis, 2011). The president of the College has served the institution for 15 years, bringing many prior years of admission experience into the role. (Midwest College Website, 2015). During his tenure, the president has ushered in changes to the institution including the departure from the state religious convention, building or renovating several buildings, supporting retention strategies through student programs, increasing alumni giving for various scholarship initiatives, and strengthening community partnerships to bring about awareness of the College in the region. For the past three years, a top priority for the College president has been student recruitment. Less than 1/3 of college campuses surveyed indicated that they had a long-term, multi-year, enrollment plan that they were following (Noel Levitz, 2009). The purchase of a robust customer relationship management system, reduced dependency on third party vendors, and a complete reorganization of the office of admission in 2014 has squarely addressed the need for significant energy and attention on the recruitment of new students.

Historically, a limiting factor in higher education has been the silos created between academic affairs and student affairs (Simon, Perkins, & Crabtree, 2014). Operationally this may make sense, but the division that occurs with this organizational model can negatively affect the most important stakeholder, the student. Now that the Provost oversees both departments, Midwest College has adequately responded to this

challenge. This has allowed opportunities for shared data to help inform strategy that connects the academic experience with the student life experience. Data must be utilized in strategic ways in order for HEIs to respond according to the internal and external environments. Examples of data usage include student retention, student engagement, fiscal projections, persistence of students from freshman to senior year, student outcomes, and placement rate (Noel Levitz, 2009).

In addition to sophisticated data gathering and processing, the College has a strong commitment to transparency from the Board of Trustees to every student. "Issues of institutional integrity must correspondingly be addressed in order to fulfill the promise of an integrity culture in which people can be trusted to do what is expected of them" (Gallant, 2007, p. 406). Integrity coupled with collaboration breaks down the institutional silos and leads to the implementation of creative and relevant ideas. There are regular staff development opportunities that facilitate cross-departmental collaboration. Faculty, staff and administrators must look beyond merely tolerating each other's roles and moving to a place of collaboration with the student's best interest at the heart of their motives (Del Favero, 2003).

Implications for Research in the Practitioner Setting

In such a competitive higher education landscape, a primary challenge for Midwest College is to continually identify and monitor what current students value. While it may be assumed that the value proposition perception of administration, faculty and staff is accurate, the more important perception is that of the student. Colleges are becoming increasingly better at capturing engagement by means of experiential education, but still struggle at capturing success measures of college graduates (Selingo,

2015). The identification of what a student values can be captured at the beginning and end of a student's college experience by means of the NSSE. However, a student's decision to remain loyal to the College or look elsewhere to an array of alternatives is ongoing through their entire HEI experience.

The qualitative data obtained regarding the student's perception of value at Midwest College will directly impact strategic considerations moving forward. Curricular, co-curricular, and extra curricular activities can be evaluated within the context of what students are actually saying at important stages of their college experience. Data will be captured from freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors in both interview and focus group settings. Creswell (2009) acknowledges that within an organization or group of individuals, there are complex factors that can only be answered by qualitative research.

Midwest College will also benefit from the answering of the case study's sub-questions. Since the National Survey for Student Engagement (NSSE, 2014) is administered to over 1500 four-year HEI's, the quantitative data may become diffuse in comparison to other institutions. In particular, how a student qualitatively defines the NSSE engagement indicators is not something that is currently captured with the NSSE instrument. The qualitative answer to how students define engagement is important because it directly impacts the strategy necessary to increase opportunities for students at Midwest College to connect with academic, extracurricular, social, or co-curricular affinity groups. Once there is an understanding of how students define engagement indicators, the proper framework can be established for understanding how this affects the student's perception of value at Midwest College.

Levels of engagement for students at Midwest College will also be addressed. How do students define low levels of engagement? What are the key characteristics of high levels of engagement? The research will enable faculty, staff and administration to understand qualitatively if higher or lower levels of engagement affect a student's perception of value. Since freshmen, sophomore, junior and senior students will participate in interviews and focus groups, similarities and/or differences will emerge when comparing different cohorts.

Some of the interview and focus group questions will help identify moments, experiences, or triggers that change a student's perception of value at Midwest College. Understanding what curricular, co-curricular, or campus community moments increase or decrease a student's perception of value will help shape future retention and student success initiatives for the College. The results may help the College consider maintaining, divesting or investing in certain programs based on the response of the participants, especially when coupled with the quantitative NSSE results.

Summary

The practitioner setting for this case study will yield important results to supplement the current NSSE method of capturing engagement data. A comprehensive approach to collecting this data from all cohorts in multiple ways will address the research question of perceptions of value of students at Midwest College. Qualitative data will address sub-questions related to types of engagement, levels of engagement, and triggers that affect student engagement. All of these answers will help Midwest College continue to stay relevant in the minds of the students who are taking part in building the next class of an historic higher education institution.

SECTION THREE

SCHOLARLY REVIEW FOR THE STUDY

The implications of a student not completing their degree at the same institution where they started are significant for both the student and the college. Student attrition costs institutions millions of dollars each year and delays a student's completion of curriculum due to the effects of transition. The benefits of the student's experience must outweigh the costs in order for a student to have the highest chance of persisting in college (Newman, Couturier, & Scurry, 2010). In order to enhance the value proposition for the student, an institution must deepen their knowledge of the current student's engagement and activate a comprehensive, campus-wide approach to student retention and success (Kuh, 2003).

This scholarly review will explore the Trust, Value, Loyalty framework and conceptual underpinnings of student engagement, student retention, and student success. The key concepts from past studies and peer reviewed journal articles are synthesized to provide context for the current study that addresses the following research question: What are the perceptions of value for students at a small, Midwestern private liberal arts college? The current status of literature surrounding this topic will also be critiqued.

Trust, Value, Loyalty Framework

The Trust, Value, Loyalty framework is based upon past research that focused on trust in social relationships and inter-organizational relationships (Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002). The development of the Trust, Value, Loyalty framework was constructed using the retail and services industry (nonbusiness airline travel). For the non-business airline customer, the study suggests organizations focus on policies that directly affect the

experience of the consumer (Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002). Both the retail and service industry relate to the student experience in higher education. Carvalho and de Oliveira Mota (2010) used the Trust, Value, Loyalty framework as a starting point to evaluate relational exchanges between students and their higher education institution. Garbarino and Johnson established consumer trust as a foundational element for consumers' current attitudes and future intentions (as stated in Carvalho & de Oliveira Mota, 2010, p. 147). Shared characteristics include: direct interaction with front line employees, memorable and influential experiences, positive and negative consequences, and differences in experiences based on changes in management policies and procedures (Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002).

Trust

For a higher education institution (HEI) to be sustainable long-term, Ghosh, Whipple, Bryan (2001) suggest that student trust remain central to strategy. Trust can be defined as the consumer's confidence in the service provider's execution of their promise (Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002). For the purpose of this study, trust can be defined as the student's level of confidence in the higher education institution's promise to deliver a quality educational experience. Ghosh et al. (2001) defines trust as the level to which a student believes that the college will assist in ensuring a quality educational and career outcome. As opposed to looking at the outcomes measures for student trust, Carvalho and de Oliveira Mota (2010) analyzed the process by which students gained trust during their time at the HEI and found that consumer trust is instrumental in creating customer loyalty. Since consumer trust does not happen in a vacuum, frontline employees (FLE) and management policies and practices (MPP) were the two primary facets considered

when the trust, value, and loyalty framework was constructed (Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002).

Ghosh and Whipple (2001) state that student trust is the result of eight different perceptions: expertise, congeniality, openness, sincerity, integrity, cooperation, timeliness and tactfulness. Hennig-Thurau, Langer and Hansen, (2001) found that the trustworthiness of front line employees and the institutional policies had significant and positive effect on a student's level of trust in the HEI. Despite the lack of research that has been focused on measuring trust in colleges, Ghosh et al. (2001) found in their study that a student's lack of trust in a higher education institution can have a significant and drastic effect because of a reduction in quality perceptions and an increase in student attrition. This depletion of trust has significant and negative impact on the financial bottom line for the organization (Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002).

Value

Value is defined as the "the consumer's perception of the benefits minus the costs of maintaining an ongoing relationship with a service provider" (Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002, p. 32). Value for the consumer increases as the value between them and the service provider become more congruent (Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002). Ledden and Kalafatis (2010) talk extensively about how value is not only determined prior to a customer (student) making a purchase, but also continuously re-assessed after the purchase has been made. The judgments and perceived trust of the student affect the value that is placed on staff, faculty and institutional policies (Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002). The role of faculty and staff is critical in inspiring students to stay motivated in their learning and class participation. As that increases, so too will the perceived value of the higher education experience (Ghosh and Whipple, 2001). Ledden and Kalafatis state that

perceived value more accurately predicts future behavior (negative or positive) than student satisfaction (as stated in Hennig-Thurau et al., 2001).

The Gallup-Purdue Index (2014) found that employed graduates of a college who felt well prepared with experiences such as internships, research opportunities, and involvement in extracurricular organizations were three times as likely to be engaged at work. These types of experiences increase the value proposition both during college and in the workplace upon graduation. The Longmire Study (2014) surveyed over 12,000 students in the summer of 2014 and found that the number one reason students make their choice to stay in college is due to high levels of engagement with current students. Prospective students felt valued in their interaction with the campus community and could envision themselves investing the time, money, and resources for the next four years on that campus. John Holland's congruence theory demonstrated a link between outcomes and environment using six key categories: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional. However, Arnold (2004) has demonstrated that the link between environment and outcomes may not be as strong in the areas of satisfaction or perceived value.

The customer's perception of value is constantly evolving and requires deep care and stewardship by the service provider. External factors include quality, environment, personnel, staff support while internal factors include emotions, knowledge, and affect (Ledden & Kalafatis, 2010). Research has been conducted on the perceptions of value from the perspective of administration, including an extensive study by the Chronicle of Higher Education in 2014. The study showed that 40% of the administrators, with a majority of positive responses from public institutions, felt that their HEI provided an

excellent value for their students (Selingo, 2014). The Longmire Study (2013) helped define value as being highly personal and found the three primary determinants of value are overall quality, cost, and level of excitement to attend.

Loyalty

The management elements of an HEI show significant influence on consumer loyalty, thus an increased value proposition for the end user (Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002). Hennig-Thurau et al. (2001) built the relationship quality-based student loyalty model, which demonstrated perceptions of quality, students' trust in the staff and faculty, and the students' personal commitment to the higher education institution resulted in student loyalty. Yu and Dean (2001) studied the emotional satisfaction of service delivery and found a significant relationship between satisfaction and loyalty. This relationship applied in both negative and positive interactions. Helgesen & Nesset (2007) conducted a study of 389 bachelor level students and found a positive correlation between the student's perception of the HEI's reputation (consumer satisfaction) and the student's loyalty to that institution.

Student Engagement

Carini, Kuh and Klein (2006) state that among all of the predictors of student success, engagement is one of the best. Student engagement has the reciprocal requirement of institutions deploying resources and student's investing time and energy (Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonya, 2008). Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004) provide definition for the types of student engagement: behavioral engagement requires participation, emotional engagement is driven from both negative and positive experiences, and cognitive engagement requires an academic investment on the part of

the student. Coates (2005) relates student engagement with positive experiences that bring together students and keep them connected, making it less desirable for them to want to leave the institution. Generally speaking, students at liberal arts colleges are more engaged than students from other types of HEIs (Kuh, 2006). Engagement strategies work for well for the persistence of all student groups, especially for those of lower ability and students of color (Kinzie, Shoup, & Gonyea, 2006).

Literature about student engagement goes back to John Dewey, suggesting that achievement is a direct result of active participation from students (as stated in Trowler, 2010). Outcomes of engagement include achievement and the prevention of students dropping out (Fredricks et al., 2004). Carini et al. (2006) found that there was a positive, but relatively small, relationship between student engagement and critical thinking skills for college students. Trowler (2010) states that students can engage across all three dimensions of Bloom's taxonomy: behavioral, emotional, and cognitive.

National Survey for Student Engagement

The National Survey for Student Engagement (NSSE), which relies solely on quantitative student feedback, originated in order to identify engagement indicators of how students actually use student resources, resulting in a more accurate representation of college quality (Kuh, 2001). "Although no questionnaire is perfect, the psychometric qualities of the NSSE instrument demonstrate that it is a valid tool for research on student engagement in educational practices associated with high levels of learning and development" (Kinzie et al., 2006, p. 68). The NSSE is often the only accurate source of student engagement information for HEIs (Kuh, 2001). A challenge of the NSSE survey is response rate. Achieving 40% response rate for an institution would be considered

above average presenting administration with the constant question of valid representation of the entire student body experience (Kuh, 2001). There are five groupings or clusters that the NSSE uses in order to simplify the results: "academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, enriching educational experiences, and supportive campus environment" (Coates, 2005, p. 4). Shulman (2002) states that measuring student engagement allows for the institution to understand how the student is intrinsically investing in their learning (as stated in Coates, 2007). Pike and Kuh, after extensive study of many HEIs who participated in NSSE, developed seven types of engagement: "diverse but interpersonally fragmented, homogenous and interpersonally cohesive, intellectually stimulating, interpersonally supportive, high-tech but low-touch, academically challenging and supportive, and collaborative" (as stated in Trowler, 2010, p. 15).

Other Engagement Tools

There is a significant body of research on how engagement is measured. Behavioral engagement is typically measured by school policies and completion of tasks. Emotional engagement typically relies on self-reporting and is often conflated with behavioral scales. Finally, cognitive engagement is also typically self-reported and is often difficult to accurately assess through observation (Fredricks et al., 2004). Other HEI engagement instruments include: Cooperative Institutional Research Program's Student Information Form, and the College Student Survey (Kuh, 2001). Most notably, Coates (2007) determined from the data gathered from the Student Engagement Questionnaire (SEQ) that there is a difference between academic engagement and social engagement. Coates (2007) developed a matrix which categorizes student's academic and social

engagement into one of four areas: collaborative, intense, independent, or passive.

Strategies for Student Engagement

Coates (2005) contends that because engagement is multidimensional, the strategies for faculty, staff and students to follow should enable students and faculty to bind to each other. Not only does engagement enhance a student's educational experience, it is also a skill necessary for success after graduation (Carini et al., 2006). Enriching educational experiences, such as conducting research with a professor, a senior capstone experience, internships, or study abroad, significantly increase opportunities for engagement (Kuh, 2006). Lower scoring students (below 990 on the SAT) generally realize greater engagement benefits than students who score higher on standardized tests (Kuh, 2006). Fredricks et al. (2004) found that engagement requires the ability of students to relate well to their teacher and fellow students. One of the most critical needs for engagement occurs between peers during the first year of college (Coates, 2005). In a 2004 study of more than 2000 students, Coates (2005) found that only 66% of students were confident that at least one professor knew their name. Markwell (2007) suggests several things are necessary for student engagement: consistent participation, understanding the purpose of the subject itself, interaction with peers, multi-dimensional resource interaction, and a sense of belonging to the institution or peer learning group. The Harvard Assessment Project found that students who are struggling academically nearly always study alone (as stated in Markwell, 2007). A tactical way of creating student engagement opportunities is to anchor the curriculum within a cohort experience (Markwell, 2007).

Institutional Policies

Institutional policies can assist in the facilitation of engagement opportunities for students and faculty. Kuh (2001) found that engagement increased at schools where highly interactive and rigorous activities were present, including capstone classes, cohort experiences, and high campus-wide expectations. When physical spaces on college campuses, especially student services, are strategic and intentional for collaboration of faculty members and students, engagement opportunities occur (Manning & Kuh, 2005). Manning and Kuh (2005) suggest several questions to evaluate whether a college campus is student engagement friendly. What are distinctive elements about the campus? How do physical spaces complement value statements? What symbols, ceremonies, or rituals support engagement opportunities? Are prospective students able to access affinity groups? What can be done on your campus to create a safer place? Are learning opportunities in surrounding communities or municipalities easily accessible for students?

Amey (2006) suggests the leader of the HEI is directly responsible for creating environments that foster "cultural awareness, acceptance of multiple intelligences and ways of knowing, strategic thinking, engagement, and a sense of collective identity as collaborators in developing knowledge and active investigators into practice" (p. 56). Coates (2005) states that the average amount of direct contact between teachers and students in the classroom has declined steadily over the past 20 years, requiring online methods to fill in the gap for engagement. Leaders of academic institutions must think differently about the ever-changing landscape of higher education. A complete

understanding of how to provide a comprehensive approach to student engagement is necessary for success (Amey, 2006).

Student Retention

Carey states that, "nearly one out of five four-year institutions graduates fewer than one-third of its first-time, full-time, degree seeking first year students within six years" (as stated in Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2011). Tinto states that nearly 25% of all students who enter college do not return to the same institution for the start of their second year (as stated in Braxton, Milem, & Sullivan, 2000). Early student retention research in the 1970's focused on student ability, but complexities were discovered and additional research was conducted resulting in student involvement becoming the most important factor in retention (Tinto, 2006). Tinto developed the interactionalist theory, which is regarded as one of the most important theories on student retention in HEI. Some of the primary components of the theory include quality of the student's entry characteristics, initial level of commitment, and the extent of a student's integration with the sub-communities within the college (as stated in Braxton et al., 2000). Braxton et al. (2000) studied the influence various types of active learning that is commonly attributed with higher retention: collaboration activities, higher order thinking, and classroom discussion.

Financial Implications

From a financial standpoint, student attrition results in the loss of both immediate revenue and lifetime revenue potential (Raisman, 2013).

"The 1,669 colleges and universities studied here collectively lost revenue due to attrition in an amount close to \$16.5 billion (\$16,451,945,426) with the largest

single school losing \$102,533,338, the smallest single loss being \$10,584, and the average school losing \$9,910,811. The publicly assisted colleges and universities averaged a \$13,267,214 loss from attrition; the average private college or university lost revenue of \$8,331,593; and for-profit schools lost an average of \$7,921,228" (Raisman, 2013).

A 2003 NCES longitudinal study showed that within six years, 56% high-income students vs. 25% of low-income students persisted to achieve a bachelor's degree (as stated in Tinto, 2006). In a recent survey of over 300 institutions, "The median retention rate among public colleges in the survey was 77 percent; private colleges was 79. The median six year graduation rate for public institutions was 51 percent; private colleges 63 percent" (Selingo, 2015).

Tsai (2008) found that there is a positive relationship between a student's perceived signal of retention (PSR) and student loyalty, suggesting institutions consider implementing strategies such as faculty tracking student progress, supporting high-risk students, and conducting exit interviews for students who do not persist. Tsai (2008) developed an information cascades-based student loyalty model by factors such as teacher quality, student retention, and quality of administrative services that demonstrated significant effects of teacher quality and PSR. Tinto and Pusser (2006) acknowledge that more research is needed on the effects of retention tactics for high-risk, often low-income and academically underprepared students.

Key Factors for Retention

Nguyen and LeBlanc (2001) state that an institution's reputation, or the ability of the organization to live up to the expectations of their constituents, plays a key role in

retention. Nguyen and LeBlanc (2001) studied 395 freshman and seniors in a business school and found that extrinsic factors such as price and service led to increased perception of reputation and subsequent loyalty to the institution. The use of adjunct professors and teaching assistants during a student's first year increases the risk of attrition since they are not as well connected to the ethos and resources of the college (Tinto, 2006). 84% of college student attrition can be attributed to one of four reasons: lack of care from the college, poor service to the student, lack of value, and scheduling conflicts (Raisman, 2013).

Institutional Priority

While there has traditionally been a focus on the behavioral characteristics of students influencing retention, Hossler et al. (2008) contend that institutional policies also play a significant role in determining the staying power of a student. Kuh et al. (2011) state that student retention shouldn't just be relegated to the student affairs staff. Rather, everyone in the institution plays a part in retaining students. Not enough institutions have committed the necessary resources to adequately address student retention (Tinto, 2006). Selingo (2015) states that nearly 25% of all institutions allocate funds specifically for student retention efforts. Schools could increase their retention rates dramatically if they understand and allocate more resources to student needs (Raisman, 2013). Tinto (2006) asserts that institutions need to move from theory to action. Braxton and McClendon have identified several policy levers that support a student's fulfillment of academic expectations and lead to higher retention: clearly managing expectations of students in the recruitment process, formally reducing opportunities for racial bias and prejudice on campus, adhering to fair institutional policies, focusing on strong and meaningful

academic advising, creating active learning environments, and providing accessible need-based financial aid (as stated in Hossler et al., 2008).

Retention Strategies

Brier, Hirschy, and Braxton (2008) examined the Strategic Retention Initiative (SRI) that involved a member of the college administration who called students within their first few weeks of their first semester. The SRI originated with 1100 undergraduate and 500 graduate students at Vanderbilt University's Peabody College. The dean called more than 200 students in the spring and fall, asking about the student's experience at the university (Brier et al., 2008). Analysis of more than seven years of data during the SRI found that the first to second year retention rate went from 88% to over 95%, implying that this type of initiative is an affirmation that the student made a good choice in attending the college (Brier et al., 2008). Ultimately, efforts such as the SRI highlight the importance of an institution looking out for the well-being of their students (Brier et al., 2008).

Periodic surveys of student loyalty throughout a student's experience are important to determine if current strategies are effective (Tsai, 2008). This suggests the importance of engaging with students to obtain feedback on more occasions than just the NSSE during the first and final year of their college experience. Much research has linked faculty pedagogy to student retention, suggesting the importance of consistent professional development (Tinto & Pusser, 2006). Common approaches contained within a comprehensive strategy for student retention include: student orientation, tutoring, mentoring, living communities, financial management programs, and mid-term academic alerts (Selingo, 2015). The next evolution for student retention strategy lies in the ability

to use big data to predict behavioral characteristics of students (Selingo, 2015). A survey of 718 first-time, full time students at a private college found that "faculty classroom behaviors in general and active learning in particular may constitute an empirically reliable source of influence on social integration, subsequent institutional commitment, and departure decisions" (Braxton et al., 2000, p. 582). Large, lecture style classes make it difficult for active learning to occur, thus increasing the chances of student attrition (Braxton et al., 2000). Opportunities for additional research in student retention exist with evaluating the true impact of institutional policies on student persistence (Tinto, 2006).

Student Success

Kinzie et al. (2006) state that getting students involved in the right activities leads to higher levels of engagement and increased student success. The original purpose of the NSSE was to facilitate a dialogue on how to increase student success (Kuh, 2001). The Connecting the Dots Survey evaluated student success based on academic achievement and persistence to the second year of study, finding that pre-college predictors such as ACT and high school GPA diminish (Kinzie et al., 2006). Kinzie and Kuh (2004) conducted a two-year study of 20 HEI's who all participated in the NSSE and who all scored better than the survey's five benchmarks: academic challenge, collaborative learning, faculty / student interaction, enriching educational experiences, and campus support. The findings of the Project DEEP (Documenting Effective Educational Practices) suggest four critical components necessary for student success: strong administrative leadership, collaboration between faculty and student affairs staff, students leading other students in curricular and extra-curricular ways, and one champion or cheerleader on campus that consistently encourages students (Kinzie & Kuh, 2004). Two

theories are foundational for understanding student persistence: Tinto's (1975) Student Integration Theory that focused on student interaction, and Bean's Student Attrition Model which contends behavioral intentions forecast rates of persistence (as stated in Kahn & Nauta, 2001). The Social Cognitive Theory, developed by Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1994) focuses on the behavioral requirements of persisting through college and are more relevant and predictive when measured during the second semester of a student's freshman year, once they have acclimatized to their college environment (as stated in Kahn & Nauta, 2001).

Conditions for Student Success

Kinzie et al., (2006) found that students with the highest GPA and those from the highest income bracket were less likely to persist or succeed to the second year, implying a rigorous first year experience is necessary for high achieving students to thrive. The Seven Principles of Good Practice in Higher Undergraduate Education provide a foundation for student success, focusing on critical elements such as academic challenge, time needed to complete a task, and participation in co-curricular activities (as stated in Kuh, 2001). Kinzie et al. (2006) conclude that HEI's must provide highly networked support systems and utilize the classroom as a hub of reciprocal learning to ensure students are succeeding. Kuh (2001) stresses the importance of a HEI culture fully committed to student success consisting of high quality programs, faculty, and staff (as stated in Kinzie et al., 2006). Manning and Kuh (2005) contend there are six conditions that are vital to student success: living a mission, relentless student learning focus, adaptable educational environments, a clear plan for each student to succeed,

opportunities for every student to improve, and shared responsibility between student and teacher.

Student Success Strategy

During the Project DEEP study, Manning and Kuh (2005) found it necessary for students to easily access student services. The need for student success strategies is evidenced by the alarming fact that according to the Department of Education, 25% of students don't persist through their first year of college (as stated in Kahn & Nauta, 2001). A measure of student success is persistence, which is heavily influenced by academic performance and social integration in the college community (Kahn & Nauta, 2001). A specific and centralized vision of student success matters greatly for HEI's (Selingo, Carey, Pennington, Fishman & Palmer, 2013). Innovating and scaling quickly can work for colleges and present students with an opportunity to be actively involved in both their success and the college's success (Selingo et al., 2013).

Literature Critique

There are two primary criticisms of the literature supporting this research. First, there is a noticeable gap in the literature between 2006 and 2013. Substantial research was done in the late 1970s and 1980s for retention and student success, resulting in a theoretical foundation. The creation and deployment of the NSSE then generated significant research in the early 2000s. As of 2013, there appears to be an increase in the literature around student engagement, retention and persistence, especially as the market for higher education continues to be more and more competitive. The fiscal implications of attrition and low rates of persistence are common themes in the most recent research.

The second criticism of the literature regarding the Trust, Value, Loyalty framework and the conceptual underpinnings of engagement, retention, and student success is a lack of qualitative research. The vast majority of the research found was quantitative, focusing on the results of a study to prove or disprove a theory developed or adapted by the author. Herein lies the opportunity for the current study. By using a quantitative study to frame the qualitative questions and provide context for the answers, a case study evaluating the perceptions of value of students at small, private, Midwestern liberal arts college will be an important addition to this body of research.

SECTION FOUR

CONTRIBUTION TO PRACTICE

Plan for Dissemination of Practitioner Contribution

Recipients of the practitioner contribution will be attendees of the 2017 Missouri Association of College Admission Counselors (MOACAC) annual conference and attendees of the 2017 Great Plains Association of College Admission Counselors (GPACAC) annual conference. The MOACAC and GPACAC organizations serve high school admission counselors, college admission counselors, and other educational organizations. Both organizations are the state / regional affiliates of the National Association for College Admission Counselors (NACAC).

