

Examining the Impact of a First-Year Experience Course on Student Retention and Persistence at a Midwest, Two-Year Public College

by

Jason E. Schenzel

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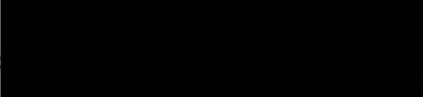
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Dr. Carol Mooney, Chair | Date

 7/16/2019

Dr. Urs Haltinner, Committee Member | Date

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Schenzel, Jason E. *Examining the Impact of a First-Year Experience Course on Student Retention and Persistence at a Midwest, Two-Year Public College*

Abstract

A Midwest two-year technical college implemented a first-year experience (FYE) course in fall of 2017, but no formal examination into the course's impact had been conducted. The purpose of this study was to investigate the college's student retention numbers pre- and post FYE course implementation and to understand if the efforts to increase student retention had been effective. A sequential mixed methods approach was used for the study and incorporated both descriptive and inferential statistics. The study concludes with an analysis of student persistence rates at a Midwest, two-year public college pre- and post implementation of the GPS course. Results of this study could help identify any gaps in the GPS course or opportunities for improvement in the curriculum or course offerings. This study has implications within continuous improvement efforts related to student retention and persistence by assessing the college's GPS course. The development of a student experience survey for the FYE course could be used in the future as a tool or process to be re-administered to continue to improve the course and reassess its impact on student retention and persistence. The overall findings of the study on the GPS course could be generalized to other public two-year colleges with similar GPS courses.

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Chapter I: Introduction

A college degree has become a necessity for career-bound adults in the United States to be competitive in the 21st century job market. As such, students' persistence in, and graduation from, postsecondary programs has become increasingly important to not only the U.S. economy, but also to students themselves (Jamelske, 2009). A significant portion of the U.S. economy is driven by employment opportunities that require workers with an education beyond high school, but less than a bachelor's degree (Association for Career and Technical Education, 2014). Projections indicate that 30% of the 55 million job openings created by 2020 will require an associate's degree or at least some college education. It is estimated that over the next 10 years, between 11% and 36% of the job growth will be in middle-skilled occupations requiring some college, a technical diploma, or a technical certificate (Stone, 2014). Research by the Association for Career and Technical Education (2014) indicates, "The skilled trades are the hardest jobs to fill in the United States, with recent data citing 806,000 jobs open in the trade, transportation, and utilities sector and 293,000 jobs open in manufacturing" (p. 1). The federal government has projected a potential shortfall of 10 million skilled workers due mostly to retirements of Baby Boomers (those born between 1946 and 1964), whose generation largely outnumbered subsequent generations (Harrison & Hargrove, 2006).

Importance of Postsecondary Degree Persistence

The importance of postsecondary students' persistence and eventual graduation goes beyond attaining gainful employment and contributing to the U.S. economy. Another key reason students should persist until they earn a credential is to avoid becoming part of the student loan crisis in the United States. According to the Federal Reserve Bank of New York (2018), student loan debt increased by over one trillion dollars, from 344.7 billion in 2004 to 1,386.4 billion in

2017. The amount of debt for students ages 30 years and under has stabilized over the past five years; however, each of the other age groups (30–39, 40–49, 50–59, and 60+) have continued to increase, with a larger percentage of the population carrying student debt later into life (Federal Reserve Bank of New York, 2018). Forty-five percent of student loan borrowers from the 2004 cohort who had not persisted to attain a credential by 2009 had defaulted on their student loans within 12 years (National Center for Education Statistics, NCES, 2018b). What’s more:

In 2017, one-fifth of those with education debt were behind on their payments.

Individuals who did not complete their degree or who attended a for-profit institution are more likely to struggle with repayment than those who took on large amounts of debt but completed a degree from a public or not-for-profit institution. (Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, 2018b, para. 2)

Undergraduate students are less likely to default on their student loans if they attain a credential; moreover, the higher the credential attained, the less likely they will default (NCES, 2018b).

Thirty-four percent of students who completed a certificate or a technical diploma reported having outstanding student loans and being behind in their debt; in comparison, only 13% of students who completed an associate’s degree reported being behind in their student loans (Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, 2017).

Graduates of postsecondary education programs earn more money annually—and over a lifetime—thus achieving greater financial well-being (Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, 2018a; Hout, 2012). Jamelske (2009) noted, “From the student perspective, retention [of students in college] is important for the simple reason that college pays” (p. 374). In 2015, the annual earnings of associate’s degree graduates averaged \$36,940, which was 17% higher than the annual earnings of those who completed high school and 32% higher than the

earnings of those who did not graduate from high school (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System data, as cited in NCES, 2016).

Clearly, college education and degree attainment has a positive impact on a student's earnings, job prestige, and job autonomy in the workplace (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Having the persistence to attain a postsecondary degree typically translates to lower unemployment rates, a more stable family life, and a longer and healthier life (Hout, 2012). According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018b), unemployment rates continually decrease and annual earnings steadily rise the more one pursues a postsecondary education (as shown in Table 1).

Table 1

Unemployment Rates and Earnings by Educational Attainment, 2017

Educational attainment	Unemployment rate (%)	Annual earnings (\$)
Bachelor's degree	2.5	60,996
Associate's degree	3.4	43,472
Some college, no degree	4.0	40,248
High school diploma	4.6	37,024
Less than a high school diploma	6.5	27,040

Note. Earning data represent persons age 25 years and over. Wages are for full-time and salary workers. Adapted from "Unemployment Rates and Earnings by Educational Attainment," by U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, 2018b, retrieved from <https://www.bls.gov/emp/chart-unemployment-earnings-education.htm>. Copyright 2018 by U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Role of Career and Technical Education

Program offerings in Career and Technical Education (CTE) target a wide array of high-demand industry sectors aimed at ensuring that America's needs for a highly skilled workforce can be met (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014). According to Gordon (2014), CTE has adapted to meet workforce needs: "Over the past decades, career and technical education has evolved with the economy to focus on high-skill careers in high-growth industries" (p. 301). The *Occupational Outlook Handbook* from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018a) projects that between 2016 and 2026, of the fastest growing careers, a majority are supported by CTE programs. CTE has evolved to not only teach the necessary technical skills and knowledge through competency-based applied learning that can lead to immediate employment opportunities, but also to impart the academic skills needed for the workforce and for continued postsecondary education (Scott & Sarkees-Wircenski, 2014). The occupational skills CTE seeks to prepare students in include creative problem solving, employability skills, work ethic, and communication skills. Wisconsin's state-run system of support for vocational, technical, and adult education—the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS, 2017)—clearly understands the evolving needs of today's students who are pursuing CTE programs, as its mission statement reads as follows:

To enable individuals to acquire the occupational skills necessary for full participation in the workforce by recognizing the rapidly changing educational needs of residents to keep current with workplace demands, and to work collaboratively with other educational institutions and partners to deliver educational options that foster economic development.

(p. 4)

While CTE programs are adapting to help build the highly skilled workforce our country's future will require, one challenge will be getting—and then keeping—students in these programs long enough to graduate with the degree required for these 21st century jobs.

Illustrating the challenge, Schield (2017) states, “Current graduation rates indicate a lack of student persistence at public two-year colleges. Student persistence through to degree attainment is critical to a nation that is aiming to compete in a rapidly evolving global economy” (p. 12).

The student retention rate from 2015 to 2016 at two-year public institutions, which have a less selective admissions process than private educational institutions do, was 62% for first-time, full-time U.S. students returning for the following fall term (NCES, 2018a). The fall-to-fall retention rates from 2015 to 2016 for two-year private institutions, which have a more selective admissions process, for first-time, full-time students at private, nonprofit institutions was 67% and was 66% for private, for-profit institutions (NCES, 2018a). A more selective admission process at private institutions have a higher retention rate than less selective public institutions.

Challenges to Student Retention and Persistence

Student retention and persistence is a moving target, changing with the world and with the circumstances that students encounter as times change. Accordingly, students of all types can have various factors working against them that they need to overcome, causing them to need help to persist in CTE programs. Internal factors working against them may include, but are not limited to, a lack of self-efficacy or a sense of belonging. Learners who have high levels of self-efficacy and who are highly motivated are better able to comprehend complex subject matter and overcome challenges encountered during their studies, making them more likely to persist in pursuing a degree (Welsh, 2007). Additionally, a student's belief in a sense of belonging to the college or program is an important factor associated with student retention (Giannakos, Pappas,

Jaccheri, & Sampson, 2016). The fewer ties a student has to the people and activities of an educational institution, the easier it is for the student to drop out. External forces can also affect a student's desire to persist in obtaining a postsecondary degree. A lack of family support can certainly impact student retention. In fact, a strong indicator that a student is likely to persist in pursuing a degree is having a greater perception of family encouragement to do so (Moore, Hossler, Ziskin, & Wakhungu, 2008). Financial aid can be another outside factor that has implications on a student's ability to persist and graduate, given the unpredictability of state and federal aid availability from year to year (Stewart, Lin, & Kim, 2015).

Student attrition is viewed as being caused and impacted by any number of the forces or factors present in students' lives (Bean & Eaton, 2002). To understand and enhance student persistence, institutions must take into consideration not only these forces on a student, but also institutional factors such as degree requirements, curriculum, faculty expectations, assignments and tests, college resources and services, and the overall environment (Noel & Levitz, 1987). The common institutional perspective on student retention has revolved around theories, actions, and questions suggesting that all colleges need to do is to focus on what needs to be done to retain students (Tinto, 2016). The students, on the other hand, seek to persist in their individual program of study and not merely to be retained by the institution. These differing perspectives require different supports.

Technical colleges have undergone a paradigm shift from student retention to student persistence that focuses their efforts on providing the skills required for the student to be successful and on determining what each student personally needs to get the most out of his or her educational journey. Some institutions have experienced increased retention rates as a result of improvements to processes and services that support students at all phases of their education,

and these improvements have led to a higher probability of the students to persist (Noel & Levitz, 1987). Such student-centered efforts have been rooted in the desire to assist students, align with their motivations, and increase their ability to persist to degree completion.

Background Information

This study was conducted at a U.S. Midwest, small- to medium-sized, two-year, publicly supported, multi-campus technical college. The college is part of a state-run system composed of 16 colleges and 54 campus locations (WTCS, 2017). The college's geographic district is composed predominantly of three rural counties in the state. The geographic area of the three counties is a total of 2,239.5 square miles (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). This equates to 4.1% of total square miles of the state where the college resides. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2017), the population per square mile is an average of 71.3 persons, with the highest county being at 94.2 and the lowest county at 32.3. These populations are all below the state average of 105 persons per square mile. The estimates as of July 2015 of the population of the college's counties total 163,991, which is 2.8% of the total population of the state at 5,771,337 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). The population change from April 2010 census data shows an increase of 0.6% for one county and a decrease of population in the other two counties at -1.8% and at -3.5%, with a total net loss of population of -1.6%; the district change compares to the state population growth at 1.5%.

The age distribution of the population of the Midwest, two-year public college district shows indications of an aging population. The percentage of the population over the age of 65 years in two of the three the counties are above the state average of 15.6% for the age bracket (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). The counties in the college's district are all below the state average

for persons ages 5 to 18 years. In the age category of 5 years and under, all of the counties in the district are below the state average of 5.9% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017).

The Midwest, two-year public college district is predominately made up of White people. The population is 94.5% White, which is above the state average of 87.6% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). The population gender distribution of the three counties is close to gender neutrality, split nearly 50/50 in each county. From a diversity perspective, the district the counties are in have all seen increases in Black or African American, American Indian, Asian, and Hispanic populations (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). The Hispanic or Latino population is the largest minority, with populations of 3.9%, 3.1%, and 2.9% in the three counties.

In 2016, the college in the study embarked on a quality-improvement initiative called the Integrated Enrollment Model (IEM). The IEM is one portion of the college's overall strategic plan, developed by college leadership in concert with a higher education consulting firm. The IEM was selected by the college as an Academic Quality Improvement Program Action Project (AQIP) as part of the Higher Learning Commission accreditation process (S. Kiddoo, personal communication, September 26, 2017). AQIP is an evaluation tool for performance and quality of postsecondary institutions to improve strategies, processes, and programs (Yarmohammadian, Mozaffary, & Esfahani, 2011). For the college, the AQIP quality improvement action project calls for improvement to the application process and for the college to address factors surrounding issue of student retention and persistence.

Changes to the enrollment process were implemented at this Midwest, two-year public college as part of the IEM, streamlining the student's steps from initial application to enrollment (Stencil, 2018). The intent of the process improvement was to see a greater percentage of students matriculate from application to course enrollment. Subsequent efforts were made to

support services to increase student retention and persistence to degree completion. Included in these efforts was the addition of a one-credit first-year experience (FYE) course called GPS for Student Success (GPS) as a graduation requirement for new students (C. Lorge, personal communication, January 11, 2019). The GPS course curriculum and learning outcomes were developed through a collaboration with the college's Dean of Student Services, Dean of General Education, Dean of Institutional Effectiveness, a general education faculty member, and an academic advisor (C. Lorge, personal communication, January 11, 2019). The GPS course was intended to provide students with the skills needed for success by creating an academic plan, identifying interpersonal attributes with the Clifton Strengths Finder assessment, understanding and adopting effective learning strategies, and receiving an orientation to the college's student resources, policies, and processes (see Appendix A). The GPS course is typically run two-hours face to face one day per week (or it can be taken online) for the first eight weeks of the term and is also offered in a boot camp style before the term starts (C. Lorge, personal communication, January 11, 2019). The GPS course is intended to be taken by the student prior to attaining 12 credits with the college and is a graduation requirement for all incoming students. Even so, there is currently no hold put on student registration if a student has not enrolled in or completed the course and has more than 12 credits.

Another effort to improve student persistence with the IEM at this college was implementation of professional academic advisors, which created academic advisor positions and a Manager of Academic Advising (Stencil, 2018; C. Lorge, personal communication, January 11, 2019). The academic advisors were assigned to students once students had been enrolled into their first term; the advisors' job was to engage students in ongoing enrollment needs through to degree completion. Academic advisors have been identified as key in helping to improve student

motivation and focus on things like self-efficacy, a sense of belonging, and the value of curriculum (Tinto, 2016). The college's academic advisor positions were leveraged as the primary instructors for a majority of the GPS courses. It was intentional that the advisors teach the first-year experience courses so they could better develop personal connections and foster trusting relationships with the incoming students. Such relationship-building efforts can help with forming a commitment to working together on long-term advising of the students and with overall program planning to improve student persistence. Faculty of the GPS course have gathered anecdotal evidence from the "Letter to the Next Class" final course assessment, offering some insights into the impact of the GPS course on the students' persistence (C. Lorge, personal communication, January 11, 2019). This anecdotal evidence gives the faculty feedback on the course but has not been gathered collegewide or analyzed for themes or trends. The Midwest college has additionally conducted an initial analysis of the effectiveness of the GPS course, pointing to potential positive impacts. While anecdotal evidence that the GPS course is positively impacting student persistence, a deeper investigation was required into the effectiveness of the GPS course on improving student retention and persistence rates at the Midwest, two-year public college.

Statement of the Problem

According to Cox, Bobrowski, and Graham (2005), "Over 70% of colleges and universities now offer some type of first-year course and or program, yet few have attempted any type of assessment beyond the collection of anecdotal data" (p. 55). The Midwest college in this study implemented their FYE program in fall of 2017, including the course GPS for Student Success; however, no formal examination into the GPS course had been conducted. It is

necessary to investigate past and present retention and persistence statistics to determine what impact the GPS course may have on student retention and persistence.

The following research questions guide this study:

1. Is there a difference in the college's retention and persistence rates before and after implementation of the first-year experience course GPS for Student Success?
2. Is there a difference in retention and persistence rates of course completers and noncompleters of the first-year experience course GPS for Student Success; is there a difference in course completion rates in relation to demographics such as gender, ethnicity, age, disability, and economic disadvantage or among the various delivery modalities by which GPS for Student Success was taught?
3. What impact has the first-year experience course GPS for Student Success had on student retention and persistence?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to investigate the Midwest college's student retention numbers pre- and post GPS course implementation to better understand if the efforts to increase student retention have been effective. It is important to research retention practices at an institutional level rather than relying on the application of general college strategies for increasing retention (Moore et al., 2008). The study collected student experiences in the GPS course to determine which competencies in the curriculum are having an influence on student persistence. This evaluation was meant to help determine if there are any gaps in the GPS course or opportunities for improvement in the current curriculum or course offerings.

Significance of the Study

The study's significance has implications with continuous improvement efforts at the Midwest, two-year public college related to student retention and persistence by assessing the GPS course. More than 40% of survey respondents in the National Survey of The First-Year Experience reported either no formal assessment of their FYE or did not know if an assessment had been conducted (Young & Hopp, 2014). The development of a student experience survey for the FYE course at this Midwest college could have future utilization as a tool or process that could be re-administered to continue efforts to improve the course and reassess its impact on student retention and persistence. The overall findings of the study on the GPS course have the potential to be generalized to other public two-year colleges with similar GPS courses, building on a research gap with two-year institutions. The process of evaluating the course, as well as the investigation into the student experience of the course, could be replicated at other institutions wishing to evaluate their FYE courses.

Assumption of the Study

One assumption that has been made with this study is that given the resources in the review of literature, the anecdotal evidence collected by the faculty of the GPS course, and the initial data on retention and persistence data, the GPS course has a positive impact on student retention and persistence rates. This study aimed to determine whether the impact is statistically meaningful as it relates to student retention and persistence.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation of the study resides in the fact that the Midwest college has just begun to teach the GPS course in the past two academic years. Having limited longitudinal data to analyze for the purpose of this study could lead to a challenge in making accurate generalizations. It may

take a few more years to gather enough data to make accurate assumptions about the effects that the GPS course have had on student retention and persistence.

Definition of Terms

Terms found within this study are common in two-year or community college settings, but some terms are specific to the state technical college system that the Midwest college resides in and thus require definition. It is important that the context of the following terms is understood by the reader to enhance the clarity of this study.

Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP). A pathway that is one of three Higher Learning Commission accreditation options that is focused on continuous quality improvement (Higher Learning Commission, 2014).

Belonging. According to Brown (2017), “Belonging is the innate human desire to be part of something larger than us” (p. 31). Belonging is often shallowly attained by trying to fit in or to seek approval; however, it starts with self-acceptance and presenting our authentic selves to the world (Brown, 2017).

Capta. According to Beverly (2017), “Capta is not data as we typically understand data. Capta represents what is seen, thought and felt. Capta, according to phenomenologists, is the data of the conscious experience” (para. 4).

Career and Technical Education (CTE). Education programs in high school, community, and technical colleges traditionally in, but not limited to, occupations not requiring a bachelor’s degree, preparing students with skills for work and for further education (Gordon, 2014).

First-year experience (FYE). A course designed to promote academic success by building and developing successful student traits and skills for first-year students at a college (Cox et al., 2005).

Graduation. Successful completion of a technical diploma, technical certificate, or associate's degree from a technical college.

Higher Learning Commission (HLC). An independent corporation that is an accreditation body for degree-granting higher education institutions in the United States North Central Region (Higher Learning Commission, 2019).

Hybrid course. A course offered face to face with a portion of the lecture or lab hours to be delivered online.

Persistence. A student's ability to cope with the stressors of attending college and to successfully overcome these stressors to continue with his or her studies (Miller & Lesik, 2014). Persistence is typically not a measurable outcome, but rather a term used to define a student's decision or motivation to stay with the college to complete a degree (Tinto, 2016). For the purpose of this study, this term means a student's continued enrollment from one academic year to the next academic year.

Postsecondary. Education at a level beyond secondary, high school, typically provided at a university or college, public or private.

Retention. An individual student's decision to continue to enroll in courses at a given college or to voluntarily leave the college. (Bean & Eaton, 2002). Colleges typically measure retention by the student enrolling in courses from term to term or from academic year to academic year. For the purpose of this study, this term means a student's continued enrollment from term to term.

Self-efficacy. The malleable belief a person holds in his or her ability to succeed at a given task or with a specific situation (Tinto, 2016).

Telepresence. A course delivered utilizing video-conferencing technology to connect multiple sites with the instructor teaching from one of the locations.

Chapter II: Literature Review

The workforce in the United States is a matter of great concern when educational systems are not able to graduate workers trained and ready for a highly skilled labor market. Large and small companies in the United States rely on the workforce education efforts of postsecondary educational institutions to meet their employment needs and to help make them competitive in the global marketplace (Gray & Herr, 1998). The future of the U.S. economy depends, in part, on the ability of students to persist in postsecondary education programs to graduation and degree completion. One challenge is that higher education institutions are enrolling students that in past economies may not have needed to seek out a degree, and this population often requires more support services and programs than ever before (Jamelske, 2009). In response, colleges are now committing additional resources to ensure student persistence and success.

Functionalist Theory

Theory seeks to give an explanation to phenomenon or to answer a question giving us a perspective (Mooney, Knox, & Schacht, 2007). The theory underpinning this study is the functionalist theory. According to the functionalist perspective, social institutions are interconnected, with each contributing to important societal functions (Mooney et al., 2007). Educational institutions have been a long-standing, essential function of society since the industrial revolution, and educational attainment has become a norm and is highly valued in our society. With not everyone having the access to education or the means to achieve educational goals, the federal government drafted legislation, starting with The Morrill Act of 1862, supporting Career and Technical Education nationally (Gordon, 2014; Scott & Sarkees-Wircenski, 2014). In the years since, federal legislation surrounding CTE has been shaped by historical events and national workforce needs while attempting to achieve equitable access to

education for all. (Gordon, 2014; Scott & Sarkees-Wircenski, 2014). With more people having access to education, there has been increased political and societal pressure on the educational institutions to ensure student success. Federal legislation, such as the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Acts, added layers of accountability for educational institutions and states relating to performance of education outcomes (Gordon, 2014; Scott & Sarkees-Wircenski, 2014).

Increased accountability measures imposed by elected officials are changing the priorities of educational institutions to align with their preferences of how the institutions should function (Dunn, 2003).

Retention

With the political trends toward accountability across the United States, educational institutions place more emphasis on student learning and increasing retention rates (Dunn, 2003). This has put an even greater focus on retaining current students with the goal of seeing more students persist through graduation. According to Jamelske (2009), “Given that students cannot graduate if they are not retained early on, student retention has become one of the most analyzed outcomes in higher education” (p. 374).

