The Role of Tutoring at a Campus Student Success Center and Student
Perceptions of Academic Success


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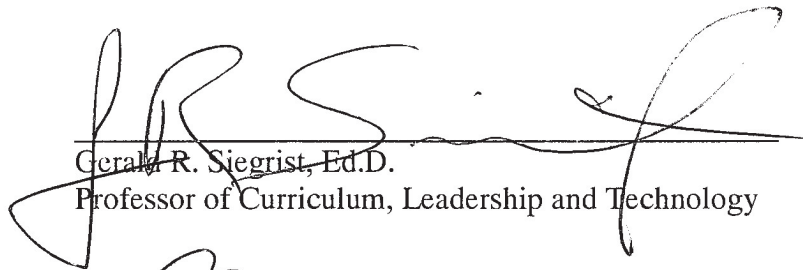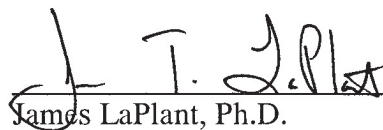| | |
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore perceptions of students utilizing tutoring services at a centralized Student Success Center (SSC) at a public, comprehensive university in southern Georgia. The study was looking at how students' perceived the influence tutoring had on their concepts of success in the class for which they received tutoring and overall success as college students. A qualitative research approach was used to examine the research question using a basic interpretive design. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from participants. Follow up interviews were conducted to allow participants to clarify meaning. This was triangulated with data from tutoring appointment forms to connect participant responses with information provided by tutors.

Data was analyzed using a constant comparative method allowing the researcher to group the data into tentative categories and coding methods were then used to develop themes. These themes were reported using the voice and language of the participants as much as possible.

The study found that students using the tutoring services had very positive perceptions of its influence on their success. Many found that without tutoring, they would have received significantly lower grades, been less confident in the material, more likely to drop the class and even withdraw from college. In addition, they reported the benefits from having one on one opportunities for learning and for learning from their peers. One finding that was unique is that the participants found benefits to their learning even from tutoring sessions they believed to be less than successful.

INDEX WORDS: retention, persistence, academic success, tutoring, drop out, Tinto's longitudinal model of student departure, Astin's I-E-O model, Astin's theory of involvement.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother, Pauline Sullivan who was always my greatest supporter in everything I did and the first person I called when something good or bad happened in my life. She was thrilled for me when I told her I was returning to school to earn my Ed.D knowing as she did how long I had wanted to do this.

Although my mom is no longer here in body with us, she will always be there in spirit for me and be my inspiration. Thanks for everything. I love you.

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Due to the continually changing nature of higher education, particularly in light of

volatile economic conditions in recent years, research on the related issues of student

retention and persistence to graduation is coming to the forefront of concern for many

college and university administrators across the country (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991;

Perin, 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). This is an important concern as the decision

to either complete or not complete a college degree has a number of implications for the

students who make that decision.  According to Tinto (1993), "for individuals, the

occupational, monetary, and other societal rewards of higher education are in large part

conditional on earning a college degree" (p. 1). Tinto also discussed additional benefits of

completing a college degree. These included improved occupational status, increased

occupational stability, greater job satisfaction and what Tinto referred to as a *sheepskin*

*effect,* which he defined as "an earnings bonus for completing the bachelor's degree

above and beyond the economic return for having the equivalent of four years of college"

(p. 3). Data from the United States (U.S.) Census Bureau (2002) confirmed this

phenomenon, which reported individuals who complete a bachelor's degree earn close to

$1 million more over their lifetime versus those with a high school diploma.

According to the U.S. Census, the gap in earnings is growing. In 1975, those with

a bachelor's degree earned 1.5 times as much as those with a high school diploma and by

1999 that difference was 1.8 times (U.S. Census Bureau). The U.S. Bureau of Labor

Statistics (2009) echoed this. In its report, the organization showed the median weekly

salary for a person with a bachelor's degree was $1,025 versus $626 per week for a high

school graduate. The report also showed the unemployment rate for high school

graduates was 9.7% versus 5.2% for those who completed a bachelor's degree. Not only

is early departure from college detrimental to students, it is also potentially damaging to

institutions of higher education (Barefoot, 2004). Loss of students before graduation

means loss of ongoing tuition revenue, possible loss of state and/or federal funding and

potential loss of reputation (Light, 1995, Jamelske, 2009). Finally, society suffers when

students do not graduate from college since it loses educated and highly skilled workers

who contribute economically (Light, 1995; DesJardins et al., 1999; Barefoot, 2004;

Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Jamelske, 2009).

There are many reasons students do not complete college, including poor

academic performance, a gap of time between completing high school and enrolling in

college, financial issues, institutional type and fit, and first generation status of the

student (Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003). Bean and Metzner (1985) found the issue of

attrition was especially important for non-traditional students. According to the authors,

"nontraditional students are distinguished by the lessened intensity and duration of their

interaction with the primary agents of socialization (faculty, peers) at the institutions they

attend" (p. 488). Factors affecting likelihood of persistence for nontraditional students

included age, full-time versus part-time enrollment status, residence, finances, hours of

employment, family responsibilities and others (Bean & Metzner, 1985). Environmental

factors such as finances, hours of employment, and family responsibilities are especially

important factors affecting persistence for nontraditional students (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Hadfield, 2003). This phenomenon is increasingly important to institutions of higher education as greater numbers of entering students in these institutions are non-traditional in nature (Bean & Metzner, 1985).

Many factors influence the retention and academic achievement levels of contemporary college students and postsecondary institutions are implementing a number of interventions to improve overall student achievement levels (Ishitani, 2008). These include tutoring, advising, freshman seminars, supplemental instruction, and other programs in separate and often piece-meal ways (McDaniel, James, & Davis, 2000). In recent years, many colleges around the country established learning assistance centers to improve delivery of services by offering them in a comprehensive manner through a centralized mechanism (McDaniel, James, & Davis, 2000; Dykshoorn, 2001; Arendale, 2004, 2010). The development of these centers occurred with the goals of offering these retention services in a more accessible format so that students could and would avail themselves more of the services, thereby increasingly their likelihood of being successful academically and remaining in school (Dykshoorn, 2001).

Student Departure

In looking at the issue of student attrition and its causes, it is important to understand models of student departure developed by leading researchers in the field of higher education. Such models can help to explain the factors involved in decisions to leave college early. By looking at models of student departure, college administrators may develop a better understanding of the root causes of attrition and use proactive strategies to increase retention and persistence to degree. According to Tinto (1982) the

"study of dropout from higher education is extremely complex, as it involves not only a variety of perspectives but also a range of differing types of dropout behavior" (p. 14). Two of the most important, and widely cited, models include those of Bean (1985) and Tinto (1975).

Bean's Model of Student Departure. Bean (1981, 1985) developed his model of student departure based on Price's (1977) model of employee turnover in work organizations. It was Price's belief that employees make their decision to stay with a job based on a series of organizational variables affecting the employee's employment satisfaction. In the same way, Bean believed that students who are not satisfied with their educational institutions would ultimately leave them. Bean included five variables in his model: student background, organizational factors, environmental factors, intention to leave, and attitudinal and outcome variables (Bean, 1981). Student background includes those characteristics with which the student enters college including personal background and academic ability. Organizational factors include all interactions a student has with the educational institution, both social and academic. Environmental factors are outside variables over which the student has no direct control and can include the need for external employment, family financial standing, and family issues (Bean, 1981). The basis for the variable of intent to leave includes a student's plan either to remain at an institution or depart. A student may enter an institution with the plan to transfer before graduation or with the intent of completing a particular program of study. It is important to know the student's intent to leave in determining persistence. Finally, attitudinal and outcome variables are the psychological results of interacting with the institution and

include student attitude toward the institution and evaluations of the educational process and institutional policies (Bean, 1981).

The basis of Bean's (1985) model is an organizational model of persistence. Just as workers who are satisfied with their employment conditions stay on the job, students satisfied with their educational situation are likely to persist. Bean believed the five variables discussed in his model worked together to determine student satisfaction and, ultimately, his or her decision to persist (Bean). Bean and Metzner (1985) further expanded on Bean's original model when looking at the issue of attrition of nontraditional students. In this model, the theorists focused more on environmental variables and less on those related to social integration.

Tinto's Longitudinal Model of Student Departure. One of the most widely used models of student departure (Tinto, 1993, Liu & Liu, 1999) is Tinto's Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure (1975), which derives from Emile Durkheim's (1951) work on suicide. Durkheim posited that when individuals do not fully integrate into society, they choose to leave it. Tinto took this concept and applied it to students within higher education who do not integrate into their academic environments and choose to leave (Tinto, 1975). Durkheim believed that persons committed suicide due to their failure to integrate fully into society. Tinto similarly found that students who do not integrate fully into college life choose to "opt out" of college as individuals committing suicide opt out of life. Tinto (1975) wrote that "when one views the college as a social system, with its own values and social structures, one can treat dropout from that social system in a manner analogous to that of suicide in the wider society" (p. 91).

Tinto (1975) also found inspiration for his model in the work of Spady (1970). Both Spady and Tinto recognized individuals needed to integrate into larger systems in order to find satisfaction. In the case of Tinto, these included two systems: the social and the academic. For Tinto, students bring particular characteristics that affect their ability to integrate into these two systems. These characteristics include pre-college traits, goals, and their commitment to those goals. Goals include intent to complete a degree and to experience the social opportunities available while in college. The greater the integration students exhibit in social and academic systems of the institution, the greater the likelihood that they will persist (Tinto). Included in these systems are involvement in student organizations, clubs and activities and connections with faculty outside the classroom as well as other academic pursuits. Lending further credence to this concept is a report released by Swail, Redd, and Perna (2003) in which the contributors stated, "the level of congruence between student and institution is a primary factor influencing students' persistence" (p. 47).

Statement of the Problem

The researcher conducted this study at a public comprehensive university, defined as an institution with a wide range of degree programs at the bachelors and masters level and a limited number of doctoral programs (University System of Georgia [USG], 2015), in the Southeast with a declining retention rate. The institution formed a Student Success Center (SSC) in 2006 with the intention of providing tutoring and other academic support services to its students in the hope of reversing the declining trend of the institution's retention rate. Data provided by the institution indicated retention rates were 71.2% and 71.8% for the years 2007 and 2008 respectively. This compares to a system wide average

retention rate of 82.6% and 85.2% for the same years (Institution's Office of Strategic

Research, 2011) and national retention rates for public 4-year institutions of 74.3% for

2008 (ACT, 2008). The institution considers that while the retention rate was moderate, it

could improve (SSC Initiative Proposal, 2006). To address retention concerns, university

personnel wrote an initiative in the summer of 2006 and submitted to the University

System of Georgia requesting the use of funds to design an SSC. The SSC would be

centrally located on campus and offer a number of services designed to encourage student

success including broad based peer tutoring in all core subject areas including

mathematics, writing, social sciences, natural sciences, and foreign languages; and

academic advising services and on-campus employment assistance. Prior to the

implementation of the SSC, tutoring at the institution was generally only available in the

areas of mathematics and writing and these services were located in separate locations on

campus. In addition, there were no workshops offered targeting such issues as time

management, study skills, test-taking strategies, and other similar concerns of students.

Finally, although on campus student employment existed before the implementation of

the SSC, there was no office coordinating those efforts and students looking for

employment had to seek it on their own, likely reducing their possibility of seeking it or

successfully finding campus employment (SSC Initiative Proposal, 2006). The stated goal

of the SSC was to provide better academic support services to students at the institution

with the intention of helping students achieve better grades and remain at the institution.

     In addition, while data have been collected over the years indicating the effect use

of the services of the SSC on things such as final course grades, overall grade point

averages, and retention rates from year to year (SSC Institutional Effectiveness Reports,

2009, 2010, 2011), no assessment has ever been conducted of the students themselves asking what influence using the center services has on their academic success.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to consider the influence of tutoring services at the SSC at a comprehensive public university in the Southeast has on the students using these services during 2012-2013 semester. The sample for the study consisted of full-time, degree-seeking students who had completed tutoring appointments at the SSC during the 2012-2013 school year. The researcher collected data by conducting semi-structured interviews. Initial interviews ran for approximately 30 minutes and followed up several weeks later with additional interviews to allow for exploration of issues raised in the initial interviews.

This study aimed to learn from students, in their own words, how the SSC supported their goal of improving their grades and completing their degrees. In using a qualitative approach, the researcher allowed students' experiences to emerge in their own voices. The findings allowed participants to discuss what influence using the services of the SSC had on their academic success.

Research Question

*What are the experiences of students who utilized the Student Success Center in regards to their academic success during the 2012-2013 school year?*

Conceptual Frameworks for the Study

The theoretical frameworks for this study include Astin's (1993) I-E-O Model and Astin's (1999) Theory of Involvement. Together, these two models of student development during college set the groundwork for this study.

