

INTERVENTIONS TO SUPPORT RETENTION AND RESILIENCY OF  
HOMELESS STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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the Faculty of the Graduate School  
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In Partial Fulfillment  
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Doctor of Education

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by

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

INTERVENTIONS TO SUPPORT RETENTION AND RESILIENCY  
OF HOMELESS STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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## ABSTRACT

Homelessness and housing insecurity is prevalent on college campuses and influences the ability for a student to persist in their degree program (Hallett 2010; Hallett & Crutchfield, 2017). Students struggling with basic needs have lower integration into the academic and social fabric of the institution (Gupton, 2017; Hallett, 2010). Persistence to degree not only helps break the cycles of homelessness and poverty, but also promotes social justice and resiliency. The data collection and analysis sought to answer four research questions. Using both qualitative and quantitative data, framed by the theoretical frameworks of resiliency and social justice theories was this inquiry.

The research was conducted at the campus of a regional, public institution within 40 minutes of a major metropolitan area. Interviews of three key administrators and a focus group of academic advisors and survey data of 50 aid administrators at large, public institutions provided the method of data collection to assess the barriers and interventions, if any, for students encountering homelessness while in college.

The data analysis found three recurring themes: *Education regarding homelessness, resource development and the elimination of barriers*. Research from this study underscored the need for interventions to be developed to assist the student to support retention. Additionally, the development of interventions allows faculty and staff to advocate for students while assisting the university in meeting enrollment and graduation goals.

SECTION ONE

INTRODUCTION TO DISSERTATION

## **Introduction to the Background of the Study**

Homelessness is a growing problem in the United States due to a variety of economic factors, including recession, lack of affordable housing, and low wages (Masten, Cutuli, Herbers, Hinz, Obradovic, & Wenzel, 2014; Rahman, Turner, & Elbedour, 2015). With the rise in housing insecurity, estimates show that 1.3-2.1 million American youth are homeless at some point between the ages of 12 and 24 (Foster, 2010). Besides the lack of shelter and necessities, homeless youth often experience disruption in their education (Crutchfield, Chambers, & Duffield, 2016; Masten, et al., 2014; Rahman, et al., 2015). Many factors including permanent addresses for school enrollment, transportation and lack of official documents such as medical records and academic transcripts complicate educational attainment for the homeless (Crook, 2015; Rahman, et al., 2015).

In an effort to combat those complications encountered by homeless youth to access educational opportunities, the *McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 1987 (MVA)* provided mandates “that require schools to uphold the right to equal educational opportunity for children and youths experiencing homelessness” (Wilkins, Mullins, Mahan, & Canfield, 2015, p. 58). *MVA* has provisions to keep students in the same school even though they may live outside of the boundaries, provide transportation, and ensure equal access to education (Cunningham, 2014; Mohan, & Shields, 2014; Rahman, et al., 2015; Wilkins, et al., 2015). Interruption of education has long-term effects such as increased risk of living in poverty, limited opportunities for work and limited wages (Crook, 2015). Using the interventions afforded by *MVA*, students can remain in school

and continue to access services such as free meals, health services and stability (Crook, 2015; Cunningham, 2014; Rahman, et al., 2015). Staying in school promotes independence and better employment opportunities upon graduation, as it is well documented that future earnings and mobility are impacted by not graduating from high school (Ausikaitis, Wynne, Persaud, Pitt, Hosek, Rekeer, Tuner, Flores, & Flores, 2015; Mohan & Shields, 2014; Rahman, et al., 2015). Consequently, breaking the cycle of poverty by promoting post-secondary education for all students, especially those experiencing homelessness, is critical (Crutchfield, et al., 2016).

As students move from high school to colleges and universities, very little research “addresses the experience of these youth once they get beyond admission into colleges” (Crutchfeld, et al., 2016, p. 191). Financial aid is available to homeless students, but there are few other interventions at the college level to assist with transition and student success. Besides those already in housing crisis, limited resources have caused many college students to have a greater incidence of housing insecurity, thus adding to the issue (Broton, Frank, & Goldrick-Rab, 2014). These economic stressors for homeless students and other low-income students cause a decreased chance at degree completion and “inhibit educational attainment” (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2016, p.19). Creating interventions for students that are homeless or at risk of being homeless would enhance their opportunity for persistence and eventual degree completion at the post-secondary level. Homelessness does not end at high school graduation, but the protections

and regulatory safety net does since few resources for housing and food exist within the college walls (Goldrick-Rab, 2017).

Research by Goldrick-Rab (2017) and others are exploring the food and housing insecurity experienced by college students. A recent study of community college students has shown that 52% of community college students have housing insecurity and 13% are homeless (Goldrick-Rab, 2017). Without access to basic needs, college degree attainment is more difficult as students focus on survival instead of classwork (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2016; Gaines, Robb, Knol & Sickler, 2014; Hallett, 2010). Financial aid offices are in a unique position, as many students either identify themselves as homeless or at risk of homelessness on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Other students may self-identify to staff members in the financial aid office as needing help with housing. Financial Aid staff often do not know of resources to refer the student and cannot respond to their needs beyond the financial aid package. Lack of policy and procedure to intervene in these situations perpetuates the problem. Through finding ways to use data and best practices, student assistance can reach, as the Chapalot, Cooper, Johnstone, and Karandjeff (2015) stated, beyond financial aid and assist with attainment of post-secondary credentials.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Attaining a college degree is a national priority as evidenced by prior President Barack Obama's 2020 college completion initiative. The goals of this initiative were to have ten million more college graduates at all levels of degree attainment by 2020 and create a more educated and skilled workforce (Kanter,

Ochoa, Nassif, & Chong, 2011). Special attention was to be focused on “fast growing first generation, under-represented and economically disadvantaged populations” (Kanter et al., 2011, p. 11), who are facing scarce resources and struggle to meet daily needs such as housing, food and transportation (Chaplot, et al., 2015).

Besides the promotion of access, it is imperative for students to have access to post-secondary education for economic gain. Currently, millions of jobs in the United States require a post-high school credential such as certificate or degree for placement consideration. By promoting college completion, students of all socioeconomic backgrounds have the means to access better-paying jobs and break the cycles of poverty and homelessness that they have experienced in their youth (Chapalot, et al., 2015; Hallett, 2010).

Investing in student success has been a part of the fabric of higher education institutions for years, but most research has focused on classroom related interventions to improve retention and graduation rates. Tinto’s retention theory (1987) identified creating environments to enhance attainment by building community and social supports on campus. Addressing homeless students and their specific needs is not in the forefront at institutions, as this is a population relatively new to the retention and attainment conversation (Chapalot, et al., 2015).

A significant gap in the research exists as few studies on homeless college students have been conducted (Crutchfield, et al. 2016). Colleges have a stake in the success of their students and need to create interventions, grounded in data to

help students overcome barriers to success. Broton and Goldrick-Rab (2016) stated institutional practices and policies contribute to the issue and need to be addressed at the local level, thus eliminating those barriers and creating supports to enhance the chances of retention and success. Research is in its infancy stages “when it comes to explaining how students experience these challenges, when and where they obtain help, and how needs insecurity affects their schooling” (Goldrick-Rab, 2017, p. 6). The problem, simply stated, is that institutions have few, if any, resources in place to assist students experiencing housing insecurity. Higher education personnel know little about how best to assist students that are homeless within the context of financial aid regulations and the constraints of institutional knowledge and budgets.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Creating interventions that support the resiliency and educational attainment of the homeless student in a compassionate manner is the focus of this study. College and universities need to work to expand the “traditional concepts of what social and financial supports are necessary to address the broader needs of low-income students” (Chapalot, et al., 2015, p. 1). Needs of this population include access to adequate housing and food security, transportation, health care, child care, and other unmet financial needs that go beyond what financial aid can cover (Chapalot, et al., 2015). Helping students meet their daily needs eliminates the stress that can detract from educational success (Chapalot, et al., 2015; Crutchfield, et al., 2016). Linking the social and financial support to the academic supports already provided at post-secondary institutions will enhance

student success of those experiencing homelessness (Crutchfield, et al., 2016). Disadvantaged populations encounter scarce resources and struggle to meet daily needs such as housing, food and transportation (Chaplot et al., 2015), thus the purpose of this study is to investigate programs in higher education institutions that assist homeless youth gain access to and support their persistence towards an undergraduate degree. The investigation will focus on the student experience using social justice theory and resiliency theory to examine in-depth programs through noted procedures, policies, and stated barriers. In addition to the student, framed in the context of social justice and retention best practices was this investigation.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions guiding this study were to investigate existing programs in higher education institutions that assist homeless youth gain access to and support their persistence towards an undergraduate degree.

1. What procedures and policies are in place to identify homeless students through the financial aid process?
2. What barriers exist in higher education for homeless students?
3. How can institutions create policies and procedures to support the homeless student population in the context of resiliency and social justice?
4. How will understanding the resiliency theory enhance the university personnel skill set as they work with homeless students?

## **Conceptual/Theoretical Framework**

Two theoretical frameworks guided understanding of this study and provided context to the issue. Resiliency theory (Masten & Odradovic, 2006) frames how students are impacted by homelessness and how the institution can support resiliency of this population. Furthermore, the tenets of social justice and critical social theory framed why this population of students need supports to retain and persist in higher education. Presented in the following sections is research on the two frameworks.

### **Retention Theory and Resiliency Theory**

An area of research review was the inequalities in access to education that are a social justice concern that is lived daily by those who are homeless (Ausikaitis, et al. 2014). Despite the challenges to educational access, especially stable housing, the student experience was investigated initially through retention theory and then through resiliency theory.

#### **Retention Theory**

Retention theory, as stated by Tinto (1987), revealed there are various dynamic factors that influence access, persistence and attainment in post-secondary education. Kalsbeek (2013) stated good retention rates are a function of the academic profile of the class. Hence, the better academic performance of the cohort or class, the better the retention rates would be (Kalsbeek, 2013). Institutional focus on integration of student services and business processes, such as housing and financial aid, help to “create a seamless experience for students as they register for courses, manage their financial arrangements and navigate

toward degree completion” (Kalsbeek, 2013, p. 11). The focus of this research was on streamlining processes to eliminate high-risk experiences and encounters of high-risk groups, such as the homeless, to enhance retention.

Additionally, retention is influenced by market position of the institution and the brand (Kalsbeek & Zucker, 2013). Retention theory, as described above, focuses on perceptions of brand and market share of the institution and academic profile, and has focused little on the individual student experience. Consequently, this theory’s limitation is the lack of focus on the outside influences that affect a student in the classroom, thus leading to a review of resiliency theory.

Specifically, the individual student experience, outside of academics, is not a key component of retention theorists.

### **Resiliency Theory**

A review of resiliency theory and its wide-ranging foci form a more robust conceptual framework for this research. Since resiliency theory is so broad, the researcher narrowed the focus to the concept of adaptation, meaning how individuals create their path despite setbacks (Masten & Odbradovic, 2006). Research by Masten and Odbradovic (2006), Masten et al. (2014) and others specifically explored the homeless student and the development of resiliency. Specifically, post-secondary resilience investigation for the homeless are few, therefore resiliency concepts surrounding student development were carefully examined to provide a conceptual framework for best practices in promoting student success and resiliency (Masten & Odbradovic, 2006; Masten et al., 2014).

A study by Watt, Norton, and Jones (2013) applied resiliency theory to foster youth and how they navigate the systems within higher education. In working with these students, social workers began to view the individual students as survivors, “who had developed unique skill sets and utilized a wide array of resources” (Watt, et al., 2013, p. 1410). Recognition of those experiences and seeing them as assets supports the resiliency of the student and supports a positive approach to interventions instead of using a deficit model (Watt, et al. 2013). Moving from a caseworker model, and using resiliency as a means of empowerment, disrupts negative stigmas that foster youth and others, such as the homeless experience in society (Saleebey, 2000; Thomas 2000; Watt, et al. 2013). Students who felt included, especially those having experienced hardships, tended to be retained at higher level and overcome negative self-perceptions (Thomas, 2000; Watt, et al. 2013). The interventions created to support resiliency can help advance students’ educational goals and provide access to a better future. Access to education provides a mechanism to “build and maintain and middle-class lifestyle” which can change the trajectory of an individual (Chapalot, et al., 2015, p. i). Eliminating barriers, including housing insecurity, can help many students who are mostly in marginalized groups (Brown, 2006). Thus the resiliency theory tenets became a conceptual framework for this inquiry as access and persistence can be enhanced by this support of resiliency that is grounded in a review of social justice theory.

### **Social Justice Theory**

Homeless students endure many challenges in accessing higher education, including access (Chapalot, et. al.2015). Similarly, students who fall into the categories of low income, homelessness or other marginalized groups experience issues of equal access (Brown, 2006). Difficulties in accessing education create a “predetermined mold designed for school failure and social inequity” Brown, 2006, p. 701). To facilitate student success and the elimination of barriers that perpetuate social inequities, educators need to create spaces for students to get the help and resources that they need to retain and persist (Ausikaitis et al., 2015; Brown, 2006; Chapalot, et al. 2015). Through addressing the issues of the homeless students and providing interventions, the system can change “to allow for meaningful inclusion of everyone, particularly those who are consistently disadvantage or marginalized” (Ryan, 2006, p. 6).

Change within the current system must occur by understanding and then reacting to those barriers that do not allow for inclusion of disadvantaged groups. Ryan (2006) administered social justice in ways that highlight the need for inclusion and creating a path for all to be involved in common social practices, such as schools and the communities. Higher education is not exempt from the challenges of homelessness, and through the two conceptual frameworks of resiliency theory and social justice theory, the researcher will examine the creation of best practices, with the ultimate goal of eliminating obstacles as homeless students work to obtain a degree.

### **Design of the Study**

Critical paradigms provided the researcher “to promote the deconstruction and critique of institutions, laws, organizations, definitions and practices for power inequities and inequities of effectiveness” (Guido, Chavez, & Lincoln, 2010, p. 9). Using the critical theory lens will give the researcher the opportunity to administer the mixed design study in a way that creates a path to change (Creswell, 2014; Guido, et al., 2010). Through careful analysis of the data, the critical theory lens will allow the researcher to engage in what Creswell (2014) referred to as “transformational advocacy” (p. 67). Creswell (2015) defined mixed methods research as:

“an approach to research in the world in the social, behavioral, and health sciences in which the investigator gathers both quantitative (closed ended) and qualitative (open ended) data, integrates the two, and then draws conclusion based on the combined strength of both sets of data to understand research problems”. (p.2)

The type of mixed design for this inquiry will be what Creswell (2015) denoted as convergent design, whereby the quantitative data and the qualitative data are collected concurrently and both datasets will be analyzed separately and then the results compared. Initially, the researcher is drawing on homeless legislation and literature, and will survey the 130 Universities within the membership of the Coalition of State University Aid Administrators (COSUAA) to provide an overview of what programs on homeless exist and what best practices have been identified. Membership of COSUAA consists of the financial aid director at large public institutions with an enrollment of 10,000. Kerrigan

(2014) further labeled this approach as a “convergent parallel mixed design method case study” (p. 341).

Concurrently, the researcher collected through interviews, focus groups, and document analysis qualitative data at a large public university with an enrollment of over 10,000 students. The use of interviews and focus groups provided the collection of responses on how higher education personnel on campuses are working with homeless students and what best practices are utilized. The document analysis provided both historical information on homeless in Universities settings, as well as the legislation influencing policies and programs for this population. Basic qualitative research allows researchers to “delve into questions of meaning, examine institutional and social practices and processes, identify barriers and facilitators to change and discover the reasons for success or failure or interventions” (Starks &Trinidad, 2007, p. 1372). Using the qualitative research approach enabled the researcher to develop descriptions and themes from the qualitative data while also providing quantitative analysis to triangulate the data (Creswell, 2014). Furthermore, data gathered via interviews, document research and focus groups allowed for the examination of concepts that enhances the development of a theory of basic social processes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Starks &Trinidad, 2007). Thus, the focus of resiliency and social justice theory informed the inquiry as the basis for assessing the effectiveness and development of interventions to eliminate barriers for homeless youth in higher education.

### **Study Setting**

The University setting where the qualitative research was conducted was purposefully selected from the member institutions of COSUAA. COSUAA is an advocacy and training organization for the financial aid profession and consists of large, public institutions with over 10,000 students. The institution was chosen based on its membership in COSUAA, the homeless student resources identified on its website, and the large percentage of Pell recipients that make up its student body, along with the close location proximity to the researcher. The concept of purposefully selected sites is based on what will “best help the researcher understand the problem and the research questions” (Creswell, 2014, p. 189). Furthermore, purposeful sampling provided the researcher to select a site for richer and in-depth study to better understand the problem and answer the research questions (Creswell, 2014).

### **Study Participants**

Since the focus of this investigation was to gain information and understanding of what universities are doing to help their homeless student population, a purposeful sampling method is the most appropriate approach for selecting research participants (Creswell, 2014). Purposeful sampling provided a mechanism for the researcher to answer the questions posed for the study by directly targeting participants that provide the best data and information to guide the study (Creswell, 2014). Initial selection of the participant group began with a review of the COSUAA membership. As discussed previously, COSUAA is comprised of large, public institutions from across the United States. Using the membership of COSUAA (n=130) as the survey population allowed for data

collection across the country from similar institutions. The quantitative portion of this mixed methods study was assessed from the survey data.

Additionally, a site selected from COSUAA membership was the setting of interviews and focus groups to enable the researcher to collect qualitative data. Regional University (RU) was chosen because of proximity to the researcher and socioeconomically diverse undergraduate population. Interviews with key administrators (n=3), including Director of Student Financial Assistance, Director of TRiO Services, and Director of Housing, occurred on campus. The identification of these administrators was purposeful, as they are involved with students on a daily basis.

Furthermore, pursuant to triangulation of the data gathered from document analysis, survey data, and the interviews, a focus group (n=5) will occur. This group, consisting of a housing representative, financial aid counseling staff and academic advisors provides a varied perspective concerning students and their challenges in and outside of academics. Selection of the focus group permitted data collection from those who interact one-on-one with students and will add rich, thick descriptive data to the study. Using the voices of those working directly with students alongside the documents and survey data assisted the researcher in creating a narrative to answer the research questions and create best practices to support resiliency (Creswell, 2014).

### **Documents**

Documents from the institution were examined along with written and online resources to review and reflect on issues surrounding homeless youth and

higher education. Public documents created the ability for the researcher to understand things that “have taken place before the study began” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 164). Specifically, the *MVA* is a starting point for investigating the context of homelessness in education, as the act outlines interventions that educational entities must perform to assist students in housing crisis. Precisely, congressional records, testimony and other transcripts will provide rich narrative to set the stage for the research questions. Another act, the *College Cost Reduction Act of 2007 (CCRA)*, placed the issue of homeless youth in the forefront of financial aid offices in higher education. This act required the addition of questions to financial aid applications to identify homeless youth to higher educational institutions. Again, the review of the legislative process leading to the passage of this act will provide context to the study as well as serving as a starting point for additional inquiry for the interviewing and observational part of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Besides Congressional actions, higher education policies and procedures from this public institution were examined to explore what types of programming is available for homeless students. The database of COSUAA members will further provide the researcher an opportunity to review individual school websites for information on homeless student resources, if any. The following documents from the institution were analyzed: financial aid policies and procedures as they relate to homeless students as defined by the FAFSA. Other documents would include websites that are designed as resources for those in housing crisis, as well as links to outside agencies that the school uses for referrals. As Merriam and Tisdell (2016) noted,

“documents of all types can help the researcher uncover meaning, develop understanding, and discover insights relevant to the research problem” (p. 189).

### **Data Collection**

Framed through a mixed design, data collection consisted initially of survey data from the 130 COSUAA institutions, along with interview and focus group data from purposefully selected individuals at the selected University. The purposeful selection enabled the researcher to gather data to assist in understanding the problem and research question (Creswell, 2014). Moreover, a mixture of survey, interview and focus group data allowed the researcher to gather direct quotes and descriptions of procedures and dealings with students to create the narrative and understand the phenomena (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Ethical issues in data gathering were addressed by seeking approval from the University of Missouri IRB and the IRB office at the selected institution. Gatekeeper letters, (see Appendix A), were sent to the Provost at the study site and a signature was obtained before any data collection or contact with subjects. Furthermore, the online survey for the COSUAA group was disseminated after final IRB approval (see Appendix B)

In addition to the approvals, the researcher adhered to ethical standards in the conduct of the research. These standards include describing the study and the final research product, describing any risks and benefits to the participants, and the ability for a participant to withdraw or refuse to answer questions at any time (Creswell, 2014; Fink, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Seidman, 2013).

## Survey Protocol

A brief online survey (see Appendix C), was sent to the membership of COSUAA, allowing for the capture of national perspectives surrounding the issue of homeless students and retention. Results of the survey were analyzed using descriptive statistics and the portion that consisted of open-ended questions was be coded and analyzed similarly as the focus groups and interviews. The descriptive statistics gleaned from the survey results was included in the analysis, which provided multiple sources for data (Yin, 2014). The survey answered the first research question, *What procedures and policies are in place to identify homeless students through the financial aid process?* and gathered short responses from participants about specific interventions they may be employing. Gathering this data involved an online survey to participants with a notice of informed consent (see Appendix C) outlining the purpose, procedures, and confidentiality (Fink, 2017).

The survey consisted of a mixture of short response questions and Likert scale responses. Thirteen questions were presented to the participants using the COSUAA listserv as a vehicle to distribute the survey. All current members were invited to participate via a link in the email sent to the list serve (n=128). Upon reaching the survey site, the statement of informed consent was provided as referenced in Appendix C and then the questions followed. Survey results were collected using Qualtrics software. Fink (2017) outlined concerns with online surveys, which include the use of multiple email addresses, not knowing who completed the survey and issues with technology and privacy concerns. These concerns are mitigated by the fact that the researcher is a part of the COSUAA

group and will have credibility, which will assist with privacy concerns and the knowledge of the survey respondent. The COSUAA group limits access to the email service to one member per institution so the data will not be corrupted by multiple users from the same school. Also, with only one member, there is only one email address associated with the institution that is being surveyed.

Surveying this closed group online will allow for large geographic coverage to schools with varying socioeconomic profiles of students that will assist with the analysis of homeless interventions.

Data concerns, as cited by Fink (2017), were minimal, as the survey was not asking for data that was personally identifiable to an individual and was not encrypted. The data was also aggregated so that a single institution was not identified in the results. Using short response and Likert items allowed the respondent to answer quickly without doing much research.

To evaluate the reliability of the survey (Fink, 2017), the researcher utilized the test-retest reliability coefficient that determined the degree scores are consistent over time. The survey was administered to the same group of 19 educators within a three-week interval. Then the scores from the survey were correlated using the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) to establish the stability for the reliability of the survey. A high coefficient of stability was the criteria for good test-retest reliability. For the survey, the correlation between the test and retest was .486, which is significant at the .005 level according to the SPSS analysis, indicating the reliability of the survey.

Besides the survey tool itself, content validity for the survey was determined by examining current literature on homeless as corroborated through research (Fink, 2017). Specific questions designed to measure perceptions of financial aid directors on the prevalence of homelessness on their campus, interventions to help those students, and number of Pell Grant eligible students were included. Using a Likert-type scale of questions will gauge the participants' perceptions about homeless students and supports on their campuses. Follow up questions in the form of open text allowed participants to give examples and elaborate on concepts in the scaled questions. This forms connections to the four research questions and allowed for triangulation of the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Utilizing the survey tool, Qualtrics, the researcher gathered and analyzed data in an efficient way within the membership of COSUAA (Newcomer, Hatry, & Wholey, 2016).

### **Focus Group Protocol**

Conducting research using a focus group allowed the researcher an understanding of “how people feel or think about an issue, idea, product or service and are used to gather opinions” (Krueger & Casey, 2015, p. 6). Furthermore, using a focus group provided for a creation of rich, thick narrative that added to data collected from the survey and interviews. (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In addition to creating a narrative, the focus group provided a mechanism for the researcher to gain understanding of the issues surrounding homeless youth. Furthermore, this group consisted of people who are closely involved with the creation or implementation of policies and

procedures to help the homeless population. Krueger and Casey (2015) cited the use of focus groups as vehicles to help with decision-making and guiding program, policy or service development and by using this means of data collection, the researcher will create a needs assessment of such programmatic development within the institution.

Focus groups included financial aid administrators, student success personnel on campus and student housing personnel (n=6-8). After the gatekeeper letter was signed for the institution, invitations were sent to a financial aid representative, two academic advisors, and a housing representative. The group interviews were on the University campus to allow the participants to feel comfortable in their setting. The focus group size was about six to eight members to allow all participants to share their experiences and viewpoints. Depending on the availability of these administrators, the researcher conducted a one or two focus group sessions to allow a more intimate setting to capture the thoughts and answers of each participant. In-depth insights will add to the rich narrative and the smaller groups creates for more conversation and follow up questions as the researcher works to gain understanding (Krueger & Casey, 2015). The smaller size also created an environment for interactive discussion, which can give a different type of data not collected in an individual interview (Hennink, 2014). Within the group setting, everyday social interaction was observed and data gathered while participants engage in discussion between each other (Hennink, 2014). The process provided the group to engage in more organic conversation

instead of a question-response model. In this model, the interviewer plays a lesser role (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

Utilizing focus groups enabled the researcher to facilitate the discovery of a “range of opinions, perceptions, ideas or feelings that people have about something like an issue, behavior, practice, policy, program, or idea” (Krueger & Casey, 2015, p. 21). The perceptions of the higher education professionals about the issues homeless students encounter and how to best facilitate their success was the focal point of the research. Collecting data in this way provided insights to how the institution works with this student group and the focus group is a way to capture insights and attitudes and to see what ideas may emerge from the collection (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

To ensure the collection of data that will support the creation of the narrative, questions aligned to the research questions were open-ended to facilitate dialogue within the group (see Appendix D). The questions developed explored the treatment of homeless students in a higher education, paying particular attention to the financial aid process. As referenced in Appendix D, the focus group protocols attempted to answer all four of the research questions and the specific questions are referenced in the protocol. Open-ended questions allowed the researcher to collect meaningful data and provided descriptive data (Hennink, 2014; Krueger & Casey, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The group sessions were no more than 45 minutes and were audio recorded to ensure the accuracy of data collection and analysis. Prior to beginning the audio recording, each participant was given an informed consent letter that had been approved by

the University of Missouri Institutional Review Board and the Regional University's Institutional Review Board to explain their rights as a participant and outline the ethical treatment of the participant and the information gathered in the session via audio recording (Appendix E). Audio recording permits transcription to occur later and helps the researcher focus on the non-verbal and setting during the group. Recording the focus groups also reiterated the professionalism of the researcher and allowed careful listening to the responses (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Seidman, 2013; Yin, 2014). Similarly, member checking was employed to ensure that the researcher (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) captured the interpretation of words and ideas accurately. Using member checking allowed the researcher to capture content validity and strengthen the credibility of the research, which is crucial when using qualitative data collection (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Further validation was provided as the researcher conducted the data analysis via the qualitative and quantitative data elements gathered.