Enrollment. Retention has become more important with enrollments for first-time degree-seeking students at two-year public and private institutions indicating enrollments have been decreasing for both full- and part-time students. As can be seen in Table 2, total enrollments of full-time students at two-year institutions declined in the United States from 918,645 students in 2009 to 656,587 students in 2015; enrollments of part-time students at two-year institutions have declined from 473,589 students in 2009 to 380,393 students in 2015 (NCES, 2016). The largest single-year decline in enrollment of two-year students occurred from 2014 to 2015, with

enrollments of full-time students decreasing by 53,237, or 7.5%, and part-time students decreasing by 43,773, or 10.31%.

Table 2

First-Time Degree-Seekers by Entry Year

Institution enrollment	2009	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Full-time, two-year	918,645	799,719	756,567	738,559	709,824	656,587
Public institutions	795,982	709,084	679,809	668,861	644,765	601,515
Nonprofit institutions	7,960	10,698	7,738	7,180	13,011	10,657
For-profit institutions	114,703	79,937	69,020	62,518	52,048	44,415
Part-time, two-year	473,589	474,207	461,878	440,820	424,166	380,393
Public institutions	464,126	466,013	455,372	435,470	419,662	376,183
Nonprofit institutions	760	955	740	839	792	760
For-profit institutions	8,703	7,239	5,766	4,511	3,712	3,450

Note. National Center for Education Statistics (2016). Adapted from “Retention of first-time degree-seeking undergraduates at degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by attendance status, level and control of institution, and percentage of applications accepted.” Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d17/tables/dt17_326.20.asp

Enrollments at two-year public institutions in the United States have continued to decrease nationally: down 1.4% from 2015 to 2016, down 2.3% from 2016 to 2017, and down 8.7% from 2017 to 2018 (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2018a). In the Midwest state that the study’s district resides in, the statewide enrollment of full-time equivalent students has declined each year minimally 3% since the 2011–2012 academic year, with a net decline of 23.7% by the 2016–2017 academic year (WTCS, 2017). With the steady decline in

student enrollment, two-year institutions have fewer and fewer students to be retained by colleges. Institutions have seen a declining trend in the total numbers of students returning in the following academic year. As shown in Table 3, returning enrollments of full-time undergraduate students at two-year institutions declined from 558,708 students in 2010 to 409,043 students in 2016 and enrollments of part-time degree-seeking students at two-year institutions declined from 197,222 students in 2010 to 168,682 students in 2016 (NCES, 2016). Between 2010 and 2016, the largest single-year decline in the number of returning students at two-year institutions occurred from 2015 to 2016, with enrollments of full-time students decreasing by 25,788, or 5.9%, and part-time students decreasing by 14,866, or 8.1%. The persistence rates for the 2016 cohort of students at two-year public institutions were 15% higher at 70.6% for full-time students compared with part-time students at 55.6% (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2018b).

Hidden within the enrollment numbers of first-time, degree-seeking undergraduate students and in the number of students returning the following year is the fact that two-year degree-granting postsecondary institutions have seen a trend of minor increases in retention rates (NCES, 2016). Full-time, two-year institution students were retained at 59% in the 2011–2012 academic year and increased to 62.3% from the 2015–2016 academic year a 3.3% increase in student retention of first-time, degree-seeking students (NCES, 2016). Part-time, two-year students were retained at 41.6% from 2009 to 2010 and increased to 44.3% from 2015 to 2016; this yielded a 2.7% increase in student retention of first-time, degree-seeking undergraduate students.

Table 3

First-Time Degree-Seekers Returning in the Following Year

Institution enrollment	2010	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Full-time, two-year	558,708	471,715	454,379	448,470	434,831	409,043
Public institutions	476,985	412,240	403,096	402,973	392,687	372,724
Nonprofit institutions	4,696	6,437	4,555	4,395	7,914	7,104
For-profit institutions	77,027	53,038	46,728	41,102	34,230	29,215
Part-time, two-year	197,222	199,259	198,663	190,966	183,548	168,682
Public institutions	192,220	194,969	195,252	188,381	181,230	166,619
Nonprofit institutions	401	514	368	435	359	339
For-profit institutions	4,601	3,776	3,043	2,150	1,959	1,724

Note. National Center for Education Statistics (2016). Retention of first-time degree-seeking undergraduates at degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by attendance status, level and control of institution, and percentage of applications accepted.

The number of sub-baccalaureate degrees or credentials awarded in the United States increased from 2003 to 2011; however, the number decreased from 2011 to 2015 (NCES, 2016). The number of degrees/certificates and credentials awarded at two-year postsecondary institutions within the state from which the Midwest college is located has steadily declined each year, from 29,316 awarded in 2010–2011 to 25,810 awarded in 2015–2016 (NCES, 2016). In the

United States, the 2013 cohort of public two-year colleges had a graduation rate of 19.4% for students graduating in 150% of the time for completion of the credential; for example, a student completing a two-year associate's degree program within three years' time (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2015).

In comparison to the U.S. average, the state in which the Midwest college is located, the 2013 cohort graduation rate was 29.1% for public two-year colleges at 150% of the time. The Midwest, two-year public college ranked 14th out of 17 public two-year colleges in the state, with a 2013 cohort graduation rate of 25.4% at 150% of the time (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2015). The college's 100% of the time graduation rate, two years to completion, for the 2013 cohort was 15.5%, ranking 13th out of 17 colleges in the state.

Strategies. As a result of the decline in the total number of degrees awarded and low graduation rates, colleges have responded to this retention and persistence challenge by allocating resources to improve student outcomes (Jamelske, 2009). Two-year colleges surveyed indicated that implementation of advising and coaching, along with supplemental instruction, resulted in increased student retention (Schield, 2017). Orientation and guidance for students from the beginning of their educational journey through graduation was one of the more important efforts colleges can make to increase student persistence (Forrest, 1987). Colleges have begun to research and employ strategies to increase student retention and persistence rates. Stress management programs have little by way of research; however, it is known that stress negatively effects grades and persistence, thus stress management programs can aid in student retention (Moore et al., 2008). Colleges that have shown significant increases in graduation rates have found that the implementation of first-year experience seminars or courses is an effective strategy at increasing student retention (Schield, 2017).

Persistence

The institutional view of student retention has typically been that of what the colleges can do to retain their students. This view makes sense to understand what an institution is responsible for; however, the institution needs to consider the students' perspective of retention (Tinto, 2016). Students do not seek to be retained by the college, rather they seek to persist in their degree program. This change in thinking for institutions gets at a student's motivation to persist; however, it is a more complex issue that is not easily influenced by the institution (Tinto, 2016). Three items that are central to motivation as students seek to persist in their educational programs are self-efficacy, sense of belonging, and perceived value of education (Tinto, 2016).

Self-efficacy. Having a strong sense of self-efficacy allows for persons to persist longer with tasks even when difficulties are encountered along the way (Tinto, 2016). Academic failures can create achievement anxiety about scholastic demands and threaten students' sense of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1993). Students entering college confident in their ability to succeed can encounter challenges that weaken their self-efficacy; thus, it is critical in the first year to secure support from the college—from faculty, advisors, and counselors—to counteract such challenges (Tinto, 2016). Students' level of interest in academics and their academic accomplishments are affected by their belief, or self-efficacy, in their ability to succeed at academic activities (Bandura, 1994). Effective student support needs to occur prior to student challenges undermining their ability to persist, and early-warning software systems are often employed to alert advisors and faculty to struggling students, thus triggering support (Tinto, 2016). Colleges increase student self-efficacy through these types of supports and strategies that foster one's sense of self-efficacy.

Sense of belonging. Belonging is part of the human condition and is our internal need to feel that we part of something greater than ourselves (Brown, 2017). The development of a sense of belonging for college students is central to their ability to succeed and is essential for students who are at risk of dropping out of school (O’Keeffe, 2013). It is especially critical during the beginning of a student’s college career because a sense of belonging contributes to academic success and motivation (Freeman, Anderson, & Jensen, 2007). To improve students’ sense of belonging in higher education, institutions need to create an environment that is welcoming and accepting of all students and to continuously display warmth and openness. Students are more likely to persist if they have the perception that they are welcomed by others and are a part of something bigger because the sense of belonging leads to increased motivation and a willingness to engage with others (Tinto, 2016). As students identified their personal strengths, as well as the strengths of their college peers, they increased self-awareness and created a deeper sense of understanding with their fellow students; this, in turn, fostered a sense of worth and belonging, which could aid in increasing retention (Soria & Stubblefield, 2015).

Perceived value of education. Students’ motivation to persist to degree completion could be enhanced by increasing their perceived value of education. One of the ways colleges could do this is by maintaining high-quality curricula and programs that are vetted by their respective industries to ensure their relevance. Institutions could also increase students’ perceived value of education by ensuring that students are enrolled in a field of study that is appropriate for their interests and needs (Tinto, 2016). FYE courses may contain topics such as career exploration or preparation and should include academic planning and advising that offers orientation to the student’s chosen program of study followed by the creation of an academic program plan (Young & Hopp, 2014). Early student orientation and advising should minimally

provide an exploration into the value of general education courses for program students (Forrest, 1987). Institutions can address the perceptions of the value of education by showing the relevance of the topics and the subjects that students will encounter and how they can be applied to real-world situations (Tinto, 2016).

First-Year Experience Courses

First-year experience courses help provide the students with the foundation they need to be successful navigating and coping with their academic journey (Bean & Eaton, 2002). Participants of FYE courses show a tendency to be more likely to persist through degree attainment and are most likely to graduate on time (Miller & Lesik, 2014). Forty-two percent of first-time, incoming, postsecondary education freshman enroll in community or other two-year colleges (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014); yet, until recently, two-year colleges have provided few FYE courses. Since the beginning of the millennia, two-year institutions have worked to adapt elements of university FYE programs into formats suited for their population and structure (Bers & Younger, 2014). The needs of two-year college students can differ from those of four-year university students; thus, the content that is contained in the FYE course should reflect this difference.

A 2008 survey conducted by the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition indicated that there are differences in the types of content covered in FYE seminars at each institution. As can be seen in Table 4, both two and four-year institutions responded that a majority of the focus in the FYE seminar was on extended orientation, with 76.5% of two-year institutions and slightly less at 57.9% of four-year institutions using the FYE course this way (as cited in Tobolowsky, 2008). Respondents indicated that the next highest focus of the FYE course was basic study skills, with 41.3% of two-year institutions covering

basic study skills, while only 21.6% of four-year institutions had the same focus. Additionally, 29% of two-year institutions responded as using the FYE course for academic seminars, while more than half of four-year institutions used the seminars for this purpose.

Table 4

Comparison of First-Year Course Content in Two-Year and Four-Year Institutions

Seminar type	Two-year (%)	Four-year (%)
Extended orientation	76.5	57.9
Basic study skills	41.3	12.6
Academic seminars	29.0	53.8
Preprofessional	12.2	14.9
Other	14.8	24.7

Note. Data from “2006 National Survey of First-Year Seminars: Continuing innovations in the collegiate curriculum,” by B. F. Tobolowsky, 2008, *The First-Year Experience Monograph Series, No. 51*, p. 14. Copyright 2008 by the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, University of South Carolina.

Beyond the differences in content, there is a difference in institution types requiring students take a FYE course at all. In the 2006 National Survey of First-Year Seminars (NSFYS) 71% of two-year institutions required an FYE course, and 86% of four-year institutions required one (Tobolowsky, 2008). The number of institutions requiring students to take an FYE course is increasing across all institutions. Reported in the 2012–2013 NSFYS, 76% of two-year institutions require all or some of their enrolled students to take an FYE course; 86% of four-year colleges require an FYE course (Young & Hopp, 2014).

Course design. FYE courses are designed to support social interaction, create awareness of student academic support, increase the sense of community, and help with strategies to persist to degree completion (What Works Clearinghouse, 2016). The typical two-year institution FYE course provides an orientation to campus resources, scheduling and enrollment, study skills, and postsecondary strategies for success (Schild, 2017). According to the 2012–2013 NSFYS, the most common course objectives or competencies of the FYE course for two-year public institutions were to provide orientation to campus resources and services, develop a connection with the institution, develop study skills, conduct self-exploration or personal development, create common first-year experience, develop critical-thinking skills, and improve second-year return rates (Young & Hopp, 2014). The 2012–2013 NSFYS responses for common topics covered during the FYE course of two-year public institutions were campus resources, study skills, academic planning or advising, time management, and campus engagement. FYE courses implementing high-impact educational practices have an emphasis on critical inquiry, information literacy, collaborative learning, and frequent writing (Association of American Colleges & Universities, 2018).

GPS for Student Success. Part of the Midwest, two-year public college's HLC Action Project, an effort to improve retention, included development and implementation of the college's FYE course, GPS for Student Success (GPS) (S. Kiddoo, personal communication, September 26, 2017). The acronym GPS in the title of the course refers to Global Positioning System; however, it is not meant literally, but as a metaphor representing a guidance system available to students in their educational journey provided via the FYE course. The GPS course was implemented and required for all new students beginning with the 2017–2018 academic year (C. Lorge, personal communication, January 11, 2019). The course was part of a larger college

initiative that focused on student retention, addressing elements of student support and academic advisement while streamlining the college's enrollment and student support processes.

Assessment of FYE courses, including GPS, is necessary for institutions to determine their effectiveness. Each institution determines how to assess the FYE course within their organizational setting (Bers & Younger, 2014). Institutions surveyed by the 2012–2013 NSFYS indicated that most assessed the FYE courses using student course evaluations, analysis of institutional data, direct assessment of student learning outcomes, and survey instrument (Young & Hopp, 2014). Student outcomes of FYE courses that have been measured by the institutions in the 2012–2013 NSFYS indicated using satisfaction with the seminar, achievement of learning or course outcomes, persistence to second year, grade point average, student self-reports of course impact, satisfaction with faculty, and participation in campus activities (Young & Hopp, 2014). Institutions identified FYE course objectives to gather data on and evaluate the effectiveness of the course. To identify the appropriate research questions and to determine the data to be collected and analyzed, institutions engaged institutional researchers, if available, to assist (Bers & Younger, 2014).

Summary

In summary, the review of the literature outlined the economic importance of postsecondary CTE. Additionally, the discussion of declining enrollment trends in postsecondary education institutions lead to the need for understanding retention and persistence efforts such as an FYE course and whether they are having a positive impact on student retention. The literature indicated that the use of FYE course in two-year institutions is a relatively new development and that most of the research has been done at four-year institutions, leaving a gap in studies that strictly focus on two-year college FYE courses. Institutions have differing rationales for offering

FYE courses and vary in the topics and intended outcomes of these courses. This finding supported the need for individual institutional exploration into the effectiveness of the FYE course topics and outcomes. The literature suggests the need for assessments of the FYE courses as part of continuous improvement efforts of public two- and four-year colleges.

Chapter III: Method and Procedures

This study investigates the impact of the first-year experience course at a Midwest, two-year public college to determine the significance of the course on the students' ability to persist in their educational programs. A sequential mixed methods approach used for the study utilizing descriptive and inferential statistics. Sequential mixed methods employ quantitative research methods in the beginning followed by qualitative methods to provide a more detailed exploration with a few individuals (Creswell, 2009).

Research Methodology

The primary purpose of this study was to determine if the FYE course, GPS for Student Success (GPS), was impacting student persistence. The study includes an analysis of student persistence rates at a Midwest, two-year public college pre- and post implementation of the GPS course. Additionally, the study compares the persistence rates of those students that completed and did not complete the GPS course.

Specifically, the research questions guiding this study include:

1. Is there a difference in the college's retention and persistence rates before and after implementation of the first-year experience course GPS for Student Success?
2. Is there a difference in retention and persistence rates of course completers and noncompleters of the first-year experience course GPS for Student Success; is there a difference in course completion rates in relation to demographics such as gender, ethnicity, age, disability, and economic disadvantage or among the various delivery modalities by which GPS for Student Success was taught?
3. What impact has the first-year experience course GPS for Student Success had on student retention and persistence?

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the results for the first and second research questions. Descriptive statistics are used in order to summarize and describe quantitative data and the measures and procedures used to analyze the data (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009). To address the first research question, the study used quantitative methods to conduct an analysis of secondary data from the Midwest college's institutional database. Data on students' fall-to-spring term retention and fall-to-fall persistence rates before the implementation of the GPS course were analyzed. Quantitative methods were used to examine the retention and persistence rates after implementation of the GPS course. A comparison was done of the pre- and post-implementation retention and persistence rates to determine if there had been any change to the rates since the college began requiring students to take the GPS course.

To address the second research question, the study used quantitative methods to investigate the impact of the GPS course on student success by analyzing secondary data from the college's institutional database on the retention and persistence rates of students enrolled in the GPS course compared with those of students who did not complete the course. Additionally, an analysis was done with students who successfully completed, with a C or better, the GPS course versus those who did not. Demographics such as gender, age, disability, economic disadvantage, and race were evaluated. An analysis of the delivery modality of the GPS course was completed to identify if there are differences in success rates depending on if the course was delivered face-to-face, in a hybrid format (a mix of face-to-face and online), via telepresence, or online.

To address the third research question, quantitative and qualitative research methods were used to gain insights into students' experience in and their perceptions of the GPS course. A survey instrument was developed to collect data to answer this research question. The survey

attempts to determine what impact the students felt the course had on their retention and persistence while enrolled at the college. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the data from the survey respondents. Additionally, interviews were conducted with a select group of self-identified individuals. Survey respondents had the opportunity to self-select and participate in a face-to-face or phone interview with the researcher. Inferential statistics (which are utilized to measure a sample of a population making inferences about the population based on the sample, Wiersma & Jurs, 2009) were used in summarizing the qualitative data from the interviews. Qualitative interviews were selected in order to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences and stories that led to their persistence.

Bringing together the quantitative and the qualitative data to complete the mixed methods approach creates the institutional picture of pre- and post-implementation of the GPS course and illuminates the student experience of course completers of the GPS course. Both types of data are necessary not only to understand whether the course was successful at impacting student retention and persistence rates, but also better answer why or why not.

Subject Selection and Description

The first research question requires that the population be made up of all students enrolled at the Midwest, two-year public college from the fall term of 2014 till the spring term of 2019. To determine the pre-GPS course implementation on student retention and persistence rates, a census sample of the population from the fall term of 2014 to the spring term of 2017 was taken for the purpose of analyzing the pre-implementation numbers. To determine the post-GPS course implementation student retention and persistence rates, a census was taken of the population from the fall of 2017 till the spring term of 2019.

The second research question population represents all students enrolled from the fall of 2017 till the spring term of 2019. To determine the impact of the FYE course, all students who were required to be enrolled in and who were enrolled in the GPS course were included in the study. Students' completion of the GPS course via various delivery modalities were examined to determine results by modality.

The third research question includes the students enrolled in and those who successfully completed the GPS course with a C or better, which aligns with the state client reporting definition of successful course completers. One challenge with participation in this sample was attempting to survey students who have since graduated from the college with a credential or who have discontinued studies at the college. Graduates from the Midwest college have access to their email for 180 days after graduation and may not be reachable if no personal email is on file. Respondents of the survey were asked if they would be willing to participate in an interview with the researcher. Of the students who self-select to participate in the interview, a random selection of three to five students were taken to participate in the interviews for the study.

Instrumentation

The first two research questions required the collection of student data from the college's student information system. Institutional data from the college's institutional research department was reviewed to examine retention and persistence rates before and after implementation of the GPS course.

A survey was developed to assist in answering the third research question. Prior to developing the survey instrument, a review of the 2012–2013 National Survey of First-Year Seminars helped to identify course topics that were most often used in FYE courses at two-year public institutions. The students were asked to provide demographic information, including age

and gender, along with indicating their program of study (Appendix B). The participants were then be asked to identify the term in their program plan in which the GPS course was taken and the delivery modality through which it was completed.

Next, the students self-reported levels of agreement or disagreement with a series of questions adapted from the NSFYS respondent results. The questions were informed from the NSFYS responses to the most frequently used student outcomes that institutions used as measures to internally assess FYE courses. For this study, the student outcome questions utilized a 5-point Likert scale (5 = *Strongly Agree*, 4 = *Agree*, 3 = *Neither Agree or Disagree*, 2 = *Disagree*, 1 = *Strongly Disagree*). The Likert scale was used to construct an attitude inventory of participants based on the major topics selected (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009). Using a 5-point Likert scale for the student perceptions allowed for a neutral response and two levels of agreement or disagreement.

Additional survey questions using the Likert scale were asked pertaining to the competencies of the GPS course and the student experience. The competency questions evaluated the value that the respondents place on each competency within the course based on the students' self-reporting their perceptions of impact. The student experience questions were the quantitative version of the participant interview questions and guided the collection of the qualitative capta. The questions were based in the research literature on student persistence asking about challenges students have faced, a sense of belonging, the value of education, and what success means to them. For the final survey questions, the students self-selected to participate in a drawing for prizes and a follow-up interview in which they had the opportunity to expand on the student experience questions and to offer more in-depth responses to the questions.

The content validity of the survey was supported by the literature review and review of survey instruments from the 2012–2013 NSFYS and the Ruffalo Noel Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory. A limitation of an attitude inventory is that respondents can skew responses regardless of their true feelings; this can be mitigated if the respondents are aware that the interest of the study is the collective of responses rather than the individual responses (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009). To reduce the potential for respondents to skew responses, language in the description of the study identified that the intent of the study was to view responses collectively for the purpose of generalizations, rather than relying on individual responses. This was necessary to ensure that students understand that their responses will in no way be used against them by the instructor or the college and that open and honest feedback is the goal.

Internal reliability of the survey was established by consistency in responses of similar questions across the population sample. A pilot study was conducted with a small random sample of students to test the instrumentation and the procedure to ensure that the process was without flaw and that the survey was clearly understood. In addition, the Applied Research Center (ARC) at the University of Wisconsin–Stout office of Planning, Assessment, Research, & Quality was consulted to review the survey instrument to be used. Both the pilot study and the consultation with the ARC resulted in improvements to the reliability of the instrument. Changes were made in the verbiage of questions to ensure understanding of the intent. Several questions shifted from open-ended to a Likert scale to simplify the survey and to potentially increase the survey response rates. A final section of open-ended survey questions, mirrored in the participant interview questions, were removed from the survey, and the focus of the survey was shifted to quantitative data collection.

