Retaining College Students from the First to Second Year: A Case Study

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Retaining College Students from the First to Second Year: A Case Study

A Thesis

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University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements of the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy of
in
Educational Administration

by
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B.S. The University of Southern Mississippi, 2006
M.Ed. The University of Southern Mississippi, 2008

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Abstract

First-year student retention has become a national priority for institutions of higher learning. Since 2004, retention of first-year college students has been on a steady decline. Due to recent the adoption of the Louisiana Granting Resources and Autonomy for Diplomas (GRAD) Act, college administrators in Louisiana are determined to increase first-year student retention, a key performance measure. Of the many factors known to support retention, student-faculty mentoring relationships are known to have a positive impact on college students’ experiences, including increased first-year student retention. However, there is less known about the role of academic advising combined with success coaching in retaining first-year college students. The purpose of this study is to understand first-year college students’ experiences with academic advising and success coaching. By conducting a case study, the researcher further understands the retention of first-year college students to the second year at a comprehensive research public university in Louisiana. The data collected from this study identifies current practices in first-year student retention to inform the current and future programs and services provided on campuses for first-year students.

Keywords: first-year retention, persistence, academic advising, success coaching
Chapter One

Problem Statement

Despite the extensive research conducted on college student retention and institutions’ efforts to increase retention, the national student retention rate from the first year to the second year of college has been on a steady decline. According to data collected by American College Testing (ACT) regarding college student retention and graduation rates, the average percentage of first-year students attending four-year public institutions that were retained to their second year by the same institution was 72.2% in 2013. This is a continual decline from 2004 when the average retention of first-year students to the second year was 73.5% (American College Testing, 2013). Furthermore, college enrollment at four-year public institutions is on the rise and projected to have continued growth (United States Department of Education, 2012). Taken together, this dual trend of expanding attendance and decreasing retention rates at four-year campuses have made retention policies and practices an area of significant effort (Braxton et al., 2013; Levitz, Noel, & Richter, 1999; Tinto, 2006). Since the first study on student retention in 1938 (McNeely), there has been an extensive amount of research conducted on college student retention, particularly first-year college student retention. Researchers have explored first-year student retention and persistence in terms of specific student populations and sub-populations (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Pidcock, Fischer, & Munsch, 2001; Schudde, 2011), living-learning communities (Hotchkiss, Moore, & Pitts, 2006; Inkelas & Weisman, 2003; Purdie & Rosser, 2011; Stassen, 2003; Zhao & Kuh, 2004), freshman/first-year success courses (Feldman & Zimbler, 2011; Goodman & Pascarella, 2006; Jamelske, 2009; Jessup-Anger, 2011; Schnell & Doetkott, 2003), first-year experience initiatives (Jamelske, 2009; Macken & Bishop, 2009; Noble, Flynn, Lee, & Hilton, 2007), and first-
generation students (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005; Padgett, Johnson, & Pascarella, 2012; Somers, Woodhouse, & Cofer, 2004). Regardless of the programs and services that have been examined above, first-year college student retention is still an area of concern for institutions of higher learning (Ishler & Upcraft, 2005; Jacobs & Archie, 2008).

Within Louisiana, recent policy changes are affecting state institutions and shifting their focus to increasing first-year student retention. In 2008, Louisiana legislators began to reduce state appropriated funds for higher education. As a result, in 2010, the Louisiana State legislature adopted House Bill 1171(2010) which is known as Louisiana Granting Resources and Autonomy for Diplomas (GRAD) Act. The GRAD Act allows state institutions to implement performance base funding in order to offset budget reductions. All of the four-year public institutions within the University of Louisiana System, Louisiana State University System, and the Southern University System have entered into the Louisiana GRAD Act six-year performance agreement. As an initiative in their institutional five-year strategic plan, the institutions have identified increasing retention to the second fall semester of first-time in college, full-time, degree seeking students.

Revenues for higher education are linked to student enrollment. In order for institutions of higher learning to maintain current revenue levels, they must continue to retain students (Levitz et al., 1999; Lundquist, Spalding, & Landrum, 2002; Nutt, 2003; Rabovsky, 2012). In the state of Louisiana, in addition to funds provided by institution’s enrollment, performance base funding contributes to institution’s operating funds. Specifically first-year student retention rates are directly connected with institutions’ graduation rates and performance base funding. Institutions in Louisiana must strategize to increase first-year student retention and meet their GRAD Act initiatives to off-set the reduction of funds allocated by the state for higher education.
The performance based funding autonomy includes an annual increase, up to 10%, in tuition and mandatory fees until reaching the average in-state tuition level of other Southern Regional Education Board public institutions. Institutions’ autonomy maybe revoked by Governor Jindal if performance based measures are not met (Office of the Governor, 2010). In an effort to meet the performance base measures outlined by the Louisiana GRAD Act, Pelican State University (PSU) realigned the services of the Office of Enrollment Services as of fall 2013. The Office of Enrollment Services provides first-year students with a comprehensive enrollment management experience. Students are able to receive information about enrollment, in addition to support during their first-year transition. Through the Office of Enrollment Services, first-year students participate in two retention programs, academic advising and success coaching.

**Literature Base on First-Year Retention Initiatives**

The focus of this study is a Louisiana public university that has a unique approach to improving first-year student retention, and implemented academic advising and success coaching in fall 2013. This study examines two forms of mentoring, academic advising and success coaching, and determines how college students at a comprehensive research public university in Louisiana describe their experiences with the reviewed mentoring strategies. Academic advising and success coaching are both forms of mentoring. Academic advising focuses on the student’s academic goals and provides support for the student to persist through their course of studies (Campbell & Nutt, 2008; Nutt, 2003; Young-Jones, Burt, Dixon, & Hawthorne, 2013). Terry O’Banion (1972/1994) defines the process of academic advising as having five different components: exploring life goals; exploring vocational goals; discussing the student’s academic program choice; selecting academic courses; and scheduling of the student’s courses. Academic advising is not accomplished in one visit between the student and the faculty member; instead, it
must evolve over time until there is an established relationship between the student and the faculty member (Cuseo, 2005; Drake, 2011; Lau, 2003; Robbins, 2012; Roberts & Styron, 2010). Success coaches support students in developing their own autonomy through self-reflection, focusing on their future ambitions, and engaging in the campus culture (Allen & Lester, 2012; McCleleean & Moser, 2011; Robinson & Gahagan, 2010). Success coaching helps the student to overcome obstacles and transition into their college career (Allen & Lester, 2012; Bettinger & Baker, 2011; Hoover, 2011; Robinson & Gahagan, 2010). While mentoring relationships can be between a number of populations, the scope of this study reviews student-faculty relationships.

Students who have relationships with faculty members outside of the classroom develop their meaning of self (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998), have a higher satisfaction with their college experience (Astin, 1977), and have increased retention (Nagda, Gregerman, Jonides, von Hippel, & Lerner, 1998). Specifically for first-year students, mentoring by a faculty member leads to performing higher academically (Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Pascarella, Terenzini, & Hibel, 1978; Robinson & Gahagan, 2010) and progressing through their course credit requirements faster than those students that are not experiencing mentoring (Campbell & Campbell, 1997). More so, student-faculty mentoring allows first-year students to become integrated to their college culture (Lee, 1999). Long-term retention plans for institutions must encourage faculty to have interactions with students outside of the classroom (Tinto, 1987). Out of the classroom relationships between students and faculty members enhance students’ academics and their overall development.

The literature on first-year student retention shows an additional emphasis on academic advising and student-faculty mentoring. Students’ retention and progression through their college tenure are positively affected through interactions with faculty members outside of the
classroom (Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Nagda, et al., 1998; Pascarella et al., 1978). The following study investigates first-year students’ experiences with academic advising and success coaching. Recent policy changes in Louisiana affected state institutions and shifted their focus to increasing first-year student retention. Institutional responses to such policy changes are a key piece of the context of this study.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to understand college students’ experiences with academic advising and success coaching. The climate of higher education in Louisiana is changing due to the influence of Louisiana’s GRAD Act. State funding of universities is being drastically reduced and funds that are needed to offset university budget deficits will depend on institutions’ successfully meeting their GRAD Act performance measures. First-year student retention to the second year of college is among the performance base measures. Previous research has shown that student-faculty mentoring relationships have positive impacts on college students’ experience (Jaasma & Koper, 1999; Komarraju, Musulkin, & Bhattacharya, 2010; Nagda et al., 1998; Pascarella et al., 1978). Students’ satisfaction with their education experience leads to students feeling a part of their institution (Astin, 1977; Kuh & Hu, 2001) and sense of belonging to an institution has a positive impact on first-year retention and student persistence is increased (Jacobs & Archie, 2008; Kuh & Hu, 2001; Morrow, & Ackermann, 2012; O’Keeffe, 2013). Furthermore, first-year college students participating in faculty mentoring relationships outside of the classroom have increased retention rates compared to their counterparts who do not have mentoring relationships with faculty (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1977). However, there is less research discussing first-year student retention in terms of academic advising combined with success coaching in the climate of budget reductions in the state of Louisiana. By conducting a
case study, the researcher was able to further understand the retention of first-year college students to the second year at a comprehensive research public university in Louisiana. This study addresses the following research question: How do college students describe their experiences with academic advising and success coaching?

Through a social constructivist lens, Tinto’s Theory of Student Departure (1975) framed the following study. Prior to the 1970s, student retention was believed to be a reflection of the individual student’s effort towards academic persistence (Astin, 1977; Spady, 1971; Tinto, 1975). Institutions were not holding their own programs and services accountable for poor retention (Tinto, 2006). The research conducted in the 1970s changed higher education’s understanding of student retention. Student retention was now linked to students’ learning environments which as a result influenced Tinto’s concepts of social and environmental integration (Tinto, 1975).

Methods

The institution included in this study is referred to by a pseudonym, Pelican State University (PSU). The Office of Enrollment Services at PSU offers optional one-on-one bi-monthly success coaching meetings to students, or may require students to participate in this service by the university if the student demonstrates high need. The student’s success coach works with the student to succeed in college and to aide in their holistic development. The student’s success coach works in conjunction with the student’s academic advisor. The academic advisor is able to provide the student support with their curriculum of study. Both the student’s academic advisor and success coach are staff members within the Office of Enrollment Services. The academic advisors and success coaches also teach freshman success seminar courses, classifying these staff members as adjunct faculty members.
The following study considers first-year college students’ retention to the second year by exploring students’ academic and social integration to their institution. The researcher studied students’ academic and social integration by gaining understanding of academic advising and success coaching. Academic advising and success coaching are forms of mentoring that focus on students’ goals. These goals are all encompassing, whether they are related to a student’s academic courses, the future of their education, issues that are important to the student, social transitions, or their transition to college. Tinto’s Theory of Departure (1975) framed the study by providing insight to the retention of first-year students and further understanding of student departure.

An instrumental case study approach was used to collect data. Using an instrumental case study allowed the researcher to conduct an in-depth study of a particular case or cases to further understand the larger issue (Creswell, 2013; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003; Glesne, 2011; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005; Stake, 2000). For the purpose of this study, the “case” was defined as a retention program at Pelican State University. In order to further understand the problem of first-year student retention, the researcher asked participants to take part in two, in-depth one-on-one interviews. Participants have experienced academic advising and success coaching at PSU. The researcher also collected documents from PSU’s Office of Enrollment Services. Additionally, all participants completed a demographic questionnaire. Tinto’s Model of Student Departure (1975) served as the guiding framework in developing interview questions.

The researcher identified any biases pertaining to the topic and bracketed these experiences before starting research. The researcher had all recorded interview data transcribed by a third party service, Verbal Ink. The researcher read through all transcriptions to ensure accuracy. The data transcribed and notes taken while conducting the interviews were re-read and
the researcher added additional comments. The researcher formed codes from the themes that emerged from the data. Like codes were grouped together to form themes and the researcher reviewed the themes to identify patterns. The researcher formed the description of the case by reviewing the data collected through interviews, artifacts and demographic questionnaire. To understand the complexity of the case the researcher identified key issues that surfaced in the research. Finally, the researcher defined the meaning of the case and the discoveries from the research to address the issue of first-year student retention.

**Gaps in the Research**

Extensive work has been done on first-year college student retention (Feldman & Zimbler, 2011; Goodman & Pascarella, 2006; Herzog, 2005; Ishler & Upcraft, 2005; Jamelske, 2009; Macken & Bishop, 2009; Noble et al., 2007; Schnell & Doetkott, 2003; Veenstra, 2009). However, as the climate within higher education changes, so does the college environment that first-year college students enter. Recent policy changes in Louisiana are affecting state institutions and narrowing their focus to increasing first-year student retention. There has not been research discussing first-year student retention in terms of academic advising combined with success coaching in the climate of budget reductions in the state of Louisiana. The university included in this study recently implemented an approach to reduce first-year attrition rates. Results of this study add to the body of literature of first-year student retention.
Chapter Two

Theoretical Frameworks and Review of Pertinent Literature

In order to conduct a comprehensive case study, the following literature review begins with context of the theoretical frameworks that shape this study, including the frameworks’ relationship to understanding first-year student retention. The theoretical frameworks selected for this study informed the research on first-year students and their persistence to the second year of college. Through a social constructivist paradigm, Tinto’s Model of Student Departure (1975) framed this study. Next, the researcher reviewed the history of student retention and the recent work on first-year student retention in the areas of academic advising and success coaching. Finally, the researcher addressed the gaps within the current body of research that are addressed by the following study. The terms “persistence” and “success” are used interchangeably throughout the review.

Theoretical Frameworks

The theoretical frameworks included in this study provided insight into first-year student retention, student departure, and environmental impact on student retention and persistence. The researcher begins this section by reviewing the paradigm of social constructivism. Social constructivism is further explored by understanding the paradigm’s relationship to student retention. Tinto’s Model of Student Departure (1975) provided the framework for the following study. The researcher reviews the development of Tinto’s Model of Student Departure (1975) and concluded the theoretical framework section by connecting the paradigm of social constructivism, Tinto’s Model of Student Departure (1975) and student retention.
Social Constructivism

A paradigm is a framework that is used to draw hypotheses about reality. Paradigms provide guidelines for how to discover reality through questions or through developing a research study (Glesne, 2011). The paradigm of social constructivism has been applied to many areas of philosophy and science including leadership (Kezar, Carducci, & Contreras-McGavin, 2006), cognitive development (Kim, 2001; McLeod, 2007), and education (Applefield, Huber, & Moallem, 2000; Jones & Brader-Araje, 2002; Kim, 2001). Social constructivism was introduced to education through the work of Lev Vygotsky in 1978 (Jones, & Brader-Araje, 2002). To develop social constructivism, Vygotsky built upon the previous work of Jean Piaget (Applefield et al., 2000; Jones & Brader-Araje, 2002; McLeod, 2007; Phillips, 1995).

Jean Piaget (1952) theorized that an individual’s knowledge was the result of one’s innate knowledge and their role in gaining further knowledge. Piaget believed the social context of an individual’s environment could add to one’s knowledge or perceptions of reality (Daniels, 2005). The individual would interpret his or her surroundings to further their own understanding of the world. Vygotsky agreed with Piaget’s philosophy of learning, but only partially. In addition to the individual’s role in seeking knowledge, Vygotsky placed an emphasis on knowledge development through working with others, social environments, and looked at the greater communities impact on individual’s way of knowing. Vygotsky’s social constructivism is the belief that knowledge does form through the individual’s experience with their social environment, particularly the social environment shapes the individual’s experiences (Applefield et al., 2000; Cole & Wertsch, 1996; Jones & Brader-Araje, 2002; McLeod, 2007; Phillips, 1995). Vygotsky’s idea of social influences affecting knowledge development led to the creation of social constructivism in education. Vygotsky’s social constructivism is applied to classroom
techniques to aid teachers in further enhancing their students’ cognitive development (Applefield et al., 2000; Jones & Brader-Araje, 2002; Kim, 2001; McLeod, 2007).

Social constructivism is the notion that one’s reality is developed through the environment in which they are surrounded. It is assumed through this paradigm an individual’s reality is a subjective experience, because their perception of reality is formed through experiences and interactions with their surrounding culture (Applefield et al., 2000; Creswell, 2013; Jones & Brader-Araje, 2002; Kezar et al., 2006; Kim, 2001). Through this paradigm it is believed that one is able to use their independent cognitive thinking in conjunction with the influences of society to form their individual reality. An individual’s perception is ever-evolving as external and internal factors that affect one’s perception of the world change as well (Applefield et al., 2000).

**Student Retention and Social Constructivism**

The paradigm of social constructivism has a clear connection to studying college student retention. College student persistence is connected to the student’s learning environment, not just the student’s knowledge capabilities (Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2008; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 2006). Each student’s college transition is unique and shaped by his or her own experiences. Environmental factors will affect individual student’s college persistence. In social constructivism, the environment is important to understand when studying individuals; the research conducted must include the individuals and their interaction in the environment in which they are a part (Creswell, 2013; Kezar et al., 2006). The social constructivist paradigm examines experiences subjectively because the experiences are developed through one’s own interactions and surrounding environment.
Originally, student retention was thought to solely depend on the individual student (Seidman, 2012). Constructivism only involved an individual’s role in understanding their reality. As newer research developed, the influence of social environments was integrated into the understandings of both student retention and social constructivism. As explained previously, it was the work of Vygotsky who integrated the social aspect into constructivism for education. Vincent Tinto (1975) introduced social and environmental factors as influences on student retention through his creation of the Theory of Student Departure.

**Development of Tinto**

Tinto’s work evolved from Durkheim’s research on the idea of suicide and departure. Durkheim (1897/1951) conducted research that changed how the world viewed suicide. Durkheim’s work discovered that suicide should not be looked at as an individual’s decision but a phenomenon that is influenced by the society that surrounds the individual. In his book *Suicide* (1897/1951), Durkheim reviewed the suicide rates in European countries from 1841 until 1858. He then compared the suicide rates to the general mortality rates from those countries. To Durkheim (1897/1951), it was obvious that a country’s suicide rate correlated with the societal events taking place in each country. For example, the start of war, new governmental leadership, or a revolution all impacted suicide rates in a country (Durkheim, 1897/1951). Through his studies, Durkheim (1897/1951) developed three categories of suicide: egoistic, altruistic, and anomic. All three categories of suicide reflect how the individual is socially integrated to society.

Durkheim’s theory was then applied to college students and their education process by Spady in 1971. By applying Durkheim’s concept of social integration to higher education, Spady developed the Model of the Student Dropout Process. Spady’s Student Dropout Process
Spady’s (1971) Student Dropout Process evaluates the students’ success as social and academic achievement linked with the students’ pre-college experiences. Students’ pre-college experiences were defined by Spady (1971) as the student’s family background. The social component that influences student departure from college in Spady’s (1971) theory can be linked to how Durkheim viewed suicide to be connected to the victim’s integration to society. The academic achievement in Spady’s (1971) theory can be linked to Durkheim’s study of rewards from society. Both academic achievement and rewards are standards by which individuals equate how they “perform” compared to others.