### **Interview Protocol**

In addition to the use of focus groups and survey data collection, the researcher also conducted interviews (n=3) to further triangulate the findings. Interview subjects included the Director of Student Financial Assistance, Director of Trio Services, and the Director of Student Housing at Regional University. Before the interview, participants were provided the informed consent form (Appendix F). The first interview was conducted face-to-face, while a second follow-up interview was conducted by telephone. Mertens (2005) claimed three

benefits when conducting interviews: depth of information, relationship development, and participant flexibility. These interviews included open-ended and semi-structured questions to establish an understanding of the construct of homeless and to frame how participants shaped their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Questions were framed around the availability of aid resources and barriers that exist or are perceived to exist for homeless students and provide data collection for all four research questions as noted in Appendix G. The *MVA* and subsequent impact of the act on the financial aid process is a further underpinning of the questions. The researcher contacted the subjects via electronic mail to schedule the approximately 30 minute interviews and secured informed consent before the interview. Questions for the interview and a confirmation given beforehand were given to the participants' with time to review and contemplate responses. To ensure accuracy, interviews were audiotaped to allow for engaged listening by the researcher during the interviews, as well as provided a mechanism for reflection and transcription of the data. Utilizing interviews assisted the researcher in strengthening data collection and "understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (Seidman, 2013; p. 9).

Seidman (2013) outlined protocols for interviews to guide the researcher to facilitate interviews to glean the most information possible by using strong questions and listening skills. Open-ended questions and exploring with targeted following questions facilitated a deep exploration of the participant's experiences and thoughts on the subject. Moreover, the researcher should be prepared to

“listen more, talk less” as they conduct the interview (Seidman, 2013, p. 86).

Listening fosters respect and leads to trust between the participant and researchers, which enhances the collection of data in this format (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Seidman, 2013). Establishing trust also assisted in the validation process as the researcher built that relationship.

Questions created by the researcher were informed by current research on the theoretical frameworks of social justice, resiliency theory, and homelessness in higher education, which framed the content validity of the interview.

Furthermore, to ensure the face validity of the interview process, member checking is essential, enabling the researcher to “solicit feedback on preliminary or emerging finding from some of the people you interviewed” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 246,). Member checking permitted validation of information and comments are in agreement with their intent and capture their experiences in the interview (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Validity of the research is critical to the researcher and participants and reinforces the trustworthiness of the researcher with the participants (Creswell, 2014). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) postulated it is “imperative that researcher and others have confidence in the conduct of the investigation and in the results of any particular study” (p. 238). Creating this confidence in the research is supported by validation of the data collection and analysis and how the researcher followed the protocols (Creswell, 2014; Krueger & Casey, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Seidman, 2013)

## **Data Analysis**

Ethical considerations of data collection are at the forefront of this research. Approvals from the University of Missouri's Institutional Review Board (IRB) were obtained (see Appendix B) and strict adherence to regulations occurred to protect the participants. Gatekeeper letters (see Appendix A) and informed consent (see Appendix C, E and F) letters were obtained before data collection that acknowledged the rights of the institutions that chose to participate in the study.

Another ethical consideration is the protection of the student experiences and situations that were shared during interviews, focus groups and other analysis. All efforts were taken to ensure maximum protection not to identify individuals and situations or otherwise exploit a student and their issues. Due to the sensitive nature surrounding the issue of homelessness, students were not participants in this research. If a participant discussed a student, the data was carefully masked to avoid any personally identifiable information in the final report.

Data obtained from the survey was tabulated and analyzed using the SPSS Version 25. The Likert scale questions were measured with a scale that ranged from one to five as previously detailed, with five indicative of extensive. The mean and standard deviation for each question will be determined to establish the frequency of responses. Using descriptive statistics will provide summaries of some of the questions and data will be illustrated with charts and bar graphs to provide a visualization of the frequency of responses, measures of central tendencies and measures of variation (Fink, 2017). Questions that ask for counts

and percentages of students to describe the schools' population were also tabulated to show distribution and regional similarities, if discovered.

Qualitative data analysis included the organization and cross-examining of data in ways that enables researchers to see patterns, identify themes, and make interpretations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), this organization of the data is done as the researcher compares similar themes and examines how these relate to the variables within the sample population. The researcher plans to use the traditional approach of coding as the themes emerged out of the data analysis (Creswell, 2014). Creation of basic categories, according to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), allows for quick identification of the information as one works through the analysis of the data. Emerging themes were triangulated with other data collection tools to help guide the research.

Thus, once the data are gathered, the transcription of the interviews were conducted and field notes completed. Coding of the transcripts was conducted in a systematic manner (Kitzinger, 1995). A two-part coding process was employed to label the segments of data to identify themes (Fossey et al., 2002). First, open coding was conducted. This involved the researcher examining the units of analysis and formulating basic, noninferential descriptions of the phenomena being studied, then grouping them into general categories that described the participants' experiences (Nelson & Quintana, 2010). Next, the researcher employed an axial coding method that created inferential descriptions of the processes being observed and giving them meaning that was relevant to the

research questions (Nelson & Quintana, 2010). Meanings, patterns, and connections among data were coded, thus giving an understanding of the data about the research questions (Fossey et al., 2002). As an additional level of data triangulation (Creswell, 2009), field notes were interpreted about the findings in the transcriptions.

### **Limitations**

A critical limitation of this study was the limited access to students that are experiencing homelessness or are at risk of being homeless during their college tenure. New guidance from United States Department of Education (ED) has created a barrier in accessing student data and names to conduct any surveys or interviews (NASFAA, 2017). Since the willingness of students to self-identify or university staff being able to share data surrounding this student group for this research, direct student contact would be impossible with these mandated constraints. The lack of the student's voice limits the study in how outreach or interventions would enhance the student's attachment and retention and persistence at the institutions in the study.

Another limitation was that only large public institutions are included the study. Private four-year and two year colleges and universities may have interventions in place for homeless students, but due to time constraints, they will not be included.

Finally, limitations to this study included the researcher's connection to the University as a former employee. Potential bias has framed the approach to the research and as such, all data from interviews and the focus groups was vetted

using member checking to ensure that personal bias does not affect the transcription of the sessions (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

### **Design Controls**

The researcher utilized several controls to reduce bias in the research. First, semi-structured questions were used in the interview and focus group settings. According to Merriam and Tisdale (2016), this provided the participants to share opinions and views without taking on the researcher's viewpoints. In addition, survey development will employ design controls, such as content validity and reliability. Furthermore, participants' short answer responses on the survey helped the researchers gather data that support the qualitative methods, in this case an online survey. The online survey to a closed membership group provided the advantage that only one entry per institution/COSUAA member will occur and that the survey is not asking for highly protected data (Fink, 2017). Finally, member checking allows bias to minimize by participants reviewing their responses and making changes to convey the correct information and tone (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdale, 2016).

### **Definitions of Key Terms**

Key terms defined help provide an understanding of the research and its key components. Thus, the following terms are defined for this inquiry:

**Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA):** This electronic form is the means by which a college-bound student applies for federal financial aid through the United States Department of Education (Crutchfield, et al. 2016).

The form takes data elements and applies a formula, mandated by Congress, to

give an estimated family contribution. This allows higher education institutions to use the results to create a financial aid package for students.

**Homelessness/Homeless Youth:** The federal government definition of homelessness is the absence of “fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence” as defined in the *McKinney Vento Act* (Crook, 2014).

**Large public university:** COSUAA defines a large public university as an institution having an enrollment of 10,000 students or more and governed by the state in which it is located.

**Resiliency:** According to Masten and Obradovic (2006), resilience is two-fold. Individuals use experiences to adapt and then develop coping mechanisms to protect against future occurrences of the experience.

**Retention:** The rate that students return to an institution in subsequent semesters. Most institutions measure retention as the rate at which first-time college students return the following fall after entry, as required by the Integrated Post-Secondary Education Data System (IPEDS).

**Unaccompanied Youth:** Minors that are not with their parents or guardians because they have been denied access to family housing, live in runaway shelters, or on the streets as defined by the *McKinney Vento Act*. Unaccompanied youth live, in some instances, doubled up with other families or friends (Ausikaitis, 2015).

### **Significance of the Study**

Homeless students at the post-secondary level deserve a level playing field as they work to obtain a degree. Undertaking this research project assisted

practitioners, especially those in student development, financial aid and retention offices, to understand and evaluate the needs of this population on individual campuses. Creating interventions to enhance persistence and completion while providing for basic needs is in both the institutions' and the students' best interest (Chapalot, et al. 2015). Empowering students to utilize available resources and creating a comprehensive approach to issues that limit educational success, such as housing insecurity, builds trust with the community and combats the issue of access (Chapalot, et al., 2015; Crutchfield, et al., 2016).

Higher education institutions are believed to be a safe zone for students to live and grow academically, but the lack of safe shelter or resources does not align with that ideal in practice at many schools. Advocacy groups have been successful in helping the homeless and unaccompanied youth in gaining access to resources through the aid process, but that legislation stops short of meeting the homeless needs of these students (Crutchfield, et al., 2016). Students have access to resources but not enough to solve the issues of housing and food security (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2016; Crutchfield, et al., 2016). Higher education institutions need to address these issues in the context of providing services and linkages to the financial aid process for homeless students (Crutchfield, et al. 2016).

### **Scholarship**

Scholarship on retention of students has been in the forefront of higher education research for the past fifty years. Previous studies have focused on academic preparedness and faculty interactions, but little has focused on the

outside of the classroom experience of students, especially those in crisis due to homelessness. By adding to this research on homeless college students, the concept of taking care of the whole person can influence policy at the institutional, state and national level.

### **Practice**

This research study can have implications for the financial aid practitioner and other student affairs professionals. The research can provide guidelines for creating interventions for students based on best practice and in support of resiliency, which in turn can affect policy. If retention practices in higher education can take into account issues beyond the tuition and financial aid needs of students, possible increases in retention and persistence will occur.

### **Summary**

Conducting this research created context for the problem of homelessness on college campuses and through careful synthesis of the data, using best practices developed across sectors to provide a template for assisting this at-risk population. Higher education administrators acknowledge the problem, but have little evidence revealing how many students are affected other than anecdotal information. Through associating the need of students to institutional practices, students experiencing homelessness can be linked to resources and lessen their chances of not persisting toward degree.

SECTION TWO  
PRACTITIONER SETTING FOR THE STUDY

## **Introduction**

Within section two, is a history of the University of Central Missouri, a large public institution. In addition, organizational and leadership analysis will be a focus and illustrate how both topics align to the research study. In conclusion, provided are the research implications and the summary.

## **History of the Organization**

Missouri's higher education institutions in the early twentieth century consisted of one university and "five splendid normal schools" (Learned, Bagley, McMurry, Strayer, Dearborn, Kandel, & Josselyn, 1920, p. xxvii). One of the five normal schools was Normal School Number 2, located in the small town of Warrensburg, Missouri. Normal schools prepared teachers and promoted standards of education for children (Learned, et al. 1920). The opening of the school in Warrensburg in 1871 provided a regional teacher preparatory school funded by the state. Warrensburg, along with the other four normal schools, eventually became the regional institutions that are state universities today. Normal School Number 2 evolved into what is now the University of Central Missouri (UCM). UCM still is a regional leader in educating teachers, but also has a large number of graduates in the business, criminal justice and health science fields (NCES, 2018).

One of the issues described by the study of Learned, et al., (1920) was the funding to sustain a normal school, an issue that exists in higher education to this day. The researchers described the funding being late and not reliable for the functioning of the school (Learned, et al, 1920). Budget cuts continue to this day

at UCM, making it difficult to provide service to students and to attract and retain staff and faculty. Issues with state funding increase the reliance on student tuition and make the recruitment and retention of those students a critical part of the mission of the institution, as they struggle to meet the needs of all students.

The University of Central Missouri's recruiting focus has changed from a state-centric model to a regional model in the last twenty years due to the decline in graduating seniors in Missouri and the need for increased revenue. State support comprises 32% of the total budget and 48% comes from tuition and fees (NCES, 2018). Signature programs, such as criminal justice and education, are still in the forefront for undergraduates, but a focus has begun to seek new students outside Missouri and outside the country, especially for graduate-level students (NCES, 2018). In the mid- 2010s, UCM had explosive growth in international enrollment for computer science based masters programs. This led to an increase in revenue and investment in the satellite location in nearby Lee's Summit, Missouri. This growth was short lived as immigration and visa concerns across the country and international economic issues caused an abrupt shift in enrollment in 2016 (Ventimiglia, 2017). For the 2016-17 academic year, UCM enrolled 13,988 total students, of which, 9,786 were undergraduates (NCES, 2018). UCM reported a first-year retention rate of 71% and a four-year graduation rate of 29% according to the National Center of Educational Statistics (2018). A four-year graduation rate is not reported for Pell Grant recipients, but a six-year graduation rate for Pell recipients at UCM is 46%. This is the only data available

on retention and completion of lower socioeconomic groups (NCES, 2016) for this University.

### **Organizational Analysis**

An eight-member Board of Governors exercises general control and management of UCM and meets monthly to conduct business. The Board oversees the operations and the Office of the President, through membership appointed by the Governor of Missouri (University of Central Missouri, 2018). The president manages the day-to-day operations of the school along with his Strategic Leadership Team (SLT). The team is comprised of the Provost and Vice-Presidents/Provosts, who act as the operational head of the entire school. Organizational charts show one provost that reports to the president and four vice-provosts report to the provost. Furthermore, the academic side of the operation is divided into four colleges. Each college has its dean and school chairs that guide that college's activities. Support units such as accounting, human resources and facilities report to vice-presidents or provosts that then lead to the SLT and president.

UCM's support units provide much of the student services that occur outside of the classroom and the academic units. Division of labor between the units on UCM's campus espouses the idea that specialized areas exist to get work done based on functional knowledge and skills (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Mintzberg, 1979). Student services include financial aid, student accounts, TRiO, Mentoring, Access and Peer Support (MAPS), student housing, and others. Each area has its own goals and student service focus. For example, the MAPS office

provides peer mentoring, counseling on academic and social issues, and a safe place to share concerns (MAPS, 2018). These areas have different reporting lines but all are providing services that influence student retention. The structural approach illustrates that the organization exists to achieve established goals and objectives (Bolman & Deal, 2013). One long-standing goal at UCM is to increase retention.

Retention rates are a key performance indicator at UCM, which is then tied to funding from the state (rpkGroup, 2015). The ownership of the success or failure of retention initiatives does not reside with one group; it is a cross-campus initiative. Since there is not one division responsible, management of the process and a reflective review of interventions and their effectiveness is difficult.

Review of processes to encompass what is working and eliminate what is not successful is critical to the success of a program (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

Continual evolution is key, but the professional bureaucracy structure and politics may not allow for continuous change (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Mintzberg, 1959).

Using the concepts of the structural and political frames will guide the analysis of the organization as it pertains to retention and student services, and changes to those services at UCM.

The structural frame, according to Bolman and Deal (2013), is comprised of six assumptions. One of these assumptions is that specialization and division of labor increases efficiency by design. Moreover, this structure allocates work and coordinates efforts across the enterprise. Retention and student services at UCM are part of multiple structures. Some services, such as advising, reside in

academic units. Others such as housing are under the direction of the finance division. To complicate the coordination, multiple managers are involved at UCM, which utilizes lateral coordination to get people and offices to work together. Lateral communication is critical to cross the boundaries, but the lack of top-down directives that cross the divisions have made integration of efforts difficult.

UCM's current structure would be construed as a stagnant bureaucracy, as it relates to the adoption of new practices. Stagnation leads to a dedication to the status quo and no impetus for change due to traditional methods of product delivery (Bolman & Deal, 2013). The delivery of education has been stable and very resistant to changes in technology and innovation on campus. The president embraces the idea of new delivery methods, but the implementation of such ideas has been problematic. Overhauling the old system, which is stable and safe, has been met with resistance and has discouraged innovation (Manning, 2013). The structures in place have allowed some offices to withhold on technology, while others have embraced implementation. The structural frame with its bureaucracy has hindered forward movement.

Bolman and Deal (2013) discussed the political frame viewing organizations as coalitions of people and interest groups. Using this frame, "politics is the realistic process of making decisions and allocating resources in a context of scarcity and divergent interests" (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 183). Several offices at UCM are part of the retention effort, many reporting to different leaders, and all with their interests. Each office is a coalition and members have

their information, interests and perceptions of reality (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Bolman & Gallos, 2011). The political differences add to the complexity of starting any new initiatives for a small pocket of students, such as the homeless. Scarce resources and no focused leadership for the retention efforts have made change difficult. Each office tends to do things in a slightly different manner, which creates disparity in service levels and the ability to benchmark data. Basic decisions, such as the use of advising software, are sources of conflict due to scarce resources and philosophical differences (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

To build consensus and momentum around the retention efforts, a new assistant vice-provost was hired in 2016. The thought process was to have one office own the retention process, thereby creating common goals and practices. Coalition building, as discussed by Bolman and Deal (2014), would help create synergy between the competing interests of the various offices and break down some of the complexity. Some positive movement occurred by having a campus leader for the retention efforts, but the struggle for power often overshadowed the goals. Most of the power struggles occur over different viewpoints and the need for autonomy for the various offices, causing some tension. The power issue is not negative, but more about how “competing groups articulate preferences and mobilize to get what they want” (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 195). These differences in preferences and resources are at the root of the politics involved and slows progress. Guiding new initiatives or restructuring outdated systems is the basic power in an organization (Bolman & Deal, 2013). The move of the assistant vice-provost to interim vice-provost in early 2018 will possibly further

complicate the political frame as the retention focus shifts as new responsibilities surface.

### **Leadership Analysis**

Retention and student service resides in many divisions across the campus of UCM. With the decentralized responsibility across the campus, there is not one individual or office that can be analyzed to assess leadership style and effectiveness. Therefore, the researcher will frame this section to discuss group dynamics and building effective self-governing teams as it relates to achieving institutional goals.

Individuals and committees have directed the retention efforts at UCM across campus divisions and colleges. These committees are informal teams charged with implementing and assessing retention efforts. Teams are often in what Levi (2014) referred to as a mixed-motive situation. Mixed-motives for a team include cooperation and competition. This conflict creates “social dilemmas” for the participants (Levi, 2014, p. 82). Team members are categorized into three personality types: competitors, cooperators and individualists. Depending on the personality types, individuals react to the mixed-motive conflict in different ways. As the team tries to work towards goals, conflict may arise which causes team members to lose trust in each other and creates disruption. Teams need to commit to common goals and communicate to diffuse the tensions between competition and cooperation. Since teams at UCM are not embedded within one structure and meet once or twice a month, communication and consensus building can prove difficult. Additionally, the

different reporting lines and politics of the situation leads the teams to have issues with cohesion. With different reporting lines and no directives other than increasing retention, individuals may side with their division instead of the group.

To counteract the natural divisions that may occur within the teams, a goal-setting program may be necessary. Levi (2014) stated to develop a vision for the team is to have a broad focus and “underlying values and purpose” (p. 332). Creating a team mission could facilitate better discussion and create a culture of problem solving and negotiation (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Levi, 2014). With the absence of a true supervisor of these groups, it may be beneficial to create a self-managing team.

Creating a high-performing team requires “focused, cohesive structure” (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 109). With a self-managing team, the team itself would have to create their norms and ways of managing conflict in addition to a team charge (Bolman & Deal, 2013, Levi, 2014). Many of the student success initiatives can function as a self-managing team and would need resources for its success. Resources would give time to create a sense of team by going through the processes such as the setting of goals and norms, as well as the socialization of the team. Utilizing this group development outline can create a sense of belonging, cohesion, and motivation in high functioning teams. Since members have different levels of experience and expertise, self-management may be a benefit (Levi, 2014). This type of team has higher levels of achievement due to its power and authority than its top-down controlled counterparts (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Levi, 2014).

Creating an environment of collaboration via the self-managing team would lead to employees feeling engaged in the process of developing and refining their roles and interactions as they approach student success initiatives to create purpose. Having purpose “yields an overall mission, but successful teams take an additional team of recasting purpose into specific and measurable performance goals” (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 107). Purpose can add to the team’s engagement and enhance performance of the individual, the team and the organization. This sense of purpose helps promote change in the context of social justice as well. In many instances, those on the front line in support roles have major impacts on individual students and the culture of the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

### **Implications for Research in the Practitioner Setting**

Assisting students encountering hardships is an integral part of the student services charge. By discussing homelessness and its impact on student success, institutions can begin to think about and create interventions. Moreover, by creating a proactive approach, institutions, especially the aid office, can assist students before the situation becomes a crisis. Many aid offices and other student services groups often find themselves lagging behind when a student presents a unique and critical challenge and often the offices cannot help in an expedited manner. Reviewing the literature and the data will enable the researcher to provide an outline to guide the creation of interventions that can be used as an initial examination of the campus climate and readiness at any institution. Utilizing resiliency theory and social justice theory as a conceptual framework

will guide the researcher to create student outreach and responses to crises to help retain students.

### **Summary**

This section provided a history of the University of Central Missouri to give understanding and context to the research. An analysis of the organization was presented, utilizing the extant scholarship, and provided a basic analysis of the leadership structure within UCM. The analysis highlights organizational and leadership issues that affect the proposed research study. Moreover, this analysis will provide context to the research study as data is gathered and analyzed throughout the study in relation to the research questions.

SECTION THREE  
SCHOLARLY REVIEW FOR THE STUDY

## Introduction

Estimates show that approximately 1.6 million children experience homelessness in any given academic year (Mohan & Shields, 2014). Many of these children receive assistance due to the *McKinney-Vento Act* while in the K-12 educational system. Homeless students, besides suffering from food and residential insecurity, also are at risk for educational performance (Mohan & Shields, 2014). Additionally, *McKinney-Vento* requires local educational agencies to provide resources and access to youth affected by homelessness. Research surrounding this issue shows how residential instability impacts academic performance (Cunningham, 2014; Mohan & Shields, 2014) in the K-12 arena.

However, as students graduate from high school and transition to post-secondary education, there is little research to show how homeless college students are impacted by their unstable housing situation. While financial aid offices have been able to provide additional resources to the homeless as Congress passed the *College Cost Reduction and Access Act (CCRAA)* in 2007 to improve access to youth affected by homelessness, higher education offers little more than basic compliance to assist homeless youth in college. Crutchfield, Chambers and Duffield (2016) stated, “Research on homeless youth in higher education is limited” (p. 191). Even with the passage of the CCRAA, very few studies have investigated the effectiveness of this act. As a result, the research for this project will begin to address this significant gap in the literature. Within this review, the lack of research on homeless students at the university level is

evident, as there is little mention of any research or programmatic interventions for students at the postsecondary level.

Attaining a college degree is a national priority as evidenced by prior President Barack Obama's 2020 college completion initiative. The goals of this initiative are to have ten million more college graduates at all levels of degree attainment by 2020 and create a more educated and skilled workforce (Kanter, Ochoa, Nassif, & Chong, 2011). Special attention was to be focused on "fast growing first generation, under-represented and economically disadvantaged populations" (Kanter et al., 2011, p. 11), who are facing scarce resources and struggle to meet daily needs such as housing, food and transportation (Chaplot, Cooper, Johnstone, & Karandjeff, 2015). Thus, the research focus is an investigation of programs in higher education institutions to help assist homeless youth gain access while supporting their resiliency and persistence towards an undergraduate degree.

### **Review of Scholarship**

In developing the study, several theories using the context of homelessness were examined. A historical view of homelessness, as referenced by Mohan and Shields (2014) and Cunningham (2014) and how it specifically relates to education was conducted. The *McKinney-Vento Act*, enacted in 1987, frames the discussion, as it is the primary government intervention for the homeless and access to education in the United States (Ausikaitis, Wynne, Persaud, Pitt, Hosek, Reker, Turner, Flores & Flores, 2015). In addition to the historical review, research questions were created using the conceptual

frameworks of social justice and resiliency theory. Utilizing historical perspectives, resiliency theory and social justice theory, a comprehensive examination was conducted to guide how financial aid professionals can affect change for students with unstable housing and promote their resiliency and persistence toward a degree.

### **Historical Background**

The historical context of homelessness in the United States provides context to understand how government interventions developed to help students impacted by a lack of housing security. Youth homelessness has increased greatly since the 1980s (Cunningham, 2014; Masten et al., 2014; Mohan & Shields, 2014). With the advent of the recession of 2007, more families have experienced economic hardships including residential instability at a greater rate than in past decades (Berg-Cross & Green, 2010; Cunningham, 2014; Masten et al., 2014; Mohan & Shields, 2014). As economic tensions increase within households, youth are impacted in various ways, including educational issues such as academic failure, lack of preparedness and being below grade-level in key subjects such as math and reading due to food and residential insecurities (Berg-Cross & Green, 2010; Hallett, 2010). As local school districts react to homelessness within their boundaries, basic needs must be met first before academic issues can be addressed. Research cited by Hallett (2010) discusses the pre-college experience of the homeless, but little has been done to measure the impacts at the college level.

Created in 1987, *McKinney-Vento* was enacted to ensure homeless youth have the same access to free, public education as all youth and they cannot be discriminated against or have services withheld due to their housing situation (Mohan & Shields, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2004). The act was an attempt to assist youth affected by homelessness to be able to access education and to obtain transportation, services and referrals to community services within the area. School districts must have a liaison to work with homeless students to comply with the tenets of *McKinney-Vento* (Cunningham, 2014). Students dealing with residential instability perform poorly in school and have issues outside the classroom (Mohan & Shields, 2014). As students move from high school into the college setting, these problems with food and shelter do not end. Therefore, it is not reasonable to expect that the challenges within the classroom would also end.

*The College Cost Reduction Act of 2007* has provided for homeless youth as defined by *McKinney-Vento* to have additional financial aid resources due to their status (Crutchfield et al., 2016; Hallett, 2010). Students with a documented status of homeless or at risk of homelessness can qualify for independent aid levels for federal programs (Crutchfield et al., 2016; Hallett, 2010). Providing additional monetary supports does help with paying bills, but does not create a stable living environment or erase the barriers the student may encounter in the future. Moreover, besides the financial aid designation, there are not the same service expectations for institutions of higher education as afforded by *McKinney-*

*Vento* for K-12 students. Students' academic and personal well-being is still an issue if the family is still in unstable housing situations.