Type of dissemination

PowerPoint slides with notes will be available for all attendees of the oral presentation at the annual conferences.

Rationale for this type of dissemination

A presentation and facilitated discussion will be the most effective dissemination of this information. The researcher will provide specific data applicable to audience members and lead a discussion of how the findings from the study applies to their professional setting.

Presentation

Perceptions of Value for Students at
a Private, Liberal Arts College in the
Midwestern United States

A Case Study Presented by:

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Statement of Problem

- Increased HEI competition
- Value proposition impacts loyalty
- Cost of attrition
- Need for engaging learning environment
- NSSE = quantitative assessment only

The intensely competitive environment of higher education requires administrators to understand the current college student's perception of value in order to communicate distinctive benefits to prospective and current students in an exceptional, compelling and sophisticated way (Newman, Couturier, & Scurry, 2010).

The student's value proposition, or level of college experience satisfaction, directly impacts their loyalty (Carvalho & de Oliveira Mota, 2010)

In a comprehensive study of 1669 colleges and universities Raisman (2013) states the average cost of attrition for a private university is over \$8M per year.

Significant research has shown a correlation of student engagement to many positive outcomes including: higher student satisfaction, improved persistence rates, and better social interaction (Trowler, 2010).

Harper (2007) suggests that quantitative assessment has overwhelmed significant qualitative research efforts, limiting potential insights gained from a student's valuable first-hand experience.

A qualitative case study will provide institutional context. Qualitative research will supplement the archival quantitative data already obtained through the NSSE.

Purpose of Research

- Understanding what a student perceives to be of value
- What is the story written between freshman and senior year NSSE surveys?
- Does a student's value proposition change?

The purpose of this study is to fill the gap in research that currently exists in the perception of value for college students at small, private liberal arts colleges.

Hossler, Ziskin, Moore, and Wakhungu (2006) encourage further inquiry of student engagement combined with contextual consideration. A qualitative case study will provide institutional context. Qualitative research will supplement the archival quantitative data already obtained through the NSSE.

Research Question

What are the perceptions of value for students at a small, Midwestern private liberal arts college?

Creswell (2009) states that a research question should address the complex factors that accompany a central process or group of individuals.

Sub-questions

- How do students qualitatively define NSSE engagement indicators at Midwest College?
- How do levels of engagement affect a student's perception of value at Midwest College?

This qualitative study will also include the use of sub-questions. The sub-questions will simplify the complex factors of the study by narrowing down the research question.

Sub-questions (continued)

- What are the similarities and / or differences between the perceptions of value between first year students and seniors at Midwest College?
- What engagement moments, experiences, or triggers change a student's perception of value during their time at Midwest College?

Theoretical Framework

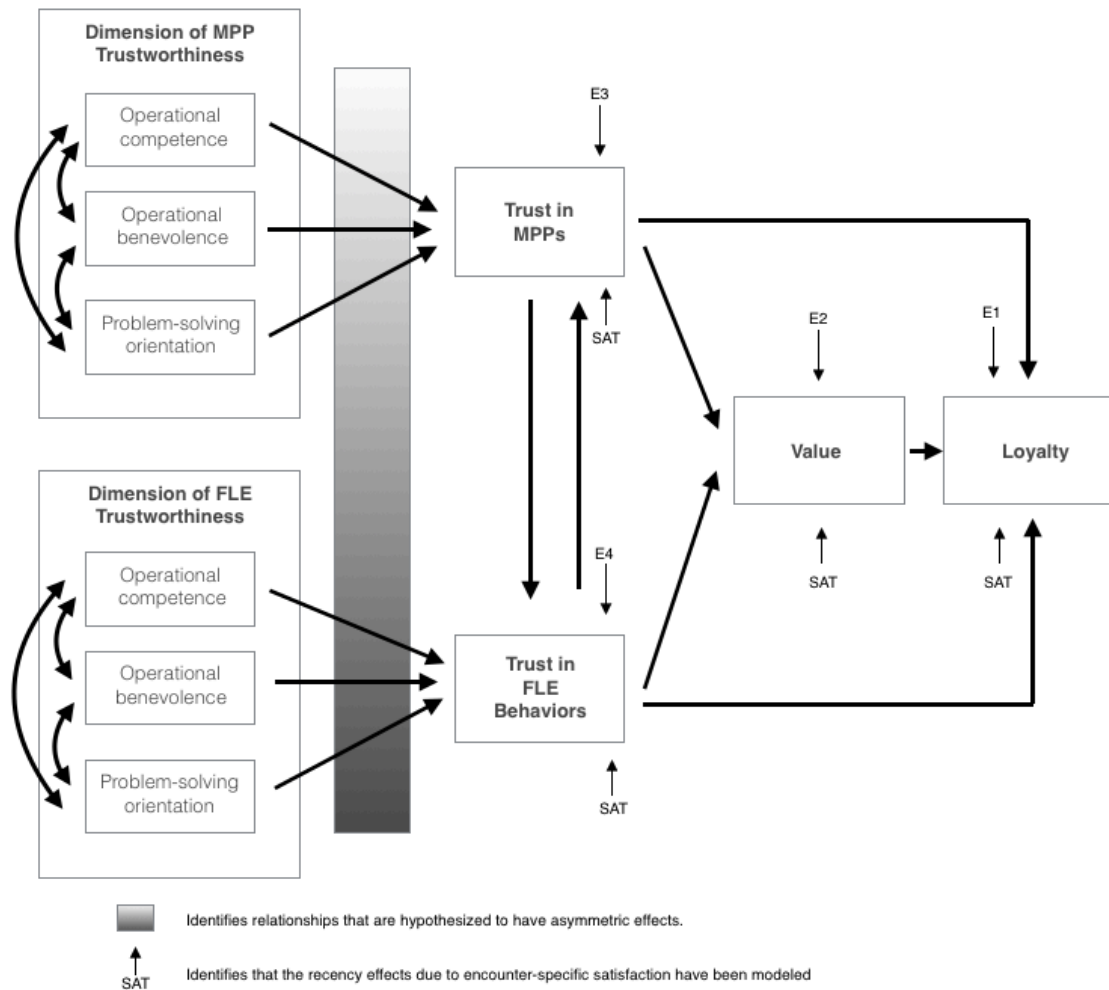
- “Scaffolding”
- Trust, Value, Loyalty – Build? Or break down?
- Used in retail settings (quantitative)
- Airline industry (quantitative)

According to Merriam (2009), the theoretical framework is the “scaffolding” or underlying structure of a qualitative study (p. 66). The theoretical framework both guides and validates the study.

The outcome of the theoretical framework will be the generation of the problem that the study intends to address (Merriam, 2009). The Trust, Value, Loyalty framework, developed by Sirdeshmukh et al. (2002), will be used in this study.

The Trust, Value, Loyalty framework was originally developed to quantitatively assess and understand the practices of service providers that build or break down consumer trust. This framework, built on the tenets of social relationships, marketing principles, and inter-organizational dynamics are all important for consideration when understanding student perceptions of value at a private liberal arts college (Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002).

Trust, Value, Loyalty Framework (Sirdeshmukh, Singh, & Sabol, 2002)



Several studies have been conducted in higher education utilizing components of the Trust, Value, Loyalty framework.

Ghosh, Whipple, & Bryan (2001) identified antecedents to trust in the context of higher education, Helgesen & Nasset (2007) explored the drivers of student loyalty, Hennig-Thurau, Langer & Hansen (2001) provide ways to manage student loyalty, and Ledden, & Kalafatis (2010) investigated the impact of time on a student's perception of value.

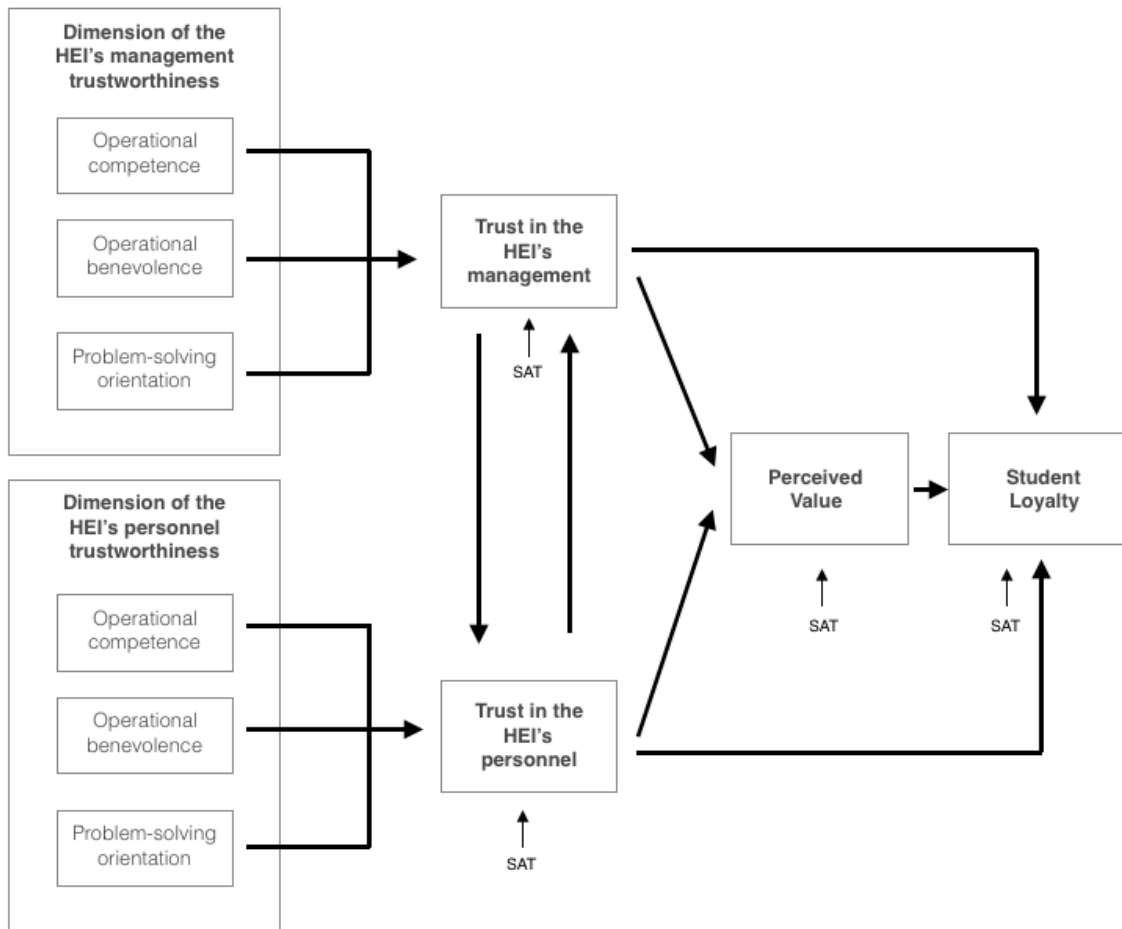
Appleton-Knapp & Krentler (2006) assessed satisfaction in terms of managing student expectations.

Finally, Carvalho & de Oliveira Mota (2010) used the trust, value, and loyalty framework to determine how trust is initially established and translated into a value proposition for a student by modifying the model of Sirdeshmukh et al. (2002). They identified the

perceived value of a student in the context of an HEI by means of quantitative assessment.

Another important element of the Trust, Value, Loyalty framework is the nature of the asymmetric relationship between a consumer's trust to the provide base on experiences with FLE's and MPP's. Sirdeshmukh et al. (2002) "allow for the possibility that the trust-building effect of a unit positive change in performance on any factor of trustworthy behaviors/practices may not be equivalent to the trust depletion effect produced by a unit negative change in performance" (p. 15-16). In other words, consumer may lack trust in a specific area of operational competence when interactive with FLE's. However, this does not necessarily deplete their perception of trust for the entire organization. In the context of higher education, this may mean that a student's loyalty to the college may remain despite the fact they have a lack of trust an institutional MPP. Sirdeshmukh et al. (2012) found that value is "the consistent, significant, and dominant determinant of consumer loyalty regardless of the service category" (p. 32). This finding is especially important in the context of higher education as institutions develop strategies for ongoing engagement and retention.

Adapted Trust, Value, Loyalty Framework (Carvalho & de Oliveira Mota, 2010)



Carvalho & de Oliveira Mota (2010) found that “this propensity to reward the HEI occurs because students perceive value in their relational exchange with the HEI and this perception of value is centered on students’ trust that the HEI (reflected in both the HEI’s personnel as well as the HEI’s management/administrative policies and practices) is focused on increasing their ability to succeed in achieving their learning and degree goals and career objectives” (p. 161)

Carvalho and de Oliveira Mota (2010) found that students not only value when an HEI demonstrates operational competence, operational benevolence, and problem solving orientation, they subsequently reward that institution with continual involvement, enrollment, and positive referral of other prospective students.

Conceptual Underpinnings

- Student Engagement
- Student Retention
- Student Success

Significant research has shown a correlation of student engagement to many positive outcomes including: higher student satisfaction, improved persistence rates, and better social interaction (Trowler, 2010). Carini, Kuh and Klein (2006) state that among all of the predictors of student success, engagement is one of the best. Student engagement has the reciprocal requirement of institutions deploying resources and student's investing time and energy (Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonya, 2008).

Generally speaking, students at liberal arts colleges are more engaged than students from other types of HEIs (Kuh, 2006). Engagement strategies work well for the persistence of all student groups, especially for those of lower ability and students of color (Kinzie, Shoup, & Gonyea, 2006). Student engagement is concerned with the interaction between the time, effort and other relevant resources invested by both students and their institutions intended to optimize the student experience and enhance the learning outcomes and development of students and the performance, and reputation of the institution (Trowler, 2010, p. 2).

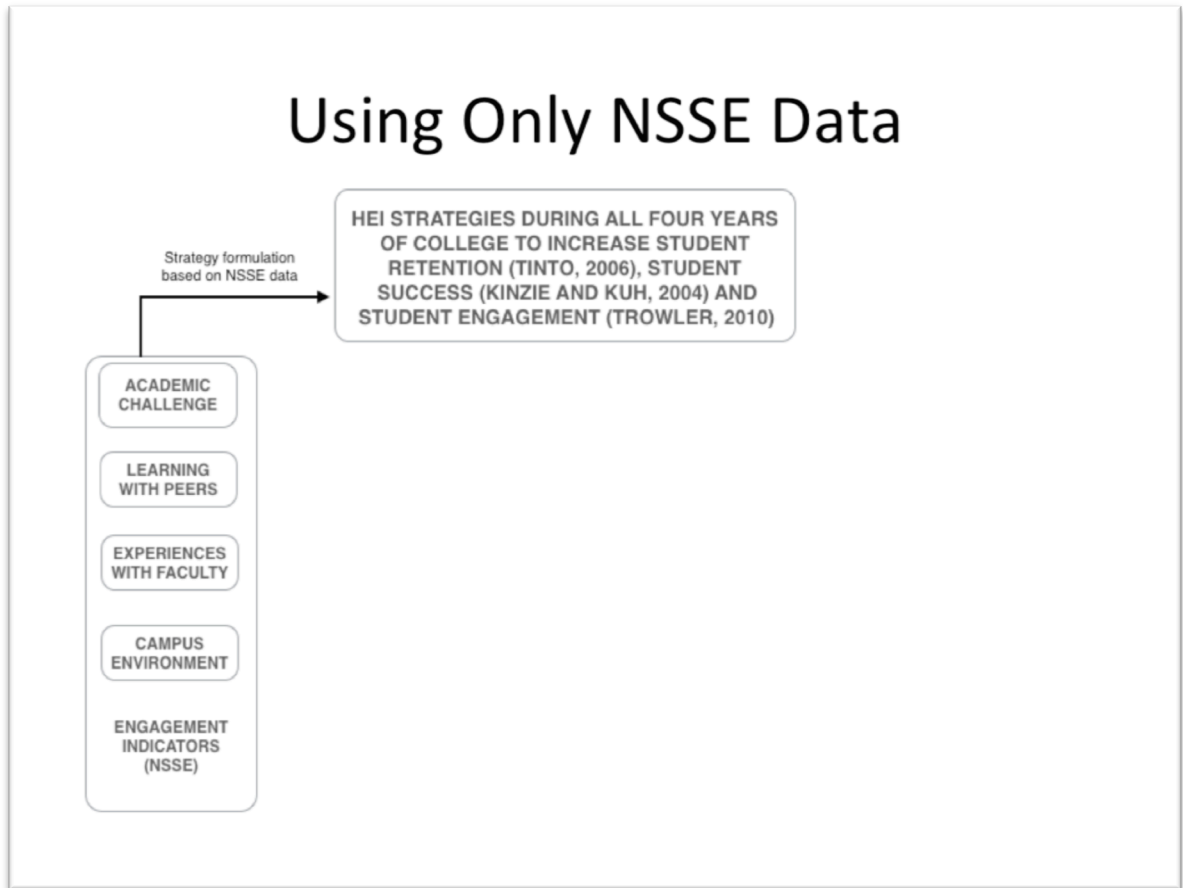
There are many dimensions to student engagement. Mann (2001), Krause (2005), Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, and Gonyea (2008), Coates (2005), and Manning and Kuh (2005) help to provide a definition and critical components of student engagement. Fredericks, Blumenfield, and Paris (2004) unite behavioral, emotional and cognitive components of

engagement into a multidimensional spectrum and are key researchers in defining the purpose of student engagement. Graham, Tripp, Seawright, and Joeckel (2007), Pascarella, Seifert, and Blach (2010) provide research on the purpose of engagement while Bensimon (2009), Strange and Banning (2001), and Rush and Balamoutsou (2006) give insight into the effects of student engagement. Finally, Busted's (2015) work connects high levels of student engagement to long-term success.

Carey states that, "nearly one out of five four-year institutions graduates fewer than one-third of its first-time, full-time, degree seeking first year students within six years" (as stated in Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2011). Tinto states that nearly 25% of all students who enter college do not return to the same institution for the start of their second year (as stated in Braxton, Milem, & Sullivan, 2000). A survey of 718 first-time, full time students at a private college found that "faculty classroom behaviors in general and active learning in particular may constitute an empirically reliable source of influence on social integration, subsequent institutional commitment, and departure decisions" (Braxton et al., 2000, p. 582). Large, lecture style classes make it difficult for active learning to occur, thus increasing the chances of student attrition (Braxton et al., 2000). Kinzie et al. (2006) state that getting students involved in the right activities leads to higher levels of engagement and increased student success.

The original purpose of the NSSE was to facilitate a dialogue on how to increase student success (Kuh, 2001). The findings of the Project DEEP (Documenting Effective Educational Practices) suggest four critical components necessary for student success: strong administrative leadership, collaboration between faculty and student affairs staff, students leading other students in curricular and extra-curricular ways, and one champion or cheerleader on campus that consistently encourages students (Kinzie & Kuh, 2004). Two theories are foundational for understanding student persistence: Tinto's (1975) Student Integration Theory that focused on student interaction, and Bean's Student Attrition Model which contends behavioral intentions forecast rates of persistence (as stated in Kahn & Nauta, 2001). The Social Cognitive Theory, developed by Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1994) focuses on the behavioral requirements of persisting through college and are more relevant and predictive when measured during the second semester of a student's freshman year, once they have acclimatized to their college environment (as stated in Kahn & Nauta, 2001).

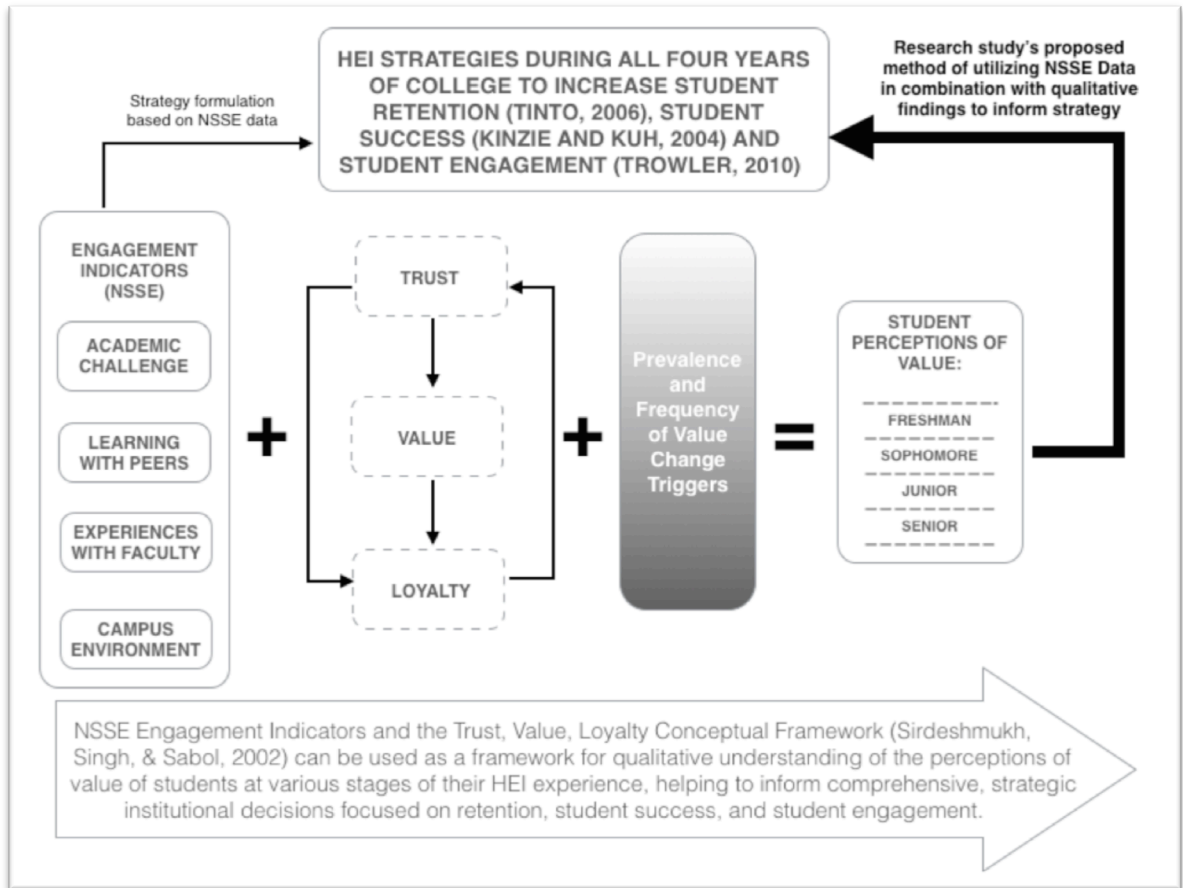
Using Only NSSE Data



To quantify student engagement, over 600 4-year institutions annually collect data during a student's first year and senior year by means of the National Survey for Student Engagement (NSSE, 2014).

This 15-minute survey measures levels of engagement in academic and non-academic settings (Kuh, 2001).

The convenience and relatively low NSSE survey expense of approximately \$3.50 per student, makes quantitative data readily accessible for participating institutions. The NSSE provides valuable quantitative data because engagement has been proven to be the leading indicator of student success (Kinzie & Kuh, 2004).



The researcher's proposed model of incorporating the quantitative benefits of the NSSE data and the qualitative benefits of focus and interviews to help inform institutional strategy resulting in improved retention, student success, and student engagement.

Research Methodology

- Assumptions
- Limitations
- Delimitations
- Definition of key terms
- Design of bounded case study
 - Interviews
 - Focus Groups
 - NSSE Data

According to Creswell (2009), research participants and the researcher introduce biases, values and their personal backgrounds to the study. The researcher has several assumptions about the qualitative case study. It is assumed that students have varying perceptions of value based on the levels of engagement at Midwest College. It is also assumed that the perception of value changes over time as a result of triggers or engagement events. Finally, it is assumed that the perceptions of value will provide a different and possibly lower level of engagement than the quantitative NSSE results from the 2014-2015 school year.

The aforementioned biases, backgrounds and values also create limitations to the study. These confounding variables, which Creswell (2009) asserts are not easily assessed while the study is taking place, and could affect the questioning strategy of the researcher. A sample size of four focus groups and multiple interviews may not accurately reflect the entire student population. The researcher has chosen to focus on one HEI which impacts generalizability, or the ability to apply the results to other colleges (Creswell, 2009). Another limitation may result from the interpersonal dynamics of the focus groups. The students may not fully share their perception of value because of the influence of other focus group participants and the fact that the researcher works at the College. Finally, qualitative data will be obtained from freshmen, despite the fact that their quantitative perceptions are not reflected in the 2014-2015 NSSE data.

The researcher will gather qualitative data from students who have spent the majority of their college career at Midwest College. The study will include students who are 18 years old or older and who are enrolled in the 2015 / 2016 academic school year. The NSSE data will be from the 2014-2015 school year. The researcher has chosen to make this study a point-in-time as opposed to a longitudinal study. In order for the entire student body to be represented, selection of the research participants will be facilitated by the Dean of Students at Midwest College.

The researcher will use simple and open-ended questions in order to gather the maximum amount of qualitative data for the focus group (Krueger, 2009). Krueger (2009) recommends conducting three or four focus groups consisting of five to eight participants for each participant group. To fully understand the perceptions of value for students at Midwest College the researcher will conduct at least four focus groups, one for each current cohort, including freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors.

Practitioner Setting for the Study

- History
- Liberal arts
- Organizational Analysis
 - Market Challenges
 - Organizational Outcomes
 - Current student engagement strategies
- Strategic Plan

Midwest College, founded in the mid-1800s is one of the oldest colleges west of the Mississippi River (Colleges of Distinction, 2015). The College was originally founded to uphold the spiritual heritage of the state's religious convention.

Although Midwest College is a liberal arts college, not all of academic majors are considered liberal arts in the strictest sense of the term. Midwest College offers many majors outside of the traditional humanities, social sciences, mathematics, and natural sciences. Some of these majors include: business administration, nursing, civil engineering, nonprofit leadership, physical education, elementary education, secondary education, economics, and recreation and sport. This is in response to increased questions about the relevancy of a traditional liberal arts education.