The research conducted in the 1970s changed higher education’s view on student retention (Astin, 1977; Spady, 1971; Tinto, 1975). Student retention was linked to students’ learning environments, which sparked Tinto’s concepts of social and environmental integration (Tinto, 1975). Tinto took the work of Durkheim and Spady to develop his Theory of Student Departure. Tinto’s Theory of Student Departure (1975) is centered on the student’s integration to their university. Through a longitudinal study, Tinto’s model (1975) examined and focused on the student’s academic and social integration into the institution while examining the student’s pre-college characteristics; essentially, how the student acclimates to their environment. The core concepts identified in Tinto’s Theory of Student Departure are pre-entry attributes, goals or commitments, institutional experiences, integration, and outcomes (Brunsden, Davies, Shevlin, & Bracken, 2000). Tinto’s theory makes it clear that it is the student's choice to remain part of the institution or to depart from college (Seidman, 2012).
Social Constructivism, Tinto, and Student Retention

Vincent Tinto’s Theory of Student Departure (1975) is directly connected with the paradigm of social constructivism and first-year student retention. First, Tinto’s theory is derived from two previous theorists, Durkheim (1897/1951) and Spady (1971), whose theories integrate the influence of the society. Additionally, in Tinto’s theory, a student will choose to depart from or persist to the second year of college is based on their college experiences. The student’s college experience is created by how they perceive the environment which surrounds them. The student’s choice to progress is influenced by how the student socially constructs the experience of college. The correlation between choosing departure and the environment in which the student belongs connects the Theory of Student Departure to social constructivism.

Additional theorists, aside from Tinto, attempted to identify the phenomenon of student departure (Astin, 1993; Braxton, 2000; Pascarella, 1985). While Tinto’s theory does have limitations, the gaps in his research have prompted other researchers to further investigate the issue of student retention. The theory he conceptualized has become influential in designing additional theories and further understanding college student persistence (Baumgart & Johnstone, 1977; Braxton, Milem & Sullivan, 2000; Herzog, 2005; Pascarella, Duby, & Iverson, 1983; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979). However, the integration of Tinto’s Theory of Student Departure is most appropriate for the current study for two main reasons. First, Tinto’s Theory of Student Departure (1975) was part of the catalyst that changed the way higher education viewed student retention. Because of Tinto’s work, student retention is no longer considered to be the sole responsibility of the student; it now involves the institutions as well. Second, additional theorists of student departure, Astin (1993) and Braxton (2000), both build their theories on the concepts derived from Tinto’s theory. It is most appropriate to start with the
foundational theory and assimilate Tinto’s concepts to the current study. According to Braxton, Sullivan, and Johnson (1997), Tinto’s theory has been mentioned in over 400 citations and 170 dissertation studies.

By examining through the lens of social constructivism and Tinto’s Theory of Student Departure (1975), the researcher identified conclusions for the research question of college students’ persistence. Specifically, the researcher examined the academic advising and success coaching provided to students. Academic advising is unique to the student, as they interpret their experience and process their own perceptions of the event (Christian & Sprinkle, 2013). Similarly, coaching is founded in constructivism since the experience is unique to the individual and their interpretation (Griffiths, 2005). By examining first-year student’s persistence to his or her second year of college and looking at the social and academic integration through academic advising and success coaching, this study directly correlates with the framework that Tinto provides in his Theory of Student Departure.

**Review of Pertinent Literature**

**Student Retention**

Student retention was not a concern as educators established the first institutions of higher learning because there were so few students enrolled in college. Instead, institutions of higher learning were focused on increasing enrollment (Seidman, 2012). However, over time, political and legislative decisions, such as the G.I. Bill post World War II, directly and indirectly increased college enrollment (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011; Seidman, 2012). As student enrollment and the number of higher education institutions increased, there was a need to focus on student retention. At its conception, student retention was referred to as “student mortality”. In 1938, John McNeely conducted the first study on student mortality for the United
States Office of Education. McNeely studied sixty institutions to examine how universities evaluated student retention, how students’ individual characteristics could influence their retention, as well as, the reasons students leave college (Seidman, 2012).

Since McNeely’s study in 1938, there has been an extensive amount of research conducted on college student retention. Retention is a pressing issue for institutions of higher learning. Researchers, as well as educators, have worked tirelessly to understand the key to student persistence and retention. From the extensive research, numerous factors have been identified as being influential to student retention and persistence in higher education. While a student’s high school grade point average is a consistent predictor of college student success (Astin, 1997; Camara & Echternacht, 2000; Geiser & Santelices, 2007; Noble & Sawyer, 2002; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005) it is not the only variable that should be considered. Students’ retention may be affected by academic and non-academic factors (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979). Academic factors, such as ACT test scores and high school grade point average, can be related to students’ academic performance prior to starting college or academic performance once taking college courses (Lotkowski, Robbins, & Noeth, 2004). Non-academic factors include those influences that do not identify with academic factors, including, but not limited to, students’ support, students’ motivation, student engagement to their institution and college culture, students’ socioeconomic status, and the programs and services offered by institutions (Lotkowski, et al., 2004).

Academic factors that can influence student retention begin with the academic preparation students receive at the K-12 education level (Adams, 2011). The current educational structure creates a disconnect between K-12 and higher education (Boswell, 2000; Hodgkinson, 1999; Kirst & Venezia, 2001). Consequently, failure to streamline these two educational
systems affects students’ college success (Brinkworth, McCann, Mathews & Nordstrom, 2009; Conley, 2010; Goldrick-Rab, Carter, & Wagner, 2007; Smith & Wertlieb, 2005; Venezia, Kirst, & Antonio, 2003). The lack of communication between K-12 administrators, higher education administrators, and policy-makers results in secondary school administrators not fully understanding what colleges are expecting from students (Hodgkinson, 1999; Miton, Schmidtlein, Mintrop, MacLellan, & Pitre, 2000; Smith & Wertlieb, 2005; Venezia, Kirst, & Antonio, 2003). In return, college expectations are not communicated to college seeking students (Smith & Wertlieb, 2005). The inconsistent levels of pre-college academic rigor and preparedness are notable through students’ test scores and need for remedial courses (Kirst & Venezia, 2001; Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez, 2001). As a result of the disconnect between K-12 and higher education, not all students are fully prepared to pursue a college degree, particularly under-represented groups (Goldrick-Rab, Carter, & Wagner, 2007; Hodgkinson, 1999; Hooker & Brand, 2010; McDonough, 2005).

The range of non-academic factors that influence student retention is broad and includes pre-college factors and factors the student encounters while attending college. Students having knowledge of the college environment prior to attending college can decrease student attrition. In order for students to be successful, they need to be knowledgeable of college admission requirements, costs affiliated with attaining a college education, and commitment required to earn a college degree (Hooker & Brand, 2010). Particularly, financial difficulties can prohibit students from completing their degree (Lotkowski et al., 2004; Oseguera & Rhee, 2009; Thompson & Prieto, 2013).

Additionally, support from family, friends or the institution can assist in retaining students. However, for students who come from families without a postsecondary education
background, college can be a foreign concept. For example, first-generation students encounter more obstacles concerning family support, degree expectations, and college preparation because the student is the first within their family to pursue a college degree (Bradbury & Mather, 2009; Ramos-Sanchez & Nichols, 2007). Support can be given to the student by other members of the college community. At times, students who make the decision to withdraw from college do not discuss withdrawing from the institution with an institution official (Hermanowicz, 2004). This is an indicator of students not feeling connected to their institution. It is important for students to have contact with an individual affiliated with the institution they are attending. Students finding faculty members approachable and supportive can aide in retaining students (Lundquist et al., 2002; Roberts & Styron, 2010).

Engaging students to their college environment can reduce attrition rates. Astin (1977, 1985) showed that student retention was not just related to the student’s experience on-campus but also the student’s involvement outside of the classroom. Astin (1977, 1985) theorized that a student’s learning is not limited to the knowledge attained in a classroom or provided by textbooks but also includes activities such as being involved in student organizations, athletic involvement, undergraduate research involvement, and student-faculty interaction. Students’ involvement in university activities outside of the classroom can increase students’ retention as well (Jacobs & Archie, 2008; Koljatic & Kuh, 2001; Kuh et al., 2008; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Institutions can also engage students outside of the classroom by having them live on-campus (Oseguera & Rhee, 2009).

Retention is an effort of the entire institution (Ishler & Upcraft, 2005). The research reviewed and the theories of student persistence explain that persistence is influenced by the students’ undergraduate experience (Astin, 1993; Kuh et al., 2008; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991;
Retention research indicates that student retention is no longer just the responsibility of the student, but instead a partnership between the student’s effort and the institution’s effort (Hunter, 2006; Ishler & Upcraft, 2005; Tinto, 1999). Institutional support services for students must be well developed to ensure the support programs will help in retaining students (Veenstra, 2009). Tinto’s three principles of retention (1993) propose well-developed guidelines for implementing student persistence initiatives and are as follows:

1. Effective retention programs are committed to the students they serve.
2. Effective retention programs are first and foremost committed to the education of all, not just some, of their students.
3. Effective retention programs are committed to the development of supportive, social, and educational communities in which all students are integrated as competent members. A comprehensive approach must be considered because of the vast characteristics that impact student retention (p.146-148).

Furthermore, Bean & Eaton (2001) recommend that administrators strategically plan programs and services based on student learning outcomes. Based on retention research, it is recommended that programs and services aim to develop student’s academic confidence, autonomy, and optimism towards their collegiate experience (Bean & Eaton, 2001). For administrators searching to solve the problem of student persistence on their campus, studying first-year college student retention from their first to second year proved to be an indicator to students’ overall progression through college and to graduation.

**First-Year Student Retention**

The first year of college has the highest attrition rates during the student’s college career (Herzog, 2005; Ishler & Upcraft, 2005; Veenstra, 2009). A student’s college transition can
interfere with the student successfully completing their first year in college. In 2014, American College Testing (ACT) reported 27.7% of first-year students attending four-year public institutions were not retained to their second year in college. Public universities graduated 44.2% of students within five years of the student starting their college career (ACT, 2014). This may be attributed to the fact that first-year students must overcome transitional challenges and adversity as they adjust to life as college students (Feldman & Zimbler, 2011; O’Keeffe, 2013; Schrader & Brown, 2008). Some students entering college have a different idea of college expectations compared to the reality of college life (Smith & Wertlieb, 2005). First-year students are more likely to be retained and graduate when expectations for academic success are communicated clearly in the first year of college (Brinkworth et al., 2009; Tinto, 1999). By increasing the first to second year retention of students, colleges will increase their overall number of completers. Programs geared towards first-year students keep students engaged and students are more likely to persist into their second year (Turner & Thompson, 2014). First-year students are in need of support as they transition into the academic and social aspects of college life (Tinto, 1999; Wilcox, Winn, & Fyvie-Gauld, 2005). Freshman success programs were introduced to higher education as academic courses designed to aid in student success and retention.

Freshman Success Seminars were first offered in 1882 at Lee College in Kentucky (Barefoot and Fidler, 1996). Freshman success courses popularity soared when they were re-introduced to higher education at the University of South Carolina in 1972 (Feldman & Zimbler, 2011). Researchers had 118 students complete pre and post-tests to evaluate the effectiveness of freshman success programs in regards to (a) increasing the perception of being prepared for college, (b) assisting in developing a college major, (c) enhancing the overall level of confidence
as a student, (d) enhancing knowledge about available campus resources, and (e) enhancing the perceived level of study skills competence. The data indicated by participating in freshman success courses, students enhanced their perception of college preparedness, confidence as a student, knowledge of academic and personal resources on-campus, and study skills efficiency (Howard & Jones, 2000). Students that participate in first-year success courses are more likely to persist to the second year of college at the same institution (Feldman & Zimbler, 2011; Kuh et al., 2008).

In addition to freshman success courses, institutions can provide first-year students added support outside of the classroom to increase in student retention. Having first-year students live on-campus instead of in off-campus housing can increase student retention to their second year (Herzog, 2005). Institutions can add another element to living on-campus by incorporating living-learning communities to increase first-year retention (Hotchkiss et al., 2005; Noble et al., 2007; Tinto, 1999). Living-learning communities are designed to link students together for course work and living (Hotchkiss et al., 2005; Noble et al., 2007; Tinto, 1999). By providing positive experiences that enhance the student’s self-confidence, institutions are increasing first-year student retention (Chemers, Hu & Garcia, 2001). Institutions recognize their role in increasing student retention and have developed strategies to provide continued support and success for their students. Of these strategies, mentoring and student-faculty relationships have proven to provide college students the added support needed to matriculate from their first to second year in college (Turner & Thompson, 2014; Veenstra, 2009).

**Student Retention in Louisiana**

Within Louisiana, recent policy changes are affecting state institutions and shifting their focus to increasing first-year student retention. In 2008, Louisiana legislators began to reduce
state appropriated funds for higher education. According to reports from a New Orleans newspaper, *The Times Picayune*, from 2008 until 2012 state funding for higher education in Louisiana was cut by $650 million dollars (Pope & Adelson, 2013). As a result, in 2010, the Louisiana State legislature adopted House Bill 1171, known as Louisiana Granting Resources and Autonomies for Diplomas (GRAD) Act. House Bill 1171 (2010) introduced Louisiana higher education to performance base funding in order to offset budget reductions. House Bill 1171 (2010) gives institutions the autonomy to create their own performance measures in addition to meeting the state’s performance measures of progression, retention, and graduation. The performance based funding autonomy includes an annual increase, up to 10%, in tuition and mandatory fees until reaching the average in-state tuition level of other Southern Regional Education Board public institutions.

All of the four-year public institutions within the University of Louisiana System, Louisiana State University System, and the Southern University System have entered into the Louisiana GRAD Act six-year performance agreement. As an initiative in their institutional five-year strategic plan, the institutions have identified increasing retention to the second fall semester of first-time in college, full-time, degree seeking students.

When initially reviewed, first-year student retention rates may not appear to be an issue for higher education in Louisiana. In fall 2013, four-year public institutions within Louisiana had a first-year student retention average of 72.9% (Louisiana Board of Regents, 2013). Louisiana’s average is above the national average, 72.2%, for four-year institutions reported by the ACT in 2013. However, first-year retention rates are inconsistent and have shown little improvement over the last four years (Louisiana Board of Regents, 2012). The Louisiana Board of Regents’ Statewide Student Profile examines the retention of first-time, full-time students.
Over the last five years, the Statewide Student Profile has shown student retention at the same institution to be inconsistent. From the fall of 2008, the retention percentages have been: 70.2% (Louisiana Board of Regents, 2008), 70.7% (Louisiana Board of Regents, 2009), 72.2% (Louisiana Board of Regents, 2010), 72.4% (Louisiana Board of Regents, 2011), 73.3% (Louisiana Board of Regents, 2012), and 72.9% (Louisiana Board of Regents, 2013) (Louisiana Board of Regents). Stagnant first-year retention rates are indicative of Louisiana’s poor graduation rates.

Graduation rates are directly related to performance based funding for higher education in the state of Louisiana and to first-year retention rates. In addition to the reductions of state funds, legislators pushed to adopt the Louisiana GRAD Act because the state of Louisiana’s college graduation rate was one of the lowest in the South at the time of the policy’s adoption. According to a press release made by Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal, “Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) reports Louisiana’s six-year graduation rate for four-year universities is 38% compared to the 53% SREB state average – which ranks Louisiana as having the second worst graduation rate in the South” (Office of the Governor, 2010, p. 1). According to SREB’s 2013 Fact Book on Higher Education, Louisiana’s six-year graduation rate for four-year public universities in 2012 was 41.8%. While this was an increase from 2010, Louisiana still has the second worst graduation rate in the South. Besides Louisiana, 2013 six-year graduation rates for the additional fifteen SREB states include: Alabama (48.4%), Arkansas (40.1%), Delaware (69.6%), Florida (61.4%), Georgia (52%), Kentucky (47.8%), Maryland (59.5%), Mississippi (49.7%), North Carolina (59.5%), Oklahoma (47.4%), South Carolina (60%), Tennessee (47.3%), Texas (49.9%), Virginia (68.8%), and West Virginia (47.2%) (Southern Regional Education Board Fact Book, 2013). The Southern Regional Education Board defines a first-
time, full-time student by the following criteria “(1) graduate from the college they first attend; (2) remain enrolled; or (3) transfer to another college within 150 percent of normal program time” (SREB, 2013, p. 70). SREB defines 150 percent of normal program time as six years for most programs (2013). Graduation rates are measured based on first-time, full-time students that complete his or her degree.

First to second year retention increases student persistence to eventual degree attainment (Kuh et al., 2008; Woosley, 2003). Levitz, Noel, and Richter (1999) found that college student attrition rates are reduced by half after completing the first year. The first year of college has the highest attrition rates during the student’s college career (Herzog, 2005; Ishler & Upcraft, 2005; Veenstra, 2009). By increasing first-year student retention, a university would in turn increase its graduation rates (Levitz et al., 1999). Revenues for higher education are linked to student enrollment. In order for institutions of higher learning to maintain current revenue levels, they must continue to retain students (Levitz et al., 1999; Lundquist, Spalding, & Landrum, 2002; Nutt, 2003; Rabovsky, 2012). In the state of Louisiana, financial income is provided not only through institutional enrollment, but also through performance based funding contributions to a public institution’s operating funds from the state. Specifically first-year student retention rates are directly connected with institutions’ graduation rates and performance based funding.

Currently, the state of Louisiana is still reducing the funds allocated for higher education. In the 2014 fiscal year, higher education state funding in Louisiana was reduced by 17% from the 2013 fiscal year. This was the largest reduction of state funds for the 2014 fiscal year in higher education according to data collected from 49 states (Hurley, Harnisch, & Parker, 2013).
Mentoring

The term mentoring appears in literature dating back to Greek mythology (Anderson, 1995; Bruce, 1995; Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Penner, 2001). Despite the extensive use of mentoring across various fields, the body of research and literature does not provide a concrete definition of the term. However, through all of the definitions, there are three main components that can be used to identify mentoring relationships: “(a) emotional and psychological support, (b) direct assistance with career and professional development, and (c) role modeling” (Jacobi, 1991, p. 510). In the field of higher education, a comprehensive definition for practice is “Mentors are colleagues and supervisors who actively provide guidance, support, and opportunities for a protégé. The functions of a mentor consist of acting as a role model, a consultant/advisor, and a sponsor” (Schmidt & Wolfe, 2009, p. 372). Mentoring relationships within higher education settings can be formally established through the university or form naturally between individuals (Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Lee, 1999).

Mentoring relationships have shown to be beneficial to student’s undergraduate experience. Formal mentoring programs have been established at institutions of higher learning to further enhance college students’ experiences particularly by improving student retention rates (Budge, 2006). Academic mentoring programs emerged as a way to assist students with navigating the college curriculum. Mentors take on a number of roles (Anderson, 1995; Penner, 2001; Schmidt & Wolfe, 2009) and while mentoring relationships can be between many different populations, the scope of this study is student-faculty relationships.

**Student-faculty mentoring.** Mentoring relationships between students and faculty are beneficial to overall student development. In 1969, Chickering created the Seven Vectors of Student Development, which outlined the comprehensive development of students during their
college years (Evans et al., 1998). Chickering (1969) acknowledged the importance of students’ environment to their overall individual development of autonomy and purpose. He concluded that student-faculty relationships, whether extensive or sporadic, would facilitate students’ development. Student-faculty relationships help students develop competence, manage emotions, move through autonomy towards interdependence, develop mature interpersonal relationships, establish their identity, develop a purpose and develop their integrity (Evans et al., 1998). Mentoring relationships between students and faculty lead to the students gaining further understanding of their individuality and holistic development as outlined by Chickering’s Seven Vectors.

Institutions of higher learning encourage formal and informal student-faculty mentoring because of the positive outcomes these relationships have on students’ collegiate experience. Student-faculty relationships outside of the classroom have been shown to increase students’ motivation (Jaasma & Koper, 1999; Komarraju et al., 2010; Pascarella, 1980). Students that develop relationships with faculty-staff outside of the classroom are more committed to their institution and to their education (Kuh & Hu, 2001; Strauss & Volkwein, 2004). Additionally, students perform higher academically when engaged with a faculty member outside of the classroom (Anderson, 1995; Pascarella et al., 1978). Academic successes can be linked to student-faculty relationships with at-risk college students as well (Santos & Reigadas, 2005). Furthermore, student-faculty mentoring increases student retention to their institution (Kuh & Hu, 2001; Nagda et al., 1998; Pascarella, 1980; Turner & Thompson, 2014).