*McKinney-Vento* and the CCRAA both sought to address access and equity issues surrounding the attainment of a K-12 education, but colleges and universities are not required to keep track of the homeless students it enrolls or provide the same access as the K-12 levels (Gupton, 2017). Student level data from the FAFSA in 2017 showed 31,498 students as *unaccompanied homeless* (NCHE, 2017). Although this gives an actual number, many feel that this underestimates the issue (Hallett & Crutchfield, 2017). Without a requirement to track, this is the best benchmark that exists to find the scope of the problem.

Any interventions provided at the collegiate level are at the institution's discretion, but are not required. These governmental acts cited above both seek structure to assist with a marginalized group, which ties to social justice. Social justice theory allows researchers to "critically examine the unequal distribution of power, wealth and privilege in society" (Ausikaitis et al., 2015, p. 710). Socioeconomic issues experienced by college students personify the issues of power and unequal distribution of wealth. Tying the social justice perspective speaks to the leadership of the institution to provide access and support the resiliency of homeless students working toward a post-secondary degree will guide this scholarly review.

### **Theoretical Frameworks Reviewed**

Reviewing the literature surrounding homeless students and educational attainment led to the identification of three areas of focus: impacts of

homelessness on academic achievement, social justice theory, and resiliency theory as it relates to the experience of college students. These theoretical frameworks guide the exploration of the review to provide context of the problem and the research to connect the themes and support the framing of best practices in creating interventions for homeless students within their post-secondary educational experience.

### **Impacts of Homelessness on Academic Achievement and Persistence**

Significant barriers faced by homeless students can influence their ability to enroll and persist in higher education (Huang, Fernandez, Rhoden, & Joseph, 2018). According to Huang et.al (2018), homeless youth are in “inherent disadvantage in an increasingly competitive and education nation (p. 209). The instability of living arrangements cause stress and a focus on basic needs, thus creating roadblocks as students navigate postsecondary education (Chapalot, et. al, 2015; Crutchfield et. al, 2016; Hallett, 2010; Huang, et. al, 2018). Many students struggle with the basic pieces of the college process, including applications, college visits and application fees due to their lack of parental/adult support and financial stressors (Crutchfield, et.al, 2016; Huang, et.al. 2018). Hallett (2010) asserted housing instability “shapes access to college as well as how students participate in the educational process once they are admitted” (p. 12). Admitted students require monetary deposits to hold their spot in the class, housing deposits are required for on or off campus housing choices and travel to the college for orientations, course scheduling and financial aid assistance can

prove difficult for those without proper guidance “to fully engage in the educational process” (Hallett, 2010, p. 12).

Manifested in the concept of social capital theory is proper guidance to students. Social capital is bound by the central premise that people foster the ability to secure benefits through their relationships in social networks (Skobba, Meyers & Tiller, 2018). Homeless students have had disruptions in their social network, thereby rendering it non-existent. (Skobba, et.al. 2018). The idea that people and their knowledge of process and information is key as students navigate the admissions and enrollment processes at a college or university. Many students in times of crisis, according to Skobba, et.al (2018), could not name one person they could turn to for assistance. When interpersonal ties are fragile, students have little access to advice, especially in terms of education and future planning. Limited access to resources creates confusion and stress for homeless students working within the bounds of the college process and may cause them to abandon plans for postsecondary education (Gupton, 2017; Skobba, et. al., 2018)

Additionally, post admission issues also arise. Support in developing study skills, decision-making skills, and balancing academic workloads with working are obstacles that homeless students face due to the lack of stable homes and parental supports once in college (Crutchfield, et. al, 2016; Hallett, 2010, Huang, et.al.2018). Few colleges have programmatic interventions to help homeless students, partially due to the low numbers of homeless that enroll at any one institution (Hallett, 2010). Nevertheless, the need for supports is critical to lead to academic success and persistence toward degree (Broton, et.al, 2014;

Hallett, 2010; Mohan & Shields, 2014). Students receiving supports described help from financial aid staff and others that build the connections to enhance the academic experience and eliminate non-academic stressors that assisted them to stay in school (Skobba, et. al, 2017). Obtaining a degree or other credential is critical in moving a homeless student beyond their current situation and out of the poverty cycle (Broton, et. al, 2014, Chapalot, et. al. 2015; Crutchfield, et. al, 2016; Hallett, 2010, Mohan & Shields, 2014; Skobba, et.al. 2017).

### **Social Justice Theory**

Using social justice theory in the context of homeless youth and their educational experiences in higher education creates a backdrop to both examine the marginalization of the homeless and the way institutions react to students in this situation. Social justice is a means for “all human beings to participate fully in society with respect for their human dignity” (Gidley, Hampson, Wheeler, & Bereded-Samuel, 2010, p. 134). Gidley, et.al. (2010) postulated educational entities, especially universities, could play a key role in social inclusion. Education is a means for not only inclusion, but provides students to maximize their potential for education and earnings to break the cycle of poverty for many (Chapalot, et. al. 2015; Gidley, et. al. 2010; Gupton, 2017; Hallett, 2010; Marshall, 2004). The inclusion in higher education is about access and success for low-income and minority students, not just the concept of access (Gidley, et. al. 2010). Embedding the concept of access, equity and success across the institution is a means to promote the diversity of ideas and diversity of people (Gidley, et. al. 2010).

Diversity of people is comprised of many different groups in the context of homelessness. Marginalization of the homeless affects many groups including students of color, LGBTQ+, and foster youth (Hallett & Crutchfield, 2017). These groups, marginalized by society, are “overrepresented in experiencing homeless and housing insecurity” (Hallett & Crutchfield, 2017, p. 28). Socioeconomic factors and the marginalization of these groups enhances the risk of homelessness and increases challenges as they access higher education (Hallett & Crutchfield, 2017). Providing a college education not only promotes diversity on campus, but also promotes the exporting of social justice and equity to the larger society (Brennan & Naidoo, 2008). Higher education, according to Brennan and Naidoo (2008), provided opportunities for success and increased status through earnings and potential. Those working in higher education want students to succeed, but the complexity of helping students that come from marginalized groups is overwhelming.

Higher education professionals either are in situations where they do not know what they can do to assist the marginalized or are often unprepared to confront issues of social justice (Marshall, 2004). In many instances, social justice work, such as advocacy, is not part of the tenure or performance review process (Marshall, 2004). Even in situations where individual staff and faculty are advocating for students that are homeless, policy patterns and campus climate can dictate whether an issue has a platform. Gupton (2017) stated homelessness is “an example of the intersection of multiple forms of marginality within systems of inequity” (p. 192). By advocating for students beyond policy, practitioners will

be able to create a path to educational equity and enhance the experience from a social justice lens.

At all levels of education, there are policies and procedure, such as *McKinney-Vento* that are supposed to protect and enhance social justice needs for students (Marshall, 2004). Even though *McKinney-Vento* addresses how and why students are supposed to keep access to education when in transitional housing situations, policy is not always implemented, as it should be due to misinterpretation, funding and personal bias (Ausikaitis et al., 2015; Marshall, 2004). Within the context of higher education, there is nothing in place to guide institutions except for basic guidance concerning financial aid for the homeless. Besides the CCRAA, institutions have no reason to assist students in housing crisis, except for the idea of doing what is right. Providing access is important, but with scarce resources, it is difficult to address all the needs of this special population. However, as educators, Ausikaitis et al., (2015) stressed it “is the legal and moral responsibility of school districts and employees to learn about and meet the needs of homeless students” (p. 719). Higher education also shares the responsibility as we educate students and provide support.

Moreover, the provisions of strong supports also contribute to the greater good for the student beyond the educational contract. The college experience “shapes a student’s cognitive, moral and psychosocial characteristics” (Rahedi, Plant, & Callister, 2015, p. 135). Rahedi, Plant and Callister (2015) researched compassion development within higher education and compassion supports social justice and a student’s development in and out of the classroom. Service to the

homeless student grounded in social justice theory provides strong support to the proposed research.

Aside from the positive impacts to students, the use of social justice as a framework also has negative constraints. Disclosure by students of their status is sometimes difficult due to the fear of judgment and other negative effects of being branded as homeless (Ausikaitis et al., 2015). The desire to help students navigate the process and get assistance is often met with resistance due to pride, embarrassment, lack of trust in the system and perceived resilience (Ausikaitis et al., 2015). Despite the need for privacy and respect for the individual, homeless students and others with low socioeconomic status need assistance that “simply cannot be addressed through traditional college supports” (Chapalot, et al., 2015, p. 1). The literature surrounding this issue points to the need for interventions, but they will have to be created and vetted in supportive environments by the institutional leadership (Brown, 2006; Chapalot, et al., 2015; Mares & Jordan, 2012; Marshall, 2004; Masten, et al., 2014; Murtadha, 2009).

Creating a supportive environment to influence the homeless student experience is imperative to affect social justice concerns and the individual students; however, institutions of higher education currently have few, if any, programs to support the challenges facing homeless students (Chapalot, et al., 2015). Working with low-income students requires a broader scope than the traditional financial aid model that is currently in place within institutions (Chapalot, et al., 2015; Masten et al., 2014). By addressing and challenging the current environment and assumptions that educators have about the advantaged and disadvantaged, social

justice concerns can be addressed (Ryan, 2006). Changing the trajectory of homeless students to college graduates “would help disrupt the systems of privilege and inequity that continue to marginalize homeless students in higher education (Gupton, 2017, p. 210).

### **Resiliency Theory**

Homeless students that aspire to postsecondary education embody traits that display resiliency. Their unique experiences have created traits that illustrate the concepts in resiliency theory. Resiliency theory defines and uses the concept of adaptation from his or her experiences but then develops coping behaviors to prevent or diminish future occurrences of that experience (Gupton, 2017; Masten et al., 2014). The resilience to stay in school, despite housing insecurity, does have positive effects on homeless youth (Ausikaitis et al., 2015; Masten et al., 2014). Masten (2014) cited students show resilience depending on systems of support. School provides structure and stability, perhaps the only stability a child has, and that stability fosters adaptability and resilience (Masten et al., 2014). Working within the context of education, homeless youth can persist due to interventions “that prevent exposure, reduce risk, and promote resilience” (Mertens et al., 2014, p.205). Education, according to Gupton (2017), provided a means to “locate a pathway out of homelessness” by “finding shelter, create and sustain supportive relationships, and continue the process of personal development” (p. 194). Developing a support system to promote the resiliency of the homeless student is the basis for this research.

The reduction of risk and promotion of resilience explored within the study of homelessness and higher education interventions enhances understanding of how to create best practices for post-secondary institutions. Masten, Cutuli, Herbers, Hinz, Obradovic, and Wenzel (2014) analyzed 20 years of research to identify how homeless elementary and secondary students develop resiliency despite their challenges with housing insecurity. Such elements as a need for stable housing for nine months, food security and a constant environment would connect to the research done regarding K-12 education to promote education for those in housing crisis. In the review of literature, instability of housing creates “adverse life experiences and sociodemographic risks” for children (Masten et al., 2014, p. 202). Adverse life experiences created educational risk, but research showed variables in the educational achievement of the homeless students (Masten, et al., 2014). The researchers attributed the variables in achievement of students’ due resiliency that is manifested within the individual despite the challenges their housing situation presents (Masten, et al, 2014). By using “evidence-based policies and interventions that prevent exposure, reduce risk, and promote resilience”, the academic issues can be mitigated in some fashion for this group of students (Masten, et al., 2014, p. 205).

Inteventions to promote resiliency need to be grounded in the four models of resiliency as described by Hallett (2012). These models are: invincibility, challenge, compensatory and protective (Hallett, 2012). Invincibility and challenge models focus on how students respond to the risk factors, while the compensatory and protective models show “the relationship between risk and

protective factors” (Hallett, 2012, p. 14). A brief review of the models helps to shape and define resiliency theory and its use as a conceptual framework for this study.

Invincibility models divide students into two categories. Students can be invincible or vulnerable, which shapes the outcomes for them in relation to the obstacles they face (Hallett, 2012). Those who display invincibility or invulnerability thrive beyond expectations, despite the issues and hardships they may have or continue to endure (Hallett, 2012). Hallett (2012) stated “scholars rarely ascribe to this model; however, the underlying assumptions have framed popular texts and major motion pictures” (p. 15). While this romanticized version would render most interventions moot, it does not, according to Hallett (2012), capture what is demonstrated by students, the concept of resiliency.

The second of the response models is the challenge model. This model, like the invincibility model, has been difficult to use in a practitioner setting (Hallett, 2012). The exploration of how risks are experienced is a useful tool of the model, but it relies on a measure of exposure to one risk to measure the development of resiliency. Most students have a myriad of experiences, both positive and negative, as they navigate situations such as homelessness (Hallett, 2012). From these experiences, resiliency is developed as youth react and develop tools to use resources (Yates, Egeland & Sroufe, 2003). The ongoing process “of garnering resources that enables the individual to negotiate current issues adaptively and provides a foundation for dealing with subsequent challenges” builds resiliency (Yates, et. al. 2003, p. 249). Although Hallett (2012) does not

view the challenge model as practical, and argues it is limited in discussing protective factors, it does still provide insight into the development of resiliency.

Continuing the discussion of risk, the compensatory model “acknowledges the impact of risk factors, but argues that protective factors can offset negative outcomes” (Hallett, 2012, p. 17). Protective factors for a homeless student can include social networks and personal traits. Thus, a student with more protective factors can overcome risks such as housing instability and develop resiliency (Hallett, 2012). Nevertheless, risks and protective factors do not occur in isolation and are embedded in the combined experiences of the individual, which makes the compensatory model difficult to study and to use in the creation of policy and interventions for students. It does, however, provide a context in how personal and social interactions can help build on resiliency promotion as it relates to this study.

Finally, the protective model provides a more frequently studied model that illustrates the ability for protective factors to offset or eliminate risk. The ability for a protective factor to help people overcome risk and be resilient is a focus of the research. Hallett (2012) used the example of a mentor to provide information and encouragement to a student in a high-risk situation and low achieving high school that is thinking about college. The development of this protective relationship can help policy makers encourage positive outcomes and mitigate the exposure to additional risk (Hallett, 2012). Utilizing these models of resiliency as a focal point of the research will enhance the development of supports for homeless students.

Furthermore, research conducted by Masten and Odradovic (2006) and Hersberger (2011) investigated the development of resilience in homeless students. The concept of learned resourcefulness and experiences “creates the basis for future coping efforts” (Hersberger, 2011, p. 4). Therefore, using this conceptual framework to explore the development and enhancement of this resilience in students helps give context to the needs of students who have experienced housing instability.

Although resiliency theory is a wide-ranging theory with many facets, the focus of this review is on the resilience of students in the context of homelessness. The adaptation of the individual creates resilience and that shapes the pathway of the individual (Masten & Odradovic, 2006). The creation of this pathway and corresponding resilience is complicated, thus the research into interventions is complex (Hersberger, 2011; Masten, et al., 2014; Masten & Odradovic, 2006). With the work of Masten and Odradovic, in particular, the concept of “resilience in children depends on resilience across interconnected systems in which human development unfolds, such as families, schools, and neighborhoods” (p. 24). However, resilience at the post-secondary level has not been studied in depth; consequently, the research at the K-12 level will be reviewed as it pertains to student development and academic achievement. The studies cited similarly discuss early interventions that influence academic success and lessen the impact of housing instability (Masten & Odradovic, 2006).

An early intervention to assist in developing and enhancing resiliency is to promote “a space and opportunity to build bonds of trust with peers and adults”

(Gupton, 2017, p. 193). Due to the transient nature of housing instability, many students do not have long-term relationships with mentors or teachers who can assist with the college process (Gupton, 2017; Hallett, 2010). This concept of resilience as institutional support highlights the need for students to have a way to develop their intelligence and internal competencies as they navigate higher education and new environments (Gupton, 2017; Stratton, O'Toole, & Wetzel, 2007). Gaining access to external supports, according to Gupton (2017), related to the need of an individual to have a means of coping and relieving stressors, such as housing. Similarly, students would have to accept the supports as useful and trustworthy and not be viewed as a resource that is trying to "figure out what is wrong with them" (Gupton, 2017, p. 208). Many institutions tend to approach supports for students in homeless situations from a charity perspective and do not look at structural changes to serve students (Hallett & Crutchfield, 2017). Creating a safe space with knowledgeable staff to guide students to resources and supports enhances the chances of success and degree attainment for this population (Broton, et. al. 2016; Gupton, 2017; Hallett, 2010).

Establishment of a support system for both social and academics within the first semesters of enrollment is crucial to continued enrollment (Stratton, et. al. 2007). Hallett and Crutchfield (2017) stated that a single point of contact like the liaisons for the *McKinney-Vento* in the K-12 arena might be a successful starting point. Institutions enroll students to create graduates and alumni, so the enhancement of early student success initiatives leads to institutional success and is a core strategy (Kalsbeek, 2013). Furthermore, there is a societal need to

enhance institutional success, but also to “incorporate protective factors that generate a resilient environment for student learning and retention” (Kerby, 2015, p. 158). Such protective factors could include the use of an assessment team comprised of offices across campus to create the environment to change campus climate (Hallett & Crutchfield, 2017). Supporting resiliency in students is important to the entire campus as we move to increase retention and completion. It is critical for college personnel to realize that there are many factors and challenges that arise from being homeless. Securing housing is not the entire solution to eliminate barriers for success in higher education, but is a starting point in the context of these models.

### **Retention Theory**

A key measure of institutional success is retention and persistence to degree for students. Kalsbeek (2013) considered retention a core purpose and the promise of the institution to its students. According to Tinto’s (1987) theoretical framework, various dynamic factors affect students’ college access, persistence, and attainment. As the seminal work in retention, Tinto (1987) asserted persistence is a product of intentions and aspirations that occur before enrollment in college. There is a duality in the retention process, the student experience and the institutional social systems that create a “directional model based on continual variance in social commitments that influence academic performance” (Kerby, 2015, p. 138). Much of the student experience shapes the chances of success, which aligned to admissions criteria, and the profile of the institution (Kalsbeek, 2013). For most students, the foci on student success, social and academic

integration, and engagement shaped by the creation of “seamless experiences for students as they register for courses, manage financial arrangements, and navigate toward degree completion (Kalsbeek, 2013, p. 11). Navigation of these common college practices is more difficult for a homeless student without social capital and resources (Gupton, 2018, Skobba, et. al, 2018).

The retention of students is comprised of many factors, both in and outside of the classroom and strategy built around maximizing retention rates (Kalsbeek, 2013). Colleges and universities need to ensure integration into the university both socially and academically to show the commitment to the student (Kalsbeek, 2013; Tinto, 1987). Even though student experience plays a large role into their success and sense of belonging at an institution, it is difficult for the institution to account for the experiences of an individual who has been homeless. Homeless students with their multiple hurdles have a harder time integrating into educational experiences due to “multiple threats to learning” (Masten, et al., 2014, p. 205). It is more difficult to integrate into the college experience for those with the stigma of homelessness and this directly challenges Tinto’s (1987) concept of higher integration. Integration leads to academic success and the goal of college completion. Higher integration of students is more difficult for those who do not have stable housing or are working many hours to maintain basic needs (Boatman & Long, 2016). The luxury of being involved in social and academic enrichment activities, both formal and informal, is not afforded to many students who are experiencing financial hardships or other stressors (Boatman & Long, 2016, Gupton, 2017). The commitment to the institution in the form of motivation and

goal completion, in this case, graduation, continues to ebb and flow as a homeless student responds to challenges to academic success (Boatman & Long, 2016; Gupton, 2017; Stratton, O'Toole, & Wetzel, 2007). As housing issues increase or other financial needs occur, a student may need to disconnect from their goal of college. This disconnection can also be a product of feeling "isolated, separated, or socially alienated from the college experience" and have "negative encounters that affect their decisions of persistence" (Kerby, 2015, p. 140). Failure to address the disconnection of those without a support system or other negative experiences will not likely increase persistence. This links into the Tinto (1987) assertion that background experiences, such as family bonds, can impact the chances of success, but data are not always collected in a systematic way that could impact retention models and subsequent interventions (Gupton, 2017). Even though a school does not have control over external factors, they still need to be accountable as student supports are implemented and assessed for impact (Kerby, 2015).

Situations of homelessness are not part of the retention analytics run by many institutions. Modeling provides tools for administrators in identifying trends and aids in the creation of interventions (Kerby, 2015). Kerby (2015) stated predictive models of persistence have "failed to examine the experiences that take place within the institutional context" (p. 140). The experiences of the individual in relation to the institution is key to building the model (Kerby, 2015). Although homelessness is not specifically part of the retention model, socioeconomic factors are. Family income and means are predictive in assessing

the ability to persist and navigate the college roadmap (Chapalot, et al. 2015; Kerby, 2015). This indirect assessment of low-income students is part of the prediction, but has not been part of the larger conversation. Some administrators do not want to stray from an academic focus and question the idea of higher education as a charity or social service agency (Broton, et al, 2014; Crutchfield, 2016; Hallett & Crutchfield, 2017). The juxtaposition of academic success and housing stability cannot be ignored, as success cannot be achieved without basic needs being met (Hallett & Crutchfield, 2017; Maslow, 1943). Hallett and Crutchfield (2017) stated, “instead of charity, this monograph moves the narrative toward an equity and justice perspective” (p. 19). Ensuring success of all students is a focal point of social justice and speaks to the mission of higher education, no matter the school.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Addressing the experience of the homeless student in formulating interventions to address motivation, financial risk, and housing instability, while promoting resiliency and social justice will be the next focal point of this research (Chapalot, et. al., 2015, Cunningham, 2014; Gupton, 2017; Hallett & Crutchfield, 2017; Kerby, 2015). After examining the myriad of theories related to the complex issues that exist for the homeless as they transition to higher education, two frameworks emerged as the conceptual focus for the study: social justice theory and resiliency theory. Overlaying these theories with the academic and social barriers that occur for homeless students provides a 360-degree view of the problem of practice. This conceptual underpinning will enhance the study of the

homeless student and how best to assist them in navigating and succeeding in the post-secondary environment as it relates to organizational structure and intervention development. The focus on retention and persistence to degree will shape the development of the interventions by providing support for the student in the form of promoting resiliency. Resiliency supports grounded in the review of the protective model will guide the promotion of academic achievement and social integration at the institution (Hallett, 2010; Hallett & Crutchfield, 2017). Additionally, the focus on retention and persistence to degree promotes institutional goals as individuals move through to graduation.

Although not specifically defined as a conceptual framework for this study retention theory was reviewed, but determined not to be the focus of the research. Retention theory largely focuses on the academic preparedness and the profile of the student, but does not delve deeply into the vast experiences of students outside of the classroom prior to entering college (Kalsbeek, 2013; Tinto, 1987). Since homelessness influences the basic needs of a student, which according to Maslow (1943), must be met before self-actualization can occur. Physiological and safety needs preclude higher level functioning, such as education. Framing the study on building resiliency and meeting the basic needs of students is aligned with resiliency theory (Hallett & Crutchfield, 2017; Masten, et.al. 2014).

Furthermore, providing a means for students to access and persist in higher education addresses the social justice aspects of education. Social justice theory addresses the marginalization of populations and the need to enhance their status to participate in society. Since the majority of students in a housing crisis

tend to be from lower socioeconomic conditions, minority groups, and diverse in sexual orientation, addressing the needs of this population brings students to the table that may otherwise not have access. Promoting access to higher education is not only good for the individual, but it also fits the mission of most public institutions as a means for creating a greater good. Building on the resiliency theories and research within the K-12 arena on how homelessness creates gaps in educational attainment for the poor, the study will provide for analysis and framing of the study within the context of social justice. Since there is a gap in research at the college level, using educationally related studies about resiliency framed through social justice and its relationship to homelessness will assist in developing interventions.

### **Summary**

Research concerning the impact of homelessness on college students is limited. Some federal mandates do exist in the area of financial assistance, but their impact has not been assessed for effectiveness and impact on access and persistence for homeless students towards a post-secondary credential. This examination will review current practices and guide the creation of comprehensive interventions for college administrators to promote retention and resiliency of this vulnerable population.

In the review of the literature, a historical context to illustrate the problem of homelessness, and how it affects education was provided. The regulations that protect students experiencing homelessness serve as a starting point for the study, such as *McKinney-Vento* and the CCRAA. These regulations frame the research

inquiry. In addition, a review of academic performance and persistence impacts was conducted to provide a context to illustrate the issues experienced by students that impede their persistence to degree.

The theoretical frameworks of resiliency theory, retention theory and social justice theory provide scholarly context for the research. From a student lens, resiliency theory promotes a student-centered lens for the research and respect for the individual, while promoting student success. Combined, these frameworks provide scholarly context for access to higher education for this marginalized group. The conceptual frameworks will guide the analysis and interpretations of the data, both qualitative and quantitative, as the researcher attempts to answer the research questions that guide the study. Using these underpinnings will contribute to the knowledge base as there currently is a gap in the research about how homeless students' access and succeed in higher education. Furthermore, the need to facilitate supports that contemplate the whole person, not just academics, is critical in promoting success. Social, financial, mental health and other issues for the homeless student complicate this issue and drive the development of interventions in the post-secondary arena.

SECTION FOUR  
CONTRIBUTION TO PRACTICE

## **Introduction**

As colleges and universities work to retain and graduate students, administrators continually explore ways to intervene to enhance opportunities for persistence and degree completion. Economic stressors for low-income students and those experiencing homelessness cause a decrease chance at degree completion and hinders educational attainment (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2016). Post-secondary education provides a means to gainful employment and economic gain and supports social justice as students have the means to access jobs to end their cycles of homelessness and poverty (Chapalot, et. al., 2015; Hallett, 2010).

To encourage degree completion and persistence, the focus of this inquiry was to answer how interventions could be created to enhance success for students in housing crisis. Students experience barriers due to institutional practices and procedures and there is little research to explain how students navigate these challenges and develop the supports needed for success (Goldrick-Rab, 2017).

## **Research Questions**

The research questions guiding this study are to investigate existing programs in higher education institutions that assist homeless youth gain access to and support their persistence towards an undergraduate degree.

1. What procedures and policies are in place to identify homeless students through the financial aid process?
2. What barriers exist in higher education for homeless students?
3. How can institutions create policies and procedures to support the homeless student population in the context of resiliency and social justice?

4. How will understanding the resiliency theory enhance the university personnel skill set as they work with homeless students?

### **Connection to Conceptual/Theoretical Framework**

Promoting persistence and degree completion using resiliency theory and social justice theory provided a framework for exploring the inequalities and barriers faced by students in housing crisis. Specifically, the concept of adaptation as it relates to resiliency was explored to consider best practices for the creation of interventions to promote resiliency and degree completion (Masten & Odradovic, 2006; Masten et.al. 2014).