Data Collection Procedures

The first research question utilized quantitative secondary data collected from the institution's student information system. Data collected includes student retention rates from term to term and persistence rates from year to year for the time periods pre- and post implementation of the first-year experience course: GPS for Student Success. The pre-implementation data includes the time period of fall 2014 to spring 2017, and the post-implementation data includes fall 2017 through the spring term 2019. Institutional data was acquired from the college's PeopleSoft student information system, utilizing Cognos and Microsoft Excel to view and organize the data.

The second research question also utilized quantitative secondary data collected from the institution's student information system. Data collected for this question includes the time period post implementation of the GPS course from fall 2017 through the spring 2019 term. The specific data included were term-to-term student retention rates and year-to-year student persistence rates. Institutional data acquired from the college's PeopleSoft student information system, Cognos, and Microsoft Excel were used to view and organize the data, and IBM SPSS Statistics were used to run the descriptive statistics cross-tabulation.

The third research question utilized quantitative and qualitative data collection. The quantitative data collected via an electronic survey developed in the online survey tool Qualtrics. The qualitative data collected from personal interviews with self-selected participants. The online survey was emailed to each of the students who had been identified from the institutional data course rosters as having taken and successfully completed the GPS for Student Success course. The survey was deployed utilizing the students' college email accounts, as well as personal email accounts if available from the institutional research department. The body of the

email to the participants contained a letter of consent; additionally, the consent to participate form was located in the description launch page of the survey instrument. Responses were collected for a period of 18 days during the later weeks of the spring term. To enhance validity and usefulness of online surveys, follow-ups should be planned and conducted at appropriate times after the initial launch (Wiersman & Jurs, 2009). A follow-up email was sent to the unfinished respondents' email accounts after the first week of the survey launch as a reminder. Two weeks after the survey launch, a second follow-up email was sent to the unfinished respondents' email accounts as a reminder of the survey, indicating the closing date and time. A final email reminder was sent to any remaining unfinished respondents the evening before the final day of data collection. To encourage participation in the survey, an incentive of a chance to win one of multiple gift cards or college gift certificates were included in the student email and on the landing page of the survey. The participants of the survey self-selected entry into the random drawing of prizes.

Once the survey collection window closed, the responses were reviewed for the prize drawings and the potential participation in interviews from the respondents who self-selected to participate in the interview. A random sample of the students were selected and invited to choose from interview times determined by the interviewer. The interviews were recorded with a digital recorder and transcribed by an online service for use in the thematic reduction process.

Data Analysis

For the first research question, the analysis identifies overall student fall-to-spring retention and fall-to-fall persistence rates pre- and post implementation of the GPS course. College enrollment numbers were totaled for student count and evaluated for enrollment trends. Retention and persistence percentages were identified from the pre-implementation data from

fall 2014 to spring 2017 and the post-implementation data from fall 2017 through the spring term 2019. The analysis determined if the proportion of students retained from term to term pre- and post implementation differs. In addition, the analysis included the proportion of students persisting from year to year pre- and post implementation of the GPS course.

For the second research question, the analysis identified and examined the student retention and persistence rates for students taking the GPS course versus those who have not taken the course. The intent was to gain an understanding of not only taking but completing the GPS course, successfully and unsuccessfully, related to student retention and persistence rates at the college. Analysis was conducted to gain insights into the varying student demographics of gender, ethnicity, age, disability, and economic disadvantage. GPS course modalities offered at the college (face-to-face, hybrid, telepresence, and online) were also analyzed to determine if there is a relationship between course delivery formats and completion rates.

For the third research question, survey responses of the students having taken and completed the GPS course were analyzed using a few methods. The nominal data collected on enrollment information were taken into consideration to identify similarities and differences that may exist in the each of the subgroups. The questions relating to course topics within the student outcomes measured section and course competencies within the course outcomes measured section were evaluated to determine if there was a significant impact on students taking the course. Questions related to the student experience and perceptions were examined for the students' feelings about topics relating to student success. The data from the Likert scale questions were interpreted as ordinal data. Measuring the central tendency of the distribution was necessary to determine the mean of the question responses. Frequency data and descriptive

statistics were used to summarize the results of the analysis regarding student perceptions of the GPS course's effectiveness.

The qualitative portion of the third research question with the interview used van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenology for the collection of data or *capta* for analysis (See Figure 1). Hermeneutic phenomenology was employed to take the experiences of individuals and attempt to illuminate a worldview based on how a subject recounts his or her life (Kafle, 2011). The rationale for utilizing van Manen's phenomenology was to be able to ask the participants open-ended questions, allowing them to speak about their experiences within the GPS for Student Success course and about student success. In the interview, the participants were asked their overall opinion of the GPS course and were requested to provide additional feedback on several student success-related questions from the survey. The study relied on the participant responses on the open-ended interview questions as the raw *capta*. The raw *capta* was reduced to interpret and understand the hidden meanings of the student experiences and perceptions.

The reduction method that was selected for the qualitative portion of the study was a thematic analysis process. The thematic analysis process utilized a reduction table to collect the raw *capta* of the participants from the open-ended questions in the interviews. The process provided the opportunity to reduce the *capta* down from the raw participants' data and to condense it into broader categories, more specific subcategories, and enduring themes from the participants. In qualitative research, the reduction of *capta*, or data analysis, is an iterative process that requires interpretation (Lichtman, 2013). The reduction was a three-step process. The first step is designed to remove any extraneous words from the *capta* and to attempt to clarify the participants' meaning separated into specific topics. The next step of reduction is to analyze the reduced *capta* and organize it into categories and subcategories based on themes that

could be identified within the participants' responses. The final reduction step is to interpret all of the categories and subcategories discovered together and to declare statements of the enduring themes derived from the process.

Capta	Codes	Categories	Concepts
Raw Capta	Reduction of Raw Capta	Themes based on Original Capta	Declaring the Themes
The original transcripts raw text as presented via the transcription process. Nothing is removed	Eliminating extraneous words in an effort to clarify structural meaning.	Captured from the meaning units are the phrases that present ideas or concepts.	Declaring themes requires maintaining the integrity across all previous steps.

Figure 1. Thematic analysis process. Adapted from 'The theory, practice, and evolution of the phenomenological method as a qualitative research procedure,' by A. Giorgi, 1997, *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, 28(2), 235-260.

The thematic analysis process was appropriate for use in the study to reduce the original participants' responses into usable categories to interpret which enduring themes occurred within the experiences of the participants. Present in the reduction was an in-depth process of removing the descriptions of people, places, and things that was necessary to unveil the meanings behind the descriptions of the experiences. Figure 1 provides a graphical depiction of the research methods employed to address the research questions of this study.

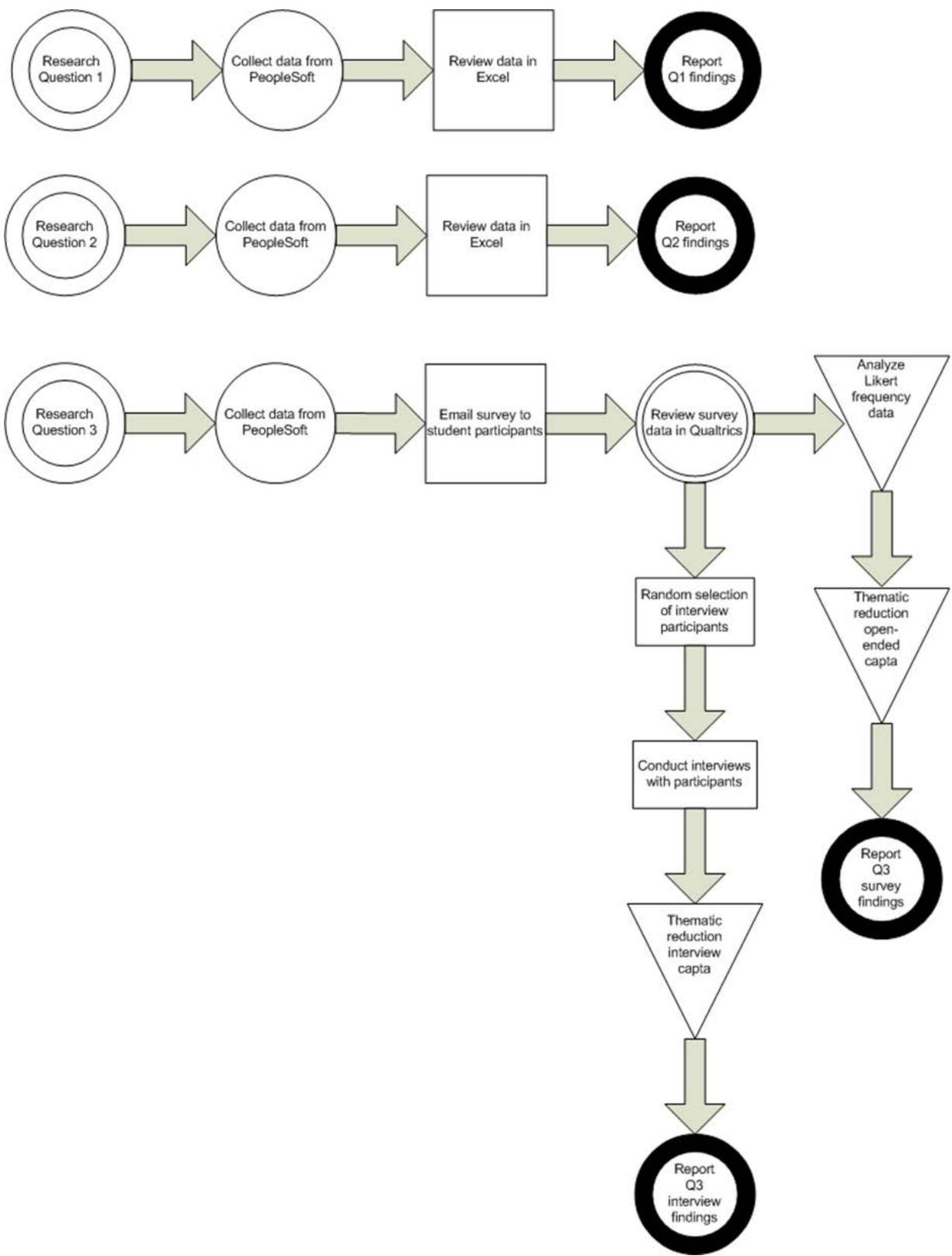


Figure 2. Research methods used to obtain findings for the three research questions posed.

Limitations of the Data

The limitations of the institutional data collection include that the college has required the GPS course since the fall of 2017, less than two full academic years. This limits the amount of years of data post implementation of the GPS course to analyze for the purpose of this study. This lack of data may require the gathering and studying of future data as a recommendation to make generalizations about the impact that the course may have on student retention and persistence rates longitudinally.

The online survey response rate can be a limitation of the study's data if only a small percentage of the student population completes the survey. Response rates to online surveys can vary from mailed questioners. There is no clear advantage between the two, and nonresponse rates are consistent with both types (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009). Measures were taken to increase response rates, with follow-up emails sent to the unfinished respondents' email accounts both one week and two weeks after the survey launch, as well as the evening before the final day of data collection. The challenge with participation of this sample are the attempts to email the online survey to students who have since graduated from the college with a credential or who have discontinued studies at the college. Graduates or students who have withdrawn from the Midwest college have access to their email accounts for 180 days after graduation and may not be reachable if no personal email address is on file in the student information system.

Summary

In summary, the purpose of the study was to investigate the impact of the GPS course on student retention and persistence rates at a Midwest, two-year public college. A mixed methods approach utilizing both quantitative and qualitative research methods was used to answer the research questions. The population and sample of the study included all students pre- and post

implementation of the course from fall of 2014 through the 2019 spring term. The gathering and review of institutional data was important to identify institutional trends with student retention and persistence rates. The participant survey for the GPS course was deployed to capture the students' perspective on the impact that the GPS course had on their ability to succeed academically, as well as to gather capta on student perceptions.

Chapter IV: Presentation of the Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine a Midwest, two-year public college's first-year experience course, GPS for Student Success, to investigate the impact that it had on student retention and persistence rates and to determine the significance of the course on the students' ability to persist. The study used both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies.

The first part of the inquiry was to understand the college's overall retention and persistence rates before and after implementation of the GPS course. The second part explored the significance of the GPS course on retention and persistence rates of completers and noncompleters of the GPS course. The first two inquiries were accomplished through an analysis of existing institutional data. The third part of the inquiry gathered information regarding the student experience in the GPS course through a survey followed by semistructured interviews with students who had completed the course. The intent was to gain an understanding of which areas of the course had the most perceived impact on the students.

The research questions guiding this study include:

1. Is there a difference in the college's retention and persistence rates before and after implementation of the first-year experience course GPS for Student Success?
2. Is there a difference in retention and persistence rates of completers and noncompleters of the first-year experience course GPS for Student Success; is there a difference in course completion rates in relation to demographics such as gender, ethnicity, age, disability, and economic disadvantage or among the various delivery modalities by which GPS for Student Success was taught?
3. What impact has the first-year experience course GPS for Student Success had on student retention and persistence?

Demographics of Student Population

During the first phase of inquiry, examining the internal data of the Midwest college from the fall term of 2017 to the fall term of 2018, the time frame in which the GPS course was implemented, revealed the gender, ethnicity, age, disability, economic disadvantage, and enrollment status of the student population of 6,571 who attended the college. As can be seen in Table 5, the majority of the student population from the fall term of 2017 to the fall term of 2018 was female at 55% (3,631). Age groups consisted of students 20 years and younger making up 42% (2,763) of the population, students 21–24 years making up 23% (1,526) of the population, and those 25 years or older comprising 34% (2,226) of the population.

Table 5

Midwest College Student Demographics: Gender and Age

Variable	<i>N</i>	%
Gender		
Male	2,933	44.6
Female	3,631	55.3
Unidentified	7	.1
Total	6,571	100
Age		
20 years and younger	2,763	42
21–24 years	1,526	23.2
25 years or older	2,226	33.8
Total	6,571	100

The ethnicity of the student population was predominantly White at 86% (5,645), with the next highest being multiple ethnicities, at 5% (307), followed by Asian, at 3% (197). The percentage of economically disadvantaged students was reported as 36% (2,385) of the population, and 6.5% (427) of the students claimed a disability. Of the student population during this time frame, 86% (5,679) were reportedly taking classes at a part-time course load and 14% (892) were enrolled full time. Table 6 presents these data.

Table 6

Midwest College Student Demographics: Economic Disadvantage, Disability, and Enrollment Status

Variable	<i>N</i>	%
Economically disadvantaged		
Yes	2,385	36.3
No	3,482	53
Unknown	704	10.7
Total	6,571	100
Disability		
Disabled	427	6.5
Not disabled	6,144	93.5
Total	6,571	100
Enrollment status		
Part-time	5,679	86
Full-time	892	14
Total	6,571	100

Demographics of Survey Participants

The demographics of the second phase of inquiry examined survey participants by age, gender, ethnicity, and economic disadvantage, as well as enrollment status of the student population who successfully completed the GPS course between the fall term of 2017 and the spring term of 2019. The survey respondents consisted of the following age groups: 27% of students were 20 years and younger ; 12% of students were 21–24 years old; and 61% were 25 years or older. The respondents were a majority female, at 69%. Table 7 presents these data.

Table 7

Midwest College Student Survey Respondent Demographics: Gender and Age

Variable	<i>N</i>	%
Gender		
Male	24	31.2
Female	53	68.8
Total	77	100
Age		
20 years and younger	21	27.3
21–24 years	9	11.7
25 years or older	47	61
Total	77	100

Ethnicity of the respondents was predominantly White at 95% (73), with the next highest ethnicities being Asian at 3% (2) and American Indian and Hispanic both representing 1% of respondents. The percentage of economically disadvantaged student respondents was reported as

33% (25). Of the student respondents, 49% (38) were reportedly taking classes at a part-time course load and 51% (39) were enrolled full time. Table 8 presents these data.

Table 8

Midwest College Student Survey Respondent Demographics: Enrollment Status and Economic Disadvantage

Variable	<i>N</i>	%
Economically disadvantaged		
Yes	25	32.5
No	52	67.5
Total	77	100
Enrollment status		
Part-time	38	49
Full-time	39	51
Total	77	100

Demographics of Interview Participants

The third phase of inquiry was with self-selected interview participants. Demographic data was collected during the interviews. Of the four interview participants, all were female. The ages of the students were 19, 34, 40, and 53. All four interview participants were White and lived within the Midwest college's district. The participants were enrolled in the following programs: Digital Marketing, Respiratory Therapy, Nursing, and Surgical Technologist.

Item Analysis

The initial analysis of institutional data from the Midwest college's student information system was completed to determine the overall retention and persistence rates for the academic

years 2015–2018. This analysis included a comparison of term-to-term and year-to-year percentages and the rate of change from one to the other. Analysis of the college’s institutional data was for the academic years the implementation of the GPS course occurred. Retention and persistence rates during this time were analyzed for students who completed the GPS course compared with students who had not. Demographics such as gender, age, disability, economic disadvantage, and race were included as part of this analysis. An analysis was also completed of GPS course completion rates between the different modalities through which the course was taught.

An online survey was deployed to all students who had successfully completed the GPS for Student Success course from fall of 2017 through spring of 2019. Survey responses were broken out into several sections based on the questions being asked. Demographics were collected and analyzed to better understand the sample. Questions pertaining to enrollment at the college and in the GPS course were also collected and analyzed. Three groups of questions were asked to prompt the participants for their perceptions and experiences within the GPS course. The first group of questions included topics used by other colleges when evaluating FYE courses. Responses were analyzed for the identification of trends. The second group of questions included the course outcomes of the GPS course; the analysis of the responses was to determine the impact of the outcomes on student retention and persistence. The third group of questions was related to items that emerged in the literature review as important factors pertaining to student retention and persistence, and the analysis aimed to understand how these factors related to the student experience.

Interviews were conducted with a small sample of self-selected students from the survey respondents. The interview questions were an extension of the quantitative survey questions,

gathering data on student outcomes, course outcomes, and the student experience. The gathering and analysis of the qualitative data allowed for a deeper understanding of the quantitative data gathered in the survey. A thematic reduction analysis was done on the participants' capta to uncover themes from the student interviews based on the lived student experience.

Institutional Data Findings

The following research questions were answered as a result of the quantitative data collection and analysis. Each of the two research questions required slightly different data sets of secondary institutional data, methods of collection, and analysis to arrive at the findings.

College retention and persistence. Research Question 1: Is there a difference in the college's retention and persistence rates before and after implementation of the first-year experience course GPS for Student Success? The investigation of the retention and persistence rates were conducted using the college's secondary institutional data. Data was gathered term by term for retention of the academic years 2014–2018, including the total student count, along with the number of students retained and not retained for each time period. Additionally, data was gathered year by year for persistence on the same academic years, including the total student count, along with the number of students persisting and not persisting.

The college's academic year total student count had been on the decline, from 2,750 in 2014 down to 2,342 for the 2018 academic year—a loss of 408 students, or a 14.8% decline, over the four academic years. The total number of students persisting at the college had also been on the decline, from 1,923 in 2014 down to 1,585 in 2017. This was a 17.6% decline over the four academic years, a loss of 338 students. The percentage of students retained by the college had also been on the decline from 2014 to 2016, dropping from 69.9% in 2014 to 68.4% in 2015 and down to 65.9% in 2016.

In 2017, the Midwest college implemented the GPS course. At the time of implementation, the college had a slight increase of .2% in persistence, narrowing the gap between students not persisting and students persisting, increasing from 65.9% (1,749 of 2,655) to 66.1% (1,585 of 2,399). (See Figure 2.)

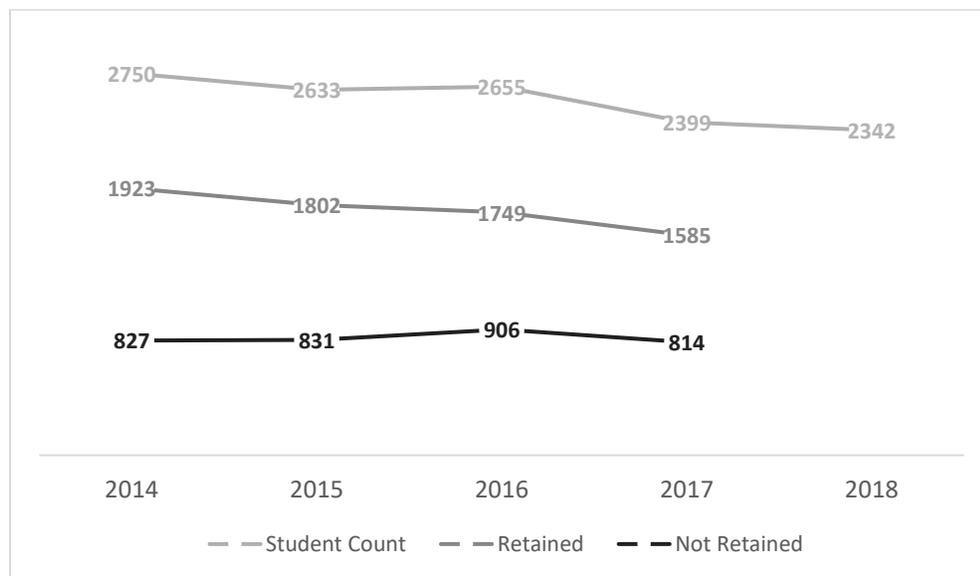


Figure 3. Midwest College's fall-to-fall student persistence numbers.

Term-to-term retention at the Midwest college had also been on a gradual decline from fall terms to spring terms, going from 79.1% of students retained in 2014 (2,176 of 2,750) down .62% in 2015 (2,067 of 2,633) and down .35% in 2016 (2,075 of 2,655). However, the college posted an increase in student retention for the first term that the GPS course was implemented. The fall-to-spring retention increased by .13% to 78.3% in 2017 (1,878 of 2,399). The 2018–2019 academic year had not yet been completed at the time of this research; however, the fall-to-spring numbers indicated a loss of 2.1%, bringing the fall-to-spring retention down to 76.2% in 2018 (1,784 of 2,342). The spring-to-fall retention percentages are factored into the fall-to-fall persistence rates and are worth noting separately as they are slightly lower than the fall to spring retention rates. The spring-to-fall retention percentages declined from 76.3% in the spring of

2015 to 75.3% in 2016 and to 73.3% in 2017. The first spring term after the implementation of the GPS course revealed a slight increase in the spring-to-fall retention percentage to 73.4%.

(See Figure 3.)