"About one-third of private institutions missed their goals for the incoming class for the fall of 2015 based on several key metrics: net revenue, total headcount, international students, yield, and full-pay students" (Selingo, p. 5).

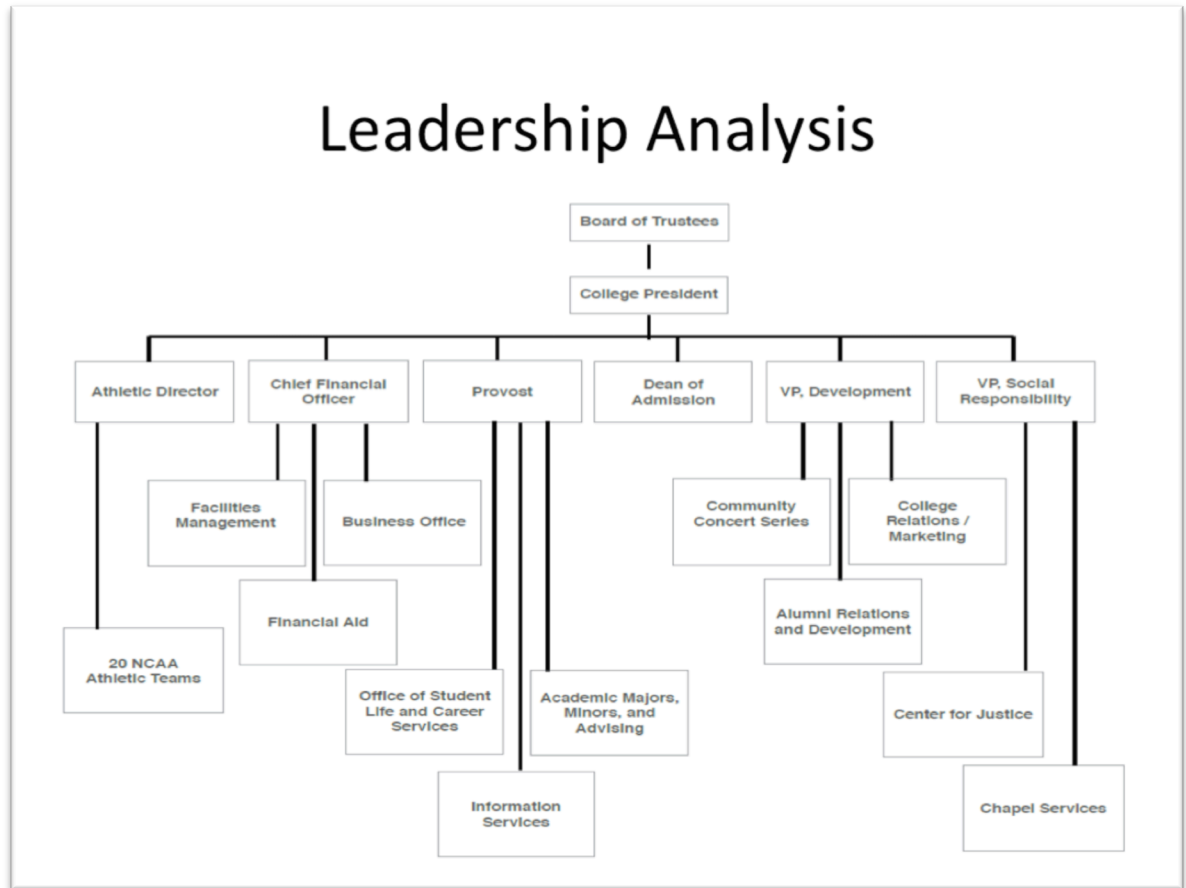
Some additional and significant challenges that higher education is facing includes an expectation from parents and students for increased student success, more institutional accountability, and access to top-rate educational experiences for low to no cost (Noel Levitz, 2009).

King et al. (2007) provides the seven dimensions for the outcomes of a private liberal arts education: effective reasoning, lifelong learning, well-being, intercultural effectiveness, leadership, moral character, and integration of learning (As stated in Pascarella et al., 2013).

Lepre states that a large percentage of first year students are undecided, leading to a higher level of stress to start the college journey (as stated in Simon, Perkins, & Crabtree, 2014). In response to this phenomenon, Midwest College developed a specific program called the First Year Experience, which includes orientation, student mentors, a formal leadership opportunity, and an introduction to career mentors. The four-year residential policy ensures that students experience college in the context of community and accountability.

Midwest College has been diligent in providing a clear plan for the next several years. Midwest College developed a 10-year strategic plan in 2007 and has over 100 outcomes it measures every year. This plan has been the North Star for both short term and long-term initiatives (Strategic Plan Retrospective, 2015).

Leadership Analysis



Kotter (1998) suggests that leadership is primarily about facilitating change through the process of vision casting, networking with strategic partners, and building relationships with key organizational constituencies (as stated in Bolman & Deal, 2012). O'Toole (1996) states that trust is the most powerful tool a leader has to shape the strategic direction of the organization (as stated Landis, 2011).

Less than 1/3 of college campuses surveyed indicated that they had a long-term, multi-year, enrollment plan that they were following (Noel Levitz, 2009). The purchase of a robust customer relationship management system, reduced dependency on third party vendors, and a complete reorganization of the office of admission in 2014 has squarely addressed the need for significant energy and attention on the recruitment of new students.

Data Collection

- 30 qualitative research participants
- Interviews and focus groups
- Cross-section of the student body
- Interview questions focused on trust, value, loyalty, engagement, changes of what students value over time, and triggers that cause those changes
- Utilization of NSSE Engagement Indicators and High Impact Practices to guide questions

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Introduction / General Information

Please share what your current year is in college (freshman, sophomore, junior, or senior).

What is your academic course of study?

What co-curricular / extracurricular programs are you formally involved in (student government, tutor, athletics, Greek life, work study, leadership roles, etc).

Trust

What things at Midwest College increase your level of trust in the institution?

What things decrease your level of trust?

Value

What things at Midwest College do you value most?

What things do you value least?

Loyalty

In what ways is your loyalty in Midwest College increasing at Midwest College?

In what ways is your loyalty decreasing at Midwest College?

Engagement

How do you define engagement in the context of learning and community at Midwest College?

How do you define:

- Academic Challenge
- Learning with Peers
- Experiences with Faculty
- Campus Environment

What things, both in the classroom and out of the classroom increase your level of engagement?

What are things that you wish would be present at Midwest College to increase your levels of engagement?

What role does the faculty play in your learning engagement at Midwest College? Please provide specific examples of how faculty have affected your level of engagement.

How does your engagement at Midwest College affect your levels of trust, value, and / or loyalty? Please provide specific examples.

Change of Values Over Time

Has what you value at Midwest College changed during your time here? (From the beginning of the school year until now? If applicable, from last year to this year? From when you started at Midwest College to now?).

What are the triggers, moments, classes, involvement, or participation in support services that have changed what you value at Midwest College?

NSSE Engagement Indicators

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Engagement Indicator</i>
<i>Academic Challenge</i>	Higher-Order Learning
	Reflective & Integrative Learning
	Learning Strategies
	Quantitative Reasoning
<i>Learning with Peers</i>	Collaborative Learning
	Discussions with Diverse Others
<i>Experiences with Faculty</i>	Student-Faculty Interaction
	Effective Teaching Practices
<i>Campus Environment</i>	Quality of Interactions
	Supportive Environment

NSSE High Impact Practices

High-Impact Practices in NSSE

- Learning community or some other formal program where groups of students take two or more classes together
- Courses that included a community-based project (service-learning)
- Work with a faculty member on a research project
- Internship, co-op, field experience, student teaching, or clinical placement
- Study abroad
- Culminating senior experience (capstone course, senior project or thesis, comprehensive exam, portfolio, etc.)

Results

“I think the fact that it's a small knit community, there's not a large amount of students, makes it more easy to get to know students better and to trust students. In particular I feel like the value system here kind of perpetuates an environment of trust.” – Sophomore Political Science Major

“I think the fact that it's a small knit community, there's not a large amount of students, makes it more easy to get to know student better and to trust students. In particular I feel like the value system here kind of perpetuates an environment of trust.” - SC

Research Participants

- 30 participants (13 female, 17 male)
- 25 academic majors represented
- All four cohorts represented
 - 9 freshman
 - 5 sophomores
 - 6 juniors
 - 10 seniors
- Many formal affinity groups represented

Majors: Honors History, Physics, Psychology, Spanish, Biochemistry, Premed, Nursing, Business Administration, Critical Thought, Philosophy, French, Political Science, Communications, Nonprofit Leadership, Elementary Education, Music Composition, Religion and Culture, Biology, Math, Economics, Accounting, International Relations, Chemistry, Mathematics, Music,

Affinity Groups: Honors program, society of physics, philosophy club, student senate, sorority, fraternity, choir, athletics, leadership program, resident assistant, DECA, campus tour guides, emerging leaders, LGBT student organization, student nursing association, campus activities organization, athletic team manager, theater, work study, campus employment, campus ministries, college tutor, elementary school tutor, international student association, national honors society, business publication contributor, college host, intramurals, black student association, nonprofit student group, mortarboard, international relief group, innovation student group, research assistant, newspaper writer, note taker for disability services,

Trust

"I trust the institution."

"I trust the institution." - FD

Trust

Increasing Trust

- Professors do much more than teach
- Students trust professors who care both inside and outside the classroom
- Genuine concern and confidentiality from faculty and staff is recognized and appreciated by students
- Affinity groups cultivate trust
- Empowerment from Student Life builds increases trust
- Open doors = communicating openly and regularly through all mediums

“When I was visiting I trusted the faculty to really be pursuing academic excellence in what they were doing and to be investing in the students, where they were caring in each individual rather than just giving the name out there.” – FA

“I really feel a level of trust with the smaller classes and being able to talk to professors after class and ask them advice for personal issues as well school issues. I trust that they’ll give me their good views like their best answer for each and that they’ll keep it confidential and help me grow as a person.” – FD

“When faculty, including professors and administrators, show genuine and sincere care of you and your personal life and your academic and professional pursuits.” – FF

“I feel like being a student-athlete, I have a team to rely on which is really built my trust for them up.” FH

“I think it's cool how, especially the professors, like, want you to succeed. I've already, within the first week of school, actually before class even started, I was already meeting with 2 professors that had their doors open, and that they just wanted to talk, or, like, help

you with anything school related or even not school related. I think it just goes to show that professors want you to succeed in school but also outside of school too.” - JB

“Ability of our Student Life and administration to allow the individual organizations on campus such as our Student Senate, Greek Life, which like I said I'm involved with, to kind of take the reins on our own. They showed that they trust you in that manner.” – JF

“Also the flexibility of communication. Teachers are very open with us. We get emails. We get their office hours, but we also get their personal, direct lines, and that often is a cellphone. Many teachers ... I can't account for all teachers, but many teachers have the policy of, "If you need anything, just message me. I'd prefer an email, but if you can't email me, message me.” – SB

Trust

Decreasing Trust

- Lack of ethnic diversity
- Lack of offerings that may be offered at other similar-sized institutions (scholarships, equipment, etc). Especially difficulty with tuition increases
- Some rules are perceived to not be followed by certain affinity groups
- Perception that there is an inability for alumni to donate to specific programs / initiatives
- Lack of clear or consistent communication at times from administration and / or faculty

“I don't consider there's a lot of diversity on campus, especially at the level of the professors. Most of them focus on one area and it's pretty biased, it's inconsistent.” – FB

“I think another thing that will give me distress is that me as a member of a certain group on campus have to work harder to get other people or administration to take what I have to say seriously. And that's not the way it should be. I should be able to come to campus and know that if I have a dilemma...that I need a high alert given back then I should feel confident enough to go to someone and not have hear previous examples or interactions that are similar to what mine would be.” – FC

“A lack of opportunities or college offered products that are not necessarily offered at other colleges of similar size, but could be offered here very easily or feasibly.” – FE

“I think sometimes certain organizations don't necessarily follow what they are presented as, and not in terribly egregious way but sometimes it's here are rules that we have, but we don't really follow them.” - FI

“Then you hear the gossip between faculty members about alumni wanting to donate to a certain program. They red tape that they have to cut through to get their money to go where they want it to. That's really disheartening as a potential alumni. That makes me

want to just forget about the institution once I leave, if what I loved about it I can't support directly.” – JD

“I would say a lack of communication. I think with communication comes active listening, which means that when you're speaking with someone of administration, faculty or staff member, you expect them to not only hear what you're saying, but also have a response and with response comes positive action.” – SD

“I would also add it's hard for me to trust a college or university when there's a lack of resources or support for different groups of students on campus. There should be support and resources for all students on campus regardless of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc.” SD

Value

“Professors invest in your life.”

“Professors invest in your life.” - JA

Value

Increasing Value

- High level of investment from professors, including ample one-on-one opportunities
- Small size = significant access to resources
- Relevance of learning and experiences in a safe environment
- Core curriculum changes the mindset
- Location to large metropolitan area
- Campus community – involvement opportunity

“The level that the professors invest in you from the very beginning, that you don’t have to like work your way through the years to get to be a part of research or other kind of extracurricular experiences. They take you seriously as not just a student but as a person from the very beginning and then they want to ... They respect the questions you have and really lead you along in the best way that they know how.” – FA

“I like the fact that this college in particular is small. So there are small class sizes. Everything is very acting and challenging, you get lots of interaction with the professors. You know, that if you have question you can stop by their office any time you need them. It's easy to set up appointments and it's easy to get that interaction that allows you to be successful. Which is something I need here.” – FC

“The ability to put what you learn into practice and get ideas like set into motion like how ... You can apply them to the real world and that along with getting to know your professors and hearing their connections and hearing their ideas for you not just what you should do but a possibility that you could do.” - FD

“I value and appreciate having a environment where I am safe and secure to not only physically but as a developing young person be able to pursue the things that I want to pursue and have the assistance of tried and tested faculty and administrators.” – FF

“The one-on-one with the teachers, I think that's the biggest difference between a private school and a big state school. I think that really changes your education that you get. I don't know how to describe the professors, a majority of them are really dedicated. It's not like you're another student. They invest in your life.” - JA

“I value a lot, the core curriculum, just because it's given me such a different way to view and perceive different ideas, and like, I don't know. That's what I value the most.” – JB

I also value, like, the location, because it's so close to, like for me, for nursing we have 12 different hospitals that we can go to and I just think that's super neat because some of my other friends, at other schools, get 2 hospitals, but they just switch each rotation. I just think it's neat because we get to be exposed to so many different trauma levels, or just anything that's different. JB

“the flexibility of communication. Teachers are very open with us. We get emails. We get their office hours, but we also get their personal, direct lines-composition student to have their works played, or critique their works or things like that. Whereas here I can simply walk into an office or ask a professor to see if this can be performed.” – SRD

Value

Decreasing Value

- Some facility updates, especially housing...certain areas are perceived to receive too much attention, such as the grounds
- Religious symbols ceremonies send mixed message
- Affinity groups turn into cliques, sometimes driven by an attitude of entitlement
- Low attendance at student events / sporting events leads to low school spirit

“The facilities, maybe more focused on majors instead of just a common study area. “ – FB

“I value least the amount of time and energy that it is perceived put into our lawn around campus.” – FF

“So I think that could be something to look at possibly for reform because for example our opening ceremony is a commencement which is a religious ceremony. There's a sermon and there's prayers you know, and singing and not everybody comes here for that really.” – FI

“In that aspect, there does seem to be cliques that form, so there is that over arching sense of community, but it seems maybe the presence of cliques is maybe more predominant, but I would feel that is not as big as an issue here as it would be at a high school, or maybe a different college.” - JC

“Not from a faculty side of things, but, being a liberal arts college, I feel like, with some of the students, there's a lot of entitlement.” – SRB

“It kind of stinks just because like the community is great when you're on the quad or during class time when you see everyone, but then outside of classes and stuff you don't really see anyone. It's just like they don't show up to sports that much.” - SB

Loyalty

“The support that I've been shown through faculty and staff has greatly influenced my loyalty to this school.”

“The support that I've been shown through faculty and staff has greatly influenced my loyalty to this school.” - SB

Loyalty

Increasing Loyalty

- Emotional investment from the campus community
- 4-year residential requirement leads to loyalty
- High quality of education
- Actually doing vs. the opportunity to do
- Relationship to the surrounding communities
- Loyalty directed at professors and affinity groups vs. loyalty to the institution
- “The College President knows my name.”
- Informal and formal connection to alumni

“Yes with like emotional investments both in the classroom and with the people around me I can feel a sense of community and kind of invest in myself into help in better this institution. Some of the organizations that I’d like to join, they help better this institution with academics and technologically. I can definitely feel my loyalty starting to build up.”
– FA

“I think the fact that we are forced to live on campus greatly contributes to how we feel identified with the institution.” - FB

“I don't know. I guess you could say it's increasing because of the fact that I know the quality of education. I think it's worth what I'm paying for it. I didn't particularly want to come here so I've had to definitely make the best of it.” – FC

“I’ve actually gotten to do things in conjunction with my college and growing and continuing to learn together that really makes that a difference.” – freshman
“The relationship that this college has with the surrounding community creates a more valid sense of what the college does and all of it's actions in this community, so that creates more loyalty for me seeing other people that respect the place that I have chosen to come to.” – FD

“I’ve tried to get everyone to come here.” – JA

“As I get close to the graduation, my loyalty I feel like it's increasing, but I can't say that my loyalty to the college is increasing. It's much more the loyalty to the professors that I have formed these relationships to and to their department. Like the theater that I am involved in, that's where my loyalty is because that's where I've gotten the loyalty back.”
– JD

“I would say that my loyalty is probably more ingrained in the specific groups that I'm a part of and seeing them develop and continue to move forward. I know that those who had things that after I graduate I'm going to look back on and feel that loyalty because I have a much stronger connection to those than maybe Midwest College as a whole.” - SRC

“I guess I feel as Participant A said, the loyalty to the faculty is the most concrete of anything I feel loyal to. Just the president of the college right now, I feel a great deal of loyalty too, because of the kind of historic decisions that this president has made. How this president has stood with the college and knows most our names which is bizarre to me. Those two things I feel most loyal to, kind of the personal relationships in that regard.” - JE

“Just over time I've developed a sense of pride and I feel very proud to have attended this school. When I meet a lot of the alumni and see their successes and the business acumen of a lot of our alumni it definitely speaks volumes of the education and quality of education that I've been obtaining over these year. I just definitely feel like, now more than ever, I feel like I'm looking forward to the proud alumni experience, I'm looking forward to being as involved as some of the alumni that came before me.” - SG

“I think that the professors have had a huge part in it for me, just because I feel like they all want me to succeed. I've only come across one professor that it didn't really seem like they wanted me to succeed or anything and like no matter how many times I would bother them saying, "Hey, what can I do?" They wouldn't really help me or anything, saying that was like all my fault. Pretty much every other professor other than that one has emailed me back on time and saying, "Hey, come in my office whenever you can or text me, email me, whatever works for you.” – SB

Loyalty

Decreasing Loyalty

- Lack of desire to connect with certain affinity groups on campus
- Lack of visible ways that the tuition is being justified
- “Favoritism” in who is being disciplined
- Transitioning to life after college provides a natural lack of direct attention (immediate loyalty) to the school
- Influence of negative social media

“I think that I’ll start to see different of the [*sic*] social groups that I may or may not want to connect myself with but I can appreciate parts that they add to the overall campus atmosphere but I don’t personally agree with all of they do on campus. I would tend to detach myself from that but I think it’s outside of the general goals and growth of the college.” – FA

“The lack of very visible ways in which our tuition is being justified. Some students, myself included, regarding the comment about the lawns, don't get to really see the value, the numerical value, because finances put stress on students even when it shouldn't necessarily be their main concern. It decreases my loyalty when I see things that I feel should not be a focus of Midwest College; that students should come first, and that sometimes the college does not place the student first, in the eyes of the student.” – FF

“Seeing occasionally but more than I'd like to see, a favoritism for who gets disciplined when in certain things and events, and how they get disciplined.” – SRE

“Namely, investing in what may become a graduate school and careers, but also that means pulling back a little bit socially. That means pulling back a little bit from my extracurricular activities because the value that those have provided for me through my college experience will no longer be able to do so upon graduation.” – SRJ

“I don't know if it would be considered decreasing of loyalty, but it's sometimes a little demoralizing especially my first year to see so many people transfer especially at semester. Sometimes you can tell pretty quickly some of the people that either do not want to be on this campus or how like the campus feels like it's not their place. In addition to people transferring, just some places like the app Yik Yak or just other places on social media you see nothing but negative comments about the college.” - SD

Engagement

“Professors are communicating their subject as one person to another person. You feel almost legitimized in that way.”

“Professors are communicating their subject as one person to another person. You feel almost legitimized in that way.” - JE

Engagement Defined

- Energetic and positive preparedness and participation
- Formal opportunities for engagement such as first-year orientation, homecoming week, and advising
- Professors going above and beyond
- You are value for more than just being a student – small class sizes enable this
- “Selective engagement” from administration
- Open-ended research in collaboration with faculty

“Academically I would define engagement as energetically being a part of your studies and that can be in class. People are different levels of outgoingness on whether they’re going to speak or not in that situation but being alert and being fully present when you’re in that place. Paying attention a professors teaching on and not getting distracted with other things you have going on and then if you have questions then I’d say like going and talking to your professors.” - FA

“The student body, upperclassmen, and faculty, and administration make it a priority to engage in things like orientation for first years. The homecoming week is very important for engaging students socially, and even if one event isn’t very successful in getting a high turnout, they continuously put forth effort into engaging with the students.” – FF

“I agree with the small class sizes and the focus of the professors. but on a note along with that, it’s not just inside the classrooms that help me engaged. I have many professors that take their time out of their day to stay extra hours to help individuals, to help groups of people, really try to pull everyone in, help everyone get the fullest of their learning experience possible. Also fellow students hold each other accountable in a lot of ways, and I think all of that helps me personally get engaged.” – FF

“They are communicating their subject as one person to another person. You feel almost legitimized in that way. It kind of makes it kind of part of a bigger story and kind of makes rethink what learning is and how it is fundamentally an interpersonal phenomena that kind of allows it grow.” - JE

“That hits somebody they realize you are not just a student. You're actually ... they create a personal relationship with you that I think they understand is can be, and I believe, much greater than them just teaching a specific subject. That's beneficial. Not even talking about professors, there are individuals that I have worked on campus, people in Student Life that will contact me for things that aren't even really related to Midwest College themselves or the institution themselves.”- JF

“I'm going to be honest, I believe that on an administrative level the College is engaged with the aspect of student's needs that they want to be engaged with. With that being said, they ignore or fail to see understanding of the aspect of student needs that it seems too difficult for them to handle, or they take them out of their comfort zone or may take extra time that's required of them that they are willing to give.” - SRD

“Open-ended research in the biology program, right at the first class we were doing research. That was designed by ourselves and got it by the professors, but we chose what we wanted to research. We constructed everything we needed to construct, we ran all of our experiments, and at the end of the semester we presented it. That was our lab.” - SD

“There are certain people in the cafeteria who now all know, ‘Oh, I’m going to get to see her at breakfast or lunch she maybe swiping my card when I get in there.’ That increases my engagement when I’m just going to eat a meal there.” - FA

“I think advising helps a lot, too, if you go to your advisor and you actually talk to them about your future plans. I think that was a way that I felt like I engaged the most academically. Non-academically,” – SRD

Engagement Opportunities

- Extracurricular / student activities
- Activism groups
- More formal / required opportunities for service
- Communication of intent of feedback
- Place and space

“We have struggled with student engagement. I personally feel that student engagement, and extra curricular activities is low here.” – JC

“In the context of student groups. I think there needs to be a better assist [*sic*] of personal values and interest and critical thinking. I think values, especially with a lot of different activism groups because I think it's important to make sure, especially activism groups make sure that all of their values, and, interest, and passions are focused by good critical thinking style.” – FI

“I know that there is a service class on-campus. However, I think it would be really cool if we incorporated, as part of the core because they're the required classes, if there was a service class involved that you had to take. I think it would be really cool as part of the freshman core classes. You may not take it freshman year, but I think that it'd be cool if we incorporated like, "You have to give back so many hours in whatever regard or aspect that may be," I think that would be really cool. Another thing ... More probably just the giving back side of things, that would be the biggest thing.” – SRB

“I would say that while they ask a lot of times for our feedback, when it comes to surveys at the end of every semester, very rarely do we ever see that feedback put into action or even just a simple, ‘These are the next steps we took after receiving this feedback.’ We

think they look through it, we hope they look through it, we hope they act on it, but some sort of notification.” – SRC

“Maybe. Or even like, some of the dorms are a little bit outdated and I think that students sometimes we need a place to hang out, the weather's not always like today where everyone wants to walk and hang out on the quad area, near the classes, sometimes people really don't want to have to get up and leave their dorms on a weekend and stuff to be productive. Sometimes being in someone's bedroom or dorm room it really isn't the most comfortable place to study so if we had, I really do wish we had lounges and more study rooms that a facilitate that type of learning. Also make students want to be there. If it's aesthetically pleasing, comfortable, I think more students would want to hang around instead of like older furniture, older desks, and even some broken desks and lounges, no one really wants to hang out there. More commons areas for students. I really like what they did down in the, I guess, the snack bar area that we got. I really liked what they did down there.” - SRG

Faculty

“I could tell that it would be a good relationship between the students and professors but I’ve been amazed as I’ve actually been here at how consistent that is.”