In reviewing resiliency theory, the breadth of the theory narrowed to the concept of adaption. Adaptation is how individuals create a path despite challenges (Masten & Odradovic, 2006). Individuals forging their path and feeling empowered, according to Thomas (2000) and Watt, et al. (2013) leads to higher retention and disrupted negative self-perceptions. The concept of seeing the individual as a survivor guides the creation of positive interventions and shuns the use of a deficit model to approach the issue of homelessness (Watt, et.al, 2013). Furthermore, providing mechanisms to eliminate barriers and aid students in fulfilling educational goals promotes social justice by enhancing the experience of marginalized groups, such as those who are homeless (Chapalot, et. al. 2015). Working within and outside of the bounds of higher educational systems, leaders need to prepare spaces for students to get help and resources and eliminate the barriers that feed social inequities.

### **Participants and Data Collection**

The qualitative portion of this mixed-method design was conducted on the campus of Regional University. Three directors were interviewed and a focus group of five staff that had direct contact with students was conducted. Questions designed by the researcher to assess what the perceptions were on campus surrounding barriers for students that were experiencing homelessness, policy and procedures that could assist students and the participants' thoughts regarding interventions or the lack thereof enhanced persistence and completion. Interviews and focus group interactions were audio recorded and transcribed for ease of analysis. The transcripts provided to the participants for member checking ensured accuracy.

It is important to note that upon initial gatekeeper approval, the researcher was referred to Regional University's Institutional Review Board to gain institutional approval for the conducting of the research. Documents submitted to MU's IRB were submitted, along with the name of the faculty sponsor. The approval letter is attached in Appendix H.

Additionally, a web-based survey (Appendix C) was sent to 129 member institutions of COSUAA, designed to assess the perceptions of barriers for homeless students and to gather best practices from across the nation. The response rate of this survey was 50 participants (39%) and was anonymous. Topics included perceptions of barriers on campus for those that are homeless, retention practices that include housing insecurity, resources for students on campus that are in housing crisis, and data on the number of homeless and Pell

Grant recipients on campus. This survey provided the quantitative component to the data collection.

Additionally, a website search was conducted for RU to assess what web-based information was available to students when the words homeless, lack of housing and emergency were searched. The only result that pertained to this study was a link to a financial aid form to document homelessness based on a response to a question on the individuals' FAFSA form. Attention to the conceptual underpinnings provided context to the problem of practice and highlighted the importance of the research.

### **Presentation of the Data**

In this section, the results of the study are presented, including both qualitative and quantitative analysis. The analysis procedure addressed the four research questions and merged the datasets using the mixed method approach denoted by Creswell (2015) as convergent design. In convergent design, the concurrent collection of both qualitative and quantities data occurs and then the data is analyzed separately and the results compared to understand the problem of practice. Questions in both data sets are used to answer all four of the research questions by using the qualitative responses in both the survey and interviews and triangulated with the quantitative data collected via the survey.

### **Research Question One**

*What procedures and policies are in place to identify homeless students through the financial aid process?*

When a student presents as homeless or housing insecure at RU, there are no policies in place, but a situation-by-situation dynamic exists. During the focus group, several of the five respondents stated that they did not have an awareness of exact policies, but they could sometimes find help for students. Residence Life staff, for example, may have been able to make accommodations in some instances, but there was not a standing policy. Focus Group Participant 1 stated “we have a procedure is that those go to the care team and on the care team 12-14 people from around campus can see who can support the student”. Another referral point mentioned by several participants is the Office of Student Experience and Engagement. This office can identify resources both on and off campus, but the off campus is largely due to the longevity and connectedness of a specific staff member to community resources. Little follow-up exists, so a referral and its results are not widely known by the staff member that tried to assist a student.

Besides the referral, the financial aspects of policy and procedures were discussed throughout the interviews and focus groups. Focus group participants finished many of their answers with questions about “how do we supplement the expense of housing” and “how do we bridge the gap”. When interviewing Director 2, the response to the research question about policy center largely around the collection of documentation to substantiate the claim of homelessness by a student when they file the FAFSA. RU requires a student to obtain a letter from the shelter or high school counselor to document their homeless status. The Director stated that “I feel like I need to be consistent with professional

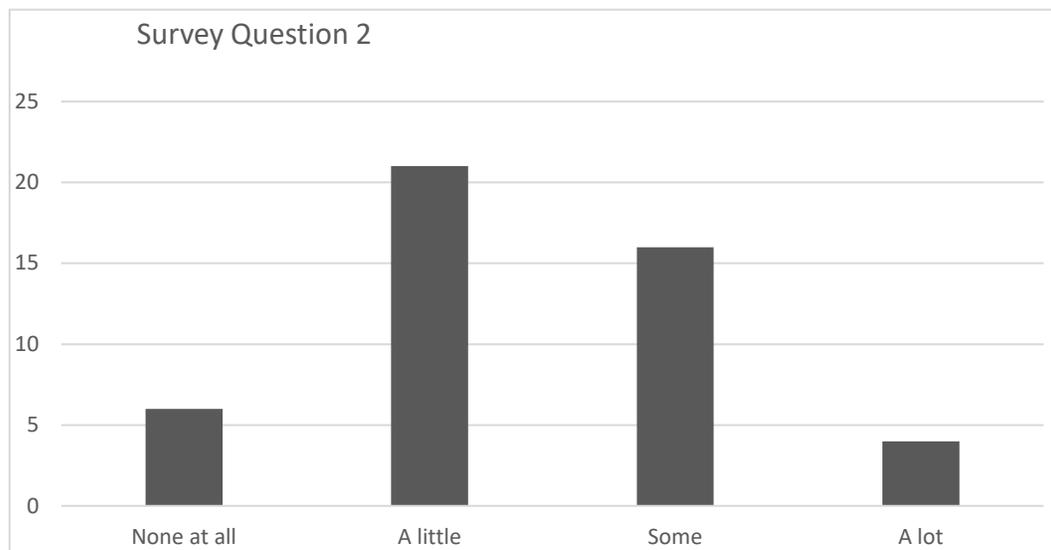
judgement and special requests and in many ways I consider this a special request” Collecting third party documentation is “just to substantiate and just make sure we don’t have a student that’s playing the system” explained the Director. The Director continued by stating “I’m not out to make him jump through extra hoops but I feel like that’s necessary to do to keep the student who aren’t playing nice, you know to keep them in check”.

Director 1 noted that they had a policy and procedure in their grant funding document that they are allowed to pay some housing costs for students. The funds can be used to procure temporary housing as an allowable cost in the grant. The Director stated, “Housing has been willing to work with us in those situations” as RU has year round housing and family housing which makes it easier to help students in a variety of situations.

From the survey, respondents could provide examples of procedures for outreach for students that had identified as homeless on the FAFSA. Out of 50 schools, three sent emails to students that outlined resources, such as food pantry, hotel affiliations, shelters, textbook resources, laundry and showers for students. One school provided aid to meet the full cost of attendance for the students considered homeless on their campus. Based on the response from that school, they are assisting about 25 students per year. Two schools also indicated that they are convening working groups to have dialogue on surrounding issues such as housing insecurity, but are in the formative stages of creating policy and procedures to intervene.

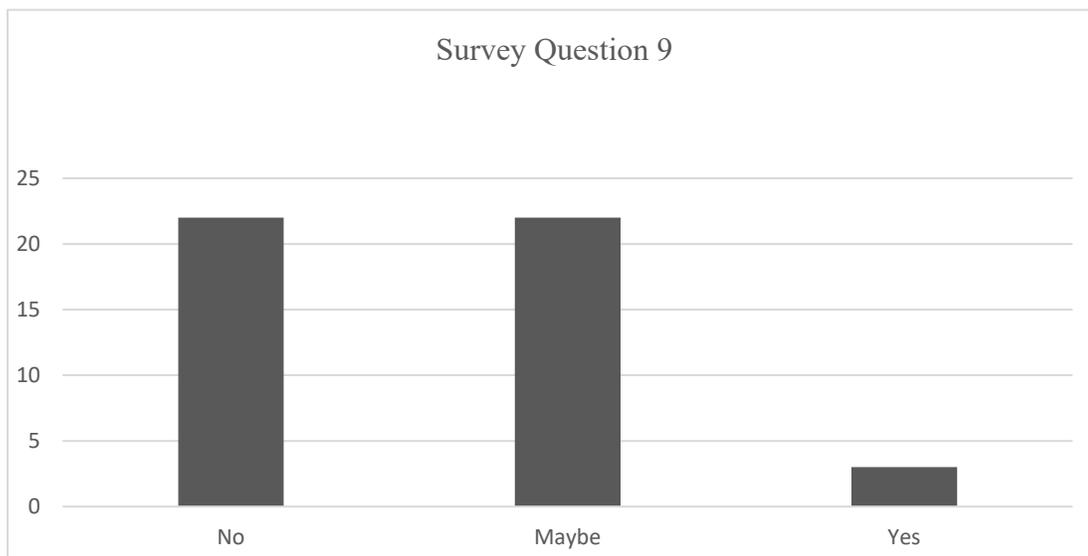
Two questions on the survey aligned with the assessment of having policies and procedures on campus to assist with students experiencing homelessness. First, question two on the survey asked if the university is doing any outreach based on the student's response to the homelessness question. Secondly, respondents answered based on a Likert scale if they had addressed homelessness as part of their retention plans. Listed below are the results in the following figures. Embedded in the survey were also open text for respondents to insert examples of interventions.

*Figure 1 Survey Question 2 How much outreach do you do for homeless students (as identified on the FAFSA) beyond what is required by federal guidelines*



Data analysis of question two revealed out of 46 respondents, 28 responded that they were doing no outreach to students that had indicated they were homeless on the FAFSA. The mean for Survey Question 2 is 1.59 and standard deviation is .87, which illustrates that there is not much variation in the data compared to the mean (see Figure 1).

*Figure 2 Survey Question 9 Is housing insecurity specifically addressed in your retention efforts?*



In Figure 2 it is suggested the institutions surveyed do not include housing insecurity in their retention plans or that its inclusion is unknown by the respondent. Data surrounding this question suggested homelessness is not part of the discussion of the student experience and is supported by Figure 1 illustrating the frequency of outreach for this population.

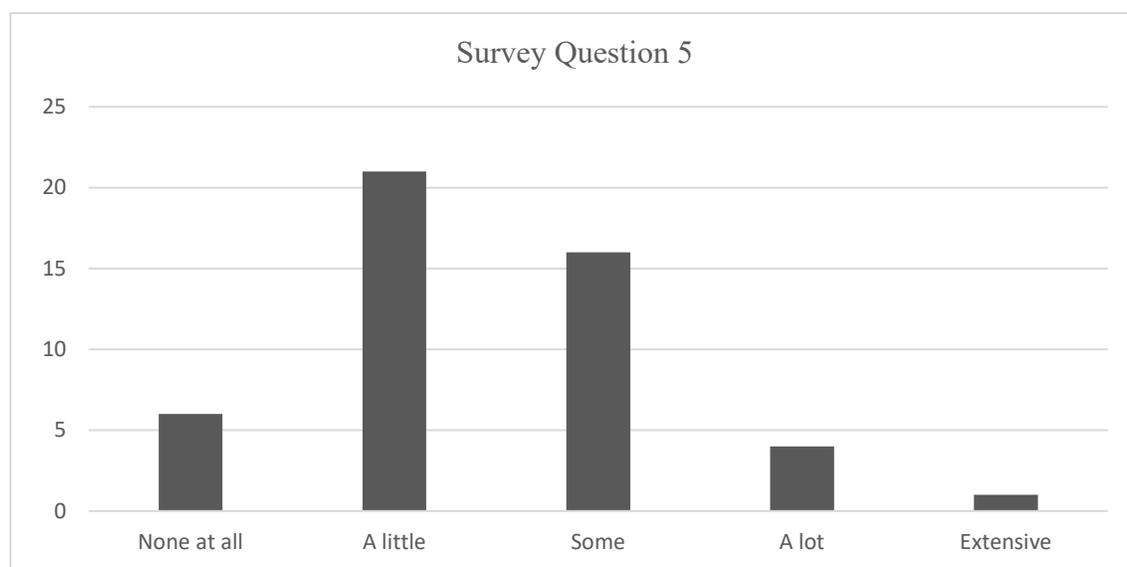
### **Research Question Two**

*What barriers exist in higher education for homeless students?*

Qualitative data primarily answered research question two from participants in the three interviews, the focus group (N=5) and the survey (N=50). The survey provided a quantitative benchmark to assess the perception of homelessness on the individual campuses. The survey question asked, “How much awareness is there on campus to the needs of students that are homeless?” The descriptive statistics displayed in Figure 3, illustrated most campuses

surveyed did not have much awareness of the issue of homelessness or did not view it as prevalent. The lower end of the scale encompassed 27% of the 48 respondents.

*Figure 3 Survey Question 5 How much awareness is there on campus to the needs of students that are homeless?*



Specifically, the survey question asked if there is a general awareness on campus and revealed little to no awareness, conversely the participants of the interview and focus group cited specific issues to students' needs. With financial resources as a barrier for students that are homeless as a thread during interviews and the focus group. Director 2 and 3 both stated finances are an issue, especially as they relate to housing. While "Cost is an issue", stated one focus group participant, "when we are on breaks, students that are homeless don't have a place to go and if they decide to stay on campus over break, there is an additional fee". Director 3 explained that they can provide housing, but it comes with a cost, and "we don't provide is differential pricing based on need". Students find themselves needing a place to stay, but the university cannot provide free

placement and with many students stating, according to Director 3, “nobody wants to go into debt”. From the university’s standpoint, Director 3 stated, we work “diligently to be as equitable as possible because everything is an auxiliary and everything is on the backs of other students”. Providing discounts to one group based on a characteristic, such as need or housing security impacts others. As a housing office, “we are unfortunately in a position to evaluate and make judgements about what is stress and a barrier versus exceptions to policy and that kind of stuff”. Director 3 discussed the barriers and issues, but in the end of the interview stated “It saddens my heart, but I can’t...I don’t know how to fix it”.

Focus group participants had similar responses to the barrier question. The group discussed costs at length. Focus Group participant A stated, “How are they going to pay for it? Students may have necessities like a shower and a couch, but how do I get the next meal?” Another participant explained how barriers of documenting homelessness for financial aid and the FAFSA and cost impact students:

Especially students coming from low income, coming from first generation backgrounds, especially students who are experiencing homelessness. This is the competing variable. If I don't continue with my education if I don't have enough aid if I can't prove that I'm actually independent then I will be homeless and I can't go back to that life. And so it's a constant balance of whether or not they're able to maintain employment or get enough scholarships and also do well in their classes to make sure that they can persist.

Academic Success Coaches that comprised the Focus Group talked about the whole student experience and how some students had to make decisions to work over attending class, or pay for food rather than purchase a book or material for a class. Students also encounter relationship issues that have led to homelessness. One example is a woman shared an apartment with a boyfriend. The coaches talked about how when he left her, she was left with all the rent and could not afford the payment and “stopped attending class while she was trying to look for other options”. Director 1 spoke of safety issues in relationships that caused students to leave stable housing or not have a safe place to go on breaks or summer vacation. “I have students who are in a transient situation; they are temporary situation where shelter is not fixed”. Some students, Director 1 shared, “have aged out of the foster care system and thus have no place to go”. He went on to describe other families having a change in housing back at home, too. The barrier is that

The structures of higher education still think and act as if most students coming here are middle income or better from two parent households and Johnny’s room is the same as when he left it with his trophies still there and he can come back at any time and an apple pie is waiting for him. And the reality is more and more students are not having that situation. They’re coming, especially the students we see [in TRiO} are coming from rental properties which are by their nature short term.

Students in the situation described above, are not afforded a space in a house as their parents or support systems; simply do not have the room to shelter

them any longer. Barriers exist as students experiencing homelessness “the traditional thing you might say is oh, someone looks like maybe they are dirty and haven’t slept well”. However, homelessness is not, as Director 1 stated, “how it is portrayed in the media or Hollywood”. When asked about the prevalence of homelessness at RU, Director 1 stated, “more than people think and I think the reason is that people have a lasting image in their mind to what homelessness looks like. The panhandler on Cleaver Boulevard, right?” It happens often when students “come to RU and whose parents then downsize or relocate to control expenses” and this means “the student does not have a home per se besides the one that they have temporarily while they’re in classes”. Awareness of the issue creates its own barrier by having a conceptualization of homelessness that does not match what the student is experiencing.

### **Research Question Three**

*How can institutions create policies and procedures to support the homeless student population in the context of resiliency and social justice?*

In analyzing data to answer this question, the researcher asked participants in the focus group and interviews about their definition of resiliency. The overarching theme was about overcoming obstacles and continuing to one’s goal. One respondent stated, “Someone who is flexible someone who bounces back is resilient”. Director 3 explained resiliency as “being emotionally and cognitively and physically able to move on. To continue. You need to have capacity to stick with”. Focus group participants illustrated resiliency as the “overcoming of a challenge or hardship” and “having a goal that you stick to no matter what

happens, whatever gets in your way keep pushing forward through adversity”.

After gathering the definitions, the researcher asked how higher education could support resiliency. A focus group participant explained that supporting resiliency was about supporting students through the One Person campaign modeled off suicide prevention in Ireland.

They have a campaign that they use in Ireland. It's something that I brought with me to this job. It's the one-person campaign so as long as you have the one person and so everybody gets their person when they come in to higher education. So, I try my best to be that one person for all my people. And so it's not just about mental health although that's a huge component of it. But making sure that they have somebody that they know cares, somebody they know is, and somebody they trust will be delicate with their situation. Be delicate with their feelings and then also be honest and be consistent with them.

Creating the bond with students is difficult for the academic success counselors, as they have large caseloads. One focus group participant discussed that “it can be tough with a large number of students, but letting know that you're the person that they can open up to and share things in that you are here to be a resource for them”. It is difficult because students have complex situations, but the focus group was going to have a course in mental health first aid that “will be good to have tools to help students where they are”.

Beyond tools to help students, questions asked of all participants about resources within the institution and community to assist students that were

experiencing homelessness. RU has a food pantry called Campus Cupboard on campus and had some community partners, such as Catholic Charities and local shelters that staff could refer students to in time of need. Survey participants mentioned emergency grant assistance United Way as a community partner and 40 out of 50 respondents had a food pantry on campus.

No survey respondents gave feedback based on the question of “If you are not doing outreach, what kinds of programs or interventions would you like to see on your campus in regard to helping the homeless students? When posed the same question, the RU participants cited that they would like to see “a one stop shop idea where we are all really accessible to each other, so we can answer all the questions at their meeting”. The focus group also talked of “serving as the middleman or advocate for the student; the mediator between student and the campus because it’s so unintuitive and intimidating”. Acting as an advocate would allow “to have those conversations alongside the students with the other people who are experts in aid, academic realms or care team vicinity would be helpful”.

#### **Research Question Four**

*How will understanding the resiliency theory enhance the university personnel skill set as they work with homeless students?*

The concepts introduced in resiliency theory surrounding adaptation are reflected in the descriptions of resiliency given by the interview and focus group participants. Nevertheless, as Director 1 explained in the interview, we have “two thoughts coming up to the jungle of higher ed”. One thought about the jungle is

that Higher Education “should pave it completely”. The other, “I know the jungle encourages the natural selection, survival of the fittest, but whoever comes out wins, and I think that’s a false choice”. Students experiencing housing insecurity have overcome barriers to enroll and “we support through it, we coach students how to get through it”. Director 1 wants students to “survive and thrive, to adapt to change, to grow, to make peace with the jungle” and as administrators, we “need to change the jungle”. In his words parts of the jungle “are unnecessarily difficult that people price themselves on being difficult for difficulty’s sake and those things need to go because excellence moving forward will be that the program is excellent and anyone can learn in it.” Posing follow up questions the researcher asked if support “in the jungle” was beyond academics. Scaling support programs cannot be so “individualized that there’s no way to scale best practices” explained Director 1, but “you have to build a kind of big tent based upon what works for most people and on some of the micro level working with individual students”. Measuring the supports is “are their grades improving, their quality of life, their well-being, their engagement and all the things we’re looking to see as markers of having engaged” is the hope of Director 1. Retaining students based on resiliency is “to be willing to rethink our approach”.

Besides the issues of scaling supports and impacting resiliency, the focus group and interview participants used mental health in their responses to issues regarding the homeless. Four of five focus group participants were concerned about their ability to assist with students that were homeless due to a “lack of mental health training” and continued to state they “were excited to have mental

health first aid training soon”. While the researcher does not discount the presence of mental illness in any students, including the homeless, it was intriguing to hear that multiple people drew a correlation between mental health issues and lack of stable housing. These statements were repeated throughout the site visit and one Director said “for others it’s probably a mental health issue of which the university, in my mind, can’t be the end all be all for every student’s baggage”. The Director continued stating “for some students mental health leads to homelessness. We have been approached before of if you have space, why don’t you let homeless live with you. And that’s not our business”.

The juxtaposition of giving someone shelter and maintaining a business was evident in this particular interview along with the mental illness commentary. Differential pricing is not available based on need and “that’s a hard pill for students to swallow as well” according to Director 3.

### **Discussion of Findings**

Organizing and examining the qualitative data to find emerging themes is a mechanism to achieve a deeper understanding of the data (Creswell, 2014). Emerging themes from the interview and focus groups and was enhanced by the review of the quantitative and qualitative analysis from the survey. Three themes presented in the data triangulation were *Education surrounding the issue of student homelessness, Resource development, and Eliminating barriers through policy and procedure.*

### **Education regarding homelessness**

As institutions work to recruit and retain students, there must be awareness that the students have experiences that exist beyond what is measured by an academic transcript or vita. Creating a plan to assist practitioners in student development, financial aid, and retention offices to enhance access and student success by combating issues like homelessness counteracts issues of access and social justice (Chapalot, et. al., 2015; Crutchfield, et. al., 2016). Participants in the interview and focus group attest to the desire to influence a student's chance of success by eliminating the barriers, but are impacted by lack of education on homelessness and how that presents in higher education. Addressing issues by linking students to services to assist with housing and food insecurity is a key tenant of newer research, but these are not widely known across campus. As illustrated in the qualitative and quantitative analysis, participants were not sure about what policies and procedures existed to help students in crisis on their campuses. Moreover, in basic document analysis on RU's website, there were no resources for students to quickly access in regard to issues with shelter or housing for emergent situations.

Creating a safety net for students encountering housing instability addresses the need for interventions to support resiliency and the social justice concerns surrounding access to higher education. Including homeless students in the narrative of higher education attainment supports diversity and limits the marginalization of the underrepresented; including students of color and of differing orientations that need additional supports to be successful (Hallett &

Crutchfeld, 2017). Students without that safety net and no guidance have more difficulty in engaging in the educational process (Hallett, 2010). Data collected in the focus group spoke to the need for that safety net and the ability for students to be able to focus on their academics without the additional stressors of finances and housing. Academic Success Coaches speaking about being an advocate for their students in crisis aligns to the research by Marshall (2004) that contended professionals within higher education do not have a grasp on what they can do to assist the marginalized and are not educated in how to address issues of social justice. Data from the survey, focus groups, and interviews illustrated the lack of conviction when speaking about what resources were available and demonstrated a lack of awareness about policy and procedures surrounding the issue of homelessness. Navigating the systems within the institution proved challenging for administrators and staff as they work to advocate for students and help them break out of the situation of poverty and disrupt the systems of “inequity that continue to marginalize homeless students in higher education (Gupton, 2017, p. 210).

Besides the notion of creating supports to assist students, the concept of homelessness, and how it influences students was interpreted in many different ways across the data. Data collected via the interviews found that two of the three directors had less of a student-focused approach to how they viewed students in housing insecure situations. In addition, homelessness was often described in the qualitative analysis linked with the words mental illness. Students finding

themselves in a housing insecure situation can be in a variety of situations, with mental illness not necessarily being one.

### **Resource development**

The data suggested that administrators often had limited awareness of resources on or off campus that could help a student outside of the classroom. For example, data collected about policy and procedures to help students was limited from the survey participants and non-existent with the participants in the on campus visit by the researcher. Not having a clear path to interventions or resources does not allow the student to get assistance without barriers. The data was clear in the focus group that the referral to the campus Care team was ambiguous and did not provide follow up for the staff that made the referral. This led to a lack of confidence in the campus' ability to triage and treat the issues. Connection to campus is important to support a student academically and socially.

The conceptual frameworks cited the need for students to feel connected to the campus as a component of retention theory. This theme was echoed in the context of resiliency theory as education provides a means to escape homelessness through the creation of supports and relationships (Gupton, 2017). In addition, the promotion of mentors to promote a positive environment of support and encouragement is a way according to Hallett (2012), to limit additional risk for a student and promote their achievement. Building the support network enhances trust and relationships with adults and peers within the institution. Homeless students due to their unstable environments do not have long-term relationships with mentors and other means of support, which are

critical to developing skills to react to the environment of higher education and coping with stressors (Gupton, 2017; Stratton, et. al., 2007). Furthermore, institutional interventions that are currently in place are sporadic at RU and do not examine the structural changes to serve students, but tend to see interventions as a quick fix. Hallett and Crutchfeld (2017) advocated for more of a holistic and structural approach to invoke change instead of operating in a reactionary environment. Securing a fix for a housing issue is a start, but it is not the entire solution to creating retention and completion success.

This housing insecurity and related financial factors limits the ability for the student to be involved in social and academic activities regardless of why they become homeless. A focus group participant echoed this concept by illustrating the paradox of working versus going to class. They explained how the student struggled with the decision. Disconnecting from the goal of graduation or retention to the next semester causes not only academic stress, but also isolation from peers and the college experience (Kerby, 2015). An institution cannot control for all external stressors for any student, but a basic understanding of the issues and how supports are created and implemented for retention impact provides context and buy-in from staff and faculty.

Besides the student experience, the data suggested a need for resources for faculty and staff in this space. Homelessness and housing insecurity are not just a problem for the low-income, or mentally ill as the data from the interviews and focus groups illustrated. Many students are coming to college from a home, but due to other factors, have become housing insecure. Students that are estranged

from family due to personal choices or sexual orientation are encountering housing insecurity (Hallett & Crutchfield, 2017). Educating staff and faculty about housing insecurity would eliminate perceptions of the issue as one for poverty-stricken or the mentally ill. The data gathered during this research supports the lack of awareness of the homeless situation and is supported by the survey.