According to Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), Astin's I-E-O model is one of the "most durable and influential college impact models" (p. 53). The model is popular largely due to its simplicity. Astin (1999) defined student involvement as "the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (p. 518). Astin's contention was the more involved students become in college, the more likely they are to persist and complete their degree. He believed that this involvement would take the form of deeper engagement within the classroom and with the learning process itself as well as broader involvement in the complete collegiate experience outside the classroom. The I-E-O model has three basic components: inputs, which are the characteristics and background with which students enter college; environment, consisting of the programs, people, culture and policies of the college encountered by the student while in college; and outcomes including the characteristics, knowledge, behaviors and skills that students depart college with. According to Astin's (1993) model, the first two sets of variables: I – input variables and E – environmental variables work together to affect the final set of variables: O – outcome. As for the Theory of Involvement, Astin (1999) stated that his, "theory of student involvement encourages educators to focus less on what they do and more on what the student does. That is, administrators should look at how motivated the student is and how much time and energy the student devotes to the learning process" (p. 522). Astin believed the model could have practical applications, which would allow college faculty and administrators to focus less on the content of coursework and more and what students are actually doing and how involved they are in the learning process thus allowing students to gain a deeper understanding of and connection to the learning material.

Using Astin's (1993, 1999) models allowed the researcher to contextualize the experiences of the students who participated in the study to learn what if any influence the Student Success Center had on their academic success.

Significance of the Study

Early departure affects both students and their institutions (Choy, 2002; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). For students, not completing a chosen program of study can lead to negative feelings about themselves and their lives. In addition, it is likely that students miss gaining knowledge and growing as an individual by not attending, or completing college (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Students who stop out (withdrawal for a period of time) of college are also likely either to take much longer to earn a degree and/or be less likely overall to complete one than other students (Choy, 2002).

In addition to personal and intellectual loss, students who fail to complete college are hurt economically. The median salary for a high school educated worker was $25,000 in 2010. This compares to an average annual salary of $40,000 for someone with a bachelor's degree (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). Additionally, lifetime earnings for someone with a bachelor's degree are approximately double that of someone with just a high school diploma (Day & Newburger, 2002). Research found that earnings increased even if no degree was completed, by approximately 5 to 8% for each year of college credits earned (Leigh & Gill, 1997). Finally, 76.7% of those with a bachelor's degree were employed full-time year round as of 2000 versus 73.1% of those with just a high school diploma (Day & Newburger, 2002). Overall, research found that persons holding a bachelor's degree were less likely to be unemployed or underemployed and had

annual earnings much greater than their counterparts with only a high school diploma or less (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012).

Not only do students suffer negative economic consequences when they choose not to complete their degrees, institutions also suffer (Barefoot, 2004; Fike & Fike, 2008). Part of the basis for college reputations and funding is the percentage of students retained and graduated, which can influence perceptions of the institution (Jamelske, 2009). It is likely that quality of instruction and programs may be questioned (Fike & Fike). The research above, therefore, suggests that retention and graduation of students has a positive impact on institutions as well as students.

Colleges may also suffer financially if their students do not stay until degree completion. Since close ties exist between many college budgets and graduation rates, loss of students can seriously affect college financial situations (Fike & Fike, 2008). This is particularly true in public institutions in which budgets are based on funding formulas determined by state and local legislatures (Barefoot, 2004; Jamelske, 2009). For private institutions, loss of students means loss of tuition dollars (Barefoot). For these institutions, which are tuition driven, loss of this revenue can be devastating (Barefoot). Donor contributions may also dry up if large numbers of students do not complete their degrees. Finally, for each student that leaves, another has to be recruited, devoting money useful elsewhere, instead to marketing and recruiting activities, which are very expensive (Jamelske, 2009).

To address the concern of loss of students at the research institution, the researcher chose to meet with students who had used the services of the institution's SSC to see what influence it had on them. The researcher was interested in finding out if the

use of the center had a positive influence on the students interviewed, increasing their positive association with the institution and therefore improving their likelihood of remaining at the institution through graduation.

Researcher's Statement

In qualitative studies, researcher experiences and beliefs have an influence on the researcher's perceptions of the data collected (Merriam, et al., 2002; Patton; 2002). First, as the researcher, I may have had prior experiences with some of the students interviewed in this study. Because the participating students have visited the SSC, I may have had prior contact with them. As the coordinator of tutoring here at the SSC there may be an issue of power in interviewing students making them reluctant to give negative feedback. As the interviewer, it is my responsibility to create an atmosphere of openness and trust with the participants to allow them the freedom to express themselves as honestly as possible. In addition, as an instructor at the institution, I may have had several of the students in class. However, I consider this study a method of improving the services offered in the center and strived to be as objective in the collection and reporting of data as possible. As a researcher and staff member within the SSC, I was interested to hear the stories of students who have used the center's services and to have an opportunity to speak with those students.

Furthermore, my background includes training in higher education administration, which may influence my analysis of the data. I have a Master's degree in student personnel administration and worked in both admissions and advising and have completed courses in individual counseling. My experience in these fields may influence my perceptions of what the interviewees say. On the other hand, my interpretations of the

data could be more effective because of my training in these fields. However, I was careful to ask interviewees if my perceptions of their responses were correct, as discussed in Chapter 3, so that I might faithfully represent the experiences of my participants.

Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 addressed the background of the study, the statement of the problem, the conceptual framework for the study, its purpose and significance and the research question for the study and a researcher's statement. Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature including a presentation of the issues of retention and persistence, factors that may affect retention and persistence discussed in this study, a history of learning assistance in U.S. colleges, and institutional responses to issues of retention and persistence. Chapter 3 presents the methodology used for the study including the context of the study, study design and sample, a description of the research site, and the qualitative methods employed. Chapter 4 presents an overview of study findings while Chapter 5 provides a discussion of these findings in the context of the broader literature, limitations of the study and recommendations for future research.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This review of literature begins with a discussion on the overall issue of college

student retention and its importance to institutions of higher education. I continue with

some history of learning assistance and its effect on retention and conclude with a review

of several factors with the potential to affect college student retention and achievement.

After a discussion of these factors, I will consider responses to these issues through a

review of research on institutional interventions. Finally, I will consider efforts made by

colleges and universities to integrate these academic interventions with analysis of the

comparative effectiveness of offering these support interventions in an in one central

location as against in separate locations on a college campus.

Retention and Persistence

Retention and persistence to degree completion are important factors for colleges

and universities within the U.S. for many reasons. Not the least of these is the fact that

many institutions, particularly public ones, receive funding based on their relative rates of

retention (Barefoot, 2004; Jamelske, 2009). In addition, retention and persistence to

graduation is important to students for several economic and social outcomes including

lower unemployment, higher earnings, greater civic involvement, and lower rates of

criminal involvement (Light, 1995; DesJardins et al., 1999; Pascarella & Terenzini,

2005). In addition, there is greater concern among public policy makers now

with accountability as measured by retention and persistence to degree. Finally, the federal Higher Education Act often uses graduation rates as a way to measure the effectiveness of institutions of higher education (Fike & Fike, 2008). Even with evidence of the importance of retention, institutions often focus more on recruiting new students than retaining current ones, although recruitment costs more (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Astin, 1993; Tinto, 1993). According to Tinto (1999), most institutions do not take retention seriously enough. With general attrition rates nearing 41% from first to second year and 34% persistence to degree rate, colleges need more than ever to focus on student success and ways to predict and improve retention (ACT, 2007; Fike & Fike, 2008). St. John and Wilkerson (2006) found that although there is much literature on persistence much of it fails to focus on student academic success and the importance of institutional interventions. One of the goals of the present study is to address this apparent gap in research by looking at the role of the tutoring services at an SSC on the academic success of the students it serves.

The following section will discuss predictors of college student retention focusing on those factors addressed in this study. This will be followed by a discussion of the history of learning assistance implemented by colleges and universities to improve retention and academic success and will finish with a discussion of the implementation of specific interventions across the U.S.

Factors Affecting College Student Retention and Persistence

Many factors affect a student's likelihood of academic success and retention in college. These include gender, race, and level of prior academic preparation. This study used interviews with students utilizing tutoring services at a public university to see if

tutoring supported their overall sense of academic achievement and success while also listening for any ways in which their gender, race, or prior academic preparation affected their perception of success. The review of literature summarizes research on retention overall and how each of these three factors affect student academic success as measured by grade point average and retention. The focus of this study was to learn about perceptions of the SSC and tutoring by students from different racial, gender and academic backgrounds and to see if there is a need for changes in the delivery of services.

Gender. Gender plays a role in a student's success in college as indicated in numerous studies (Adebayo, 2008; Clifton, et al., 2008; Lei, Kuestermeyer, & Westmeyer, 2010). Recent studies point to changing demographics in American colleges as more women are attending as compared to their male peers (Adebayo, 2008; Doyle, 2010). According to Vedder (2004), the percentage of students who are female continually increased in the U.S. from 38% in 1960 to about 50% in 1980 to over 56% in 2000. Knowing this, colleges and universities are using this information to inform institutional planning especially in the areas of recruitment and retention of both male and female students. While females outnumber males, research shows that women with some college or an associate's degree earn just slightly more than male high school dropouts and less than men with a high school diploma (Doyle, 2010). As a result, scholars still see the need to consider gender and gender equity in higher education (Bobbitt-Zeher, 2007, Canada & Pringle, 1995). In addition, one study comparing the experience of male and female college students looked at differences in the psychosocial dispositions of the genders and their academic achievement levels (Clifton et al., 2010). Clifton et al. found that although women outnumber men in U.S. colleges currently, their

interactions with other students, staff and faculty on their campuses are colder than their male counterparts, causing a negative impact on their psychosocial dispositions and negatively affecting their academic achievement.

In a study of how high school factors affect persistence and graduation at a public university, Johnson (2008) found that female college students were more likely to persist to the second year than male students and were less likely to depart for academic reasons. However, when controlling for academic performance, a female's odds of leaving school became higher than her male peers. This finding is consistent with prior research (Johnson, 2006) and theory that "the departure of females is relative to that of males, more determined by social forces than academic ones" (Tinto, 1993, p. 73). Based on this data, it seems that although women may attend in greater numbers than men, they still face unique challenges to success in college. Therefore, it is important still to consider gender when designing retention initiatives. Because of this study, if discrepancies are found in perceptions of the SSC by students based on gender, SSC staff will consider a review of the method of the delivery of these services.

Race. Race is another contributing factor in students' success in college as measured by academic performance, retention and persistence (Johnson, 2008; Rivas-Drake, & Mooney, 2008; Kiser & Price, 2007). Research suggests that while more minority students are finishing high school and attending college, the gap in achievement is greater now than ever. As of 2005, approximately 85% of white Americans attended college and almost 28% finished bachelor's degrees. This compares with 59% and 12% for Latinos (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2006a). Furthermore, Latinos are less likely than any other ethnic group to finish high school with a dropout

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rate of 22.4% (NCES, 2006b). Rivas-Drake and Mooney (2008) found that the beliefs of

Latino students in elite colleges concerning potential opportunity relate to their

perceptions of both covert and overt campus prejudice affecting their academic

performance.

This issue exists for African American students at predominately White

institutions (PWI) as well. Rodgers and Summers (2008) found that these institutions

were not as effective as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU's) in

retaining and graduating African American students. They posit that this is due to the

attempts by these colleges to use a traditional model of retention designed for White

students with African American students. This study interviewed both white and African

American students to learn if those students' experience with tutoring at an SSC are

different and therefore create differing perceptions of the influence of tutoring on their

academic success. If the researcher found differences, the center would initiate ways to

improve delivery of its services to all students.

Academic Preparedness. A third factor in determining a student's success in

college and likelihood of retention and persistence until graduation is level of academic

preparation upon entering college (Tinto 1997). The most common definition of

academic preparedness is a combination of precollege academic measures including high

school grade point average (GPA), high school rank, scores on standardized exams,

difficulty level of high school course load, quality of high school, and overall quality of

high school curriculum (Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003). According to Perin (2004), "the

issue of academic preparedness…may affect a significant portion of the college degree

program as underprepared students enroll in college-credit courses" (p. 560). This study

took place at fifteen community colleges across six states that together accounted for more than half of all community college enrollments in the U.S. Perin confirmed Astin's (1964) study of college dropouts. As more students enter college with weaker pre-college academic preparation, the likelihood of attrition appears to grow.

In addition to the issue of academic underpreparedness as a factor in student attrition is the related issue of academic underachievement. Although underachievement can have many definitions, one that is neither too broad nor too limited could include a "severe discrepancy between expected achievement…and actual achievement" (Reis & McCoach, 2000, p. 157). Underachievement can be the result either of lack of academic preparation by students or students whose performance in college does not live up to standards expected of them based on pre-college academic measures (Nelson, 1998). Nearly 50% of students in 4-year colleges lack adequate academic preparation, nearly one-quarter are not retained to their sophomore year and fully 50% do not graduate with a bachelor's degree within 6 years as shown in several studies (Haycock & Huang, 2001) In addition, a significant number of students who leave college prior to graduation have been on academic probation at least one time (Coleman & Freedman, 1996). Balduf (2009) found that this lack of preparation was an important factor leading students to depart college before graduation. She conducted a qualitative study with seven freshman placed on probation at a private college in the southern U.S. Results suggested that previously high-achieving students entered college without necessary academic skills including time management and an inability to adjust to their newfound independence. As many students using SSC services find the transition to college difficult due to issues such as lack of study skills and problems managing time (Balduf, 2009), this study

investigated ways the SSC assisted students in these areas. The researcher did this by

asking open-ended questions of participants about their tutoring experiences at the SSC.