Astin’s (1977) longitudinal study was influential in higher education utilizing mentoring. In fact, out of all the college involvement variables studied by Astin, student-faculty interactions had the strongest relationship in terms of student satisfaction to their overall college experience.
Specifically, positive student-faculty interactions lead to students being satisfied in their personal life, academic goals, and college administration (Astin, 1977). Students’ satisfaction with their education experience leads to students feeling a part of their institution (Astin, 1977; Kuh & Hu, 2001). Further, students’ sense of belonging to an institution has a positive impact on first-year retention and student persistence is increased (Jacobs & Archie, 2008; Kuh & Hu, 2001; Morrow, & Ackermann, 2012; O’Keeffe, 2013).

First-year mentoring. Integrating first-year students to their college environment early is a main key to first-year retention (Woosley, 2003). Universities and colleges have attempted many different approaches to immerse first-year college students to their academic setting. Extended orientation programs, first-year seminar classes, and student engagement in organizations and campus events have all been established as strategies to retain first-year college students to their second year. Counseling and advising programs are among the lengthy list of initiatives that have been used to retain first-year students (Barefoot, 2000). Student-faculty mentoring allows first-year students to become integrated to their college culture (Lee, 1999).

Pascarella & Terenzini (1977) discovered that students’ relationships with faculty and staff members could influence students’ persistence to his or her second year in college. The results of the study showed that interactions with faculty or staff were likely to occur with first-year students and interactions focused on academic or intellectual topics were more influential in students’ persistence than the conversations that were unrelated to academics. Overall, a student’s academic performance is the largest indicator in student retention and degree attainment (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). First-year students who have faculty-staff relationships outside of the classroom are more inclined to higher academic achievement as
opposed to those students who do not have mentoring relationships with faculty and staff (Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Pascarella et al., 1978; Salinitri, 2005). Additionally, first-year students being mentored by faculty members completed more hours of course credit than those students not mentored by faculty (Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Salinitri, 2005).

Mentoring has proven to be quite successful for college students and can reach beyond just helping students assimilate to college academics and can reach beyond student-faculty mentoring. Stephen F. Austin State University introduced a peer mentoring program that focused on mentors providing advice to first-year students on how to get involved (Peck, 2011). The program was structured like peer academic mentoring but focused more so on getting students involved outside of the classroom. The institution found that of the students who participated in the peer involvement advising programs were not only more engaged in the community but the mentoring also increased first-year retention. Of the first-year students participating in mentoring, 95% were retained to the next semester. In comparison, 86% of the non-mentored students were retained to the next semester (Peck, 2011).

Unfortunately, students do not take advantage of meeting with faculty outside of the classroom (Cotten & Wilson, 2006; Kuh & Hu, 2001). Institutions rely on formal relationships with students and faculty members in order to connect students to their institutions. Formal mentoring relationships are established by the institutions through mentees being connected to a specific mentor to achieve specific outcomes (Jacobi, 1991). Formal student-faculty relationships can refer to the relationship that is developed through institution’s academic advising initiatives (O’Banion, 1972/1994).
**Academic Advising**

Academic advising is at the forefront of conversations in higher education (Drake, 2011). Despite the buzz around the topic, academic advising is not a new concept in the field of higher education. In 1972, Crookston introduced developmental academic advising as a partnership between the student and advisor to plan the student’s academic future. Crookston (1972) defined developmental academic advising as being “…concerned not only with a specific personal or vocational decision but also with facilitating the student’s rational processes, environmental and interpersonal interactions, behavior awareness, and problem-solving, decision making, and evaluation skills” (p.5). While much has changed since 1972, the foundation of providing students holistic development through academic advising still remains relevant. More recently, a task force for the National Association of Academic Advising developed a ‘concept’ of Academic Advising (National Association of Academic Advising, 2006). The concept for academic advising includes three equal parts: learning outcomes, curriculum, and pedagogy. Academic advising is more than just course registration.

Academic advising is a form of mentoring that connects the student to the institution and provides support through the student’s education process (Campbell & Nutt, 2008; Nutt, 2003; Young-Jones et al., 2013). The Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) in Higher Education (2011) states, “A crucial component of the college experience, academic advising encourages students to cultivate meaning in their lives, make significant decisions about their futures, and access intuitional resources” (p.2). Students also recognize the importance of academic advising as an essential part to their college education (Freeman, 2008). According to data collected by Noel-Levitz in 2009, 84,638 students attending four-year public colleges and
universities were asked to select what they felt was “the most important educational experience”—the majority of the students identified academic advising (p. 3).

Academic advising is considered the hub of student retention (Nutt, 2003). Not only is academic advising beneficial for the student in their academic progression, but it has also shown to increase students’ grade point averages and students’ autonomy towards their academic studies (Young-Jones et al., 2013). Specifically for first-year students, academic advising should be a high priority for administrators. Cuseo (2005) explains, “leaving first-year students on their own to design an educational plan and to select courses relevant to that plan, means that students completely bypass the advising process, along with its retention-promoting potential” (p. 35). Researchers recommend that advising occur early within the first year, and first-year students be required to meet with an advisor prior to registering classes (Johnson & Morgan, 2005). Academic advisors can provide resources for first-year students as they transition into the college setting (Young-Jones et al., 2013). It is important that the academic advisors are prepared to guide students in the right directions to meet their needs (Robbins, 2012). Metzner (1989) found that even non-quality advising had a greater impact on freshman attrition than if the student received no advising from the institution. The relationship that fosters between the student and their advisor during the first-year can be influential throughout the student’s academic tenure (Young-Jones et al., 2013).

The relationship between the student and the academic advisor is one that involves contribution from both parties. Both must be engaged and know their roles and responsibilities (Hunter & White, 2004; McClellan & Moser, 2011). Younger students are inclined to become dependent on their academic advisors and not take on their responsibilities for their own academic progression (Christian & Sprinkle, 2013). It is recommended that academic advisors
are cautious not to assume the student’s responsibilities but instead the advisor should use their advising time as an opportunity to teach the student (Campbell & Nutt, 2008; Drake, 2011).

Like many aspects of higher education, there is not one approach to academic advising. The academic advising experience is defined by the student’s interpretation of the experience (Christian & Sprinkle, 2013). Higher education institutions can strategically prepare to provide a quality academic advising experience for students. Academic advising should be directly connected to the institution’s mission (Campbell & Nutt, 2008; McClellan, 2013). An outlined mission statement should guide the academic advising programs (Hunter & White, 2004).

Furthermore, advisors need to be aware of the campus culture and the students they are advising (Bigger, 2005; Hunter & White, 2004; O’Banion, 1994). Johnson & Morgan (2005) refer to creating a culture where “students and faculty can expect quality advising” (p.17). Quality advising is not just a formality, but each student is given the time that they need to be assisted and to develop a relationship with their advisor (Cuseo, 2005; Drake, 2011; Lau, 2003; Robbins, 2012; Roberts & Styron, 2010).

Institutions as well as researchers suggest different ways to reach out to students and support them through their academic progress. O’Banion (1972/1994) suggests that all students meet with their advisors at least once a semester. However, additional research suggests that some students are unaware of the resources that are available to them and do not take advantage of academic advising (Hunter & White, 2004). For those students who do take advantage of academic advising, it may be the student’s sole interaction with an institutional administrator outside of the classroom (Steingass & Sykes, 2008).

Academic advising is an opportunity to teach the student and should be approached in such a way (Campbell & Nutt, 2008; Drake, 2011). Institutions need to teach students about the
resources that are available to them through advising. Campuses are preparing syllabi for their academic advising experience to ensure that students’ learning outcomes are achieved through their advising experience (Campbell & Nutt, 2008; Trabant, 2006). Campuses require students to meet with their advisors regularly and even before declaring a major (Johnson & Morgan, 2005). Increasing student to advisor ratios can make it difficult to provide a comprehensive advising experience (Freeman, 2008). Those campuses that are unable to provide quality time with each student individually have started to provide group advising in order to be time efficient for the advisor and the student (Cuseo, 2005; Johnson & Morgan, 2005; Robbins, 2012). Other campuses have implemented virtual advising to reach more students (Thompson & Prieto, 2013). One of the many roles of an academic advisor is to connect students from their academic program to graduation, and then to their career field (Bigger, 2005). With this in mind, some campuses have housed academic advisors and career counselors together in order to provide students support and connect their academic work in college to their career placement upon degree completion (Cuseo, 2005; Nutt, 2003).

Higher education administrators must strategically plan academic advising and prepare to achieve specific learning outcomes with the student (Campbell & Nutt, 2008; McClellan, 2013). Academic advising, just as student retention, should be an effort of all members of the campus community (Campbell & Nutt, 2008; Nutt, 2003). Advising is important now during times of financial instability in higher education (Hunter & White, 2004). Regardless of the approach, academic advising must provide the students with a quality academic experience or the institution will have defeated the purpose of providing student support.
Success Coaching

The terms success coaching and academic coaching are interchangeably used throughout the literature review. The National Academic Advising Association (NACADA, 2014) defines academic coaching as, “…an interactive process that focuses on the personal relationship created between the student and the coach. The coach challenges the student to think about his or her personal and/or professional goals in order to relate them to his or her academic/educational goals” (para. 2). While advising a student can take the form of coaching (McClellan & Moser, 2011), success coaching is not the same form of mentoring as academic advising (NACADA, 2014).

Success coaches provide more than academic support and guidance; they are also focused on challenging students to develop their own autonomy through self-reflection, aspiring for future goals, and becoming engaged in their institution (Allen & Lester, 2012; McClellean & Moser, 2011; Robinson & Gahagan, 2010). This one-on-one coaching allows students to connect with a mentor who will support the student through their collegiate experience. The coach must be an active listener and be attentive in order to identify the student’s needs, and assist the student in identifying how coaching sessions can help the student accomplish their goals and meet their needs (McClellan & Moser, 2011). Together, the student and the success coach work to ensure the student’s success (NACADA, 2014).

Success coaching helps the student overcome obstacles as they transition into their college career (Bettinger & Baker, 2011; Hoover, 2011; Robinson & Gahagan, 2010). Coaching is about being proactive and setting attainable goals (Allen & Lester, 2012; Griffiths, 2005). Robinson & Gahagan (2010) refer to making two plans with students; one is an academic plan and the other is an engagement plan. The academic plan focuses on the student’s academic goals
while the engagement plan is focused on assisting the student to integrate into the college culture.

Even other areas of education have introduced success coaching to their practice. When applied to secondary schools, students who were mentored by success coaches showed improvements on their academic test scores (Joyella, 2009). While other fields have taken advantage of success coaching, it is a form of mentoring that has only recently been applied to higher education (Griffiths, 2005). The most frequently referenced study in terms of success coaching in higher education was conducted in 2011 by Bettinger and Baker (Field, Parker, Sawilowsky, & Rolands, 2013; Hayes, 2012; Hoover, 2011; Karp, 2013; Phillip, 2011). These two researchers sought to understand how success coaching provided by an outside company, InsideTrack, impacted students. The study found that students who were coached by members from InsideTrack were more likely to be retained through their first two years of college and were more likely to graduate. Six months into the study, 63.2% of the students participating in success coaching were retained. Comparatively, only 58.0% of students that did not participate in success coaching were retained. This is a 5.2% difference. Additionally, over the three cohorts that were included in the study, graduation rates were 4% higher than those students that were not coached (Bettinger & Baker, 2011).

According to Tripp (2005) success coaching was created as a first-year retention strategy for integrating new students to college culture and ensuring student success. Coaching is being used as a recruitment and retention tool in institutions (Hayes, 2012; Hoover, 2011; Tripp, 2005). This form of mentoring has proven to increase the retention and graduation rates of students who are partnered with a success coach (Bettinger & Baker, 2011).
Literature Summary

From the literature on student retention, we see additional emphasis on student-faculty mentoring and academic advising. Students’ retention and progression through their college tenure are positively affected through interactions with faculty members outside of the classroom. The current study explored first-year students’ experiences with academic advising and success coaching. Recent policy changes in Louisiana have affected state institutions and shifted their focus to increasing first-year student retention. Institutional responses to such policy changes are a key piece of the context of this study.

Student-faculty mentoring can be seen as encompassing both social and academic integration, making it natural outgrowth for campuses interested in applying Tinto’s Theory of Student Departure to increasing persistence (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979; Tinto, 1987). The following study examined two mentoring approaches: academic advising and success coaching. To understand academic advising and success coaching as it is reviewed in the study, it is important to understand the importance of mentoring programs and the research that has been conducted with mentoring and first-year retention.

In summary, key areas of focus in the literature on student retention are mentoring relationships. Specifically within the literature on first-year student retention, we see additional emphasis on student-faculty mentoring and academic advising. This research study explored the potential impacts of academic advising and success coaching on first-year student retention. As the climate within higher education changes, so does the environment in which first-year college students are entering. The study of first-year retention, while currently representing a large body of work, remains relevant as the environment of universities are constantly changing. As a result first-year college retention constantly evolves.
Gaps in the Research

Research has shown that retention can be attributed to three main factors: early engagement of students to their institution, programming for first-year students, and quality academic advising (Drake, 2011). Though several factors and influences have been identified over the years of research, questions still remain. Despite the extensive research that has been done on student retention from the first to second year of college, student retention still remains a pressing issue for institutions of higher learning. Specifically, the existing research does not look at institutions within the state of Louisiana and their retention efforts since the implementation of the Louisiana GRAD Act. After the recent policy changes and consistent budget cuts, institutions in Louisiana must identify the programs that are successful and will help them achieve their performance measures as mandated by the Louisiana GRAD Act. Results of this study add to the body of literature of first-year student retention.

The information found from this study impacts practice and research. Overall the findings are beneficial in informing other universities, specifically within the state of Louisiana and states with performance base funding, ways to improve first-year student retention and ultimately meet their GRAD Act measures. Reduction in current funding is forcing institutions to strategically provide services for students. In terms of practice, the data collected from this study identified current practices in first-year student retention to inform the current and future programs and services provided on campuses for first-year students. The current body of research examines the effects of academic advising and success coaching on first-year student retention; this study examined the combination of both academic advising and success coaching in the context of higher education in Louisiana.
The focus of this study is a public Louisiana university that has a unique approach to strengthen first-year student retention. There has not been research on the effects of academic advising and success coaching in the climate of budget reductions in the state of Louisiana. This research will inform future practices, and enlighten higher education professionals on how to retain first-year students in spite of the instability of state funding.
Chapter 3

Methods

First-year student retention is a national focus for institutions of higher learning (Jacobs & Archie, 2008). Since 2004, retention of first-year college students has been on a steady decline (American College Testing, 2012). Due to recent policy changes in Louisiana, college administrators and politicians are determined to increase first-year student retention. In order for institutions to better support first-year students and their persistence to the second year of college, administrators must understand the process of retaining students from the first to second year. Each student’s college transition is unique and shaped by his or her own experiences and environmental factors.

By conducting a case study, the researcher was able to further understand the retention of first-year college students to the second year at a comprehensive research public university in Louisiana. The study addressed the following research question: How do college students describe their experiences with academic advising and success coaching?

Research Design

A qualitative research design was used to understand students’ progression from the first to second year of college. Qualitative research allows for the participant’s voice to be heard and for the participant to feel a sense of ownership to his or her experience (Creswell, 2013; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). Qualitative research allowed the researcher to gain in-depth knowledge from first-year students. Additionally, to approach research using social a constructivism lens, the researcher should use interviews, surveys, and observe interactions to gather data (Kezar et al., 2006) which, are qualitative means for collecting data. As Miles and Huberman (1994) explained, one of the many strengths of qualitative research is that it allows the researcher to,
“focus on naturally occurring, ordinary events in natural settings so that we have a strong handle on what ‘real life’ is like” (p. 10). When conducting qualitative research the researcher is able to observe the participants in their authentic environment to further understand the problem studied.

An instrumental case study approach was used to collect data. According to Creswell (2013):

Case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system or multiple bounded systems over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information and reports a case description and case themes (p. 97).

Case studies are used to understand the development of reality as it is socially constructed (Heck, 2009). An instrumental case study is an in-depth study of a particular case or cases to further understand a larger issue (Creswell, 2013; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003; Glesne, 2011; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005; Stake, 2000). As Dyson and Genishi (2005) explain “…the end goal is to understand how the phenomenon matters from the perspectives of participants in the ‘case”’ (p. 81). This research design allowed the researcher to dig deep into the issues and gain a full understanding of the problem (Creswell, 2013).

Yin (2014) explains that case studies can be understood by the scope of the case study and the features of the case study. Yin (2014) describes the scope of the study as “… an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the “case”) in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident” (p.16). Yin (2014) describes how the features of a case study:

copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points and as one result relies on multiple sources of
evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, an as another result
benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection
and analysis (p. 17).

As Yin (2014) explains in his definition of a case study, both the scope of a case study and the
feature of a case study allowed the researcher to answer the research question. The researcher
chose a case study design to answer the research question because this methodology allowed her
to understand the experiences of first-year students in their own college life. Furthermore, the
researcher was able to examine multiple forms of data to gain a full understanding of the
experiences of academic advising and success coaching.

For the purpose of this study, the “case” was defined as a retention program at Pelican
State University (PSU), a four-year comprehensive research public university in Louisiana.
Throughout the study, the institution is referred to by that pseudonym.

Data Collection

Site Selection

The sampling region is Pelican State University. In an effort to meet the performance
base measures outlined by the Louisiana GRAD Act, PSU has realigned the services provided by
the Office of Enrollment Services to one building on-campus in fall 2013. The Office of
Enrollment Services provides first-year students with a comprehensive enrollment management
experience. Students are able to receive information about enrollment in addition to support
during their first-year transition. Through the Office of Enrollment Services, first-year students
are able to participate in academic advising and success coaching. Given the unique approach of
PSU’s academic advising and success coaching, it is appropriate to use PSU as the sole site of
data collection.
Carnegie Classifications (2010) defines PSU as a medium four-year public institution with a student population that is high in undergraduate students. The student population is primarily nonresidential students; the majority of students do not live on-campus. Carnegie (2010) classifies PSU as Bal/HGC: Balanced arts & sciences/professions, high graduate coexistence institute. This classification denotes that PSU offers a balance of arts, science, and professional programs for undergraduate degrees. Additionally, PSU offers graduate degrees for half of the undergraduate degrees the institution offers their students. By looking at the specific case of a retention program at PSU, the researcher further understood the unique student retention programming and highlighted the details of the programs provided to students.

**Participant Overview**

The researcher used purposeful sampling to identify participants. Purposeful sampling is when the researcher chooses participants from a specific sample to inform the current study (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003; Onwuegbuzie, Jiao, & Bostick, 2004). To participate in this study, participants had to be enrolled at PSU during the fall 2013 semester. Students needed to have participated in both academic advising and success coaching programs at PSU. Additionally, participants needed to be 18 years old or older.

The researcher worked with the staff from PSU’s Office of Enrollment Services in order to gain access to the sample of students that qualified for the study. Staff were able provide the names and contact information for qualified students. All fifty-four students who participated in success coaching beginning in fall 2013 were contact via email to participate in the study. The recruitment email (APPENDIX E) outlined the purpose of the study, requested participation, and confirmed confidentiality. The researcher sent multiple emails to potential participants. Staff members from PSU’s Office of Enrollment Services and a staff member from PSU’s Student
Affairs division forwarded the recruitment email to potential participants on behalf of the researcher. Only three students responded with interest to participate in the study. Due to poor response, the researcher reached out again to the same student population via social media, Facebook. The researcher informed the potential participants of the purpose of the study, requested participation, and confirmed confidentiality. The remaining 10 participants were recruited through Facebook messaging.