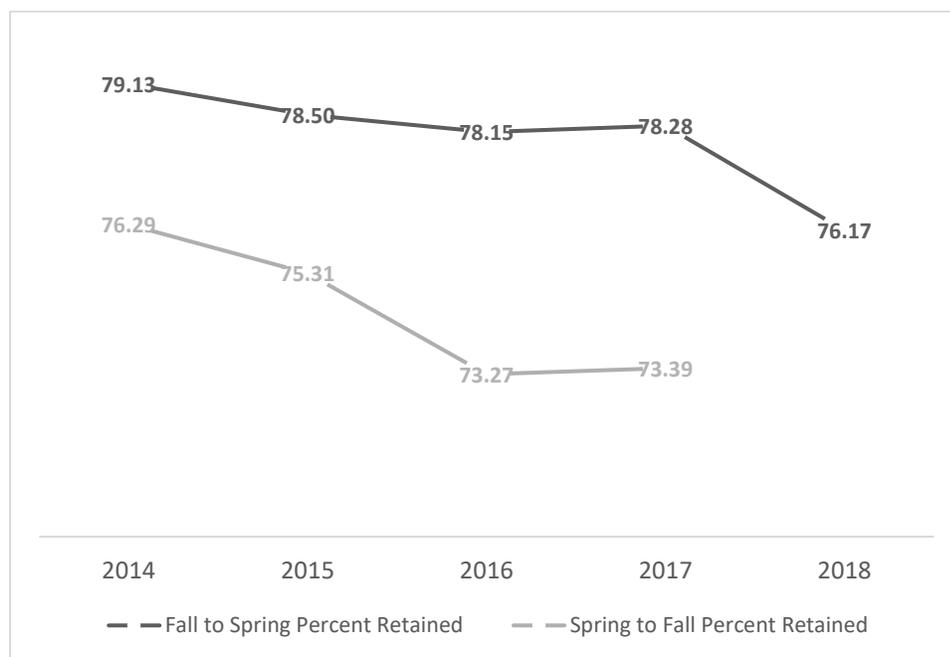


Figure 4. Midwest College's term-to-term student retention percentages.

Student retention. Research Questions 2 and 3 set out to determine if there is a difference in retention and persistence rates of course completers and noncompleters of the first-year experience course GPS for Student Success in relation to demographics such as gender, ethnicity, age, disability, and economic disadvantage. Additionally, the research sought to discover if there is a difference in course completion percentages between the various instruction modalities.

Over the three-year period since the GPS course was implemented, the college's enrollment of students eligible to take the GPS course consisted of 1,904 students. Of those eligible students, 392 had enrolled and 1,512 had not enrolled in the GPS course (see Table 9). The fall-to-spring retention rate for all students enrolled at the college was 44.3% (844). For the

purpose of this study, successful completion of the course was counted as those students who earned a grade of C or better in the course. The retention rate for students who had successfully completed the GPS course was significantly higher, at 84.1%, or a total of 253. The retention rate for students who enrolled in the GPS course and did not successfully complete the course was slightly higher (40.7%) than those who had not enrolled in the GPS course (36.6%).

Table 9

GPS for Student Success Fall-to-Spring Retention Rates

Cohort	Retained / (%)	Not retained / (%)	Total
Did not enroll in GPS course	554 / (36.6)	958 / (63.4)	1,512
Successful completion of GPS course	253 / (84.1)	48 / (15.9)	301
Unsuccessful completion of GPS course	37 / (40.7)	54 / (55.7)	91
Total overall retention	844 / (44.3)	1,060 / (55.7)	1,904

Note. Midwest, two-year public college secondary institutional data cross-tabulation. Successful completion is determined by a grade of C or better.

Student retention by gender. Further analysis of the fall-to-spring retention rates by gender indicates a significantly higher retention rate by successful GPS course takers compared with unsuccessful course takers and students who did not enroll. The female successful course takers were retained at a rate of 82.2%, or a total of 143 of 174, while male successful course takers were retained at 86.6%, or a total of 110 of 127 (see Table 10). There was a less significant difference in the retention rate of males who were unsuccessful in the GPS course takers compared with females. Male unsuccessful course takers were retained at 49.1% (26 of 53) compared with non-course takers at 34% (258 of 758). The male students were retained at a 15.1% higher rate by taking the GPS course and unsuccessfully completing it compared with

those who did not enroll in the GPS course at all. Female unsuccessful GPS course takers were retained at 28.9% (11 of 38) and had a lower retention rate than female students who had not taken the course, at 39.3% (296 of 753) retention.

Table 10

GPS for Student Success Fall-to-Spring Retention Rates by Gender

Cohort	Males retained / (%)	Males not retained / (%)	Total	Females retained / (%)	Females not retained / (%)	Total
Did not enroll in GPS course	258 / (34.0)	500 / (66.0)	758	296 / (39.3)	457 / (60.7)	753
Successful completion of GPS course	110 / (86.6)	17 / (13.4)	127	143 / (82.2)	31 / (17.8)	174
Unsuccessful completion of GPS course	26 / (49.1)	27 / (50.9)	53	11 / (28.9)	27 / (71.1)	38
Total overall retention	394 / (42)	544 / (58)	938	450 / (46.6)	515 / (53.4)	965

Note. Midwest, two-year public college secondary institutional data cross-tabulation. Successful completion is determined by a grade of C or better.

Student retention by ethnicity. When examining the impact of the GPS course in relation to ethnicity, there is limited differentiation in race to be able to make meaningful conclusions. The Midwest college enrollment for the sample is 86.5% (1,646) White, with the next highest ethnicity being multiple races at 4.3% (82). Of the successful completers of the GPS course, retention rates for White students ranged from 70.6% (12 of 17) for Asian students to 100% for American Indian (5), African American (2), and Hispanic (6) students. The successful White

GPS completers were retained at 83.3% (207 of 247). The combined retention rate was 43.3% (713) for White course takers and students not taking the GPS course, with overall retention at 47.3% (844) for all students of all races combined.

Student retention by age. Analyzing retention rates by age indicated a difference between age groups and the percentage with which they were retained at the college. The impact of the GPS course completion on student fall-to-spring retention analysis indicated a lack of sufficient data to make conclusions for the under 18 and over 65 years age categories. The age groups of 25–29, 35–39, and 50–64 years were all retained at rates over 90% as successful course completers. Completers in the age group 25–29 years revealed retention of 33 of 36 students; the age group 35–39 years retained 14 of 15 students; and the age group 50–64 years retained 9 of 10 students. Students in the 18–19 age group comprised the largest age group at 22.8% of the overall sample, or 434 total students; they were successful course completers and retained at a rate of 86.3%, 113 of 131 students. Retention rates for the successful course completers in the age groups of 30–34 and 40–49 years were 86.4% (19 of 22) and 84.6% (11 of 13), respectively. Age groups of 20–21 and 22–24 years had the lowest successful course completion and retention rates, with less than 80% retention for each group, with ages 20–21 years retaining only 37 of 51 students, or 72.5%, and the age group 22–24 years retaining just 17 of 22 students, or 77.3%.

Further analysis of retention rates by age show the 18–19 years age group of GPS course takers who had not successfully completed the course being retained at the highest rate—53.7%, or a total of 22 of 41. All other age groups experienced retention rates below 35% for nonsuccessful GPS course takers. Of the students who had not taken the GPS course, the lowest retention rate was the 18- to 19-year-old age group, retaining only 88 of 262 students, or 33.6%.

The highest retention rate for non-GPS course takers was the 20- to 21-year-old group, with a 66.2% retention rate, retaining 94 of 142 students. The remaining age groups ranged from 46.2% to 58.10% for retention rates of students who had not enrolled in the GPS course.

Student retention by enrollment status. Student enrollment status was a strong indicator of retention in general for full-time verses part-time students. Full-time students were retained at a rate of 98.6% regardless of enrolling in or completing the GPS course. However, full-time students comprised just 18.1% of the GPS cohort sample. Part-time students outnumbered the full-time students, with 1,559 of the 1,904 students attending part time. The overall retention rate for part-time students was lower, at 32.3%. Part-time students who did not enroll in or who had not successfully completed the GPS course were retained at rates of 28.7% and 21.7%, respectively. Successful completion of the GPS course for part-time students increased the retention rate to 69.3%, but this was still lower than the rate of the full-time students. Table 11 presents this data.

Table 11

GPS for Student Success Fall-to-Spring Retention Rates by Enrollment Status

Cohort	Full-time retained / (%)	Full-time not retained / (%)	Total	Part-time retained / (%)	Part-time not retained / (%)	Total
Did not enroll in GPS course	169 / (98.3)	3 / (1.7)	172	385 / (28.7)	955 / (71.3)	1,340
Successful completion of GPS course	149 / (98.7)	2 / (1.3)	151	104 / (69.3)	46 / (30.7)	150
Unsuccessful completion of GPS course	22 / (100)	0 / (0)	22	15 / (21.7)	54 (78.3)	69
Total overall retention	340 / (98.6)	5 / (1.4)	345	504 / (32.3)	1,055 / (67.7)	1,559

Note. Midwest, two-year public college secondary institutional data cross-tabulation. Successful completion is determined by a grade of C or better.

Student retention by economic status. Students at an economic disadvantage were identified within the college's student information system. Analysis of these students showed a significant relationship between successful completion of the GPS course for those in the disadvantaged and unknown groups. As seen in Table 12, students at an economic disadvantage who did not enroll in the GPS course were retained at 8.5%, and students who had not successfully completed the course were not retained at the college. Of those students at an economic disadvantage who successfully completed the GPS course, 66.7% of students were retained by the college.

Table 12

GPS for Student Success Fall-to-Spring Retention: Economic Disadvantage

Economic Status	Did not enroll in GPS course / (%)	Successful completion of GPS course / (%)	Unsuccessful completion of GPS course / (%)	Total
<hr/>				
Not economically disadvantaged				
Retained	301 / (64)	185 / (86.9)	25 / (38.5)	511 / (68.3)
Not retained	169 / (36)	28 / (13.1)	40 / (61.5)	237 / (31.7)
Total	470	213	65	748
<hr/>				
Economically disadvantaged				
Retained	14 / (8.5)	2 / (66.7)	0 / (0)	16 / (9.4)
Not retained	151 / (91.5)	1 / (33.3)	2 / (100)	154 / (90.6)
Total	165	3	2	170
<hr/>				
Unknown				
Retained	239 / (27.3)	66 / (77.6)	12 / (50)	317 / (32.2)
Not retained	638 / (72.7)	19 / (22.4)	12 / (50)	669 / (67.8)
Total	877	85	24	986

Note. Midwest, two-year public college secondary institutional data cross-tabulation. Successful completion is determined by a grade of C or better.

Students with an unknown economic status included 986 students. Unknown economic status students were retained at 27.3% for students who had not enrolled in the GPS course and at 50% for those who unsuccessfully completed the course. The successful completers of the GPS course in the unknown group were retained at 77.6%. Students who were not economically disadvantaged had higher retention rates whether or not they enrolled in or completed the GPS course.

Student retention by disability. The number of students with a disability, according to the college's secondary student data from the student information system, was 144 of 1,904, or 7.65% of the sample. The group of students with a disability who successfully completed the GPS course were retained at an 80.8% rate, 21 of 26 students. The students with a disability who were not successful in the course had a retention rate of 13.3% (2 of 15) and the students with a disability who did not take the course were retained at 54.4%, or 56 of 103 (see Table 13). Students completing the course who were not disabled were retained at a higher rate compared with those who had not taken the course. Successful completers were retained at a rate of 84.4%, or 232 of 275, and unsuccessful course completers were retained at a rate of 46.1%, or 35 of 76. For the 1,409 students who were nondisabled and who had not enrolled in the GPS course, the retention rate was 35.3% (498).

Table 13

GPS for Student Success Fall-to-Spring Retention Rates by Disability

Cohort	Disabled retained	Disabled not retained	Total	Not Disabled retained	Not Disabled not retained	Total
Did not enroll in GPS course	56	47	103	498	911	1,409
	54.4%	45.6%		35.3%	64.7%	
Successful completion of GPS course	21	5	26	232	43	275
	80.80%	19.2%		84.4%	15.6%	
Unsuccessful completion of GPS course	2	13	15	55	41	76
	13.3%	86.7%		46.1%	53.9%	
Total	79	65	144	765	995	1,760
overall retention	54.9%	45.1%		43.5%	56.5%	

Note. Midwest, two-year public college secondary institutional data cross-tabulation. Successful completion is determined by a grade of C or better.

Student persistence. The Midwest college's fall-to-fall persistence overall was lower than the retention rates for fall to spring. The fall-to-fall persistence rates for successful GPS course completers were 57.5% persisting and 42.5% not persisting. Students who had not enrolled in the GPS course had a 28% persistence rate, and students who had not successfully completed the course persisted at 24.2%. The students who successfully completed the GPS course were over 30% more likely to persist year to year than were the rest of the students. Table 14 presents these data.

Table 14

GPS for Student Success Fall-to-Fall Persistence Rates

Cohort	Persisted	Did not persist	Total
Did not enroll in GPS course	423	1,089	1,512
	28.0%	72.0%	
Successful completion of GPS course	173	128	301
	57.5%	42.5%	
Unsuccessful completion of GPS course	22	69	91
	24.2%	75.8%	
Total	618	1,286	1,904
overall persistence	32.5%	67.5%	

Note. Midwest, two-year public college secondary institutional data cross-tabulation. Successful completion is determined by a grade of C or better.

Student persistence by gender. Analysis of the fall-to-fall persistence rates of female and male students indicated a higher persistence rate by successful GPS course takers compared with those who were unsuccessful and those who did not enroll in the GPS course at all. Male students who successfully completed the GPS course persisted at a rate of 61.4%, and female students persisted at a rate of 54.6%. Students who were not successful in the GPS course persisted at a significantly lower rate of 30.2% for males and 15.8% for females. The persistence rates for students who did not enroll in the GPS course were also lower than the rates for successful course takers. Tale 15 presents these findings.

Table 15

GPS for Student Success Fall-to-Fall Persistence Rates by Gender

Cohort	Male – Persisted	Male – Not persisted	Total	Female – Persisted	Female – Not persisted	Total
Did not enroll in GPS course	227 29.9%	531 70.1%	758	196 26.0%	557 74.0%	753
Successful completion of GPS course	78 61.4%	49 38.6%	127	95 54.6%	79 45.4%	174
Unsuccessful completion of GPS course	16 30.2%	37 69.8%	53	6 15.8%	32 84.2%	38
Total	321	617	938	297	668	965
overall persistence	34.2%	65.8%		30.8%	69.2%	

Note. Midwest, two-year public college secondary institutional data cross-tabulation. Successful completion is determined by a grade of C or better.

Student persistence by ethnicity. Persistence rates by ethnicity were of limited sample sizes. Persistence rates for all categories of ethnicity of the successful completers of the GPS course had significantly lower persistence rates compared to retention rates. The largest group by ethnicity were White; the successful GPS completers had a persistence rate of 58.7%, with an overall retention rate of 33.1% for all students in the demographic category. The next largest group was multiple race, and persistence was at 43.8% for successful course completers. The unknown ethnicity group had the largest change from retention to persistence—from 87.5% to 25% persistence. Of all of the 91 unsuccessful GPS course takers, 22 students remained one year after starting.

Student persistence by age. The impact of successful completion of the GPS course on student persistence shows ages 18–19 years persisted at a 58.8% rate, 20–21 years persisted at 51%, 22–24 years persisted at 54.5%, 25–29 years persisted at 66.7%, 30–34 years persisted at 54.5%, 35–39 years persisted at 60%, 40–49 years persisted at 53.8%, and 50–64 years persisted at 60%. All of these successful course completer age groups had a higher persistence rate than students who did not enroll in the GPS course or than those who were not successful in the course.

Student persistence by enrollment status. Enrollment status was less important as an indicator of persistence for full-time students than it was for student retention. As noted in prior analysis, full-time students at the college were retained fall to spring at a rate of 98.6% (340 of 345 students) regardless of enrolling in the GPS course and regardless of whether they successfully completed the course if enrolled. However, when analyzing the persistence rates from fall to fall, the rates were found to be only about half of the retention rates, with 57.7% (199) of 345 full-time students persisting. Successful GPS completers persisted at 66.9%, or 101 students of 151. Persistence rates for unsuccessful GPS course takers was 54.5%, or 12 of 22 students. Students who did not take the course persisted at 50% of the 172 students. The overall persistence rate for part-time students was 26.9% (419 of 1,559) compared with a retention rate of 32.3%. Students who did not enroll in the GPS course persisted at 25.1% of the 1,340 students. Sixty-nine, or 14.5%, of students who had not successfully completed the course persisted. Persistence rates for both full- and part-time students remained higher for successful GPS course completers than for the non-course takers or for course takers who did not successfully complete the course. Table 16 presents these data.

Table 16

GPS for Student Success Fall-to-Fall Persistence Rates by Enrollment Status

Cohort	Full-time – Persisted	Full-time – Not persisted	Total	Part-time – Persisted	Part-time – Not persisted	Total
Did not enroll in GPS course	86	86	172	337	1,003	1,340
	50.0%	50.0%		25.1%	74.9%	
Successful completion of GPS course	101	50	151	72	78	150
	66.9%	33.1%		48.0%	52.0%	
Unsuccessful completion of GPS course	12	10	22	10	59	69
	54.5%	45.5%		14.5%	85.5%	
Total	199	146	345	419	1,140	1,559
overall persistence	57.7%	42.3%		26.9%	73.1%	

Note. Midwest, two-year public college secondary institutional data cross-tabulation. Successful completion is determined by a grade of C or better.

Student persistence by economic status. Analysis of students at an economic disadvantage indicates a weak relationship between successful completion of the GPS course and student persistence. As seen in Table 17, of the successful completers in the economically disadvantaged group, 33.3% (1) of the 3 students persisted at the college. The successful completers of the GPS course in the unknown economic status group persisted at 52.9%, 45 of 85 students. The unknown economic status students persisted at 26.5% (232 of 877) for students who had not enrolled in the GPS course, and 33.3% (8 of 24) for those who were unsuccessful at completing the course. Of the GPS course completers, students who were not economically disadvantaged had higher persistence rates.

Table 17

GPS for Student Success Fall-to-Spring Persistence: Economic Disadvantage

Cohort		Did not enroll in GPS course	Successful completion of GPS course	Unsuccessful completion of GPS course	Total
Not economically disadvantaged	Persisted	152	127	14	293
		32.3%	59.6%	21.5%	39.2%
	Not persisted	318	86	51	455
		67.7%	40.4%	78.5%	60.8%
Total		470	213	65	748
Economically disadvantaged	Persisted	39	1	0	430
		23.6%	33.3%	0%	23.5%
	Not persisted	126	2	2	130
		76.4%	66.7%	100%	90.6%
Total		165	3	2	170
Unknown	Persisted	232	45	8	285
		26.5%	52.9%	33.3%	28.9%
	Not persisted	645	40	16	701
		73.5%	47.1%	66.7%	71.1%
Total		877	85	24	986

Note. Midwest, 2-year public college secondary institutional data cross-tabulation. Successful completion is determined by a grade of C or better.

Student persistence by disability. Overall persistence for students with a disability was 29.9% (43 of 144), and overall persistence of nondisabled students was 32.7% (575 of 1,760). Students with a disability who successfully completed the GPS course persisted at a 53.8% rate,

or 14 of 26 students; this group was just slightly lower than those who were not disabled, at 57.8%, or 159 of 275 students (see Table 18). Students who had not enrolled in the GPS course—including those with disabilities (28 of 103) and those without disabilities (395 of 1,409)—both persisted at higher rates than did students who failed to successfully complete the GPS course. One of the rare instances in the analysis of the data was that the non-course takers' persistence rates were higher than the rates for students who were enrolled but did not successfully complete the GPS course.

Table 18

GPS for Student Success Fall-to-Fall Persistence Rates by Disability

Cohort	Disabled – Persisted	Disabled – Not persisted	Total	Not disabled – Persisted	Not disabled – Not persisted	Total
Did not enroll in GPS course	28 27.2%	75 72.8%	103	395 28%	1,014 72%	1,409
Successful completion of GPS course	14 53.8%	12 46.2%	26	159 57.8%	116 42.2%	275
Unsuccessful completion of GPS course	1 6.7%	14 93.3%	15	21 27.6%	55 72.4%	76
Total	43	101	144	575	1,185	
overall persistence	29.9%	70.1%		32.7%	67.3%	

Note. Midwest, two-year public college secondary institutional data cross-tabulation. Successful completion is determined by a grade of C or better.

GPS Course Delivery Modality

The Midwest college's completion rate for the course GPS for Student Success was 74.8% across all modalities through which it was delivered. The modality with the greatest completion rate was hybrid (a mix of face-to-face and online), at 82.7%, or 126 of 152 students. The face-to-face student completion rates were the next highest, with 398 of 516 completers, or a 77.1% completion rate. The face-to-face modality had the highest enrollment numbers, at 1,165, or 44.3% of course takers. The telepresence modality had the smallest enrollments and had a course completion rate of 72.6%, or 53 of 73 students. The delivery modality with the lowest completion rate of the GPS course was online, at 69.3%, or 294 of the 424 students completing the course. Table 19 presents course modality completion data.

Table 19

GPS for Student Success Delivery Modality Completion Rates

Completion	Face-to-face	Hybrid (Face-to-face and online)	Telepresence	Online	Total
Successful	398 77.1%	126 82.9%	53 72.6%	294 69.3%	871 74.8%
Unsuccessful	118 22.9%	26 17.1%	20 27.4%	130 30.7%	294 25.2%
Total	516	152	73	424	1,165

Note. Midwest, two-year public college secondary institutional data cross-tabulation. Successful completion is determined by a grade of C or better.

Quantitative Survey Findings

The research question being asked at this part of the inquiry was, “What impact has the first-year experience course GPS for Student Success had on student retention and persistence?” In order to answer this research question, an online survey was deployed to gather data on the GPS course topics, competencies, and student experience.

A pilot study was deployed and, as a result, the survey was refined to incorporate best practices for increasing participation and the response rate by eliminating open-ended questions. The length of the survey was taken into consideration, and the overall question total was decreased. A shorter survey was assumed to have a higher response rate, which would help avoid nonresponse bias (Glen, 2015).