This open-ended format allowed the participants to speak freely about the experiences

and what benefits they gained from tutoring including improved time management and

tips for studying subjects with which they struggled.

Level of Engagement. Student engagement within the institution is another factor

that can affect likelihood of success (Community College Survey of Student Engagement

[CCSSE], 2005). At the community college level, student engagement as a consideration

in retention was reported in the CCSSE. The CCSSE considered such issues as how much

interaction students have with faculty and fellow students, and how students spent their

time on campus – including the amount of time preparing for their classes and what

services they use on campus. According to the CCSSE, which was conducted at the

University of Texas Community College Leadership Program in 2005, the more engaged

a student is, the more likely that student is to be successful in college. Kay McClenney,

CCSSE director, noted this engagement is particularly important for students identified as

"at risk," which in this study focused primarily on those attending part-time.

The role of student engagement in retention is critical at 4-year institutions as

well (Tinto, 1998). Tinto highlights the importance of student involvement in college. His

study found that the more interactions students had with faculty and other students, and

the more positive these interactions were, the more likely they were to persist to

completion. Swail, Redd and Perna (2003) confirmed this finding, in a study based on

Tinto's student integration model. For commuter students, engagement in the classroom

was of particular significance since, for them, the classroom forms the core of both their

academic and social connection to the institution (Tinto, 1997). Pascarella and Terenzini (1977) similarly found that informal positive interactions with faculty outside the classroom contributed to student persistence.

Hausmann, Feifei, Schofield, and Woods (2009) researched students' sense of belonging to their particular college or university. The aim of the study was to determine if sense of belonging had any effect on student retention. The focus of the research was on whether sense of belonging – defined by the authors as "psychological sense of identification and affiliation with the campus community" (Hausmann, et al., p. 650) – had a relationship to persistence. The researchers conducted the study at a predominately white public university and included all first year, non-transfer African American students and a random sample of white students. The study found that students' sense of belonging does relate to persistence. Guiding theory for this study included Tinto (1975) and Astin (1993). Schlossberg (1989) found that sense of belonging is important to all students. Sense of belonging is a question of feeling marginal or mattering in Schlossberg's study. She asked the question "are we part of things; do we belong; are we central or marginal?" (Schlossberg, 1989, p. 6). As such, colleges and universities need to find ways to engage their students, make them a part of the campus community, to encourage their sense of mattering and ultimate success.

Hu, a leading figure in retention research, recently undertook work on student engagement (2010, 2011). His research found a complex relationship between engagement and persistence. In his study conducted at Washington State University in 2011, Hu found that while greater social engagement and persistence had a positive link; increased academic engagement had a negative correlation. Hu and Wolniak (2010)

found similar results in their study, which found a positive relationship between social engagement and greater early career earnings while academic engagement was not. This study looked at if using the SSC's tutoring services helped student connect more to their institution and if they perceived their needs mattered to the center and addressed these needs in the tutoring sessions. The study accomplished this by focusing on students who had used the SSC at least three times during the 2012-2013 year and included students who not only used the services of the SSC but provided them as well.

Prior literature discusses several factors that influence student success as determined by retention and persistence to graduation. These factors include race, gender, academic background and others. This study looked at student perceptions of the SSC on their success and included students of multiple races, both genders and varied academic backgrounds. The researcher included these participants in an effort to reflect the diversity of students using the center and to learn from the students in their own stories if these factors had an influence on the students' perception of the centers role on their academic success.

History of Learning Assistance as Related to Retention and Persistence

To understand better the field of learning assistance, as it exists in higher education today, one needs to understand the development of learning assistance strategies throughout the history of the postsecondary education. According to Arendale (2010), learning assistance has its foundations in the U.S. starting in 1636 with the founding of Harvard College (Arendale, 2002b). Over time, the complexity of the field grew with the increasing number and scope of colleges and the continual increase in student enrollments. To understand the development of learning assistance, Arendale

(2010) divided the field into six distinct historical phases – 1600s to 1820s; 1830s to 1860s; 1870s to Mid-1940s; Mid-1940s-1970s; Early 1970s to Mid-1990s; and Mid-1990s to the present.

Phase One (1600s to 1820s). During phase one (1600s to 1820s), colleges in the U.S. were open only to young white men of privileged cultural and economic backgrounds (Arendale, 2010). At this time, the only form of learning assistance that existed was that of the individual tutor (Arendale, 2010). This learning assistance developed in response to the stringent admission requirements of the limited number of colleges that existed in the U.S. at the time and the lack of preparation demonstrated by the admission of exclusively elite young men. Due to weaknesses in areas such as Greek, Latin and mathematics, clergymen often followed the example of the "dame school" of England (small tutorial centers usually run by educated women of high social standing), to provide tutoring (Gordon & Gordon, 1990).

Phase Two (1830s to 1860s). Phase two (1830s to 1860s) saw the emergence of academic preparation academies (Arendale, 2002b). These institutions served much the same purpose as today's public high schools, which were not common in this period (Arendale, 2010). These academies developed as colleges began to realize the tutoring they offered was no longer sufficient to serve the needs of new students entering the institution. These community based institutions offered remedial classes in reading, writing, and mathematics, in addition to tutoring (Arendale, 2002b). However, this phase was short due to the rapid expansion of public education across the nation. The makeup of the students in college changed very little during this from the earlier phase. The

majority of students in college still came from white families of privileged origins (Arendale, 2010).

Phase Three (1870s to Mid-1940s). During phase three (1870s to Mid-1940s), the expansion of tutoring and inclusion of remedial courses in the college curriculum took place (Arendale, 2000). These services, which institutions previously housed in the academic preparation academies developed in phase two, now moved to the main campus. Although White, privileged males still dominated, institutions designed for women and minorities began to emerge (Arendale, 2010). The First Morrill Act of 1862 (U.S. National Archives & Records Administration, 2011) also brought the influence of the federal government into higher education for the first time, significantly expanding the types of programs offered by and students attending college primarily through the introduction of land-grant colleges. The result of this was the need for increased amount of remediation in colleges through academic preparatory departments. By the late 1880s, in fact, some 84% of land-grant institutions offered remedial courses (Craig, 1997). However, the extent of remediation offered at colleges within the U.S. was still very uneven as late as the 1920s (Parr, 1930).

Phase Four (Mid-1940s to 1970s). The middle of the twentieth century saw what Arendale (2010) called phase four of learning assistance history (Mid-1940s to the 1970s). During this period, college enrollments expanded significantly and learning assistance programs increased along with enrollment. In addition to the tutoring and remedial courses already offered, compensatory education for at-risk students began and colleges saw the beginning of the development of formal learning assistance centers (Arendale, 2002b). Due to greater differences in the quality of academic preparation of

incoming students, stigma associated with learning assistance increased. Students from more privileged backgrounds now entered college with higher levels of academic preparation and, unlike in previous periods, had little need for remediation (Brubacher & Rudy, 1976). New groups of students, including first-generation, economically disadvantaged, and minorities entered college in increasing numbers. This group also included immigrant children who entered the U.S. from Asia, Africa and the Near East starting in the 1960s because of new legislation such as the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which abolished the system of national origin quotas for immigrants previously enforced. These immigrants brought with them unique challenges based on their limited exposure to English as a language of instruction (Collins, 2009).

Phase Five (1970s to 1990s). In phase five of Arendale's (2010) learning assistance history, (1970s to the 1990s), colleges developed new learning assistance programs. These included non-credit activities and a move toward skill development for college-level courses (Arendale, 2010). Formal learning assistance centers, which emerged during the early 1970s, developed further (Arendale, 2004; Christ, 1971). California State University – Northridge established the first of these programs. A unique feature of these centers was their comprehensive nature and their focus not just on underprepared students but all students and sometimes even faculty (White, Jr. & Schnuth, 1990).

Arendale (2004) indicated a number of factors occurring at the federal level spurring the development of learning assistance centers. These factors included the Servicemen's Readjustment Act (GI Bill) of 1944, which gave financial support to nearly one million returning veterans from WWII to attend college; the Civil Rights Act of 1964

(U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, 1985); and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (U.S. Department of Justice, 2011), which addressed the inherently unequal access given to disadvantaged students. Students entering college through these programs, and alternatively through newly developed open admission community colleges, generally enrolled with much lower academic profiles and test scores creating a greater likelihood of departure. The needs of such students made it necessary for colleges to provide additional academic assistance. The theme in many colleges had become one of a "right to fail" (Arendale, 2004, p. 11) as students were often admitted to colleges to pursue degrees for which they had little appropriate academic preparation (Arendale, 2004).

Phase Six (1990s to present). Arendale (2010) notes the current phase of learning assistance (1990s to the present) for its instability. Colleges and universities have curtailed the use of learning assistance centers, along with developmental education programs in general, because of increased competition for funding within universities and from outside agencies. This has been especially true in the 4-year public sector. Funding decreases are the result of declining budgets in universities, especially public ones as sources of income such as tax revenue dry up (Barefoot, 2004; Fike & Fike, 2008; Jamelske, 2009). Learning assistance has lost much of its funding due to criticism concerning the offering of learning assistance to students in 4-year institutions both from outside (particularly from legislators) and within the academy being seen as no longer appropriate in higher education (Arendale, 2004). In response to this, many redesigned learning assistance centers offer themselves as resources for both students and faculty expanding beyond their perception as centers of remediation (Arendale, 2004).

The Role of Institutional Learning Assistance in Student Retention and Persistence

Due to the myriad factors, discussed previously that can reduce a student's likelihood of completing a college degree, colleges and universities developed numerous ways to address to issue of student retention. Early interventions included peer tutoring, which began primarily on an individual, limited basis and over time became more centralized and broadly accessible (Arendale, 2004). The addition of advising services helped guide students through their academic careers so they would be better prepared for entry to their careers. More recent interventions developed by learning assistance centers include supplemental instruction (an intentional form of tutoring stressing group study activities) freshman success courses, and finally learning assistance centers, which combine many of the aforementioned activities into one location (Arendale, 2004).

Peer Tutoring and Supplemental Instruction. One of the most often used institutional interventions to improve student performance, retention and persistence is peer tutoring (Hodges, 2001). Early students in the U.S. often did not enter college with levels of preparation as strong as their European counterparts and therefore needed additional assistance before admission (White & Schnuth, 1990). According to Arendale (2010), most colonial era students were White males of privileged backgrounds but who had deficiencies in the areas of foreign language and mathematics. Preparation for admission to schools such as Harvard and Yale necessitated that these students seek out private tutors either in Europe or, later on, within the British colonies of the U.S. This tutoring usually consisted of preparation to complete examinations in Greek and Latin and to verify that the student was of good moral character (Arendale, 2010). The tutoring often continued after admission to these elite institutions since many of the textbooks

written at the time were in Latin. In fact, Harvard began to require a form of remedial studies for all its entering students (Boylan & White, 1987).

College populations are much more diverse and tutoring programs are more widespread since the early days of American higher education. More underprepared students are entering higher education, so colleges have turned more and more to peer tutoring as an intervention. The broad definition of peer tutoring is "more able students helping less able students to learn in co-operative working pairs or small groups carefully organized by a professional teacher" (Topping, 1996, p. 322). While this definition is by no means complete, it does show the cooperative nature of traditional peer tutoring in which a student with more mastery of a particular content area can provide help to a student struggling to succeed. Peer tutoring can have advantages for both the tutors and the tutees as several studies have found (Hodges, 2001; Rittschof & Griffin, 2001, Topping, 1996). Rittschof and Griffin (2001) conducted randomized design experiments at a university in the southern U.S. to determine if cooperative-learning procedures offered greater intellectual and psychological benefits for participants than independent learning. This study consisted of two experiments. The first consisted of 97 graduate students and the second of 100 undergraduate students. Contrary to researchers' expectations, the experiment failed to improve students' understanding of course materials. However, it did report that students reported improvement in studying course content for both tutors and tutees. For tutors, the tutoring process allows them to think about the material in new and different ways and allows learning to occur through the act of teaching (Topping, 1996). For the tutee, the advantages include a more active and

interactive form of learning, immediate feedback in the learning process and increased

sense of ownership over the learning process (Topping, 1996).

Studies find tutoring to be particularly advantageous to those students who enter

college with challenges (Stodden, Whelly, Chung, & Harding, 2001; Vogel, Fresko, &

Wertheim, 2007). Among these are students with disabilities, particularly those with

learning disabilities. In a survey of 650 colleges in the U.S., researchers found that 56%

frequently used tutoring as a support service but only 14% reported not having any

tutoring services (Stodden et al., 2001). An NCES (NCES, 1999) survey similarly found

that 77% of institutions surveyed offered tutoring services. Research shows that different

forms of tutoring have been effective for tutees and that their level of satisfaction with

tutoring is very high (Vogel et al., 2007).