### **Elimination of barriers**

Throughout the resiliency framework, many researchers discussed the creation of supports for students to feel a connection to the campus, peers, or faculty and staff. Barriers created by the institution to protect resources or the perceived integrity of the very systems designed to support students are the culprits in creating ill will and a lack of trust in the system (Ausikaitis, et. al., 2015). Two of the Directors interviewed spoke of the systems as a necessity to protect resources and prevent the working of the system. Within the context of social justice, interventions are needed but have to be framed within the context of support, not as punitive. Supportive interventions require a greater scope than the traditional financial aid model that is the only official support in place at RU.

The focus group participants were appreciative for the emergency funds that sometimes were available to a student in a housing crisis, but the only students being assisted are the ones that are comfortable sharing their stories. There is some data available via the FAFSA regarding homelessness or the risk of being homeless, but overwhelmingly the institutions surveys did no outreach based on that data. In addition, most institutions had little or no understanding of

the retention policy at their institution or the resources, outside the food pantry, that were afforded within the community or institution. Social capital is lacking for most students that are in housing crisis or have been homeless prior to college attendance. This lack of capital, according to Skobba, Meyers and Tiller (2018) limits the ability of people to secure help or benefits via their connectedness to a person or network. The network and systems within an institution of higher education are complex for any student, with or without strong social capital or networks. Adding the layer of low support or an emergency to the mix can erode the ability for the student to stay in class and realize their potential, as their basic needs are not being met (Hallett & Crutchfield, 2017; Maslow, 1943). Integrating a student into the college fabric is a component of retention theory, but one that is hard to achieve without eliminating outside the classroom stressors. These “multiple threats to learning” are issues that are barriers to integration and challenge retention efforts surrounding academic success (Masten, et. al., p. 205). Academic success and integration are the theoretical underpinning of the Tinto (1987) retention theory. Research from this study shows barriers and perceptions exist which undermine the ability for a homeless student to succeed, despite resiliency.

### **Conclusion**

Research regarding the experience of students that are homeless while in college is not as prevalent as the K-12 arena. The creation of interventions, as *McKinney Vento* mandated for school districts is left to the institutions discretion at the post-secondary level. This research intended to provide information

regarding how colleges and universities assisted the homeless and housing insecure in the context of retention and completion. Specifically, the purpose was to determine interventions to enhance the ability of a student that was homeless to access and persist in their higher education program.

Despite not having any formalized policy or procedure, staff and directors are navigating the systems in place at RU to find means to assist individual students. The interventions are not scaled to help everyone, and are not grounded in data that can be access from the FAFSA. Academic success coaches in the focus group voiced their desire to find resources, but had concerns about their caseload and referral methodology. The concept of advocacy and mentorship was clear within the focus group and supports resiliency concepts of forming relationships to foster a sense of belonging. This belonging generates an environment that supports student learning and retention (Kerby, 2015). Integration via student supports in the academic and social fabric of the institution is central to retention, especially those that are early in the students' academic career (Kalsbeek, 2013).

Formulating these supports is difficult as shown by the data collection. Resources are not well defined, well-funded, or well known by staff at the institutions surveyed. High profile imitative such as the work of TRiO at RU and food pantries across those school on the survey were well know and easily referenced for a student in need. The lack of housing interventions or the knowledge of a housing issue was prevalent in the research. Most institutions did not think there was much of an issue around the concept of homelessness despite

what the national statistics revealed. Furthermore, one concludes that this lack of awareness correlates with the lack of policy and procedure to intervene for the homeless.

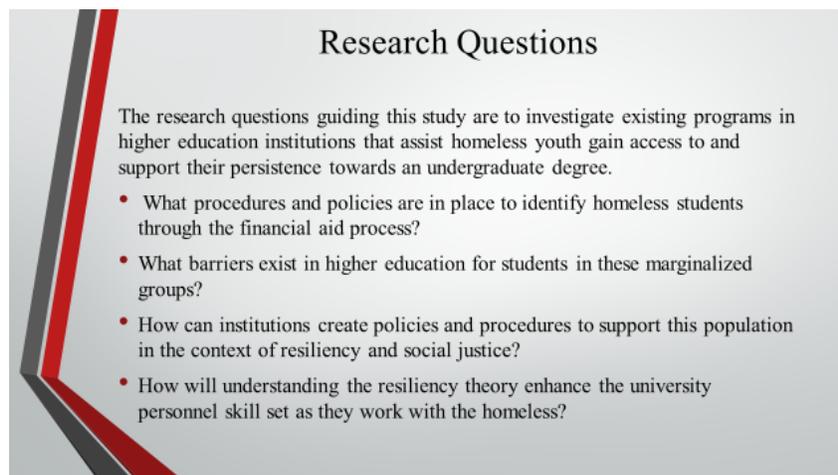
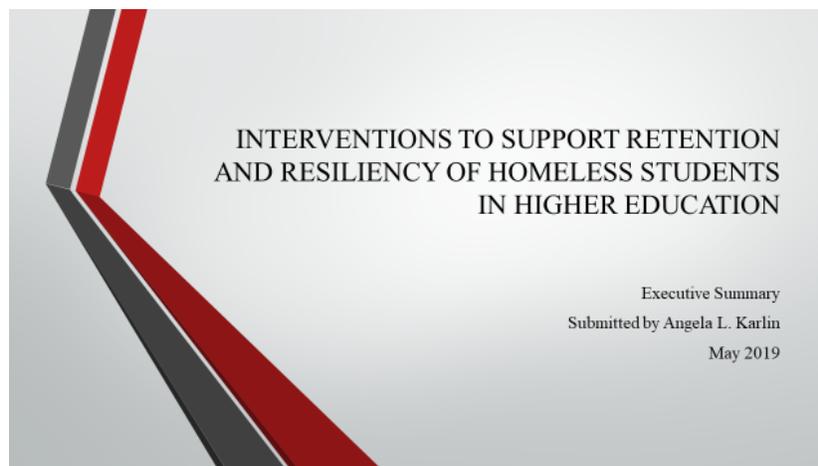
Additionally, the perceptions of staff surrounding the attributes of a student that is homeless was evident in the data collection. These perceptions suggest that there is misalignment between what is actually happening on campuses and perceived reality. Unfortunately, the stigma of homelessness does not encourage students to self-report or tell their story unless trust is gained (Ausikaitis, et.al, 2015). Providing support to students must be framed in a respectful and private way and will need to be created, as the current, traditional supports do not address the homeless student experience (Chapalot, et al., 2015). Data collection illustrates the need for supports and education throughout the institution to support students with housing challenges. Although only personnel from one institution were interviewed, the data provided the information to assess the campus climate and concerns that surround this population. Using this information as a starting point to build interventions to support the homeless student will help financial aid professionals and campus partners to begin the conversation.

### **Recommendations**

This study focused on one regional, public institution to gauge the climate and perceptions about barriers and policy surrounding homeless students and how they access and persist in higher education. The research highlighted that most staff are not equipped to handle the complex issues and lack of direction on how

to advocate and intervene on a student or students' behalf. The inquiry supported the assertion that policy and procedure needs to be developed to assist students navigate the college process and a system of supports need to be created for retention and degree completion. Following is an executive summary in PowerPoint format to enhance the understanding of the issue and what issues should be reviewed in the context of creating an intervention for homeless students. The summary also highlights the critical need to enhance the resiliency of students in the context of promoting social justice via degree attainment.

### **Executive Summary Presentation**



## Findings

### Themes emerging from data

- Education Regarding Homelessness
- Resource Development
- Elimination of Barriers

## Recommendations

### Education Regarding Homelessness

- Faculty and Staff training on issues of homelessness that impact retention and completion
  - Sharing of data collected from FAFSA and data mining of Maxient software to quantify the issue of homelessness and housing insecurity on campus
  - Training on campus (similar to Green Dot) to illustrate the different faces of homelessness beyond just those that are low income
  - Housing insecurity takes many forms including those that are “couch surfing”, temporarily homeless due to the end of a relationship, victims of domestic violence, students in conflict with their parents or guardians regardless of socioeconomic status
  - Shedding perceptions that mental health issues are always present in those that are homeless

## Resource Development

- Create a comprehensive list of all resources available to students in times of housing crisis
  - Institutional and community resources, such as Campus Cupboard, shelters or housing options on campus
  - Ability for all staff to disseminate this information so that students do not have to go to multiple offices to tell their story multiple
- Website creation for emergency situations including housing issues for students to access anonymously if they do not wish to share their situation with staff or faculty
  - Includes referral information to financial aid and student engagement offices, as well as community resources
- Housing scholarship/grant or work program to offset cost for on campus housing
  - Addresses the barrier of cost for students needing housing, but have no aid or means to pay

## Elimination of Barriers

- Eliminate the collection of documentation for FAFSA filers that identified they were homeless or at-risk of homelessness
  - Not required to receive aid
  - Creates stress for a vulnerable population
- Exploration of emergency funds to address housing costs for those in crisis
- Study to assess the need for charging for break housing ad
  - Additional costs for students that have no where to go during breaks
  - Is the charge needed to maintain the building or a historical practice?

SECTION FIVE  
CONTRIBUTION TO SCHOLARSHIP

Editorial Board, *Journal of Student Financial Aid*

Please accept this research article submission for review in the next issue of the *Journal of Student Financial Aid (JSFA)*. Students experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity while in college is a topic with a gap in the research. Due to the increased scrutiny of higher education outcomes and how we assist students to access, persist and graduation from institutions, this article is timely and supports the financial aid community with implications for practice and recommendations that is a pillar of the *JSFA*.

The article adheres to the content guidelines specific to a research article and includes an introductory statement of purpose, related research, and methodology. Analysis of evidence and implications related to the research are also included in the narrative. The manuscript is less than the maximum 15,000 words and 40 pages specified in the publication guidelines. Format submission rules are also followed, as the research article complies with the style and reference directives using the 6th edition of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA).

Specifically, the researcher conducted a survey of large public institutions across the United States and did interviews and focus group qualitative research at a regional institution that supports a student population largely comprised of first-generation and lower income students. This article reviews current literature surrounding homelessness, resiliency theory, and social justice theory as they relate to the promotion of student access and persistence in higher education. This study promotes awareness and the importance of grounding interventions in

data collection and scholarly review to enhance the student experience and relate it to financial aid best practices.

Thank you,

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### **Introduction to the Problem of Practice**

Homelessness is a growing problem in the United States due to a variety of economic factors, including recession, lack of affordable housing, and low wages (Masten, Cutuli, Herbers, Hinz, Obradovic, & Wenzel, 2014; Rahman, Turner, & Elbedour, 2015). With the rise in housing insecurity, estimates show that 1.3-2.1 million American youth are homeless at some point between the ages of 12 and 24 (Foster, 2010). Besides the lack of shelter and necessities, homeless youth often experience disruption in their education (Crutchfield, Chambers, & Duffield, 2016; Masten, et al., 2014; Rahman, et al., 2015). Many factors including permanent addresses for school enrollment, transportation and lack of official documents such as medical records and academic transcripts complicate educational attainment for the homeless (Crook, 2015; Rahman, et al., 2015).

In an effort to combat those complications encountered by homeless youth to access educational opportunities, the *McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 1987 (MVA)* provided mandates “that require schools to uphold the right to equal educational opportunity for children and youths experiencing homelessness” (Wilkins, Mullins, Mahan, & Canfield, 2015, p. 58). *MVA* has provisions to keep students in the same school even though they may live outside of the boundaries, provide transportation, and ensure equal access to education (Cunningham, 2014; Mohan, & Shields, 2014; Rahman, et al., 2015; Wilkins, et al., 2015). Interruption of education has long-term effects such as increased risk of living in poverty, limited opportunities for work and limited wages (Crook, 2015). Using the interventions afforded by *MVA*, students can remain in school

and continue to access services such as free meals, health services and stability (Crook, 2015; Cunningham, 2014; Rahman, et al., 2015). Staying in school promotes independence and better employment opportunities upon graduation, as it is well documented that future earnings and mobility are impacted by not graduating from high school (Ausikaitis, Wynne, Persaud, Pitt, Hosek, Rekeer, Tuner, Flores, & Flores, 2015; Mohan & Shields, 2014; Rahman, et al., 2015). Consequently, breaking the cycle of poverty by promoting post-secondary education for all students, especially those experiencing homelessness, is critical (Crutchfield, et al., 2016).

As students move from high school to colleges and universities, very little research “addresses the experience of these youth once they get beyond admission into colleges” (Crutchfield, et al., 2016, p. 191). Financial aid is available to homeless students, but there are few other interventions at the college level to assist with transition and student success. Besides those already in housing crisis, limited resources have caused many college students to have a greater incidence of housing insecurity, thus adding to the issue (Broton, Frank, & Goldrick-Rab, 2014). These economic stressors for homeless students and other low-income students cause a decreased chance at degree completion and “inhibit educational attainment” (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2016, p.19). Creating interventions for students that are homeless or at risk of being homeless would enhance their opportunity for persistence and eventual degree completion at the post-secondary level. Homelessness does not end at high school graduation, but the protections

and regulatory safety net does since few resources for housing and food exist within the college walls (Goldrick-Rab, 2017).

Research by Goldrick-Rab (2017) and others are exploring the food and housing insecurity experienced by college students. A recent study of community college students has shown that 52% of community college students have housing insecurity and 13% are homeless (Goldrick-Rab, 2017). Without access to basic needs, college degree attainment is more difficult as students focus on survival instead of classwork (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2016; Gaines, Robb, Knol & Sickler, 2014; Hallett, 2010). Financial aid offices are in a unique position, as many students either identify themselves as homeless or at risk of homelessness on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Other students may self-identify to staff members in the financial aid office as needing help with housing. Financial Aid staff often do not know of resources to refer the student and cannot respond to their needs beyond the financial aid package. Lack of policy and procedure to intervene in these situations perpetuates the problem. Through finding ways to use data and best practices, student assistance can reach, as Chapalot, Cooper, Johnstone, and Karandjeff (2015) stated, beyond financial aid and assist with attainment of post-secondary credentials.

### **Statement of Purpose**

Attaining a college degree is a national priority as evidenced by prior President Barack Obama's 2020 college completion initiative. The goals of this initiative were to have ten million more college graduates at all levels of degree attainment by 2020 and create a more educated and skilled workforce (Kanter,

Ochoa, Nassif, & Chong, 2011). Special attention was to be focused on “fast growing first generation, under-represented and economically disadvantaged populations” (Kanter et al., 2011, p. 11), who are facing scarce resources and struggle to meet daily needs such as housing, food and transportation (Chaplot, et al., 2015).

Besides the promotion of access, it is imperative for students to have access to post-secondary education for economic gain. Currently, millions of jobs in the United States require a post-high school credential such as certificate or degree for placement consideration. By promoting college completion, students of all socioeconomic backgrounds have the means to access better-paying jobs and break the cycles of poverty and homelessness that they have experienced in their youth (Chapalot, et al., 2015; Hallett, 2010).

Investing in student success has been a part of the fabric of higher education institutions for years, but most research has focused on classroom related interventions to improve retention and graduation rates. Tinto’s retention theory (1987) identified creating environments to enhance attainment by building community and social supports on campus. Addressing homeless students and their specific needs is not in the forefront at institutions, as this is a population relatively new to the retention and attainment conversation (Chapalot, et al., 2015).

A significant gap in the research exists as few studies on homeless college students have been conducted (Crutchfield, et al. 2016). Colleges have a stake in the success of their students and need to create interventions, grounded in data to

help students overcome barriers to success. Broton and Goldrick-Rab (2016) stated institutional practices and policies contribute to the issue and need to be addressed at the local level, thus eliminating those barriers and creating supports to enhance the chances of retention and success. Research is in its infancy stages “when it comes to explaining how students experience these challenges, when and where they obtain help, and how needs insecurity affects their schooling” (Goldrick-Rab, 2017, p. 6). The problem, simply stated, is that institutions have few, if any, resources in place to assist students experiencing housing insecurity. Higher education personnel know little about how best to assist students that are homeless within the context of financial aid regulations and the constraints of institutional knowledge and budgets.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Creating interventions that support the resiliency and educational attainment of the homeless student in a compassionate manner is the focus of this study. College and universities need to work to expand the “traditional concepts of what social and financial supports are necessary to address the broader needs of low-income students” (Chapalot, et al., 2015, p. 1). Needs of this population include access to adequate housing and food security, transportation, health care, child care, and other unmet financial needs that go beyond what financial aid can cover (Chapalot, et al., 2015). Helping students meet their daily needs eliminates the stress that can detract from educational success (Chapalot, et al., 2015; Crutchfield, et al., 2016). Linking the social and financial support to the academic supports already provided at post-secondary institutions will enhance

student success of those experiencing homelessness (Crutchfield, et al., 2016). Disadvantaged populations encounter scarce resources and struggle to meet daily needs such as housing, food and transportation (Chaplot et al., 2015), thus the purpose of this study is to investigate programs in higher education institutions that assist homeless youth gain access to and support their persistence towards an undergraduate degree. The investigation will focus on the student experience using social justice theory and resiliency theory to examine in-depth programs through noted procedures, policies, and stated barriers. In addition to the student, the institutional perspective of program development will be framed in the context of social justice and retention best practices.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions guiding this study are to investigate existing programs in higher education institutions that assist homeless youth gain access to and support their persistence towards an undergraduate degree.

1. What procedures and policies are in place to identify homeless students through the financial aid process?
2. How can institutions create policies and procedures to support the homeless student population in the context of resiliency and social justice?

### **Discussion of recent and relevant research**

In developing the study, several theories using the context of homelessness were examined. A historical view of homelessness, as referenced by Mohan and Shields (2014) and Cunningham (2014) and how it specifically relates to education was conducted. The *McKinney-Vento Act*, enacted in 1987,

frames the discussion, as it is the primary government intervention for the homeless and access to education in the United States (Ausikaitis, Wynne, Persaud, Pitt, Hosek, Reker, Turner, Flores & Flores, 2015). In addition to the historical review, research questions were created using the conceptual frameworks of social justice and resiliency theory. Utilizing historical perspectives, resiliency theory and social justice theory, a comprehensive examination was conducted to guide how financial aid professionals can affect change for students with unstable housing and promote their resiliency and persistence toward a degree.

### **Historical Background**

The historical context of homelessness in the United States provides context to understand how government interventions developed to help students impacted by a lack of housing security. Youth homelessness has increased greatly since the 1980s (Cunningham, 2014; Masten et al., 2014; Mohan & Shields, 2014). With the advent of the recession of 2007, more families have experienced economic hardships including residential instability at a greater rate than in past decades (Berg-Cross & Green, 2010; Cunningham, 2014; Masten et al., 2014; Mohan & Shields, 2014). As economic tensions increase within households, youth are impacted in various ways, including educational issues such as academic failure, lack of preparedness and being below grade-level in key subjects such as math and reading due to food and residential insecurities (Berg-Cross & Green, 2010; Hallett, 2010). As local school districts react to homelessness within their boundaries, basic needs must be met first before

academic issues can be addressed. Research cited by Hallett (2010) discusses the pre-college experience of the homeless, but little has been done to measure the impacts at the college level.

Created in 1987, *McKinney-Vento* was enacted to ensure homeless youth have the same access to free, public education as all youth and they cannot be discriminated against or have services withheld due to their housing situation (Mohan & Shields, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2004). The act was an attempt to assist youth affected by homelessness to be able to access education and to obtain transportation, services and referrals to community services within the area. School districts must have a liaison to work with homeless students to comply with the tenets of *McKinney-Vento* (Cunningham, 2014). Students dealing with residential instability perform poorly in school and have issues outside the classroom (Mohan & Shields, 2014). As students move from high school into the college setting, these problems with food and shelter do not end. Therefore, it is not reasonable to expect that the challenges within the classroom would also end.

*The College Cost Reduction Act of 2007* has provided for homeless youth as defined by *McKinney-Vento* to have additional financial aid resources due to their status (Crutchfield et al., 2016; Hallett, 2010). Students with a documented status of homeless or at risk of homelessness can qualify for independent aid levels for federal programs (Crutchfield et al., 2016; Hallett, 2010). Providing additional monetary supports does help with paying bills, but does not create a stable living environment or erase the barriers the student may encounter in the

future. Moreover, besides the financial aid designation, there are not the same service expectations for institutions of higher education as afforded by *McKinney-Vento* for K-12 students. Students' academic and personal well-being is still an issue if the family is still in unstable housing situations.

*McKinney-Vento* and the *CCRAA* both sought to address access and equity issues surrounding the attainment of a K-12 education, but colleges and universities are not required to keep track of the homeless students it enrolls or provide the same access as the K-12 levels (Gupton, 2017). Student level data from the FAFSA in 2017 showed 31,498 students as *unaccompanied homeless* (NCHE, 2017). Although this gives an actual number, many feel that this underestimates the issue (Hallett & Crutchfield, 2017). Without a requirement to track, this is the best benchmark that exists to find the scope of the problem.

Any interventions provided at the collegiate level are at the institution's discretion, but are not required. These governmental acts cited above both seek structure to assist with a marginalized group, which ties to social justice. Social justice theory allows researchers to "critically examine the unequal distribution of power, wealth and privilege in society" (Ausikaitis et al., 2015, p. 710). Socioeconomic issues experienced by college students personify the issues of power and unequal distribution of wealth. Tying the social justice perspective speaks to the leadership of the institution to provide access and support the resiliency of homeless students working toward a post-secondary degree will guide this scholarly review.

## **Theoretical Frameworks Reviewed**

Reviewing the literature surrounding homeless students and educational attainment led to the identification of three areas of focus: impacts of homelessness on academic achievement, social justice theory, and resiliency theory as it relates to the experience of college students. These theoretical frameworks guide the exploration of the review to provide context of the problem and the research to connect the themes and support the framing of best practices in creating interventions for homeless students within their post-secondary educational experience.

### **Impacts of Homelessness on Academic Achievement and Persistence**

Significant barriers faced by homeless students can influence their ability to enroll and persist in higher education (Huang, Fernandez, Rhoden, & Joseph, 2018). According to Huang et. al. (2018), homeless youth are in “inherent disadvantage in an increasingly competitive and education nation (p. 209). The instability of living arrangements cause stress and a focus on basic needs, thus creating roadblocks as students navigate postsecondary education (Chapalot, et. al, 2015; Crutchfield et. al, 2016; Hallett, 2010; Huang, et. al, 2018). Many students struggle with the basic pieces of the college process, including applications, college visits and application fees due to their lack of parental/adult support and financial stressors (Crutchfield, et.al, 2016; Huang, et.al. 2018). Hallett (2010) asserted housing instability “shapes access to college as well as how students participate in the educational process once they are admitted” (p. 12). Admitted students require monetary deposits to hold their spot in the class,

housing deposits are required for on or off campus housing choices and travel to the college for orientations, course scheduling and financial aid assistance can prove difficult for those without proper guidance “to fully engage in the educational process” (Hallett, 2010, p. 12).

Manifested in the concept of social capital theory is proper guidance to students. Social capital is bound by the central premise that people foster the ability to secure benefits through their relationships in social networks (Skobba, Meyers & Tiller, 2018). Homeless students have had disruptions in their social network, thereby rendering it non-existent. (Skobba, et.al. 2018). The idea that people and their knowledge of process and information is key as students navigate the admissions and enrollment processes at a college or university. Many students in times of crisis, according to Skobba, et. al (2018), could not name one person they could turn to for assistance. When interpersonal ties are fragile, students have little access to advice, especially in terms of education and future planning. Limited access to resources creates confusion and stress for homeless students working within the bounds of the college process and may cause them to abandon plans for postsecondary education (Gupton, 2017; Skobba, et. al., 2018)

Additionally, post admission issues also arise. Support in developing study skills, decision-making skills, and balancing academic workloads with working are obstacles that homeless students face due to the lack of stable homes and parental supports once in college (Crutchfield, et. al, 2016; Hallett, 2010, Huang, et.al.2018). Few colleges have programmatic interventions to help homeless students, partially due to the low numbers of homeless that enroll at any

one institution (Hallett, 2010). Nevertheless, the need for supports is critical to lead to academic success and persistence toward degree (Broton, et.al, 2014; Hallett, 2010; Mohan & Shields, 2014). Students receiving supports described help from financial aid staff and others that build the connections to enhance the academic experience and eliminate non-academic stressors that assisted them to stay in school (Skobba, et. al, 2017). Obtaining a degree or other credential is critical in moving a homeless student beyond their current situation and out of the poverty cycle (Broton, et. al, 2014, Chapalot, et. al. 2015; Crutchfield, et. al, 2016; Hallett, 2010, Mohan & Shields, 2014; Skobba, et.al. 2017).

### **Social Justice Theory**

Using social justice theory in the context of homeless youth and their educational experiences in higher education creates a backdrop to both examine the marginalization of the homeless and the way institutions react to students in this situation. Social justice is a means for “all human beings to participate fully in society with respect for their human dignity” (Gidley, Hampson, Wheeler, & Bereded-Samuel, 2010, p. 134). Gidley, et.al. (2010) postulated educational entities, especially universities, could play a key role in social inclusion. Education is a means for not only inclusion, but provides students to maximize their potential for education and earnings to break the cycle of poverty for many (Chapalot, et. al. 2015; Gidley, et. al. 2010; Gupton, 2017; Hallett, 2010; Marshall, 2004). The inclusion in higher education is about access and success for low-income and minority students, not just the concept of access (Gidley, et. al. 2010). Embedding the concept of access, equity and success across the

institution is a means to promote the diversity of ideas and diversity of people (Gidley, et. al. 2010).

Diversity of people is comprised of many different groups in the context of homelessness. Marginalization of the homeless affects many groups including students of color, LGBTQ+, and foster youth (Hallett & Crutchfield, 2017). These groups, marginalized by society, are “overrepresented in experiencing homeless and housing insecurity” (Hallett & Crutchfield, 2017, p. 28). Socioeconomic factors and the marginalization of these groups enhances the risk of homelessness and increases challenges as they access higher education (Hallett & Crutchfield, 2017). Providing a college education not only promotes diversity on campus, but also promotes the exporting of social justice and equity to the larger society (Brennan & Naidoo, 2008). Higher education, according to Brennan and Naidoo (2008), provided opportunities for success and increased status through earnings and potential. Those working in higher education want students to succeed, but the complexity of helping students that come from marginalized groups is overwhelming.

Higher education professionals either are in situations where they do not know what they can do to assist the marginalized or are often unprepared to confront issues of social justice (Marshall, 2004). In many instances, social justice work, such as advocacy, is not part of the tenure or performance review process (Marshall, 2004). Even in situations where individual staff and faculty are advocating for students that are homeless, policy patterns and campus climate can dictate whether an issue has a platform. Gupton (2017) stated homelessness

is “an example of the intersection of multiple forms of marginality within systems of inequity” (p. 192). By advocating for students beyond policy, practitioners will be able to create a path to educational equity and enhance the experience from a social justice lens.