“I could tell that it would be a good relationship between the students and professors but I’ve been amazed as I’ve actually been here at how consistent that is.” - FA

Faculty

- Resource generosity – “always available”
- Foundation building
- Challenging academic and personal pursuits
- Networking champions
- Highly influential – “exponential”
- Personal relationship commitment
- Strong evidence of reciprocal loyalty

“I would say that the professor will stick around after class to talk to you if you have questions or just a comment or something you’re still trying to figure out. It’s amazing how generous they are with their time even as they’re challenging you to more than you might think you can do. They challenge themselves to try to help get you there.” – FA

“In terms of class engagement, I think that it’s really important because the professors all have a vast knowledge and give you enough of a foundation to build on, but at the same time let you pursue your own interests because of the small class ratio, you can focus on specific areas of knowledge.”- FB

“As was mentioned, the experience of faculty here, the education behind faculty here. What they bring to the table is something very unique and something you might not see at a different school. Something that definitely drew me here and along those lines, throw that in with the student-faculty ratio, they’re always available, they always are there to help you no matter what you need, if its class related or not because they have experience in any sort of situation where they can help you out.” – FE

“Faculty has played an enormous role in how I spend my time here.” – JC

“Much more it's the professor who helped me exponentially more than the college overall has. I mean although there are people in the administration that I love and I'm very loyal to, it just seems that the professor is what is going to be lasting for me.” - JF

“I think that the personal relationship relates back to the trust that you form with everyone here. Then, because of that you have a greater trust for the rest of the colleges as a whole.” - SRH

“All of the professors care about us. They tell us that they want us to succeed multiple times. They tell us if you have any problems, come into our office. We're always available. Hearing that they care about you and like want you to succeed, they want you to come into their office all the time, like just chat with them about things other than school is really great.” - SB

“Whereas I hear from friends in other campuses it seems like some professors they just do research and they have no loyalty to the students. Some seem to only want to teach, they do no research. Some see it as just another stop for them on their journey or just another place to get in and get out of. I haven't seen a whole of that here on campus, at least among the professors that I've encountered.” – SD

Academic Challenge

“I think when the professors challenging more, that can engage you more because you're when you're getting that kind of consistent feedback on what you're doing, you're held accountable in a positive way on continuing to push yourself and see how far you can go with your learning.”

“I think when the professors challenge more, that can engage you more because you're when you're getting that kind of consistent feedback on what you're doing, you're held accountable in a positive way on continuing to push yourself and see how far you can go with your learning.” - FA

Academic Challenge

- Expected from students
- Self-improvement – reaching fullest potential
- Comprehensive betterment
- Sets students apart for future opportunity
- Appeals to and activates competitive spirit

“I need to know that if I'm coming to an institution and paying this institution money, a good amount of money to be educated then I need to know that what I'm being taught will make me competitive for whatever future decisions I decide to make.” – FC

“The challenge that the teachers give you definitely sharpens you as a student and as a person. That definitely has separated myself from where I was a couple of months ago prior to high school...prior to college. I can definitely tell the difference of who I am as person and who I am as a student has definitely improved for the better through these challenges.” – FD

“The academic challenge really shows through later on when you present yourself for future higher education or in the job field, because the way we've been challenged here is unique from other schools or places in my opinion and so I think that what I will have to bring to the table will really set me apart and show that I have been challenged academically.” – FE

“I believe without the academic challenge, we wouldn't be pushing ourselves to become the fullest that we could. Academic challenge allows each one of us to get the most of the time we put in, the money we put in for school, and like I said, it allows us to get better and actually gain from what we're doing.” – FG

“I'm competitive. I'm not in any sports, so academic competition is really the only thing I've got. If there's other students who are willing to challenge, then that makes me better in a way because I want to be. It motivates you more I guess.” – JA

“I think for me what I personally value most in education is just overall being developed into the best person I can be. So not just intellectual is a good part of that but also on a personal level and an emotional level. And so on and so on. And this institution as far as the program so far has been doing that for me.” – FI

Change in Value

“I think that is something each person has to understand when they come to an institution, you may not walk out the same person you were when you walked in.”

“I think that is something each person has to understand when they come to an institution, you may not walk out the same person you were when you walked in.” – FC

Change in Value

- Deepening of relational connections
- A push / pull learning process
- Most students experience a significant change in what they valued, the rest classified it as a strengthening of what they already valued
- A change in value occurs even within the first year
- Thinking more critically outside of class
- From satisfaction to fulfillment of purpose

“I think that I came in valuing the kind of environment that was going to nurture learning at this very fundamental level and the professors, and just all the student body that was really just trying to encourage that. At the beginning of your time here is like you don’t have those kinds of deep connection with people so you can know like, Oh, I have really good professors and I really appreciate them. You don’t know any ... You haven’t heard their stories yet or experienced real discussions with them and gotten feedback and had this kind of push and pull of the learning process that continues to change the way you view this overall direction of learning, and a revision of that learning.” – FA

“For me personally I came in with knowledge and wisdom as my utmost qualities that I think are ... I was looking for in a school; things that I’ve kind of come to appreciate and learn was loyalty and kind of innovation with things in addition to wisdom and knowledge. It’s been built in on the things that I’m appreciating. I haven’t really changed and as in something that’s been taken away, but something has been added for me.” – FD

“The more I’ve studied the more I valued critical thinking. They care how you think it, or why you think that, or if you’re true to what you think. I’ve never thought about that before or cared about that before, but every class you take here focuses on that or at least touches on it somewhat.” FA

“The start of my sophomore year, the main value was a certain level of happiness. I had spent my whole freshman year on YouTube in my room alone, just watching videos about, just about what to do with your life when you don't know what to do with your life.” - JD

“The value kind of encompassed all that, and when I got ... I valued the responsibility, then I had to get the good grades I was looking for. Then the responsibility, the values, what I valued landed on how happy I was studying what I was studying, and how happy I was looking at the future.” – JD

Change in Value

- Increased value in academics over time may create social disengagement
- Transition from classroom learning to global experiences
- Valuing the process vs. only the result
- From participant to leader

“I felt like I was part of something that was bigger than myself and the institution. I loved being up and around all the things that were happening with my class. Like everyone was living in the dorms and like you knew what other people were doing. Now I’m here for the academics. I no longer feel like team class of 2017. There is more like team waking up for this class in the morning, though I guess that was the value that fundamentally changed.” – JE

“I think that’s changed now. I think obviously I focused on my academics, but I wouldn’t say that’s the highest value for me. I would say that experiencing something rather than learning something in a lecture hall is much more valuable to me. I would much rather go on a trip somewhere, and I know this may sound bad for a student than ... I’d rather go on a trip to experience specific event rather than sit in a lecture and learn about the event.” – JF

“When I was a first-year at this College I valued the end result, my own personal success. I thought, ‘You’re going to go to College, get all the answers and go be successful and make a bunch of money.’ I’m happy to say that my experience here at this College has let me to know and believe that it’s not the end result that I actually value, but it’s the process.” – SRD

“It's changed for me in, I didn't anticipate how many leadership roles I'd be able to be a part of. Officially with prior leadership or top leadership but also, not that I want sound like I'm a big leader on campus, but being someone that people can come talk to about what's going on.” -SRH

Triggers for Change

- Professor's invitation for engagement
- Academic rigor
- Realization that the campus community cares
- Core curriculum = "I have to think my own thoughts."
- Participating in something bigger than class
- Exceptional faculty contribution
- Academic major change / advisor guidance
- Pushing students far beyond expectations
- Living in community

"It seemed even though it was academically related it was also kind of a personal, 'How's my involvement? Do I need to be paying more attention to letting others speak, or do I need to be speaking more?' Trying to get some kind of outside feedback on that even though it wasn't directly related to something we would get graded on." – FA

"My first semester for a specific class it was a philosophy class. It challenged me and basically with my schedule and football it's been every Saturday and Friday night working on this class and doing my best on it because it's probably one of the more challenging writing classes I ever had. Getting to understand ... And I ended up getting an A, and getting to understand that you know the hard work for that class you know it was ... ended up paying off. – FD

"Upon coming here, the lack of independence that was needed to survive in this atmosphere was somewhat striking to me, and I think to some extent I value the fact that I'm very taken care of here, but in some ways I think that that will change closer to my senior year." – FE

"I have to think my own thoughts." – JA

“I was elected Secretary for the State Nursing Student Association, and that served as part of a trigger, or like, I should be thankful for. Just like these small opportunities, like I had no idea that was going to happen that day. I guess there are just small things throughout the day that you can find I guess, as triggers. That can just make us more thankful for the smaller things in life, so.” - JB

“She was very much engaged in my presentation, my prep work, way up to the day of the presentation. Just general encouragement, she was extremely engaged, and that was ... I don't think could have been able to go through that entire process without her help with that.” – JE

“In talking to my advisor for my education major, he was ... when I was debating whether or not to change he actually encouraged me to experiment with things outside of his department and totally supported my decision to switch.” – JE

“I had a professor who really, she was in English department. She really pushed us. I remember getting my first or second paper back. I don't think I actually did that poorly on the paper. It was just that I looked at the paper and turned it over and then it was just a page and a half of remarks. I was just like it really hit me, I'm like okay, like I need to readjust my thinking. I need to readjust like who I am...It's going to be college, and I can get good grades. It's going to be that. I can have the social life too, and just readjust what you focused on.” – JF

“I was recently selected to be a part of something that is very important for the future of our school ...But just being able to be a part of that in general it allowed me to meet some people who have accomplished so much and kind of give me the belief that I can accomplish these things, it kind of gave me more patience because I saw that they had accomplished so much over a long period of time. It gave me more confidence that over my years I have time to experience and get out and see the world.” SRG

“Going through initiation for a fraternity last year, I got to see how the seniors in that fraternity appreciated their time, both at the school as well as in the fraternity. It really made me realize how important it is to enjoy your time in school and not just always look to the future and what I'm going to get out of school, but also just to enjoy being in college while I'm studying and everything.” - SE

NSSE High Impact Practices - Frequency Ranking

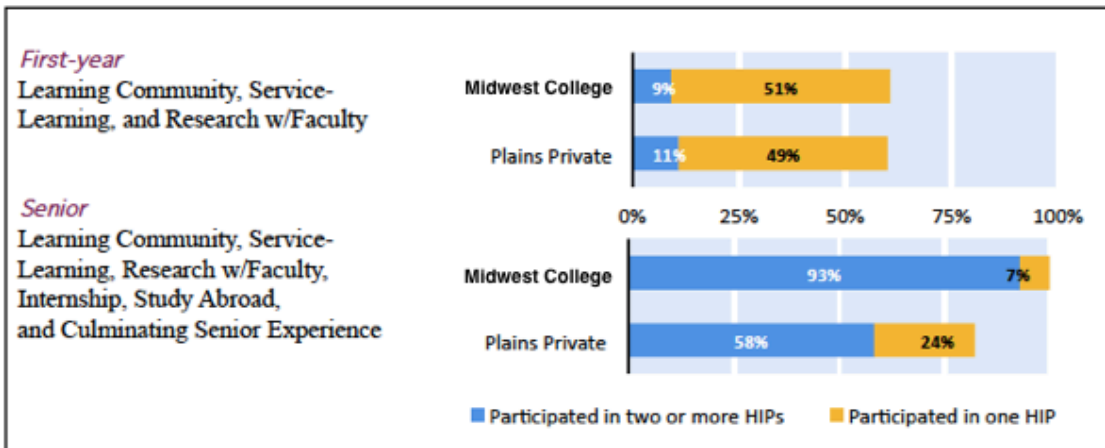
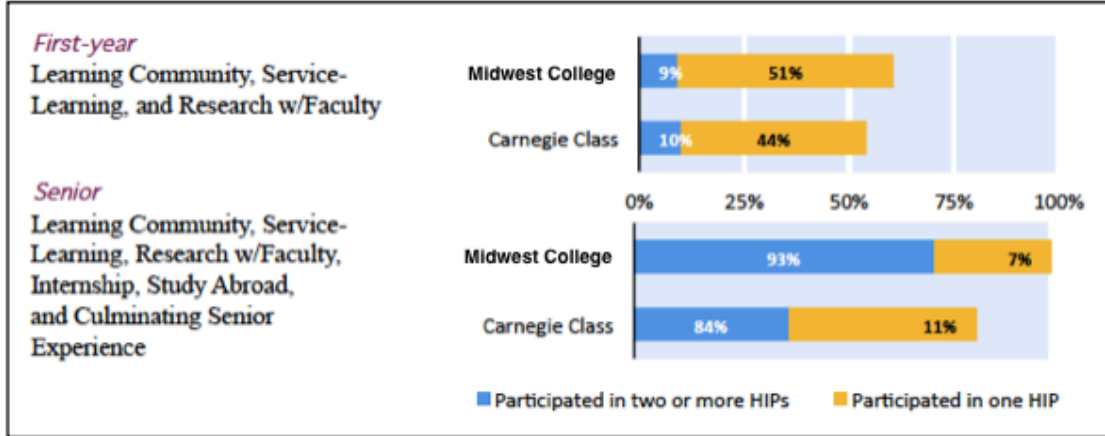
1. Learning Community
2. Faculty Research
3. Service Learning
4. Internships
5. Study Abroad
6. Senior Capstone

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Engagement Indicator</i>
<i>Academic Challenge</i>	Higher-Order Learning Reflective & Integrative Learning Learning Strategies Quantitative Reasoning
<i>Learning with Peers</i>	Collaborative Learning Discussions with Diverse Others
<i>Experiences with Faculty</i>	Student-Faculty Interaction Effective Teaching Practices
<i>Campus Environment</i>	Quality of Interactions Supportive Environment

First-Year Students		Mean	Your first-year students compared with					
Theme	Engagement Indicator		NSSE Top 50%			NSSE Top 10%		
			Mean	Effect size	✓	Mean	Effect size	✓
Academic Challenge	Higher-Order Learning	44.3	40.6 *	.27	✓	42.7	.12	✓
	Reflective and Integrative Learning	41.0	37.3 **	.30	✓	39.3	-.14	✓
	Learning Strategies	43.1	41.2	.14	✓	43.4	-.02	✓
	Quantitative Reasoning	29.5	28.8	.05	✓	30.6	-.07	✓
Learning with Peers	Collaborative Learning	38.2	34.7 *	.26	✓	37.0	.09	✓
	Discussions with Diverse Others	46.9	43.2 *	.24	✓	45.6	.09	✓
Experiences with Faculty	Student-Faculty Interaction	24.9	23.3	.10	✓	26.9	-.13	
	Effective Teaching Practices	42.7	42.4	.02	✓	44.6	-.15	
Campus Environment	Quality of Interactions	45.8	44.0	.15	✓	46.0	-.02	✓
	Supportive Environment	39.0	39.4	-.03	✓	41.4	-.18	

Seniors		Mean	Your seniors compared with					
Theme	Engagement Indicator		NSSE Top 50%			NSSE Top 10%		
			Mean	Effect size	✓	Mean	Effect size	✓
Academic Challenge	Higher-Order Learning	43.6	43.3	.02	✓	45.3	-.13	
	Reflective and Integrative Learning	42.7	41.1	.13	✓	43.1	-.03	✓
	Learning Strategies	41.3	42.5	-.08	✓	44.9 **	-.26	
	Quantitative Reasoning	33.6	31.3	.13	✓	33.0	.04	✓
Learning with Peers	Collaborative Learning	37.5	35.4	.16	✓	37.7	-.01	✓
	Discussions with Diverse Others	42.3	43.9	-.10		45.8 **	-.23	
Experiences with Faculty	Student-Faculty Interaction	34.4	29.5 ***	.30	✓	34.4	.00	✓
	Effective Teaching Practices	42.6	43.0	-.03	✓	45.1 *	-.19	
Campus Environment	Quality of Interactions	45.7	45.3	.03	✓	47.4	-.15	
	Supportive Environment	36.7	36.1	.04	✓	39.0	-.17	

The chart above shows Midwest College in comparison to the Carnegie Class of schools, a group of 164 private liberal arts colleges across the country. An important consideration when interpreting this data is the effect size. “An effect size, considered a measure of practical significance, is any measure of the strength of the relationship between two variables” (Chen, Gonyea, Sarraf, BrckaLorenz, Korkmaz, Lambert, Shoup, and Williams, 2009, p. 41). “NSSE’s comparison reports use Cohen’s d, the standardized difference between the institution’s mean and the comparison group’s mean, calculated by dividing the mean difference by the pooled standard deviation” (Rangea, 2009, p. 1). NSSE has developed their own effect size interpretation scale to address the intentionally vague nature of Cohen’s d (Rangea, 2009). None of the effect sizes for Midwest College are over .30, the minimum threshold considered medium strength when comparing the Midwest College’s results to other colleges. Many of the effect sizes are considered trivial, especially when comparing Midwest College to the NSSE top 10%. The dilemma of low effect sizes can be addressed by understanding the numbers in the proper context. By assessing the frequencies for individual items on the NSSE results report, HEI’s will be able to understand the effect size in a more relevant and meaningful context. The vague interpretation and challenges of contextualizing low effect sizes further justifies the use of qualitative data collection to more fully understand student engagement.



(HIP 1) Learning community or some other formal program where groups of students take two or more classes together

(HIP 2) Courses that included a community-based project (service-learning)

(HIP 3) Work with a faculty member on a research project

(HIP 4) Internship, co-op, field experience, student teaching, or clinical placement

(HIP 5) Study abroad

(HIP 6) Culminating senior experience (capstone course, senior project or thesis, comprehensive exam, portfolio, etc.)

Observations

- A student's loyalty to the institution is often defined by their relationship to faculty
- A change in value during the first year (which was common in this study) may affect third semester retention
- The process of having perceptions of value qualitatively understood was valued by students
- Students are busy, but are they engaged?
- Affinity groups are critical to engagement

Recommendations

- Advising appointments *formally* coupled with engagement assessment and support
- Adding engagement questions to course evaluations
- Listening sessions
- Inviting students to solve a bigger problem with affinity group collaboration
- Creating meaningful affinity groups
- Stronger emphasis on the “Big 6”

1. Formal and frequent listening session opportunities that involves students, faculty, staff, and alumni
2. Meaningful and measurable faculty and student interaction opportunities
3. Iteratively capturing more engagement data and using it to inform practical institutional strategies
4. Administration intentionally connecting with students on issues that are most meaningful to the student
5. Not just affinity groups...meaningful and actionable affinity groups

Raisman (2013) found that 84% of college student attrition could be attributed to one of four reasons: lack of care from the college, poor service to the student, lack of value, and scheduling conflicts.

Engagement leads to higher value.

Good practice indicators include: high quality interaction with faculty, academic challenge, influential peer interaction, diverse experiences, and collaborative learning (Seifert et al., 2010).

Continue formal engagement events.

Listening sessions between administration and students. Adequate follow up strategy for survey driven initiatives.

SECTION FIVE

CONTRIBUTION TO SCHOLARSHIP

Target Journal

Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice

Rationale for Target Journal

The *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice* is the “only quarterly scholarly referred journal devoted exclusively to college student retention issues.” Several members of the Editorial Board are cited in the literature review of this study. The *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice* relates to all conceptual underpinnings of this study: student engagement, student retention, and student success.

Plan for Submission

An abstract of 100 to 150 words will be sent to journal’s online portal for review. A manuscript, without personally identifiable information and in APA format, will be submitted to journal’s online portal

Submission-ready journal article

Abstract

Large amounts of quantitative data can be obtained by means of the National Survey for Student Engagement (NSSE). However, can a 15-minute survey truly provide an institution with enough relevant data to adequately understand a student’s perception of value in order to help inform strategic changes that will affect future levels of engagement? Harper (2007) suggests that quantitative assessment has overwhelmed significant qualitative research efforts, limiting potential insights gained from a student’s

valuable first-hand experience. Whereas student success can be measured at the end of a semester, school year, or educational career, qualitative measurement of a student's perception of value reflect how their learning experience evolves over the course of their entire college experience. This qualitative bounded case study examines the perceptions of value for students at a private, liberal arts college in the Midwestern United States.

Statement of Problem

The intensely competitive environment of higher education requires administrators to understand the current college student's perception of value in order to communicate distinctive benefits to prospective and current students in an exceptional, compelling and sophisticated way (Newman, Couturier, & Scurry, 2010). Economic conditions and increased competition among colleges have heightened the expectation to provide students with the greatest value (Longmire Study, 2013). An organization's value proposition justifies the cost of the product to the customer. The student's value proposition, or level of college experience satisfaction, directly impacts their loyalty (Carvalho & de Oliveira Mota, 2010). The effective understanding and communication of student loyalty is needed for higher education institutions (HEIs) to attract prospective students, retain current students, and engage alumni (Carvalho & de Oliveira Mota, 2010). A college student's value proposition is developed over the course of their multi-year undergraduate experience. A college's value proposition for a student is realized through many forms of engagement including: academic challenge, enriching educational experiences, faculty and student interaction, access to collaborative learning, and support systems on campus (Kuh, 2003; Coates, 2005).

To quantify student engagement, over 600 4-year institutions annually collect data during a student's first year and senior year by means of the National Survey for Student Engagement (NSSE, 2014). This 15-minute survey measures levels of engagement in academic and non-academic settings (Kuh, 2001). The convenience and relatively low NSSE survey expense of approximately \$3.50 per student, makes quantitative data readily accessible for participating institutions. The NSSE provides valuable quantitative data because engagement has been proven to be the leading indicator of student success (Kinzie & Kuh, 2004). In addition to archival NSSE data, there is an opportunity for small, private liberal arts colleges to utilize qualitative data to further understand a student's perception of value and how that might change over time.

From a financial standpoint, student attrition results in the loss of both immediate revenue and lifetime revenue potential (Raisman, 2013).

"The 1,669 colleges and universities studied here collectively lost revenue due to attrition in an amount close to \$16.5 billion (\$16,451,945,426) with the largest single school losing \$102,533,338, the smallest single loss being \$10,584, and the average school losing \$9,910,811. The publicly assisted colleges and universities averaged a \$13,267,214 loss from attrition; the average private college or university lost revenue of \$8,331,593; and for-profit schools lost an average of \$7,921,228" (Raisman, 2013).

A 2003 NCES longitudinal study showed that within six years, 56% of high-income students vs. 25% of low-income students persisted to achieve a bachelor's degree (as stated in Tinto, 2006). In a recent survey of over 300 institutions, "The median retention rate among public colleges in the survey was 77 percent; private colleges was

79. The median six year graduation rate for public institutions was 51 percent; private colleges 63 percent" (Selingo, 2015).

Tsai (2008) found that there is a positive relationship between a student's perceived signal of retention (PSR) and student loyalty, suggesting institutions consider implementing strategies such as faculty tracking student progress, supporting high-risk students, and conducting exit interviews for students who do not persist. Tsai (2008) developed an information cascades-based student loyalty model by considering factors such as teacher quality, student retention, and quality of administrative services that demonstrated significant effects of teacher quality and PSR. Tinto and Pusser (2006) acknowledge that more research is needed on the effects of retention tactics for high-risk, often low-income and academically underprepared students.

Purpose of the Study

Large amounts of quantitative data can be obtained by means of the NSSE. However, can a 15-minute survey truly provide an institution with enough relevant data to adequately understand a student's perception of value in order to help inform strategic changes that will affect future levels of engagement? Harper (2007) suggests that quantitative assessment has overwhelmed significant qualitative research efforts, limiting potential insights gained from a student's valuable first-hand experience. The Longmire Study (2013), which surveyed 34 institutions deduced that the "determination of value is highly personal" (p. 1). Merriam (2009) suggests that this type of personal information can be obtained through qualitative methods such as focus groups and interviews. In combination with the NSSE data, the qualitative data obtained from these methods will provide a more comprehensive view of the student's perception of value at an HEI.

Why should student engagement and perceptions of value matter to HEIs?

Markwell (2007) suggests engagement is required for positive interaction with faculty and the development of learning. Values are inherent in the learning process, which in turn is valuable to the student (Amey, 2006). NSSE Data shows quantitative levels of engagement, but it does not provide a student's perception of value. Project DEEP (Documenting Effective Educational Practices) evaluated 20 NSSE schools with extensive qualitative research. However, their findings only pointed to student success and not specifically to perceptions of value (Kinzie & Kuh, 2004). Whereas student success can be measured at the end of a semester, school year, or educational career, qualitative measurement of a student's perception of value reflect how their learning experience evolves over the course of their entire college experience.

The purpose of this study is to fill the gap in research that currently exists in the perception of value for college students at small, private liberal arts colleges. Value is defined as the difference between the consumer's perception of benefits and the cost associated with relationship continuation with the service provider (Sirdeshmukh, Singh, & Sabol, 2002). This study aims to understand the perception of value for a college student (consumer) in relation to the college (service provider). Hossler, Ziskin, Moore, and Wakhungu (2006) encourage further inquiry of student engagement combined with contextual consideration. A qualitative case study provides institutional context. Qualitative research will supplement the archival quantitative data already obtained through the NSSE. In the past, the Trust, Value, Loyalty framework (Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002) has not been used in combination with the NSSE data to comprehensively evaluate perceptions of value for students at private liberal arts colleges.

The overarching research question guiding this case study is: What are the perceptions of value for students at a small, Midwestern private liberal arts college? For the purpose of this study, the school that was studied was given the surname Midwest College. Additional sub-questions to support the research question in understanding perceptions of value at Midwest College include:

- How do students qualitatively define NSSE engagement indicators at Midwest College?
- How do levels of engagement affect a student's perception of value at Midwest College?
- What are the similarities and / or differences between the perceptions of value between first year students and seniors at Midwest College?
- What engagement moments, experiences, or triggers change a student's perception of value during their time at Midwest College?

Merriam (2009) encourages the researcher to ask qualitative questions about what the respondent feels or believes. Research shows that positive beliefs and attitudes correlate to a student's increased rate of persistence in college (Kahn and Nauta, 2001).

Theoretical framework

According to Merriam (2009), the theoretical framework is the "scaffolding" or underlying structure of a qualitative study (p. 66). The theoretical framework both guides and validates the study. The researcher should use the theoretical framework as the basis of the study. The outcome of the theoretical framework will be the generation of the problem that the study intends to address (Merriam, 2009). The Trust, Value, Loyalty framework, developed by Sirdeshmukh et al. (2002), will be used in this study. The

Trust, Value, Loyalty framework was originally developed to quantitatively assess and understand the practices of service providers that build or break down consumer trust. This framework, built on the tenets of social relationships, marketing principles, and inter-organizational dynamics are all important for consideration when understanding student perceptions of value at a private liberal arts college (Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002).