Supplemental Instruction (SI) is another form of learning assistance gaining

popularity nationally. The development of SI took place in 1973 at the University of

Missouri-Kansas City (UMKC) and UMKC's International Center for Supplemental

Instruction (2013) defines it as "an academic assistance program that utilizes peer-

assisted study sessions. SI sessions are regularly scheduled, informal review sessions in

which students compare notes, discuss readings, develop organizational tools, and predict

test items." (p 2) The institution established SI to target historically difficult courses

rather than students at risk of failure to help reduce the stigma of academic weakness

often attached to tutoring. According to UMKC, the purpose of SI is threefold – "to

increase retention within targeted historically difficult courses, to improve student grades

in targeted historically difficult courses, and to increase the graduation rates of students"

(UMKC International Center for Supplemental Instruction, 2013, p. 2).

Research indicates that SI has benefits, for students, faculty and staff across the institutions that implemented it (Zerger, Clark-Unite & Smith, 2006). SI contributes to the education of students in that by targeting courses and not students, it creates a broader environment for academic success in much the same way that the community health model broadens the concept of treating individual patients (Arendale, 2002). For students, the benefits include learning the material more effectively, improving grades, staying within their chosen disciplines, and being retained and graduating at much higher rates. In addition, students reported greater satisfaction with courses supported by SI than those without (Zerger, Clark-Unite, & Smith, 2006). Students utilizing SI "facilitate their greater conceptual understanding and their success on problem-solving tasks and examinations increases substantially" (McGuire, 2006, p. 8). Research also concluded SI leaders, those students who conducted the study groups, benefited as well. According to McGuire (2006), these students' learning improved by having to develop learning situations for other students. They also gained skills in leadership, group dynamics, and strategies to help motivate others.

Faculty also benefit from having SI leaders support their classes (Zaritsky & Toce, 2006). One way is that a SI leader can act as an assistant to the faculty member both within and outside the classroom. This allows the faculty member time to address other teaching needs (Zaritsky & Toce, 2006). Additionally faculty development benefits increase because of the use of supplemental instruction in courses. Since many faculty members completed their education in an individualistic format, they can benefit from the collaborative nature of supplemental instruction, particularly in the complexities of today's world (Zerger, Clark-Unite, & Smith, 2006). Finally, faculty members who have

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taught courses supported by SI indicated that they were more in touch with the needs of the students in those courses, allowing them to modify more quickly the class curriculum to meet those needs (McGuire, 2006).

Administrators also benefit from the implementation of SI on their campuses. Because SI is a very data-driven intervention program, administrators can quickly see how well it works in improving student grades and retention rates (Zaritsky & Toce, 2006). Additionally, SI is a much more cost-effective intervention than traditional tutoring (Zerger, Clark-Unite, & Smith, 2006). Since the structure of SI is a group format rather than the traditional one-on-one setup, the cost per student is lower. In addition, since each student they lose to attrition negatively affects many public institutions' budgets, the increased retention rates achieved by SI help the institutions economically (Zerger et al., 2006).

Research indicates that SI is a growing form of learning assistance and that it has benefits across the institutions that offer it. Students, SI leaders, faculty and institutions gain from the use of SI in addition to other forms of learning assistance provided. In the current study, participants utilized both supplemental instruction and traditional tutoring in the study's SSC research location.

Academic Advising. An integral component of higher education in the U.S. since the founding of the earliest colleges is academic advising (Arendale, 2002b). Academic advising is broadly defined by the National Association of Academic Advising (NACADA) as

A series of intentional interactions with a curriculum, a pedagogy, and a

set of student learning outcomes. Academic advising synthesizes and

contextualizes students' educational experiences within the frameworks of
their aspirations, abilities and lives to extend learning beyond campus
boundaries and timeframes (NACADA, 2006)

As advising is often a component of university Learning Assistance Centers (LACs),
advising, like tutoring, supplemental instruction and first-year seminars is an important
form of learning assistance and can improve a student's chance of academic success in
college (Perin, 2004, Bahr, 2008). Advising is an important way colleges can address
issues of student dropout and increase retention rates (Bahr, 2008). Quality advising
assists students to "succeed academically, establish clearer educational and lifelong
objects, and tailor their educational experience toward theirs goals and aspirations
(Steingass, & Sykes, 2008). In a study of first-time college freshman in 107 of
California's community colleges in fall 1995, Bahr found that "advising appears to be
beneficial to students' chances of success, and all the more so for students who face
academic deficiencies" (p. 726) His study looked at two subsets of the fall 1995 cohort
across all of California's community colleges. The goal was to determine if advising has
an effect on students' ability to achieve their academic goals controlling for student
race/ethnicity, racial/ethnic makeup of the college and level of preparation of the student
when entering college. Bahr found that advising has significant benefits for students,
particularly those with academic deficiencies (Bahr).

The above finding confirms earlier results from Pascarella and Terenzini (1977)
who noted informal student-faculty contact (including academic advising) was a strong
predictor of persistence in college. Community colleges found faculty based advising to
be particularly important with their prevalence of older and more transient students

(Perin, 2004). Community college students are also more likely to enter college with poorer academic skills, competing obligations including family and employment and less consistent connections to their academic institutions (Perin). In a study of faculty advising at a community college, McArthur (2005) found that faculty members represent a measure of authority and act as role model in a way that does not exist in other aspects of the student's life. McArthur also found that while the faculty member's major role is to provide instruction in the classroom; they can make an important additional impact upon students' through providing academic guidance. Advising is particularly important within the community college environment since these students have often been away from school for a number of years, may have greater concerns about career choices, and have few, if any, other interactions with their institutions (McArthur). Advising, as a retention tool, is not only the purview of faculty as colleges and universities have increasingly moved to offering advising through professionally trained advisors and even college librarians (Kelleher & Laidlaw, 2009). Kelleher and Laidlaw's research took place at the University of St. Thomas where librarians were engaged in advising and participated fully in the university's Freshman Year Experience (FYE) program as advisors. According to the authors, this enabled students to engage with librarians as full faculty members as well as staff members with knowledge bases beyond their discipline (Kelleher & Laidlaw, 2009).

   Freshman Seminars and Learning Communities. A need for administrators and others on college campuses to look for new ways to connect with their students came about because of the diversity of the modern college student population (Hausmann, Feifei, Schofeld, & Woods, 2009). The typical definition of the college student as

someone between 18-22 years of age, attending full-time, living on campus and enrolling directly from high school now accounts for a minority of today's students (NCES, 2009). Part-time students, who accounted for 32% of all students in 1970, accounted for 43% in 1990. Between 2000 and 2009, while the enrollment of students under age 25 rose by 27%, enrollment for those over 25 rose by 43%, a trend expected to continue for many years (NCES, 2009). Today's students face a variety of challenges including need for remediation, financial management issues, balancing school with work and family life, and lack of support structures (Choate & Smith, 2003). These challenges are unlike those of previous generations who were primarily of traditional age, single, full-time and residing on campus (Choate & Smith). One form of support recently implemented by institutions to address these myriad issues is a first-year success course (Jamelske, 2009; Potts & Schultz, 2008). According to a study conducted by the Policy Center on the First Year of College (2002), 94% of 4-year colleges in the U.S. offer a first-year course to some students while more than 50% of 4-year colleges offer a first-year course to 90% of first-year students.

Porter and Swing (2006) conducted a study of first-year seminars' effect on persistence at 45 institutions and found that out of five common measures (study skills, campus policies, campus engagement, peer connection, and health information) two - study skills and health information - substantially impact a student's early intention to stay in school. First-year seminars have a particularly positive impact on students who, upon admission to college, had at least one identifiable characteristic that would classify them as at-risk, as research has shown (Potts & Schultz, 2008). These factors include living off-campus, having below average standardized entrance exam scores, and below

average high school rank (Potts & Schultz, 2008). Jamelske (2009) found that first-year courses had no overall positive impact retention but that students enrolled in these courses did achieve higher GPAs than their counterparts who did not enroll.

An extension of the first-year seminar on many college campuses is the first-year experience (FYE). In FYE programs, institutions pair first-year success courses with other introductory courses in writing and content courses such as history or psychology (Tinto, 1999). In addition, students often live together in a common residence hall, have a common academic advisor, and often have similar career goals. Differences between FYE programs exist between public and private colleges, large and small colleges and teaching versus research institutions (Jamelske, 2009). However, all programs have the goal of improving academic performance, retention, and graduation by creating an environment in which the student feels integrated into the institution. (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

A longitudinal study matching treatment and control groups conducted by Schnell and Doetkett (2002) found significantly higher retention rates for students completing first-year programs over a 4-year period at a medium-sized public university in the Midwest. Hotchkiss, Moore, and Pitts (2006) similarly found that first-year communities had a small but significant effect on GPA and retention. Some research however has found no positive effect of first-year programs. Potts, Schultz, and Foust (2003) found no statistically significant effect on GPA or retention but that the residence hall component of the program had positive retention effects. Similarly, Rhodes and Carifio (1999) found that while freshman seminar experiences had a number of positive impacts on their students, there was significant dissatisfaction with grouping students of different ages,

backgrounds and abilities randomly into one seminar course. Their research suggests that institutions develop different types of seminars for different types of students. Although the present study did not look at the influence of freshman seminars or learning communities on students, since many learning assistance centers sponsor these programs, there is opportunity for future research.

Learning Assistance Centers. LACs, alternatively known as SSCs, Academic Success Centers, or Learning Skills Centers (Stern, 2001) became an important component of colleges and universities striving for academic success (Arendale, 2004). These centers offer a variety of services including peer tutoring, academic skills workshops, advising, faculty outreach, and supplemental instruction (Perin 2004). LACs emerged in the latter part of the twentieth century as a reaction to the increasing diversity and reduced level of academic preparedness of entering students (Arendale, 2004). However, unlike previous forms of academic interventions, LACs were designed differently in that they were comprehensive and were designed to be available to all students regardless of academic background (Dvorak, 2004). In fact, the students using services offered by LACs today are very diverse and there is recognition that most college students today require some type of academic support services (Dvorak, 2004). To provide the greatest access to the largest number of students, LACs offer their support services in an easy to find, centralized format (Steingass & Sykes).

LACs have a positive impact on the students they serve (Gribbons & Dixon, 2001). Perin (2004) found that assistance centers played a very important role in the success of students by increasing their preparedness for postsecondary study. Additionally, she found that through offering assistance in mathematics, reading, and

writing they provide important remedial roles. Data collected for the LAC at the University of North Carolina-Greensboro supported this claim, indicating that students who completed 3 or more hours of tutoring annually from 2008-2010 had average GPAs of approximately 2.88 versus 2.70 for students with less than 3 hours (UNCG, 2010). These results indicate that students who completed at least 3 tutoring hours annually during these years were more successful overall than those who had less than 3 hours or no tutoring at all during the same period.

According to Enright (1975), learning assistance centers evolved in four distinct stages starting in the early twentieth century and continuing throughout the century. The period from 1916-1940 saw the development of study skills courses in such centers. Second, during the period from1940-1950, LACs developed remedial reading programs to assist their students. The period from 1950-1960 saw the development of more holistic interventions focusing on the entire student. Finally, the period from 1960 to the present saw the development of fully integrated learning assistance centers. However, according to a 2009 interview by Barbara Calderwood with Frank Christ (Calderwood, 2009), former director of the Learning Assistance Support System at California State University – Long Beach, LACs still have further evolutionary needs including serving their entire campus communities. It is his belief however that these centers serve an integral purpose on their campuses that will only be more important in the ever increasingly complex world of higher education.

This study looked at a learning assistance center, known as an SSC on one university campus. The goal of the study was to see how influential the center was on the students it serves particularly in terms of how it helped improve grades in the courses for

which students received help, increased their self-confidence and improved their chances

for retention and persistence to graduation. In speaking with the participants, it also

became apparent that students believe the SSC is essential to the institution and the

students it serves. The study aligned with prior research showing that tutoring, especially

when conducted within a centralized, accessible center on a university campus, has a

strong ability to enhance student success. It also confirmed that positive student

interactions with peers in a centralized learning assistance center increases student

confidence in themselves and their academic abilities.

Summary

This review of literature included a discussion of factors affecting college student

retention and achievement, institutional responses to these issues, and a discussion of

ways in which colleges and universities support students through LACs. Consideration of

student persistence continues to be a very important issue since attainment of a degree is

the primary outcome of entering college (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). St. John and

Wilkerson (2006) found that while there has been much literature devoted to issues of

persistence, focus on the more critical issue of student academic success and the value of

institutional interventions is lacking. This study contributed to this gap in persistence

literature by focusing on how one particular institutional intervention, namely tutoring

within an SSC, helped students be more successful and perceive that they are more

successful. College administrators need to consider new ways of tackling persistence. In

their edited issue of *New Directions for Institutional Research,* St. John, Wilkerson and

their colleagues identified the need for new research and perspectives in student

departure, confirming earlier findings by St. John, Hu, Simmons and Musoba (2001).

More recently, Jones-White, Radcliffe, Huesmann Jr., and Kellogg (2010) suggested that the traditional measure of student persistence, which looked at student persistence within the institution of entry, is no longer adequate. They recommended new research designs including persistence, as an outcome, should shift focus from an institutional perspective to one that is student centered. While this study focused on one institution, usually the institution of entry for the students who participated, it attempted to look at the issue of persistence through not only the institutional lens but the student one as well. In interviewing students about their experiences with the SSC on campus, this study was able to get the student perspective on how the center assisted them in being more successful in college and remaining until graduation.