Sample size was determined by guidelines proposed by Creswell (2013). Creswell (2013) suggests that the sample size not only allows the researcher to study a few sites and individuals but also allows for the researcher to collect in-depth details about the individuals and sites being studied. Through both means, email and Facebook messages, thirteen students were selected to participate in the study.

Table 1 outlines the participants’ demographics, participation in interviews and enrollment at PSU. Each participant was designated a pseudonym to differentiate from others and to maintain confidentiality. Under the sex column; male is abbreviated with “M” and female is abbreviated with “F”. Cultural background & major includes the students’ verbatim response. Participants’ failure to respond or responses that were inconclusive to the questions are indicated with “X”. The final column indicates if participants were first-time, full-time freshman in fall 2013. If participants were first-time, full-time freshman “Y” is used to indicate, if participants were not first-time, full-time freshman “N” is used to indicate. Clinton, Delilah, Gabe, Jen, and Mark were not first-time, full-time freshman in fall 2013. In the findings and discussion of the findings, they are referred to as non-traditional students. Clinton and Jen started at PSU in fall 2013 but had previously attended other public institutions within the state of Louisiana. Gabe began attending PSU in fall 2010. At the time of data collection eleven of the thirteen
participants were enrolled at PSU. Delilah started PSU in fall 2012 but was not enrolled at PSU when the interviews were conducted in fall 2014. Mark started PSU in fall 2013 but was not enrolled at PSU when the interviews were conducted.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Cultural Background</th>
<th>In-state/out-of-state</th>
<th>Commuter/Residential</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>First semester at PSU</th>
<th>FTF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>In-state</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brandy</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>In-state</td>
<td>Residential</td>
<td>Exercise Physiology</td>
<td>Fall 2013</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinton</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>*</td>
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<td>Commuter</td>
<td>Urban Studies and Planning</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delilah</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>In-state</td>
<td>Commuter</td>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>Fall 2013</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emma</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>In-state</td>
<td>Commuter</td>
<td>IDS</td>
<td>Fall 2013</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Half Greek/ Half Hispanic</td>
<td>In-state</td>
<td>Residential</td>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>Fall 2013</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabe</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Residential</td>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>Fall 2010</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hailey</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>In-state</td>
<td>Commuter</td>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>Fall 2013</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivy</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>In-state</td>
<td>Commuter</td>
<td>Business Administration</td>
<td>Fall 2013</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jen</td>
<td>F</td>
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<td>Commuter</td>
<td>IDS</td>
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<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kent</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>Out-of-state</td>
<td>Residential</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Fall 2013</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauren</td>
<td>F</td>
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<td>In-state</td>
<td>Residential</td>
<td>HRT</td>
<td>Fall 2013</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>German/Irish</td>
<td>In-state</td>
<td>Commuter</td>
<td>Exercise Physiology</td>
<td>Fall 2013</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Participant Overview

*Participant stated he was “Italian, Cajun French, Irish, Scottish, Native American, and a bit of German raised in Louisiana”.

**Data Collection Process**

In order to further understand the problem of first-year student retention, the researcher collected data from multiple sources. The researcher conducted two, in-depth, one-on-one
interviews and collected documents and artifacts from the Office of Enrollment Services at PSU. Additionally, all participants completed a demographic questionnaire (APPENDIX D).

Participants were asked to participate in two, one-on-one interviews. Table 2 outlines each participant’s participation in the current research projects interviews.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Initial Interview</th>
<th>Follow-up Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brandy</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinton</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delilah</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emma</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabe</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hailey</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivy</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jen</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kent</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauren</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Participation in Interviews

The initial one-on-one interviews and follow-up interviews were conducted fall 2014. In-depth, one-on-one interviews allowed participants the opportunity to share their stories and share the issues they found to be important with the researcher (Bouma & Ling, 2004). The researcher chose this method in order to be able to: have in-person contact, create an in-depth understanding of the issue, understand students’ perceptions, and gain clarification when needed for decisions and behaviors.

The researcher used a semi-structured interview approach. In this approach, the researcher identified themes and questions she wanted to examine with participants, but the researcher was open to asking additional questions that surfaced as a result of the participants’ responses and stories shared during the interview (Glesne, 2011; Kvale, 1996). The researcher
framed the study by using Tinto’s Model of Student Departure (1975). The researcher used Tinto’s model to develop the initial interview questions (APPENDIX A) by centering the questions on students’ academic and social integration to their institution during their first-year of college.

One-on-one interviews lasted approximately one hour. Interviews were conducted in a private location with only the researcher and participant. The researcher traveled to PSU and secured a non-biased area for interviews to be conducted. As compensation for participating in the study, participants received a ten dollar gift card for each interview which they completed.

The interview questions for the follow-up one-on-one interviews (APPENDIX B) were framed by the responses collected during the initial interviews. The researcher had all one-on-one audio recordings of initial interviews, and the notes taken while interviewing transcribed by a third party transcription service, Verbal Ink. Once completed, the researcher read the third party transcriptions to ensure accuracy. To produce the follow-up interview questions, the researcher needed to identify themes from the first one-on-one interview responses. To start the coding process, the researcher read through the data to identify themes. Responses were coded and then clustered together to identify the emerging themes form the data. Themes were identified to answer the research question: How do college students describe their experiences with academic advising and success coaching? The researcher then developed the follow-up interview questions based on the themes that were identified.

Secondary data included artifacts from Pelican State University. The researcher gathered some first-year retention data from the institution by meeting with staff members of the Office of Enrollment Services. Artifacts included PSU’s Office of Enrollment Services promotional material, academic advising and success coaching participation numbers and evaluations of the
programs from student participants, retention reports from first-year students participating in success coaching beginning in fall 2013, PSU’s first-year student enrollment in fall 2013, and retention rates from fall 2013 to fall 2014 for first-year students.

PSU’s Office of the Registrar provided enrollment and retention information on students participating in success coaching and first-year academic advising in fall 2013. According to the enrollment data, 41 of the students that participated in success coaching in fall 2013 returned to PSU in fall 2014. That is a 75.926% retention rate. Comparatively, the total enrollment of all first-time freshmen at PSU in fall 2013 was 860. First to second year retention of first-time full time students to fall 2014 was a retention rate of 69%.

The focus of this study was to understand first-year students’ perceptions of academic advising and success coaching on retention to the second year of college. For this reason, the meetings with staff members were only to gain factual information and artifacts about first-year services and programs. The staff members were not interviewed to ensure their perceptions did not inform this study.

The researcher designed this study to include focus group interviews with the participants. However, due to poor attendance, the researcher was unable to hold focus group interviews. A focus group would have provided the researcher an opportunity to observe the participants with their peers, learn from the participants’ reactions to other’s responses, and have additional contact with participants. Students participating in one-on-one interviews were the only students asked to participate in the focus group interview. The focus group interviews were scheduled to take place after the initial one-on-one interviews had occurred.

The researcher made three attempts to conduct focus group interviews with participants. The focus group interviews were arranged to take place in a private location with only the
researcher and participants. The researcher traveled to PSU and secured a non-biased area for focus group interview to be conducted. The first and second attempts at conducting the focus group interviews were in fall 2014. The researcher contacted all of the participants that had taken part in the initial one-on-one interviews. For the first scheduled focus group interview, only one student could commit. The researcher cancelled the interview. The second attempt, the researcher had commitment from four students to participate in the focus group. When the focus group convened, only one participant attended. The final attempt was made in spring 2015 after the follow-up one-on-one interviews were conducted. The researcher reached out to the participants and had four students commit to participate in the interview. Unfortunately, only one student attended the focus group interview. At this point in the research process, the researcher removed the focus group interviews from the data collection. She moved forward in analyzing the data which had already been collected through one-on-one interviews, demographic questionnaires, and secondary data.

Consent

At the beginning of each interview, the researcher requested to see the participant’s license and student identification card to verify that the participant was over the age of 18. Next, the researcher reviewed the letter of consent (APPENDIX C) and received approval to audio record the interview. Students completed a “Demographic Questionnaire” (APPENDIX D) which contained information concerning: age, sex, ethnicity, city of birth, residence, college hours completed, major, and grade point averages.

Data Analysis

Creswell (2013) explains qualitative data analysis as an analysis spiral which includes four loops: (1) data management, (2) reading and memoing, (3) describing, classifying and
interpreting, and (4) representing and visualizing. Creswell’s (2013) model for qualitative analysis allowed the researcher to review the data multiple times (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). The researcher began data analysis by bracketing previous experiences of working with first-year college students and advising students. Next the researcher managed the data that was collected by transcribing audio recordings of one-on-one interviews, and the notes taken while interviewing. A third party transcription service, Verbal Ink, transcribed all interview data. The researcher read through all interview transcriptions to ensure accuracy of data. The researcher logged notes during the one-on-one interviews. The notes taken while conducting the interviews were re-read after the interviews were complete. The researcher then added additional comments by “memoing”. Memoing allows the researcher to take additional notes or thoughts after data collection occurs (Glesne, 2011).

Once transcriptions were complete, the researcher began to read through the data to identify themes. Responses were coded and then clustered together to identify the emerging themes form the data. The researcher reviewed all of the data collected and then began to code the data. Codes are labels that are given to sections of data that have similar meanings and are informative to the study (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Like codes were grouped together into themes. These themes were established based on recurring ideas, language, and patterns of belief of the participants’ responses. After the themes were identified, the researcher reviewed the data to interpret patterns. The data was reviewed and reevaluated multiple times before the final codes and themes were produced and the researcher felt she had reached data saturation. The researcher used multiple sources to collect data, and all sources and data had to be compared to form the description of the case.
The researcher formed the description of the case by reviewing the data collected through interviews, notes, and artifacts. To understand the complexity of the case, the researcher identified key issues that surfaced in the research. This is called analysis of the case (Creswell, 2013). In the findings, the researcher highlighted specific facts that are important to the specific case, and the data was examined to identify patterns or trends in the research. Finally, the researcher defined the meaning of the case and the discoveries from the research to address the issue of first-year student retention. The analysis of data took approximately three months.

**Verification Procedures**

The researcher used three strategies to validate the results of the study. These strategies were executed as explained by Creswell (2013). First, the researcher identified any biases in regards to the topic. This allowed the researcher to reflect on past experiences that may have shaped or influenced the study. Second, the researcher had five colleagues peer review the study. This allowed for external parties to review the research. The researcher’s peers proposed questions to the researcher concerning aspects of the study including methods and the analysis of the data. Peers received the following study’s research proposal once the proposal had been approved by the researcher’s dissertation committee. Peer reviewers were given one month to provide the researcher with feedback. The final data analysis was sent to peer reviewers for reconsideration and provide additional feedback to the researcher. Peer reviewers were given one month to provide the researcher with feedback. This allowed the researcher to check the credibility of the study both before and after data was gathered. Finally, the researcher used the strategy of member checking to validate the results of the study. Member checking allowed for the study’s participants to review the researcher’s data, analysis, and conclusion to ensure accuracy (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). Members were asked to review the transcription of one-
on-one interview data after each interview was transcribed. A copy of the information was emailed to participants for them to review independently. Participants were asked to validate their responses within two weeks. Only one participant, Faith, validated her interview data. Additionally, copies of the final document, including the discussion of the research results, were given to participants at the conclusion of the study to further validate responses and the analysis of their responses. Participants were given two weeks to validate responses. Hailey and Ivy validated the final analysis of the data collected.

**Ethical Considerations**

Participation in this study was voluntary. The risks associated with participating in this study were minimal. In order to maintain minimal risk for the participants in the study, the researcher took precautions to ensure that the identities of the participants were confidential through the entire research process. Additionally, participants were made aware that if at any time a student choose not to participate or wished to withdraw from the study, there would be no penalty.

During the data collection procedures, including interviews, and demographic questionnaire, the researcher was the only one that was able to identify a participant’s response with the appropriate participant. In the final write-up, real names and the name of the institution were replaced with pseudonyms. Transcription of the recordings also included pseudonyms. All written notes, recordings, and transcriptions were kept in a locked and secured file by the researcher at all times and will be shredded/discarded May 2020 (within five years after the research has been published). Recordings were erased and hard copies of data were shredded.
Researcher Identity

Throughout my tenure as a graduate student, I began to notice a trend in my research interest. I am student centered, an advocate for college students, and I have a passion for students in their first-year of college. Enrollment management issues were at the forefront of my research agenda considering my experiences with the topic.

While pursuing my Masters of Education, I worked as a graduate assistant in the First-Year Experience Office at The University of Southern Mississippi. This office programmed summer orientations, carried out welcome week for first-year students, and developed the curriculum for the first-year success seminar. The First-Year Experience Office also coordinated first-year mentoring. I was able to serve as a mentor for students placed on probation from their academic scholarships. Additionally, I volunteered at The University of Southern Mississippi’s Admissions Office and developed recruitment marketing. I was approached to re-evaluate the curriculum for the university’s incoming leadership scholars. The opportunity to work with these scholars allowed me to work with a new subpopulation of first-year students.

Upon completing my master’s degree, I wanted to find a position that would allow me to work directly with first-year students. My first full-time position was not housed under enrollment management; however I found that as the coordinator for the Student Government Association (SGA) at Southeastern Louisiana University, I was able to work with first-year students on a daily basis. SGA had a mentoring program for first-year students. Shortly after working with SGA, I was given the opportunity to oversee Greek Life. I worked directly with first-year students through the recruitment and new member process within the Greek community.
Later the position of Director for the Office for Student Engagement granted me the autonomy to develop new programs for first-year students. As policies changed for institutions within the state of Louisiana, so did the institutions efforts to retain first-year college students. In addition to the pre-existing programs and services for first-year students, I started new programs for first-year students. Our office hosted family day, a welcome week program known as Traditions, and coordinated the current student side of summer orientation. In addition to my professional experiences with first-year students, I also started to research first-year students and their college transition. In the fall of 2012, my independent study and my research final project were both on first-year students. In my most recent position I serve as an academic advisor for a community college. While I am not solely working with first-year students, I am first-hand advising students in their academic studies.

I include all of this information in my role as a researcher because through my experiences I have learned my biases in regards to first-year students and academic advising. I have discovered that I, by default, speak of first-year students as if they are all traditional. I noticed that I define first-year students as students that attend college in the fall directly after their high school graduation. I am aware that there are non-traditional first-year students and I make the conscious effort to distinguish the two when researching or working with the population.

The other bias that I have come to realize through my work and research with first-year college students is I believe the way to help first-year students with their transition into college is by providing programs and events. I am aware that students need more than just social events and involvement in organizations yet when I read through my previous research and writing on first-year college students, my work does not reflect my knowledge of the student’s holistic
development. I was aware of my favoritism to traditional first-year students and to first-year programs while conducting this research project. Additionally, I was conscious not to allow previous research to sway the current research study.

Before academic advising, I was unaware of how important the role of an academic advisor can be for a student. I have quickly learned how instrumental the role of an academic advisor can be in students’ undergraduate experience. However, I had to separate this opinion from my research study in order to understand the students’ experiences with academic advising and success coaching.
Chapter Four

Findings

Through data analysis the researcher identified three emerging themes. First, navigating college life, explores the participants’ experience from selecting their institution to their integration into their new college life. This theme is important to provide context for the two additional themes that answer the study’s research question. The second theme, experiences with academic advising, the participants share their interactions with their academic advisors and the role advising had on their college life. The third theme, experiences with success coaching, discusses the participants’ interpretation of their meetings with their success coaches and the affects coaching had on their collegiate experience. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary of the findings.

Emerging Themes

Navigating College

The theme of navigating college life does not directly answer the study’s research question. However, the information found throughout the following theme provides important contextual information that adds to the participants’ explanation of their experiences with academic advising and success coaching. Participants were met with new challenges while transitioning to life as a college student at Pelican State University. Participants openly shared the new opportunities they encountered, events that took place, and transitions along the way. Mark explained: “My life was completely different when I stepped foot on college. Even though I’m only eight miles away, it was a completely different universe for me.” The new college environment caused confusion and students were eager to understand the many aspects that surrounded college life. Participants shared how they navigated through college life from their
initial decision to attend PSU to adjusting to their new learning and living environment. They explained the process of feeling part of PSU and letting themselves evolve during their college experience.

**College, the only option for success.** Participants chose to pursue a college degree because they believed a postsecondary degree was the only viable option to be successful. Hailey explained:

> College for me wasn’t, it’s not an option. It’s not like some people, for me personally you go to college; that’s what you do after high school. I would never not go to college, that’s just what you do because it’s just being realistic with today’s economy, you can’t be someone without a degree in my eyes. I know there are other ways to become someone, but for me you have to have a degree.

Students wanted to attend college to ensure their own personal success.

Participants considered attending other institutions before selecting Pelican State University. The influence of family surfaced when discussing participants’ final selection of where to attend college. Hailey told of her parents’ influence on attending PSU: “… I was supposed to go to [different Louisiana university], but then my parents just wanted me to go to [PSU] because they thought it was a better school so I mean I had no options.” Students considered cost of attending institutions, programs of study offered, and institutional size when trying to determine where to enroll for their postsecondary degree. However, family’s opinions of institutions and the location of campuses in relation to close proximities of participants’ families were ultimately the deciding factors in students’ decision to attend Pelican State University.
New challenges found on and off-campus. Participants self-identified themselves as an on-campus student or a commuter student. For the participants living on-campus in residential housing, moving to college was the first time they had lived away from home. College fostered the students’ new found independence. Living on-campus provided the participants with their own space and, for the first time, students were responsible for their own actions. Students established their own household and structured how they were going to live.

Participants’ new on-campus living arrangements included roommates. Roommates forced students to learn how to live with another person or persons and be considerate of their roommates’ life style. Emma’s experience living on-campus with roommates resulted in her moving off campus:

I had three random roommates I didn’t know but the whole year, all my roommates except one moved out. They trampled all over me because I’m such a nervous person who’s quiet to myself. I never would say anything, they didn’t clean, they didn’t do this, they didn’t do that. So living with people I didn’t know that was hard to go through. Students compromised in order to share living quarters with roommates who were strangers before attending college.

Kent and Gabe are both international students. Moving on-campus was not only their first time away from home, but also their first time living in the United States. They were faced with adversity because of moving away from their native country and having to adjust to new cultural norms in the United States. Kent was intrigued that college students in the United States have an option to live away from home and be on-campus:

People, they start moving out from their family once they start going to the college over here. But, in Nepal, they don’t usually leave the family until they graduate or until they
marry. So, it’s a difference, because they have different level of independence over here and over there.

Gabe struggled being so far away from his family and had a negative view about living on-campus: “I’ll be alone and I feel like bored, just go home and stay home…. It’s nothing special about it.” He did not feel that living on-campus engaged him in college life.

Commuter or off-campus students adjusted to traveling from their place of residence to the institution. Participants commuted anywhere between five to 45 minutes one-way to campus. Students juggled their commute with several schedules and planned accordingly to ensure prompt arrival for classes. To these participants, living off-campus and being away from campus made it easier to forget about school obligations. Mark spoke about his distractions when living at home: “If I’m at my house, you have to have a very high amount of discipline to sit at your desk, no TV, and it’s awesome when no one’s home but sometimes there are people home.”