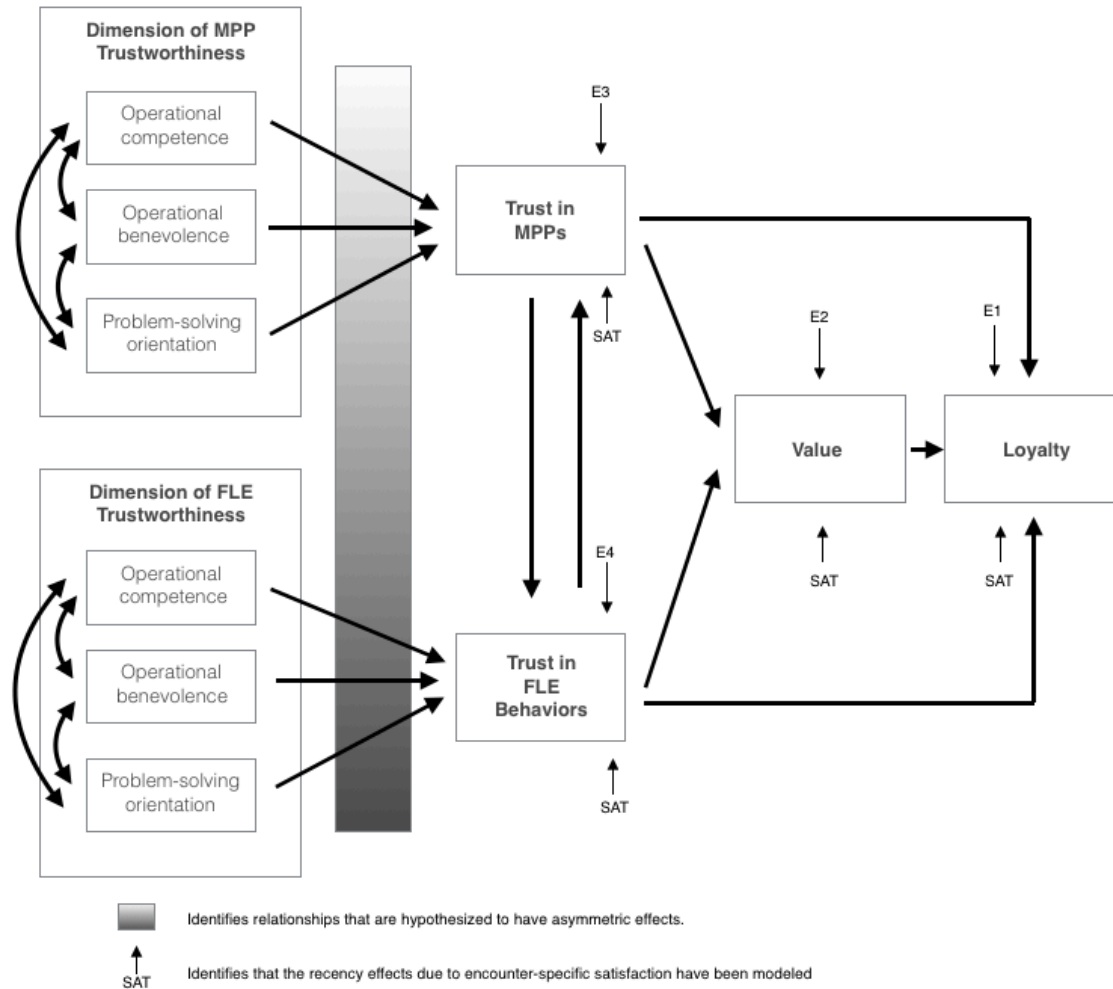


Figure 5: Trust, Value, Loyalty Framework developed by Sirdeshmukh et al. (2002) to quantitatively assess consumer trust in the retail and airline industry.

In the model, Sirdeshmukh et al. (2002) focus on frontline employees (FLE) and management policies and practices (MPP). “This focus is managerially useful because its

pinpoints those frontline behaviors and management that likely are the key drivers of consumer trust” (Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002, p. 15). E represents the specific elements of operational competence, operational benevolence, and problem-solving orientation.

Sirdeshmukh et al. (2002) posit that value is the superordinate consumer goal in relational exchanges and that consumers will not demonstrate loyalty toward the service provider if they do not perceive value in their relational exchange with that service provider (as stated in Carvalho & de Oliveira Mota, 2010, p. 148).

Another important element of the Trust, Value, Loyalty framework is the nature of the asymmetric relationship between a consumer’s trust to the provide base on experiences with FLE’s and MPP’s. Sirdeshmukh et al. (2002) “allow for the possibility that the trust-building effect of a unit positive change in performance on any factor of trustworthy behaviors/practices may not be equivalent to the trust depletion effect produced by a unit negative change in performance” (p. 15-16). In other words, consumer may lack trust in a specific area of operational competence when interactive with FLE’s. However, this does not necessarily deplete their perception of trust for the entire organization. In the context of higher education, this may mean that a student’s loyalty to the college may remain despite the fact they have a lack of trust an institutional MPP. Sirdeshmukh et al. (2012) found that value is “the consistent, significant, and dominant determinant of consumer loyalty regardless of the service category” (p. 32). This finding is especially important in the context of higher education as institutions develop strategies for ongoing engagement and retention.

The principles of the Trust, Value, Loyalty framework along with the NSSE engagement indicators were considered for building the focus group and interview

questions, a key component to gather qualitative findings. Several studies have been conducted in higher education utilizing components of the Trust, Value, Loyalty framework. Ghosh, Whipple, & Bryan (2001) identified antecedents to trust in the context of higher education, Helgesen & Nettet (2007) explored the drivers of student loyalty, Hennig-Thurau, Langer & Hansen (2001) provide ways to manage student loyalty, and Ledden, & Kalafatis (2010) investigated the impact of time on a student's perception of value. Appleton-Knapp & Krentler (2006) assessed satisfaction in terms of managing student expectations. Finally, Carvalho & de Oliveira Mota (2010) used the trust, value, and loyalty framework to determine how trust is initially established and translated into a value proposition for a student by modifying the model of Sirdeshmukh et al. (2002). They identified the perceived value of a student in the context of an HEI by means of quantitative assessment.

Carvalho & de Oliveira Mota (2010) found that

This propensity to reward the HEI occurs because students perceive value in their relational exchange with the HEI and this perception of value is centered on students' trust that the HEI (reflected in both the HEI's personnel as well as the HEI's management/administrative policies and practices) is focused on increasing their ability to succeed in achieving their learning and degree goals and career objectives (p. 161).

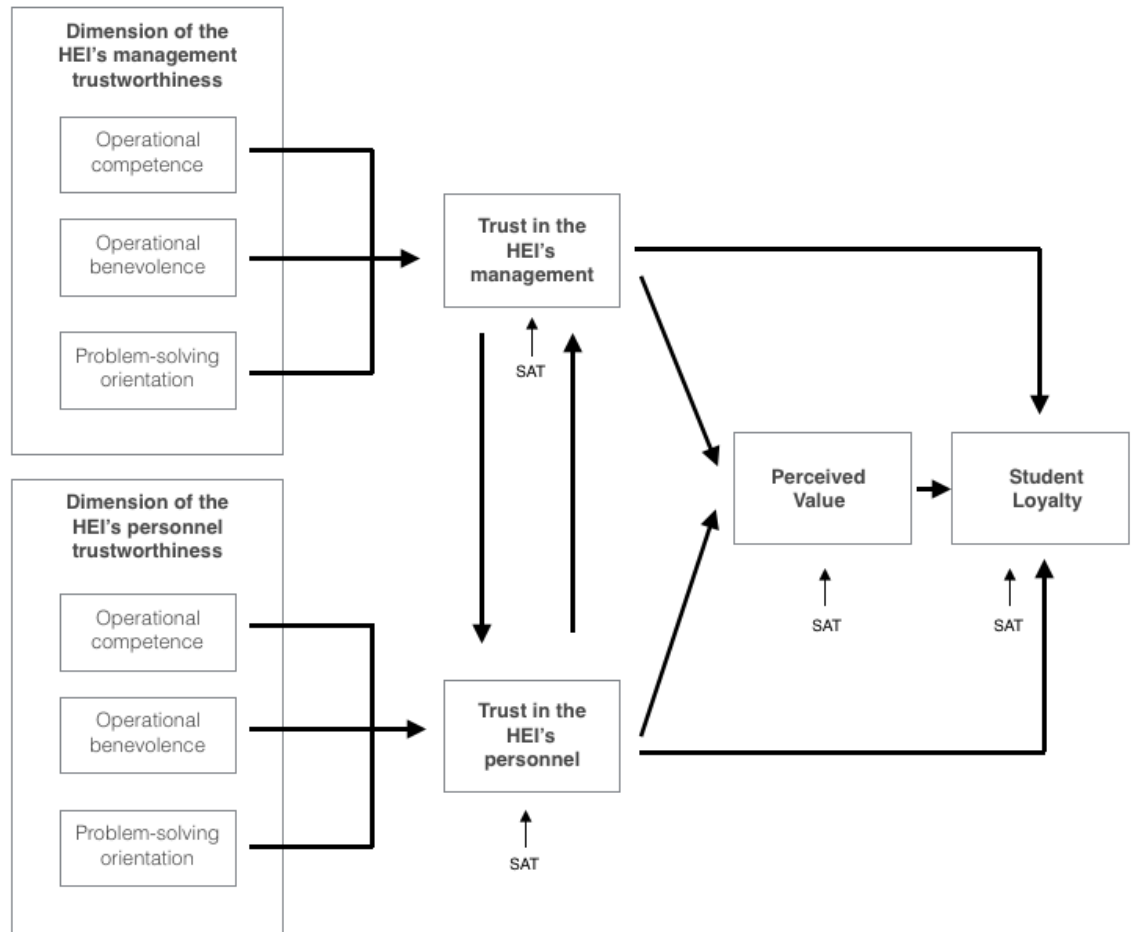


Figure 6: Modified version of the Trust, Value, Loyalty framework for assessment of how trust is initially established for students in an HEI (Carvalho & de Oliveira Mota, 2010)

Carvalho and de Oliveira Mota (2010) found that students not only value when an HEI demonstrates operational competence, operational benevolence, and problem solving orientation, they subsequently reward that institution with continual involvement, enrollment, and positive referral of other prospective students.

The researcher of the current study is building upon both of these models by adding qualitative data to the NSSE data to help inform the phenomenon of a student rewarding the HEI with their loyalty as a result of higher levels of trust and perceived

value. The qualitative interview and focus group questions were built using the NSSE engagement indicators in combination with the key components of the Trust, Value, Loyalty Framework. The proposed model is focused on understanding the perception of value of students and if / how what they value changes during their HEI career.

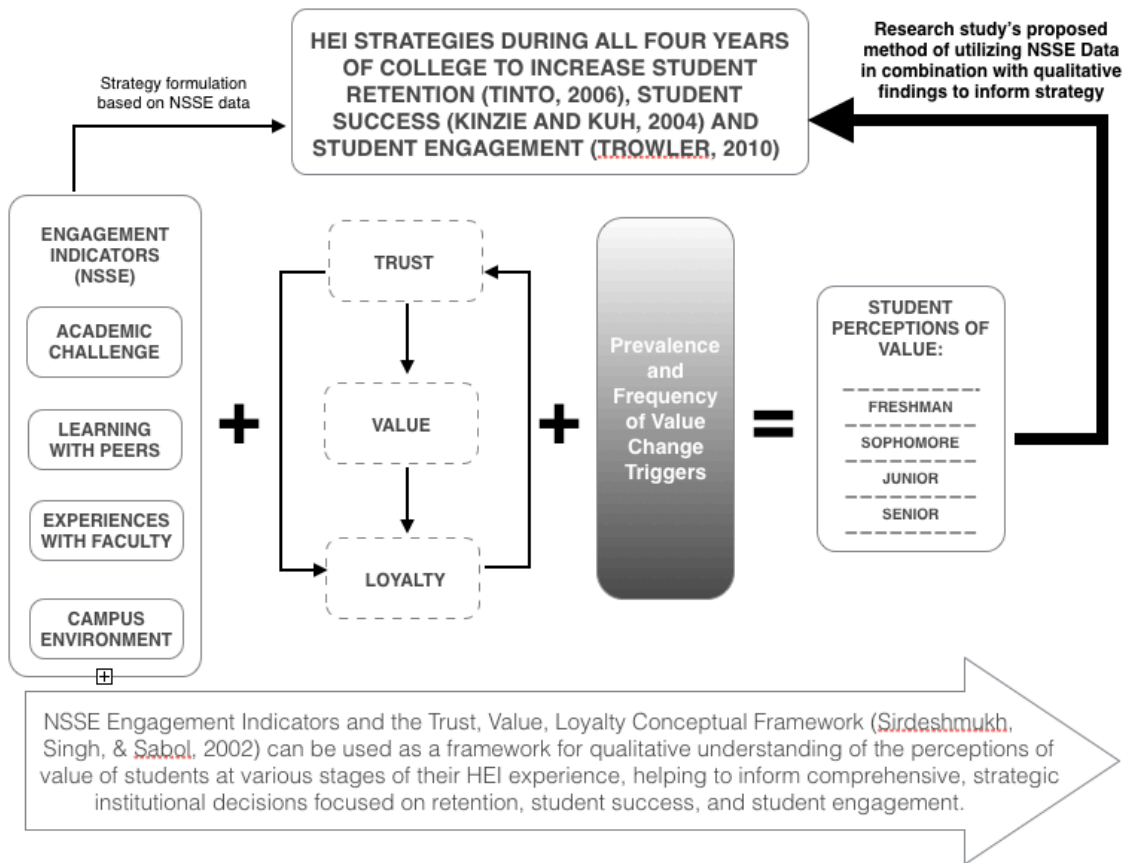


Figure 7: Qualitative perception of value framework developed by researcher

To further explore the theoretical framework, this study investigated a college student’s perception of value through the following conceptual underpinnings: student engagement, student retention, and student success.

Student Engagement

Significant research has shown a correlation of student engagement to many

positive outcomes including: higher student satisfaction, improved persistence rates, and better social interaction (Trowler, 2010).

Student engagement is concerned with the interaction between the time, effort and other relevant resources invested by both students and their institutions intended to optimize the student experience and enhance the learning outcomes and development of students and the performance, and reputation of the institution (Trowler, 2010, p. 2).

There are many dimensions to student engagement. Mann (2001), Krause (2005), Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, and Gonyea (2008), Coates (2005), and Manning and Kuh (2005) help to provide a definition and critical components of student engagement. Fredericks, Blumenfield, and Paris (2004) unite behavioral, emotional and cognitive components of engagement into a multidimensional spectrum and are key researchers in defining the purpose of student engagement. Graham, Tripp, Seawright, and Joeckel (2007), Pascarella, Seifert, and Blach (2010) provide research on the purpose of engagement while Bensimon (2009), Strange and Banning (2001), and Rush and Balamoutsou (2006) give insight into the effects of student engagement. Finally, Busted's (2015) work connects high levels of student engagement to long-term success.

King et al. (2007) provides the seven dimensions for the outcomes of a private liberal arts education: effective reasoning, lifelong learning, well-being, intercultural effectiveness, leadership, moral character, and integration of learning (As stated in Pascarella et al., 2013).

Compared to students attending research universities or regional institutions in the United States, American liberal arts college students in our sample reported

significantly greater overall exposure to clear and organized classroom instruction and significantly more higher-order, reflective, and integrative learning experiences (Pascarella et al., 2013).

The reflective and higher-order outcomes enable liberal arts graduates to apply a problem-solving mindset to their careers, even if it is not completely in line with their original course of study.

Student Retention

College student retention is another important concept that has garnered significant research attention. Vincent Tinto and John Braxton have been prolific researchers in the area of student retention. Tinto's (1999, 1987, 2006) research areas of focus have included learning communities, causes of attrition, and policy considerations. John Braxton has co-authored many articles addressing the influence of active learning (Braxton, Milem & Sullivan, 2001), social integration through institutional policies and practice (Braxton and Mundy), and strategic retention initiatives (Brier, Hirschy, & Braxton, 2008). Hossler et al. (2008) added to the body of retention research with a study focused on policy "levers" such as student orientation and faculty advising (p. 5). The impact of increased retention has a significant implication for HEIs. In a comprehensive study of 1669 colleges and universities Raisman (2013) states the average cost of attrition for a private university is over \$8M per year. Nguyen and LeBlanc (2001) studied 395 freshman and seniors in a business school and found that extrinsic factors such as price and service led to increased perception of reputation and subsequent loyalty to the institution. Nguyen and LeBlanc (2001) also studied an institution's reputation, or the

ability of the organization to live up to the expectations of their constituents, and found that it plays a key role in retention.

Student Success

Student success is often defined with one of five categories: background of the student, institutional characteristics, influence and interaction of faculty and staff, the students perception of learning and group environments, and the effort or grit that a student puts forth (Kuh et al., 2008). Student success is most commonly found at academic institutions where students, faculty and staff have an authentic and intentional focus (Kinzie & Kuh, 2004). Manning and Kuh (2005) also support the notion that a concerted effort on the part of the institution is necessary for consistent student success. Student success is measured in terms of grades, attendance, persistence, and placement rate. Because student success relies on the entire institution, it is often difficult to accurately measure the specific initiatives (Selingo, 2015). Therefore, archival quantitative NSSE data combined with qualitative interview and focus group data will provide a measurement for the factors that lead to student success through the Trust, Value, Loyalty framework.

One measure of student success is persistence, or the rate in which a student moves from their first year in college to graduation. Kahn and Nauta (2001) found that persistence is heavily influenced by academic performance and social integration in the college community. Manning and Kuh (2005) conducted the Project DEEP study in response to the alarming fact that, according to the Department of Education, 25% of students don't persist through their first year of college (as stated in Kahn & Nauta, 2001). Selingo, Carey, Pennington, Fishman & Palmer (2013) found that HEIs must have

a centralized vision of what student success should look like to maximize effectiveness. Innovating and scaling quickly can work for colleges and present students with an opportunity to be actively involved in both their success and the college's success (Selingo et al., 2013).

Assumptions

According to Creswell (2009), research participants and the researcher introduce biases, values and their personal backgrounds to the study. The researcher has several assumptions about the qualitative case study. It is assumed that students have varying perceptions of value based on the levels of engagement at Midwest College. It is also assumed that the perception of value changes over time as a result of triggers or engagement events. Finally, it is assumed that the perceptions of value will provide a different and possibly lower level of engagement than the quantitative NSSE results from the 2014-2015 school year.

Limitations

The aforementioned biases, backgrounds and values also create limitations to the study. These confounding variables, which Creswell (2009) asserts are not easily assessed while the study is taking place, and could affect the questioning strategy of the researcher. A sample size of four focus groups and multiple interviews may not accurately reflect the entire student population. The researcher has chosen to focus on one HEI which impacts generalizability, or the ability to apply the results to other colleges (Creswell, 2009). Another limitation may result from the interpersonal dynamics of the focus groups. The students may not fully share their perception of value because of the influence of other focus group participants. Finally, qualitative data will be obtained from

freshmen, despite the fact that their quantitative perceptions are not reflected in the 2014-2015 NSSE data.

Delimitations

The researcher gathered qualitative data from students who have spent the majority of their college career at Midwest College. The study included students who are 18 years old or older and who are enrolled in the 2015 / 2016 academic school year. The NSSE data evaluated was from the 2014-2015 school year. The researcher chose to make this study point-in-time as opposed to a longitudinal study. In order for the entire student body to be represented, selection of the research participants was facilitated by the Dean of Students at Midwest College.

Definition of Key Terms

Value – the value proposition justifies the cost of the product to the consumer. A student’s value proposition, or level of college experience satisfaction, directly impacts their institutional loyalty (Carvalho & de Oliveira Mota, 2010).

Student Engagement – Shulman (2002) states that student engagement “measures individual intrinsic involvement with their learning” (as stated in Coates, 2007, p. 122). Examples of student engagement include: discussing classroom topics outside of the class with faculty members, creating content with a diverse perspective, working with teams to create a measurable outcome (Kuh, 2003).

Student Retention – percentage of students who return to the college, commonly measured at the start of the third semester. This is typically referred to as first-to-second-year retention rate (Kuh et al., 2011).

Student Success – Manning and Kuh (2005) state the following conditions are needed for student success: “Living mission and lived educational philosophy, unshakeable focus on student learning, environments adapted for educational enrichment, clear pathways, improvement-oriented ethos, and shared responsibility” (p. 1).

Student Persistence – the time it takes for a college student complete their degree. Tinto (1975) developed the Student Integration Theory that connects persistence with the level and quality of interactions between students and faculty (as stated in Kahn and Nauta, 2001).

National Survey for Student Engagement (NSSE) – the NSSE is a quantitative assessment administered to college freshmen and seniors focusing on the following engagement indicators: “academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, enriching educational experiences, and a supportive campus environment” (Kuh, 2003, p. 29).

Research methodology

Since no two students and no two institutions are the same, the value of a current student’s experience may vary widely at the same college. A recent study by the Lawlor Group (2015), a leading market research group for higher education, found that for smaller colleges under 4000 students, there is more variance within an institution for student engagement than there is between institutions (Lawlor Group, 2015). Therefore, understanding the specific qualitative components of a student’s perception of value at a small liberal arts college in addition to comparing quantitative engagement indicators data is important for targeted student recruitment and retention strategies.

A qualitative bounded case study was used to answer the research question. A bounded case study requires the researcher to collect information in various ways during a specific period of time (Creswell, 2009). For this study, the bounded case included students who attended Midwest College during the 2015-2016 school year. The unit of study must be bounded in order for it to be a case (Merriam, 2009). The researcher aimed to analyze highly descriptive information through the lens of the Trust, Value, Loyalty theoretical framework. The challenge of any case study is found in generalizability, which was true for this case since the researcher focused on one organization (Merriam, 2009). An additional challenge for any researcher is to minimize bias. The researcher aimed to minimize bias by taking into consideration differences in the collected qualitative data (Merriam, 2009).

Research Setting

The setting for this qualitative case study was Midwest College, a private higher education institution situated in the central region of the United States. With a full-time undergraduate population of 1060 students and a one to eleven faculty to student ratio, Midwest College is considered a small, private college (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). Midwest College, a nationally ranked liberal arts college, values students experiences, faculty interaction, academic rigor, and the accountability of community (Strategic Plan Retrospective 2015). Midwest College has been recognized by Colleges of Distinction (2015), an organization that highlights schools where students have the greatest opportunities to "learn, grow, and succeed."

The setting for this specific study was chosen because price and value are important for families considering an annual tuition cost of over \$30,000 per year. There

are many benefits for students attending smaller liberal arts colleges. Seifert, Pasarella, Goodman, Salisbury, and Blaich (2010) state that research has empirically shown that liberal arts colleges have a positive effect on cognitive and non-cognitive elements of long-term success for students. "Liberal arts colleges seem to provide the greatest exposure to good practices in undergraduate education as it relates to in-class academic experience" (Seifert et al., 2010, p. 18). These in-class academic experiences engage students in the learning process directly. Astin (1999) states that for years, small, private liberal arts colleges have been considered ideal educational environments to encourage cognitive growth for students (as stated in Pasarella, Wang, Trolian, & Blaich, 2013). In fact, students at liberal arts colleges had greater access to 80% of the good practice indicators compared to all other four-year higher education institutions (HEI's).

Compared to students attending research universities or regional institutions in the United States, American liberal arts college students in our sample reported significantly greater overall exposure to clear and organized classroom instruction and significantly more higher-order, reflective, and integrative learning experiences (Pasarella et al, 2013).

Good practice indicators include: high quality interaction with faculty, academic challenge, influential peer interaction, diverse experiences, and collaborative learning (Seifert et al., 2010). Hart Research Associates cite that 94% of employers are highly supportive of a liberal arts education (as stated in Simon, Perkins, & Crabtree, 2014).

Although Midwest College is a liberal arts college, not all of academic majors are considered liberal arts in the strictest sense of the term. Midwest College offers many majors outside of the traditional humanities, social sciences, mathematics, and natural

sciences. Some of these majors include: business administration, nursing, civil engineering, nonprofit leadership, physical education, elementary education, secondary education, economics, and recreation and sport. This is in response to increased questions about the relevancy of a traditional liberal arts education. "The undiluted liberal arts experience is battling the pressure of escalating costs, rising tuitions, and increasing demands for career training as a primary component of undergraduate study" (Lang, 1999).

As with many liberal arts colleges, Midwest College requires students to complete a core curriculum. The core, which is made up of 35 credit hours distributed over all four years of a student's educational experience, incorporates classes into a comprehensive path of study as opposed to simply offering general education requirements that are not related to the academic major or minor. The goal of the core curriculum is to prepare students of all disciplines to think, speak, and write critically in order to solve some of this world's greatest problems (Core Curriculum, 2015). Elements of the core curriculum, combined with hands-on, experiential learning opportunities can be completed for a second academic major (Strategic Plan Retrospective, 2015).

Although the benefits of a liberal arts education for students are many, the institutional challenges are significant. "About one-third of private institutions missed their goals for the incoming class for the fall of 2015 based on several key metrics: net revenue, total headcount, international students, yield, and full-pay students" (Selingo, p. 5). Higher education faces major changes as a result of financial concerns of families, technological innovation, and increased competition in the industry (Selingo, 2015). "Over the next decade, the number of high-school graduates will decrease, and some

regions— particularly the Northeast and the Midwest— will experience significant declines, according to the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (Selingo, 2015). The next decade will see a decrease in the number of graduating seniors, including the region in which Midwest College’s primary market is situated

Some additional and significant challenges that higher education is facing include an expectation from parents and students for increased student success, more institutional accountability, and access to top-rate educational experiences for low to no cost (Noel Levitz, 2009). The continual struggle and opportunity for private, liberal arts colleges is to clearly define, communicate and execute the value proposition that is most relevant to the needs of the student. The biggest challenges for Midwest College are first year student recruitment and third semester student retention. Since 2007, the number of students enrolled each year has gone down 100 students. For a small, private liberal arts college, the financial impact on the organization is significant (Strategic Plan Retrospective, 2015). Student retention also has a significant impact on the bottom line, with current third semester retention rates hovering around 80 percent.

In light of increased competition in higher education, Midwest College is currently facing the challenge of differentiating itself among the sea of college options for high school students. Even the mission statements of colleges sound similar to each other. A recent Gallup poll of 50 HEI’s found very little difference in the mission, vision, and purpose statement (Dvorak and Busteed, 2015). The study goes on to say that very few of the colleges communicate tangible outcomes to prospective and current students. Kuh states that many scholars agree that clear and positive career outcomes result from out-of-classroom experience (as stated in as stated in Simon, Perkins, & Crabtree, 2014).