In Chapter Three, I will present the methodology used for the study including the context of the study, study design and participants, the research site, qualitative methods employed and data collection and analysis methods. The chapter will include detailed information about each aspect of the methodology and the rationale for using specific designs, research sites, participants and forms of data collection and analysis.

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to determine the ways in which a Student Success Center (SSC) at a regional comprehensive public university in south Georgia influenced student academic success and retention. The overall research question for this study was:

*What are the experiences of full-time, degree-seeking, undergraduate students who utilized the Student Success Center in regards to their academic success during the 2012-2013 school year?*

Design of the Study

I chose a constructivist framework through which to conduct the study. Constructivism states that humans construct their reality and that the world of human perception is not real in an absolute sense but shaped by cultural and linguistic constructs (Merriam et al., 2002). Essentially no reality is absolute but only understandable within varying contexts (Neimeyer, 1993). Lincoln and Guba (1994) discuss several assumptions that must be considered when using the constructivist framework including: 1) "truth" is a matter of informed constructors; 2) "facts" have no meaning except within a framework of values; 3) "causes and effects" do not exist except by imputation; 4) phenomena can only be understood within the contexts in which they are studied and findings cannot be generalized to other contexts; and 5) data derived from constructivist inquiry have no particular status or legitimacy.

Qualitative research concerns itself with how individuals interact with and interpret the world around them (Merriam et al., 2002). It focuses on situations or phenomena about which one would like to have more information and knowledge. In addition, qualitative research is concerned with how people interpret phenomena and make meaning of what is going on around them (Patton, 2002). According to Merriam et al. (2002), qualitative research "is a powerful tool for learning more about our lives and the sociohistorical context in which we live." (p. xv) The authors further state that qualitative research is used in "understanding a phenomenon from the participants' perspectives – the meanings people derive from a situation or understanding a process" (Merriam et al. 2002). Additionally, the authors contend, "the key to understanding qualitative research lies with the idea that meaning is socially constructed by individuals in interaction with their world" (Merriam et al., 2002, p. 3).

According to Patton (2002), qualitative research generally includes three types of data collection. These types of data collection include interviews, observations and document review. Researchers use each of these methods independently and in concert to answer research questions and to provide greater understanding of phenomena under consideration (Patton). Through interviews, the researcher is able to collect direct quotations from participants regarding their experience within the phenomenon. Observation allows the researcher to view directly people's actions and interactions. Finally, document analysis includes reviewing institutional records as well as personal logs (Patton).

It is also important to note several other characteristics that distinguish qualitative research from other approaches. One important characteristic is that "*the researcher is*

*the primary instrument* for data collection and data analysis" (Merriam et al., 2002). Qualitative research differs from quantitative approaches in that it is primarily inductive, meaning that researchers use qualitative approaches in situations where existing theory is inadequate (Merriam et al., 2002). Finally, according to Merriam et al. (2002), the data collected in qualitative research is "richly descriptive" in that it includes descriptions of participants, activities, and their context.

This study utilized a basic interpretive qualitative design to examine the above research question. Basic interpretive design is the most basic of all qualitative designs and underpins all the others (Merriam et al., 2002). At its heart, a basic interpretive design seeks to consider how people interpret their experiences, construct their worlds, and interpret the meaning they attribute to their experiences (Merriam et al., 2002). Since the goal of this study was learn the perceptions of the students who used the SSC tutoring services of those services, a basic interpretive design met the needs of the research. The qualitative methods included conducting semi-structured interviews with students who used the SSC during the 2012-2013 academic year. I used qualitative interviewing to gain a deeper understanding of the influence of the SSC on students and ways the students perceived the SSC as influencing their grades, likelihood of returning to school and their time to their degree.

Conceptual Frameworks

As stated in chapter one, the conceptual frameworks for this study include Astin's (1993) I-E-O Model and Astin's (1999) Theory of Involvement.  In the I-E-O model, Astin contends that three sets of factors work together to determine a student's overall success in college. The first of these factors are inputs or the pre-college characteristics

with which a student enters college.  The second factor includes the environment, which

consists of the culture, programs, and people with whom the student interacts while in

college.  The final factor includes outputs, which are knowledge and skills with which the

student departs college.

In Astin's (1999) Theory of Involvement, he defines student involvement as "the

amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic

experience" (p. 518). Astin's main postulates in this theory are that student learning and

development are associated with any program that with a direct relationship to the

quantity and quality of involvement of the student's experience and that effectiveness of

educational programs and policies is directly related to that policy or program's capacity

to increase student involvement (Astin, 1999). In the current study, the institutional

practices under consideration are the tutoring services offered by the SSC and the

student's level of involvement was based on the students' choice to use the SSC services

in the first place.

A number of studies use Astin's (1993, 1999) models to consider student

behavior, particularly with regard to persistence and degree completion. Knight (1994)

used Astin's I-E-O Model as a guide in a study examining factors that might influence a

student's time to degree. In his study, Knight theorized that factors influencing whether

or not a student completed a degree within a specific period would also affect the time it

took to complete the degree. Influences examined in this study included both inputs and

environmental variables. His study found that both input and environmental factors had

significant influences on time to degree. In other words, his study found that both pre-

college characteristics of students as well as interactions with their collegiate institutions affect their ability to graduate in a timely manner (Knight, 1994).

Kelly's (1996) study considered persistence to graduation at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy as a function of the institution's ability to retain its student's year over year. Relationships looked at included those between input and outcome variables, environmental and output variables and between input and environmental variables. Kelly found that while input variables did not have a significant effect on student persistence, they were significantly related to involvement measures and concluded that measures of academic performance and early social integration helped to determine predictors of long-term persistence, meaning that students who had positive interactions with their institutions were more likely to persist to graduation than those who did not (Kelly, 1996). In this study, the researcher employed a qualitative approach including participant interviews to learn the stories of the students who used the services of the center. While the center collects information on student perceptions of individual tutoring sessions, no research had been done on perceptions of how the center as a whole influenced students' overall sense of achievement.

Setting

The research site for this study was a comprehensive public university in Georgia operating under the authority of the University System of Georgia (USG). At the time of this study, the university offered a wide range of baccalaureate degrees spread among five academic colleges. These included Arts, Arts & Sciences, Business, Education, and Nursing. In addition, the university offered a limited number of associates degrees, a wide range of master's degree programs and four professional doctoral degree programs

(Ed.D. and D.P.A.). The university had one main campus and offered a limited number of degree programs available on a satellite campus.

In fall 2012, the institution enrolled 10,290 undergraduate students, and 2,225 graduate students (Institution's Office of Strategic Research, November, 2012). Of the undergraduate population, 54.6% were white, 34.3% were African American, 3.9% were Hispanic and the remaining 7.2% was of other ethnic backgrounds or was unreported. The full-time population comprised 86.4% of the student body. The majority of enrolled students at the University were female comprising 59.9% of the total degree-seeking candidates (Institution's Office of Strategic Research, 2012).

The SSC is a learning assistance center in a centralized location on campus offering tutoring and supplemental instruction, advising, and workshops with the goal of increasing students' academic preparedness and persistence toward the undergraduate degree. The center's goals include supporting students who want to achieve excellence, as well as those who feel they are struggling. The center is interdisciplinary, involving all divisions on campus, serving as a self-proclaimed "one-stop-shop" for resources (SSC Brochure, 2013).

The university provided significant resources to establish and operate the SSC, which included a tenured faculty director at the rank of Associate Professor, two full-time advisors (one who also coordinates tutoring activities), a full-time student employment manager, and a full-time administrative secretary (BOR Proposal, 2006). Student workers at the center include 29 graduate students assisting with advising activities in colleges and departments throughout the university, 40-45 peer tutors and supplemental instruction leaders, and 5-7 student workers to cover front desk duties. In addition, the

center created space inside of an existing residence hall to make office spaces for the full-time staff as well as space to allow for student tutoring. Staff purchased furniture and other equipment such as computers and a student printer. According to information obtained from the SSC, the center maintains office hours 6 days a week, including 4 weekday evenings until 8:00 pm to accommodate a wide range of student schedules (Institution's Student Success Center, 2012).

The University created the SSC to provide services to improve student success by helping students increase their grades in courses, be better prepared academically for the challenges they will face while in college, and ultimately to increase their likelihood of being retained by the institution and completing their degrees (Institution's Office of Strategic Research, 2010).

SSC staff carries out evaluations of program effectiveness in multiple ways. In addition to reviewing institutional data to compare retention, graduation rates and GPAs of students using the center versus those not using it, the SSC conducts several forms of self-evaluation. These include tutor observations, tutor self-reflections on their strengths and areas for improvement, and student evaluations of their own tutoring sessions. These evaluations occur each semester and full-time staff conducts these evaluations and share the results with tutors (SSC evaluation documents, 2013). This study added to the understanding of what support the center provides to the students it serves. Staff members are encouraged, as budget and time allows, to join their respective professional organizations and to attend local, regional and national conferences. In addition, the staff members take advantage of professional development opportunities offered at the research site.

The researcher chose the SSC for several reasons. First, the site is typical of learning assistance centers on campuses nationwide and combines many of the aspects common to these centers including tutoring and supplemental instruction, college readiness workshops, academic advising, and first-year courses (Perin, 2004). Second, its mission to improve course grades, overall grade point averages, and retention for the students it serves also makes it characteristic of learning assistance centers throughout the U.S. (Arendale, 2010). In addition, while the center has received descriptive data showing its impact on student success, no qualitative analysis of data exists related to services provided by the center in the voices of those students who utilized the center. Finally, center staff plans to use the research to inform future practice by using the feedback given by participants in tutor training.

Sample

The sample for this study included five full-time, matriculated, degree-seeking students at the host institution who completed three or more tutoring appointments in the 2012-2013 school year. The researcher selected these students as they had used the services of the center in order to help them succeed academically. Participants included both male and female students, students of the African American and Caucasian races, multiple class standing (sophomore, junior and senior), and many programs of study including English, Middle Grades Education, Environmental Geosciences, and Biology. As the literature suggests, both race and gender are predictors of enrollment in and completion of college, and, as these characteristics were discussed in the review of literature for this study, the researcher determined that the sample should consist of students of both genders and multiple racial backgrounds.

The method of sampling used for this study was purposeful sampling. This is a method used frequently in qualitative research whereby the researcher chooses "*information-rich cases…*from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry (Patton, 2002, p. 230). The strategy implemented to achieve this method is that of maximum variation in which the researcher seeks a diversity of participant characteristics within a small sample size including gender, race and class standing (Patton, 2002). Recruitment of participants occurred using flyers posted in strategic areas of the campus, including residence halls and classroom buildings. In addition, the researcher sent emails to faculty members with the flyer attached so they could announce the study in their classes.

Data Collection

Following Institutional Review Board approval (Appendix C), the researcher conducted interviews with students who completed a minimum of three tutoring appointments at the SSC during the 2012-2013 school year. It was felt that less than three completed appointments would not give the participant enough involvement with the SSC to be able to express his or her perceptions. The researcher provided a consent statement (Appendix A) to all students asking for agreement to participate before the interview began. The researcher further advised participants that by responding to the interview questions, they agreed to participate in the study. However, the researcher gave notification to all participants that participation in the study was strictly voluntary and that they had the right to end their participation at any point in the process. The researcher conducted interviews in the researcher's office within the SSC. The interviewer and participant sat across from each other at a small round table and the

researcher told each participant this was the set up before the interview began and the researcher asked each participant for their consent to the set up. The office belonged to the researcher and was connected by an opening to the researcher's primary office. It had a door and window both leading to the main tutoring area on the second floor of the SSC. The researcher closed the door to the room during the interviews to reduce distractions after gaining consent for this from the participants. The researcher told participants that their interviews were being recorded and again consent was secured for the recording to occur.

The researcher interviewed students in an effort to determine how they believed the SSC influenced their academic success, including grades in courses, likelihood of returning to school, and time to degree. The researcher a prepared script to each student explaining the parameters of the interview and were provided with an opportunity to ask any questions regarding their participation. The researcher used a standardized semi-structured interview (Patton, 2002) for the interviews (Appendix B). Guiding questions were prepared prior to the interviews to frame the interview and create a climate of trust but also to allow questions to develop as the interview progressed. In using this format, I allowed the interviews to be guided by the participants' own experiences and not by my own assumptions. Having prepared questions ahead of time allowed participants to have a sense of comfort knowing that a certain structure existed to the interview so that participants knew what to expect while allowing the discussion to develop based on answers to those questions.

The interviews varied in length from 30 to 60 minutes and were tape recorded to ensure that I missed no responses (Patton, 2002). Notes were also taken during the

interview to "help the interviewer formulate new questions as the interview moves along" and to "facilitate later analysis, including locating important quotations from the tape itself" (Patton, 2002, p. 383). The researcher also advised all participants that the researcher would use pseudonyms in reporting the data and that because of this confidentiality; they could feel comfortable about providing full and honest responses. The researcher conducted interviews to the point of saturation (Seidman, 2006) until no new information was being learned by continuing the interviewing process. However, as Coordinator of Tutoring, I realized that participants might feel uncomfortable discussing negative perceptions of the SSC for fear of reprisals. To counter this, I endeavored to make the interview process as informal and comfortable for each participant as possible and assured them that the SSC would use no information about their identities or responses to harm them but only to improve services of the SSC as needed.