Participants found more unrelated school distractions arose by living away from college and these distractions often interfered with their studies. In order to utilize campus services and engage in college life, commuters felt they had to make more of an effort. Offices, faculty, and staff were not as easily accessible for commuters due to their off-campus living arrangement. Not being within walking distance of campus and having to leave campus each day to return home hindered commuter students’ opportunities to connect with college life and made it difficult for them to engage with other students outside of the time spent within the classroom.

Distance from school had negative effects on students’ college experience. Commuter participants who performed poor academically found it to be a result of living away from the institution. Emma shared her experience of living on-campus her first semester and then moving off-campus for her second semester: “Last semester I lived at [resident hall] which was
right there…The library’s right here, everything’s walking distance so living on-campus was really cool but I didn’t want to go through all the different roommates again.” Emma decided to move off-campus her second semester so that she would not have to overcome the challenge of living with roommates. However, living off-campus had its own challenges. Emma shared:

I went to school and then I worked and I had no time, I have no time. Like stop and do homework and stay after school and do this and do that and then I have to drive home to go do something or I can’t just walk back home. I can’t do that. That was really difficult.

The majority of the commuter students participating in this study were living off-campus with family members. These traditional-aged college students, those enrolling in college directly following high school graduation, struggled to balance their new sense of autonomy and living in the same environment that they lived in prior to college. Parents were no longer keeping the student accountable in terms of academic responsibilities, but students still had to respect their parents’ terms of living at home.

Clinton, whose living off-campus with roommates was the first time he was living away from home, found: “It was tough for me at first learning how to pay my own bills and everything like that while trying to keep up with school, and being involved on-campus for the first time. That was tough.” He struggled to find a balance being away from home for the first time and learning to be a successful college student.

Non-traditional participants that lived off-campus found family members did not understand the demands of college or the rigor of college studies. Delilah, who was not enrolled at the time of interviews, shared her experience attending school while her husband compared his educational experience to hers. Her husband expected her to be able to balance home life and
school: “It was really hard because…he is older than me so he graduated back then and he was single when he did all of this. So he’s always ‘if I could do it, why can’t you do it?’” Family life remained the same, and students were expected to keep a sense of normalcy in their household despite their new schedule and responsibilities.

The more I learn, the more I want to be a part of it. Participants were proud to be students at Pelican State University and spoke highly about the institution which they were attending. A main concern regarding starting college was how to meet new people and connect with the institution. Participants wanted to feel like they belonged. While some participants knew of other PSU students from high school, they did not consider these students friends. The majority of participants began college without a community of friends at PSU. College introduced to the participants new people from diverse backgrounds, socioeconomic statuses, beliefs, and regions. Participants were amazed by the open-mindedness of others within their college community. The college environment welcomed others from various walks of life more than the high school environment participants had previously known. The students found it easier to integrate into their new culture because the college community was welcoming and nonjudgmental.

The university provided outlets for students to engage with other college students. While the length of semester courses made it sometimes difficult to establish lasting connections with other students through classes, participants were able to develop meaningful friendships with other student through outlets offered by the university. Jen, a non-traditional student, found it easier to connect with her institution than anticipated:

The only transitional issue that I thought I was going to have was I thought I would be a very nontraditional student, meaning that I would come to school, go to class, leave;
come to school, go to class, leave. The more I learned about [PSU] the more I wanted to get involved and so that’s I guess the only struggle is to try to balance my life at home, the kids, the husband, and then having a life on-campus as a nontraditional student and still wanting to participate with the other college students and you know just that kind of balance.

Through university sponsored programs, on-campus organizations, university social media, classes and on-campus housing, students could connect with college life and other students.

On-campus organizations allowed the students to meet other students with similar interests as their own. Networking through new student connections generated additional friendships as well. Faith was an on-campus student and shared her experiences of developing relationships with other college students:

Well I live on [resident hall] and last year I was in the dorms. It’s pretty good because you get to meet a lot of people whereas if you’re a commuter, it’s a lot harder to meet people unless you actually get involved. … I actually do recommend that if people do have the opportunity to live on-campus, because that’s how you get to meet a lot of people and get involved and know what’s going on in the school.

Students spoke about their involvement on-campus, the additional opportunities, and the lasting friendships that membership in their organizations provided them.

**Easy to abuse freedom.** The structure of high school established routine schedules for students and participants were able to anticipate a typical day in high school. College allowed for students to create their own schedules and structure of their “school day”. Participants were able to select their own courses and when they would be attending class. Creating their own classes schedule required students to be self-aware of their learning styles, personality, and
obligations outside of the classroom. These were characteristics the participants did not have to consider previously when attending high school.

Participants had to modify their routine and learn how to balance classes with other responsibilities, including family, jobs, and college life. Having time between classes and different routines from day to day was challenging for the participants. Students were trying to learn how to balance life as a college student. Ivy disclosed:

A lot of times you have all these empty spaces in between class and it’s like, “Well what do I do?” Before when you were in high school you don’t have that problem of trying to figure out what to do next, because you have it set and I mean you have study hall but it’s more when you go to college you kind of have to, you have your own time. You have a lot of free time to do whatever you personally want to do with it.

Participants were now self-sufficient and were faced with choices. College allowed participants the liberty to decide if they were going to attend class, complete assignments, or study for test. Faith found it was “easy to abuse freedom” and she struggled to be productive. While instructors did not micromanage the students and their progression, students were still held responsible for academic obligations and there were ramifications for not following through. The participants realized that they were the only ones that could motivate themselves to accomplish tasks. This transition allowed students to learn responsibilities and to make choices independently. Emma further explained:

I guess making myself do things because no one’s there behind your back telling you, you need to do this, you need to do that. You actually need to get up and go to class and stuff like that. Having those responsibilities jump onto you like that, that was a little difficult to handle.
By developing ownership in their academics, students felt they had control of their future. Being in charge of their college experience gave participants a sense of accomplishment and students took pride in what they had accomplished while attending school.

Transitioning from high school to college affected the students as an individual. Life as a college student challenged participants and made them question who they were as an individual, their values and beliefs, and their future plans. College pushed students to develop their own sense of autonomy. Involvement in on-campus organizations cultivated participants’ sense of accountability. Participants took on different leadership roles within student organization and wanted to perform well academically for the organization. Maintaining a high grade point average was needed for membership in the organization and to hold offices. Clinton tried to explain how he felt accountable to the organizations which he belonged: “…I think through having those responsibilities that I do on-campus I have to maintain a certain level of GPA, and I have friends in these organizations, so it pushes me to do well.” The students were challenged to manage time and balancing their lifestyle to meet the expectations of membership.

Financial responsibility developed students’ self-responsibility. Participants sought to gain employment or acquire on-campus leadership positions that would provide monetary stipends in order to meet their financial obligations. Brandy was determined to be financially independent through her involvement on-campus:

I found a way to pay for school without my parents having to worry, or without me having to take out thousands of dollars worth of student loans. I plan on keeping these positions until I graduate hopefully because they do help a lot.

The students were aware of the cost associated with their education and felt added pressure to perform well in order to wisely utilize the money they were spending on tuition and college
expenses. Delilah explained that finances were one of the reasons she was not enrolled at the time interviews were conducted. Her husband paid for her tuition and she explained: “… it comes out of his pocket, the tuition, so I’m not taking that many classes because I’m not doing good and I don’t want to just go to school, just waste my time and energy…” The notion of being financially stable and learning to balance this responsibility was a constant factor of college life for participants.

**College academics, it wasn’t what I was expecting.** Participants were surprised by the lack of academic rigor that was expected in college. Lauren stated: “So it wasn’t bad, but it wasn’t what I was expecting.” The assumption was college academics would be substantially more challenging than what was expected in high school. Amanda shared her expectations for college academics in comparison to her actual experience: “I knew that there was more reading, but I thought it would really be harder, like much, much harder than high school, and it’s not that much harder than high school.” College academics proposed challenges for the participants but the students were able to manage the academic demands.

Some participants felt prepared for general education college courses. The courses seemed to be a review of what they had learned previously in high school. However, while course content was similar, the means of academic preparation was different. Students were able to succeed or “get by” in high school by listening and participating in class and no additional work was needed outside of regular class time. Emma shared: “… throughout high school I just got through it because my teachers were pushovers and so when I got to college I was like, I can’t push my professor over. I actually have to try and learn this.” College courses required preparation outside of the classroom and students could no longer rely solely on class lectures to learn course content. Participants struggled with how to prepare for college assessment and how
to integrate materials covered in the classroom with their own preparation. Having to learn course content outside of the classroom challenged students to teach themselves course material while allotting sufficient amount of time to do so. Students had to be responsible for their own education.

High school was predictable and students knew what was expected of them throughout the semester, including how to prepare for what was ahead in their courses. In college, participants had to learn to adjust with each semester as a new set of professors would be introduced to the student. College academics required students to learn each professor’s classroom management style, instruction, how professors assessed students’ knowledge of material covered, and the expectations they had for students. Academic freedom allows for the professors to instruct students as they felt appropriate. High school teachers have similar types of instruction and assessment that are mandated by the school. College courses covered a concentrated amount of materials and assessment was not limited to one chapter or section. Students were expected to cover large amount of material in a smaller amount of time and retain information from throughout the semester.

Students assumed college faculty and support staff would nurture them just as their high school faculty. Participants found faculty and staff at PSU to be caring and willing to help but the method of providing support was different then what they were accustomed to in high school. Students were expected to take responsibility for their education and they were no longer “babied”. The students had to initiate one-on-one help from their professors. The additional assistance was provided to students outside of normally schedule class time.
Experience with Academic Advisor

Each student at Pelican State University is assigned an academic advisor. Students are advised by a first-year academic advisor or a college academic advisor. When first starting at PSU, students are alphabetically assigned to one of the four first-year academic advisors that work with first-year students. The first-year academic advisor is a general advisor who consults with the student about their academics until their second year. According to secondary data collected from PSU’s promotional materials, first-year advising is designed to focus on the student’s academic plans and assists them in academic decisions. The student works with their first-year academic advisor to establish an academic foundation before moving to their college advisor. Once moving on to their second year, when the student has completed 30 semester hours, the student is then advised by an academic advisor within their academic college.

That's all I know. Academic advising was confusing for participants. While there were clear moments, as far as the function of the academic advisor, this clarification came after the participant was able to decipher who was their academic advisor. The participants had only met with their academic advisors a handful of times, though were very familiar with their success coaches. Because of this, the participants confused their success coaches with their academic advisor. Additionally, students were confused because they were working with a first-year academic advisor during their first-year of college and then had to switch during their second year and work with an academic advisor from their academic college. Students were lost between transitioning from first-year academic advisor to college academic advisor. There was also uncertainty as to when and why students move from first-year advising to their college advisor. Emma tried to explain:
Yes, but from what I understand, I’m getting a different one? I don’t know if I’m still a freshman or not but I feel like when you get to a certain point, you go to advisors who are specifically in the field you’re going into.

Hailey could not identify the difference between her first-year advisor and her college advisor. She felt lost:

…The only thing I know anything about advising is that if you go for your college, and that, if I wanted to go get advised, I can just go up to the third floor of [academic building] and schedule an appointment. That’s all I know.

The confusion surrounding transitioning from one advisor to another left some participants feeling frustrated.

**Advising process: first to second year.** When first enrolling at PSU, participants shared that they were contacted by their first-year academic advisor via email and they were assigned to an advisor based on their last name. Hailey walked through the process: “For freshman they sent out an email to all of the freshman, you need to go see an academic advisor and you went online and scheduled a time to go see them…They like all freshmen go see academic advisors.”

According to data collected from PSU, in fall 2013, there were 930 students that participated in first-year advising. These 930 students were classified as first-time, full-time, degree seeking freshman or first-time, full-time, degree seeking transfer students with fewer than 30 credit hours completed.

To ensure first-year students met with an academic advisor, the Office of Enrollment Management placed holds on students’ online enrollment management accounts. This hold, which could only be lifted by their academic advisor, prevented the students from enrolling in courses. Students found value in meeting with their first-year academic advisor. Amanda felt
she understood the necessity of having a first-year advisor and shared why she felt it made sense
to have a hold on your account: “…if you’re kind of doing bad in some classes they’ll be like
well, you might have to take this class again, or we can try and get resources to help you to pass
this class.” While enrollment holds were the main reason for participants to initially visit with
their first-year academic advisor, the registration hold forced students to speak with an academic
advisor. Students felt that, without this initial meeting, they would have been lost and may not
have made the correct choices when selecting courses. Together, the student and academic
advisor outlined a plan for the student to complete his or her degree.

The process of advising was clear. Students knew they had to meet with an academic
advisor their first-year in order to have a hold removed that would allow them to register online
through the university’s online enrollment management system. The participants were also clear
and descriptive when referencing the process of meeting with their academic advisor. Ivy
recalled her advising process:

She logs on the computer and she sees all the classes that I’ve already taken and she sees
what I have to take in my junior and senior year in the next couple of semesters and so
she tells me these are the courses that you still have to take and then she leaves it up to
me to decide which one I want to take next. I have to enroll. All the courses that we
decide on for that particular meeting she prints it out and she gives it to me so I’ll have it
ready for when I enroll.

Advising would take place with their academic advisor and then the students would
independently enroll in courses based on the recommendations made by their academic advisor.

Once the student had completed 30 hours of course work, they would then be advised by
an academic advisor from their academic college. Some participants discovered that they were
being advised by a new academic advisor, because they were redirected when trying to visit their first-year academic advisor. Participants found college advisors to be more knowledgeable of courses and requirements for major and first-year academic advisors to be knowledgeable of advising process and general education courses. Kent felt first-year advisors provided general information: “…all the first-year classes that you have to take, it’s basically the same for everyone. So, it’s not so much a big deal.” Compared to college advisors, first-year academic advisors were perceived to be easier to access and more approachable than college advisors. Participants shared their experiences with their college and first-year academic advisors by explaining the process of advising at PSU, how their advisors assisted them and the role of academic advising in college success. From the participants’ experiences, first-year and college academic advisors had different strengths and weakness but the students found the end result was the same when going to an academic advisor. Regardless of seeing their first-year or college academic advisor, students left knowing the courses that were required to complete their degree.

‘Cause of course, they will know. Both first-year and college academic advisors helped the students clarify their course selections. Together the students and academic advisors would review the students’ intended major. They would make a plan that the student could follow in order to complete all the courses that were required to complete their degree. This plan helped the student to be aware of what courses were needed to eventually lead to graduation. Clinton was surprised by his graduation date and would not have discovered how quickly he could complete his undergraduate degree without the help of his academic advisor: “…he [academic advisor] was very adamant about me getting out as fast as I can. I thought I had a year and a half left, or two years left and I didn’t. Turns out I only had a year left.” Emma explained the plan she made with her academic advisor:
She would plan for me to be out in four years but that’s the only thing. But that’s not happening ‘cause I did change my major but that was the only thing we planned out was getting out in four years. She pushes me towards that.

Academic advisors were able to provide direction, and reassurance that the curriculum students were pursuing matched potential employment opportunities that were connected to the student’s interests.

Faith was able to advance her academic career through her academic advisor’s recommendations: “But I met with one of the business administration advisors for what classes I should take for accounting and that was very helpful and I even added a minor.” Academic advisors were able to make recommendation that would maximize the student’s academic experience.

Course selection was more than viewing the college catalog and selecting courses from the curriculum required. Academic advisors had to assist students with processes and policies. They explained pre-required courses and why pre-requisite courses needed to be considered when selecting potential courses. Academic advisors provided insight for course parings and the semester that courses would be offered to students. This allowed students to strategically select courses based on the course sequence. When applicable, the academic advisor helped the student determine their area of concentration and how to withdraw from courses. They also made students aware of the opportunities available to take part in honor societies or departmental organizations. Transfer students, or students who changed majors, found their academic advisors were able to review their completed courses and apply them to current degree program. It was through the counsel of their academic advisors that students were able to make the most of the academic opportunities that were offered.
Participants left their interaction with their academic advisor fulfilled and prepared for future semesters. Ivy shared: “I only met them on a couple of times to meet with them and schedule my classes and stuff. But over the time that I met them they’ve been really useful and knowledgeable in helping me transition.” Brandy provided additional insights into how academic advisors assisted students:

But it is an outlet to use to make sure that you know for sure that you’re supposed to be taking this and that. You’re not taking the wrong thing. I know a lot of people come to college and they’re like oh, I know how to register for classes, or I know what I’m supposed to take, I looked at the curriculum. I think that it’s just something to be safe. Because with college if you take the wrong class sometimes it doesn’t apply to your degree and there’s something you can really do about it.

Academic advisors provided materials students referred to as “flow charts” (APPENDIX F). These “flow charts” outlined the students’ curriculum until degree completion. Some students felt they were capable of advising themselves once they had reviewed the “flow chart” with their academic advisor.

Participants felt that meeting with an academic advisor is beneficial to all students. They were able to keep the student’s course selections in line with the curriculum required for their major. While students felt they learned the process of course selection and knew their intended path, academic advising was a way to ensure their estimated graduation date. The students found their academic advisor provided them security, ensuring they were heading in the right direction for degree completion and for their future academic plans. Brandy liked to check in with her academic advisor:
I don’t know, off the top of my head, what classes I need to take all the time. You see a class on your course list, and you’re like, “Okay, I need to take this class” but then, course lists change, sometimes every semester. You go to your adviser to figure out if this is still a requirement for your major. ‘Cause of course, they will know. You want to keep track, keep you on track; keep you honest, so that when you get to your senior year, you don’t have five classes that you needed to take that you haven’t taken yet, so then you can’t graduate.

Some participants believed academic advising was necessary to college success, but did not feel they needed to speak to an academic advisor each semester. However, they knew academic advising was always available if they needed reassurance.

**It’s strictly business.** Participants shared that their interaction with their academic advisor was both pleasant and formal. It was a systematic process that students followed when meeting with their academic advisor. Meetings were concise and straightforward. The relationship was solely related to the student’s academics. Faith explained: “It’s just strictly business, about my education.” Students felt more comfortable meeting with their first-year academic advisor as opposed to their college academic advisors. Emma shared her concerns about meeting with her college academic advisor: “I’m going to be a little uneasy at first just because I don’t know them?... And having to re-explain everything. Because she knows and then I have to re-explain everything to him…. It’s going to be a little weird.” Students had more of an established relationship with first-year academic advisor.

Participants respected their academic advisors’ role as someone who could inform their academic career. They also noted the many responsibilities that their academic advisor had within the institution and how they could play a role in their future. Kent admired his academic
advisor: “For the academic college advisor, I think it’s really important. Because my college advisor is also a distinguished professor for the college of mechanical engineering. So, I assume that he knows a lot of things that I don’t.” Kent viewed his advisor as a source to connect him to his future career:

I think he can help me a lot by sharing what classes and how beneficial they are. In terms of opportunities I should be looking for, he doesn’t tell me about anything, but he could make a difference in that thing. My college advisor could talk about different kinds of college-related programs, like my academics-related programs. Internships, some kinds of presentation or some kind of conferences. I think my college advisor could make a difference in that one.

Academic advisors were able to guide students’ in their current academic progress and provide insight for the students’ future career aspirations.

**One word.** During follow-up one-on-one interviews, participants were asked to describe academic advising in one word. The following table shares each participant’s one word response.

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<thead>
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<th>Participant</th>
<th>One word description for Academic Advising</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amanda</td>
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<td>Flawless</td>
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<td>Delilah</td>
<td>Guide</td>
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Table 3. One Word Descriptions for Academic Advising

From students’ one word descriptions, they were able to further express their experience with academic advising. The students’ one word descriptions support the findings that have been discussed throughout their experiences with academic advising. The students found the
information provided to them was useful and important to their academic progression. 
Additionally, the one word descriptions are similar to the findings from the survey developed by the first-year academic advising at PSU.