Bolman and Deal (2012) state that company presidents who only thought of their companies in terms of the structural frame were found to be ineffective, which suggests a more comprehensive utilization of the four frames is necessary. A college campus is a complex community with an abundance of intellectual, physical, and monetary resources. Effectively managing the interplay of those resources takes continual management of all key stakeholders. Bolman and Deal's (2012) political frame is also necessary in HEI's to cultivate numerous strategic partnerships with community organizations and constituents both on and off campus.

Data Collection – Focus Groups

Collection of qualitative data for this bounded case study included focus groups. Focus groups help the researcher understand the perspectives in that organization (Krueger, 2009). The focus groups took place in the natural setting (Creswell, 2009) of Midwest College. The field researcher collected important notes, including: first impressions, significant findings according to the participant, and how those findings become significant to the researcher (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). The researcher used simple and open-ended questions in order to gather the maximum amount of qualitative data for the focus group (Krueger, 2009). Krueger (2009) recommends conducting three or four focus groups consisting of five to eight participants for each participant group. To fully understand the perceptions of value for students at Midwest College the researcher conducted four focus groups, one for each current cohort, including freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors.

Data Collection – Interviews

Gathering data with multiple methods is important for a researcher in order to improve the validity of the study (Creswell, 2009). Interviews provide an additional qualitative research method. The researcher conducted interviews for each of the freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior cohorts. Good interviews require the asking of good questions (Merriam, 2009). Engagement indicators from the NSSE informed the interview questions. Reflective notes and demographic information are important to help fulfill the interview's observational protocol (Creswell, 2009). The researcher recruited participants for the focus groups and interviews through the Office of Student Life at Midwest College. In order to provide the best research database (Merriam, 2009) for the case study, the researcher digitally recorded all focus groups and interviews for transcription purposes.

Data Collection - Procedure

All interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed by rev.com, a professional transcription service. Student information will remain confidential and their names were replaced with pseudonyms. Interviews and focus groups were conducted until data saturation was reached. Creswell (2002) states that data saturation is “the state in which the researcher makes the subjective determination that new data will not provide any new information or insights for the developing categories” (p. 450). Research participants were not invited to provide perspective on the theoretical framework or conceptual underpinnings. Rather, as Moghaddam (2006) suggests, “grounded theory is not their voice; it is a generated abstraction from their doings and their meanings that are taken as data for the conceptual generation” (p. 59).

Levels of engagement for students at Midwest College were also investigated. How do students define low levels of engagement? What are the key characteristics of high levels of engagement? The research will enable faculty, staff and administration to understand qualitatively if higher or lower levels of engagement affect a student's perception of value. Since freshmen, sophomore, junior and senior students will participate in interviews and focus groups, similarities and/or differences emerged when comparing different cohorts.

Some of the interview and focus group questions helped identify moments, experiences, or triggers that changed a student's perception of value at Midwest College. Understanding what curricular, co-curricular, or campus community moments increase or decrease a student's perception of value will help shape future retention and student success initiatives for the College. The results may help the College consider maintaining, divesting or investing in certain programs based on the response of the participants, especially when coupled with the quantitative NSSE results.

Interview questions

- Please share what your current year is in college (freshman, sophomore, junior, or senior).
- What is your academic course of study?
- What co-curricular / extracurricular programs are you formally involved in (student government, tutor, athletics, Greek life, work study, leadership roles, etc).
- What things at Midwest College increase your level of trust in the institution?
- What things decrease your level of trust?
- What things at Midwest College do you value most?
- What things do you value least?

- In what ways is your loyalty in Midwest College increasing at Midwest College?
- In what ways is your loyalty decreasing at Midwest College?
- How do you define engagement in the context of learning and community at Midwest College?
- What things, both in the classroom and out of the classroom increase your level of engagement?
- What are things that you wish would be present at Midwest College to increase your levels of engagement?
- What role does the faculty play in your learning engagement at Midwest College? Please provide specific examples of how faculty have affected your level of engagement.
- How does your engagement at Midwest College affect your levels of trust, value, and / or loyalty? Please provide specific examples.
- Has what you value at Midwest College changed during your time here? (From the beginning of the school year until now? If applicable, from last year to this year? From when you started at Midwest College to now?).
- What are the triggers, moments, classes, involvement, or participation in support services that have changed what you value at Midwest College?

Archival NSSE Data

The researcher evaluated archival NSSE summary data for freshman and seniors taken during the 2014 / 2015 school year. The researcher obtained IRB approval from Midwest College before obtaining NSSE data.

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) documents dimensions of quality in undergraduate education and provides information and assistance to colleges, universities, and other organizations to improve student learning. Its primary activity is annually surveying college students to assess the extent to which they engage in educational practices associated with high levels of learning

and development (NSSE Annual Report, 2014, p.1).

Midwest College uses the NSSE as an engagement instrument for both freshman and seniors. There are five specific benchmarks that the NSSE uses as categories: academic challenge, collaborative learning, interaction between students and faculty, enriching educational experiences, and supportive campus environments (McCormick, Gonyea, & Kinzie, 2013).

The NSSE, which relies solely on quantitative student feedback, originated in order to identify engagement indicators of how students actually use student resources, resulting in a more accurate representation of college quality (Kuh, 2001). "Although no questionnaire is perfect, the psychometric qualities of the NSSE instrument demonstrate that it is a valid tool for research on student engagement in educational practices associated with high levels of learning and development" (Kinzie et al., 2006, p. 68). The NSSE is often the only accurate source of student engagement information for HEIs (Kuh, 2001). Shulman (2002) states that measuring student engagement allows for the institution to understand how the student is intrinsically investing in their learning (as stated in Coates, 2005). Pike and Kuh, after extensive study of many HEIs who participated in NSSE, developed seven types of engagement: "diverse but interpersonally fragmented, homogenous and interpersonally cohesive, intellectually stimulating, interpersonally supportive, high-tech but low-touch, academically challenging and supportive, and collaborative" (as stated in Trowler, 2010, p. 15).

The researcher aimed to have data reliability, validity, and generalizability. Creswell (2009) suggests several reliability techniques to analyze qualitative findings including: checking for mistakes on the transcripts, verifying consistency in the coding,

and recording as many steps in the coding process as possible. The Trust, Value, Loyalty theoretical framework influenced the categories for the findings. Categories of data should relate directly to the purpose of the research and be “conceptually congruent” (Merriam, 2009, p. 187). The researcher triangulated the findings from the interviews and focus groups with the archival NSSE data to ensure validity (Creswell, 2009). Yin (2003) encourages the researcher to generalize the findings to a broader theory in order to minimize qualitative challenges associated with generalizability. For example, findings in this study may relate to broader theories of student engagement, retention, or value.

Results

After the qualitative data was transcribed and coded, several themes emerged to help answer the research question and sub-questions. To help understand the data, the information was coded into the following categories: trust, value, loyalty, engagement, role of faculty, the change of value, and the triggers that cause changes in value. The results of this study were considered through the lens of the Trust, Value, Loyalty framework, which is based upon past research that focused on trust in social relationships and inter-organizational relationships (Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002). The development of the Trust, Value, Loyalty framework was constructed using the retail and services industry (nonbusiness airline travel). For the non-business airline customer, the theory suggests organizations focus on policies that directly affect the experience of the consumer (Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002). The retail and service industries share characteristics of the student experience in higher education. Carvalho and de Oliveira Mota (2010) used the Trust, Value, Loyalty framework as a starting point to evaluate relational exchanges between students and their higher education institution. Garbarino and Johnson

established consumer trust as a foundational element for consumers' current attitudes and future intentions (as stated in Carvalho & de Oliveira Mota, 2010, p. 147). Shared characteristics include: direct interaction with front line employees, memorable and influential experiences, positive and negative consequences, and differences in experiences based on changes in management policies and procedures (Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002).

Trust

Students at Midwest College were asked questions about how their trust was increase and decreasing. Freshman Participant D succinctly stated, “I trust the institution.” Most participants provided a detailed response of who or what they trust or distrust. Sophomore Participant C referred to the importance of an accessible community of learners:

I think the fact that it's a small knit community, there's not a large amount of students, makes it easier to get to know student better and to trust students. In particular I feel like the value system here kind of perpetuates an environment of trust.

Based on the response of several participants, it is evident that professors do much more than teach. Freshman Participant D stated:

I really feel a level of trust with the smaller classes and being able to talk to professors after class and ask them advice for personal issues as well school issues. I trust that they'll give me their good views like their best answer for each and that they'll keep it confidential and help me grow as a person.

The level of trust that students indicate was both deep and meaningful. Junior Participant F referred to professors at “genuine” and “showing sincere care” of both personal and academic pursuits.

Communication from faculty members is a necessary element to increase trust for students. Authentic and consistent communication, coupled with the use of multiple mediums increases trust according to Sophomore Participant B:

Teachers are very open with us. We get emails. We get their office hours, but we also get their personal, direct lines, and that often is a cellphone. Many teachers ... I can't account for all teachers, but many teachers have the policy of, ‘If you need anything, just message me. I'd prefer an email, but if you can't email me, message me.’

The small class sizes and low faculty to student ratio at Midwest College enable this type of open-door communication. Faculty or adjunct professors teach all classes, and there are no teaching assistants.

Outside of the classroom, students indicated high levels of trust with the Office of Student Life and other campus offices related to autonomy and empowerment for affinity groups. Junior Participant F spoke specifically about how this empowerment increases trust:

[The] ability of our Student Life and administration to allow the individual organizations on campus such as our Student Senate, Greek Life, which like I said I'm involved with, to kind of take the reins on our own. They showed that they trust you in that manner.

In addition to autonomy, there is also accountability. For example, the Honor Code Council of Midwest College includes students who serve in leadership capacities. These students review honor code violations and their opinions, coupled with those of faculty and staff, ultimately affect the decision outcome.

Most of the participants provided examples of how their trust was increasing at Midwest College. There were also opinions expressed about elements of the College that decreased their trust. While size and accessibility was primarily considered a strength, a lack of amenities compared with other colleges led to a decrease in trust for Freshman Participant E: “A lack of opportunities or college offered products that are not necessarily offered at other colleges of similar size, but could be offered here very easily or feasibly.” The perceived lack of resources affected other areas of the student experience besides amenities.

Several participants expressed a concern for a lack of diversity at Midwest College, resulting in a decrease in trust. Freshman Participant B stated, “I don't consider there's a lot of diversity on campus, especially at the level of the professors. Most of them focus on one area and it's pretty biased, it's inconsistent.” Whereas Freshman Participant B was primarily referring to diversity of thought, Sophomore Participant B stated:

I would also add it's hard for me to trust a college or university when there's a lack of resources or support for different groups of students on campus. There should be support and resources for all students on campus regardless of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc.

Students spoke freely of these concerns in the focus groups and interviews. It was evident that their concerns regarding a lack of diversity were very important, but did not create a pervasive negative tone to their other comments throughout the interview / focus group.

Value

The topic of value garnered a wide range of responses. The researcher made it clear that the questions were referring to value, not the individual values of the participants. Similar to the responses to the topic of trust, Junior Participant A referred to a high level of commitment and investment from professors:

The one-on-one with the teachers, I think that's the biggest difference between a private school and a big state school. I think that really changes your education that you get. I don't know how to describe the professors; a majority of them are really dedicated. It's not like you're another student. They invest in your life.

Since professors at Midwest College are also involved with affinity groups such as music, their influence and impact is apparent outside of the classroom according to Sophomore Participant D:

Another thing is involvement on campus; it's very easy to get involved in many things, especially non-major things. I compose music and it's outside my major, so on perhaps large campuses, especially on music programs, the composition, instructor, anything like that, they might not have time for a non-composition student to have their works played, or critique their works or things like that.

Whereas here I can simply walk into an office or ask a professor to see if this can be performed.

Safety was also a theme that surfaced when students considered in what ways their value was increasing for Midwest College. Freshman Participant F stated:

I value and appreciate having an environment where I am safe and secure to not only physically but as a developing young person to be able to pursue the things that I want to pursue and have the assistance of tried and tested faculty and administrators.

The location of the College was first referred to in conjunction with what students value. Junior Participant B, a nursing major, stated she valued having “12 different hospitals that we can go to and I just think that's super neat because some of my other friends, at other schools, get 2 hospitals, but they just switch each rotation.”

The consistent increase in tuition every year has negatively affected some of the participant's perception of value. Freshman Participant specifically stated, “I value least the amount of time and energy that it is perceived put into our lawn around campus.” Some of the participants felt that the priority of keeping the grounds in good condition was of less value to them than making improvements to dorms. This response supported by several other participants in the focus group.

Although the campus community at Midwest College is small, the high number of student organizations seems to generate cliques according to Junior Participant C:

In that aspect, there does seem to be cliques that form, so there is that overarching sense of community, but it seems maybe the presence of cliques is maybe more predominant, but I would feel that is not as big as an issue here as it would be at a high school, or maybe a different college.

The cliques not only create tension for some students, it also isolates groups and decreases overall campus involvement at campus and sporting events. Several participants alluded to a lack of school spirit at campus events. Sophomore Participant B stated:

It kind of stinks just because like the community is great when you're on the quad or during class time when you see everyone, but then outside of classes you don't really see anyone. It's just like they don't show up to sports that much.

Loyalty

Relationships were a primary ingredient in the responses by participants regarding how their loyalty was increasing at Midwest College. Relationships with faculty, staff, fellow students, and the surrounding community were all mentioned. Sophomore Participant B stated, "The support that I've been shown through faculty and staff has greatly influenced my loyalty to this school." Even students early in their career are experiencing an increase in their loyalty to the College. Freshman Participant A described this increase in loyalty:

Yes with like emotional investments both in the classroom and with the people around me I can feel a sense of community and kind of invest in myself into helping better this institution. Some of the organizations that I'd like to join, they help better this institution with academics and technologically. I can definitely feel my loyalty starting to build up.

Freshman Participant D concurred with a growing sense of loyalty to the college in the context of the relationship of the institution to the surrounding community:

The relationship that this college has with the surrounding community creates a more valid sense of what the college does and all of its actions in this community, so that creates more loyalty for me seeing other people that respect the place that I have chosen to come to.

Interestingly, several students further along in their career at Midwest College stated that the increase in their loyalty was towards professors and affinity groups. Junior Participant D reflected on this dynamic:

As I get close to the graduation, my loyalty I feel like it's increasing, but I can't say that my loyalty to the college is increasing. It's much more the loyalty to the professors that I have formed these relationships to and to their department. Like the theater that I am involved in, that's where my loyalty is because that's where I've gotten the loyalty back.

Senior Participant C had a similar response:

I would say that my loyalty is probably more ingrained in the specific groups that I'm a part of and seeing them develop and continue to move forward. I know that those who had things that after I graduate I'm going to look back on and feel that loyalty because I have a much stronger connection to those than maybe Midwest College as a whole.

The sense of pride and loyalty extends to the relationship that some students, including Senior Participant G, have had with alumni of the College:

Just over time I've developed a sense of pride and I feel very proud to have attended this school. When I meet a lot of the alumni and see their successes and the business acumen of a lot of our alumni it definitely speaks volumes of the

education and quality of education that I've been obtaining over these year. I just definitely feel like, now more than ever, I feel like I'm looking forward to the proud alumni experience, I'm looking forward to being as involved as some of the alumni that came before me.

The elements that decreased loyalty for the research participants were not as prevalent. However, Freshman Participant F communicated a concern of how tuition revenue was used:

The lack of very visible ways in which our tuition is being justified; some students, myself included, regarding the comment about the lawns, don't get to really see the value, the numerical value, because finances put stress on students even when it shouldn't necessarily be their main concern. It decreases my loyalty when I see things that I feel should not be a focus of Midwest College; that students should come first, and that sometimes the college does not place the student first, in the eyes of the student.

College fit was also referred to by Sophomore Participant D, who referred to students transferring after their first year as “demoralizing” because they do not see Midwest College as “their place.” Sophomore Participant D also commented on the prevalence of negative comments made about the College on popular social media platforms.

Engagement

Students define engagement in different ways at Midwest College. Whereas the NSSE captures engagement indicators at the beginning and end of as student’s college career, this study aimed to understand how engagement helps to shape a student’s perception of

value in all four cohorts. Some students, like Freshman Participant A, felt that personal ownership was necessary for engagement to occur:

Academically I would define engagement as energetically being a part of your studies and that can be in class. People have different levels of outgoingness on whether they're going to speak or not in that situation but being alert and being fully present when you're in that place. Paying attention a professors teaching on and not getting distracted with other things you have going on and then if you have questions then I'd say like going and talking to your professors.

Several participants recognized engagement in the classroom, from administration and within their affinity groups. Junior Participant E has felt the effect of a professor's commitment to engage students and has felt "legitimized" in a way where they are "communicating their subject as one person to another person." Junior Participant F has observed engagement occur in the classroom and through support services such as Student Life.

That hits somebody [when] they realize you are not just a student. They create a personal relationship with you. That's beneficial. Not even talking about professors, there are individuals that I have worked on campus, people in Student Life that will contact me for things that aren't even really related to Midwest College themselves or the institution themselves.

Student Life is also responsible for facilitating opportunities for student engagement. This has been recognized and appreciated by Freshman Participant F:

The student body, upperclassmen, and faculty, and administration make it a priority to engage in things like orientation for first years. The homecoming week

is very important for engaging students socially, and even if one event isn't very successful in getting a high turnout, they continuously put forth effort into engaging with the students.

Despite the favorable views of engagement that many participants had in the context of the classroom and their affinity groups, comments were made also about the perceived disengagement of administration. Senior Participant D commented:

I'm going to be honest, I believe that on an administrative level the College is engaged with the aspect of student's needs that they want to be engaged with. With that being said, they ignore or fail to see understanding of the aspect of student needs that it seems too difficult for them to handle, or they take them out of their comfort zone or may take extra time that's required of them that they are willing to give.

Senior Participant C expressed concern about a the disconnect between administration's intent to engage and a follow up strategy unseen by the student:

I would say that while they ask a lot of times for our feedback, when it comes to surveys at the end of every semester, very rarely do we ever see that feedback put into action or even just a simple, "These are the next steps we took after receiving this feedback." We think they look through it, we hope they look through it, we hope they act on it, but some sort of notification.

Certainly not all students feel this disconnect. Senior Participant G, who was recently asked by administration to take part in a sub-committee of students to provide critical feedback for a significant institutional hiring decision, internalized the opportunity: "But

just being able to be a part of that in general it allowed me to meet some people who have accomplished so much and kind of give me the belief that I can accomplish these things.” The theme of lack of student engagement surfaced again during this question for Junior Participant C: “We have struggled with student engagement. I personally feel that student engagement, and extra curricular activities is low here.” Many components of the responses during the questions about trust, value, and loyalty were evident when discussing engagement including: investment by professors, size and structure of College enabling classroom engagement, positive association with affinity groups, perception of disconnect with administration, disconnect as a result of cliques among affinity groups, and meaningful opportunities to engage in projects or initiatives as a result of being asked by faculty or administration.

Faculty

The responses about the positive impact and role the professors play in facilitating engagement were consistently positive among all cohorts. Freshman Participant A’s expectations were met and exceeded: “I could tell that it would be a good relationship between the students and professors but I’ve been amazed as I’ve actually been here at how consistent that is.” Going above and beyond was common in the responses. Faculty members, according to Freshman Participant A, are “generous” with their resources. Junior Participant C added, “Faculty has played an enormous role in how I spend my time here.”

Junior Participant reaffirms the sentiment that a student’s loyalty based on the personal interaction with faculty:

Much more it's the professor who helped me exponentially more than the college overall has. I mean although there are people in the administration that I love and I'm very loyal to, it just seems that the professor is what is going to be lasting for me.

Senior Participant H transfers their loyalty towards professors to loyalty for the College:

“I think that the personal relationship relates back to the trust that you form with everyone here. Then, because of that you have a greater trust for the rest of the college as a whole.” It is evident that many of the students in the study felt a genuine concern from the faculty. Sophomore Participant B stated:

All of the professors care about us. They tell us that they want us to succeed multiple times. They tell us if you have any problems, come into our office. We're always available. Hearing that they care about you and like want you to succeed, they want you to come into their office all the time, like just chat with them about things other than school is really great.

The challenge of academics at Midwest College facilitates positive engagement with professors. Students recognize this as an opportunity for self-improvement.

Freshman Participant A acknowledges the importance of academic challenge and the corresponding accountability: I think when the professors challenge more, that can engage you more because you're when you're getting that kind of consistent feedback on what you're doing, you're held accountable in a positive way on continuing to push yourself and see how far you can go with your learning.

Freshman Participant C connected academic challenge to the process of improving their chances of being more competitive professionally upon graduation:

I need to know that if I'm coming to an institution and paying this institution money, a good amount of money to be educated, then I need to know that what I'm being taught will make me competitive for whatever future decisions I decide to make.

Junior Participant A is not connected to an athletic team at Midwest College. However, “academic competition” is important because of the self-motivation it facilitates. A student’s self-motivation created as a result of faculty intentionally and thoughtfully challenging and supporting students was consistent throughout the data.

Change in Value

An important reason for the gathering of this research was to determine if what students value changes over their time at Midwest College. The responses consistently showed that what a student values does indeed change over time. Freshman Participant C expressed anticipation of this change: “I think that is something each person has to understand when they come to an institution, you may not walk out the same person you were when you walked in.” Freshman Participant A explains the change that occurs has a result of a commitment on the part of both the faculty and student:

I think that I came in valuing the kind of environment that was going to nurture learning at this very fundamental level and the professors, and just all the student body that was really just trying to encourage that. At the beginning of your time here is like you don’t have those kinds of deep connections with people so you can know like, oh, I have really good professors and I really appreciate them. You don’t know any; you haven’t heard their stories yet or experienced real discussions with them and gotten feedback and had this kind of push and pull of

the learning process that continues to change the way you view this overall direction of learning, and a revision of that learning.

Junior Participant D confirmed this change and describes the transformation as going from a pursuit of happiness to a fulfillment of purpose in the context of academic pursuit and establishing a strong foundation for the future:

The start of my sophomore year, the main value was a certain level of happiness. I had spent my whole freshman year on YouTube in my room alone, just watching videos about, just about what to do with your life when you don't know what to do with your life. Then the responsibility, the values, what I valued landed on how happy I was studying what I was studying, and how happy I was looking at the future.

Junior Participant E communicate a similar sentiment, but expressed that the initial value of being a part of a campus community has changed to less social and more academic: “I loved being up and around all the things that were happening with my class. Now I'm here for the academics.”

Reflecting what was valued during her past four years at Midwest College, Senior Participant D stated:

When I was a first-year at this College I valued the end result, my own personal success. I thought, ‘You're going to go to College, get all the answers and go be successful and make a bunch of money.’ I'm happy to say that my experience here at this College has let me to know and believe that it's not the end result that I actually value, but it's the process.

For Senior Participant H, the process involved leadership roles that were not necessarily anticipated when starting as a freshman: “It's changed for me in, I didn't anticipate how many leadership roles I'd be able to be a part of...[including] being someone that people can come talk to about what's going on.” Several participants communicated that the change in what they valued was more of a strengthening and confirmation of something they value when they started at Midwest College.

Triggers for Change in Value

Upon learning from participants that what they valued had changed or been strengthened over the course of time, the researcher explored the specific triggers that caused this change. Freshman Participant A took experienced this change as a result of introspection:

It seemed even though it was academically related it was also kind of a personal. ‘How’s my involvement? Do I need to be paying more attention to letting others speak, or do I need to be speaking more?’ Trying to get some kind of outside feedback on that even though it wasn’t directly related to something we would get graded on.

Freshman Participant D connected a change in value at Midwest College to a first semester class:

My first semester for a specific class it was a philosophy class. It challenged me and basically with my schedule and football it’s been every Saturday and Friday night working on this class and doing my best on it because it’s probably one of the more challenging writing classes I ever had. I ended up getting an A, and

getting to understand that you know the hard work for that class ended up paying off.

Freshman Participant E anticipates a change of community dependence to independence as they approach graduation: “Upon coming here, the lack of independence that was needed to survive in this atmosphere was somewhat striking to me...I think that that will change closer to my senior year.”

Sophomore Participant D connected a change in value to the formal welcoming they experienced during their fraternity orientation:

Going through initiation for a fraternity last year, I got to see how the seniors in that fraternity appreciated their time, both at the school as well as in the fraternity. It really made me realize how important it is to enjoy your time in school and not just always look to the future and what I'm going to get out of school, but also just to enjoy being in college while I'm studying and everything.

The core curriculum that all students experience at Midwest College was the catalyst for change for Junior Participant A: “I have to think my own thoughts.” Other participants, including Junior Participant E, echoed how academic rigor and the direct support of a professor caused them to change what they valued:

[The professor] was very much engaged in my presentation, my prep work, way up to the day of the presentation. Just general encouragement, she was extremely engaged, and that was ... I don't think I could have been able to go through that entire process without her help with that.

Academic rigor combined with intentional feedback from faculty served as a catalyst for the change in value for Junior Participant F:

I had a professor who really pushed us. I remember getting my first or second paper back. I don't think I actually did that poorly on the paper. It was just that I looked at the paper and turned it over and then it was just a page and a half of remarks. I was just like it really hit me, I'm like okay, like I need to readjust my thinking. I need to readjust like who I am. It's going to be college, and I can get good grades. It's going to be that. I can have the social life too, and just readjust what you focused on.

The feedback from the professor was constructive and supportive, initiating a dialogue in the student's mind about the prioritization of important activities. Ownership of these priorities was consistent with Junior Participant A's realization that "I have to think my own thoughts."

NSSE

The NSSE data from Midwest College was evaluated and utilized to help shape the research questions. Below is the NSSE data for freshmen and seniors during the 2014-2015 school year.