Response rate. The online survey tool Qualtrics was utilized for this phase of the study. A survey was sent out to a total of 1,821 email addresses using college email addresses (1,039) and student personal secondary contact email addresses (782). These addresses were accessed using the student rosters for the GPS course from the college’s PeopleSoft student records. Qualtrics tracked the number of email addresses that bounced back or were undeliverable, reporting 3%, or 31 (6 college, 25 personal) undeliverable messages. One week after the survey launch, a follow-up reminder email was sent to those who had not started the survey or to respondents who had started but were tagged as unfinished. A second follow-up email, two weeks after launch, was sent to those who had not started the survey or to students who had started but were still indicated as unfinished, notifying them of the closing date and time for the survey. A final email reminder was sent to any remaining nonrespondents the evening before the final day of the survey’s data collection window.

As reported in Table 20, of the 1,033 email invitations sent to college email accounts, 47 individuals completed the survey, yielding a response rate of 4.6%. Of the 757 email invitations sent to students' personal secondary contact email account, 35 individuals completed the survey, yielding a response rate of 4.6%. The total response rate of the 1,033 potential student respondents was 82 students, or a 7.9% overall response rate. An additional 48 respondents started the survey but did not complete it, which invalidated their responses for inclusion in the survey results.

Table 20

Number and Percent of Students Who Received and Returned the Survey

Email activity	<i>N</i>	%
College emails	1,033	100
Surveys started	83	8
Surveys finished	47	4.6
Emails bounced	6	.6
Secondary emails	757	100
Surveys started	47	6.2
Surveys finished	35	4.6
Emails bounced	25	3.3
Total potential respondents	1,033	100
Surveys started	130	12.9
Surveys finished	82	7.9
Emails bounced	31	3

Nonrespondents. Response rates for an online survey distributed electronically via email were presented as a limitation of the study. Nonresponse bias can occur if the survey email invitations did not reach the participants due to spam or junk mail filters, undeliverable messages, or unmanaged email accounts (Glen, 2015). A study by Fosnacht et al. (2015) on response rates concluded, “This study did not find that a 5% response rate or even a 75% response rate provides unbiased population estimates under all circumstances” (p. 21).

In March and April of 2019, the Midwest college deployed an online survey to the GPS for Student Success course takers as part of the Promising Practice grant reporting. The college invited students who had taken the GPS course to complete the online survey, yielding a 12% response rate (L. Vargo, personal communication, May 17, 2019). The Promising Practices online survey invitations were sent to all GPS course takers. In contrast, this study sent online survey invitations only to GPS course takers who completed the course with a C or better, equating to 369 fewer participants due to the qualification. The potential for nonparticipation from the sample exists with students who have graduated or have discontinued studies at the college since taking the GPS course. According to institutional data from fall of 2015 until the summer of 2018 regarding students who had enrolled in the GPS course, 29.2% (172) of the students were not successful at completing the course, as seen in Table 21. Nineteen percent (112) of the students during this time graduated with a credential. One hundred (17%) of the students were not retained by the college from fall to spring, and 32.8% (194) did not persist from fall to fall.

Table 21

GPS for Student Success Enrollment from Fall 2015 Till Summer 2018

Enrollment	<i>N</i>	%
Successful	590	77.4
Not successful	172	22.6
Graduated	112	14.7
Not retained fall to spring	100	13.1
Not retained fall to fall	194	25.5

Taking in account these percentages in Table 21 if they were to be applied to the uncompleted academic year of 2018–2019, it could be projected that these same percentages of students would not be successful in the GPS course (22.6%), students that would graduate (14.7%), students that would not be retained (13.1%), and students that would not persist at the college (25.5%). As seen in Table 22, the projected numbers would contribute to nonparticipants of the study, considering that students from the fall of 2018 and spring of 2019 were included into the survey sample not knowing if they were going to graduate, be retained, or persist.

Table 22

GPS for Student Success Enrollment from Fall 2018 and Spring 2019

Enrollment	Projected <i>N</i> for fall of 2018	Projected <i>N</i> for spring of 2019	% from fall 2015 to summer 2018
Successful	281	156	77.4
Not successful	63	35	22.6
Graduated	41	23	14.7
Not retained fall to spring	37	20	13.1
Not retained fall to fall	72	40	25.5

The projected number of students who would not be successful in completing the GPS course was 63 from the fall 2018 term and 35 from the spring term, for a total of 98 students. The projected number of students who would graduate in the fall of 2018 was 41 and in spring of 2019 was 23—a total of 64 students projected to graduate over the two terms. The number of students projected to not be retained in fall of 2018 was 37 and in spring 2019 was 20, for a total of 57 students. Students projected to not be retained for fall of 2018 was 72 and for spring of 2019 was 40, for a total of 112 students. The cumulative total of students who would be potential nonparticipants is projected to be 331, which would impact the response rate calculation, knowing that these students were likely to not participate in the survey due to their inactive enrollment.

Student enrollment information. The enrollment status of the survey respondents differed slightly from the overall college enrollment status. As reported in Table 23, respondents of the survey indicated full-time enrollment status for 50.6% (39) of the students and part-time status for 49.4% (38) of the students. A further distinction was reported for part-time students with a credit load of 9 to 11 credits, with 33.8% (26) indicating this status and 15.6% (12) indicating being enrolled in 8 or fewer credits per term.

Table 23

Enrollment Status—Number of Credits Typically Enrolled in Per Semester/Term

Enrollment	<i>N</i>	%
Part-time (8 or fewer credits)	12	15.6
Part-time (9–11 credits)	26	33.8
Full-time (more than 12 credits)	39	50.6
Total	77	100

Additional enrollment information was reported on questions pertaining to the student's current enrollment status. Sixty-eight, or 88.3%, of the students indicated they were currently enrolled in courses at the college. Of the respondents, 11.7% (9) of the students indicated they were no longer enrolled in courses at the college. The follow-up question to student enrollment was if the participants were continuing toward a degree. Respondents indicated that 79.2% (61) were still working toward the degree they first started, while 9.1% (7) indicated that they were continuing toward a degree but had switched programs. Consistent with the responses of the enrollment status, 11.7% (9) students indicated they were no longer seeking a degree at the college. Additionally, 94.8% (73) of the respondents had not yet graduated with a degree, diploma, or credential from the college. Four, or 5.2%, of the respondents had graduated from a program.

GPS for Student Success enrollment. Two questions of the survey inquired about enrollment in the GPS course. The questions pertained to when the course was taken and in which delivery modality they enrolled. As reported in Table 24, the majority of students had enrolled in the GPS course during their first term at the college, 54.5%, or 42 total. The next highest enrollment of respondents was 26% (20) who had enrolled in the GPS course before their first term of studies at the college. The remaining students responded that they had taken the course after their first term, with 10.4% (8) of the students taking the course after their first year of studies, and 9.1% (7) of the students taking the GPS course after their first term of studies.

Table 24

Student Enrollment Schedule for GPS for Student Success

GPS enrollment timetable	<i>N</i>	%
During first term	42	54.5
Before first term	20	26
After first term	7	9.1
After first year	8	10.4
Total	77	100

The second query of the GPS course enrollment asked about the delivery modality of the GPS course. Respondents indicated that 49.4% (38) had taken the course in the online modality (see Table 25) and 29.9% (23) had taken it face to face during the first eight weeks of the term. The remaining 20.8% (16) students enrolled in the course face to face before the term of their studies started.

Table 25

Delivery Modality of the GPS Course

GPS delivery modality	<i>N</i>	%
Online	38	49.4
Face-to-face (8 weeks during term)	23	29.9
Face-to-face (before term started)	16	20.8
Total	77	100

Student outcomes measured. The survey questions relating to student outcomes were informed from the 2012–2013 National Survey of First-Year Seminars (NSFYs). The most frequently used student outcomes that institutions used as measures to internally assess FYE

courses were reviewed and modified for this study. Participants were asked for their agreement or disagreement with a series of questions pertaining to the perceived impact of the GPS course. The perception questions on student outcomes utilized a 5-point Likert scale (5 = Strongly Agree, 4 = Agree, 3 = Neither Agree or Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 1 = Strongly Disagree). A 5-point Likert scale allowed for a neutral response and two levels of agreement or disagreement for the respondents to choose from.

The question of whether the students believed that the GPS course had helped to improve their grade point average yielded 43.4% (33) of respondents reporting that they strongly agreed and 35.5% (27) that they agreed (see Table 26). Of the respondents, 34% either disagreed or strongly disagreed, 23.7% (18) and 10.5% (8), respectively. Respondents who were neutral on the GPS course's impact on their grade point average consisted of 22.4% (17) of the students.

Table 26

The GPS Course Helped to Improve My Grade Point Average?

Response	Frequency	%
Strongly agree	6	7.9
Agree	27	35.5
Neither agree nor disagree	17	22.4
Disagree	18	23.7
Strongly disagree	8	10.5
Total	76	100%

When students were asked if the GPS course had a positive impact on their educational journey, of the respondents, 17.1% (13) strongly agreed and 35.5% (27) agreed, for a total of

52.6% (40). Students who disagreed accounted for 14.5% (11), strongly disagreed for 11.8% (9), and students who were neutral accounted for 21.1% (16). Table 27 presents these findings.

Table 27

I Feel the GPS Course had a Positive Impact on My Educational Journey?

Response	Frequency	%
Strongly agree	13	17.1
Agree	27	35.5
Neither agree nor disagree	16	21.1
Disagree	11	14.5
Strongly disagree	9	11.8
Total	76	100

For the question of whether the students felt that they were satisfied with their achievement in the GPS course, 63% of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed that the course helped, 28.9% (22) and 34.2% (26), respectively (see Table 28). Respondents who disagreed with this statement were 10.5% (8), and 7.9% (6) strongly disagreed. Respondents who were neutral on being satisfied with their achievement consisted of 18.4% (14) of the students.

Table 28

I am Satisfied with My Achievement of the GPS Course Outcomes?

Response	Frequency	%
Strongly agree	22	28.9
Agree	26	34.2
Neither agree nor disagree	14	18.4
Disagree	8	10.5
Strongly disagree	6	7.9
Total	76	100

As seen in Table 29, when asked if the respondents were satisfied with the GPS course, 25% (19) strongly agreed and 31.6% (24) agreed—a total of 56.6% (43). Students who disagreed accounted for 14.5% (11), and those who strongly disagreed accounted for 18.4% (14). Students who were neutral on being satisfied with the GPS course made up 10.5% (8) of respondents.

Table 29

Overall, I was Satisfied with the GPS for Student Success Course?

Response	Frequency	%
Strongly agree	19	25
Agree	24	31.6
Neither agree nor disagree	8	10.5
Disagree	11	14.5
Strongly disagree	14	18.4
Total	76	100

For the question of whether the students felt that the GPS course had helped them to improve academically, 14.5% (11) of the respondents strongly agreed and 30.3% (23) agreed. Twenty-three percent (18) of students disagreed that the course helped and 35.5% (27) strongly disagreed. Table 30 presents these findings.

Table 30

The GPS for Student Success Course Helped Me to Improve Academically?

Response	Frequency	%
Strongly agree	11	14.5
Agree	23	30.3
Neither agree nor disagree	15	19.7
Disagree	18	23.7
Strongly disagree	9	11.8
Total	76	100

When asked if the GPS course encouraged participation in campus activities, as seen in Table 31, 6.7% (5) of the respondents strongly agreed and 25.3% (19) agreed. Students who were neutral on the GPS having a positive impact on participation consisted of 20% (15) of respondents. Forty percent (30) of respondents disagreed and 8% (6) strongly agreed that the course had encouraged participation. The total of respondents that either were neutral or disagreed was 68% (51).

Table 31

The GPS Course Encouraged my Participation in Campus Activities?

Response	Frequency	%
Strongly agree	5	6.7
Agree	19	25.3
Neither agree nor disagree	15	20.0
Disagree	30	40.0
Strongly disagree	6	8.0
Total	75	100

The question of whether the students perceived the GPS course to have helped to increase the use of campus services such as tutors and counselors revealed that 44.7% (34) of the respondents either strongly agreed or agreed, 28.4% (14) strongly agreed, and 26.3% (20) agreed (see Table 32). Respondents who were neutral on the GPS's impact on their campus service usage consisted of 15.8% (12) students. Respondents who strongly disagreed were 10.5% (22) of the students, and those who disagreed were 28.9% (22) of the students, for a total of 39.5% (30).

Table 32

My Use of Campus Services (Link, Tutors, Counselors, Etc.) Increased as a Result of the GPS Course?

Response	Frequency	%
Strongly agree	14	18.4
Agree	20	26.3
Neither agree nor disagree	12	15.8
Disagree	22	28.9
Strongly disagree	8	10.5
Total	76	100

As seen in Table 33, when asked if the GPS course increased connections with peers of the respondents, 3.9% (3) strongly agreed and 19.7% (15) agreed that the course had increased connections. Students who were neutral on the GPS having a positive impact on increasing connections consisted of 26.3% (20) of respondents. Twenty-nine, or 38.2%, of respondents disagreed, and 11.8% (6) strongly disagreed. The total of respondents who either were neutral or disagreed was 76.3% (58).

Table 33

In the GPS for Student Success Course I Increased My Connections with Peers?

Response	Frequency	%
Strongly agree	3	3.9
Agree	15	19.7
Neither agree nor disagree	20	26.3
Disagree	29	38.2
Strongly disagree	9	11.8
Total	76	100

Course outcomes measured. The survey questions on course outcomes continued the usage of the Likert scale to attain the participants' perceptions. The questions were informed by the five competencies of the GPS for Student Success course. Participants were asked to respond to questions about the impact of the course competency as result of completing the course. One additional question was asked inquiring if the students felt the experience would have been more beneficial if they were enrolled with students in their program.

For the question of whether the students felt that as a result of the GPS course that they had gained a better understanding of college resources, policies, and procedures, 20.3% (15) of students strongly agreed and 60.8% (45) agreed, for a total of 81.1% in agreement (see Table 34). Students who either disagreed or strongly disagreed were a total of 16.2% (12) of the respondents, with 12.2% (9) who disagreed and 4.1% (3) who strongly disagreed. Respondents who were neutral about this statement consisted of 2.7% (2) students.

Table 34

I Gained a Better Understanding of the College Resources, Policies, and Processes?

Response	Frequency	%
Strongly agree	15	20.3
Agree	45	60.8
Neither agree nor disagree	2	2.7
Disagree	9	12.2
Strongly disagree	3	4.1
Total	74	100

When asked if designing an academic plan in the GPS course was critical to their educational success, 16.2% (12) of the respondents strongly agreed and 39.2% (29) agreed, for a total of 55.4% (41). Students who disagreed accounted for 23% (17); those who strongly disagreed and those who were neutral both were 10.8% (8) of the respondents. (See Table 35.)

Table 35

Designing an Academic Plan was Critical to My Educational Success?

Response	Frequency	%
Strongly agree	12	16.2
Agree	29	39.2
Neither agree nor disagree	8	10.8
Disagree	17	23
Strongly disagree	8	10.8
Total	74	100

For the question of whether the students felt that as a result of the GPS course, they had learned about interpersonal attributes for student success and whether it helped them grow personally, 47.3% (35) of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed (see Table 36). Students who either disagreed or strongly disagreed were 31.1% (23) of the respondents. Respondents who were neutral about the interpersonal attributes helping them grow consisted of 21.6% (16) students.

Table 36

Learning About Interpersonal Attributes for Student Success Helped Me Grow Personally?

Response	Frequency	%
Strongly agree	9	12.2
Agree	26	35.1
Neither agree nor disagree	16	21.
Disagree	17	23
Strongly disagree	6	8.1
Total	74	100

When asked if as a result of the GPS course, students were better able to utilize college resources to help with time management and personal budgeting, 16.2% (12) strongly agreed and 33.8% (25) agreed. A total of 50% (37) either agreed or strongly agreed that they were better able to utilize the resources. Students who were neutral accounted for 23% (17), those who strongly disagreed accounted for 10.8% (8) of respondents, and those who disagreed were at 16.2% (12). Table 37 shows these results.

Table 37

I am Better Able to Utilize College Resources to Help with Time Management and Personal Budgeting?

Response	Frequency	%
Strongly agree	12	16.2
Agree	25	33.8
Neither agree nor disagree	17	23
Disagree	12	16.2
Strongly disagree	8	10.8
Total	74	100

For the question of whether the students felt that as a result of the GPS course, they were able to adopt new strategies for learning efficiently and effectively, 21.6% (16) strongly agreed and 31.1% (23) agreed (see Table 38). Respondents who were neutral about adopting new strategies to learn consisted of 14.9% (11) students. Sixteen students, or 21.6%, disagreed, and 10.8% (8) strongly disagreed.

Table 38

I Was Able to Adopt New Strategies for Learning Efficiently and Effectively?

Response	Frequency	%
Strongly agree	16	21.6
Agree	23	31.1
Neither agree nor disagree	11	14.9
Disagree	16	21.6
Strongly disagree	8	10.8
Total	74	100

As reported in Table 39, when asked if the experience in the GPS course would have been better “if you had been with students in your program or school,” students who agreed and strongly agreed were both at 14.9% (11). An additional 33.8% (25) of the students were neutral, 25.7% (19) of the respondents disagreed, and 10.8% (8) strongly disagreed, for a total of 36.5% (27). The extended total of 70.3% (52) of the respondents did not feel it would have been better in the GPS course with same-program students.

Table 39

Would Your Experience in the GPS Course Have Been Better if You Had Been with Students in Your Program or School?

Response	Frequency	%
Strongly agree	11	14.9
Agree	11	14.9
Neither agree nor disagree	25	33.8
Disagree	19	25.7
Strongly disagree	8	10.8
Total	74	100

Student experience and perceptions. Questions related to the student experience and their perceptions were intended to gather respondents' feelings about topics relating to student success. Self-efficacy, a sense of belonging, and the perceived value of education were all important to retention and persistence, according to the review of literature. Accordingly, the survey questions were focused on these areas. A final question was asked about attaining a credential and if that is part of how students define success in their lives.

The survey question pertaining to self-efficacy asked if the students had experienced challenges during their education, but always believed in themselves. Of the respondents, 57.5% (42) agreed and 24.7% (18) strongly agreed (see Table 40). Respondents who either agreed or strongly agreed made up 82.2% (60) of the students. The participants who were neutral on the topic consisted of 11% (8) of the students. Students who either disagreed or strongly disagreed were 6.8% (5) of the respondents.

Table 40

I Have Experienced Challenges During My Education, But Always Believed in Myself

Response	Frequency	%
Strongly agree	18	24.7
Agree	42	57.5
Neither agree nor disagree	8	11
Disagree	3	4.1
Strongly disagree	2	2.7
Total	73	100

When asked if a sense of belonging at the school and in classes were important, as seen in Table 41, 31.5% (23) of the respondents strongly agreed and 46.6% (34) agreed that a sense of belonging is important, for a total agreement of 78.1% (57). Students who were neutral accounted for 16.4% (12), and those who disagreed and strongly disagreed both came in at 2.7% (2).

Table 41

A Sense of Belonging at the School and in Classes are Important to Me

Response	Frequency	%
Strongly agree	23	31.5
Agree	34	46.6
Neither agree nor disagree	12	16.4
Disagree	2	2.7
Strongly disagree	2	2.7
Total	73	100

For the survey question that asked if the value of the education in their program was important, 56.2% (41) of the respondents strongly agreed and 38.4% (28) agreed (see Table 42). The total respondents who either agreed or strongly agreed were 94.5% (69) of the students. The participants who were neutral on the topic consisted of 4.1% (3) students, with 1.4% (1) who disagreed and no participants who strongly disagreed.

Table 42

The Value of the Education in My Program is Important to Me

Response	Frequency	%
Strongly agree	41	56.2
Agree	28	38.4
Neither agree nor disagree	3	4.1
Disagree	1	21.4
Strongly disagree	0	0%
Total	73	100

When asked if attaining a college credential is part of how students define success in life, 31.5% (23) of the respondents strongly agreed and 31.5% (23) agreed, for a total of 63% (46). Students who were neutral accounted for 23.3% (17), for a total of 86.3% (63) of students who either strongly agreed, agreed, or were neutral about degree attainment relating to success. Respondents who disagreed were 5.5% (4) of the students, and those who strongly disagreed were 8.2% (6) of respondents. Table 43 displays these findings.

Table 43

Attaining a College Credential (Degree, Diploma, or Certificate) is Part of How I Define Success in Life

Response	Frequency	%
Strongly agree	23	31.5
Agree	23	31.5
Neither agree nor disagree	17	23.3
Disagree	4	5.5
Strongly disagree	6	8.2
Total	73	100

Qualitative Interview Findings

Invitations to participate in a follow-up interview were sent out to the 16 self-selected participants from the survey. Four students responded to the invitation. Interviews were scheduled and conducted in person on two campuses, and one via phone, over three scheduled days.

Interview questions started with the overall research question, “In your experience, what was the impact the first-year experience course GPS for Student Success had on your retention and persistence at the college?” with follow-up questions relating to the course competencies and the students’ opinions on improvements to the course (see Appendix B). Four questions from the survey on the students’ experience and perception were asked for greater depth. The interview capta were analyzed utilizing an iterative process that included reduction of raw capta, categories of themes, and then the identification of enduring themes among the participants. See Appendix C for the reduction process. See Figure 5 for the enduring themes.

<p>What was the impact of the first-year experience course, the GPS for student success and what it had on your retention and persistence at the college?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up for success • Build skills
<p>Describe appropriate Mid-State resources, policies and processes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orientation
<p>Investigate interpersonal attributes for student success</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal growth • Results not consistently used
<p>Adopt strategies for learning efficiently and effectively</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repeat • Benefited preparedness
<p>Utilize Mid-State resources to help in areas of time management and personal budgeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budgeting • Time management
<p>Design an Academic Plan for Student Success</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repeat • Planning ahead
<p>In your opinion what could be improved in the GPS for Student Success course, and why based on your experience?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take before any classes • Improvements • Consistency across faculty
<p>What if any challenges have you experienced in your educational journey?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenges overcome • Self-Efficacy • Advisors
<p>How do you define a sense of belonging?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationships • Excellent service • Student centric • College experience
<p>What is the value of your education, and what does it mean to you?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It means the world • Life-long learning • Career benefits
<p>How do you personally define success in your life?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Versatility • Career benefits • Employer value

Figure 5. Thematic reduction enduring themes.