According to the survey conducted by first-year academic advising, in fall 2013, first-year advisors served 930 freshman and transfer students. This number of freshman and transfer students included any first-time, full-time, degree-seeking freshman and degree-seeking transfer students that completed less than 30 credit hours. These students also started PSU in either summer 2013 or fall 2013. After first-year advising sessions, students were emailed a link to participate in an advising survey. The survey asked students to rate their satisfaction in specific categories pertaining to first-year advising. The following includes the survey prompts and the percentage of students who indicated high satisfaction; learning everything (95%), provided resources (94%), felt advisor was prepared (93%), and felt welcomed in advising session (98%). Ninety-four percent of students who responded to the survey were satisfied with their overall advising experience. The summary of survey results provided did not detail the number or percentage of students who responded to the advising survey.

**Experience with Success Coach**

Success coaching is not required of students, but the participants in this study opted to take part in the program. Participants learned about success coaching through university recruitment initiatives including informational emails, new student orientation information sessions, and classroom visits from success coaches to freshman success courses. PSU had five success coaches to assist students. Participants shared their experiences with success coaching by describing the initial interaction, the progression of their relationship with their success coach,
and how the experience with their success coach introduced them to new aspects of themselves as a student.

**A lifesaver.** Success coaching was a new concept to participants and while they were not exactly sure of the program specifics, they believed it would be advantageous to take part. Students choose to participate in success coaching because they were looking for encouragement and support during their college transition and first-year. Students were in need of motivation and confidence to flourish in their new college setting, as they were concerned with “getting lost” in the college environment. Amanda recalled her interest in success coaching:

> In the summer before that fall we got an email about success coaching and if you wanted to do it. I was like well; I guess I can just do this for college. Anything with the university when we first started I just wanted to do it.

Participants wanted to gain knowledge about college in order to succeed and saw success coaching as an opportunity to learn tools for success. They were hoping to learn study habits, time management tools, and suggestions for how to increase their grade point average. The guidance and added support helped the students feel less overwhelmed by college.

In addition to the overall consensus for wanting to participate in success coaching for added support, each student had personal reasons for wanting to take part in the program. For Brandy, Delilah, Emma, and Lauren, home did not provide the assistance they felt was needed to succeed in navigating college. They hoped success coaching would fill the void of family support and knowledge. Brandy shared her experience of being a first-generation college student: “Because I was first-gen; there wasn’t a lot of college vocabulary in my household. There was a lot of vocabulary, but not college words. I don’t know if that makes sense.” She believed that having a success coach was necessary in order to succeed in college:
I wanted that extra leap of what it looked like to be in college while I, um, I wanted to be able to jump into it without drowning. I saw success coaching as my lifesaver, the little thingy that helps you when you’re drowning. And it was; in some ways, it was.

Gabe and Kent are international students. The distance between them and their families made it difficult to feel supported in their college studies. They turned to their success coaches to provide them support that they were unable to receive from their families. Their success coaches were their confidants as they transitioned to college.

Clinton and Jen, who transferred to PSU from previous institutions, elected to partake in success coaching because of their poor college experience at their previous institution. Success coaching offered an opportunity to thrive in college and they did not want to experience the feeling of failure again. The transfer participants also felt university services were geared towards traditional first-year students and success coaching was on program that made them feel included.

**We are friends.** Together students and their success coaches created a proposed schedule to meet over the course of a semester. Meetings were set based on the student’s availability. Most participants started seeing their success coach once a week and that commitment altered based on the student’s needs. Success coaches held students to their scheduled meeting times and expected active participation in the program from students. Ivy recalled signing a contract which outlined her and her success coach’s commitment to the program and program expectations.

Success coaches made themselves available to students through office hours, emails, and phone calls. Participants found their success coaches to be approachable and compassionate to students and their needs. Lauren felt she could be honest with her success coach:
It’s a great thing to have someone who you don’t know to talk to who you don’t have to feel like you can’t tell them everything. It’s like someone you don’t know; you can tell them anything and it’s nice to have someone like that to talk to straight up who doesn’t, someone who would never judge you. Who is very understanding and it’s just nice to have someone like that.

Participants were able to speak freely to their success coaches because of their accessibility and openness.

The first couple of meetings between the student and the success coach provided the student with a sense of “college life”. Students were able to engage in casual conversation while success coaches would ask probing questions to learn about the students and their needs. Students guided the discussion with what they felt needed to be addressed. Each meeting with the success coach covered new topics or followed up with previous issues. They were able to talk about any topic, not just problems. When discussing the realm of topics that could be talked about with the success coaches, Jen shared how broad she saw the spectrum: “… the success coaches here truly believe in the whole wellness balance. …because as I’ve come to learn if one of those things is out of balance it can throw everything else out of balance.” Students would share their experiences adjusting to college including their study habits, responsibilities outside of college, and their social life, while coaches engaged in active listening. When they needed a break from college life, students felt that their success coaches could help. Success coaches added a new perspective to managing life as a college student.

Students learned to know their success coaches and develop a relationship. The participants considered their success coaches to be one of their friends. Amanda valued her friendship with her success coach: “If I ever need someone to, you know, anything with on-
campus I can go to her and talk to her about it without feeling like she’s a success coach. She made you feel like you were her friend.” The students had developed strong relationships with their success coaches. Even thought she was not a current PSU student, Delilah described her close relationship with her success coach: “We are like friends, and he’s my coach and my success coach so I really love communicating with him.” Participants felt connected to their success coaches and shared a lasting relationship.

Success coaches challenged the students to change and overcome adversity that they faced with college life. Meetings were more than an opportunity to talk, but a way to implement change. Emma found her success coach to be helpful in all aspects of her life:

I met with her every week for like 30 minutes to an hour and we were supposed to talk about school but she’s there just to talk about whatever you want to talk about so, last semester I had really problems with work. There were people there that were causing havoc and it was ruining my life so she was there to listen and give me insight and input and what she thought about the situation. Then she’d write notes and she’d send me little charts and notes on what I need to do to improve this or how to help me get through certain situations easier. She was kind of like the life coach I guess? She helped me with everything. She helped me learn how to study and schedule, plan out my days and what I’m supposed to do so I can boost my grades or have free time to do whatever.

Aside from the discussion the student had with the success coach during their meetings, success coaches provided students supplementary materials to assist students in applying the tools that were learned during success coaching meetings.

Without success coach meetings, some participants would not have taken the opportunity to be involved on-campus. Success coaches advocated for students to make the most of their
free time by taking an active role and engaging in student life. Success coaches introduced them to opportunities on-campus and told them about other programs that they could take advantage of within the university. Brandy welcomed her success coach’s recommendations for involvement: “…it was a little confidence boost for me.” Because of the student-success coach relationship, success coaches were able to make suggestions for campus involvement that fit students’ personalities. Students were challenged to develop their leadership skills and as a result started taking on leadership roles. Kent recalled the support his success coach provided in terms of getting involved on-campus: “My success coach was focused on the life over here. She would encourage me to be involved in things like leadership positions. She would try to connect me with various opportunities on the campus that I may not know of.” Being involved on-campus also introduced participants to friends and integrated them in college life. Students may not have been involved their first semester but decided to take part in college life their second semester because of their success coach.

**It’s all about balance.** Participants spoke the most about their success coaches enabling them to manage their time and responsibilities. Time management skills were always a focus of success coaching meetings. Ivy spoke about learning to manage her time by working with her success coach:

> I think one thing I remember is he would always make sure that I was planning out my workload. He met with me and made sure that I had written all the different days that I would study in my agenda so I would be prepared for the future.

She continued to apply her success coach’s advice even after their meetings had ended: “He did give me new ideas with the way that he planned out what day I was going to study in my agenda. Some of those techniques I still use now.” Success coaches were able to keep the students from
feeling overwhelmed by teaching them to manage all aspects of their life and students found a sense of relief after weekly meetings.

Managing priorities helped students find the time for studying and kept them on top of their assignments. Students were not balancing their time or providing themselves enough time for school. In order to do so they first needed to learn how much time was required to be successful in their classes. Small time management adjustments made a significant difference for students. Living off campus, some students wanted to head home after completing their classes for the day. Success coaches recommended scheduling time on-campus to work on their academics.

New ways of organizing college life and study habits were introduced. Strengthening time management skills and refining study habits helped students to improve their procrastinating habits. Faith was well aware of the time management steps she needed to take to be successful: “Even though you have tough classes and it may seem impossible, there’s ways that you could still have a life and still get good grades as long as you know how to manage. It’s all about balance.” At the time of the interviews, students were still using study habits their success coach had introduced.

Students didn’t realize how important time management was in college without the help of their success coaches. They learned to acknowledge their priorities daily and how to accomplish their goals for the day. Students developed action plans to make their goals attainable whether they were short term or long term goals. Success coaches assisted students in planning how to overcome the obstacles which were preventing them from succeeding, walked them through their goals, and helped them to prioritize their aspirations in order to achieve.
Managing time taught students to take care of their own well-being and balance the stress of college life. Brandy’s success coach taught her how to manage her new obligations:

I had finally gotten the hang of this college experience being in that my major was set on what I really wanted to do, and of course it wasn’t because I changed it. That helped me realize my time management skills were wrong, so I worked on them my first semester, and going into my second semester it helped because I had joined two organizations over that time period. Adding on-campus organizations to my course load put my time management skills that I learned from success coaching to the test, and I passed. Well, I feel like I passed.

Despite the extensive amount of discussions and tools concerning time management, students still felt they could benefit from additional work in area of time management.

**It’s like going to the gym.** The students saw the role of a success coach to be able to help them in their transition from high school or previous institution to college and through their first-year. Success coaches were not counselors but a resource to assist students. They were able to provide students with the answers to questions and connect them to the right places on-campus. Faith explained her views of a success coach’s purpose: “I feel the role of a success coach is to help the students reach their – how should I say this, guide the students and reaching their full potential.” Non-traditional students found that success coaching helped them continue their strides in college success. There was a sense that no one cared about them before attending success coaching sessions.

When students were not performing to the level they were when in high school, success coaches were able to connect students to tutoring and academic services on-campus. Gabe found his success coaches recommendations to be beneficial: “I learned about how to be prepared for
my exam and how to plan for it and what buildings to go, what kind of tutoring on-campus, and it was great. I raised my GPA from 2.0 to 2.8.” Success coaches were knowledgeable of university policies and procedures and were able to help students utilize the university’s services and programs.

Success coaches held students accountable for their academics and stressed the importance academic performance. Clinton needed the accountability to achieve:

By meeting with [success coach] weekly I did become more balanced and more proactive. I’m better when I have someone holding me accountable I’m much better at getting my work done. Just because if I’m just doing it for me sometimes I’ll just let it slide. I can disappoint myself, but if I disappoint someone else I take it much worse. By doing that it forced me to get started doing it for her, and of those habits eventually came in for me.

Success coaches helped students keep on top of assignments and followed up with their progress and test performance. A process that was helpful for students learning how to be accountable for themselves and their actions. Students were going to be held accountable by someone other than their professors.

Participants found comfort knowing they had a person on-campus who was genuinely concerned about their well-being and successes. Success coaches never lost sight of students’ abilities and helped them to realize their potential. Mark said seeing his success coach was: “like putting gas in the gas tank of keeping me rolling”. Coaches championed students and their accomplishments. This external encouragement helped students to build confidence in themselves and their abilities in and outside of school. Brandy remembered:
He also was good at celebrating what accomplishments I had done already, and what I was improving on. He celebrated my improvements, and he always let me know how proud of me he was, and how he got midterm grades. He was so excited. So that confidence in me reassured my confidence in myself. I’ve always been very confident in myself, but having someone that you put your trust into, reassure your confidence and your ability, it definitely helps.

Ivy compared her interaction with her success coach like going to the gym. She believed some people are able to motivate themselves to go to the gym, while students like Ivy needed a push from others. While students were learning to take responsibility for their own actions and choices, they enjoyed receiving motivation and encouragement from their success coach.

While success coaches were not academic advisors, students talked with the success coach about their academic interests. Hailey’s success coach helped her in selecting a major:

When I first came to [PSU] my major wasn’t marketing, it was like liberal arts or something. So for me being able to talk to him really helped me decide what my major I wanted it to be. We talked about careers. Jobs with marketing and what I could I could do with it.

Success coaches helped guide the student to possible majors that were in line with their interests.

PSU requires all first-time, full-time students to enroll in and pass a university success course. The eight week success courses are designed to assist students in transitioning to college. According to information gathered from PSU, the course is co-taught with a PSU faculty or staff member and a peer mentor. Success coaches taught university success courses at PSU. Participants, who spoke of having the same individual as their success coach and university success instructor, preferred the individual meetings as compared to the class. Lauren
explained why she preferred meeting with her success coach over just taking the course: “I felt it was more personal. [University success course] is a big class. You can’t really be personal with your teacher.” Materials covered in university success courses were brought up during success coaching sessions. The sessions provided a chance for the students to review the material from class one-on-one with their success coach. Ivy found the parallelism between success coaching and the university success course: “Some of the techniques that they taught in UNIV class kind of tied over with success coaching.” The meetings outside of class allowed the success coach/instructor to provide personal attention to the student and apply the tools learned in the course to the student life.

**Building a foundation.** Success coaching is offered to students during their first year at PSU. Success coaching provided the participants with a foundation for succeeding in college. Some of the participants that chose not to continue their success coaching for a second semester felt as if they had been given a platform to build upon. The others that continued simply wanted to have their continued support as their foundation of success grew.

Emma, Faith, Ivy, and Jen chose to only participate in success coaching for one semester. Delilah was not enrolled the semester following when she began success coaching so consequently did not participate in success coaching for a second semester. The remaining eight participants elected to participate in success coaching during their second semester at PSU. Emma, Faith, Ivy, and Jen chose not to continue because they felt they had grown out the program. Students did not have time to see their success coach regularly. They had taken on additional obligations, and their courses were more demanding. Faith shared why she discontinued her meetings with the success coach: “I don’t think I needed it the second semester. I think I needed it the first semester, because it was my first semester in college. By the second
semester, I kind of got on the groove of it all.” Some participants shared that they knew of group success coaching opportunities but chose not to take part.

The other participants opted to remain part of the success coaching program for an additional semester. They wanted an additional semester with their success coach to get “an extra push”. Lauren wanted others to benefit from the same opportunity she had:

‘Cause I felt that other people would need to be there more than me. I know what I’m doing now. I had a lot of help with it and if I need to I would definitely go back and talk to him. I think I shouldn’t go every week if I don’t need to when someone else could be there.

Even though the participants took part in success coaching for a second semester, students still viewed the program as ending with their first-year. Participants shared that although they viewed success coaching as a program that was needed for first-year or first semester students, their success coaches still cared about them and would always be willing to help. Brandy said: “I do feel like I can still go back to my success coach and ask him anything, and he’ll be able to give the advice.” They wanted to continue their relationship with their success coach even after they had stopped seeing their coach. Success coaches welcomed the students to come back for additional coaching if needed.

Students who were performing poor academically or did not continue their second semester at PSU, found their success coach to keep up with them. Delilah was not currently enrolled at the time of the study. She felt lost, but her success coach continued to stay in touch with her: “Every month or so if he don’t hear from me, he will just, “Hey [Delilah], just checking on you and following up, how is everything going?” For Delilah, the constant contact from her success coach was instrumental in her persistence of education. When speaking about her
interaction with her success coach about dropping out, she attributed: “I probably wouldn’t have wanted to come back.” He encouraged her to return, pushed her to take advantage of the educational opportunity, and assisted her through the reapplication process.

Participants thought other students did not take advantage of the program because they were unaware of the services and what success coaching could provide to them as a student. Due to success coaching being a non-mandated program, students did not see the necessity to add an additional obligation to college life. Lauren wished more students would have capitalized on the opportunity to meet with a success coach:

I know one other person who did it, and I think that really that’s sad, but I wish more people would’ve gone because it was helpful to me and I wish my other friends would’ve wanted to go, but they thought it would be a waste of time. I told my freshman friends they should do it this semester because it was so helpful to me and I wish other people would be able to do that.

Friends of participants were still trying to adjust to college life even though they were in their second year at the university. The participants, such as Hailey and Lauren, felt that meeting with a success coach would have helped their friends “get the hang of college”. Lauren was forever grateful for the experience she was provided: “That’s someone I would remember even out of college. This whole program helped me. It definitely got me through my first semester and I would never forget that.” Hailey and Lauren felt they were settled into college life because of their meetings with their success coach.

Participants recognized that success coaching would be beneficial to PSU students as they transition from high school to college or to college from their previous institution. Success coaches helped students survive their first-year of college. Some felt any classification of
students should be able to have a success coach but students should outgrow the need for a success coach by their junior or senior year in college. Hailey shared her thoughts on which other students could benefit from meeting with a success coach:

Definitely all freshmen, I feel like should have it. Maybe transfer students. Freshmen, because it’s their first-year in college, and everybody’s lost and doesn’t know what to do. Transfer students ‘cause they’re new to the university, and it might be different from their other university.

Participants felt students should consider success coaching if they were in need of socialization, procrastinated, had poor study habits, or if home did not provide support.

One word. During follow-up one-on-one interviews, participants were asked to describe success coaching in one word. The following table shares each participant’s one word response.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>One word description for Success Coaching</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amanda</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brandy</td>
<td>Helpful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delilah</td>
<td>Helpful</td>
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<td>Mark</td>
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Table 4. One Word Descriptions for Success Coaching

From students’ one word descriptions, they were able to further express their experience with success coaching. The students’ responses had a consistent theme when identifying one word to describe their experiences with their success coach. Overall, the students’ experiences were positive. They found their success coaches to knowledgeable and someone they could turn to for assistance. PSU administered surveys to all students that participated in success coaching. The results of these surveys echoed the students’ one word description of success coaching.
The researcher received fall 2013 success coaching survey results. The fifty-four students experiencing success coaching in fall 2013 were emailed surveys at the midpoint in the fall 2013 semester and at the end of the fall 2013 semester. The surveys asked students to rate their success coaches based on specific characteristics, indicated the topics they discussed with their success coach, and rate their overall success coaching experience. Thirty-one students participated in the midterm survey. At the midpoint of the semester, ninety-four percent of students considered their success coaching experience excellent. Results from the midterm survey also indicated an overwhelming majority of students felt success coaching prepared them to be successful at PSU (94%).

Twenty-three of the fifty-four students that participated in success coaching during fall 2013 responded to the end of semester survey. From the results of the survey, ninety-one percent of the students rated their overall experience with their success coach as excellent. Success coaches’ characteristics were rated by the students. The highest rated characteristics were overall helpfulness (91%) and concerned for the students’ academic and personal success (91%). Students were asked to share their favorite aspects of success coaching and eighteen students responded. Of the eighteen student responses, 61.11% identified their favorite aspect of success coaching was talking to someone openly about their concerns. Ninety-one percent of the students that responded to the survey stated they felt better prepared for finals due to their success coaching experience.

**Chapter Summary**

Students shared with the researcher their concerns of adjusting to college life. The students were met with adversity and had to learn how to navigate college. Before attending PSU, students were faced with decisions and uncertainties about college. They weighed out their
options of institutions to attend in order to pursue their post-secondary degree, and were unsure of what would be expected of them in terms of college academics. They wanted to feel a part of their new institution and were concerned of how to engage in the campus culture. Starting college, for some participants, meant moving away from home for the first time. Other participants had to learn how to manage their current living arrangements at home coupled with college demands. Once enrolled in courses, students had to learn how to manage their new college life with obligations and free time. They had a new found sense of independence. Through the student’s meetings with their academic advisor and their success coach, they were provided valuable information to assist them with their transitions and their college career.