At all levels of education, there are policies and procedure, such as *McKinney-Vento* that are supposed to protect and enhance social justice needs for students (Marshall, 2004). Even though *McKinney-Vento* addresses how and why students are supposed to keep access to education when in transitional housing situations, policy is not always implemented, as it should be due to misinterpretation, funding and personal bias (Ausikaitis et al., 2015; Marshall, 2004). Within the context of higher education, there is nothing in place to guide institutions except for basic guidance concerning financial aid for the homeless. Besides the *CCRAA*, institutions have no reason to assist students in housing crisis, except for the idea of doing what is right. Providing access is important, but with scarce resources, it is difficult to address all the needs of this special population. However, as educators, Ausikaitis et al., (2015) stressed it “is the legal and moral responsibility of school districts and employees to learn about and meet the needs of homeless students” (p. 719). Higher education also shares the responsibility as we educate students and provide support.

Moreover, the provisions of strong supports also contribute to the greater good for the student beyond the educational contract. The college experience “shapes a student’s cognitive, moral and psychosocial characteristics” (Rahedi, Plant, & Callister, 2015, p. 135). Rahedi, Plant and Callister (2015) researched

compassion development within higher education and compassion supports social justice and a student's development in and out of the classroom. Service to the homeless student grounded in social justice theory provides strong support to the proposed research.

Aside from the positive impacts to students, the use of social justice as a framework also has negative constraints. Disclosure by students of their status is sometimes difficult due to the fear of judgment and other negative effects of being branded as homeless (Ausikaitis et al., 2015). The desire to help students navigate the process and get assistance is often met with resistance due to pride, embarrassment, lack of trust in the system and perceived resilience (Ausikaitis et al., 2015). Despite the need for privacy and respect for the individual, homeless students and others with low socioeconomic status need assistance that "simply cannot be addressed through traditional college supports" (Chapalot, et al., 2015, p. 1). The literature surrounding this issue points to the need for interventions, but they will have to be created and vetted in supportive environments by the institutional leadership (Brown, 2006; Chapalot, et al., 2015; Mares & Jordan, 2012; Marshall, 2004; Masten, et al., 2014; Murtadha, 2009).

Creating a supportive environment to influence the homeless student experience is imperative to influencing social justice concerns and the individual students; however, institutions of higher education currently have few, if any, programs to support the challenges facing homeless students (Chapalot, et al., 2015). Working with low-income students requires a broader scope than the traditional financial aid model that is currently in place within institutions (Chapalot, et al., 2015;

Masten et al., 2014). By addressing and challenging the current environment and assumptions that educators have about the advantaged and disadvantaged, social justice concerns can be addressed (Ryan, 2006). Changing the trajectory of homeless students to college graduates “would help disrupt the systems of privilege and inequity that continue to marginalize homeless students in higher education (Gupton, 2017, p. 210).

### **Resiliency Theory**

Homeless students that aspire to postsecondary education embody traits that display resiliency. Their unique experiences have created traits that illustrate the concepts in resiliency theory. Resiliency theory defines and uses the concept of adaptation from his or her experiences but then develops coping behaviors to prevent or diminish future occurrences of that experience (Gupton, 2017; Masten et al., 2014). The resilience to stay in school, despite housing insecurity, does have positive effects on homeless youth (Ausikaitis et al., 2015; Masten et al., 2014). Masten (2014) cited students show resilience depending on systems of support. School provides structure and stability, perhaps the only stability a child has, and that stability fosters adaptability and resilience (Masten et al., 2014). Working within the context of education, homeless youth can persist due to interventions “that prevent exposure, reduce risk, and promote resilience” (Mertens et al., 2014, p.205). Education, according to Gupton (2017), provided a means to “locate a pathway out of homelessness” by “finding shelter, create and sustain supportive relationships, and continue the process of personal

development” (p. 194). Developing a support system to promote the resiliency of the homeless student is the basis for this research.

The reduction of risk and promotion of resilience explored within the study of homelessness and higher education interventions enhances understanding of how to create best practices for post-secondary institutions. Masten, Cutuli, Herbers, Hinz, Obradovic, and Wenzel (2014) analyzed 20 years of research to identify how homeless elementary and secondary students develop resiliency despite their challenges with housing insecurity. Such elements as a need for stable housing for nine months, food security and a constant environment would connect to the research done regarding K-12 education to promote education for those in housing crisis. In the review of literature, instability of housing creates “adverse life experiences and sociodemographic risks” for children (Masten et al., 2014, p. 202). Adverse life experiences created educational risk, but research showed variables in the educational achievement of the homeless students (Masten, et al., 2014). The researchers attributed the variables in achievement of students’ due resiliency that is manifested within the individual despite the challenges their housing situation presents (Masten, et al, 2014). By using “evidence-based policies and interventions that prevent exposure, reduce risk, and promote resilience”, the academic issues can be mitigated in some fashion for this group of students (Masten, et al., 2014, p. 205).

Inteventions to promote resiliency need to be grounded in the four models of resiliency as described by Hallett (2012). These models are: invincibility, challenge, compensatory and protective (Hallett, 2012). Invincibility and

challenge models focus on how students respond to the risk factors, while the compensatory and protective models show “the relationship between risk and protective factors” (Hallett, 2012, p. 14). A brief review of the models helps to shape and define resiliency theory and its use as a conceptual framework for this study.

Invincibility models divide students into two categories. Students can be invincible or vulnerable, which shapes the outcomes for them in relation to the obstacles they face (Hallett, 2012). Those who display invincibility or invulnerability thrive beyond expectations, despite the issues and hardships they may have or continue to endure (Hallett, 2012). Hallett (2012) stated “scholars rarely ascribe to this model; however, the underlying assumptions have framed popular texts and major motion pictures” (p. 15). While this romanticized version would render most interventions moot, it does not, according to Hallett (2012), capture what is demonstrated by students, the concept of resiliency.

The second of the response models is the challenge model. This model, like the invincibility model, has been difficult to use in a practitioner setting (Hallett, 2012). The exploration of how risks are experienced is a useful tool of the model, but it relies on a measure of exposure to one risk to measure the development of resiliency. Most students have a myriad of experiences, both positive and negative, as they navigate situations such as homelessness (Hallett, 2012). From these experiences, resiliency is developed as youth react and develop tools to use resources (Yates, Egeland & Sroufe, 2003). The ongoing process “of garnering resources that enables the individual to negotiate current issues

adaptively and provides a foundation for dealing with subsequent challenges” builds resiliency (Yates, et. al. 2003, p. 249). Although Hallett (2012) does not view the challenge model as practical, and argues it is limited in discussing protective factors, it does still provide insight into the development of resiliency.

Continuing the discussion of risk, the compensatory model “acknowledges the impact of risk factors, but argues that protective factors can offset negative outcomes” (Hallett, 2012, p. 17). Protective factors for a homeless student can include social networks and personal traits. Thus, a student with more protective factors can overcome risks such as housing instability and develop resiliency (Hallett, 2012). Nevertheless, risks and protective factors do not occur in isolation and are embedded in the combined experiences of the individual, which makes the compensatory model difficult to study and use in the creation of policy and interventions for students. It does, however, provide a context in how personal and social interactions can help build on resiliency promotion as it relates to this study.

Finally, the protective model provides a more frequently studied model that illustrates the ability for protective factors to offset or eliminate risk. The ability for a protective factor to help people overcome risk and be resilient is a focus of the research. Hallett (2012) used the example of a mentor to provide information and encouragement to a student in a high-risk situation and low achieving high school that is thinking about college. The development of this protective relationship can help policy makers encourage positive outcomes and mitigate the exposure to additional risk (Hallett, 2012). Utilizing these models of

resiliency as a focal point of the research will enhance the development of supports for homeless students.

Furthermore, research conducted by Masten and Odradovic (2006) and Hersberger (2011) investigated the development of resilience in homeless students. The concept of learned resourcefulness and experiences “creates the basis for future coping efforts” (Hersberger, 2011, p. 4). Therefore, using this conceptual framework to explore the development and enhancement of this resilience in students helps give context to the needs of students who have experienced housing instability.

Although resiliency theory is a wide-ranging theory with many facets, the focus of this review is on the resilience of students in the context of homelessness. The adaptation of the individual creates resilience and that shapes the pathway of the individual (Masten & Odradovic, 2006). The creation of this pathway and corresponding resilience is complicated, thus the research into interventions is complex (Hersberger, 2011; Masten, et al., 2014; Masten & Odradovic, 2006). With the work of Masten and Odradovic, in particular, the concept of “resilience in children depends on resilience across interconnected systems in which human development unfolds, such as families, schools, and neighborhoods” (p. 24). However, resilience at the post-secondary level has not been studied in depth; consequently, the research at the K-12 level will be reviewed as it pertains to student development and academic achievement. The studies cited similarly discuss early interventions that influence academic success and lessen the impact of housing instability (Masten & Odradovic, 2006).

An early intervention to assist in developing and enhancing resiliency is to promote “a space and opportunity to build bonds of trust with peers and adults” (Gupton, 2017, p. 193). Due to the transient nature of housing instability, many students do not have long-term relationships with mentors or teachers who can assist with the college process (Gupton, 2017; Hallett, 2010). This concept of resilience as institutional support highlights the need for students to have a way to develop their intelligence and internal competencies as they navigate higher education and new environments (Gupton, 2017; Stratton, O’Toole, & Wetzel, 2007). Gaining access to external supports, according to Gupton (2017), related to the need of an individual to have a means of coping and relieving stressors, such as housing. Similarly, students would have to accept the supports as useful and trustworthy and not be viewed as a resource that is trying to “figure out what is wrong with them” (Gupton, 2017, p. 208). Many institutions tend to approach supports for students in homeless situations from a charity perspective and do not look at structural changes to serve students (Hallett & Crutchfield, 2017). Creating a safe space with knowledgeable staff to guide students to resources and supports enhances the chances of success and degree attainment for this population (Broton, et. al. 2016; Gupton, 2017; Hallett, 2010).

Establishment of a support system for both social and academics within the first semesters of enrollment is crucial to continued enrollment (Stratton, et. al. 2007). Hallett and Crutchfield (2017) stated that a single point of contact like the liaisons for the *McKinney-Vento* in the K-12 arena might be a successful starting point. Institutions enroll students to create graduates and alumni, so the

enhancement of early student success initiatives leads to institutional success and is a core strategy (Kalsbeek, 2013). Furthermore, there is a societal need to enhance institutional success, but also to “incorporate protective factors that generate a resilient environment for student learning and retention” (Kerby, 2015, p. 158). Such protective factors could include the use of an assessment team comprised of offices across campus to create the environment to change campus climate (Hallett & Crutchfield, 2017). Supporting resiliency in students is important to the entire campus as we move to increase retention and completion. It is critical for college personnel to realize that there are many factors and challenges that arise from being homeless. Securing housing is not the entire solution to eliminate barriers for success in higher education, but is a starting point in the context of these models.

### **Retention Theory**

A key measure of institutional success is retention and persistence to degree for students. Kalsbeek (2013) considered retention a core purpose and the promise of the institution to its students. According to Tinto’s (1987) theoretical framework, various dynamic factors affect students’ college access, persistence, and attainment. As the seminal work in retention, Tinto (1987) asserted persistence is a product of intentions and aspirations that occur before enrollment in college. There is a duality in the retention process, the student experience and the institutional social systems that create a “directional model based on continual variance in social commitments that influence academic performance” (Kerby, 2015, p. 138). Much of the student experience shapes the chances of success,

which aligned to admissions criteria, and the profile of the institution (Kalsbeek, 2013). For most students, the foci on student success, social and academic integration, and engagement shaped by the creation of “seamless experiences for students as they register for courses, manage financial arrangements, and navigate toward degree completion (Kalsbeek, 2013, p. 11). Navigation of these common college practices is more difficult for a homeless student without social capital and resources (Gupton, 2018, Skobba, et. al, 2018).

The retention of students is comprised of many factors, both in and outside of the classroom and strategy built around maximizing retention rates (Kalsbeek, 2013). Colleges and universities need to ensure integration into the university both socially and academically to show the commitment to the student (Kalsbeek, 2013; Tinto, 1987). Even though student experience plays a large role into their success and sense of belonging at an institution, it is difficult for the institution to account for the experiences of an individual who has been homeless. Homeless students with their multiple hurdles have a harder time integrating into educational experiences due to “multiple threats to learning” (Masten, et al., 2014, p. 205). It is more difficult to integrate into the college experience for those with the stigma of homelessness and this directly challenges Tinto’s (1987) concept of higher integration. Integration leads to academic success and the goal of college completion. Higher integration of students is more difficult for those who do not have stable housing or are working many hours to maintain basic needs (Boatman & Long, 2016). The luxury of being involved in social and academic enrichment activities, both formal and informal, is not afforded to many students who are

experiencing financial hardships or other stressors (Boatman & Long, 2016, Gupton, 2017). The commitment to the institution in the form of motivation and goal completion, in this case, graduation, continues to ebb and flow as a homeless student responds to challenges to academic success (Boatman & Long, 2016; Gupton, 2017; Stratton, O'Toole, & Wetzel, 2007). As housing issues increase or other financial needs occur, a student may need to disconnect from their goal of college. This disconnection can also be a product of feeling “isolated, separated, or socially alienated from the college experience” and have “negative encounters that affect their decisions of persistence” (Kerby, 2015, p. 140). Failure to address the disconnection of those without a support system or other negative experiences will not likely increase persistence. This links into the Tinto (1987) assertion that background experiences, such as family bonds, can impact the chances of success, but data are not always collected in a systematic way that could impact retention models and subsequent interventions (Gupton, 2017). Even though a school does not have control over external factors, they still need to be accountable as student supports are implemented and assessed for impact (Kerby, 2015).

Situations of homelessness are not part of the retention analytics run by many institutions. Modeling provides tools for administrators in identifying trends and aids in the creation of interventions (Kerby, 2015). Kerby (2015) stated predictive models of persistence have “failed to examine the experiences that take place within the institutional context” (p. 140). The experiences of the individual in relation to the institution is key to building the model (Kerby, 2015).

Although homelessness is not specifically part of the retention model, socioeconomic factors are. Family income and means are predictive in assessing the ability to persist and navigate the college roadmap (Chapalot, et al. 2015; Kerby, 2015). This indirect assessment of low-income students is part of the prediction, but has not been part of the larger conversation. Some administrators do not want to stray from an academic focus and question the idea of higher education as a charity or social service agency (Broton, et al, 2014; Crutchfield, 2016; Hallett & Crutchfield, 2017). The juxtaposition of academic success and housing stability cannot be ignored, as success cannot be achieved without basic needs being met (Hallett & Crutchfield, 2017; Maslow, 1943). Hallett and Crutchfield (2017) stated, “instead of charity, this monograph moves the narrative toward an equity and justice perspective” (p. 19). Ensuring success of all students is a focal point of social justice and speaks to the mission of higher education, no matter the school.

### **Summary**

Research concerning the impact of homelessness on college students is limited. Some federal mandates do exist in the area of financial assistance, but their impact has not been assessed for effectiveness and impact on access and persistence for homeless students towards a post-secondary credential. This examination will review current practices and guide the creation of comprehensive interventions for college administrators to promote retention and resiliency of this vulnerable population.

In the review of the literature, a historical context to illustrate the problem of homelessness, and how it influences education was provided. The regulations that protect students experiencing homelessness serve as a starting point for the study, such as *McKinney-Vento* and the *CCRAA*. These regulations frame the research inquiry. In addition, a review of academic performance and persistence impacts was conducted to provide a context to illustrate the issues experienced by students that impede their persistence to degree.

The theoretical frameworks of resiliency theory, retention theory and social justice theory provide scholarly context for the research. From a student lens, resiliency theory promotes a student-centered lens for the research and respect for the individual, while promoting student success. Combined, these frameworks provide scholarly context for access to higher education for this marginalized group. The conceptual frameworks will guide the analysis and interpretations of the data, both qualitative and quantitative, as the researcher attempts to answer the research questions that guide the study. Using these underpinnings will contribute to the knowledge base as there currently is a gap in the research about how homeless students' access and succeed in higher education. Furthermore, the need to facilitate supports that contemplate the whole person, not just academics, is critical in promoting success. Social, financial, mental health and other issues for the homeless student complicate this issue and drive the development of interventions in the post-secondary arena.

## **Methods**

Framed through a mixed design, data collection will consist initially of survey data from the 130 COSUAA institutions, along with interview and focus group data from purposefully selected individuals at the selected university. The purposeful selection enables the researcher to gather data to assist in understanding the problem and research question (Creswell, 2014). Moreover, a mixture of survey, interview and focus group data will allow the researcher to gather direct quotes and descriptions of procedures and dealings with students to create the narrative and understand the phenomena (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Ethical issues in data gathering will be addressed by seeking approval from the University of Missouri IRB and the IRB office at the selected institution. Gatekeeper letters will be sent to the Provost at the study site and a signature will be obtained before any data collection or contact with subjects. Furthermore, the online survey for the COSUAA group will be disseminated after final IRB approval.

In addition to the approvals, the researcher will adhere to ethical standards in the conduct of the research. These standards include describing the study and the final research product, describing any risks and benefits to the participants, and the ability for a participant to withdraw or refuse to answer questions at any time (Creswell, 2014; Fink, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Seidman, 2013).

### **Survey Protocol**

A brief online survey (see Appendix A), sent to the membership of COSUAA, allows for the capture of national perspectives surrounding the issue of homeless students and retention. Results of the survey will be analyzed using

descriptive analyzes and the portion that consists of open-ended questions will be coded and analyzed similarly as the focus groups and interviews. The descriptive statistics gleaned from the survey results will be included in the analysis, which provides multiple sources for data (Yin, 2014). The survey will answer the first research question, *What procedures and policies are in place to identify homeless students through the financial aid process?* and will gather short responses from participants about specific interventions they may be employing. Gathering this data involves an online survey to participants with a notice of informed consent (see Appendix C) outlining the purpose, procedures, and confidentiality (Fink, 2017).

The survey consists of a mixture of short response questions and Likert scale responses. Thirteen questions will be presented to the participants using the COSUAA listserv as a vehicle to distribute the survey. All current members will be invited to participate via a link in the email sent to the list serve (n=128). Upon reaching the survey site, the statement of informed consent will be provided as referenced in Appendix C and then the questions are to follow. Survey results will be collected using Qualtrics software. Fink (2017) outlined concerns with online surveys, which include the use of multiple email addresses, not knowing who completed the survey and issues with technology and privacy concerns. These concerns are mitigated by the fact that the researcher is a part of the COSUAA group and will have credibility, which will assist with privacy concerns and the knowledge of the survey respondent. The COSUAA group limits access to the email service to one member per institution so the data will not be

corrupted by multiple users from the same school. Also, with only one member, there is only one email address associated with the institution that is being surveyed. Surveying this closed group online will allow for large geographic coverage to schools with varying socioeconomic profiles of students that will assist with the analysis of homeless interventions.

Data concerns, as cited by Fink (2017), will be minimal, as the survey is not asking for data that are personally identifiable to an individual and will not need to be encrypted. The data will also be aggregated so that a single institution will not be identified in the results. Using short response and Likert items allows the respondent to answer quickly without doing much research, so responses should not be difficult to obtain.

To evaluate the reliability of the survey (Fink, 2017), the researcher utilized the test-retest reliability coefficient that determined the degree scores are consistent over time. The survey was administered to the same group of 19 educators within a three-week interval. Then the scores from the survey were correlated using the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) to establish the stability for the reliability of the survey. A high coefficient of stability was the criteria for good test-retest reliability. For the survey, the correlation between the test and retest was .486, which is significant at the .005 level according to the SPSS analysis, indicating the reliability of the survey.

Besides the survey tool itself, content validity for the survey was determined by examining current literature on homeless as corroborated through research (Fink, 2017). Specific questions designed to measure perceptions of

financial aid directors on the prevalence of homelessness on their campus, interventions to help those students, and number of Pell Grant eligible students were included. Using a Likert-type scale of questions will gauge the participants' perceptions about homeless students and supports on their campuses. Follow up questions in the form of open text will allow participants to give examples and elaborate on concepts in the scaled questions. This forms connections to the four research questions and allows for triangulation of the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Utilizing the survey tool, Qualtrics, the researcher will be able to gather and analyze data in an efficient way within the membership of COSUAA (Newcomer, Hatry, & Wholey, 2016).

### **Focus Group Protocol**

Conducting research using a focus group allows the researcher an understanding of “how people feel or think about an issue, idea, product or service and are used to gather opinions” (Krueger & Casey, 2015, p. 6). Furthermore, using a focus group will provide for a creation of rich, thick narrative that will add to data collected from the survey and interviews. (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In addition to creating a narrative, the focus group will provide a mechanism for the researcher to gain understanding of the issues surrounding homeless youth. Furthermore, this group will consist of people who are closely involved with the creation or implementation of policies and procedures to help the homeless population. Krueger and Casey (2015) cited the use of focus groups as vehicles to help with decision-making and guiding program, policy or service development and by using this means of data

collection, the researcher will create a needs assessment of such programmatic development within the institution.

Focus groups will include financial aid administrators, student success personnel on campus and student housing personnel (n=6-8). After the gatekeeper letter is signed for the institution, invitations will be sent to a financial aid representative, two academic advisors, and a housing representative. The group interviews will be on the university campus to allow the participants to feel comfortable in their setting. The focus group size will be six to eight members to allow all participants to share their experiences and viewpoints. Depending on the availability of these administrators, the researcher will conduct a one or two focus group sessions to allow a more intimate setting to capture the thoughts and answers of each participant. In-depth insights will add to the rich narrative and the smaller groups creates for more conversation and follow up questions as the researcher works to gain understanding (Krueger & Casey, 2015). The smaller size also creates an environment for interactive discussion, which can give a different type of data not collected in an individual interview (Hennink, 2014). Within the group setting, everyday social interaction can be observed and data gathered while participants engage in discussion between each other (Hennink, 2014). The process provides the group to engage in more organic conversation instead of a question-response model and the interviewer plays a lesser role (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

Utilizing focus groups will enable the researcher to facilitate the discovery of a “range of opinions, perceptions, ideas or feelings that people have about

something like an issue, behavior, practice, policy, program, or idea” (Krueger & Casey, 2015, p. 21). The perceptions of higher education professionals about the issues homeless students encounter and how to best facilitate their success will be a focal point of the research using the group. Collecting data in this way will also provide insights to how the institution works with this student group and the focus group is a way to capture insights and attitudes and to see what ideas may emerge from the collection (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

To ensure the collection of data that will support the creation of the narrative, questions aligned to the research questions are to be open-ended to facilitate dialogue within the group (see Appendix B). The questions developed will explore the treatment of homeless students in a higher education, paying particular attention to the financial aid process. As referenced in Appendix B, the focus group protocols will answer all four of the research questions and the specific questions are referenced in the protocol. Open-ended questions allow the researcher to collect meaningful data and provide more descriptive data (Hennink, 2014; Krueger & Casey, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The group session will be no more than 45 minutes and will be audio recorded to ensure the accuracy of data collection and analysis. Prior to beginning the audio recording, each participant will be given an informed consent letter that has been approved by the University of Missouri Institutional Review Board and the Regional University Institutional Review Board to explain their rights as a participant and outline the ethical treatment of the participant and the information gathered in the session via audio recording. Audio recording permits transcription to occur later

and helps the researcher focus on the non-verbal and setting during the group. Recording the focus groups also reiterates the professionalism of the researcher and allows careful listening to the responses (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Seidman, 2013; Yin, 2014). Similarly, member checking will be employed to ensure that the researcher (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) captures the interpretation of words and ideas accurately. Using member checking allows the researcher to capture content validity and strengthen the credibility of the research, which is crucial when using qualitative data collection (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Further validation will be provided as the researcher conducts the data analysis via the qualitative and quantitative data elements gathered.

### **Interview Protocol**

In addition to the use of focus groups and survey data collection, the researcher will also conduct interviews (n=3) to further triangulate the findings. Interview subjects will include the Director of Student Financial Assistance, Director of Trio Services, and the Director of Student Housing at the Regional University. Before the interview, participants will be given the informed consent form. The first interview will be conducted face-to-face, while a second follow-up interview will be conducted by telephone. Mertens (2005) claimed three benefits when conducting interviews: depth of information, relationship development, and participant flexibility. These interviews included open-ended and semi-structured questions to establish an understanding of the construct of homeless and to frame how participants shaped their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Questions

will be framed around the availability of aid resources and barriers that exist or are perceived to exist for homeless students and provide data collection for all four research questions as noted in Appendix C. The *MVA* and subsequent impact of the act on the financial aid process is a further underpinning of the questions. The researcher will contact the subjects via electronic mail to schedule the approximately 30 minute interviews and will secure informed consent before the interview. Questions for the interview and a confirmation given beforehand will give the participants time to review and contemplate responses. To ensure accuracy, interviews will be audiotaped to allow for engaged listening by the researcher during the interviews, as well as providing a mechanism for reflection and transcription of the data. Utilizing interviews will assist the researcher in strengthening data collection and “understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (Seidman, 2013; p. 9).

Seidman (2013) outlined protocols for interviews to guide the researcher to facilitate interviews to glean the most information possible by using strong questions and listening skills. Open-ended questions and exploring with targeted following questions will facilitate a deep exploration of the participant’s experiences and thoughts on the subject. Moreover, the researcher should be prepared to “listen more, talk less” as they conduct the interview (Seidman, 2013, p. 86). Listening fosters respect and leads to trust between the participant and researchers, which enhances the collection of data in this format (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Seidman, 2013). Establishing trust will also assist in the validation process as the researcher builds that relationship.

Questions created by the researcher were informed by current research on the theoretical frameworks of social justice, resiliency theory, and homelessness in higher education, which framed the content validity of the interview. Furthermore, to ensure the face validity of the interview process, member checking is essential, enabling the researcher to “solicit feedback on preliminary or emerging finding from some of the people you interviewed” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 246,). Member checking permits validation of information and comments are in agreement with their intent and experiences captured in the interview (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Validity of the research is critical to the researcher and participants and reinforces the trustworthiness of the researcher with the participants (Creswell, 2014). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) postulated it is “imperative that researchers and others have confidence in the conduct of the investigation and in the results of any particular study” (p. 238). Creating this confidence in the research is supported by validation of the data collection and analysis and how the researcher followed the protocols (Creswell, 2014; Krueger & Casey, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Seidman, 2013)

### **Data Analysis**

Ethical considerations of data collection are at the forefront of this research. Approvals from the University of Missouri’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) will be obtained and strict adherence to regulations will occur to protect the participants. Gatekeeper letters and informed consent letters will be obtained before data collection that will acknowledge the rights of the institutions that chose to participate in the study.