The impact of the GPS course on student retention and persistence was identified as the first theme of *setting students up for success and for building skills*. The setting up for success theme included stories about the interviewees being prepared with what to expect while in college after taking the course and by the general benefit they felt they received from the orientation to the college. One of the participants said, “I think it got me prepped for what to expect to prepare for classes.” Another interviewee stated, “I felt it was extremely beneficial for me.” The *building skills theme* came from interviewees discussing the increased understanding of their personal strengths as part of GPS, building of appropriate study skills, and developing as a person during the course. For example, one student indicated, “I learned some good study techniques.”

Course outcomes. Follow-up questions were asked about each of the course outcomes and related to the GPS course outcome of *describe appropriate college resources, policies, and processes*. The enduring theme from this question was orientation to the college. The benefit the interviewees identified was gaining an understanding of the student handbook, which helped to set up the students’ expectations of the college. One interviewee said, “They got me set up in a sense of what to expect, how to handle it when it comes.” Students also indicated that the GPS course orientated them to scholarship information and expectations, which was beneficial, and helped them gain an understanding of the available student resources presented in the GPS course.

While investigating the outcome of *investigate interpersonal attributes for student success*, the theme of personal growth was seen, along with participants noting that during the different GPS sections, the Strengths Finder results were not consistently utilized. Personal growth was derived from the interviewees indicating that this GPS outcome was beneficial in

developing as a person and gaining an understanding of a person's strengths and what they mean, and responders indicated that this gave the course a more personal feel. One student indicated, "I've kept my Clifton Strengths, and have gone back to that." The interviewees' experience was that the use of the Strengths Finder results varied and that the tool was not used consistently during the course. Participants indicated that the strengths had been utilized differently by their instructor and there were differing stories from other students on how it was utilized in their GPS section. Examples of these inconsistencies included variances in team/group project application of strengths and the instructor not leveraging the strengths results as it would pertain to teams. Several interviewees shared that there was not enough explanation of the strengths results, with one participant saying, "I don't think that we really talked about how to specifically use your personal attributes." Another participant reported a very robust discussion and application with activities surrounding the strength results. The interviewee commented the following about the Clifton Strengths from their instructor: "Going through it, understanding what this actually means to me as a student... She did a great job with that."

The course outcome of *adopting strategies for learning efficiently and effectively* was identified with the theme of being a potential repeat, as activities of the GPS course were also being done in a program class. One interviewee said, "I had to do the exact same thing in one of my classes." It was also identified as feeling unnecessary for students straight out of high school who had already been prepared for these skills there. An additional theme of the outcome was benefitting preparedness of the student. This was identified by participants pointing out the benefit of learning study habits and by the student learning preferences being helpful for two students who had been out of school for some time who were returning. For example, one student said, "I do think it made a difference for me anyway, coming back."

Interview participants responded to the outcome of *utilize college resources to help in areas of time management and personal budgeting* with areas that benefited them and ones that did not for both time management and personal budgeting. Topics benefiting students identified during the interviewees include that the course taught students the need for scheduling breaks when studying and during the semester and that it helped them to gain an understanding of how to better manage time. One student reported, “You have to put in time for some downtime. If you don’t, you will emotionally burnout and it will affect your grades in the long run.” Students also identified a benefit as knowing that if they became overwhelmed during the term, the college has resources to help and that it is recommended to cut back on commitments and it is ok to say no to additional commitments to focus on student success. For example, an interview participant said, “I reprioritized things just so that I would do better.”

Interviewees reported examples that not all students benefited from the budgeting and time-management discussions. One example cited was that the essay on procrastination felt wrong and insulting for a student their age and that the topic of taking shortcuts or skimming while reading college texts could be taken as bad advice. One interview participant stated, “I’m 34 years old so I’ve had enough life experience that the budget was kind of silly, and I know that I’ve heard from others that the budget assignments are not useful to them.”

The *design an academic plan for student success* outcome was identified with the themes of being repetitious and as being a tool for planning ahead. Students indicated that they had created an academic plan with their academic advisor prior to the GPS course and another developed one as part of the dislocated worker program. One interviewee stated, “My entire three years is already planned out.” Benefits of the academic plan pertaining to the planning ahead theme was identified with examples of the plan being something that helped to see all of

the terms planned out and helped the students plan for future terms. The interviewees indicated that the academic plan work in the GPS course allowed for the alteration of the plan utilizing strategies learned in the course to add additional time to set themselves up for success. One student said, “Before I did that course, I didn’t calculate in there the extra time needed.”

GPS for Student Success improvements. One question asked the interview participants about what could be improved in the GPS course. The themes that emerged included that the GPS course should be taken before any other classes and that the course should be consistent across all faculty teaching, plus several miscellaneous suggestions for improvements. The theme of taking the GPS course before any other classes was consistent through all four interviewees. Students expressed thoughts of having the course be an orientation before the term starts. One interviewee said, “Take it out of the semester. Some sort of like a week orientation ahead of time.” Interviewees felt the college should ensure that GPS be completed before any other classes are taken, with one participant stating, “It’d have been kind of nice to have that before I started.” Interviewees also pointed out that taking the course during the term meant that much had already been experienced or done prior to taking GPS.

Consistency of teaching GPS across faculty was identified as a theme for improvement from the interviewees. The four interviewees each had a different instructor teaching their courses. Examples from participant interviews included a note that facilitators should ensure that the instructor has the appropriate time to teach the course and that the same level of student interaction is occurring in all GPS classes. Additionally, student feedback related to equalizing the depth that the Strengths Finder results are utilized and ensuring that team-building activities using the identified strengths were conducted in each class. One student commented about the

strengths activities that “they’re able to do the different interactive activities with the strengths. They are more essential than you realize.”

The miscellaneous improvements theme had two participants indicating that the GPS course could be made to be more concise or not as long. One participant suggested, “...a shorter and condensed version but you would do it before you did any other classes.” Two additional improvements identified by the interviewees were more discussion of financial aid and FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) and that the GPS class should not be required by all students if they meet certain requirements. One interviewee talked about not needing to take GPS coming straight from high school, “Cause if I have a 3.5 GPA and I’m getting emails to join honor societies..., why should I be required to take a class on learning how to learn?”

Student experience and perceptions. Questions pertaining to the student experience and perceptions were asked to attain a more in-depth response to the related quantitative survey questions. The questions stem from the research literature on student persistence inquiring about challenges that students have faced, their sense of belonging, the value they place on education, and what success is defined as to them.

The interviewees were asked if they had experienced any challenges during their educational journey. The challenges that the students shared included a challenging instructor who almost pushed a student to quit, surviving through a divorce and an abusive relationship of a child, and a major traffic violation. One student said, “I’ve had so many doubts where I’m like maybe I’m not good enough to do this because there’s so much to memorize...” The things that students reported helped them to overcome these challenges were their self-efficacy and the belief in themselves. One student discussed self-efficacy, “I’ve always believed in myself, always been determined.” Interviewees also discussed the presence and help of the college

student advisors. One student indicated, “I didn’t know that the college had professional counselors before the course.” Another interviewee talked about the help of advisors, “The only time I’ve ever had challenges, I’ve reached out to my advisor who I’ve had since day one and she’s been amazing.” One student discussed an experience with an advisor, “I was having a little bit of challenge of trying to balance my credit load as a new coming-back student, and I went and talked to my advisor as per advice from my teacher.”

The interviewees discussed knowing about the challenges of the students who were enrolled with them in their program classes and noted that the sizes of the classes were getting smaller day by day, with students dropping out. One student said, “[the class] starts out with a higher number and then they weed themselves out as it goes.” The interviewees’ peers reported that they needed to drop classes because they felt they could not handle the rigor or that they did not believe they could be successful.

The second student experience question asked if they had felt a sense of belonging at the college. The themes interviewees reported that contributed to a sense of belonging were building relationships, excellent service, being student centric, and participating in the college experience. Participants indicated that relationships were built in the second term, when the students began to recognize other students and that developing relationships with their cohorts led to an increased sense of belonging. One of the interviewees indicated feeling so connected with peers and the faculty that the person cried at the end of the last class, sorry to see it end. Smaller class sizes were reported as allowing for more connections with peers and faculty to be made in the classroom. A participant said, “I like that it’s a little smaller so that I feel like it’s kind of easy for everything and you kind of know everybody.” Excellent service was discussed as being a factor of belonging, identifying that faculty showed that they truly cared for the students, and the

faculty never treated the student differently for being nontraditional. One student discussed the instructors' commitment to students, "I think in my case it has a lot to do with the instructors themselves. I felt that they actually cared about me." Interviewees also indicated that the college made them feel comfortable with learning and that the advisors and faculty were very welcoming. One participant indicated that in the first term, all the classes were online and the student did not feel the same sense of belonging online as when the student came to the campus. The student said, "...I did feel kind of like I wasn't really in school, but then when I started coming in, then I started to feel like, okay I'm actually a college kid." Being student-centric was another theme contributing to a sense of belonging. Interviewees discussed the faculty being relatable, creating a positive classroom feel, and personalizing the learning. An interviewee said, "They never made me feel uncomfortable. If I had to ask a question that to me might have seemed dumb, the instructor didn't make me feel stupid." Another theme contributing to belonging was the college experience. Interviewees indicated that the student life events and student ambassadors contributed to belonging, and they pointed out the importance of students feeling that they belong at the college. One student talked about student life, "...they have cookouts and things like that, that's kind of fun. It gives you that college experience."

The third student experience question was, "What is the value of education, and what does it mean to you?" The themes from the responses to this question were that the value of education means freedom in the world, lifelong learning, and career benefits and advantages. The responses from interviewees pertaining to the theme of education meaning the world came from an interviewee indicating that education simply means freedom and being able to escape from a dead-end job while being able to move almost anywhere. One interviewee responded to the value of education by saying, "Oh, it's going to mean everything." Other participants indicated that the

value is high to them; one was a dislocated worker needing a second chance on a career and having to form a home that fostered a strong value of education. Participants of the interviews indicated their desire to be lifelong learners as a theme. Interviewees discussed the existence of being passionate about learning and that they intended to continue their education after completing their degree. One interview discussed enjoyment of a science class stating, "I'm not going to stop learning." Attending the Midwest college for one student ran in the family, with both the student's brother and sister attaining degrees from the same college. The student said, "It's a family tradition." Another theme with interviewees was the career benefits being a value of education. Interviewees discussed the value of education as giving yourself an edge in the job market, indicating examples of allowing for a needed career change opportunity and getting out of a dead-end job as a direct result of their studies. An interviewee said, "I've always stressed school, whether you're young or old, to give yourself a little bit better edge there in the world of everyday jobs."

The fourth student experience question asked how the student would define success in life and whether attaining a credential was part of defining success. The themes from this question spoke to the versatility of the credential, the career benefits, and the employer value. The versatility of the credential theme came from interviewees indicating that the credentials they are seeking are in demand almost anywhere, and the interviewee felt that the skills being learned in the program will become more relevant over time. A student relayed, "I think my program's pretty versatile." For the career benefits theme, students indicated that it goes beyond just the credential and that in the current job market, more jobs are requiring degrees, and that the process of attaining the degree makes for a more well-rounded applicant. Another career benefit identified was that after completion of a credential, a student said, "Education can

potentially open doors for other opportunities in life.” The value to the employer theme was explored with participants discussing that attaining a degree shows an employer one’s focus and commitment and indicates a sense of responsibility and diligence in a person. One participant discussed the specific degree not being as important, saying, “I also feel like in today’s society a lot of jobs don’t really care what your degree is in just as long as you...have one.”

Summary

This study utilized both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The first part of the research was to investigate the college’s overall retention and persistence rates pre- and post implementation of the GPS course. The second part of the inquiry explored the significance of the GPS course on retention and persistence rates of course completers versus noncompleters of the course. Existing data from the college’s internal database was examined to answer these questions. The third part of the study gathered the student experience in the GPS course through an online survey. Interviews with self-selected students who had successfully completed the course were then used as a follow-up to the survey to deepen the understanding of the student experience.

Chapter V: Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

An essential part of the U.S. economy is having a qualified and highly skilled workforce. Higher education institutions are integral to the process of educating our current and future workforce; however, colleges are finding it challenging to retain their enrolled students. All across the country, college educators, advisors, and counselors are being charged with providing additional supports to students to help them persist in their postsecondary education programs through to graduation or degree completion. Two national trends are increased accountability for educational institutions and more emphasis being placed on increasing student retention rates (Dunn, 2003).

Postsecondary institutions in the United States are committing resources to ensure student success. The context of this research was conducted at a Midwest college which implemented an FYE program in fall of 2017 with the development of a new course: GPS for Student Success. Since the implementation of the GPS course, no formal examination into the course had been conducted. An investigation into the past and present retention and persistence statistics was necessary to determine what, if any, impact the GPS course has had on student retention and persistence rates at the college.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to investigate the Midwest college's student retention and persistence numbers pre- and post implementation of the GPS for Student Success course in an effort to understand the impact of the course on student success. To address the research questions of the study, both quantitative and qualitative methods were utilized in a mixed methods design. The inquiry began with the investigation of the college's pre- and post-implementation of the course on student retention and persistence rates from 2014 to 2018. The

analysis examined the college's secondary institutional data on term-to-term retention rates and the fall-to-fall persistence rates of the college for this same time frame.

The next step in the inquiry was to gather and analyze institutional data on retention and persistence rates of all students eligible to take the GPS course. The investigation explored overall retention and persistence rates of students successfully completing the GPS course with a C or better, students not successfully completing the course, and students who had not taken the course. Additional inquiry was completed related to retention and persistence rates based on the student demographics of gender, ethnicity, age, enrollment status, economic status, and disability. The study also investigated the course completion rates for the various delivery modalities by which the course was taught.

To gather additional data, the study collected student feedback and experiences in the GPS course through a survey and interviews. The intent was to determine which aspects, if any, of the GPS course were having an influence on student retention and persistence. The analysis aimed to determine what the course was doing well and if there were any gaps or opportunities for improvement in the current curriculum or course offerings. The first part of this inquiry was a quantitative online survey deployed to all of the successful completers of the GPS course. The survey questions related to student outcomes, course outcomes, and student experience and perceptions relating to student success. The final qualitative inquiry took place by conducting interviews with self-selected participants gathered from the online survey. The interviews were necessary to provide depth to the survey through a discussion of the student experience.

Research questions. The following research questions guided this study:

1. Is there a difference in the college's retention and persistence rates before and after implementation of the first-year experience course GPS for Student Success?

2. Is there a difference in retention and persistence rates of course completers and noncompleters of the first-year experience course GPS for Student Success; is there a difference in course completion rates in relation to demographics such as gender, ethnicity, age, disability, and economic disadvantage or among the various delivery modalities by which GPS for Student Success was taught?
3. What impact has the first-year experience course GPS for Student Success had on student retention and persistence?

The secondary institutional data collected from the Midwest, two-year public college student information system on retention and persistence rates provided the appropriate information to analyze pre- and post implementation of the GPS course. The study analyzed the retention and persistence rates of the college. Results indicated the GPS course has had a significant positive impact on student retention when students successfully complete the course; and even if they do not complete the course with a C or better, there is still a slight positive impact on retention numbers.

Institutional data results. Findings from the analysis of the institutional data regarding Research Question 1 include the following: After years of decreasing retention rates, there was a slight increase (.13%) in retention at the college fall of 2017 and spring 2018 post implementation of GPS. The preliminary numbers for the fall 2018 term indicated retention rates were down 2.11%. Persistence rates from the 2017 to the 2018 academic year had showed a slight increase in student persistence (.19%).

When analyzing the institutional data of the GPS course pertaining to Research Question 2, the following findings were key results:

- Retention and persistence rates of students who completed the GPS course were higher than unsuccessful course takers and non–course takers.
- Demographics of gender, ethnicity, age, enrollment status, economic disadvantage, and disability revealed increased retention and persistence rates of students taking the GPS course.
- The modalities with the highest completion percentage were hybrid and face-to-face delivery methods.

Retention. The findings indicated that the GPS course takers for both genders were retained at a higher rate, and both genders that had not taken the course were roughly equal. However, the female students did not gain from just taking the GPS course, whereas the male students did. Male students had a higher retention rate for unsuccessfully taking the course, whereas female unsuccessful course takers had a lower retention rate than female non–course takers. The GPS course data show a potential to positively impact retention for students who are economically disadvantaged, as well as for those students with an unknown economic status. Part-time students made up the majority of enrollments at the college, with 1,559 of the 1,904 students from the study attending classes part time. Enrollment status findings indicated that the retention rate for part-time students was significantly lower (at 32.3%) than that for full-time students (98.6%). The retention rate for successful GPS course takers was higher than the overall rate, at 69.3%; however, it was lower than the rate of full-time students.

Persistence. The findings indicated that the impact of the GPS course on successful course takers was significantly less for persistence rates than for retention rates. Successful GPS course takers persisted at 57.5% compared with the retention rate of 84.1%. The persistence rate for nonsuccessful course takers was 24.2% and was lower than the persistence rate of students

who did not enroll in GPS (28%). This was in opposition to the retention rate of the two groups; students who had taken the course and did not complete it had a higher retention rate than those who had not taken the course. The findings continue to indicate a slightly higher persistence rate for male students, both for fall-to-fall and fall-to-spring retention. The findings indicate that both male and female GPS course takers persist at a higher rate and that both genders that had not taken the GPS course were approximately equal. However, the female students did not gain from taking the course alone, whereas the male students had almost double the female persistence rate even though they were not successful in completing the course. The study's findings reveal that all of the successful course completer age groups posted higher persistence rates than did students who did not enroll or who were not successful in the GPS course. This continues to illustrate the positive impact of successful completion of the course on student success.

Delivery modality. The course delivery modality with the greatest completion rate was hybrid, a combination of face-to-face and online instruction, at 82.7%, or 126 of 152 students. The face-to-face student completion rates were the next highest, with 398 of 516 completers, or a 77.1% completion rate. The face-to-face modality had the highest enrollment numbers, at 516 of 1,165, or 44.3% of all course takers. The telepresence modality had the lowest enrollments and had a course completion rate of 72.6%, or 53 of 73 students. The delivery modality with the lowest completion rate of the GPS course was online, at 69.3%, or 294 of the 424 students completing the course.

Survey results. The response rates for the online survey was less than expected, with an overall response rate of 7.9%. In an attempt to reduce nonresponse bias, consultation on best practices was done with the Applied Research Center at the university. Several follow-up attempts were made to prompt students who had not started the survey and to remind the

participants who started but who had not completed the survey. Students who had graduated or discontinued studies at the college may not have been checking their student email. Something to be taken into consideration was that the students receiving the invitation had already been surveyed via an online survey about the GPS course several months before this study's survey was conducted. What can be learned from the online survey is that more efforts can be made to help increase the response rates and a deeper investigation into best practices should be done before deploying an online survey.

Findings discovered from the analysis of the Research Question 3 quantitative online survey culminated with these key findings:

- Students felt that the GPS course had had a positive impact on their student success and were satisfied with the course.
- The GPS course did not encourage participation in campus activities or increase connections with peers.
- As a result of the GPS course, students gained a better understanding of college resources, policies, and processes.
- The perceived value of the student's educational programs is important.

When asked about the student outcomes measured in the course, a majority of the students responded that they felt as though the GPS course had had a positive impact on their educational journey (52.6%), and 63% of the respondents (48 of 76) were satisfied with their achievement of the GPS course outcomes. Of the respondents, almost half (48%), felt that the GPS course did not encourage participation in campus activities and 20% neither agreed nor disagreed. Fifty percent of the student respondents indicated that the GPS course did not increase their connections with peers and 26.3% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Over 80% of the respondents indicated that the GPS course gave them a better understanding of college resources, policies, and processes. Fifty-five percent of the respondents indicated that designing an academic plan was critical to their success. As a result of the GPS course, over 50% of respondents felt they adopted new strategies for learning efficiently and effectively. When asked if the course would have been better if the GPS course had been taken with students in the respondent's same program or school, over 70% of the respondents did not feel it would have been better.

The questions about student experiences and perceptions yielded the following results: 94.5% of the respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement "The value of the education in my program is important to me. A majority of the respondents, 82.2%, admitted to having experienced challenges during their studies, but had always believed in themselves. Seventy-eight percent of respondents indicated that a sense of belonging at school was important to them.

Interview results. The use of a mixed methods approach allowed for the integration of qualitative interviews into the study. The interviews were a powerful way to capture the students' perceptions and recommendations based on their experience in the GPS course.

Findings uncovered from the analysis of the Research Question 3 qualitative portion of the research were derived from an iterative reduction process. The resultant themes from the interviews were:

- The GPS course outcomes are beneficial to student success for a majority of the students, but not for all students.
- The GPS course should be completed before or during the student's first term and offered via either the face-to-face or hybrid modality.

- The course outcomes should be taught consistently from instructor to instructor.
- Self-efficacy, a sense of belonging, and the perceived value of education contribute to student success.

When asked if the GPS course had an impact on their retention and persistence, all of the interviewees gave examples of how the course positively impacted their success. When talking about the impact of the course, a student said, “I felt it was extremely beneficial to me.” During the interviews, students responded positively to each of the course outcomes of the GPS course, with a few students indicating that some topics were not as beneficial to them or other students. Students indicated the course outcome—to describe appropriate college resources, policies, and processes—was beneficial as an orientation to the college. One student said about the topic, “I found that part helpful.” There were mixed results when asking about the course outcome of adopting strategies for learning efficiently and effectively, with students indicating that much of the material was repetitive from other college courses or from high school classes. An interviewee said, “I had to do the exact same thing in one of my other classes.”

When asked what could be improved with the GPS course, two themes were to make the course shorter or more condensed and to have students take the course before their first term. An interviewee stated, “It’d have been kind of nice to have that before I started.” Two of the interview participants enrolled in the online GPS course, and the course objective feedback was similar; however, the sense of belonging was not the same. One participant indicated that in the first term of enrollment, all classes were online, so the student did not feel the same sense of belonging as when the student came to the campus.

Conclusions

Conclusions regarding expected persistence and retention as the result of the GPS course are as follows: Students who take the GPS course and successfully complete it will have the highest retention and persistence rates. Students who take the GPS course and do not successfully complete the course with a C or better will have higher retention and persistence rates than students who did not enroll in the GPS course at all.

In the analysis of institutional demographic data, the findings of overall retention and persistence rates were consistent. It can be concluded from the research that the GPS course increased the retention and persistence rates of all students in the demographics of gender, ethnicity, age, enrollment status, economic disadvantage, and disability who enrolled in the course. Regarding enrollment status specifically, it can be concluded that full-time students will be retained and persist at a higher rate than part-time students. However, and importantly, the majority of students enrolled at the college were attending part-time.