Data Analysis

Immediately after the interview, the researcher transcribed the recordings in order to facilitate data analysis procedures. The researcher identified respondents by pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality, and I aggregated all responses into a single report. I organized transcripts from the interviews by matching the questions asked during the sessions with the responses of each of the participants. I wrote descriptive summaries for each question, noting themes in responses that were common to all students (Krueger & Casey, 2000). I evaluated the recordings for themes and patterns in responses using a constant comparative analysis. According to Merriam and Simpson (2000), constant comparative analysis requires that the researcher compare the incidents and responses of data and code it into tentative categories.

Coding occurred in three stages including open coding, axial coding and focused

coding (Saldana, 2013; Merriam et al., 2002). Coding is an integral component of

qualitative inquiry in that it can make sense out of the raw data collected through field

notes or interview transcriptions (Patton, 2002). It is through this that one finds "patterns

in qualitative data and turn those patterns into meaningful categories and themes (Patton,

p. 463). Open or initial coding is a first cycle coding method used in the initial stages of

analyzing data in which data are broken into individual coded segments (Saldana, 2013).

Axial and focused coding are second cycle methods used in the later stages of analysis

that "constantly compare, reorganize, or "focus" the codes into categories (Saldana, 2013,

pp. 51-52). In addition, the researcher completed all coding "in vivo" meaning it was kept

in the language of the participants. Open coding allowed the researcher to look at the

observations line by line so that the researcher assigned a code to each incident that

represented the underlying concept of the observation (Merriam et al., 2002). Axial

coding took the discrete codes developed in open coding and put them back together in

ways that allowed connections between categories and subcategories to develop new

categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Finally, focused coding integrated the categories

that developed to form theory (Merriam et al, 2002). Analysis of data continued until the

researcher could obtain no further information. This happens when the analysis is able to

develop no new themes or categories. The researcher compared interview responses to

responses given on tutoring appointment summary forms to determine if responses given

in interviews correlated with information in the appointment forms. Finally, the

researcher compiled the findings of the coding analysis into a report so that an overall

understanding of students' perceptions of the influence of the SSC on academic success could be determined.

Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, researchers should be concerned with trustworthiness, which Lincoln and Guba (1986) define as the qualitative equivalent of scientific rigor. Within the umbrella of trustworthiness, qualitative researchers need to be concerned with credibility (analogous to internal validity); transferability (analogous to external validity), and dependability (analogous to reliability) and all must be in place in order for the study to be considered trustworthy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), credible designs are those in which the "*reconstructions* [of the multiple realities] that have been arrived at via the inquiry are *credible to the constructors of the original multiple realities"* (p. 296). Merriam and Simpson (2000) report that credibility in a qualitative study questions whether the findings are a true reflection of reality. One achieves credibility through triangulation of data, peer review of findings and through the researcher's statement of experiences and biases.

External validity is in a strict sense impossible to achieve in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and is not the goal of the naturalist. Instead, one achieves transferability by using thick description, which enables someone interested in transferring to contemplate the possibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transferability questions the extent to which the findings can be generalized to other similar test conditions under similar contexts. Merriam and Simpson (2000) state the ability to apply the findings of one study to other events is actually determined by the individuals involved in those situations. Lincoln and Guba (1985) assert that transferability of

working hypotheses is the most that can occur and is dependent on the degree of similarity of the sending and receiving contexts and cannot be determined by a researcher who only knows the sending context (p. 297). Merriam and Simpson (2000) concur stating that the extent to which findings are generalizable to other situations is determined by "the consumer of the research" (p. 103) as well as the instigator.

Reliability concerns itself with whether the findings would be the same if the study is replicated. In qualitative data, however, findings are not necessarily replicable, primarily because researchers bring with them varying backgrounds and experiences, which influence the interpretation of data. According to Merriam and Simpson (2000), this does not discredit the findings; the most critical matter is that the results are consistent with the data derived during the study. Instead, naturalistic researchers are concerned with dependability in which "the naturalist seeks means for taking into account both factors of instability and factors of phenomenal or design induced change" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 299)

To examine the data, the researcher employed three research strategies including triangulation of data, member checks, and the use of thick description. In addition, the researcher's statement allowed for a discussion of the researcher's biases and perspectives. Triangulation in this study involved using two methods of qualitative research to confirm the findings of each. These included the interviews conducted with participants and triangulation of these findings information gained from tutor session evaluation forms completed by tutees after each completed tutoring session. This triangulation allowed the researcher to look for themes common to both and to determine if discrepancies existed. In using member checks, the researcher gave the participants an

opportunity to determine if the transcription of their words was accurate, if the interpretation of those words was correct and to clarify any meaning allowing for further assurance of credibility. To do this, I provided each participant with a copy of the interview transcript and asked for comments or corrections. Four of the five participants returned the transcripts and indicated that the information, as written, was accurate. In addition, I sent each participant a copy of the themes that I developed including quotations from him or her supporting the inclusion of the theme in the list. Three of the five participants returned this information. Each agreed that the themes reflected what he or she had said in the interviews and were, therefore, true to their experiences.

Using thick description, which is defined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as describing the phenomenon in sufficient detail to allow one to consider how transferable the results are to other places, people, or situations, the researcher contextualized the interviews by describing the students' backgrounds allowing for a sense of transferability which would "enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 316). Since dependability cannot exist without credibility in qualitative research just as reliability cannot exist without internal validity in quantitative research (Patton, 2002; Merriam & Simpson, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the measures taken to ensure credibility including triangulation of data collection methods and use of member checks also ensured that the study ensured dependability.

In conclusion, the researcher assured trustworthiness by triangulation of the data, by member checking, and by use of thick description to gain an understanding of student perceptions of the SSC.

Limitations

The primary limitation in the current study is the difficulty in generalizing the results for all similar student success centers on college campuses, and the design of similar centers may not exactly match that of the research site. Although most include tutoring as a foundational service, many other services offered are not the same. Some centers offer counseling, some offer advising of varying sorts, and still others offer supplemental instruction or are responsible for teaching success courses. In addition, different campuses locate the center in varying areas of the campus. This can have the result of affecting the perception of the center's importance on campus and therefore how students utilize it and perceive its usefulness.

Summary

This chapter detailed the qualitative research design and procedures. Included in this discussion was the research methods employed, verification methods for the assumptions of these data collection and analysis methods, sampling method, data collection and analysis techniques, how the researcher addressed issues of validity and reliability, biases and limitations delimitations of the study. Chapter 4 will present the results of the study, including an analysis of the qualitative data collected by the researcher. Chapter 5 will provide a discussion of these findings in the context of the broader literature, and recommendations for future research

Chapter IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this basic interpretive qualitative research study was to consider the influence of tutoring services at the Student Success Center (SSC) at a comprehensive public university in the Southeast on the students using these services during the 2012-2013 semester. The sample for the study consisted of full-time, degree-seeking students who had completed tutoring appointments at the SSC during either fall or spring of the 2012-2013 academic year. I collected data by conducting semi-structured interviews. Initial interviews lasted for approximately 30 minutes and I conducted follow up interviews several weeks later to allow for exploration of issues raised in the initial interviews. I also used information from tutor session forms to look for commonalities and any discrepancies in participant recollections. In completing this study, I hoped to gain a greater sense of student perspectives on how using SSC services influence their academic success.

I used the constant comparative method of data analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) in looking at the data from the interview transcripts and the tutor session forms. This meant constantly comparing data within each transcript and tutor form and across all transcripts and forms. Doing this allowed me to find both similarities and differences in responses from participants chosen as part of the purposeful sample for the study. Using initial or open coding allowed me to analyze data line by line and assign codes to specific data points. Saldana (2013) states that using initial coding allows a researcher to break

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data into individual segments. Use of focused coding allowed me to compare the individually coded segments across all the data to develop categories and themes. Using these steps allowed me to develop themes that expressed the meaning behind the students' experiences with the SSC.

The data from the study resulted in four major themes and several sub-themes for three of the major themes. The major themes highlighted include: *SSC helpfulness to students, working with peers, class concerns, successful versus less successful sessions*. Within the major theme of *SSC helpfulness to students,* I identified the following sub-themes: *earning better grades,* and *strengthening self-confidence and knowledge.* Within the theme of *working with peers,* I identified the sub-themes of *one-on-one connections, seeing different ways to solve problems, making you think for yourself,* and *developing positive relationships.* For the major theme of *class concerns,* I identified several sub-themes including *weakness in a subject area, large classes,* and *instructor encouragement.* I used direct quotations from students' interviews as well as information from tutor appointment forms to inform the analysis of each of the themes and sub-themes, helping to gain an understanding of the students' experiences. I developed the themes in my pursuit to answer the central research question of the study: *What are the experiences of students who utilized the Student Success Center in regards to their academic success during the 2012-2013 school year?* Direct quotations from the tutee interviews along with information gained from the tutoring session sheets informed my analysis of all the themes and sub-themes generated.

Information from tutor session information sheets helped me make connections between what actually happened between the tutor and tutee during their sessions and the

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recollections of the tutoring sessions given to me by the tutees during the interviews. I brought up any discrepancies between these forms and the initial interviews when I met again with the interviewees during the process of member checking. Member checking (Saldana, 2013) also enhanced the study's credibility by allowing each participant an opportunity to confirm or modify any responses or interpretation of those responses.

Interview Sessions

I conducted five face-to-face interviews in an effort to explore student perceptions of the SSC. I conducted interviews with five students who used tutoring services of the SSC. These students completed three or more tutoring sessions at the SSC during the 2012-2013 school year.

Three interview participants were female and two were male. Of these, four participants were Caucasian and one was African American. All five participants were traditional age, or less than 25 years old, and attended college on a full-time basis, meaning they enrolled for a minimum of 12 credit hours each semester. Of the participants, three were in their senior year of school, one was a junior and one was a sophomore. The participants had a range of undergraduate majors. Two majored in Environmental Geosciences, one in English, one in Biology and one in Middle Grades Education. Additionally, two participants also had a minor in addition to a major program of study.

In reporting the findings of my study, I used pseudonyms to protect participant confidentiality. Donna was a white female senior English major with a minor in Political Science; Tom was a white male senior majoring in Environmental Geosciences; Doug was a white male junior majoring in Biology with minors in Deaf Studies and Chemistry;

Sheila was an African American female sophomore majoring in Middle Grades Education; and Cassandra was a white female senior with a major in Environmental Geosciences.

These students attended tutoring for a number of subject areas including writing, mathematics, and several science disciplines. Although I hoped for additional participants and a greater racial diversity, recruitment proved a challenge. I posted flyers around campus and sent a recruitment flyer via the university's listserv for students but received very little response to either effort. My hope was to have a sample size of 10 or more to increase the potential diversity of responses to questions and hopefully to represent more strongly the diversity of the institution itself. The lack of diversity perhaps limited my ability to answer questions regarding differing perceptions of success when using the SSC based on race or other demographic characteristics.

Discussion of Themes

The interview process utilized a semi-structured interview guide (Appendix B), which provided some structure while allowing flexibility to ask additional question to gain a greater understanding of responses and to be able to delve deeper into issues brought up as needed. When appropriate, I asked additional questions to help the participants further explore their perceptions of the SSC and to investigate further their experiences regarding the services provided. In the following sections, I will discuss three major themes developed from study data, *SSC helpfulness to students, working with peers,* and *class concerns,* as well as a number of subthemes related to each of the larger themes.

SSC helpfulness to students. This theme focused on ways in which the participants viewed the helpfulness of the SSC and the tutoring services to students at the university. This theme focuses on the ways in which the SSC is important, conceptually, to all students rather than to the participants individually. In other words, the participants often spoke of how helpful it is to have a center like this on campus available to all students, not just themselves. Based on responses to question one, all interviewees indicated that their overall experience with the SSC was positive. Participants used phrases such as "extremely helpful" to describe their experiences. For example, Cassandra stated, "my overall experience has been actually very pleasing and rewarding." She continued in that stating, "coming to the Student Success Center. I feel like, overall it's really helpful." Tom concurred with this, saying that his tutoring in differential calculus was very helpful. He said, "We did a few problems that was just…step by step, broken down…and with that, in doing so, everything clicked." Doug stated, "the tutors that …were really, um, proficient in their area…I felt like it helped because they teach you things students need to know." Doug also indicated, "You guys are actually helping on campus."

*Earning Better Grades.* Under the subtheme of earning better grades, all five participants indicated that using the tutoring services at the SSC had a positive effect on the grades they achieved in the classes for which they received tutoring. For example, Donna, who received help in Geology, indicated that as a result of the assistance she "aced the exam," which meant she earned a grade of A. Sheila, likewise, ultimately earned an A on a paper for which she received assistance because she "wasn't really sure if [her] paper was an A yet."

Doug responded that tutoring,

> Really helped me a lot in my classes like calculus, um, I'm pretty sure that if I
>
> hadn't have come, I wouldn't have gotten the B I got, so that was very, um,
>
> beneficial, and it helps me to reinforce my knowledge too.