Another ethical consideration is the protection of the student experiences and situations that were shared during interviews, focus groups and other analysis. All efforts will be taken to ensure maximum protection not to identify individuals and situations or otherwise exploit a student and their issues. Due to the sensitive nature surrounding the issue of homelessness, students will not be participants in this research. If a participant discusses a student, the data will be carefully masked to avoid any personally identifiable information in the final report.

Data obtained from the survey will be tabulated and then analyzed using the SPSS Version 25. The Likert scale questions were measured with a scale that ranged from one to five as previously detailed, with five indicative of extensive. The mean and standard deviation for each question will be determined to establish the frequency of responses. Using descriptive statistics will provide summaries of some of the questions and data will be illustrated with charts and bar graphs to provide a visualization of the frequency of responses, measures of central tendencies and measures of variation (Fink, 2017). Questions that ask for counts and percentages of students to describe the schools' population will also be tabulated to show distribution and regional similarities, if discovered.

Qualitative data analysis includes the organization and cross-examining of data in ways that enables researchers to see patterns, identify themes, and make interpretations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), this organization of the data is done as the researcher compares similar themes and examines how these relate to the variables within the sample population. The researcher plans to use the traditional approach of coding as the

themes emerged out of the data analysis (Creswell, 2014). Creation of basic categories, according to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), allows for quick identification of the information as one works through the analysis of the data. Emerging themes will be triangulated with other data collection tools to help guide the research.

Thus, once the data are gathered, the transcription of the interviews will be conducted and field notes will be completed. Coding of the transcripts will be conducted in a systematic manner (Kitzinger, 1995). A two-part coding process will be employed to label the segments of data to identify themes (Fossey et al., 2002). First, open coding is conducted. This involves the researcher examining the units of analysis and formulating basic, noninferential descriptions of the phenomena being studied, then grouping them into general categories that described the participants' experiences (Nelson & Quintana, 2010). Next, the researcher employs an axial coding method that created inferential descriptions of the processes being observed and giving them meaning that was relevant to the research questions (Nelson & Quintana, 2010). Meanings, patterns, and connections among data are coded, thus giving an understanding of the data about the research questions (Fossey et al., 2002). As an additional level of data triangulation (Creswell, 2009), field notes will be interpreted about the findings in the transcriptions.

### **Limitations**

A critical limitation of this study will be the limited access to students that are experiencing homelessness or are at risk of being homeless during their

college tenure. New guidance from United States Department of Education (ED) has created a barrier in accessing student data and names to conduct any surveys or interviews (NASFAA, 2017). Since the willingness of students to self-identify or university staff being able to share data surrounding this student group for this research, direct student contact would be impossible with these mandated constraints. The lack of the student's voice limits the study in how outreach or interventions would enhance the student's attachment and retention and persistence at the institutions in the study.

Another limitation is that only large public institutions are included the study. Private four-year and two year colleges and universities may have interventions in place for homeless students, but due to time constraints, they will not be included.

Finally, limitations to this study include the researcher's connection to the University as a former employee. Potential bias has framed the approach to the research and as such, all data from interviews and the focus groups will be vetted using member checking to ensure that personal bias does not affect the transcription of the sessions (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

### **Design Controls**

The researcher will utilize several controls to reduce bias in the research. First, semi-structured questions will be used in the interview and focus group settings. According to Merriam and Tisdale (2016), this provides the participants to share opinions and views without taking on the researcher's viewpoints. In addition, survey development will employ design controls, such as content

validity and reliability. Furthermore, participants' short answer responses on the survey will help the researchers gather data that support the qualitative methods, in this case an online survey. The online survey to a closed membership group provides the advantage that only one entry per institution/COSUAA member will occur and that the survey is not asking for highly protected data (Fink, 2017). Finally, member checking allows bias to minimize by participants reviewing their responses and making changes to convey the correct information and tone (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdale, 2016).

### **Analysis of Evidence**

In this section, the results of the study are presented, including both qualitative and quantitative analysis. The analysis procedure addressed the four research questions and merged the datasets using the mixed method approach denoted by Creswell (2015) as convergent design. In convergent design, the concurrent collection of both qualitative and quantities data occurs and then the data is analyzed separately and the results compared to understand the problem of practice. Questions in both data sets are used to answer all four research questions by using the qualitative responses in both the survey and interviews and triangulated with the quantitative data collected via the survey.

### **Research Question One**

*What procedures and policies are in place to identify homeless students through the financial aid process?*

When a student presents as homeless or housing insecure at Regional University (RU), there are not policies in place, but a situation-by-situation

dynamic exists. During the focus group, several of the five respondents stated that they did not have an awareness of exact policies, but they could sometimes find help for students. Residence Life staff, for example, may have been able to make accommodations in some instances, but there was not a standing policy. Focus Group Participant 1 stated “we have a procedure is that those go to the care team and on the care team 12-14 people from around campus can see who can support the student”. Another referral point mentioned by several participants is the Office of Student Experience and Engagement. This office can identify resources both on and off campus, but the off campus is largely due to the longevity and connectedness of a specific staff member to community resources. Little follow-up exists, so a referral and its results are not widely known by the staff member that tried to assist a student.

Besides the referral, the financial aspects of policy and procedures were discussed throughout the interviews and focus groups. Focus group participants finished many of their answers with questions about “how do we supplement the expense of housing” and “how do we bridge the gap”. When interviewing Director 2, the response to the research question about policy center largely around the collection of documentation to substantiate the claim of homelessness by a student when they file the FAFSA. RU requires a student to obtain a letter from the shelter or high school counselor to document their homeless status. The Director stated that “I feel like I need to be consistent with professional judgement and special requests and in many

ways I consider this a special request” Collecting third party documentation is “just to substantiate and just make sure we don’t have a student that’s playing the system” explained the Director. The Director continued by stating “I’m not out to make him jump through extra hoops but I feel like that’s necessary to do to keep the student who aren’t playing nice, you know to keep them in check”.

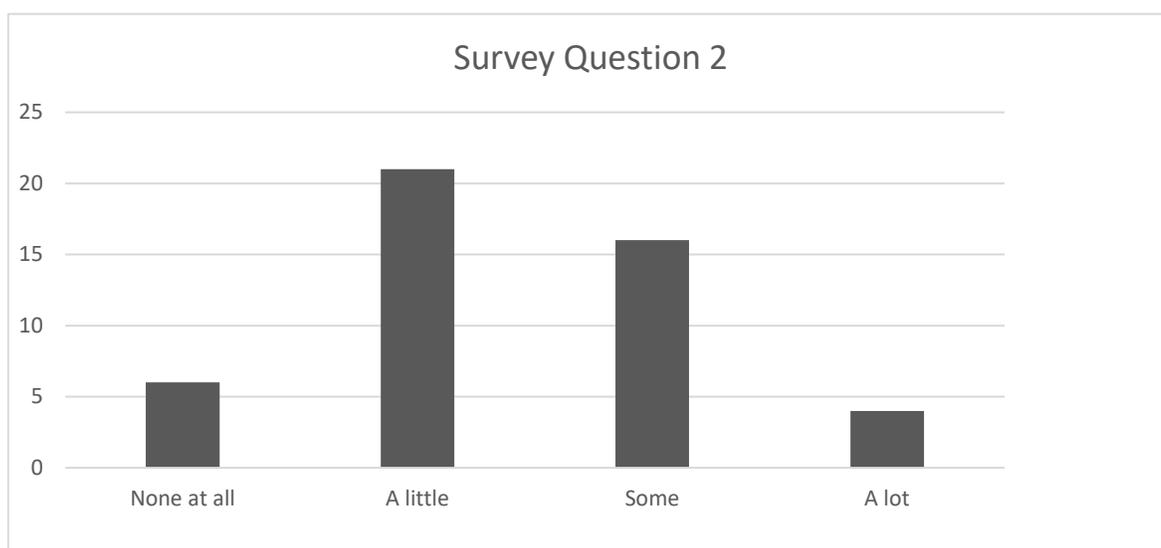
Director 1 has a policy and procedure in their grant funding document that they are allowed to pay some housing costs for students. The funds can be used to procure temporary housing as an allowable cost in the grant. The Director stated, “Housing has been willing to work with us in those situations” as RU has year round housing and family housing which makes it easier to help students in a variety of situations.

From the survey, respondents could provide examples of procedures for outreach for students that had identified as homeless on the FAFSA. Out of 50 schools, three sent emails to students that outlined resources, such as food pantry, hotel affiliations, shelters, textbook resources, laundry and showers for students. One school provided aid to meet the full cost of attendance for the students that are considered homeless on their campus. Based on the response from that school, they are assisting about 25 students per year. Two schools also indicated that they are convening working groups to have dialogue surrounding issues such as housing insecurity, but are in the formative stages of creating policy and procedures to intervene.

Two questions on the survey tie into the assessment of having policies and procedures on campus to assist with students experiencing homelessness.

First, question two on the survey asks if the university is doing any outreach based on the student's response to the homelessness question. Secondly, respondents answered based on a Likert scale if they had addressed homelessness as part of their retention plans. The results are listed in the following figures.

*Figure 1* Financial Aid Survey Question 2: How much outreach do you do for homeless students (as identified on the FAFSA) beyond what is required by federal guidelines?



Data analysis of question two shows that out of 46 respondents, 28 responded that they were doing no outreach to students that had indicated they were homeless on the FAFSA. The mean for Survey Question 2 is 1.59 and standard

deviation is .87, which illustrates that there is not much variation in the data compared to the mean.

*Figure 2* Survey Question 9 Is housing insecurity specifically addresses in your retention efforts?

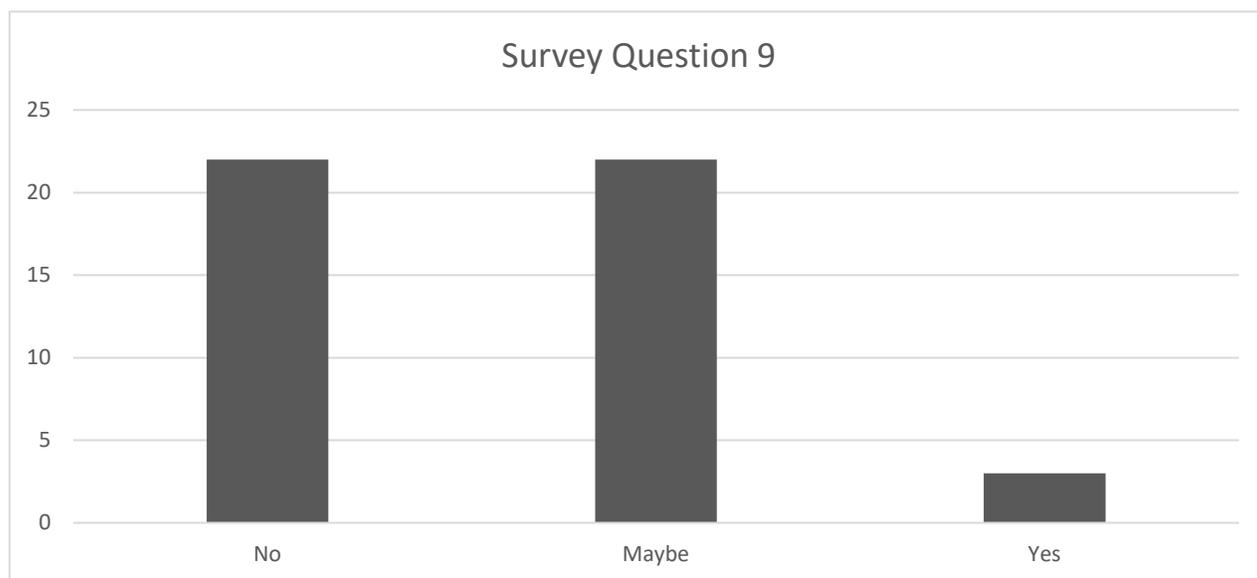


Figure 2 suggests that the institutions surveyed do not include housing insecurity in their retention plans or that its inclusion is unknown by the respondent.

### **Research Question Two**

*How can institutions create policies and procedures to support the homeless student population in the context of resiliency and social justice?*

In analyzing data to answer this question, the researcher asked participants in the focus group and interviews about their definition of resiliency. The overarching theme was about overcoming obstacles and continuing to one's goal. One respondent states, "Someone who is flexible someone who bounces back is resilient". Director 3 explained resiliency as "being emotionally and cognitively and physically able to move on. To continue. You need to have capacity to stick

with”. Focus group participants illustrated resiliency as the “overcoming of a challenge or hardship” and “having a goal that you stick to no matter what happens, whatever gets in your way keep pushing forward through adversity”. After gathering the definitions, the researcher asked how higher education could support resiliency. A focus group participant explained that supporting resiliency was about supporting students through the One Person campaign modeled off suicide prevention in Ireland.

“They have a campaign that they use in Ireland. It's something that I brought with me to this job. It's the one-person campaign So as long as you have the one person and so everybody gets their person when they come in to higher education. So, I try my best to be that one person for all my people. And so it's not just about mental health although that's a huge component of it. But making sure that they have somebody that they know cares, somebody they know is, and somebody they trust will be delicate with their situation. Be delicate with their feelings and then also be honest and be consistent with them”.

Creating the bond with students is difficult for the academic success counselors, as they have large caseloads. One focus group participant discusses that “it can be tough with a large number of students, but letting know that you're the person that they can open up to and share things in that you are here to be a resource for them”. It is difficult due to the fact that students have complex situations, but the focus group was going to have a course in mental health first aid which “will be good to have tools to help students where they are”.

Beyond tools to help students, questions asked of all participants about resources within the institution and community to assist students that were experiencing homelessness. RU has a food pantry called Campus Cupboard on campus and had some community partners, such as Catholic Charities and local shelters that staff could refer students to in time of need. Survey participants mentioned emergency grant assistance United Way as a community partner and 40 out of 50 respondents had a food pantry on campus.

No survey respondents gave feedback based on the question of “If you are not doing outreach, what kinds of programs or interventions would you like to see on your campus in regards to helping the homeless students? When posed the same question, the RU participants cited that they would like to see “a one stop shop idea where we are all really accessible to each other, so we can answer pretty much all the questions at their meeting”. The focus group also talked of “serving as the middleman or advocate for the student; the mediator between student and the campus because it’s so unintuitive and intimidating”. Acting as an advocate would allow” to have those conversations alongside the students with the other people who are experts in aid, academic realms or care team vicinity would be helpful”.

### **Discussion of Findings**

Organizing and examining the qualitative data to find emerging themes and a mechanism to achieve a deeper understanding of the data (Creswell, 2014). Emerging themes from the interview and focus groups and was enhanced by the review of the quantitative and qualitative analysis from the survey. Three themes

presented in the data triangulation were: Education surrounding the issue of student homelessness, Resource development, and Eliminating barriers through policy and procedure.

### **Education regarding homelessness**

As institutions work to recruit and retain students, there must be awareness that the students have experiences that exist beyond what is measured by an academic transcript or vita. Creating a plan to assist practitioners in student development, financial aid, and retention offices to enhance access and student success by combating issues like homelessness counteracts issues of access and social justice (Chapalot, et. al., 2015; Crutchfield, et. al., 2016). Participants in the interview and focus group attest to the desire to affect a student's chance of success by eliminating the barriers, but are impacted by lack of education on homelessness and how that presents in higher education. Addressing issues by linking students to services to assist with housing and food insecurity is a key tenant of newer research, but these are not widely known across campus. As illustrated in the qualitative and quantitative analysis, participants were not sure about what policies and procedures existed to help students in crisis on their campuses. Moreover, in basic document analysis on RU's website, there were no resources for students to quickly access in regards to issues with shelter or housing for emergent situations.

Creating a safety net for students encountering housing instability addresses the need for interventions to support resiliency and the social justice concerns surrounding access to higher education. Including homeless students in

the narrative of higher education attainment supports diversity and limits the marginalization of the underrepresented; including students of color and of differing orientations that need additional supports to be successful (Hallett & Crutchfeld, 2017). Students without that safety net and no guidance have more difficulty in engaging in the educational process (Hallett, 2010). Data collected in the focus group spoke to the need for that safety net and the ability for students to be able to focus on their academics without the additional stressors of finances and housing. Academic Success Coaches speaking about being an advocate for their students in crisis ties to the research by Marshall (2004) that contends professionals within higher education do not have a grasp on what they can do to assist the marginalized and are not educated in how to address issues of social justice. Data from the survey, focus groups, and interviews illustrated the lack of conviction when speaking about what resources were available and demonstrated a lack of awareness about policy and procedures surrounding the issue of homelessness. Navigating the systems within the institution prove challenging for administrators and staff as they work to advocate for students and help them break out of the situation of poverty and disrupt the systems of “inequity that continue to marginalize homeless students in higher education (Gupton, 2017, p. 210).

Besides the notion of creating supports to assist students, the concept of homelessness and how it influences students was interpreted in many different ways across the data. Data collected via the interviews found that two of the three directors had less of a student focused approach to how they viewed students in housing insecure situations. In addition, homelessness was often described in the

qualitative analysis linked with the words mental illness. Students finding themselves in a housing insecure situation can be in a variety of situations,

### **Resource development**

The data suggested that administrators often had limited awareness of resources on or off campus that could help a student's outside of the classroom. For example, data collected about policy and procedures to help students was limited from the survey participants and non-existent with the participants in the on campus visit by the researcher. Not having a clear path to interventions or resources does not allow the student to get assistance without barriers. The data was clear in the focus group that the referral to the campus Care team was ambiguous and did not provide follow up for the staff that made the referral. This led to a lack of confidence in the campus' ability to triage and treat the issues. Connection to campus is important to support a student academically and socially.

The conceptual frameworks cite the need for students to feel connected to the campus as a component of retention theory. This theme was echoed in the context of resiliency theory as education provides a means to escape homelessness through the creation of supports and relationships (Gupton, 2017). In addition, the promotion of mentors to promote a positive environment of support and encouragement is a way according to Hallett (2012), to limit additional risk for a student and promote their achievement. Building the support network enhances trust and relationships with adults and peers within the institution. Homeless students due to their unstable environments do not have long-term relationships with mentors and other means of support, which are

critical to developing skills to react to the environment of higher education and coping with stressors (Gupton, 2017; Stratton, et. al., 2007). Furthermore, institutional interventions that are currently in place are sporadic at RU and do not examine the structural changes to serve students, but tend to see interventions as a quick fix. Hallett and Crutchfeld (2017) advocate for more of a holistic and structural approach to evoke change instead of operating in a reactionary environment. Securing a fix for a housing issue is a start, but it is not the entire solution to creating retention and completion success.

This housing insecurity and related financial factors limits the ability for the student to be involved in social and academic activities regardless of how they become homeless. A focus group participant echoed this concept by illustrating the paradox of working versus going to class. They shared how the student struggled with the decision. Disconnecting from the goal of graduation or retention to the next semester causes not only academic stress, but also isolation from peers and the college experience (Kerby, 2015). An institution cannot control for all external stressors for any student, but a basic understanding of the issues and how supports are created and implemented for retention impact provides context and buy-in from staff and faculty.

Besides the student experience, the data suggests a need for resources for faculty and staff in this space. Homelessness and housing insecurity are not just a problem for the low-income, or mentally ill as the data from the interviews and focus groups illustrated. Many students are coming to college from a home, but due to other factors, have become housing insecure. Students that are estranged

from family due to personal choices or sexual orientation are encountering housing insecurity (Hallett & Crutchfield, 2017). Educating staff and faculty about housing insecurity would eliminate perceptions of the issue as one for poverty-stricken or the mentally ill. The data gathered during this research supports the lack of awareness of the homeless situation and is supported by the lack of data on the issue across those surveyed.

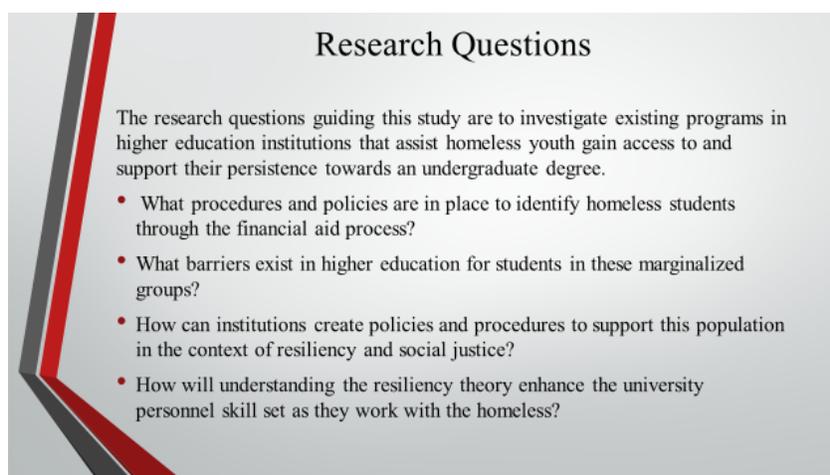
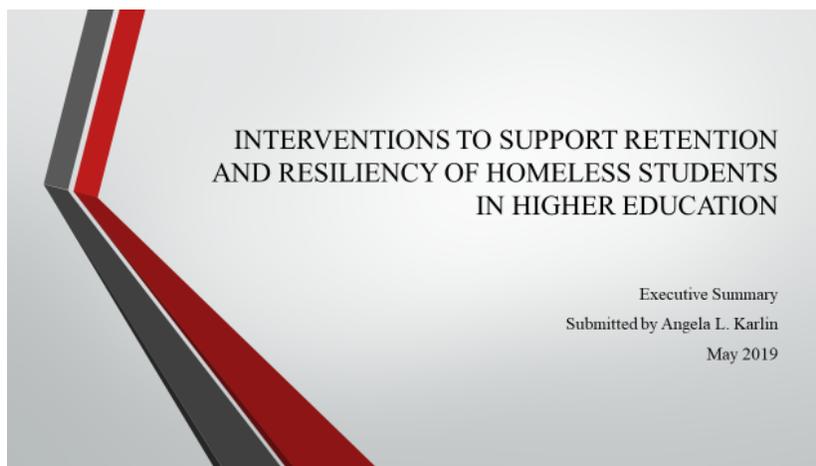
### **Elimination of barriers**

Throughout the resiliency framework, many researchers discussed the creation of supports for students to feel a connection to the campus, peers, or faculty and staff. Barriers created by the institution to protect resources or the perceived integrity of the very systems designed to support students are the culprits in creating ill will and a lack of trust in the system (Ausikaitis, et. al., 2015). Two of the directors interviewed spoke of the systems as a necessity to protect resources and prevent the working of the system. Within the context of social justice, interventions are needed but have to be framed within the context of support, not as punitive. Supportive interventions require a greater scope than the traditional financial aid model that is the only official support in place at RU.

The focus group participants were appreciative for the emergency funds that sometimes were available to a student in a housing crisis, but the only students being assisted are the ones that are comfortable sharing their stories. There is some data available via the FAFSA regarding homelessness or the risk of being homeless, but overwhelmingly the institutions surveys did no outreach based on that data. In addition, most institutions had little or no understanding of

the retention policy at their institution or the resources, outside the food pantry, that were afforded within the community or institution. Social capital is lacking for most students that are in housing crisis or have been homeless prior to college attendance. This lack of capital, according to Skobba, Meyers and Tiller (2018) limits the ability of people to secure help or benefits via their connectedness to a person or network. The network and systems within an institution of higher education are complex for any student, with or without strong social capital or networks. Adding the layer of low support or an emergency to the mix can erode the ability for the student to stay in class and realize their potential, as their basic needs are not being met (Hallett & Crutchfield, 2017; Maslow, 1943). Integrating a student into the college fabric is a component of retention theory, but one that is hard to achieve without eliminating outside the classroom stressors. These “multiple threats to learning” are issues that are barriers to integration and challenge retention efforts surrounding academic success (Masten, et. al., p. 205). Academic success and integration are the theoretical underpinning of the Tinto (1987) retention theory. Research from this study shows barriers and perceptions exist which undermine the ability for a homeless student to succeed, despite resiliency.

## Recommendations



## Findings

### Themes emerging from data

- Education Regarding Homelessness
- Resource Development
- Elimination of Barriers

## Recommendations

### Education Regarding Homelessness

- Faculty and Staff training on issues of homelessness that impact retention and completion
  - Sharing of data collected from FAFSA and data mining of Maxient software to quantify the issue of homelessness and housing insecurity on campus
  - Training on campus (similar to Green Dot) to illustrate the different faces of homelessness beyond just those that are low income
  - Housing insecurity takes many forms including those that are “couch surfing”, temporarily homeless due to the end of a relationship, victims of domestic violence, students in conflict with their parents or guardians regardless of socioeconomic status
  - Shedding perceptions that mental health issues are always present in those that are homeless

## Resource Development

- Create a comprehensive list of all resources available to students in times of housing crisis
  - Institutional and community resources, such as Campus Cupboard, shelters or housing options on campus
  - Ability for all staff to disseminate this information so that students do not have to go to multiple offices to tell their story multiple
- Website creation for emergency situations including housing issues for students to access anonymously if they do not wish to share their situation with staff or faculty
  - Includes referral information to financial aid and student engagement offices, as well as community resources
- Housing scholarship/grant or work program to offset cost for on campus housing
  - Addresses the barrier of cost for students needing housing, but have no aid or means to pay

## Elimination of Barriers

- Eliminate the collection of documentation for FAFSA filers that identified they were homeless or at-risk of homelessness
  - Not required to receive aid
  - Creates stress for a vulnerable population
- Exploration of emergency funds to address housing costs for those in crisis
- Study to assess the need for charging for break housing ad
  - Additional costs for students that have no where to go during breaks
  - Is the charge needed to maintain the building or a historical practice?

## Conclusion

Research regarding the experience of students that are homeless while in college is not as prevalent as the K-12 arena. The creation of interventions, like McKinney Vento mandated for school districts is left to the institutions discretion at the post-secondary level. This research intended to provide information regarding how colleges and universities assisted the homeless and housing insecure in the context of retention and completion. Specifically, the purpose was to determine interventions to enhance the ability of a student that was homeless to access and persist in their higher education program.

Despite not having any formalized policy or procedure, staff and directors are navigating the systems in place at RU to find means to assist individual students. The interventions are not scaled to help everyone, and are not grounded in data that can be access from the FAFSA. Academic success coaches in the focus group voiced their desire to find resources, but had concerns about their caseload and referral methodology. The concept of advocacy and mentorship was clear within the focus group and supports resiliency concepts of forming relationships to foster a sense of belonging. This belonging generates an environment that supports student learning and retention (Kerby, 2015). Integration via student supports in the academic and social fabric of the institution is central to retention, especially those that are early in the students' academic career (Kalsbeek, 2013).