The retention and persistence of students ties back to the functionalist perspective and the educational institution's role in society and the economy. The societal functions of institutions are interconnected, with each contributing to a society in important ways (Mooney et al., 2007). Increased accountability across the United States indicates that educational institutions are devoting more resources to student learning and increasing retention rates (Dunn, 2003). Institutions showing significant increases in students' rates of persistence to graduation have discovered that the implementation of first-year experience courses to be effective at increasing student retention (Schield, 2017). Student retention and persistence is important to the student due to the value of educational attainment in society, and students are judged by their degrees and credentials.

From the examination of the institutional data on course delivery modality, it can be concluded that hybrid and face-to-face delivery are the most effective styles for course completion and retention. The hybrid modality had greater than 80% completion, and face-to-face delivery was just shy of 80%. The completion percentage for telepresence and online were below the 75% average completion for all modalities; online completion rates were 69%. The conclusion from the student interviews is that the preferred modality and sequence of the GPS course would be that the course be delivered in the hybrid modality and taken before the student's first term at the college.

Although the response rates for the online survey were lower than expected, it can be concluded that the response rate is adequate for the purpose of this study analyzing the GPS course. Conclusions regarding the students' perceptions and experience were that the participants of this study felt that the GPS course positively impacted their success and that they were satisfied with the course. Additionally, the student respondents reported that the GPS course provided them with a better understanding of the college's resources, policies, and processes. From the data, it can be concluded that the GPS course did not have an impact on encouraging student participation in campus activities or increasing connections with peers. Conclusions regarding the perceived value of education were that it was important to the students to have value in their educational programs. From the qualitative research, it can be concluded that the value of education contributed to the students' success, as did self-efficacy and a sense of belonging. An additional conclusion from the interviews is that not all students benefited equally from all aspects of the course depending on the life experience of the student.

The student interviews each provided examples of how certain areas of the GPS course had been taught differently or with more or less emphasis. Each interviewee had a different

instructor and experienced a differing level of instruction relating to course outcomes. It can be concluded from the research that the course outcomes should be taught consistently from instructor to instructor.

Recommendations

The GPS for Student Success course is a graduation requirement for all new students attending programs at the Midwest college. Given the research results and conclusions, the following recommendations are offered:

- The college should continue to require the GPS course.
- The college should look at additional enhancements to the GPS course to increase student success at the college. For example, the research indicates that the GPS course would be best offered before the term starts in a hybrid or face-to-face modality. The modalities of telepresence and online had lower completion rates, thus they should be evaluated for elimination as delivery offerings due to minimal results. The college should, at a minimum, make efforts to encourage students to take the GPS course in the recommended modalities.

As a follow-up to this study, the following recommendations are put forth:

- An analysis of retention and persistence rates should be conducted when the college's client reporting is completed for the 2018–2019 academic year. Continued monitoring of the retention and persistence rates are necessary to determine the impact of the GPS course.
- An annual course review of the GPS for Student Success course should be conducted involving the Dean of Student Services, the Dean of General Education, and instructors teaching the course. The review can continue the work to determine which

course outcomes are making the greatest impact on student success. As noted in the conclusions, some topics benefited certain students more than others, and it may be necessary to research these further to understand which populations benefit more from each course outcome.

- This study investigated the successful completers of the GPS course and gathered qualitative data from students currently enrolled at the college. Continued research examining the students that did not successfully complete the course or were not retained by the college is necessary. Knowing what the successful student experience is like identifies the best practices, but gathering the unsuccessful student stories and experiences may uncover gaps or challenges.

A majority of the students at the Midwest college were enrolled at a part-time status, and the retention rates are significantly lower for that group. The recommendation from the research would be as follows:

- Part-time students should be encouraged to take the GPS course before taking any other classes.
- Additional research should be conducted to better understand the part-time versus full-time student experience. This could include assessing resources and their alignment with part-time student needs. For example, are student success resources available for part-time students when they need them, like after work hours and on the weekends?
- Additionally, are classes, such as GPS, scheduled in the most efficient manner for part-time students with employment, or are they geared more toward the full-time student experience?

The interviews revealed that some of the course outcomes had been delivered differently among instructors. The goal of the Midwest college is to teach the course consistently from instructor to instructor, and research is necessary to determine where the differences are occurring. The recommendation from the research would be as follows:

- The college should investigate these inconsistencies. For example, the research indicated differing levels of depth and application of the Strength Finder assessments. Sixteen different staff, counselors, advisors, deans, and academic or student service staff have taught the GPS course since it was implemented.
- The college should evaluate who is teaching the courses or who is delivering portions of the course based on his or her role or expertise at the college and then develop systems to ensure that all objectives are being met.

Through the literature, it was found that the self-efficacy, a sense of belonging, and the value of education are strong indicators of student success, and the research confirmed this in the successful GPS course takers. The college—through the GPS course, academic advisors, and faculty—should:

- Ensure that students are made aware of college resources that support student learning and success. For example, accessibility of tutors, counselors, and emergency financial services.
- Explore ways to ensure that each student understands the value of the education he or she is receiving in a given program to help increase retention and persistence.
- Bring awareness to student life opportunities, and college clubs to students for opportunities to build a sense of belonging.

The process of conducting this research leads to recommendations of improvements to the survey design and scope of research:

- This study was broad in nature as to understand the multiple ways the GPS course impacted student persistence and retention. In further studies a more targeted approach could be done on specific factors leading to higher retention and persistence rates.
- From a research methodology perspective, the use of online surveys, while convenient, further research should, if possible, be done via a paper survey in an effort to increase the response rate.
- This study had 48 students start the survey, but not complete. The recommendation would be the length of a survey instrument must be designed in a strategic manner in an effort to increase response rates.
- Consideration should be given for mobile phone users in the survey design.

Finally, the findings and results of this study build on the identified research gap for two-year public institutions related to retention and persistence. More research is necessary to explore the strategies that prove to be successful in these educational settings to increase retention and persistence.

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Appendix A: GPS for Student Success Course Survey

GPS for Student Success Course Survey

UW-Stout Implied Consent Statement

for Research Involving Human Subjects

Consent to Participate In UW-Stout Approved Research

Project Title: Examining the Impact of a First-Year Experience Course on Student Persistence at a Midwest, Two-Year Public College

Description: The study will also collect the student experiences in the GPS course to know what influence the GPS course had on student success. The results of the study will help determine if there are any gaps in the GPS course or opportunities for improvement in the current curriculum, or course delivery and offerings. Please feel free to ask the researcher any questions that you may have regarding this study.

Risks: While completing the survey the computer screen could cause a typical discomfort as associated with computer use such as eye strain. During the interview, if you self-select to participate, you might remember some unpleasant memories that might make you feel bad.

Benefits: The benefit to participation is that your feedback will be utilized to improve the first-year experience for future students. You will receive no payment for participating in the interview, however, have the option to self-select being entered into a drawing for the chance to win one of multiple gift cards or college gift certificates. At the end of the survey participants can self-select entry into the drawing. If self-selecting to participate in the interview, it may be beneficial for you to talk about your experience at greater depth with the researcher, and additional feedback will be used to improve the first-year experience for future students.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. In the report I write for the dissertation research, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you to the public or the college. Research records will be stored in a password protected computer for a period up to 1 year after final data analysis; only researchers will have access to the records. An anonymous dataset will be used after the survey time window ends. Qualtrics will report data in aggregate; no names or known identifiers will be reported. I may receive help from someone to transcribe the recording of the interview. That person will be instructed to keep the information confidential. As soon as the recording has been transcribed, it will be erased; that will be within the three weeks following the interview.

Future Use: Any information collected for this research project will be stripped of identifiers and will not be used in other research in the future.

Time Commitment: The survey is a short series of 30 questions, which should take a maximum of 15-20 minutes to complete.

Right to Withdraw: Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may choose not to participate without any adverse consequences to you. You have the right to stop the survey at any time. However, should you choose to participate and later wish to withdraw from the study, there is no way to identify your anonymous document after it has been turned into the investigator. If you are participating in an anonymous online survey, once you submit your response, the data cannot be linked to you and cannot be withdrawn.

IRB Approval: This study has been reviewed and approved by The University of Wisconsin-Stout's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has determined that this study meets the ethical obligations required by federal law and University policies. If you have questions or concerns regarding this study, please contact the Investigator or Advisor. If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a research subject, please contact the IRB Administrator.

<p>Investigator: Jason Schenzel schenzelj@my.uwstout.edu</p> <p>Advisor: Dr. Carol Mooney mooneyc@uwstout.edu</p>	<p>IRB Administrator: Elizabeth Buchanan Office of Research and Sponsored Programs 152 Vocational Rehabilitation Bldg. UW-Stout Menomonie, WI 54751 715.232.2477 Buchanane@uwstout.edu</p>
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Click the arrow on the bottom right to continue

Statement of Consent

By selecting yes and completing the following survey, you agree to participate in the project entitled, Examining the Impact of a First-Year Experience Course on Student Persistence at a Midwest, Two-year Public College.

- Yes
- No

Enrollment Information

How many credits are you typically enrolled in per term?

- Full-time (more than 12 credits)
- Part-time (9-11 credits)
- Part-time (8 or less credits)

When did you enroll in the FYE course GPS for Student Success?

- Took the FYE course before my first term
- Took FYE course during my first term
- Took FYE course after my first term
- Took FYE course after my first year

I enrolled in GPS course in what modality:

- Face to Face (8 weeks during term)
- Face to Face (before term starts)
- Online

Are you currently enrolled in courses at the college?

- Yes
- No

Are you continuing progress towards your degree?

- Yes, I am working towards the degree I first started in
- Yes, but I have switched programs
- No

Have you graduated with your credential (degree, diploma, or certificate)?

- Yes
- No

Demographics Information:

What is your age?

- Under 20
- 21-24 years
- 25 years or older

What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Other

What is your ethnicity?

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Hispanic
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- White
- Multiple

Are you considered to be economically disadvantaged?

- Yes
- No

Student Outcomes Measured

GPS for Student Success Course Competencies

1. Describe appropriate Mid-State resources, policies, and processes
2. Investigate interpersonal attributes for student success
3. Adopt strategies for learning efficiently and effectively
4. Utilize Mid-State resources to help in areas of time management and personal budgeting
5. Design an Academic Plan for Student Success

I am satisfied with my achievement of learning or course outcomes?

- Strongly Agree
 Agree
 Neither Agree or Disagree
 Disagree
 Strongly Disagree

In the GPS for Student Success course, I increased my connections with peers?

- Strongly Agree
 Agree
 Neither Agree or Disagree
 Disagree
 Strongly Disagree

The GPS course helped to improve my grade point average?

-

Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree or Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

The GPS for Student Success course encouraged my participation in campus activities?

 Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree or Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

Overall, I was satisfied with the GPS for Student Success course?

 Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree or Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

I feel the GPS course had a positive impact on my educational journey?

 Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree or Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

The GPS for Student Success course helped me to improve academically?

 Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree or Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

My use of campus services (Link, tutors, counselors, etc.) increased as a result of the GPS course?

 Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree or Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

Course Outcomes Measured

As a result of completing the GPS course, I gained a better understanding the college resources, policies, and processes?

 Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree or Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

As a result of completing the GPS course, learning about interpersonal attributes for student success helped me grow personally?

 Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree or Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

As a result of completing the GPS course, I was able to adopt new strategies for learning efficiently and effectively?

Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree or Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

As a result of completing the GPS course, I am better able to utilize college resources to help with time management and personal budgeting?

Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree or Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

As a result of completing the GPS course, designing an academic plan was critical to my educational success?

Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree or Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

Would your experience in the GPS course have been better if you had been with students in your program or school?

Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree or Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

Student Experience and Perceptions

I have experienced challenges during my education, but always believed in myself.

Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree or Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

The value of the education in my program is important to me.

Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree or Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

A sense of belonging at the school and in classes are important to me.

Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree or Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

Attaining a college credential (degree, diploma, or certificate) is part of how I define success in life

Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree or Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

Participation Drawing

Would you like to be entered into a drawing to win one of multiple gift cards or college gift certificates?

- Yes
 No

Participation Drawing Contact Information

If yes, please provide your email and or phone number for notification of winners.

Student Interview Consent

To further discuss your experience in the GPS course, would you be willing to participate in a one-on-one interview with the researcher at a time that is mutually convenient?

- Yes
 No

Student Interview Contact Information

If yes, please provide your email and or phone number for later contact.

Thank you for your participation; your help is greatly appreciated.

The results of the study will help determine if there are any gaps in the GPS course or opportunities for improvement in the current curriculum, or course delivery and offerings.

Respectfully,

Jason Schenzel
Doctoral Candidate
University of Wisconsin - Stout

Appendix B: GPS for Student Success Course Interview Questions

Research Question

In your experience what was the impact the first-year experience course GPS for Student Success had on your retention and persistence at the college?

Student Outcomes Measured

GPS for Student Success Course Competencies

1. Describe appropriate Mid-State resources, policies, and processes
2. Investigate interpersonal attributes for student success
3. Adopt strategies for learning efficiently and effectively
4. Utilize Mid-State resources to help in areas of time management and personal budgeting
5. Design an Academic Plan for Student Success

In your opinion what was most beneficial about the GPS for Student Success course, and why based on your experience?

In your opinion what could be improved in the GPS for Student Success course, and why based on your experience?

Student Experience and Perception

Survey question - I have experienced challenges during my education, but always believed in myself.

What if any challenges have you experienced in your educational journey?

Survey question - A sense of belonging at the school and in classes are important to me.

How do you define a sense of belonging?

Survey question - The value of the education in my program is important to me.

What is the value of your education, and what does it mean to you?

Survey question - Attaining a college credential (degree, diploma, or certificate) is part of how I define success in life

How do you personally define success in your life?

Appendix C: GPS for Student Success Course Interview Enduring Themes

Reduction of raw capta	Categories of themes based on original capta <i>Rough emergent themes and subthemes roughly yet ethically tied to the authentic capta.</i>	Enduring themes (no sub-themes remain) Re-narrate the themes into your own words
Reduction	Themes	Enduring themes
What was the impact of the first-year experience course, the GPS for student success and what it had on your retention and persistence at the college?		
<p>1. It wasn't all terrible. And like I said, if I hadn't been extremely stressed out, I would have been a lot more receptive to what they were trying to teach.</p> <p>2. I think it got me prepped for what to expect to prepare for classes because it gave practice assignments and it kind of gives you how it's going to be at this particular location when you're doing the assignments.</p> <p>where to find things for the school which was nice because the website was all over the place.</p> <p>gave me some things on how to find if I needed help or a tutor or things like that because I had been going back to school since having ten years off.</p> <p>That was kind of a good thing because I didn't have clue when I had that much of a break to come back to school and how to do stuff.</p> <p>3. I didn't take it before the summer class, because it wasn't available at the time. So, I had a regular class, medical terminology that summer and I took it the September after. I took it with a Julianne and I felt it was extremely beneficial for me.</p>	<p>It wasn't all terrible Was extremely beneficial to me I was glad I took the course I felt it was extremely beneficial for me</p> <p>Did not take it the first term Took it in the first term Took it after my first term</p> <p>Impact got me prepped for what to expect to prepare for classes</p> <p>where to find things for the school</p> <p>how to find help or a tutor</p> <p>Learned some good study techniques</p> <p>It was really beneficial to developing myself</p> <p>Academic plan where you meet with your advisor and</p>	<p><u>Set up for success</u> The GPS course was beneficial to student success</p> <p>Prepared for what to expect</p> <p>Orientation to the college</p> <p><u>Build skills</u> Developing personally</p> <p>Building study skills</p>

<p>I learned some good study techniques, I learned there was a lot of interaction in her class. My daughter actually was going to school at the same time as me, so we both started school about the same time and she as well took the GPS course. Her experience was not a good experience, because for her and it wasn't interactive</p> <p>I find that having the GPS class be more of an interactive class, it really is beneficial to developing myself.</p> <p>I was glad I took the course.</p> <p>4. Academic map assignment where you meet with your financial advisor and you kind of plan out where you're going in the next year</p>	<p>plan out your next year</p>	
<p>Describe appropriate Mid-State resources, policies, and processes.</p>		
<p>1. that was in there but it was a teeny tiny little portion of it. What we had to do was answer some questions where we looked into the student handbook. I found that that part was helpful.</p> <p>And then there was a portion where we filled out potential scholarship questions. I found that really helpful too.</p> <p>2. NA</p> <p>3. It was. It was, because they did go through that and they got me set up in a sense of what to expect, how to handle it when it comes.</p> <p>4. they did a bunch of presentations on where things were on the website and things like scholarships and where to find those. And there's a whole class dedicated to some lady talking about scholarships and stuff. I thought that was helpful.</p>	<p>Found the student handbook portion to be helpful</p> <p>The potential scholarship questions were really helpful</p> <p>Set up the expectations of college and how to handle it</p> <p>Where things were on the website</p> <p>Class dedicated to scholarships was helpful</p>	<p><u>Orientation</u> Helpful to get to know the student handbook</p> <p>Set up expectations of the college</p> <p>Scholarship information and expectations beneficial</p> <p>Understanding of available student resources</p>
<p>Investigate interpersonal attributes for student success</p>		
<p>1. Investigate interpersonal attributes for student success was not needed for my situation. I've been in the workforce for 20 years. If I haven't figured out how to do that by</p>	<p>was not needed for my situation</p> <p>anything but working in</p>	<p><u>Personal growth</u> Beneficial to developing as a person</p>

<p>now, there is no hope for me.</p> <p>anything but working in teams actually</p> <p>2.NA</p> <p>3. Clifton Strengths. Going through it, understanding what this actually means to me as a student. How you can use this information to set up for the class, which I got wonderful from Julianne. She did a great job with that. I found I did utilize that. I've kept my Clifton Strengths, I've gone back to that. She did another activity where we were moving around, doing stuff, seeing what other people had in their class. I thought that was a very good exercise, just because it showed me a little bit of where I'm at.</p> <p>That helped you kind of learn and identify how you, yourself learned. I thought it was great. I loved it. I wish Brianna, would've had that opportunity. She didn't have that at all.</p> <p>So, I find that having the GPS class be more of an interactive class, it really is beneficial to developing myself. What I'm good at, where my strengths are, what isn't so good for me.</p> <p>She did do an exercise where we had to do stuff as a team and one of the things you brought out is that as a team, each one has their role. But, at the same time you don't want the same personality on your team.</p> <p>It really helped me realize more of my personalities, that Clifton strengths. I thought at first when we were doing it, it was kind of dumb. I admit, but I found out as I did it ... I was like, "Oh. This does line up. Oh, hey. Well, this is a side where I'm not as strong in there as I thought. Well, how can I use it?"</p> <p>4 . I think that was kind of helpful. It made it feel more personalized too and not just another class. I don't think that we really talked about how to specifically use your personal attributes.</p> <p>We did like group projects where we had to work with other students and stuff, but I don't think they really tied in your results with how</p>	<p>teams actually</p> <p>understanding what this actually means to me as a student</p> <p>I've kept my Clifton Strengths, I've gone back to that</p> <p>it really is beneficial to developing myself</p> <p>where my strengths are, what isn't so good for me</p> <p>activity as a team with each person having their role</p> <p>first thought it was kind of dumb</p> <p>Was helpful</p> <p>Made the course feel more personalized</p> <p>Did not talk specifically how to use the attributes</p> <p>Did a group project with other students, but did not tie back to results and how to work in teams</p>	<p>Understanding a person's strengths</p> <p>Gave the course a personal feel</p> <p><u>Results not consistently used</u></p> <p>Results not consistently utilized with team/ group projects</p> <p>Did not leverage teams</p> <p>No explanation of results</p>
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you work in the group or anything.		
Adopt strategies for learning efficiently and effectively.		
<p>1. I had to do the exact same thing in one of my classes, so I was doing, I had to do it twice daily. I did it in my biology class</p> <p>2.NA</p> <p>3. did another activity where we learn different study habits or different ways to study. You know, what works best for you. Well, those are very beneficial.</p> <p>Determined I was a visual and hand on learner. When I studied for the instrument test I utilized the pictures versus a description or anything.</p> <p>Do you feel like that was helpful, because you had been out of school for a while and coming back</p> <p>Yeah. I'm returning to the work. I'm 56 years old, I had a 30 year career in histology. Now I have to reinvent myself. I do think that did help, I do think it made a difference for me anyway, coming back.</p> <p>4. That was kind of like my least favorite part of the class because we spent a lot of time talking about test-taking and being organized and motivated and stuff. But I just kind of felt like that was almost a waste of time because like I went to high school, you know what I mean? Graduated high school and we learned all that in high school and now I'm taking this required class that I have to pay for to learn how to learn so not my favorite thing.</p>	<p>Did the same thing in another class</p> <p>Learned different study habits</p> <p>Understand the different ways to study</p> <p>Determined learning preferences</p> <p>Helpful being out of school for some time</p> <p>I do think it made a difference</p> <p>Least favorite part</p>	<p><u>Repeat</u> Repeat of another class</p> <p>Out of high school it was unnecessary</p> <p><u>Benefited preparedness</u> Benefited from study habits</p> <p>Learning preferences helpful when being out of school</p>
Utilize Mid-State resources to help in areas of time management and personal budgeting.		
<p>1. We had to watch a video about how to read a college text. So basically they're telling you from the beginning, "Don't bother to try and read all of your college texts. Just skip that." Where you don't have to read all your college texts, just skim this and this is how you can get the best information the fastest. To me that seems like that's the last thing you would want</p>	<p>How to read a college text taught shortcuts</p> <p>Essay on procrastination</p> <p>Financial plan for graduation</p>	<p><u>Budgeting</u> Financial plan for graduation</p> <p>Budgeting not needed for certain age demographics</p>