Academic advisors provided students with information regarding the courses that were needed for the student to complete their intended degree. Students were required to meet with their academic advisors during their first-year of college. This was ensured by a registration hold being applied to students’ accounts that could only be lifted by academic advisors. Students described their relationship with their academic advisor to be formal and meetings were structured. While the students were confused about having a first-year academic advisor and a college academic advisor, the students still viewed the meetings with their advisor to be instrumental in the academic success. From their meetings with academic advisors, students knew the process of academic advising, what as required of them as a student, and knew their academic advisor could provide valuable information. The academic advisors also provided students with information concerning academic policies and procedures at PSU.

Success coaching was optional for first-year students at PSU. The participants of this study wanted to take part in success coaching because they were determined succeed in college. They felt by having a success coach they would be able to conquer life as a college student.
Students felt that they were friends with their success coaches and they could talk with them about anything. Success coaches provided them support and taught them the importance of time management as a college student. The meetings with their success coaches were positive and the students enjoyed their success coaching experience.

In addition to academic advising and success coaching, students spoke of several other retention programs and events. Students’ engaged in first-year welcome week events, first-year programming throughout the semester, social meet and greets for students, orientation, and a scavenger hunt which allowed the students to visit offices on-campus. The services and programs provided to students were all under the umbrella of the institution. The programs and services encouraged students to discover other offices and services on-campus, connected the students with faculty and staff members. The events offered through the institution fostered university pride. Through academic advising, success coaching, and other retention initiatives students were provided multiple opportunities to engage with their campus community at PSU.
Chapter 5

Discussion

The following chapter answers the research question: how do college students describe their experiences with academic advising and success coaching? The answers have been formulated by data collected from interviews with students from Pelican State University and artifacts collected from PSU. In the final chapter, the researcher discusses the findings, implications for practice, and limitations of the study. The chapter concludes with recommendations for future research.

This research study explored first-year student retention programs at Pelican State University, a four-year comprehensive research public university in Louisiana. Student retention is a major concern for higher education administrators (Ishler & Upcraft, 2005; Jacobs & Archie, 2008), specifically in the state of Louisiana. Student retention is linked to performance base funding that is allocated to higher education institutions within Louisiana. Retaining students is vital to the financial stability of higher education institutions (Levitz et al., 1999; Lundquist, Spalding, & Landrum, 2002; Nutt, 2003; Rabovsky, 2012). It is important to understand students’ perspectives of student retention programs within the context of higher education in Louisiana to strengthen the current initiatives for student retention.

Theoretical Framework and Findings

Tinto’s Theory of Student Departure (1975) served as the framework for the research conducted. Tinto’s Theory of Student Departure (1975) identified that students are less likely to withdraw from their institution when they are socially and academically integrated into the campus culture. Core concepts that should also be considered when applying Tinto’s Theory of Student Departure (1975) include pre-entry attributes, goals or commitments, institutional experiences, integration, and outcomes (Brunsden, Davies, Shevlin, & Bracken, 2000). Tinto’s
Theory of Student Departure (1975) is centered on the student’s integration to their university and how the student acclimates to their environment. Through the discussion the findings, students’ academic and social integration to PSU were examined. Both of these mentoring strategies were used by PSU to retain students. Student-faculty mentoring can be seen as encompassing both social and academic integration, directly associating to Tinto’s Theory of Student Departure to increasing persistence (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979; Tinto, 1987). The data collected from this study confirms Tinto’s Theory of Student Departure (1975). Students’ out of classroom experiences and relationships developed through academic advising and success coaching were instrumental in students’ academic and social integration to PSU. The following empirical findings discussed support this notion.

**Empirical Findings**

**Academic Advising**

Through their experiences with academic advisors, participants informed the researcher that they were confused by the advising process, who they could receive academic advising from, and the extent of information the academic advisors could provide in relation to their college career. Previous research conducted found similar results as students were confused by academic advising and students were unaware of the resources that are available through academic advising (Hunter & White, 2004). It is important for college students to have a clear understanding of their academic requirements. Confusion surrounding academic expectations can impact student retention. Specifically, in regards to retaining first-year students to graduation it is important that expectations for academic success are clear to the student (Brinkworth et al., 2009; Tinto, 1999). Clear communication concerning the process of
academic advising and the services that are provided to students through their advisors is important to student retention and progression.

Additionally, the process of moving students from a first-year advisor to a college academic advisor after the student completed over 30 semester hours created uncertainty for students. It was difficult after a year of working with first-year advisors for students to form a relationship with their college academic advisor. There was a level of comfort between the student and their first-year advisor. Forcing the students to change from first-year advisor to college advisor resulted in the students feeling uneasy and unsure about the advising process. Handing students off from their first-year to college advisor could have an effect on students’ college experience. Other studies have found the relationship development between the student and their academic advisor during their first-year of college can impact the student’s academic career (Young-Jones et al., 2013). The first-year in college is an influential time and institutions need to capitalize on the connection that first-year students are making with their academic advisors. Research has shown college programs that focus on connecting first-year students to their institutions are more likely to have first-year students that persist to their second year (Turner & Thompson, 2014).

The nature of meetings between students and academic advisors was formal. The students were seeking information about courses within their major, and the information provided was straightforward. Students’ main objective was to learn what was needed to complete their degree and graduate. They were not concerned with who was providing them the pertinent information. This is in part as to why the students did not remember who their advisor was, or the names of their advisors. There was no lasting impression from being academically advised. The business-like relationship between students and academic advisors contradicts
other studies that recommend academic advising connect students to their institution in addition to providing academic support (Campbell & Nutt, 2008; Nutt, 2003; Young-Jones et al., 2013). Students’ only memories of academic advising consisted of information regarding how to register for courses or the courses that were needed to complete their degree. Previous research about academic advising demonstrated students must develop a lasting relationship with their advisor in order to have a quality academic advising experience (Cuseo, 2005; Drake, 2011; Lau, 2003; Robbins, 2012; Roberts & Styron, 2010).

Even though there was not a personal relationship between the students and their academic advisor, there was a level of respect. The students valued the advice that their academic advisors shared with them. Regardless of the confusion surrounding advising, the students still found it important to meet with their advisor and to heed their advice. This supports Freeman (2008) and Noel-Levitz (2009) findings that students recognize the importance of academic advising to their college education. The students understood their academic advisors were a wealth of information pertaining to their academic future. They never questioned the advice that was given to them or direction they received from their academic advisor as it pertained to their academic progression. The students wanted to be successful in college and saw their academic advisors as a means to do so. Their perception was their academic advisor could connect them to resources on-campus and to resources within their career field. It was previously discussed that academic advisors should connect students to their campus (Campbell & Nutt, 2008; Nutt, 2003; Young-Jones et al., 2013) but additionally, as Bigger (2005) highlights one of the many roles academic advisors is to guide students to graduation and associate the student’s academic program to a career. The students wanted to
know exactly what they needed to do to be successful in college and in their career. To them their college academic advisors held the answers.

**Success Coaching**

Students’ experiences with success coaching revealed that the students perceived their success coaches to be their on-campus advocates. The students were looking for someone to understand them. Prior to meeting with their success coaches, the students felt they would go unnoticed at PSU. The participants felt their success coaches took a genuine interest in them. It is important for students to make a connection with someone on-campus. Research has proven that having a faculty mentor on-campus has positive impact on students. Faculty mentoring relationships can positively influence students motivation (Jaasma & Koper, 1999; Komarraju et al., 2010; Pascarella, 1980), commitment to their education (Kuh & Hu, 2001; Strauss & Volkwein, 2004), academic performance (Anderson, 1995; Pascarella et al., 1978) and can increase student retention (Kuh & Hu, 2001; Nagda et al., 1998; Pascarella, 1980; Turner & Thompson, 2014). Having a mentoring relationship, similar to the experience PSU students had with their success coaches, can support students to persist from their first to second year in college.

Success coaches were a connection to the university that was outside of the classroom setting. As discussed in Chapter Four, some students did have success coaches teach their first-year student success course. However, the students were still provided an out of the classroom experience with success coaching because of their one-on-one meeting time. Providing the students faculty mentoring outside of the classroom has been show to increase student retention to their institution (Kuh & Hu, 2001; Nagda et al., 1998; Pascarella, 1980; Turner & Thompson,
The students’ experiences with their success coaches confirmed the importance of student-faculty relationships outside of the classroom.

Success coaches were more invested in students and took more of hands on approach when working with student than academic advisors. They were closer to the students and knew more about the individuals and their needs than the student’s academic advisors. Participants had a different type of relationships with their academic advisor then they did with their success coach. Throughout the interview process, when students were asked questions about academic advising, the students default the answers to be about success coaching as opposed to academic advising. To the students, success coaching is where the priority interaction occurred. Success coaches were not intended to give academic advice, but they still gave advice to the students in regards to their academic progression. The students solicited their success coaches’ advice in terms of academics because they had an established relationship with them. The students confided in their success coaches and trusted their opinions. Having their success coach give advice about the classes they should take was just an extended conversation of students’ goals and aspirations and the students’ time management skills. Course completion was part of the short term goals that the students needed to accomplish in order to reach their long term goal of degree completion. The students were learning to manage their time by scheduling their courses and developing a timeline to degree completion. Academic advising was an easy correlation to the other topics that were being discussed within success coaching. In success coaching, the students could have a conversation with someone about their academics and not just be provided information. The success coaches had taken on the role of an academic coach. The National Academic Advising Association (NACADA, 2014) defines academic coaching someone who
works with the student to develop their goals and then helps them to connect those personal goals to their academic goals.

Additionally, success coaches had an active role in meeting the needs of specific student subpopulations within the study which included transfer students, international students, first-generation students, and non-traditional students. For each of these subpopulations, finding support from others on campus, their families and friends was difficult. They turn to their success coaches for support. The meetings with success coaches were beneficial. Success coaching offered students encouragement to be successful and advocated for the students to continue in their accomplishments. Success coaches provided the student reassurance in the academic goals and the students sought validation from their success coaches. McClellan & Moser (2011) found the role of the success coach is to understand the students’ needs and help the student identify how the success coach can fulfill those needs. Through their work with the subpopulations of students included in this study, success coaches were able to identify students’ needs and assist them in meeting their needs. Understanding subpopulations of students is significant in process of strengthening student retention. It is important for retention programs to understand the student population they are serving and to be all inclusive (Tinto, 1993).

**Student Retention**

Academic advising is designed to mentor students, connect them to the institution and support them through the education process (Campbell & Nutt, 2008; Nutt, 2003; Young-Jones et al., 2013). There were four, first-year academic advisors to provide one-on-one time to 930 students at PSU in fall 2013. That is 1:233 ratio of academic advisor to student. Academic advisors have further job responsibilities in addition to the one-on-one advising they provide to students. Taken together the students’ perception of their advising experiences and the number
of students being service, academic advising was not an experience; it was a process for the participants. Having unmanageable student to academic advisor ratios make it difficult to provide a comprehensive advising experience (Freeman, 2008). It is important to focus on providing an advising experience for all students, because even a non-quality advising experience can have a greater impact on freshman attrition than if the student received no advising from the institution (Metzner, 1989). Furthermore, students’ interaction with their academic advisor should be on going and not consist of one visit a semester. It is important for the student to have constant contact with their academic advisor (Lau, 2003). The students contact and quality of interactions with academic advisor should be strengthened because of the importance advising plays in students’ retention, progression, and graduation.

The process of academic advising is important to retaining students at PSU. Academic advisors were able to help students stay on track with their academic studies. They were able to ensure the student was consistent with their curriculum path, and course selections were on course for degree completion. Similar to the relationship of the student to their academic advisor, the role of the academic advisor was formal in nature but imperative to the retention and progression of students. Nutt (2003) found academic advising to be the center of student retention. Despite the necessity, students found it more of a challenge to see the effects of meeting with an academic advisor. At the time of the research study, most of the participants were just starting their second year of college. The concept of graduation was not a reality for them. Applying the advice that was provided to them by their academic advisor was important but did not provide instant gratification. However, the information they were receiving from their academic advisor concerning their college academics was vital to their progression.
Success coaches not only helped students cope with their day to day issues, but also were able to foster a relationship with the students and knew the student as an individual. In fall 2013 semester, five success coaches were serving as mentors to fifty-four students. This is a success coach to student ratio of 1:11. Having a small success coach to student ratio allowed for the success coaches to spend a quality amount time with the students and provide a valuable experience. Success coaches also have additional job responsibilities in addition to success coaching. This small number of students is more manageable than working with over 200 hundred students as the academic advisor. Earlier research confirms that students having a personal connection with someone on-campus (Turner & Thompson, 2014; Veenstra, 2009) and a student feeling as if they belong at their institution (Jacobs & Archie, 2008; Kuh & Hu, 2001; Morrow, & Ackermann, 2012; O’Keefe, 2013) are instrumental in first-year retention and student persistence.

When issues arose that were beyond the scope of what the success coach could handle, they were able to connect the students to a department or office on campus that could help. The success coach served as a gateway for the students to connect to the university and helped them to make the most of the resources that were available to them as students. The success coaches took on the role of being a mentor to the students. As defined by Schmidt & Wolfe (2009), they were acting as a role model to the students by providing them advice and opportunities to ensure college success. Success coaches were focused on the overall development of the students. It is important for students to have a support unit on-campus, specifically for first-year student as they transition into the academic and social aspects of college life (Tinto, 1999; Wilcox, Winn, & Fyvie-Gauld, 2005).
The students opted into success coaching because they wanted to succeed in college. They shared that they felt that success coaching did provide them with the necessary means to be successful. The participants raved over their experience with their success coaches. They felt their success coaches should be attributed for helping them through their first year of college. The students were able to see the effects of meeting with their success coaches immediately. The information that was provided to them during their coaching meetings could be applied to their everyday life. Academic advising was providing the students with information that would be beneficial to the longevity of their academic career.

Drake (2011) found retention can be attributed to three main factors: early engagement of students to their institution, programming for first-year students, and quality academic advising. Both academic advising and success coaching are important to students’ progression, retention, and graduation. Academic advising can be compared to a big picture approach and success coaching can be compared a detail oriented approach to student retention. Academic advising provided a scope for the students’ entire academic career. They were able to help the students realize where they were currently in their academic career, and where they were going next in terms of academics. While success coaching did the same, as far as aiding the students to see where they were going next, they were able to focus on the daily issues and the development of the students.

Development of Self

The findings in Chapter Four reveal the students’ development over their first year of college at PSU. As students entered their first-year, academic advisors were assisting students through the process of enrollment. They supplied the students with “flow charts” that would guide the direction of their future academics. As the student entered into their second semester
or second year, they started to gain confidence and began to advise themselves. The students still needed their advisor, but now the advisor’s role was to authenticate the student’s choices and academic progress. The students were taking ownership in their education.

Students developed a sense of autonomy through their success coaching experiences. This supports previous research conducted in regards to the effects of success coaching. Success coaches provide more than academic support and guidance; they are also focused on challenging students to develop their own autonomy through self-reflection, aspiring for future goals, and becoming engaged in their institution (Allen & Lester, 2012; McClelean & Moser, 2011; Robinson & Gahagan, 2010). Initially, students were meeting with their success coaches once a week or twice a month. Slowly, over the course of the first semester or first year, some of the students felt that they had reached a point where they were too busy to meet with their success coaches. Other obligations, including involvement on-campus, academic courses, social opportunities, and job responsibilities, were taking priority over the students’ meetings with their coaches. The students were developing their own life at PSU. Student-faculty relationships help students develop competence, manage emotions, move through autonomy towards interdependence, develop mature interpersonal relationships, establish his or her identity, develop a purpose and develop their integrity (Evans et al., 1998). They were no longer dependent on their meetings with their success coach to help them navigate their life as a college student.

The participants identified that they felt they had changed from their first fall semester to their second fall semester at PSU. Participants were more comfortable and knowledgeable of college by the end of their second semester and the beginning of their second year. Students embraced changing as a result of college and from participating in academic advising and
success coaching. They found confidence with their goals and themselves. At the time of the interviews, the participants were clear and specific with their plans for life after Pelican State University. They came into their own and discovered responsibilities.

While PSU was not the first choice for the participants, the majority of them seemed to be overly pleased with their college experience thus far. The students were proud to be students at PSU and want were eager to be part of the institution. Over the course of the first-year students became integrated to PSU college environment. The mentoring of academic advising and success coaching were significant in fostering student pride in their institution. Astin (1977) determined positive student-faculty interactions leads to students being satisfied in their personal life, academic goals, and college administration. Furthermore, when students are satisfied with their education experience it leads to students feeling a part of their institution (Astin, 1977; Kuh & Hu, 2001).

Navigating College Life- Successfully

Participants’ experiences of academic advising and success coaching helped to address some of the transitional issues the students were facing. Participants were concerned when first entering college. While some were not as forth coming with transitions that they faced when entering the college environment, issues started to surface. Through the interview process, students discussed navigating college life and their difficulty embracing their new way of life. The students wanted to connect with the institution and they chose to take part in success coaching to make that connection. The students were aware the transition to college would be difficult at times. They were open to assistance provided to them from the institution to overcome their college transitions. The students struggled with coming into adulthood but feeling like they needed help and guidance from others. They wanted someone to care for them.
Just as previous research has suggested in terms of first-year students, the participants are in need of support during their first-year transition (Tinto, 1999; Wilcox, Winn, & Fyvie-Gauld, 2005). Students were concerned about fitting in and being part of PSU. After their first-year at PSU, the majority of the participants shared experiences and stories that lead to the notion that they were acclimated to their institution.

Academic advisors and success coaches provided students with services that assisted them through the transition of their first year at PSU. Both offered the students valuable information to help them succeed during their tenure at Pelican State University. From the findings of this study, the students felt they were provided valuable information from their academic advisor and they were given an advantage to succeed in college by participating in success coaching. While participants’ responses illustrated academic advisors and success coaches were contributory to their successes, the participants viewed academic advisors and success coaches’ functions different from each other. Academic advisors provided information towards their academic goals. The students had an experience with their success coach. It is important to reduce student attrition to provide students a positive undergraduate experience (Astin, 1993; Kuh et al., 2008; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1975; Woosley, 2003).

Implications for Future Practices

The current body of research examines the effects of student-faculty mentoring relationships on first-year student retention. This study combines academic advising and success coaching in the context of higher education in Louisiana. As a result of findings of this study, the researcher recommends developing meaningful mentoring experiences and combining retention strategies as implications for future practice.
Institutions should provide students with meaningful one-on-one mentoring. Institutions can implement a number of strategies to ensure students are provided a meaningful mentoring relationship by evaluating the number of students serviced by one mentor, the development of the mentor relationship, and establishing mentor relationships with the intention to foster students through degree completion. The discussion of the findings reviewed the ratios of student to academic advisors and student to success coaches. The number of students receiving academic advising far outnumbered the number students who were part of success coaching. A relationship was formed between students and success coaches because of the number of students being served and the nature of the relationship. Institutions should have a manageable amount of students assigned to faculty mentors. Also, the relationship should be formed by the success coach reaching out to the student. This approach would foster the development of a relationship as opposed to the student being assigned to a faculty member. In first-year academic advising, there was complete disconnect because students were assigned alphabetically to an academic advisor. When students met with their college advisor, they would be advised by any faculty member that was available to assist the student at that time. This gives the impression of the student being a number to their academic advisor.

For future initiatives and to provide a meaningful mentoring relationship, it would be beneficial for the students to work with the same faculty mentor throughout their tenure at their institution. Students are confused by having two separated advisors. Additionally, the lasting mentor relationship will further develop the student and provide a well-rounded academic experience.