Engagement Indicators (EIs) provide a useful summary of the detailed information contained in your students' NSSE responses. By combining responses to related NSSE questions, each EI offers valuable information about a distinct aspect of student engagement. Ten indicators, based on three to eight survey questions each (a total of 47 survey questions), are organized into four broad themes as shown below (NSSE, 2014)

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Engagement Indicator</i>
<i>Academic Challenge</i>	Higher-Order Learning Reflective & Integrative Learning Learning Strategies Quantitative Reasoning
<i>Learning with Peers</i>	Collaborative Learning Discussions with Diverse Others
<i>Experiences with Faculty</i>	Student-Faculty Interaction Effective Teaching Practices
<i>Campus Environment</i>	Quality of Interactions Supportive Environment

Figure 8: NSSE Engagement Indicators

The following describes how to interpret the Midwest College data from the comparisons with top 50% and top 10% institutions report:

While the average scores for most institutions are below the mean for the top 50% or top 10%, your institution may show areas of distinction where your average student was as engaged as (or even more engaged than) the typical student at high-performing institutions. A check mark signifies those comparisons where your average score was at least comparable to that of the high performing group. However, the absence of a significant difference between your score and that of the high-performing group does not mean that your institution was a member of that group (NSSE, 2014)

First-Year Students		Mean	Your first-year students compared with					
Theme	Engagement Indicator		NSSE Top 50%			NSSE Top 10%		
			Mean	Effect size	✓	Mean	Effect size	✓
Academic Challenge	Higher-Order Learning	44.3	40.6 *	.27	✓	42.7	.12	✓
	Reflective and Integrative Learning	41.0	37.3 **	.30	✓	39.3	.14	✓
	Learning Strategies	43.1	41.2	.14	✓	43.4	-.02	✓
	Quantitative Reasoning	29.5	28.8	.05	✓	30.6	-.07	✓
Learning with Peers	Collaborative Learning	38.2	34.7 *	.26	✓	37.0	.09	✓
	Discussions with Diverse Others	46.9	43.2 *	.24	✓	45.6	.09	✓
Experiences with Faculty	Student-Faculty Interaction	24.9	23.3	.10	✓	26.9	-.13	
	Effective Teaching Practices	42.7	42.4	.02	✓	44.6	-.15	
Campus Environment	Quality of Interactions	45.8	44.0	.15	✓	46.0	-.02	✓
	Supportive Environment	39.0	39.4	-.03	✓	41.4	-.18	
Seniors		Mean	Your seniors compared with					
Theme	Engagement Indicator		NSSE Top 50%			NSSE Top 10%		
			Mean	Effect size	✓	Mean	Effect size	✓
Academic Challenge	Higher-Order Learning	43.6	43.3	.02	✓	45.3	-.13	
	Reflective and Integrative Learning	42.7	41.1	.13	✓	43.1	-.03	✓
	Learning Strategies	41.3	42.5	-.08	✓	44.9 **	-.26	
	Quantitative Reasoning	33.6	31.3	.13	✓	33.0	.04	✓
Learning with Peers	Collaborative Learning	37.5	35.4	.16	✓	37.7	-.01	✓
	Discussions with Diverse Others	42.3	43.9	-.10		45.8 **	-.23	
Experiences with Faculty	Student-Faculty Interaction	34.4	29.5 ***	.30	✓	34.4	.00	✓
	Effective Teaching Practices	42.6	43.0	-.03	✓	45.1 *	-.19	
Campus Environment	Quality of Interactions	45.7	45.3	.03	✓	47.4	-.15	
	Supportive Environment	36.7	36.1	.04	✓	39.0	-.17	

Table 1: NSSE Top 50% and 10% comparison report for Midwest College

The chart above shows Midwest College in comparison to the Carnegie Class of schools, a group of 164 private liberal arts colleges across the country. An important consideration when interpreting this data is the effect size. “An effect size, considered a measure of practical significance, is any measure of the strength of the relationship between two variables” (Chen, Gonyea, Sarraf, BrckaLorenz, Korkmaz, Lambert, Shoup, and Williams, 2009, p. 41). “NSSE’s comparison reports use Cohen’s d, the standardized difference between the institution’s mean and the comparison group’s mean, calculated by dividing the mean difference by the pooled standard deviation” (Rangea, 2009, p. 1). NSSE has developed their own effect size interpretation scale to address the intentionally vague nature of Cohen’s d (Rangea, 2009). None of the effect sizes for Midwest College

are over .30, the minimum threshold considered medium strength when comparing the Midwest College’s results to other colleges. Many of the effect sizes are considered trivial, especially when comparing Midwest College to the NSSE top 10%. The dilemma of low effect sizes can be addressed by understanding the numbers in the proper context. By assessing the frequencies for individual items on the NSSE results report, HEI’s will be able to understand the effect size in a more relevant and meaningful context. The vague interpretation and challenges of contextualizing low effect sizes further justifies the use of qualitative data collection to more fully understand student engagement.

The chart below shows Midwest College in comparison to the Plains Private schools, a group of 64 schools regional private colleges.

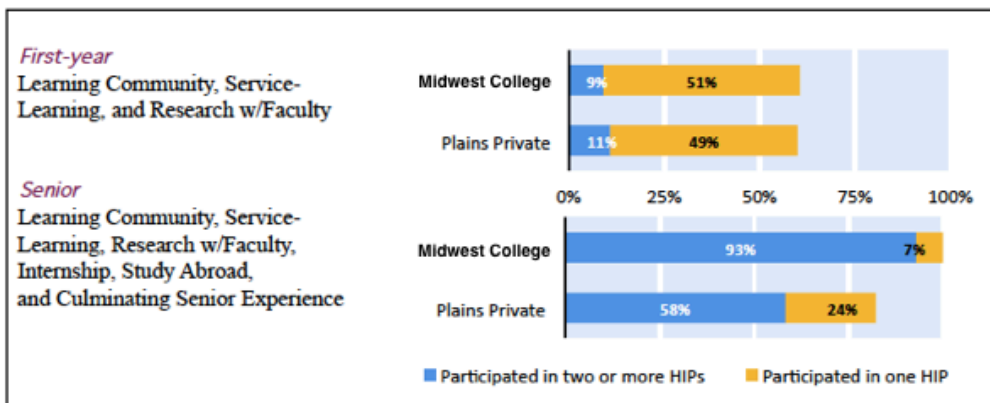
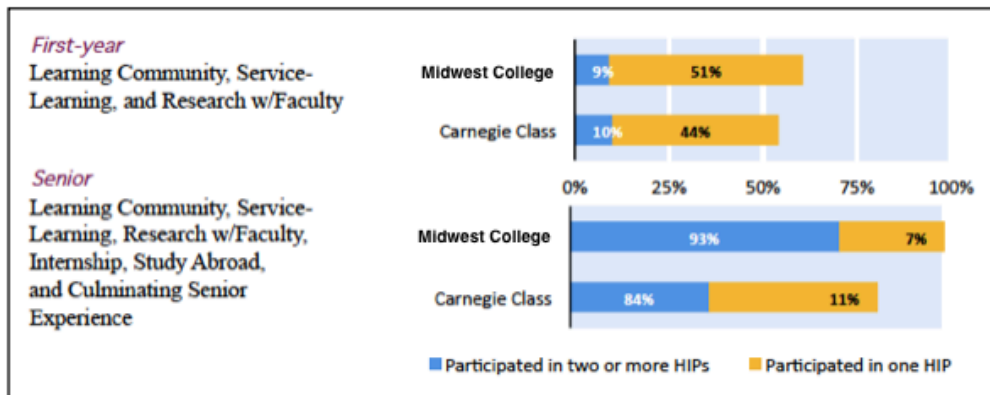


Table 2: NSSE High Impact Practices comparison report for Midwest College

High Impact Practices (HIPs) are the only component of the NSSE survey that asks a student to assess their experience cumulatively, as opposed to the standard questions that only ask for current year engagement assessment (NSSE, 2014). According to NSSE (2014), High Impact Practices include:

1. Learning community or some other formal program where groups of students take two or more classes together
2. Courses that included a community-based project (service-learning)
3. Work with a faculty member on a research project
4. Internship, co-op, field experience, student teaching, or clinical placement
5. Study abroad experience
6. Culminating senior experience (capstone course, senior project or thesis, comprehensive exam, portfolio, etc.)

The following is an explanation from the Midwest College NSSE report related to HIPs:

Due to their positive associations with student learning and retention, certain undergraduate opportunities are designated "high-impact." High-Impact Practices (HIPs) share several traits: They demand considerable time and effort, facilitate learning outside of the classroom, require meaningful interactions with faculty and students, encourage collaboration with diverse others, and provide frequent and substantive feedback (NSSE, 2014).

George Kuh (2008) states "participation in these [high impact] practices can be life-changing" (as stated in NSSE, 2014). It is evident from the chart above that Midwest College has a commitment to engagement resulting in higher rankings when compared to both Plains Private and Carnegie Class schools. It is also evident that there is strong

quantitative evidence showing Midwest College is engaging first year students and seniors. The HIPs indicate a significant increase of HIPs (93% experiencing at least two) saturation among the majority of students at Midwest College by the time they take the NSSE survey their senior year.

Discussion

Trust

For an HEI to be sustainable long-term, Ghosh, Whipple, Bryan (2001) suggest that student trust remain central to strategy. Trust can be defined as the consumer's confidence in the service provider's execution of their promise (Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002). For the purpose of this study, trust is defined as the student's level of confidence in the higher education institution's promise to deliver a quality educational experience. Ghosh et al. (2001) defines trust as the level to which a student believes that the college will assist in ensuring a quality educational and career outcome. As opposed to looking at the outcomes measures for student trust, Carvalho and de Oliveira Mota (2010) analyzed the process by which students gained trust during their time at the HEI and found that consumer trust is instrumental in creating customer loyalty. Since consumer trust does not happen in a vacuum, frontline employees (FLE) and management policies and practices (MPP) were the two primary facets considered when the trust, value, and loyalty framework was constructed (Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002).

Ghosh and Whipple (2001) state that student trust is the result of eight different perceptions: expertise, congeniality, openness, sincerity, integrity, cooperation, timeliness and tactfulness. Hennig-Thurau, Langer and Hansen, (2001) found that the trustworthiness of front line employees and the institutional policies had significant and

positive effect on a student's level of trust in the HEI. Despite the lack of research that has been focused on measuring trust in colleges, Ghosh et al. (2001) found in their study that a student's lack of trust in a higher education institution can have a significant and drastic effect because of a reduction in quality perceptions and an increase in student attrition. This depletion of trust has significant and negative impact on the financial bottom line for the organization (Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002).

Value

Value is defined as the "the consumer's perception of the benefits minus the costs of maintaining an ongoing relationship with a service provider" (Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002, p. 32). Value for the consumer increases as the value between them and the service provider become more congruent (Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002). Ledden and Kalafatis (2010) talk extensively about how value is not only determined prior to a customer (student) making a purchase, but also continuously re-assessed after the purchase has been made. This need for continual reassessment justifies a qualitative understanding of students' perception of value during all four years of their time in college. The judgments and perceived trust of the student affect the value that is placed on staff, faculty and institutional policies (Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002). The role of faculty and staff is critical in inspiring students to stay motivated in their learning and class participation. As trust increases, so too will the perceived value of the higher education experience (Ghosh and Whipple, 2001). Ledden and Kalafatis state that perceived value more accurately predicts future behavior (negative or positive) than student satisfaction (as stated in Hennig-Thurau et al., 2001).

The Gallup-Purdue Index (2014) found that employed graduates of a college who felt well prepared with experiences such as internships, research opportunities, and involvement in extracurricular organizations were three times as likely to be engaged at work. These types of experiences increase the value proposition both during college and in the workplace upon graduation. The Longmire Study (2014) surveyed over 12,000 students in the summer of 2014 and found that the number one reason students make their choice to stay in college is due to high levels of engagement with current students. Prospective students felt valued in their interaction with the campus community and could envision themselves investing the time, money, and resources for the next four years on that campus. John Holland's congruence theory demonstrated a link between outcomes and environment using six key categories: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional. However, Arnold (2004) has demonstrated that the link between environment and outcomes may not be as strong in the areas of satisfaction or perceived value.

The customer's perception of value is constantly evolving and requires deep care and stewardship by the service provider. External factors include quality, environment, personnel, staff support while internal factors include emotions, knowledge, and affect (Ledden & Kalafatis, 2010). Research has been conducted on the perceptions of value from the perspective of administration, including an extensive study by the Chronicle of Higher Education in 2014. The study showed that 40% of the administrators, with a majority of positive responses from public institutions, felt that their HEI provided an excellent value for their students (Selingo, 2014). The Longmire Study (2013) helped define value as being highly personal and found the three primary determinants of value

are overall quality, cost, and level of excitement to attend.

Loyalty

The management elements of an HEI show significant influence on consumer loyalty, thus an increased value proposition for the end user (Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002). Hennig-Thurau et al. (2001) built the relationship quality-based student loyalty model, which demonstrated perceptions of quality, students' trust in the staff and faculty, and the students' personal commitment to the higher education institution resulted in student loyalty. Yu and Dean (2001) studied the emotional satisfaction of service delivery and found a significant relationship between satisfaction and loyalty. This relationship applied in both negative and positive interactions. Helgesen & Nettet (2007) conducted a study of 389 bachelor level students and found a positive correlation between the student's perception of the HEI's reputation (consumer satisfaction) and the student's loyalty to that institution.

Student Engagement

Carini, Kuh and Klein (2006) state that among all of the predictors of student success, engagement is one of the best. Student engagement has the reciprocal requirement of institutions deploying resources and student's investing time and energy (Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonya, 2008). Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004) provide definition for the types of student engagement: behavioral engagement requires participation, emotional engagement is driven from both negative and positive experiences, and cognitive engagement requires an academic investment on the part of the student. Coates (2005) relates student engagement with positive experiences that bring together students and keep them connected, making it less desirable for them to

want to leave the institution. Generally speaking, students at liberal arts colleges are more engaged than students from other types of HEIs (Kuh, 2006). Engagement strategies work well for the persistence of all student groups, especially for those of lower ability and students of color (Kinzie, Shoup, & Gonyea, 2006).

Literature about student engagement goes back to John Dewey, suggesting that achievement is a direct result of active participation from students (as stated in Trowler, 2010). Outcomes of engagement include achievement and the prevention of students dropping out (Fredricks et al., 2004). Carini et al. (2006) found that there was a positive, but relatively small, relationship between student engagement and critical thinking skills for college students. Trowler (2010) states that students can engage across all three dimensions of Bloom's taxonomy: behavioral, emotional, and cognitive.

National Survey for Student Engagement

There are five groupings or clusters that the NSSE uses in order to simplify the results: "academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, enriching educational experiences, and supportive campus environment" (Coates, 2005, p. 4). Shulman (2002) states that measuring student engagement allows for the institution to understand how the student is intrinsically investing in their learning (as stated in Coates, 2007). Pike and Kuh, after extensive study of many HEIs who participated in NSSE, developed seven types of engagement: "diverse but interpersonally fragmented, homogenous and interpersonally cohesive, intellectually stimulating, interpersonally supportive, high-tech but low-touch, academically challenging and supportive, and collaborative" (as stated in Trowler, 2010, p. 15).

There is a significant body of research on how engagement is measured.

Behavioral engagement is typically measured by school policies and completion of tasks. Emotional engagement typically relies on self-reporting and is often conflated with behavioral scales. Finally, cognitive engagement is also typically self-reported and is often difficult to accurately assess through observation (Fredricks et al., 2004). Other HEI engagement instruments include: Cooperative Institutional Research Program's Student Information Form, and the College Student Survey (Kuh, 2001). Most notably, Coates (2007) determined from the data gathered from the Student Engagement Questionnaire (SEQ) that there is a difference between academic engagement and social engagement. Coates (2007) developed a matrix that categorizes student's academic and social engagement into one of four areas: collaborative, intense, independent, or passive.

Strategies for Student Engagement

Coates (2005) contends that because engagement is multidimensional, the strategies for faculty, staff and students to follow should enable students and faculty to bind to each other. Not only does engagement enhance a student's educational experience, it is also a skill necessary for success after graduation (Carini et al., 2006). Enriching educational experiences, such as conducting research with a professor, a senior capstone experience, internships, or study abroad, significantly increase opportunities for engagement (Kuh, 2006). Lower scoring students (below 990 on the SAT) generally realize greater engagement benefits than students who score higher on standardized tests (Kuh, 2006). Fredricks et al. (2004) found that engagement requires the ability of students to relate well to their teacher and fellow students. One of the most critical needs for engagement occurs between peers during the first year of college (Coates, 2005). In a 2004 study of more than 2000 students, Coates (2005) found that only 66% of students

were confident that at least one professor knew their name. Markwell (2007) suggests several things are necessary for student engagement: consistent participation, understanding the purpose of the subject itself, interaction with peers, multi-dimensional resource interaction, and a sense of belonging to the institution or peer learning group. The Harvard Assessment Project found that students who are struggling academically nearly always study alone (as stated in Markwell, 2007). A tactical way of creating student engagement opportunities is to anchor the curriculum within a cohort experience (Markwell, 2007).

Institutional Policies

Institutional policies can assist in the facilitation of engagement opportunities for students and faculty. Kuh (2001) found that engagement increased at schools where highly interactive and rigorous activities were present, including capstone classes, cohort experiences, and high campus-wide expectations. When physical spaces on college campuses, especially student services, are strategic and intentional for collaboration of faculty members and students, engagement opportunities occur (Manning & Kuh, 2005). Manning and Kuh (2005) suggest several questions to evaluate whether a college campus is student engagement friendly. What are distinctive elements about the campus? How do physical spaces complement value statements? What symbols, ceremonies, or rituals support engagement opportunities? Are prospective students able to access affinity groups? What can be done on your campus to create a safer place? Are learning opportunities in surrounding communities or municipalities easily accessible for students?

Amey (2006) suggests the leader of the HEI is directly responsible for creating

environments that foster "cultural awareness, acceptance of multiple intelligences and ways of knowing, strategic thinking, engagement, and a sense of collective identity as collaborators in developing knowledge and active investigators into practice" (p. 56). Coates (2005) states that the average amount of direct contact between teachers and students in the classroom has declined steadily over the past 20 years, requiring online methods to fill in the gap for engagement. Leaders of academic institutions must think differently about the ever-changing landscape of higher education. A complete understanding of how to provide a comprehensive approach to student engagement is necessary for success (Amey, 2006).

Student Retention

Carey states that, "nearly one out of five four-year institutions graduates fewer than one-third of its first-time, full-time, degree seeking first year students within six years" (as stated in Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2011). Tinto states that nearly 25% of all students who enter college do not return to the same institution for the start of their second year (as stated in Braxton, Milem, & Sullivan, 2000). Early student retention research in the 1970's focused on student ability, but complexities were discovered and additional research was conducted resulting in student involvement becoming the most important factor in retention (Tinto, 2006). Tinto developed the interactionist theory, which is regarded as one of the most important theories on student retention in HEI. Some of the primary components of the theory include quality of the student's entry characteristics, initial level of commitment, and the extent of a student's integration with the sub-communities within the college (as stated in Braxton et al., 2000). Braxton et al. (2000) studied the influence various types of active learning that is commonly attributed

with higher retention: collaboration activities, higher order thinking, and classroom discussion.

Key Factors for Retention

Nguyen and LeBlanc (2001) state that an institution's reputation, or the ability of the organization to live up to the expectations of their constituents, plays a key role in retention. Nguyen and LeBlanc (2001) studied 395 freshman and seniors in a business school and found that extrinsic factors such as price and service led to increased perception of reputation and subsequent loyalty to the institution. The use of adjunct professors and teaching assistants during a student's first year increases the risk of attrition since they are not as well connected to the ethos and resources of the college (Tinto, 2006). 84% of college student attrition can be attributed to one of four reasons: lack of care from the college, poor service to the student, lack of value, and scheduling conflicts (Raisman, 2013).

Institutional Priority

While there has traditionally been a focus on the behavioral characteristics of students influencing retention, Hossler et al. (2008) contend that institutional policies also play a significant role in determining the staying power of a student. Kuh et al. (2011) state that student retention shouldn't just be relegated to the student affairs staff. Rather, everyone in the institution plays a part in retaining students. Not enough institutions have committed the necessary resources to adequately address student retention (Tinto, 2006). Selingo (2015) states that nearly 25% of all institutions allocate funds specifically for student retention efforts. Schools could increase their retention rates dramatically if they understand and allocate more resources to student needs (Raisman, 2013). Tinto (2006)

asserts that institutions need to move from theory to action. Braxton and McClendon have identified several policy levers that support a student's fulfillment of academic expectations and lead to higher retention: clearly managing expectations of students in the recruitment process, formally reducing opportunities for racial bias and prejudice on campus, adhering to fair institutional policies, focusing on strong and meaningful academic advising, creating active learning environments, and providing accessible need-based financial aid (as stated in Hossler et al., 2008).

Retention Strategies

Brier, Hirschy, and Braxton (2008) examined the Strategic Retention Initiative (SRI) that involved a member of the college administration who called students within their first few weeks of their first semester. The SRI originated with 1100 undergraduate and 500 graduate students at Vanderbilt University's Peabody College. The dean called more than 200 students in the spring and fall, asking about the student's experience at the university (Brier et al., 2008). Analysis of more than seven years of data during the SRI found that the first to second year retention rate went from 88% to over 95%, implying that this type of initiative is an affirmation that the student made a good choice in attending the college (Brier et al., 2008). Ultimately, efforts such as the SRI highlight the importance of an institution looking out for the well-being of their students (Brier et al., 2008).

Periodic surveys of student loyalty throughout a student's experience are important to determine if current strategies are effective (Tsai, 2008). This suggests the importance of engaging with students to obtain feedback on more occasions than just the NSSE during the first and final year of their college experience. Much research has

linked faculty pedagogy to student retention, suggesting the importance of consistent professional development (Tinto & Pusser, 2006). Common approaches contained within a comprehensive strategy for student retention include: student orientation, tutoring, mentoring, living communities, financial management programs, and mid-term academic alerts (Selingo, 2015). The next evolution for student retention strategy lies in the ability to use big data to predict behavioral characteristics of students (Selingo, 2015). A survey of 718 first-time, full time students at a private college found that "faculty classroom behaviors in general and active learning in particular may constitute an empirically reliable source of influence on social integration, subsequent institutional commitment, and departure decisions" (Braxton et al., 2000, p. 582). Large, lecture style classes make it difficult for active learning to occur, thus increasing the chances of student attrition (Braxton et al., 2000). Opportunities for additional research in student retention exist with evaluating the true impact of institutional policies on student persistence (Tinto, 2006).

Student Success

Kinzie et al. (2006) state that getting students involved in the right activities leads to higher levels of engagement and increased student success. The original purpose of the NSSE was to facilitate a dialogue on how to increase student success (Kuh, 2001). The Connecting the Dots Survey evaluated student success based on academic achievement and persistence to the second year of study, finding that pre-college predictors such as ACT and high school GPA diminish (Kinzie et al., 2006). Kinzie and Kuh (2004) conducted a two-year study of 20 HEI's who all participated in the NSSE and who all scored better than the survey's five benchmarks: academic challenge, collaborative learning, faculty / student interaction, enriching educational experiences, and campus

support. The findings of the Project DEEP (Documenting Effective Educational Practices) suggest four critical components necessary for student success: strong administrative leadership, collaboration between faculty and student affairs staff, students leading other students in curricular and extra-curricular ways, and one champion or cheerleader on campus that consistently encourages students (Kinzie & Kuh, 2004). Two theories are foundational for understanding student persistence: Tinto's (1975) Student Integration Theory that focused on student interaction, and Bean's Student Attrition Model which contends behavioral intentions forecast rates of persistence (as stated in Kahn & Nauta, 2001). The Social Cognitive Theory, developed by Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1994) focuses on the behavioral requirements of persisting through college and are more relevant and predictive when measured during the second semester of a student's freshman year, once they have acclimatized to their college environment (as stated in Kahn & Nauta, 2001).

Conditions for Student Success

Kinzie et al., (2006) found that students with the highest GPA and those from the highest income bracket were less likely to persist or succeed to the second year, implying a rigorous first year experience is necessary for high achieving students to thrive. The Seven Principles of Good Practice in Higher Undergraduate Education provide a foundation for student success, focusing on critical elements such as academic challenge, time needed to complete a task, and participation in co-curricular activities (as stated in Kuh, 2001). Kinzie et al. (2006) conclude that HEI's must provide highly networked support systems and utilize the classroom as a hub of reciprocal learning to ensure students are succeeding. Kuh (2001) stresses the importance of an HEI culture fully

committed to student success consisting of high quality programs, faculty, and staff (as stated in Kinzie et al., 2006). Manning and Kuh (2005) contend there are six conditions that are vital to student success: living a mission, relentless student learning focus, adaptable educational environments, a clear plan for each student to succeed, opportunities for every student to improve, and shared responsibility between student and teacher.

Student Success Strategy

During the Project DEEP study, Manning and Kuh (2005) found it necessary for students to easily access student services. The need for student success strategies is evidenced by the alarming fact that according to the Department of Education, 25% of students don't persist through their first year of college (as stated in Kahn & Nauta, 2001). A measure of student success is persistence, which is heavily influenced by academic performance and social integration in the college community (Kahn & Nauta, 2001). A specific and centralized vision of student success matters greatly for HEI's (Selingo, Carey, Pennington, Fishman & Palmer, 2013). Innovating and scaling quickly can work for colleges and present students with an opportunity to be actively involved in both their success and the college's success (Selingo et al., 2013).

Recommendations

The qualitative data suggests that the student's perception of value at Midwest College is shaped significantly by curricular and co-curricular engagement, academic rigor, affinity group participation, meaningful relationship with professors, and access to opportunities that will heavily impact their future success. Value is the outcome of trust and is the seed of institutional loyalty. Because the qualitative data shows that this

perception of value changes over the course of a student's college career, the following strategic recommendations are offered to increase trust, value, and loyalty in hopes of improving student engagement, retention, and success. The researcher recommends five strategies for Midwest College to improve the perception of value for students in relation to their peers, faculty, staff, and the institution:

1. Formal and frequent listening session opportunities that involves students, faculty, staff, and alumni
2. Meaningful and measurable faculty and student interaction opportunities
3. Iteratively capturing more engagement data and using it to inform practical institutional strategies
4. College administration intentionally connecting with students on issues that are most relevant to the student
5. Not just affinity groups...meaningful and actionable affinity groups

Formal and Frequent Listening Sessions

The process of gathering qualitative data for this study involved listening to the opinions, stories, reflections, and priorities of the students at Midwest College. All students in the study who committed to attend showed up and actively participated in the focus group or interview. Tsai (2008) recommends engaging students with periodic surveys. Whereas quantitative surveys are more efficient, the process is transactional. Engaging students in qualitative listening sessions will foster increased trust and provide context for data formerly obtained through quantitative methods. Attendees of these sessions should include students, faculty, staff and alumni interacting together to discuss current or changing perceptions of value of the institution.