<p>to teach your students. How do you want to teach them how to slack off and do less? I'm 40 years old. I know how to read. To come here to a college where I'm paying money to learn and then have to waste my time with that really made me angry.</p> <p>Here's an entire essay on procrastination. But if I've procrastinated for 40 years having someone telling me to stop procrastinating, it's not going to help me</p> <p>There was a financial plan for graduation. That was probably a decent thing.</p> <p>2. there was things in there that I thought didn't need to be in there, like the budgeting. I'm 34 years old so I've had enough life experiencing that the budget was kind of silly and I know that I've heard from others that the budget assignments are not useful to them. The budgeting isn't really a factor.</p> <p>I think the budgeting thing's kind of lame. If you're going to have budgeting part I guess it didn't need to be as... There was a lot of assignments for it and I felt like it was repetitive to a point where it was like this is really not as much needed.</p> <p>3. Went over the budgeting and the time management. I realized then that my goal of kind of like saying no</p> <p>after doing the exercise on time management I discovered, "Oh, boy. You know, I could cut a little bit here. It's only while I'm in school anyway." Because I reprioritized things just so that I would do better.</p> <p>Schedule yourself a break. You have to put in time for a break, you have to put in time for some downtime. If you don't you will emotionally burnout and it will affect your grades in the long run.</p> <p>It makes a difference, how you budget your time, as well as your finances.</p>	<p>Budgeting didn't need to be there due to life experience</p> <p>Time management realizing it is ok to say no</p> <p>Schedule breaks to avoid burnout</p> <p>Understand how you are going to manage your time</p> <p>If feeling overwhelmed the college has resources</p> <p>The true cost of education</p> <p>Is it worth another student loan</p> <p>Cut back on commitments it may make a difference of graduating or not</p> <p>time management is definitely useful, but not all students benefited equally</p>	<p>True cost of education Is it worth another student loan</p> <p><u>Time management</u> Essay on procrastination felt wrong</p> <p>Schedule breaks</p> <p>Understand how to manage time If overwhelmed college has resources</p> <p>Cut back on commitments, it is ok to say no</p> <p>Was useful, but not all benefited</p> <p>How to take shortcuts while reading</p>
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<p>sometimes you have to work when you go through school, but then how are you going to manage it? You have to put limits on it or you're not going to do well, and then you defeat the purpose all together.</p> <p>She even did a segment on how the emotions can affect things and even like the suicides and stuff, because you're feeling overwhelmed and you have to allow yourself breaks, or all hell breaks loose.</p> <p>Well, they have resources. Even if it's temporary, just to talk it out. It may not always change everything, but you'd be surprised at just talking it out and getting some feedback maybe just to help adjust.</p> <p>Personal budgeting was a challenge. I mean, yes. It needed to be addressed. It made me want to cry, because it's not exactly like I can afford really to work part-time and make all the bills. So, if I didn't have support at home you have to really draw that fine line with that budget. Is it worth another student loan or not?</p> <p>Here's how much your education costs and here's how you need to manage getting through your education, but then also paying it back when you're done and managing those costs over time. She did recommend, if at all possible to put monies on to the interest on the unsubsidized loans and that makes sense.</p> <p>I only would work three days at a maximum six hour shift. And then, this last semester I cut it down to two, because it's not going to be worth it financially if I can't pass the class. But, in the long run I know it will make a difference of me graduating and not graduating. That's why this coming fall semester, yes. I probably will take out an extra student loan, but I will not work. But, it's the last semester I'll do it.</p> <p>4. I don't really remember learning anything about personal budgeting quite honestly. but</p>		
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time management is definitely useful. Not all students benefited equally from the time management discussion.		
Design an Academic Plan for Student Success.		
<p>1. I did that with my advisor. Well before I started school, so when that assignment rolled around I had already done it My entire three years is already planned out. So, that really should have been dropped.</p> <p>2.NA</p> <p>3. I did develop it, and it did help because by seeing it all out as we went through every semester, and then by seeing what it was all out, how much I would need to take and how much time academically I was able to plan out. I planned out to work part-time. I worked more hours at the beginning. Don't set yourself up for failure, which was a good idea.</p> <p>There was a little bit that was a repeat, because I had to work out this already in my academic plan for the course, because I'm going to school through the displaced worker program.</p> <p>Before I did that course I didn't calculate in there the extra time needed for ... Add in study time, add in a break time, because you're going to need it.</p> <p>4. map assignment where you meet with your advisor and you kind of plan out where you're going in the next year</p>	<p>Created a 3 year plan with advisor prior to class</p> <p>Had already created a preliminary academic plan prior to the course.</p> <p>Helped to see all the courses in the program planned out</p> <p>Don't set yourself up for failure</p> <p>Altered the plan in GPS with the advice to build in the extra time needed for studying and breaks.</p> <p>Little bit of a repeat</p> <p>Helped the most to plan for future terms</p>	<p><u>Repeat</u> Created with advisor prior</p> <p>Had created as part of dislocated worker</p> <p>Bit of a repeat</p> <p><u>Planning ahead</u> Helped seeing all terms planned</p> <p>Altered plan to set up for success</p> <p>Helped plan future terms</p>
In your opinion, what was most beneficial about the GPS for Student Success course, and why based on your experience?		
1. Financial aid thing and like I said, the answers to potential questions for scholarships, that was helpful.		
In your opinion, what could be improved in the GPS for Student Success course, and why based on your experience?		
1. I think going through the student handbook, can't there be an orientation before you start school where they could do that? Just so that doesn't add on to your first semester stress. I would just remember feeling so buried in work	<p>Orientation before school starts</p> <p>Take it out of the semester</p>	<p><u>Take before any classes</u> Orientation before school starts</p>

<p>and I was really struggling and then to have to do 500 word essay on how to read my college texts. All that weren't helpful. Take it out off the semester. Some sort of like a week orientation ahead of time because if you aren't completely swamped, we're doing other work, then maybe I would have been much more receptive to having someone teach me to read.</p> <p>2. my feedback was going to be that it could be more concise but before the first term. It doesn't have to be as long because some of the stuff is more droning on. If it was me it would be a shorter and condensed version but you would do it before you did any other classes. when you come back to school you don't necessarily know oh if I have a question on this I can ask the advisor. It'd have been kind of nice to have that before I started. They gave me how to navigate the website, well by that point I had already done a bunch of things because I had to sign up for my classes. That would be nice as a pre so I would know how to use everything and be ready to do it. And it definitely doesn't need to be as long. Because the assignments were repeat things to draw it out. I don't know that that class needs to be as long as it was. I know that everybody said that they wished that the class did more on FAFSA. It would be nice to have one section be on aid or how to make payments for college or anything on how to pay for it</p> <p>3. instructor has the time to do the course</p> <p>that they're able to do the different interactive activities with the strengths. They are more essential than you realize. I mean, for me they really were</p> <p>consistency across how the course is being</p>	<p>Week orientation ahead of time</p> <p>Completed before any classes taken</p> <p>Would have been nice to have before started</p> <p>Had already done much of the course prior</p> <p>More on financial aid and FASFA</p> <p>Shorter condensed version</p> <p>Could be more concise</p> <p>Should not be required for all</p> <p>Ensure instructor has time</p> <p>Same level of interaction</p> <p>Depth of Strengths Finder</p> <p>Team building using Strengths</p> <p>GPS only for low GPA students</p> <p>How strengths play out</p> <p>Apply to real situations</p>	<p>Take it out of the semester</p> <p>Week orientation ahead of time</p> <p>Completed before any classes taken</p> <p>Would have been nice to have before started</p> <p>Had already done much of the course prior</p> <p><u>Improvements</u> More on financial aid and FASFA</p> <p>Shorter condensed version</p> <p>Could be more concise</p> <p>Should not be required for all</p> <p><u>Consistency across faculty</u> Ensure instructor has time</p> <p>Same level of interaction</p> <p>Depth of</p>
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<p>delivered and taught no matter who the instructor is. Come up with a best practice for the course and follow it.</p> <p>4. I think GPS can be useful and it is useful in some aspects. But, the fact that it's a required class that we have to pay for and have to take in order to graduate. For somebody like me who's just graduated high school, having to take a class like that, I just kind of thought it was obsolete and just you know, it was kind of like annoying that I had to take that and it was mandatory.</p> <p>This one point where we suggested that GPS should only be required if your GPA is falls below a certain grade point average. Cause if I have a 3.5 GPA and I'm getting emails to join honor societies and stuff, why should I be required to take a class on learning how to learn, you know what I mean? Whereas somebody who isn't doing quite as well and maybe has like a 2.5 GPA could find things like that more useful.</p> <p>I was in a class with somebody in my Psychology class who was so far into college where she wasn't required to take it cause she had so many credits</p> <p>Clifton Strengths - doing active group work and participation to provide an example of how your strengths would actually play out, in like real life other than telling me that based on my results. Actually applying the results to situations.</p>		<p>Strengths Finder</p> <p>Team building using Strengths</p>
<p>Survey question - I have experienced challenges during my education, but always believed in myself.</p> <p>What if any challenges have you experienced in your educational journey?</p>		
<p>1. I don't think that my problem was ever that I was down trodden or I felt that I needed some motivation because I am self driven. I'll work myself ragged, but I did have experiences in the first semester with an awful instructor who literally zapped my will to live. I was ready to quit.</p> <p>Unless there's some way that could you go to</p>	<p>awful instructor who literally zapped my will to live. I was ready to quit.</p> <p>What is the process for faculty complaints</p> <p>Was made to feel stupid,</p>	<p><u>Challenges overcome</u> Challenging instructor</p> <p>I almost quit</p> <p>Had many</p>

<p>you with complaints about an actual instructor. your direct recourse obviously is with your instructor but your secondary recourses then with the Dean or Associate Dean and your end. Now that you mentioned that, I just wonder is that something that was a challenge that you experienced that if you had known that you had these are the people you could talk to- I certainly would</p> <p>when you get tested like that and you feel that you are stupid, that's why I felt the need to, I almost quit. I felt that I was the problem. So if anything, maybe put how to deal with this instructor if you go to them and you're not getting the help that you need, what do you do next? That needs to be taught because I don't feel that I'm a stupid person and she flat out told me that my reading comprehension must not be on par</p> <p>What truly bothers me about that is how many kids of those eight that we started with gave up because they were like me. They thought they were not good enough and that's a four credit class. It costs a lot of money. How many of people gave up because of that?</p> <p>2. The only time I've ever had challenges I've reached out to my advisor who I've had since day one and she's been amazing.</p> <p>I really haven't had any because any time I have any questions they're easily accessible it starts out with a higher number and then they weed themselves out as it goes and it gets smaller and smaller and smaller. And a lot of that, like when you talked to them people later when you see them they just, oh I just couldn't handle all that. And it's like, could you not handle it or you just didn't think that you could handle it. I get it.</p> <p>I've had so many doubts where I'm like maybe I'm not good enough to do this because there's so much to memorize, I get that.</p> <p>One thing that definitely was cool is I had a beginning, not a long challenge but I was having a little bit of challenge of trying to balance my credit load as a new coming back</p>	<p>and I felt the need to, I almost quit</p> <p>How many classmates quit because of this</p> <p>Reached out to advisor with challenges</p> <p>Classes got smaller and smaller</p> <p>Students says they couldn't handle it</p> <p>Or did they just not believe in themselves</p> <p>I've had so many doubts</p> <p>maybe I'm not good enough</p> <p>trying to balance my credit load as a new coming back student</p> <p>advisor isn't just to set up your initial classes</p> <p>Always believed in myself, and been determined</p> <p>Divorce, new relationship</p> <p>abusive relationship</p> <p>helped me at least know that the resources were there</p> <p>give you advice on how to do stuff</p> <p>personal emotions will interact or play out when</p>	<p>doubts</p> <p>Maybe, I am not good enough</p> <p>Divorce, new relationship</p> <p>Abusive relationship</p> <p>OWI charge</p> <p><u>Self-Efficacy</u> Was self-driven</p> <p>Worked myself ragged</p> <p>Always been determined</p> <p>Hard to stay motivated</p> <p>Uncertain about future</p> <p><u>Advisors</u> Reached out for help</p> <p>Balancing credit load</p> <p>Give you advice</p> <p>Help dealing with stress</p> <p><u>Classmates dropping</u> Half of the class dropped out</p>
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<p>student, and I went and talked to my advisor as per advice from my teacher.</p> <p>I think really letting people know that the advisor isn't just to set up your initial classes and be done, they're here to help you if you have a challenge or a struggle or if you're not sure on what your aid is or if you think you might be taking too many classes. And they'll talk to you and they'll give you advice on how to do stuff and how to plan and time management a little better. The advisors are definitely a tool that I think are under utilized and they are pretty awesome</p> <p>3. I've always believed in myself, always been determined. The go getter, you know? Dig my heels in and go.</p> <p>Divorce, and then helping my daughter who was trying to get out of an abusive relationship. She lost her son and right now he's still in the foster care system, she's trying to get him back. I had a starting of a new relationship. You know, the ending of a long time marriage.</p> <p>I do think that the course itself and when they address some of those things, that it helped me at least know that the resources were there if I needed to do the counseling. If I could have time for the counseling.</p> <p>One of the activities, I think it was when we did the class on suicide, and different emotional things, and how you don't realize how your personal emotions will interact or play out when you're a student</p> <p>Just some tips on how to handle different stresses, which we did in one of these stress activities, and they were helpful, and I did apply them.</p> <p>I didn't know that the college had professional counselors before the course. That there was something available if I needed it</p>	<p>you're a student</p> <p>how to handle different stresses</p> <p>didn't know that the college had professional counselors</p> <p>going to college is because about a year ago I got an OWI charge</p> <p>really hard to stay motivated</p> <p>don't really know if you belong in the college</p> <p>really what you want to do</p>	<p>Classes getting smaller by the day</p> <p>Said they couldn't handle it</p> <p>Did they believe in themselves</p>
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<p>4. I'm actually going to college is because about a year ago I got an OWI charge. And so going to college and living at home makes my car insurance like way cheaper. That's kind of one of the only reasons I'm going to college so it's like really hard to stay motivated and keeping up on work and doing good when you don't really know if you belong in the college scene or if that's really what you want to do.</p>		
<p>Survey question - A sense of belonging at the school and in classes are important to me. How do you define a sense of belonging?</p>		
<p>1. I do think it's important to have a sense of belonging. I feel a lot better now that I'm in my second semester. You'd actually start to recognize students. And that's one thing about being just gen ed first year. I'm not with anybody that is in my core classes where you develop those relationships because you see those people so much. So I don't really have that much belonging and when my classes finish, I feel sad that I'm never going to see those people anymore. I cried last semester but two of my instructors that were both really good, I cried. I don't know. I think in my case it has a lot to do with the instructors themselves. I felt that they actually cared about me.</p> <p>2. Yeah, the teachers are real relatable and that makes you feel like you're not excluded from things. The student ambassador stuff where they have cookouts and things like that, that's kind of fun. It gives you that college experience. I like that it's a little smaller so that I feel like it's kind of easy for everything and you kind of know everybody, so when you come a lot you start to know all of the staff people. I think it's pretty inclusive. my first semester was all online so i did feel kind of like I wasn't really in school but then when I started coming in then I started to feel like, okay I'm actually a college kid. That definitely does make a difference, coming to class versus the online experience. Part of that is when you have to take an online</p>	<p>Important to have a sense of belonging</p> <p>Felt more belonging now in the second semester</p> <p>Started to recognize students</p> <p>Developed relationships with peers</p> <p>Cried at the end of class</p> <p>Felt faculty actually cared</p> <p>teachers are real relatable</p> <p>Student life gives a college experience</p> <p>Smaller class sizes allow for more connections</p> <p>Online classes didn't feel like was in school</p> <p>Online faculty not as accessible</p> <p>Faculty never treated me different as a non-trad</p> <p>Feel like I belong</p>	<p><u>Relationships</u></p> <p>Felt more belonging in second term</p> <p>Started to recognize students</p> <p>Developed relationships with peers</p> <p>Cried at the end of class</p> <p>Smaller class sizes allow for more connections</p> <p><u>Excellent service</u></p> <p>Felt faculty actually cared</p> <p>Never treated me differently</p> <p>Online faculty not as accessible</p> <p>Made me feel comfortable</p>

<p>class the teachers are not as accessible because they're adjunct instructors or whatever and they may or may not be as personal, not all of them but some of them might not be. I have had a bad experience.</p> <p>Some don't understand how their text can be interpreted and they just shoot it. And you read that and you're like, wow this teacher is tough</p> <p>3. Oh, yes. And I do feel like I belong. Even though I'm an older lady back in the arena, the instructors were great. Every single one of them I really, totally enjoyed.</p> <p>They never treated me differently. Being that I'm older and that would have been a factor for me</p> <p>They never made me feel uncomfortable, if I had to ask a question that to me might have seemed dumb</p> <p>The instructor didn't make me feel stupid, they didn't make me feel like it was a dumb question, and they did explain it at a different angle, and I got it.</p> <p>4. my academic advisors and all the teachers that I've had, they've made me feel like very welcome and been really helpful and been making things very personalized so in that way I feel like, you know I belong there.</p>	<p>No question was ever a dumb one</p> <p>Did not make me feel stupid</p> <p>Never made me feel uncomfortable</p> <p>Advisors and faculty welcoming</p> <p>Learning is personalized</p> <p>You know you belong</p>	<p>with learning</p> <p>Advisors and faculty are welcoming</p> <p><u>Student centric</u> Faculty are relatable</p> <p>Classroom feel</p> <p>No question was ever dumb</p> <p>Learning is personalized</p> <p><u>College experience</u> Student life events</p> <p>Online classes didn't feel like school</p> <p>You know you belong</p>
<p>Survey question - The value of the education in my program is important to me. What is the value of your education, and what does it mean to you?</p>		
<p>1. It means freedom. To me education because I spent 20 years working for the same employer and by the time I got to the end, I was making enough that I was stuck there. I could not go anywhere else to do the job that I did.</p> <p>So I was literally stuck there and this is a breakout. It was extremely stressful. I am extremely broke but it's worth it. And I loved to learn my science classes, I just love them. And I'm not going to stop learning. I will graduate from here but I'm not going to stop.</p>	<p>It means freedom</p> <p>Stuck in a dead end job</p> <p>I'm not going to stop learning</p> <p>It's a family tradition</p> <p>it's going to mean everything</p>	<p><u>It means the world</u> Freedom</p> <p>It is going to mean everything</p> <p>Value is high</p> <p>Always been value in</p>

<p>So it's important. Sounds like it's everything. Yeah.</p> <p>My brother as a mid-state graduate, so it was my sister</p> <p>So they are both mid-state graduates and here I am. It's a family tradition.</p> <p>2. Oh, it's going to mean everything.</p> <p>So my value's high and I think that's why taking the course loads that I've been taking isn't a big deal to me because I'm passionate about it and I like the environment. I think the double makes it a little easier for me to push. did you feel like from the beginning you felt the value in it?</p> <p>Yeah. I mean obviously because I've had more life experiences and I kind of know, but yeah I definitely know that my value of this is high. When it finally became my turn I was like, I'm going all in.</p> <p>3. It's very important to me. My number one priority is school, because I've always stressed school whether you're young or old, to give yourself a little bit better edge there in the world of everyday jobs.</p> <p>It's really important to do something that you like and I told all my kids that when you pursue college, even if it means changing midstream, whatever, do something you like doing or interests you</p> <p>That was really important and there's always been a value on education in my household</p> <p>4. In certain ways, no I suppose. Example of that would be, I just recently finished by Adobe Video Design class and everything that I learned in that class, I can look up on the internet and learn how to do for free, you know what I mean?</p>	<p>my value's high</p> <p>I am passionate about learning</p> <p>I like the learning environment</p> <p>It's very important to me</p> <p>My number one priority is school,</p> <p>give yourself a little bit better edge</p> <p>always been a value on education in my household</p>	<p>education in my home</p> <p><u>Life-long learning</u></p> <p>Not going to stop learning</p> <p>It's a family tradition</p> <p>Passionate about learning</p> <p>Like the learning environment</p> <p><u>Career benefits</u></p> <p>Stuck in a dead-end job</p> <p>Career change</p> <p>Give yourself an edge in the job market</p> <p>Very important to do something you love</p>
<p>Survey question - Attaining a college credential (degree, diploma, or certificate) is part of how I define success in life.</p> <p>How do you personally define success in your life?</p>		
<p>1. Absolutely.</p>	<p>Absolutely</p>	<p><u>Versatility</u></p>

<p>And it's not just like respiratory therapy is in one city and I have to go there. You need them everywhere</p> <p>2. Yeah, I do. It doesn't mean that because you don't have one you're not successful but in today's world it's required for a lot of better jobs. So do I define it as a point of success? Yeah, it shows that you were focused and that you stuck to something long enough to get an award</p> <p>So it shows responsibility and diligence and to an employer that's why they like that, because it shows, hey this person can stick with this task for this long versus a fly by night situation. That partnered with experience shows success.</p> <p>Thinking about going on to further education I totally get that because it used to be if you had an associates degree that was really something, and now that's going down by the way side, everybody really requires a bachelors for everything.</p> <p>3. Yeah. Yes, it is. I totally feel that as successful, because you've made something of yourself</p> <p>It doesn't matter what you choose to do to be successful. If it's the route that needs a little extra help, be it a more of a nontraditional role in life like a homemaker, or be it a medical profession, be it a laborer, there's things you can do and if there's education to help make it more rounded and more successful? Do it. Do it.</p> <p>I guess I have instilled that if you can get that education to afford you more options in life, do it.</p> <p>Education can potentially open doors for other opportunities in life</p> <p>4. I personally do not correlate success to</p>	<p>These positions are in demand everywhere</p> <p>in today's world it's required for a lot of better jobs.</p> <p>shows that you were focused and that you stuck to something</p> <p>shows responsibility and diligence and to an employer</p> <p>More jobs are requiring degrees than in the past</p> <p>Shows you have made something of yourself</p> <p>Education helps to make you more rounded and more successful</p> <p>Education to afford you more options in life</p> <p>potentially open doors</p> <p>jobs don't really care what your degree is in just as long as you have one</p> <p>becoming a lot more relevant as time goes on</p>	<p>Credentials are in demand everywhere</p> <p>Skills will become more relevant over time</p> <p><u>Career benefits</u> Degrees are required for many jobs</p> <p>Increase in number of jobs wanting degrees</p> <p>Makes you more well rounded</p> <p>Affords you more opportunities</p> <p>Potentially opens doors</p> <p><u>Employer value</u> Shows focus and commitment</p> <p>Indicates responsibility and diligence</p> <p>Specific degrees not as important as just attaining one</p>
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<p>degrees and jobs and things like that. I also feel like in today's society a lot of jobs don't really care what your degree is in just as long as you kind of like, have one.</p> <p>I think my program's pretty versatile as well especially cause a lot of it has to do with social media and stuff like that that's becoming a lot more relevant as time goes on.</p>		
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