Furthermore, the roles of academic advisors (Nutt, 2003) as well as success coaches (NACADA, 2014; Tripp 2005) are important to student success and retention. Academic
advisors provided students with information that overtime would be beneficial for their degree completion whereas success coaching provided the students with instant gratification. It is important to have both. As a student first enters college, research has shown that it is important that they make a lasting connection with someone on-campus. By introducing students to their success coach, they are immediately connected to the institution and feel as if they have a connection. But immediate gratification has to be paired with the overall goal in mind. Institutions are concerned with the retention, progression, and graduation of their students. This is directly related to students’ progression in their academic program. The pairing of academic and social integration within Tinto’s Model of Student Departure (1975) echoes the need for both. However, within the current climate of higher education, where institutions are forced to provide more with less funding, these two programs should be combined. Institutions should have one person to be the students’ advocate, coach, and academic advisor. Holds could be applied to accounts just as the academic advisors, but students would be required to meet with their success coach throughout the semester. The researcher will make further make recommendations for practice by referring to this new role as an academic success coach.

Based on the finding of the study, it is recommended that institutions combine the roles of academic advisors and success coaches. This will allow for more faculty members to serve as mentors and the students would be able to work with the same faculty mentor until graduation. Additionally, students will have access to information early in their college career. Some of the participants were hoping to gain information about their major when first entering PSU. However, they found their first-year advisor did not provide them with enough information. By combining academic advising and success coaching, students will be directly working with
someone from their academic college and gain specific knowledge for their major during their first-year.

Another implication for practice is for institutions to implement the use of online degree audits. This would allow students to have access to the degree progression online. This feature will assist students in becoming independent and assuming the responsibility of their education early in their college career. Participants in this study wanted to continually speak to their academic advisor to validate their academic progress. An online degree audit would allow the students to validate their academic progression with a click of a button. Online degree audits would also beneficial for academic success coaches that are serving as mentors to students. Having an online degree audit would allow the academic success coach more time to engage with the student. From the findings, students’ experiences with their academic advisors were formal and straight forward. There was not enough time for the academic advisors to serve the volume of students that needed assistance and engage in meaningful conversations with the students. Instead of the meeting time being spent confirming the student’s course completions, an online degree audit would allow for the information to already be prepared. The academic success coach can spend the time with the student in conversation about their academics and other topics that are important to the student’s success. Essentially, an academic success coach could be crossed trained as a success coach and academic advisor. The online degree audit could be used as the main tool to assist in students’ progression in their academics.

Success coaching meetings were led by the students and talking points that were similar to the university success courses were used. Retention programs are designed to assist students in their personal development. In a generation where everything is individualized, it is not unusual that the student spoke highly about their one-on-one meetings with their success coaches
as opposed to meeting with a group of students for success coaching or being part of a university success classes. The structures of the success coach meetings plays well into our society which values having individual means to promote yourself and your successes (Spence, 1985). There needs to be further discussions in regards to the need of providing university success courses if institutions are able to supplement the courses role with individualized success coaching. If funding was unlimited, it would be ideal to implement every retention program feasible. But considering budgets are constantly decreasing and the reduction of personnel, it is not the best use of funds and of employees to provide both. Based on the study’s findings, it would be more beneficial to provide the students an academic success coach who would give one-on-one mentoring to students. This recommend change from providing success courses to success coaches is applicable when the institution is able to provide a meaningful mentor relationship to students.

Of the interview responses, it was the out of the classroom experiences that students spoke about the most. There was never discussion about a lecture or activity that was done in class. Previous research highlights the benefits of out of classroom experiences have on students’ college experience (Anderson, 1995; Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Kuh & Hu, 2001; Pascarella et al., 1978; Salinitri, 2005; Strauss & Volkwein, 2004). Academic advising and success coaching can provide students with a quality out of the classroom experience. The use of an academic success coach will enhance this experience because it will merge the information received in academic advising with the connection of working with a success coach. From previous research done in the field of success coaching it was concluded that advising a student can take the form of coaching (McClellan & Moser, 2011) but success coaching is not the same form of mentoring as academic advising (NACADA, 2014). It is important for institutions to
focus on the out of classroom experience when considering their student retention programs. The findings from this study are beneficial in informing other universities, specifically within the state of Louisiana, on ways to improve first-year student retention and ultimately meet their GRAD Act measures. Reduction in current funding is forcing institutions to strategically provide services for students. The data collected from this study identified current practices in first-year student retention to inform the current and future programs and services provided on campuses for first-year students.

**Limitations and Future Research**

This study included students from a four-year public research institution in Louisiana to inform practice. The sample for the following study was limited to only students that participated in academic advising and success coaching in fall 2013 at PSU. As mentioned in the findings, academic advising and success coaching are only two of the many retention programs that are offered by PSU. The following study reviewed only two programs, academic advising and success coaching, from the perspectives of the students who experienced the programs. To further inform the current findings of this study, it would be beneficial for future research to include students who did not participate in success coaching during their first semester at PSU. The data from this population of students will identify how students without a success coach progress through college. The students that participated in this study spoke of the role their success coach had in assisting them through their transitions. It would be helpful to know from the students that do not have success coaches, how they are navigating and adjusting to life as a college student. Additionally, there were several other programs and services that surfaced during the one-on-one interviews. Since this study is from the student perspective, it is difficult to understand how these programs work together as part of the institution’s comprehensive
enrollment management plan. Future research should review the comprehensive enrollment
management plan offered at institutions. This will better inform all institutional retention
practices.

The participants included in this study spoke highly of their experiences with academic
advising and success coaching. It is important to note that while all students who participated in
success coaching in fall 2013 were asked to participate in this research study, not every student
chose to participate. It is possible that students who did not to participate in this study may not
have had different experiences than the students whose stories are shared in the results of this
study. Furthermore, the surveys conducted by PSU to evaluate the academic advising and
success coaching experiences yielded positive results. However, the results do not include all
participants, only those who wished to share their thoughts about their academic advising and
success coaching experiences. It would be beneficial for future research to understand the
perspective of all students that experience academic advising and success coaching. Inclusion of
all students may yield different result than the following study.

The researcher encountered some challenges while trying to conduct the following
research study. It was difficult to recruit students to participate in the study. To overcome this
issue and to reach students, the researcher used social media to send messages to potential
participants. From this experience it is recommended that future research consider social media
as a means to recruit to students. Additionally, the researcher failed to hold successful focus
group interviews. Future research should utilize social media to hold virtual interviews and
focus groups. By expanding how researchers can connect to participants and communicate with
them, we will be able to understand more perspectives and enhance the current body of research.
The researcher was only able to interview thirteen students to learn about their experiences with academic advising and success coaching. Through the research collected, the researcher did identify some participants as belonging to subpopulations. However, this limited number of students did not fully inform the many subpopulations of students and their specific needs. In addition to the subpopulations of students included in this study, college students may include students with disabilities, adult learners, and community college transfers. Future research should be conducted in each of the subpopulations to determine if any additional variables exist. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to interview the students that took part in these retention programs at each stage of their education to include first-year through their graduation from the institution. Success coaching was initiated in fall 2013 at PSU. The programs’ brief time at the chosen site selection limited the study’s findings to the students’ second year of college. The same study conducted with students at different points in their college career could yield supplemental results to the results of this study.

Future research will need to be conducted at all institutions within the Louisiana to get both an in-depth analysis of each individual campus’ efforts for improving first-year retention and a complete picture of retention strategies in the state. This study is also limited to reviewing a four-year institution’s retention programming. Additional research will need to review two-year community colleges as well. While the following study provides some insight as to how support services and programs contribute to the Louisiana GRAD Act performance measures, it not reflect all state institution’s efforts.

Retention is the effort of the entire institution (Ishler & Upcraft, 2005). In order to further understand first-year student retention and the Louisiana GRAD Act, there is a need to study this topic from the perspective of administrators, faculty, and staff at Louisiana institutions.
All stakeholders’ perspectives should be considered when working on the issue of student retention. The perceptions of institution employees could potentially reveal additional strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities pertaining to student retention. Understanding their perspective on first-year retention in the midst of recent policy changes will aid in implementing changes in campus culture that will enhance first-year student retention initiatives.

**Conclusion**

Retention programs are essential to higher education funding in the state of Louisiana. The following study sought to further understand the retention programs at a university in the state of Louisiana. Through the perspectives of the students, the researcher learned about the students’ experiences with academic advising and success coaching. A qualitative design was used to gather interview data and gain in-depth details about students’ experiences. From the data collected the researcher identified three emerging themes; navigating college life, experience with academic advisor, and experience with success coach. The themes identified further supported for student retention programs to provide students with meaningful mentoring relationships.

Throughout the data collected from participants, the roles of academic advising and success coaching were important to the students’ success at PSU. Students recognized the information that their academic advisors could provide as their road map to complete their college degree and to be successful within their career. Success coaches were providing the students with information based on the students’ needs but the students spoke more about the relationship they had with their success coach. Their experience with their success coach created a connection between them and PSU. Students also viewed their success coach as a facilitator in
their personal development. From the students’ perspective, the connection and experience they had with their success coach was influential in their college experience.

The mentoring strategies of academic advising and success coaching are equally important to students’ retention, progression, and graduation. From the students’ perspective, the development of a relationship, out of the classroom, is meaningful. By combining the experience of success coaching with the direction and information of academic advising, institutions will be able to better serve students. Strengthening these mentoring strategies and providing them to students through the services of an academic success coach will enhance the students’ college experience and as a result improve the institution’s retention, progression and graduation rates.
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APPENDIX A

One-on-One Interview Protocol

Introduction

Hi (insert student’s name), thank you for volunteering to meet with me today. I am conducting a dissertation research study. The purpose of the research is to discover new information about the first-year college students’ perception of persistence and your experiences with academic advising as well as success coaching. Through the data collected, the results might influence student retention issues for first-year students. Today, I will ask you questions concerning your first-year college experience, academic advising, and success coaching. Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. If you complete today’s interview, I will provide you with a $10.00 gift card. The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be used. Your responses will be confidential. For the purpose of this study the institution that you attend will be referred to by a pseudonym, Pelican State University (PSU). The risk associated with partaking in this study is minimal. Do you have any questions concerning the research study? (pause for response)

Okay, I will be recording today’s interview in order to accurately translate your responses. Are you okay with that? (pause for response)

Before we get started, I would like for you to complete this consent form and this demographic questionnaire. I would like to give you some time to read through both forms and if you have any questions please feel free to ask.

(Once student has completed paperwork) Okay, let’s get started.

Questions

1. Tell me about your college experience and why did you decide to attend college?

2. Tell me about the other institutions you considered attending and why you chose to attend [PSU].

3. Can you identify, if any, transitional issues or challenges that you may have encountered while in your first-year?
4. What is your ultimate goal in regards to your academic career?

5. How do you feel this fall compares to last fall?

6. What has been your experience with faculty and staff on-campus?

7. Tell me about your relationships with other students on-campus. Did you know them prior to attending college?

8. Tell me about you experience with academic advising.

9. What do you believe is the role of your academic advisor?

10. How often did or do you and your academic advisor meet?

11. Tell me how meeting with your academic advisor was initiated.

12. What do you feel that you accomplished when visiting your academic advisor?

13. Tell me about your experiences with your success coach.

14. How often did or do you and your success coach meet?

15. What do you believe is the role of your success coach?

16. What do you feel that you accomplish(ed) when visiting your success coach?

17. Tell me how meeting with your success coach was initiated.

18. Did you make a plan with either your academic advisor, success coach or both? Can you tell me about this plan?
Follow-Up One-on-One Interview Protocol

Introduction

Hi (insert student’s name), thank you again for volunteering to meet with me today. Today, I will be a continuation of when we last spoke. I will ask you questions concerning your first-year college experience, academic advising, and success coaching. Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. If you complete today’s interview, I will provide you with a $10.00 gift card. Do you have any questions concerning the research study? (pause for response)

Okay, I will be recording today’s interview in order to accurately translate your responses. Are you okay with that? (pause for response)

Okay, let’s get started.

Questions

1. Why did you choose to continue/discontinue success coaching during your second semester?
2. If you were currently seeing a success coach, what benefits would come from your meetings?
3. What benefits would come from students outside of their freshman year seeing a success coach?
4. What were you hoping to gain from participating in success coaching?
5. How do you feel that your first year or semester would have been different if you had not participated in success coaching?
6. Tell me about the use of social media to connect with success coach/coaching. i.e. is there a facebook group or do you follow them on twitter?
7. How much of your personal life did you share with your success coach?
8. Tell me what students should have a success coach.

9. Tell me about any additional programs that you participated in because you had a success coach.

10. How do you feel that your first year or semester would have been different if you had not participated in academic advising?

11. Tell me about the use of social media to connect with academic advising/advisor/college.

12. Tell me about the similarities and differences between First-Year Advising and your college academic advising.

13. What is the benefit of having First-Year Advising and your college academic advising?

14. What were you looking to gain from going to your academic advisor?

15. How much of your personal life do/did you share with your academic advisor?

16. Tell me what students should have an academic advisor.

17. What benefits would come from you seeing an academic advisor currently?

18. Walk me through the enrollment process.
   a. How do you register for courses?
   b. Do you enroll in your courses for each semester or does your advisor enroll you?
   c. When enrolling for courses, do you choose your courses or does your academic advisor?

19. Tell me about your support system here at [PSU]. Who is part of your support system?
APPENDIX C

LETTER OF CONSENT FOR ADULTS

Dear ________________:

I am an administrator at Delgado Community College and a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership Department at the University of New Orleans. I am conducting a dissertation research study with my professor, Dr. Chris Broadhurst. The purpose of the research is to discover new information about the experience of first-year college students, academic advising, and success coaching. Through the data collected, the results might influence student retention issues for first-year students. Students who are enrolled in their second consecutive semester at [PSU] and have participated in, or are currently experiencing success coaching and academic advising are being asked to participate in this study.

I am requesting your participation, which will involve two interviews with me that will last about one hour each, and validating your responses which will take about one hour. All data will be collected by the end of the fall 2014 semester. Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose to participate, you will receive a ten dollar gift card for each interview which you complete. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty and gift cards that you received from completing previous interviews will not need to be returned. The results of the research study may be published but your name or identity will not be revealed. In order to maintain confidentiality of your records, name of investigator will not use your name but a pseudonym.

Although there may be no direct benefit to you, the possible benefit of your participation is that it informs others about the first-year college student experience, which is a very important student population to explore and understand within Louisiana. The research is beneficial because it will address student retention issues.

The risk associated with partaking in this study is minimal.

Please contact Dr. Ann O’Hanlon (504) 280-3990 at the University of New Orleans for answers to questions about this research, your rights as a human subject, and your concerns regarding a research-related injury.

Sincerely,

Cherie’ Kay LaRocca, M. Ed.
Dr. Chris Broadhurst
(504) 671-6116 (504) 280-6026
Cherie.larocca@gmail.com cbroadhu@uno.edu

Any questions you have concerning the research study or your participation in it, before or after your consent, will be answered by Dr. Christopher Broadhurst. He may be reached at (504) 280-
He is office is located at the University of New Orleans, Room 348-G in the Bicentennial Education Center.

This form explains the nature, demands, benefits and any risk of the project. By signing this form you agree knowingly to assume any risks involved. Remember, your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefit. In signing this consent form, you are not waiving any legal claims, rights, or remedies. A copy of this consent form will be given (offered) to you. Your signature below indicates that you consent to participate in the above study.

____________________  __________________________  ___
Subject’s Signature  Printed Name  Date

I certify that I have explained to the above individual the nature and purpose, the potential benefits and possible risks associated with participation in this research study, have answered any questions that have been raised, and have witnessed the above signature.

These elements of Informed Consent conform to the Assurance given by the University of New Orleans to the Department of Health & Human Services to protect the rights of human subjects.

I have provided (offered) the subject/participant a copy of this signed consent document.

Signature of Investigator____________________________________  Date_____________
APPENDIX D

“First-Year College Student Retention”

Preliminary Demographic and Background Questions:

You have the option to decline to answer any of these questions by simply leaving the space blank.

1. Are you an Undergraduate Student at [Pelican State University]?  
   ____ Yes  ____ No

2. What year were you born?

3. What is your sex?

4. What is your cultural background?

5. Are you classified as an in-state or out of state student?

6. Are you a commuter or residential student?

7. What is your major?

8. How many academic hours have you completed at [PSU]? 

9. How many years have you been enrolled at [PSU]?

10. Did you transfer credits from another college or university? If so, about how many credits and from which institution?

11. If you feel comfortable to share, what is your current cumulative GPA?

12. What semester did you begin seeing your academic advisor?

13. What semester did you being seeing your success coach?
Good Afternoon!

My name is Cherie’ Kay LaRocca, and I am an administrator at Delgado Community College and a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership Department at the University of New Orleans. I am conducting a dissertation research study with my professor, Dr. Chris Broadhurst regarding *first-year college students and their experiences with academic advising and success coaching.* If you are 18 years of age or older, enrolled in their second consecutive semester at [PSU] and have participated in, or are currently experiencing success coaching and academic advising, I would appreciate an interview with you. The following is some helpful information:

**Purpose and Procedure:** The purpose of the research is to discover new information about the experiences of first-year college students, academic advising, and success coaching. Through the data collected, the results might influence student retention issues for first-year students. Your participation in this study will involve two interviews with me that will last about one hour each, and validating your responses which will take about one hour. All data will be collected by the end of the fall 2014 semester.

**Voluntary Participation:** Your participation in this study is voluntary. In the event that a student feels uncomfortable at any time during the interview they are free to withdraw their participation or may choose to not answer a question. An official consent letter to participate will be given prior to the interview.

If you choose to participate, you will receive a ten dollar gift card for each interview which you complete. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty and gift cards will not need to be returned. The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be used.

**Risk and Benefits:** The risk associated with partaking in this study is minimal. If you choose to participate, you will receive a ten dollar gift card for each interview which you complete.

**Confidentiality:** Student’s participation in this research is confidential. Interviews will be conducted in a private location with only the researcher and student participant. Student participants’ names will not be used, but will be assigned pseudonyms instead. Student participants’ responses will only be referred to through their assigned pseudonym.
If you find that you would be interested in participating in our study and/or have questions, please email me at Cherie.larocca@gmail.com

Thank you for your consideration, and I hope to hear from you soon!

Cherie Kay LaRocca
APPENDIX G

IRB Exemption

University Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research
University of New Orleans

Campus Correspondence

Principal Investigator: Dr. Chris Broadhurst
Co-Investigator: Chéri Kay Thriffiley LaRocca
Date: September 30, 2014
Protocol Title: “Retaining College Students from the First to Second Year: A Case Study”
IRB#: 08Sep14

The IRB has deemed that the research and procedures described in this protocol application are exempt from federal regulations under 45 CFR 46.101 category 2, due to the fact that any disclosure of the human subjects’ responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects’ financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Exempt protocols do not have an expiration date; however, if there are any changes made to this protocol that may cause it to be no longer exempt from CFR 46, the IRB requires another standard application from the investigator(s) which should provide the same information that is in this application with changes that may have changed the exempt status.

If an adverse, unforeseen event occurs (e.g., physical, social, or emotional harm), you are required to inform the IRB as soon as possible after the event.

Best wishes on your project.
Sincerely,

[Signature]

Robert D. Laird, Ph.D., Chair
UNO Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research
Vita

The author was born in Metairie, Louisiana. She obtained her Bachelor’s degree in Hospitality Management from The University of Southern Mississippi in 2006. She completed her Master’s of Education degree from The University of Southern Mississippi in 2008. She joined the University of New Orleans education graduate program to pursue a Ph.D. in Educational Administration in 2011.