Formulating these supports is difficult as shown by the data collection. Resources are not well defined, well funded, or well known by staff at the institutions surveyed. High profile imitative such as the work of TRiO at RU and food pantries across those school on the survey were well know and easily referenced for a student in need. The lack of housing interventions or the knowledge of a housing issue was prevalent in the research. Most institutions did not think there was much of an issue around the concept of homelessness. Furthermore, one concludes that this lack of awareness correlates with the lack of policy and procedure to intervene for students.

Additionally, the perceptions of staff surrounding the attributes of a student that is homeless was evident in the data collection. These perceptions

suggest that there is a disconnect between what is actually happening on campuses and reality. Unfortunately, the stigma of homelessness does not encourage students to self-report or tell their story unless trust is gained (Ausikaitis, et.al., 2015). Providing support to students must be framed in a respectful and private way and will need to be created, as the current, traditional supports do not address the homeless student experience (Chapalot, et al., 2015). Data collection illustrates the need for supports and education throughout the institution to support students with housing challenges. Although only one institution was interviewed, the data provides the information to assess the campus climate and concerns surround this population. Using this information as a starting point to build interventions to support the homeless student will help financial aid professionals and campus partners to have the conversation.

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## Journal Appendix A

### Interventions for Homeless Students Survey

You are being asked to participate in a survey entitled "Interventions for Homeless Students" which is being conducted by Angela Karlin, Doctoral Candidate at the University of Missouri. This survey is anonymous. No one, including the researcher, will be able to associate your responses with your identity. The survey should take 10-15 minutes to complete. Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to take the survey, to stop responding at any time, or to skip any questions that you do not want to answer. Submission of the survey will be interpreted as your informed consent to participate.

If you have any questions about the research, please contact Angela Karlin via email at [akarlin@ku.edu](mailto:akarlin@ku.edu) or the faculty advisor Dr. Barbara Martin at [bmartin@ucmo.edu](mailto:bmartin@ucmo.edu). If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact the MU Institutional Review Board (IRB) at (573) 882-3181.

Q1 How much outreach do you do for homeless students (as identified on the FAFSA) beyond what is required by federal guidelines?

	None at all (1)	A little (2)	Some (3)	A lot (4)	Extensive (5)
	<input type="radio"/>				

Q2 What types of outreach do you conduct on your campus?

---

Q3 How much awareness is there on campus to the needs of students that are homeless?

	None at all (1)	A little (2)	Some (3)	A lot (4)	Extensive (5)
	<input type="radio"/>				

Q4 To what extent does housing insecurity/homelessness affect retention and persistence on your campus?

	None at all (1)	A little (2)	Some (3)	A lot (4)	Extensive (5)
	<input type="radio"/>				

Q5 Are there barriers on your campus for those that are homeless or at risk of homelessness?

	Not at all (1)	A few (2)	Some (3)	A lot (4)	Extensive (5)
	<input type="radio"/>				

Q6 What are some examples of barriers for the homeless student on your campus?

---

Q7 Is housing insecurity specifically addressed in your retention efforts?

	No (1)	Maybe (2)	Yes (3)
	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q8 Are there resources for homeless students on your campus?

	No (1)	Maybe (2)	Yes (3)
	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q9 Please list resources for homeless students on your campus.

---

Q10 Does your campus have a food pantry?

	No (1)	Maybe (2)	Yes (3)
	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q11 Are there community partners that help address homelessness in your area?

	None at all (1)	A little (2)	Some (3)	A lot (4)	Extensive (5)
	<input type="radio"/>				

Q12 Please list community resources that exist for the homeless in your area.

---

Q13 What retention efforts address housing issues?

---

Q14 Do you have any special programs/offices that specifically address issues pertaining to housing insecurity? Please list them below.

---

Q15 What is the number of students that indicated they are homeless (on the FAFSA) in the 2017-2018 aid year at your institution?

---

Q16 What percentage of Pell grant recipients attended your institution (17-18 aid year)?

---

## Journal Article Appendix B

### Focus Group Protocol for Higher Education Administrators

Date:

Start Time:

## Introduction:

Thank you for taking the time to discuss your experiences with students and the financial aid process, especially those students that are low income and identified as homeless. My name is Angela Karlin and I will serve as the moderator for today's focus group. The purpose of today's discussion is to get information from you about students' financial aid interactions and interactions with the aid office.

We will have questions to help start the conversation, but do not feel that you have to address the specific question or go in order. This is meant to be a conversation among the group members so please interact with each other and feel free to bring up different points of view. I hope to gather information about your experiences, so there are no right or wrong answers.

Our session will last about 45 minutes. In my written notes, the evaluator will maintain your confidentiality during future reporting. No names will be included in any reports.

Information	
1. Tell me your name, your role at the university and how long you have been working in higher education.	Learn about participants
2. How prevalent to you think homelessness and housing insecurity is at your institution?  Probe:  What barriers exist, especially for students that are homeless or at risk of homelessness?	Q1, 2, 3

<p>3. What resources are available to students that are experiencing difficulties outside of the classroom as it pertains to housing and other basic needs?</p> <p>Probe: How do financial stressors affect persistence and access?</p>	Q1, 2, 3,4
<p>4. Does your institution have any policies/procedures in place to assist students in a housing insecure situation? If not, what would you like to see out into action?</p> <p>Probes:</p> <p>What would make the most significant impact?</p>	Q2 & Q4
<p>5. How do financial stressors affect persistence and access?</p>	Q4
<p>6. What is your definition of resiliency?</p>	Q2, 3 & 4
<p>7. How can we support resiliency in our students that are experiencing homelessness?</p> <p>Probe: What would be of most impact or considered a best practice?</p>	Q2, 3 & 4
<p>8. Do you have an example of a student that has had a significant housing related issue? What was the outcome?</p> <p>Probe: Are there things you wish you could have done differently?</p>	Q2,3 & 4

Thank you for your time and participation.

## Journal Article Appendix C

### Interview Protocol

#### Introduction:

Thank you for taking the time to discuss your experiences with students experiencing significant issues outside of the classroom and how they retain and persist at your institution. I am most interested in your interactions with students that are low income and identified as homeless. My name is Angela Karlin. The purpose of today's discussion is to get information from you about students' financial aid interactions and interactions with the aid office and how you may interact with students that identify as homeless.

We will have questions to help start the conversation, but do not feel that you have to address the specific question or go in order. I hope to gather information about your experiences, so there are no right or wrong answers.

Our session will last about 45 minutes. In my written notes, the evaluator will maintain your confidentiality during future reporting. No names will be included in any reports.

Information	
1. Tell me your name, your role at the university and how long you have been working in higher education.	Learn about participants
2. How prevalent to you think homelessness and housing insecurity is at your institution?  Probe:  What barriers exist, especially for students that are homeless or at risk of homelessness?	Q1, 2, 3
3. What resources are available to students that are experiencing difficulties outside of the classroom as it pertains to housing and other basic needs?	Q1, 2, 3,4

Probe: How do financial stressors affect persistence and access?	
4. Does your institution have any policies/procedures in place to assist students in a housing insecure situation? If not, what would you like to see out into action?  Probes:  What would make the most significant impact?	Q2 & Q4
5. How do financial stressors affect persistence and access?	Q4
6. What is your definition of resiliency?	Q2, 3 & 4
7. How can we support resiliency in our students that are experiencing homelessness?  Probe: What would be of most impact or considered a best practice?	Q2, 3 & 4
8. Do you have an example of a student that has had a significant housing related issue? What was the outcome?  Probe: Are there things you wish you could have done differently?	Q2,3 & 4

Thank you for your time and participation.

SECTION SIX  
SCHOLARLY PRACTITIONER REFLECTION

When I began the program four years ago, I had no idea what changes were going to occur in my life. During the last semester of coursework, my dream job became open at the University of Kansas. The application process began in January, interviews in February and March and I was offered the job in late March with a June start date. I had no idea that I would be afforded such an amazing opportunity due to my Ed.D., so quickly.

The opportunities that I had because of this program cannot be quantified or explored in a page or two of reflection. My experience made me reflect more; present my leadership style and thoughts in a new and different way. Data began to become a theme in my daily life, beyond the dissertation. I had lived in a world of stories and one off situations within the confines of the financial aid office, but my exposure to research and theory changed my actions at work. My new boss is a data driven person and wants quantities analysis all the time. Thankfully, I have learned to provide him my stories as real life examples of how his data plays out in practice. Approaching my research in a mixed-method design enhances how I approach my work surrounding the student experience. This dissertation has equipped me to converse in a way that uses theory to shape and discuss policy and procedure. I feel more confident in my decisions, and what I bring to the leadership team at Kansas.

The research topic that I chose is one with many strong feelings attached to it. I have been labeled a bleeding heart and thought to be wasting my time on a topic that would have a miniscule impact at my current institution, as the perception is that Kansas does not have those issues. By using data and showing

how the student experience is impacted, the compassion that I have to promote access and equity is a strength for our retention efforts instead of a personal agenda. Unfortunately, moving to a larger school has felt a bit odd as I feel less connected to students. However, with a larger school comes exposure, so I shall leverage that as I try to impact change for students in housing insecure situations. All students deserve a safe environment and supportive structures as they navigate higher education.

Additionally, the position at Kansas will enable me to have the means to present and publish in a much different scope than at my former institution. Using this dissertation as a stepping-stone, I will be able to share my ideas and recommendations with others in the financial aid community on a national scale.

This process of writing and researching alone without the structure of class has been the most intense process that I have experienced as a professional. My topic was never out of my mind and I had to compartmentalize my life to keep from feeling out of control. I did not realize the stress of an unfinished project could be so all consuming. Even when I planned a break, I felt guilty and overwhelmed at times due to the pressure. My synthesis of information is much better than before and I have learned a lot about technology via this process. I also feel more confident as a leader, which has helped tremendously during my transition to my new job.

In conclusion, my greatest joy is seeing my goal realized and being able to share all the difficulties of the process with my daughter. As a woman, it is so important for me to be able to show her hard work and education are worth the

stress and time commitment. The timing of the doctoral program was such that her middle school and early high school years mirrored my school journey. I was able to show her how to juggle multiple tasks, how to say no to the things that would be in the way of my writing and how to deal with frustration in good and bad ways. The conversations we have had over the last year while I worked on the dissertation have been a gold mine for showing her it is good to be a woman with a goal. I have truly enjoyed the educational aspects as well as the personal growth I have experienced throughout the program.

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**APPENDIX A****Gatekeeper Permission for Administrator and Educator Participation Letter**

Dr. Mike Godard  
University of Central Missouri  
Administration 203  
Warrensburg, MO 64093

Dear Dr. Godard,

I would like to request your permission to invite applicable staff and faculty at the University of Central Missouri to participate in a research study entitled *Interventions to Support Retention and Resiliency of Homeless Students in Higher Education*. I am examining the practices and interventions available to students that are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Questions will focus on how the institution supports resiliency, retention and persistence of homeless students and the responses will be coded to assess current practices in place to support those students. The information gathered should be beneficial to the student support services, especially financial aid. This study is part of my dissertation research for a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis from the University of Missouri-Columbia.

For the study, the Directors of TRiO, Student Financial Assistance, and a representative from Housing will be asked to complete a qualitative interview. Other staff members including the offices listed above and academic advisors will be asked to participate in a focus group. No personal or identifying information will be collected from these educators. I am seeking your permission as Interim Provost to contact the administrators for their participation in this study

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

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns about participation either by phone at (816) 679-1247 or by electronic mail at [akarlin@ku.edu](mailto:akarlin@ku.edu). In addition, you are also welcome to contact the dissertation advisor for this research study, Dr. Barbara Martin, who can be reached at 660-543-8823 or by email at [bmartin@ucmo.edu](mailto:bmartin@ucmo.edu).

If you choose to allow me to contact administrators and educators regarding participation in this study, please complete the attached permission form. A copy of this letter and your written consent should be retained by you for future reference.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Angela L. Karlin  
Doctoral Candidate

## APPENDIX B

### Gatekeeper Permission for Administrator and Educator Participation

I, \_\_\_\_\_, grant permission for administrators and educators the University of Central Missouri to be contacted to participate in the study *Interventions to Support Retention and Resiliency of Homeless Students in Higher Education* conducted by Angela L. Karlin, doctoral candidate at the University of Missouri. By signing this permission form, I understand that the following safeguards are in place to protect staff and faculty choosing to participate:

- All participation is voluntary, and may be withdrawn at any point before culmination of the study.
- All responses will be used for dissertation research and potential future journal publications.
- All identities will be kept confidential in all phases of the research.
- An interview will occur with each administrator in-person, lasting approximately one hour in length.
- Focus Group will occur with a group of administrative staff in-person, lasting approximately forty-five minutes in length.

Please keep the consent letter and a copy of the signed consent form for your records. If you choose to grant permission for educators in your school district to participate in this study, please complete this *Administrative Permission for Program Participation Form*, please return it to Angela L. Karlin, as soon as possible.

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

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Title/Position:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Institution:

---

**Please return to: Angela Karlin, 2600 W. Dartmouth, Olathe, KS 66061**

**Cell Phone: 816-679-1247 Email: [akarlin@ku.edu](mailto:akarlin@ku.edu)**

## APPENDIX C

### Interventions for Homeless Students Survey

You are being asked to participate in a survey entitled "Interventions for Homeless Students" which is being conducted by Angela Karlin, Doctoral Candidate at the University of Missouri. This survey is anonymous. No one, including the researcher, will be able to associate your responses with your identity. The survey should take 10-15 minutes to complete. Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to take the survey, to stop responding at any time, or to skip any questions that you do not want to answer. Submission of the survey will be interpreted as your informed consent to participate.

If you have any questions about the research, please contact Angela Karlin via email at [akarlin@ku.edu](mailto:akarlin@ku.edu) or the faculty advisor Dr. Barbara Martin at [bmartin@ucmo.edu](mailto:bmartin@ucmo.edu). If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact the MU Institutional Review Board (IRB) at (573) 882-3181.

Q1 How much outreach do you do for homeless students (as identified on the FAFSA) beyond what is required by federal guidelines?

	None at all (1)	A little (2)	Some (3)	A lot (4)	Extensive (5)
	<input type="radio"/>				

Q2 What types of outreach do you conduct on your campus?

---

Q3 How much awareness is there on campus to the needs of students that are homeless?

	None at all (1)	A little (2)	Some (3)	A lot (4)	Extensive (5)
	<input type="radio"/>				

Q4 To what extent does housing insecurity/homelessness affect retention and persistence on your campus?

	None at all (1)	A little (2)	Some (3)	A lot (4)	Extensive (5)
	<input type="radio"/>				

Q5 Are there barriers on your campus for those that are homeless or at risk of homelessness?

	Not at all (1)	A few (2)	Some (3)	A lot (4)	Extensive (5)
	<input type="radio"/>				

Q6 What are some examples of barriers for the homeless student on your campus?

---

Q7 Is housing insecurity specifically addressed in your retention efforts?

	No (1)	Maybe (2)	Yes (3)
	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q8 Are there resources for homeless students on your campus?

	No (1)	Maybe (2)	Yes (3)
	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q9 Please list resources for homeless students on your campus.

---

Q10 Does your campus have a food pantry?

	No (1)	Maybe (2)	Yes (3)
	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q11 Are there community partners that help address homelessness in your area?

	None at all (1)	A little (2)	Some (3)	A lot (4)	Extensive (5)
	<input type="radio"/>				

Q12 Please list community resources that exist for the homeless in your area.

---

Q13 What retention efforts address housing issues?

---

Q14 Do you have any special programs/offices that specifically address issues pertaining to housing insecurity? Please list them below.

---

Q15 What is the number of students that indicated they are homeless (on the FAFSA) in the 2017-2018 aid year at your institution?

---

Q16 What percentage of Pell grant recipients attended your institution (17-18 aid year)?

---

## APPENDIX D

### Focus Group Protocol for Higher Education Administrators

Angela Karlin

Focus Group: Student Support Staff

Date:

Start Time:

Introduction:

Thank you for taking the time to discuss your experiences with students and the financial aid process, especially those students that are low income and identified as homeless. My name is Angela Karlin and I will serve as the moderator for today's focus group. The purpose of today's discussion is to get information from you about students' financial aid interactions and interactions with the aid office.

We will have questions to help start the conversation, but do not feel that you have to address the specific question or go in order. This is meant to be a conversation among the group members so please interact with each other and feel free to bring up different points of view. I hope to gather information about your experiences, so there are no right or wrong answers.

Our session will last about 45 minutes. In my written notes, the evaluator will maintain your confidentiality during future reporting. No names will be included in any reports.

Information	
1. Tell me your name, your role at the university and how long you have been working in higher education.	Learn about participants
2. How prevalent to you think homelessness and housing insecurity is at your institution?  Probe:  What barriers exist, especially for students that are homeless or at risk of homelessness?	Q1, 2, 3

<p>3. What resources are available to students that are experiencing difficulties outside of the classroom as it pertains to housing and other basic needs?</p> <p>Probe: How do financial stressors affect persistence and access?</p>	Q1, 2, 3,4
<p>4. Does your institution have any policies/procedures in place to assist students in a housing insecure situation? If not, what would you like to see out into action?</p> <p>Probes:</p> <p>What would make the most significant impact?</p>	Q2 & Q4
<p>5. How do financial stressors affect persistence and access?</p>	Q4
<p>6. What is your definition of resiliency?</p>	Q2, 3 & 4
<p>7. How can we support resiliency in our students that are experiencing homelessness?</p> <p>Probe: What would be of most impact or considered a best practice?</p>	Q2, 3 & 4
<p>8. Do you have an example of a student that has had a significant housing related issue? What was the outcome?</p> <p>Probe: Are there things you wish you could have done differently?</p>	Q2,3 & 4

Thank you for your time and participation.

## APPENDIX E

### Informed Consent From Focus Group Participant

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to participate in the study *Interventions to Support Retention and Resiliency of Homeless Students in Higher Education* conducted by Angela Karlin, doctoral candidate at the University of Missouri-Columbia. I understand the following:

- My participation is voluntary, and may be withdrawn at any point before culmination of the study.
- My responses will be used for dissertation research and potential future journal publications.
- My identity will be kept confidential in all phases of the research.
- An interview will occur either in-person or via video conference at a mutually agreed upon time, lasting approximately one hour in length.

Please keep the consent letter and a copy of the signed consent form for your records. If you choose to participate in this study, please complete the attached **signed consent form**, seal it in the enclosed envelope, and return to Angela Karlin as soon as possible. ***Please to be sure and include contact information so interview plans can be made and communicated to you.***

I have read the material above, and any questions that I have posed have been answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Title/Position: \_\_\_\_\_

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#### Contact Information:

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ (circle one) WORK    HOME    CELL

Best time for contact:  
 \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

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**Please return to: Angela Karlin, 2600 W. Dartmouth, Olathe, KS 66061  
 Cell Phone: 816-679-1247    Email: akarlin@ku.edu**

## APPENDIX F

### Informed Consent From Interview Participant

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to participate in the study *Interventions to Support Retention and Resiliency of Homeless Students in Higher Education* conducted by Angela Karlin, doctoral candidate at the University of Missouri-Columbia. I understand the following:

- My participation is voluntary, and may be withdrawn at any point before culmination of the study.
- My responses will be used for dissertation research and potential future journal publications.
- My identity will be kept confidential in all phases of the research.
- An interview will occur either in-person or via video conference at a mutually agreed upon time, lasting approximately one hour in length.

Please keep the consent letter and a copy of the signed consent form for your records. If you choose to participate in this study, please complete the attached **signed consent form**, seal it in the enclosed envelope, and return to Angela Karlin as soon as possible. *Please to be sure and include contact information so interview plans can be made and communicated to you.*

I have read the material above, and any questions that I have posed have been answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Title/Position:  
\_\_\_\_\_

#### Contact Information:

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ (circle one)    WORK    HOME    CELL

Best time for contact:  
\_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

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**Please return to: Angela Karlin, 2600 W. Dartmouth, Olathe, KS 66061  
Cell Phone: 816-679-1247    Email: akarlin@ku.edu**

## APPENDIX G

### Interview Protocol for Higher Education Administrators

Angela Karlin

Interview Protocol

Introduction:

Thank you for taking the time to discuss your experiences with students experiencing significant issues outside of the classroom and how they retain and persist at your institution. I am most interested in your interactions with students that are low income and identified as homeless. My name is Angela Karlin. The purpose of today's discussion is to get information from you about students' financial aid interactions and interactions with the aid office and how you may interact with students that identify as homeless.

We will have questions to help start the conversation, but do not feel that you have to address the specific question or go in order. I hope to gather information about your experiences, so there are no right or wrong answers.

Our session will last about 45 minutes. In my written notes, the evaluator will maintain your confidentiality during future reporting. No names will be included in any reports.

Information	
1. Tell me your name, your role at the university and how long you have been working in higher education.	Learn about participants
2. How prevalent to you think homelessness and housing insecurity is at your institution?  Probe:  What barriers exist, especially for students that are homeless or at risk of homelessness?	Q1, 2, 3

<p>3. What resources are available to students that are experiencing difficulties outside of the classroom as it pertains to housing and other basic needs?</p> <p>Probe: How do financial stressors affect persistence and access?</p>	Q1, 2, 3,4
<p>4. Does your institution have any policies/procedures in place to assist students in a housing insecure situation? If not, what would you like to see out into action?</p> <p>Probes:</p> <p>What would make the most significant impact?</p>	Q2 & Q4
<p>5. How do financial stressors affect persistence and access?</p>	Q4
<p>6. What is your definition of resiliency?</p>	Q2, 3 & 4
<p>7. How can we support resiliency in our students that are experiencing homelessness?</p> <p>Probe: What would be of most impact or considered a best practice?</p>	Q2, 3 & 4
<p>8. Do you have an example of a student that has had a significant housing related issue? What was the outcome?</p> <p>Probe: Are there things you wish you could have done differently?</p>	Q2,3 & 4

Thank you for your time and participation.

## APPENDIX H

## University of Central Missouri and University of Missouri IRB Consent



**Institutional Review Board**  
**University of Missouri-Columbia**  
 FWA Number: 0002876  
 IRB Registration Numbers: 00000731, 00009014

482 McReynolds Hall  
 Columbia, MO 65211  
 573-882-3181  
 irb@missouri.edu

December 19, 2018

Principal Investigator: Angela Karlin (MU-Student)  
 Department: Educational Leadership-EDD

Your IRB Application to project entitled Interventions to Support Retention and Resiliency of Homeless Students in Higher Education was reviewed and approved by the MU Institutional Review Board according to the terms and conditions described below:

IRB Project Number	2013306
IRB Review Number	243470
Initial Application Approval Date	December 19, 2018
IRB Expiration Date	December 19, 2019
Level of Review	Exempt
Project Status	Active - Exempt
Exempt Categories	45 CFR 46.101b(2)
Risk Level	Minimal Risk

The principal investigator (PI) is responsible for all aspects and conduct of this study. The PI must comply with the following conditions of the approval:

1. No subjects may be involved in any study procedure prior to the IRB approval date or after the expiration date.
2. All changes must be IRB approved prior to implementation utilizing the Exempt Amendment Form.
3. The Annual Exempt Form must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval at least 30 days prior to the project expiration date to keep the study active or to close it.
4. Maintain all research records for a period of seven years from the project completion date.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB at 573-882-3181 or irb@missouri.edu.

Thank you,  
 MU Institutional Review Board



Office of Sponsored Programs & Research Integrity  
Administration 315  
Warrensburg, MO 64093  
Office 660-543-4264  
Grants/Contracts: osp@ucmo.edu  
Compliance: researchreview@ucmo.edu

External Protocol Review  
1/16/2019  
Protocol Number: 1284

Dear Barbara Martin:

Your research project, 'Interventions to Support Retention and Resiliency of Homeless Students in Higher Education', was approved by the University of Central Missouri Human Subjects Review Committee on 1/16/2019. You may collect data for this project until 1/10/2020.

**If an adverse event (such as harm to a research participant) occurs during your project, you must IMMEDIATELY stop the research unless stopping the research would cause more harm to the participant.** If an adverse event occurs during your project, notify the committee IMMEDIATELY at researchreview@ucmo.edu.

The following will help to guide you. Please refer to this letter often during your project.

- If you wish to make changes to your study, submit an "Amendment" through Blackboard under the "Amendment and Renewals" tab. **You may not implement changes to your study without prior approval of the UCM Human Subjects Review Committee.**
- If the nature or status of the risks of participating in this research project change, submit an "Amendment" through Blackboard under the "Amendment and Renewals" tab. **You may not implement changes to your study without prior approval of the UCM Human Subjects Review Committee.**
- If you are nearing the expiration date for collecting data for this project (1/10/2020) and you have not finished collecting data:
  1. submit your project application via Blackboard under the "Amendment and Renewals" tab (include any revisions and/or amendments approved since you submitted your application initially)
  - AND
  2. submit a "Renewal Report" through Blackboard under the "Final/Renewal Report" tab.
- **When you have completed your collection of data, please submit the "Final Report" found on Blackboard under the "Final/Renewal Report" tab.**

If your protocol contained a consent form and the consent form was approved, you will receive an additional e-mail. The e-mail will contain a copy of your consent form with an approval stamp in the top right corner. Do not begin data collection until you receive a copy of your consent form with an approval stamp. Note: One year after your protocol's approval date, a request for renewal OR a final project report is required.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at researchreview@ucmo.edu.

Sincerely,

## VITA

Born and raised in Kansas City, Missouri, Angela Karlin has worked in higher education since her graduation from Truman State University (Northeast Missouri State) in 1993 with a Bachelor of Arts in History. In 2005, Angela earned a Master of Public Administration from the University of Kansas. Continuing her education, Angela obtained a Doctorate in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis from the University of Missouri in 2019.

Angela's work in higher education began as an administrative assistant at Park University's Independence campus working with adult learners on degree completion. She transitioned to Rockhurst University in 1998 and served as a Project Manager for two years before becoming the Assistant Registrar for Systems in 1999. In 2002, Angela was appointed Assistant Director of Financial Aid. Her 17-year career in financial aid includes directorships at Rockhurst University and the University of Central Missouri. Most recently, Angela was named Assistant Vice Provost for Financial Aid and Scholarships at the University of Kansas in June 2017. Besides her roles in aid offices, Angela has served as a board member of the Missouri Association of Financial Aid Personnel and the Midwest Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators for many years and as President of the Missouri association in 2016. Her presentations include outreach to families and high school counselors on the financial aid process and professional development opportunities for those in the profession. Angela plans to use the research from this dissertation and the experiences working in financial aid to help all students, regardless of circumstance to access

and persist in higher education. Angela currently resides in Olathe, Kansas with her daughter.