Understanding a student's perceptions of value and the triggers that change those perceptions are necessary to shape student retention strategies. By involving key stakeholders in the discussion, resources can be deployed quickly to support and encourage the student. These listening sessions need to formally occur in a student's first and second semester to provide an opportunity for student's to understand that the change in value they may be experiencing is normal and should be expected. Additional listening session opportunities during their sophomore, junior, and senior year should be made available by Midwest College. Midwest College can then formally follow up with the students to ensure that adequate resources are being provided to encourage their newly valued pursuits. The listening sessions will cultivate trust for the student, especially when relevant student services resources are activated.

To assist in capturing the qualitative data during the student's first semester, counselors from the office of admission should help facilitate listening sessions with the students that were recruited out of their geographic region. Admission counselors establish meaningful and trusting relationships with students and their families in the recruitment process. Instead of an admission office handing off the first year students to the office of student life on the first day of classes, admission counselors can play a key role in helping students transition effectively by being the first institutional employees to capture meaningful qualitative data by means of listening sessions. Furthermore, admission counselors should have as part of their performance reviews a third semester retention expectation for the students they recruited. This expectation will result in the admission counselor furthering their relationship of trust that has already been established with the student.

Meaningful and Measurable Faculty and Student Connection

The research showed that a student's loyalty to the institution is often defined by their relationship with faculty. Tinto and Pusser (2006) found that professor pedagogy was directly linked to student retention. Improved faculty and student interaction will require retention-specific professional development opportunities for faculty of all experience levels. Approaching faculty with peer-reviewed literature on strategies for student engagement, student retention, and student success will communicate the critical role faculty play in the shaping of a student's level of trust and subsequent perception of value that ultimately results in institutional loyalty. These professional development opportunities should encourage an ongoing dialogue of best practices, challenges, and success stories.

A significant advantage for Midwest College is the ability to have faculty academically advise students. This is especially important during a student's first and second semester, since this could directly impact third semester retention rates. Braxton and McClendon found that meaningful faculty advising not only meets an unmet need for the student, but also fulfills their academic expectation (as stated in Hossler et al., 2008). This fulfillment of purpose is reached by means of engaging the student in a one on one setting with consistent and ongoing meeting times. Midwest College should continue the practice of requiring advising sessions each semester by means of cancelling classes on those days and equipping faculty members with the necessary student information. There is an opportunity for the student's current perception of value to be captured through qualitative methods during each advising session. One or two open-ended questions, agreed upon by the faculty, should be asked of the student at least eight times (one formal

advising session each semester) during their career at the College. This qualitative data should be aggregated, coded, and presented to the relevant offices on campus to better inform institutional strategy and activate appropriate student services.

Research opportunities that are offered by faculty members should be catalogued and shared with all faculty, staff, alumni, and community members in creative and inspiring ways through the office of college relations. Additionally, the evaluation of the student's research experience should include a qualitative component that addresses the questions of how their research opportunity served as a trigger that changed their perception of value for the institution. These results should be aggregated and shared with faculty and staff to reinforce the significant change in value that often occurs when faculty challenge their students to engage in meaningful academic research.

Iteratively Capturing More Engagement Data

The advantage of qualitative data is that it can complement the quantitative NSSE data that is obtained during a student's first and final year. Midwest College should distribute a qualitative survey to students every year. The qualitative survey should ask open-ended questions related specifically to their perception of value, how it has changed during their time at the College, and what were the triggers that caused that change. The engagement indicators and high impact practices found on the NSSE can help guide the construction of the qualitative questions. Ledden and Kalafatis (as stated in Hennig-thurau et al., 2001) suggests pointing the questions more towards a value assessment as opposed to a satisfaction survey since the former has a higher correlation with student retention.

Qualitative data should also be collected by means of a longitudinal focus group strategy. Harper (2007) provides a relevant example:

Focus groups may be facilitated two or three times each year with one small cohort of football student-athletes from the start of college through graduation.

Annual interviews with the same students, individually or in groups, are good for assessing development and change. They would also enable researchers to ascertain the value (or lack thereof) of experiences that supposedly add value to student learning (p. 66).

This same methodology should be used to capture relevant student experiences from any formal or informal affinity group. Student life should capture this data since they have oversight of all student organizations. Faculty members who oversee co-curricular affinity groups should also provide consistent qualitative assessment opportunities for their participating students.

Another formal means of capturing engagement data could be in conjunction with course evaluations. Carvalho & de Oliveira Mota (2010) provide a quantitative framework that could be used to capture this data. The model, based on dimensions of management trustworthiness and personnel trustworthiness, is intended to understand perceived value of students through quantitative methods. This data should be aggregated to help inform institutional strategies for increased student engagement.

Administration Connection

Multiple participants expressed concern at the perceived disconnect with the College administration. Administration should continue their commitment to, and increase the frequency of, inviting diverse cross-sections of the student population to help

solve problems that are bigger than the institution. These opportunities will increase the value of the student's experience, much like a student feeling valued when being challenged by their professor. The Midwest College administrative council, made up of the leaders of every department on campus, should formally divide the first year class into smaller groups and provide resources for one-on-one engagement opportunities during a meal or coffee session. These sessions will result in opportunities to help the campus work on community-based projects in service to others as a result of student-focused dialogue. Determining this support is ultimately incumbent upon the College's faculty, staff, and students to work towards clearer understanding through consistent communication.

Additionally, increasing the opportunity for students to ask hard questions, receive honest answers, and have adequate opportunities for follow-up sessions will help students have a better connection with the administration of Midwest College. Internal activation of these initiatives, including the recruitment of student participants, will require effective communication so that all students are fully aware of these opportunities to formally contribute to the betterment of the campus culture. Part of the activation process needs to involve providing board members of the College with engagement data to inform long-term strategy that will result in increased educational quality (Kuh, 2011). By inviting students to participate in the planning and promotion of these opportunities, the College administration will be in tune with the issues and challenges most relevant to the students.

Meaningful and Actionable Affinity Groups

The data from this study suggests students at Midwest College are busy, but they are positively engaged in the context of the campus community. Affinity groups are critical to engagement opportunities. Assessing the status and effectiveness of formal and informal affinity groups through the lens of Ghosh and Whipple's (2001) eight perceptions of student trust (expertise, congeniality, openness, sincerity, integrity, cooperation, timeliness and tactfulness) may initiate a dialogue of how each affinity group can have a consistent approach to build trust. If a common understanding of trust leads to an agreement upon how affinity groups should exist in the Midwest College campus community, there will be more opportunities to reduce the cliques experienced by many in the research study.

The research participants clearly stated that formal opportunities for students to connect through ceremonies, campus events, and athletic contest attendance are necessary to increase their perceived level of value of the campus community. Inviting more affinity groups to strategically work together with fellow students, faculty, staff, and alumni to increase participation will result in meaningful engagement opportunities. The priority of increased participation must be elevated to increase the students' perception of value of the College. Affinity groups that are thriving should be used as models to create new programs or renovate existing student affinity groups.

Looking Forward

Midwest College has all of the resources necessary to increase the likelihood that students will one day reflect on their time in college as an engaging, transformational experience. Although aspirational, it is certainly a worthy pursuit for Midwest College to

strive for all students to answer yes to each of the six Gallup-Purdue Index questions, found on a recent survey administered to 30,000 employees that correlate to “long-term life outcomes, such as employee engagement and well-being” (Dvorak and Busted, 2015).

<i>The Undergraduate Experience: Support and Experiential Learning</i>	
	% Strongly agree
Support	
I had at least one professor at [College] who made me excited about learning.	63
My professors at [College] cared about me as a person.	27
I had a mentor who encouraged me to pursue my goals and dreams.	22
Strongly agree with all three support statements	14
Experiential	
I worked on a project that took a semester or more to complete	32
I had an internship or job that allowed me to apply what I was learning in the classroom.	29
I was extremely active in extracurricular activities and organizations while I attended [College].	20
Strongly agree with all three experiential statements	6
Strongly agree with all six statements	3
Gallup-Purdue Index Feb. 4-March 7, 2014	

Figure 9: Gallup-Purdue Index (Dvorak and Busted, 2015)

Faculty and staff must continually invite students into an ongoing dialogue about how the institution can work together to achieve positive responses to these six important attributes of an engaging college experience.

Practically speaking, Midwest College should take the recommendations of this study, incorporate them into institutional planning, allocate necessary resources,

collaboratively execute through program initiatives and regularly assess through qualitative and quantitative methods. The data from this case study confirms the importance of utilizing the researcher's qualitative model for the perception of value, which suggests that more relevant institutional strategy will be formed when NSSE quantitative data is coupled with qualitative data from all cohorts. This approach, when executed in the context of the principles of student engagement, will further support the College's commitment to increasing student retention and student success. All of the components of support and experiential learning exist at Midwest College, and many students are already fully engaged in the process. There is and will always be an opportunity to reach students by fully engaging them in meaningful experiences to increase their perception of value of the College.

Conclusion

In such a competitive higher education landscape, a primary challenge for Midwest College will be to continually identify and monitor what current students value and how their perception of value is changing. While it may be assumed that the value proposition perception of administration, faculty and staff is accurate, the more important perception is that of the student. The identification of what a student values can be captured at the beginning and end of a student's college experience by means of the NSSE. However, a student's decision to remain loyal to the College or look elsewhere to an array of alternatives is ongoing through their entire HEI experience.

Creswell (2009) acknowledges that within an organization or group of individuals, there are complex factors that can only be answered by qualitative research.

The qualitative data captured from freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors in both interview and focus group settings in this study will now impact strategic considerations moving forward for Midwest College. This data can also inform other liberal arts colleges, similar in size, in their efforts to increase student engagement resulting in higher rates of student retention and persistence. Curricular, co-curricular, and extra curricular activities must be evaluated within the context of what students are actually saying during all stages of their college experience in order for positive institutional change to occur.

SECTION SIX

SCHOLARLY PRACTITIONER REFLECTION

Influence of Dissertation on my Practice as an Educational Leader

An important outcome for higher education is to provide a positive, transformational experience for students. Mezirow and Taylor (2011) refer to the transformative learning process as taking past and current experiences to help inform future practices. These experiences are cultivated in the context of a higher education learning environment. Tactically, transformative learning can occur through case studies, portfolios, action learning and project teams (Mezirow & Taylor, 2011). For transformational learning to thrive, the faculty, staff, and administration within the higher education institution (HEI) should adhere to the principles of transformational leadership.

Transformational Leadership Defined

There are many definitions of and theories about leadership. Countless books have been written, classes have been taught, documentaries have been made, and case studies have been developed. Ultimately, the role of a leader is to persuade a follower to support the leader's goals (Mihelic, Lipicnik, & Tekavic, 2010). Some consider effective leadership an extraordinary pursuit by extraordinary people (McCleskey, 2014). A leader must understand the needs of others in order to fully earn the credit of followers (Boerner, Eisenbeiss, & Griesser, 2007). A leader, formal or informal, must provide the strategic direction and inspiration for positive change to occur (Rowold, 2014).

The past three years have afforded me the opportunity to be an educational leader at and a student of higher education in the ELPA Program at Northwest Missouri State University / University of Missouri. I have developed my skills and experienced firsthand

the importance of being committed to the tenets of transformational leadership. Although the original context for leadership in my higher education career took place as a professor four years ago, the role that I have been in over the past 18 months has been in administration as the Dean of Admission. There have been many challenges encountered and overcome in my vocational and educational career.

The dissertation process has required of me all of the traits a transformational leader would expect of an organization committed to achieving the final goal: focus, endurance, a network of help, persistence, constant learning, organization, balance in the midst of busyness, data to drive decisions, an attainable strategic plan, and wisdom from those who have gone before me in these endeavors. The dissertation process has been transformational in my personal and professional pursuits.

Transformational vs. Transactional Leadership

Transformational leadership is focused on the inward, behavioral change of a person. Transformational leadership is focused on moving followers to change their behaviors, actions, and self-motivation to the organization's collective purpose (Feinberg, Ostroff, & Burke, 2005). Amey (2006) compares transformational leadership to learner-centered education, where the teacher facilitates the process of creating a culture and community with their organization (classroom) for students to activate their creative energy to positively affect the outcomes of the group. Whereas transactional leadership is concerned primarily with the day-to-day, functional operations of an organization, transformational leadership identifies important problems to solve and leverages the team's ability to collaborate and innovate (Astin, 2000). Transformational leadership focuses on how goals are met more than what goals are met. Transformational leadership

is not restricted to a linear process of $x + y = z$. Rather, it is an iterative and cyclical process that requires regular reflection on the leader's moral choices and subsequent actions (Trevino, et al., 2003). Consistent reflection, prompted by feedback of others enables relevant changes to occur in the organization. The transformational leader models openness to change and a willingness to make decisions beyond self-interest towards the needs of the entire group (Bass, 1997).

Factors Emerging from Transformational Leadership

Hall, Johnson, Wysocki, and Kepner (2008) suggested four factors that emerge from a transformational leader: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. This is especially relevant for my current profession. It's difficult to build trust with a team of individuals. It's even more difficult when a lack of stability and poor operational outcomes were the status quo for many years prior to my arrival. I need to continually remind myself that my role as a leader is to emulate the characteristics and behaviors that the institution needs to be successful (McCleskey, 2014). I have found that organizational process and culture change is a delicate and slow process. I have a vision for what the Office of Admission should look like. As someone committed to being a transformational leader, I must continually find opportunities to inspire others towards that vision. I am also aware that I need to invest in professional development opportunities for myself to prompt me to think creatively about the work of admission.

The college president, a transformational leader, has provided my context for learning over the past 18 months. Honest feedback, relentless standards of excellence, relevant resources, consistency of communication, relinquishing of control, and ample

resources have contributed to a positive context for learning. Despite the past 18 months being my most intense professional learning experience, I have endured because of the transformation leadership I have received. “Academic leaders create learning environments that include cultural awareness, acceptance of multiple intelligences and ways of knowing, strategic thinking, engagement, and a sense of collective identity as collaborators in developing knowledge and active investigators into practice” (Amey, 2006). I must invite my team to help me actively investigate opportunities for sustained admission operations resulting in growth.

Self-Leadership

Transformational leadership starts with self-leadership. Because the last 18 months have resulted in both a significant learning curve and comprehensive departmental change, the future results are ambiguous. Complicating the change process has been some resistance to processes, policies, and procedures. “Resistance is a necessary part of the change process. Just when a critical mass of people begins to practice the transformative leadership principles is when those who do not yet understand the change effort are most likely to react strongly.” (Astin & Astin, 2000, p. 94). Resistance often ushers in various levels of conflict among team members. Astin and Astin (2000) go on to state that a significant limiting factor for transformational leaders is a lack of self-confidence. My lack of prior knowledge of the admission process has proven this to be true. My 18-month anniversary in the new position represented an important milestone in my development as the dean of admission. My confidence is growing each day, and my day-to-day reliance on the college president is diminishing. Zenger and Falkman (2014) state that one of the most important things a transformational

leader can do is set high standards for themselves. I must continue to stay diligent and lead myself through change in order to expect others to change.

Whereas transactional leaders seek to create and reinforce policies that protect their own department, transformational leaders seek collaboration and policymaking for the good of the institution. Leaders are key to determining appropriate policies for the success of a higher education institution (Amey, 2006). Extraordinary outcomes are achieved when transformational leaders provide “meaning and understanding” to the policies that guide the institution (Boerner et al., 2007). I have been fortunate to report directly to the president of the College, who I consider to be a transformational leader. One of my requirements for taking the job as the new dean was formal mentorship from the president to ensure policy alignment with the College. Bardach (2011) emphasizes the importance of engaging a broad set of institutional stakeholders in order to deepen the analysis of policy considerations and alternatives. Transformational leaders, with their commitment to ensuring the health of the entire organization, should regularly engage in this type of stakeholder stewardship.

Influence of Dissertation on my Practice as a Scholar

The dissertation process has given me a deep appreciation for obtaining accurate data through a sound process to fill a gap in the existing research. Well before the data was gathered, I worked through the process of identifying a relevant topic that would both hold my attention for many months of work and fill a gap in the current research literature. Starting at the top of a massive research funnel, I simply started the process by reading one article, and then another. I repeated this process over and over and I noticed I was gaining a deeper appreciation of the quantitative and qualitative findings with every

article I read. Authors like Kuh, Tinto, Carvalho, Busteed, Trowler, Singh, Creswell, Ghosh, Markwell, Pascarella, Sirdeshmukh, and of course, Merriam, became scholarly colleagues.

Research Focus

I learned, with the gracious assistance of my dissertation advisors, how to take my initial list of 18 different research topics and boil it down to one research question by first clearly articulating how the theoretical framework and conceptual underpinnings were interacting with past research. I was afforded the gift of honest feedback and was encouraged to take my research analysis to the next level. That was the beginning of my journey to becoming a scholarly contributor. I have been intellectually pushed to another level, swirling the works of the research giants in areas such as student retention, student loyalty, and student success. The dissertation process has deepened my passion for pure data and has given me a stronger sensitivity towards biased, anecdotal data. The process of data collection has been incredibly valuable. I have become a better steward of capturing, coding, communicating, and connecting data for the purpose of scholarly contribution. Harper (2007) captures the essence of my scholarly pursuit:

One of the fundamental goals of qualitative research is to provide rich, deep descriptions of people's lived experiences. To accomplish this, institutional researchers should spend face-to-face time with students and invite them to reflect meaningfully on who they were before they enrolled in college, how their college-going aspirations were developed, the methodologies they used to search for and select an institution from among available choices, the facilitators of or barriers to smooth adjustments in the first year, the role of significant others (for example,

peers, parents, or educators) in their success, experiences in residence halls and classrooms, explanatory factors for active or passive engagement, environmental conditions that have fostered changes in their attitudes and behaviors, and gains and outcomes accrued through participation in enriching educational experiences (p. 55).

Every student has a story and that story deserves to be captured properly and understood through the context of other relevant research. As a researcher, I now better understand the power of these stories.

Looking Forward

My future research interests will build upon the foundation I have established during my dissertation process. Because college is a significant investment of time, money, and energy, I am motivated to learn more about how institutions can respond in the most relevant ways by anticipating and supporting the triggers that change a student's perception of value. As a college admission professional, I am committed to recruiting successful alumni as opposed to just recruiting a first-year class. I plan to further my qualitative research related to retention and student success. The approach to this research can happen through various topics including identifying: perceptions of the importance of college fit for prospective students, ingredients of student success during the most vulnerable times for student attrition, and attributes identified by alumni regarding intentional and institutional support that led to their success in college.

Conclusion

I care deeply about students thriving in college. Student success begins with students finding the right college fit. Educating prospective students and their families on

how their perception of value will change will enhance their college selection process. This dissertation process has introduced me to the value of using data to help inform my current professional strategies towards student recruitment. My attitude towards the dissertation process from the beginning was “all-in.” Faculty members, fellow cohort members, and family members have supported me in countless ways. They have all completely enabled my confidence throughout the dissertation process. The importance of pursuing transformational leadership has been modeled and emphasized throughout the ELPA program. Each day I am thankful to have endured the process of contributing to both my practice as an educational leader and to scholarly research with a relevant and valid research approach. Although the dissertation process is formally coming to a close, I look forward to discovering and filling more gaps in research.

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Appendix A

Participant Cover Letter

Date: _____

Dear Participant:

Thank you for considering participating in the study of how students perceive trust, value, and loyalty in the context of higher education. This study, entitled *Perceptions of Value for Students at a Private Liberal Arts College in the Midwestern United States*, is being conducted as a research project in the University of Missouri / Northwest Missouri State University Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis program as part of the dissertation process. The case study will be used to provide explicit knowledge to others about perceptions of value for college students and in what ways, if any, are these perceptions affected by elements of engagement. The study will build upon the Trust, Value, Loyalty Framework and the following conceptual underpinnings: student engagement, student retention, and student success.

As a study participant, you will be asked to respond to questions related to engagement indicators, perception of value, and elements of trust and loyalty. The time allowed for the focus group/individual interview is not expected to take longer than thirty minutes. Please read below to understand how your input will be used in the study and how your rights as a participant will be protected.

1. Participation in this study is *completely voluntary*. You may withdraw from participation at any time, including the middle of the focus group/interview, or after it is completed. If you decide at a later time you do not wish your input to be included in the study, you may withdraw. Please do not hesitate to contact me at 816-518-8163 or by email: cory.scheer@gmail.com. You may also contact the University of Missouri IRB at 573-882-9585 with concerns.
2. Should you decide to participate, your identity, as well as your input, will remain anonymous. A pseudonym will be used to protect your identity when reporting the findings.
3. The school will be referred to as “Midwest College” throughout the research process. If you are still interested in participating in this research project you will be required to sign a consent letter before the project begins.

Thank you for your consideration,

Cory B. Scheer, Doctoral Candidate

*Adapted from J.H. Wolfe, 2010.

Appendix B

Participant Consent Form

I, _____, have read the guidelines on the proposed study and agree to participate in the case study conducted by Cory B. Scheer, doctoral student in the University of Missouri / Northwest Missouri State University Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis program. Furthermore, I understand that:

1. My participation is *completely voluntary*, and I may *withdraw at anytime* during the study.
2. The Focus Group/Individual Interview will be recorded. The data will be used for dissertation research and possible future publications.
3. My identity will be protected throughout the process of the study and a pseudonym will be used when reporting findings.
4. I will be given the opportunity to review transcriptions.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Please keep a copy of this consent form and the Participant Cover Letter for your records.

*Adapted from J.H. Wolfe, 2010.

Appendix C

Interview / Focus Group Questions

Introduction / General Information

- Please share what your current year is in college (freshman, sophomore, junior, or senior).
- What is your academic course of study?
- What co-curricular / extracurricular programs are you formally involved in (student government, tutor, athletics, Greek life, work study, leadership roles, etc).

Trust

- What things at Midwest College increase your level of trust in the institution?
- What things decrease your level of trust?

Value

- What things at Midwest College do you value most?
- What things do you value least?

Loyalty

- In what ways is your loyalty in Midwest College increasing at Midwest College?
- In what ways is your loyalty decreasing at Midwest College?

Engagement

- How do you define engagement in the context of learning and community at Midwest College?
- What things, both in the classroom and out of the classroom increase your level of engagement?

- What are things that you wish would be present at Midwest College to increase your levels of engagement?
- What role does the faculty play in your learning engagement at Midwest College? Please provide specific examples of how faculty have affected your level of engagement.
- How does engagement with peers at Midwest College affect your levels of trust, value, and / or loyalty? Please provide specific examples.
- Why is academic challenge so important for you at Midwest College?

Change of Values Over Time

- Has what you value at Midwest College changed during your time here? (From the beginning of the school year until now? If applicable, from last year to this year? From when you started at Midwest College to now?).
- What are the triggers, moments, classes, involvement, or participation in support services that have changed what you value at Midwest College?

Appendix D

Executive Summary

A CASE STUDY OF PERCEPTIONS OF VALUE FOR STUDENTS AT A PRIVATE, LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGE IN THE MIDWESTERN UNITED STATES

<u>Statement of the Problem</u> There is a gap in qualitative research that addresses students' perceptions of value at private, liberal arts colleges.	
<u>Purpose of the Study</u> <p>The purpose of this study is to fill the gap in research that currently exists in the perception of value for college students at small, private liberal arts colleges.</p> <p>This study aims to understand the perception of value for a college student (consumer) in relation to the college (service provider).</p>	<u>Theoretical Framework</u> <p>Trust, Value, Loyalty Framework (Sirdeshmukh, Singh, & Sabol, 2002)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Conceptual Underpinnings</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Student Engagement (Trowler, 2010)- Student Retention (Tinto, 2006)- Student Success (Kinzie and Kuh, 2004)
<u>Design of the Study</u> <p><i>Qualitative Case Study</i> - A bounded case study requires the researcher to collect information in various ways during a specific period of time (Creswell, 2009).</p> <p><i>Focus Groups / Interviews</i> – Conducted with students over the age of 18 representing the current freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior cohorts at Midwest College.</p> <p><i>NSSE Summary Data Review</i> – Archival summary data from the National Survey of Student Engagement, collected during the 2014-2015 school year, will be evaluated.</p>	
<u>Research Question</u> What are the perceptions of value for students at a small, Midwestern private liberal arts college?	
<u>Research Sub-questions</u> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. How do students qualitatively define NSSE engagement indicators at Midwest College?2. How do levels of engagement affect a student's perception of value at Midwest College?3. What are the similarities and / or differences between the perceptions of value between first year students and seniors at Midwest College?4. What engagement moments, experiences, or triggers change a student's perception of value during their time at Midwest College?	
<u>Limitations</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Biases, backgrounds and values create limitations to the study, which Creswell (2009) asserts are not easily assessed while the study is taking place, and could affect the questioning strategy of the researcher.- Sample size may not accurately reflect the entire student population.- Students may not fully share their perceptions- Focus on only one HEI, which may affect generalizability, or the ability to apply the results to other colleges (Creswell, 2009).- The qualitative data obtained for freshmen will not be reflected in the 2014-2015 NSSE data	<u>Delimitations</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- The study will include students 18 or older enrolled in 2015 / 2016 academic school year.- NSSE data from 2014-2015 school year- Non-longitudinal- Selection of the research participants will be facilitated by the Dean of Students at Midwest College to ensure a pool that is representative of the entire student population.
<u>Significance of the Study</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Since no two students and no two institutions are the same, the value of a current student's experience may vary widely at the same college.- Important for targeted student retention and recruitment strategies- Expansion of current research that combines NSSE data with qualitative results focused on value	

**A CASE STUDY OF PERCEPTIONS OF
VALUE FOR STUDENTS AT A PRIVATE, LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGE IN THE
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<p><u>Statement of the Problem</u></p> <p>There is a gap in qualitative research that addresses students' perceptions of value at private, liberal arts colleges.</p>	
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Vita

The author of this qualitative study, Cory Scheer, has bachelor degrees from Southwest Baptist University, an M.B.A. from Rockhurst University, and is currently completing a Doctorate in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis from the University of Missouri. Cory serves as the Dean of Admission at William Jewell College and lives in Liberty, MO with his wife and four children. Prior to his role in higher education administration, Cory served as a faculty member in the Department of Business and Nonprofit Leadership at William Jewell College.