Sheila agreed with Doug's sentiment and talked about it in terms of relieving anxiety.
She stated, "I used to have really bad paper anxiety, and I don't have it anymore! Now I
get A's and B's on papers instead of C's." Sheila further stated that, "the biggest
difference – thing for me was confidence. It completely – I was there and now I'm here."
Cassandra echoed this in saying, "I [have] gotten help for multiple classes that, you
know, I may not have done as well in if there wasn't help provided." Tom concurred in
saying, "if I had not come to the Student Success Center, my grades would have
definitely been affected, and uh, I would have to seek help outside, or, I don't know, drop
out, or maybe think about how I should approach college." Donna also felt visiting the
SSC improved her grades, stating, "I would not have aced, made an A in that class,
without having gone and gotten help with it." Each of these participants discussed ways
in which tutoring not only improved their grades in individual courses, but decreased
their stress with and improved confidence in broader academic disciplines. Many of the
participants stated that coming to the SSC reduced their anxiety in subjects in which they
felt they struggled and it therefore helped them achieve greater understanding and
improved grades in those subject areas.

Three of the five participants indicated that receiving tutoring improved their
grades in the course or courses based on what they likely would have received had they
not received tutoring at the SSC. The other two interviewees stated that while they would

have earned the same grade, achieving that grade would have been much more difficult. One person indicated the possibility of dropping out of college due a probable failing grade if not for the assistance given at the SSC, and one spoke about the increase in confidence in her academic ability.

Tom believed he would fail calculus outright had he not gone to the SSC. Donna, while not believing she would have failed, stated that instead of an A, she probably would have gotten no better than a B, which, in her words, would have been unsatisfactory. Cassandra stated that in calculus she would not have earned as good a grade, whereas in physics she said, "I probably could have scraped by in it because you just have to memorize the formulas there and the theories. Um, I, I'm sure I did better though, because I came." Doug had a similar response, stating that he likely would have earned an A in English because, as he said, "I made over 100 in that class." However, in calculus, he thought the best he would have done was a C and in chemistry, he went from a very low B to an 89, or high B. Finally, Sheila stated that her English class grade would likely have been the same as it was after tutoring but "the biggest difference, thing for me was confidence. It completely, I was there, and now I'm here."

Participants also discussed that coming to the SSC multiple times only served to increase their likelihood of better grades and that coming often also helped them continue in that positive direction. Cassandra touched on this when she said that going to the SSC more than once gave her:

> Reassurance that I was staying on track, and beyond staying on track, making sure that, like, I mean, calculus is most time offered early in the morning. So you sit there, you wake up, you drink your coffee, you go to school, and it's like the first

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thing you do, so by the end of the day you're like, Aww man, like, what did I just

learn?

Overall, participants saw the SSC as an important factor in their being able to improve their grades in the classes and assignments for which they received tutoring. They also indicated that earning better grades in these classes was important to their overall success. Finally, they stated that coming to the SSC multiple times was important to keep them on track to better grades.

*Strengthening Self-confidence and Knowledge.* Several participants in this study indicated that getting help at the SSC improved their knowledge and self-confidence in the subject areas for which they sought help. Several of these participants also work as tutors at the SSC and stated that they improved their confidence in the subject in which they tutor. These participants indicated that the atmosphere of learning that exists in the SSC and their role as tutors helped strengthen their own knowledge in their subject area. Two of the five respondents discussed their roles as tutors in the center. They indicated that by tutoring others, they reinforced their own knowledge of the material and increased their confidence. Cassandra commented that,

Since I'm a tutor, has helped me grow so much. I mean, this is my third semester

working here as an SI leader. Um, you know, it keeps me constantly up to date

and refreshed with all the material…It helped me stay on top of my studies, stay

on top of, you know up to date, current on issues within my major.

Doug concurred with Cassandra that being a tutor at the SSC helped him be a better student. Doug said,

> As a tutor myself, it even helps me to reinforce my knowledge too, because I feel like one of the best ways of learning is to teach something yourself, and so me being able to teach my subject area helps me to remember it and learn it better, and it actually helps me in upper level course as well.

Cassandra's follow up comment summed up the benefits the participants expressed in being a tutor at the SSC,

> Me tutoring this 2000 level course, no it's a 1000 level course, I mean, I'm so far past it within my major, but even, like, helping students with it time and time again, it just nails it into my brain, and I'm more confident in things that I do academically now.

The participants who also tutored at the SSC indicated that having the opportunity to teach concepts within their chosen disciplines increased their confidence in their own coursework. It also reinforced their foundations in the basics of the subject matter, making it easier to succeed in their advanced courses. The participants who were not tutors at the center had similar experiences with improved self-confidence. Sheila stated, "I think the biggest thing for me was the confidence wise because the grade wise, I tend to, it takes me a while if I have to do it on my own, but I tend to probably get the same grade."

Participants were unanimous in their belief that the SSC was instrumental in their being able to improve grades in the assignments for which they received help, which in turn improved their future work. They also found that they became more confident in

their general ability to succeed. Finally, they agreed that by coming to the SSC more than once, they did not allow themselves to fall back into old habits and continued to do well.

Working with Peers. A reoccurring theme related to participants' experiences with the SSC was the benefits they found in working with peers. Several participants commented that in the SSC, they were able to work with peers and that this allowed them to feel more comfortable in asking questions they would not be able to ask in class. Cassandra particularly felt that the peer concept of the SSC was a strong factor in her comfort with it:

I feel like, overall, it's really helpful, and it's really rewarding because, you know, you're essentially being helped by your peers, so you don't have that initial, I don't know, I don't want to sound stupid in front of people who are my superiors. I don't want for my professor to think that I'm some hopeless student that just needs to get through this class and get out because, a lot of times, unfortunately, because there is a percentage of the student population that does that.

Tom agreed with this sentiment in saying that,

I had, my first time around calculus, I had a foreign teacher, and, I mean, he did things the way he was taught, um, I guess overseas, and it's not how I learned it in high school, so I came here and they were basically like, "No, you can do this, and it's fine."

Tom further said, "You go to the Student Success Center, and it gets explained sometimes similar but sometimes differently, and, I mean, that in itself can make a world of difference." Doug concurred by saying that it's "just helpful in the fact that, you know, teachers only give you the cut and dry…but, um, the way my brain is wired, I, uh,

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connect things with other things." He also stated that working with peers "makes it more personal".

Participants found that working with peers was a great benefit to them in providing new and different ways to address issues and problems. They also stressed that having one-on-one attention was extremely important, as was the opportunity to work with someone who had actually completed the same course they were taking.

*Making One-on-One Connections.* Several interviewees brought up the fact that they had taken classes known as "super-sections," meaning there were 200 or more students in the class with them. As a result, they often felt disconnected from their instructor and unable to go to him or her for assistance. The participants found that the direct one-on-one meetings with tutors helped them address this concern.

Donna, a senior English major, summed up this by saying,

The class was a super-section, so there were like 150 students, and I didn't feel like I could connect with the professor or, like, ask specific questions because, if it was a smaller class, maybe it would have been easier to figure out, like, I don't know, I just felt like it was really ambiguous what was going to be on the exam, and I wanted to review.

Tom also felt this connection was helpful, saying,

Class is very boring, and um, and I just like the one on one attention. It makes it more personal, I guess, than being in a lecture hall full of 200 students.

Overall, the participants said that having a one on one connection and personal interaction during their tutoring was beneficial. As many of them stated, the institution has a number of very large classes offered in difficult subject areas, and the participants

often felt unable to speak with their instructors during class when there were 150-200 students in the lecture hall with them.

*Seeing Different Ways to Solve Problems*. Several participants spoke about how tutoring allowed them to see things in ways that were different from what they learned in class. Tom, a senior Environmental Geosciences major stated,

In class, the teacher explains things a certain way, and you go to the Student Success Center, and it gets explained sometimes similar but sometimes differently, and, I mean, that in itself can make a world of difference, and you'll understand it.

Doug, a junior Biology major agreed when discussing his calculus tutors. He commented,

The tutors that I had for that were really, um, proficient in their area, and, um, not necessarily by the book, but I felt like it helped because they teach you things that students need to know like shortcuts and stuff, like little cheats, like pneumonic devices and that sort of thing.

Cassandra also agreed with this idea. In her response she said,

Sometimes you need somebody else to sit there and work with you through it, or explain it in a different way, or show you step-by-step because when you're in math classes above, like algebra and statistics, they don't always show you.

Overall, participants in the interviews noted that tutors often had different ways of explaining concepts to them than their instructors did. They believed that having different ways of seeing problems worked out and solved made it much easier for them to understand what was going on in the classroom and improved their level of confidence.

*Making You Think for Yourself.* A common thread that I found in the responses to the structure of the tutoring sessions that the participants encountered was that as tutees, they did most of the talking and strategizing. This meant that the tutor acted more as facilitator than teacher and the tutees found that it made them think for themselves.

Doug responded by saying that the sessions were, "more tutee driven than tutor driven with the subjects I've come in for. Um, they definitely steer you in the right direction, but they try to make you think a lot." Tom concurred when discussing his tutoring sessions for Differential Equations. He said, "we did it step by step…by the end of the session, it was just like, I was breaking stuff down into steps instead of trying to jump like he was doing in class." Sheila commented that her English tutors would have her "read my paper out loud, and um, sometimes I might catch a mistake and sometimes they might stop me and um, say like 'What is wrong with that?'."

The common thread in this subtheme was the participants indicated that during their tutoring sessions, they did the majority of the talking and thinking. In addition, they stated that the tutors mostly guided them to the correct answers but allowed them to discover those answers for themselves. Participants indicated that although this process made the tutoring session more demanding, they came away feeling more confident than if the tutor had just given them answers.

*Developing Positive Relationships.* Participants also talked about how working individually with tutors, particularly when they worked over time with a single tutor, allowed them to develop positive relationships with these tutors. Participants indicated that by developing these relationships, they were more comfortable going to the SSC and improved their overall success.

The interviewees again talked about being able to work out issues and problems in ways that were different from how their teachers showed them. Participants also stressed the idea that having someone else working with them; a peer, helped them make needed connections. Sheila stated, "you can go over a paper and say that this should have been reworded, or that doesn't connect, but if I don't know it didn't connect, then I don't know how to fix it when I'm doing it myself." Doug recalled that in his calculus tutoring session, his tutor "thinks a lot like me, and that he tries to, like, logic his way out of things, and, like, he showed me how to logic my way out of calculus." He further stated that he "was able to look at things and not necessarily, um, always have to go by the book."

Donna described a successful session she had when studying for an exam for a class on Weather and Climate. Her statement was that "he made it like a story. It wasn't just isolated scientific phenomena. He incorporated how I could understand it in real life." When I asked her to elaborate on what she meant by "made it like a story," Donna described how the tutor took the scientific terminology and described real weather events that have occurred and showed the connections between these events.

While participants did not mention a specific reason why a particular session was successful, most felt that making connections with the tutor was important, In addition, the opportunity to be able to see the problem from different perspectives and be given different paths to finding a solution made the sessions successful.

Theme two focused on how the participants were able to work with peers, make connections with them in ways they found difficult with instructors, think for themselves, and develop good working relationships. The answers to various questions showed that

the participants found working with peer tutors helped them become more self-assured and confident, and gave them opportunities to solve problems and answer questions in ways that were different from those they learned in the classroom.

Class Concerns. A third theme that emerged from the stories provided by study participants was one of issues or concerns with courses or subjects. Participants made statements about the large size of some classes, their perception of being weak in a subject, not being able to connect with instructors, and finally, encouragement from instructors to pursue tutoring as a way to overcome concerns. These concerns with their classes prompted them to pursue receiving tutoring as a way to counteract these issues.

*Weakness in Subject Area.* Four of the five participants mentioned that they initially came to the SSC for tutoring because they either were weak in or disliked a particular subject or course. Donna said, "Well, I was never good at, I never liked science." She continued in this vein by stating,

> I don't enjoy it, and if I work really hard, I make an A, but like some people have the natural ability to just not worry about it and do well, but I have to work hard to make sure I know the information. Like I can't just sit during the lecture and absorb it, like, just like that. (snaps). I have to, like, work at it.

Donna echoed concerns about perceived weakness in the subject area for which she first received assistance at the SSC. In speaking about her calculus class, Donna stated,

> Calculus, I mean, I got through trig, but I mean, I didn't do bad. I got a B, but it took a lot of effort, and it took me going and seeing my professor, and I was always really nervous about what we were talking about and that... I had a really

wonderful professor for, um, trig, but in calculus, I was just so... I figured out that:

A - it's mental for me—that I was so intimidated by the material, and B - coming

to the Student Success Center helped me figure out why I was having issues with

it because I didn't realize that I was horrible at algebra, and it took me coming

here, showing the tutor that, "Hey, I'm having issues with this," them asking me

where, and then us resorting to, "Okay, well you pick up a white board marker,

and you work this out for me, and I'm going to watch, and I'm going to see

what's happening."

Weakness in math as a trigger for going to the SSC also came up in Doug's response to

this question. He said,

Oh, well, I was, um, really having a hard time with calculus. Um, I'm not really a

math person, and I came last semester for calculus, and I've never been good with

chemistry and to me, chemistry is math and magic.

Sheila spoke about her concerns with her progress in an English course, which brought

her to the SSC.  She said, "I wanted to get an A in the class. I think I made a C on my

first paper.

Having difficulty or feeling weak in a subject area was quite common as a reason

to visit the SSC initially. Participants spoke quite candidly about their personal belief that

they were weak in a subject and that they did not enjoy that discipline. Coming to the

SSC for help gave them increased confidence in the subject and allowed them to earn a

much higher grade then they possibly expected to. Cassandra, for example, said, "I'm

actually doing great in calculus now. It just took me practicing and realizing what I

needed to practice". For some participants, working as tutors at the SSC made them more

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comfortable with coming as tutees, knowing that the assistance provided was strong. For others, a personal desire for success seemed to be the driving factor. For these students, the desire to succeed in their classes and in college was stronger than their fear or embarrassment about seeking tutoring assistance. Finally, instructors gave encouragement to others, lessening their sense of fear about seeking assistance.

*Large Classes.* As participants discussed their reasons for choosing to pursue tutoring, one reason that often came up was the fact that they were in very large classes; sometimes of more than 150 students and that they were having difficulty digesting the material by just attending class and reading their textbooks. They indicated that using the tutoring services at the SSC allowed them to better process the information they learned more effectively.

As mentioned in the earlier theme of *one on one connections*, participants mentioned that due to the large class size, the format of the classes were often lecture style, which they found boring and hard to follow. They found it difficult to follow the instructor and to ask questions when they needed further guidance. Utilizing the tutoring at the SSC gave them the chance to ask the questions they felt unable to ask in class and make the connection between the material and their own understanding.

*Instructor Encouragement.* Several participants spoke about the fact that their instructors made a point of publicizing the SSC in class and encouraged students needing assistance to find it there. Donna, in discussing the paper on which she received a C grade, said, "I talked to my teacher, and my teacher said I should come here." Tom had a similar experience. He stated that many professors told him, "if you need extra help outside of class, you can come by during my office hours or the SSC is always willing to

help." Doug also was encouraged by his English Composition class instructor, but for a different reason. Doug said, "I was doing really well in 1101, anyway, so I didn't really need any help, but, um, my professor said that if I came, and I got a sheet signed, that I would get bonus points on my paper."

Overall, instructor encouragement seems to have played a significant role in the decision by participants to seek out assistance at the SSC. Although the reasons varied, these students followed their instructors' advice and went to the SSC when they either needed help or had reason to think attendance would boost their grade.

The participants indicated that they had concerns with their classes in varying ways, from large classes conducted in lecture format and concerns with their abilities within a subject area to encouragement from instructors to seek assistance for any issues. They agreed that the tutoring services provided at the SSC addressed these concerns by giving them more confidence in their understanding of the subject and the ability to ask questions and get assistance in a small, personalized setting.

Successful versus Less Successful Sessions. Three of the participants spoke about sessions where they felt that either the tutor's style of tutoring or their content knowledge of the subject played a role in making a session less than successful. Doug recalled a session he had with a chemistry tutor in which the tutor had him sitting in a chair, the tutor stood in front of him at the whiteboard, and the session took on the form of a lecture. His comments were that it was not like his usual sessions "one on one sitting at a table, um, working out problems together." He further contended that the session "just seemed, um, less personal." However, he ended stating, "It wasn't a bad tutoring session at all. It was definitely very beneficial to me."

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Tom also talked about a time when he felt the tutor's weakness made the session less successful. His comments centered on a session he had on limits in calculus. Tom stated that the session occurred close to the time on an exam. He was unable to book a session with the calculus tutor he preferred to meet with and so met with an alternate tutor. Tom commented that he thought the tutor's knowledge of calculus was not "up to par" and that although he felt she understood math in general "she didn't portray or display the correct, um, help that I needed." Tom concluded by saying, "I ended up receiving my help in the end."

Donna talked about one group tutoring session she attended where she didn't feel complete success because "I didn't know what I was looking for from the session, I didn't have specific questions….I had not gone over the information prior to coming to the session." However, she explained, "since there weren't too many people…it was good because there weren't all these distractions…"

The participants generally felt that most of their tutoring sessions were successful and when they were not as successful, the participants seemed to want to minimize how unsuccessful the sessions were. The participants cited several reasons for the perception of the session being less than successful, including the format of the tutoring session, the belief that the tutor was not fully competent in the material, or that they, as tutees, were not fully prepared for tutoring. In most responses, participants said that although they may not have gotten everything out of the session they hoped for, they still came away more prepared after the session than before. An illustration of this was Doug's comment that his less than successful chemistry session "was still very beneficial."

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Conclusion of the Interviews

Based on the responses to questions asked during interviews, overall perceptions of the SSC were extremely positive. All the participants believed they improved their grades and overall sense of personal confidence by using the services of the SSC. One consistent theme across several student interviews was how important the SSC was to the institution and to the students it serves. Participants used words like "rewarding" and "important" repeatedly during the interviews. Even when students indicated that they encountered difficulties with certain tutors or sessions, they stressed that they still gained benefits from their tutoring sessions and continued to use the SSC for additional tutoring assistance.

Triangulation of Interview Data with Tutor Appointment Forms

In order to understand better the responses by participants to questions posed in the interviews, I reviewed the tutor appointment forms for these participants for tutoring sessions they had completed in the subject areas they spoke about in the interviews. Tutor appointment forms are completed by tutors at the end of all completed tutoring appointments in which tutors can encapsulate the sessions.

Forms cover information such as overall success of the appointment; how well-prepared the tutee was; what issues and information were covered during the session; and any issues that possibly arose during the session. Reviewing these forms allowed me to compare the responses given to me by the participants in the study about their tutoring experiences with the perception of the tutoring sessions from the perspective of the tutor. It allowed me either to confirm what the participant said or to discover any possible discrepancies between the participant's perception and the tutor's.

For each participant, I pulled a minimum of two appointment forms from the 2012-2013 academic year for each course they spoke about in the interviews. Whenever possible, I pulled appointment forms from different tutors within the same course so I would get a greater comparison of information than from one tutor.

The information reported by the tutors generally aligned very well with what the students reported as their experiences. In one of the Calculus sessions, the tutor wrote "I read the questions and helped the student answer them in a different way." In another Calculus session, a different tutor wrote, "Helped student find ways to approach the problems on the homework." These comments confirmed the participants' perceptions that tutoring helped them see different ways to solve problems. On an English tutoring session appointment form, a tutor wrote, "Had student read her paper to me so she could find mistakes and correct them." In a Geography session, a tutor commented that she "had student work out problems on the whiteboard herself." These comments back up the participants' belief that tutoring sessions made them think for themselves. In a chemistry session, the tutor indicated that this was the fourth session with the tutee and that "she worked one on one with the student to complete his lab report." This information confirms the perception that tutoring helps participants make one-on-one connections with peers.

Overall, in reviewing the tutor appointment sheets, I found confirmation of what I heard in the interviews. Both the tutees to whom I spoke and the tutors with whom they met emphasized the importance of one-on-one connections, finding new ways to solve problems, and making the tutees think for themselves by doing the work during the session. However, I was not able to find confirmation for the other comments made by

participants such as instructor encouragement, weakness in subject, or issues with large

classes. I found no evidence that the tutor did not share these perceptions, just that there

was no mention made of these issues on the appointment forms.

Summary

      This chapter discussed the results of the study, including the responses by

participants to the questions posed about their experiences using the tutoring services of

the SSC. Included in this discussion were direct quotations from the students as they

talked about their experiences and the themes that emerged that were common to many or

all of the experiences. Chapter 5 will provide a discussion of study findings in the context

of the broader literature, some limitations and conclusions from the study, and

recommendations for future research.

Chapter V

DISCUSSION

This study was a basic interpretive qualitative investigation  seeking to consider the influence of tutoring services provided at a Student Success Center (SSC) on student perceptions of academic success. The study was conducted at a comprehensive public university in the Southeast. Participants in the study utilized tutoring services at the institutions SSC during the 2012-2013 academic year. My hope was to generate themes related to participants' experiences with the SSC and answer the overarching research question proposed for this study: *What are the experiences of full-time, degree-seeking, undergraduate students who utilized the Student Success Center in regards to their academic success during the 2012-2013 school year?*

The sample for this study consisted of five full-time, degree-seeking students who completed at least three tutoring appointments at the SSC during the 2012-2013 academic year. Three of the five participants were female and two were male, reflecting the institution's gender ratio of 59.9% female to 40.1% male (Institutions' Office of Strategic Research, 2012). One participant was African American, and the other four were Caucasian. Participants included students from multiple levels of class standing, including sophomore, junior, and senior; students studying in a variety of major areas; and visiting the SSC for a range of subjects. All participants in the study were full-time, meaning they enrolled for a minimum of 12 credit hours each semester. Finally, two of the respondents worked as tutors or supplemental instruction leaders at the SSC in addition to receiving tutoring during the 2012-2013 school year. I collected data for the

study by conducting semi-structured, individual, face-to-face interviews. Initial interviews ran for approximately 30 minutes, and I conducted a follow up face-to-face interview of between 15 and 20 minutes in length several weeks later with each participant to allow for exploration of issues raised in the initial interviews. I asked questions of these students to discover more about the sessions they had with the SSC over the school year and how their experiences with tutoring influenced their perception of their academic success. In addition, I reviewed tutor appointment forms as a way to corroborate information provided during the interviews. This allowed me to make connections between what happened during tutoring and what participants said in the interviews, and to discuss any discrepancies that possibly occurred. Data analysis of the interviews resulted in four major themes reflecting the students' experiences with the tutoring at the SSC: *SSC helpfulness to students, working with peers, class concerns, and successful versus unsuccessful appointments.*

This study aimed to learn from students, in their own words, how the SSC supported their goal of improving their grades and completing their degrees. In using a basic interpretive qualitative approach (Merriam et al., 2002), I allowed students' experiences to emerge in their own voices. The findings allowed participants to discuss what influence using the services of the SSC had on their academic success. This chapter discusses study findings within the context of the broader literature on student retention, and considers the relationship of institutional interventions such as tutoring to retention. The chapter will also consider the findings in relation to the study's conceptual frameworks: Astin's (1993) I-E-O Model and Astin's (1999) Theory of Involvement. The chapter will provide a summary of the findings, relate those findings to

the existing literature, and discuss implications for future practice and research opportunities.

Significant Themes

Students who participated in the interviews generally gave very positive statements regarding their association with and perception of the SSC. All of the students believed that the SSC played a significant role in the culture of the university and, more specifically, played a similarly significant role in their individual academic success. Participants spoke frequently about the benefits gained by the one-on-one attention received at the SSC, the personal connections made, and the ability to work with one's peers.

Participants stressed that using the SSC assisted in their feelings of improved self-confidence and comfort with the material in the disciplines for which they sought tutoring. For those respondents who tutored at the center in addition to being tutored, self-confidence also increased within their major disciplines. Respondents indicated that tutoring allowed them to think about the subjects in ways that they had not been able to before and made them think more critically about the subject.

While some of the students did indicate some of the tutoring sessions were not as successful as they would have liked, they felt in several cases that the cause of the problem was their own lack of preparation. However, the respondents always felt that something positive came out of the session. In addition, all students indicated that even though they had one or two negative experiences, their overall experience using the SSC was so positive that they returned after the negative experiences. No participants found

any specific ways in which the SSC needed to improve or modify its services. The study generated a number of findings related to the research question.

The themes discussed in Chapter 4 emerged during interviews with tutees and analysis of tutor appointment forms. The major themes highlighted include: *SSC helpfulness to students, working with peers, class concerns,* and *successful versus less successful sessions*. Within the major theme of *SSC helpfulness to students,* I identified the following sub-themes: *earning better grades* and *strengthening self-confidence and knowledge.* Within the theme of *working with peers,* I identified the sub-themes of *one-on-one connections, seeing different ways to solve problems, making you think for yourself,* and *developing positive relationships.* For the major theme of *class concerns,* I identified several sub-themes, including *weakness in a subject area, large classes,* and *instructor encouragement.* I endeavored to discuss each of these themes and sub-themes in the context of the study's conceptual frameworks and prior studies done on this topic.

SSC Helpfulness to Students. During the interviews, the theme *SSC helpfulness to students* emerged as important because each of the five participants spoke often of ways in which the SSC was important not only to their personal success but to the overall mission of the university. As students spoke of the importance of the SSC, additional sub-themes developed, which included: *earning better grades* and *strengthening self-confidence.* These sub-themes emerged in several of the interviews.

*Earning Better Grades.* During the interviews, one concept that often came up as a reason the participants sought tutoring and returned to the SSC for additional tutoring was the expectation and ultimate acquisition of better grades in the classes for which they sought assistance. Participants indicated that, in some cases, coming to the SSC not only

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helped them achieve better grades, but also was a deciding factor in staying in college. One participant stated if "I had not come to the Student Success Center, my grades would definitely been affected, and uh, I would have to seek help outside, or, I don't know, drop out." Another participant, who received tutoring for calculus, stated that because of tutoring she was "actually doing great in calculus now."

Prior studies show the link between higher grades and increased likelihood of staying in college (Bean, 1985; Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Additional research shows the link between receiving several hours of tutoring and increases in grades. For example, a study conducted for the Learning Assistance Center at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro found that students who completed 3 or more hours of tutoring annually increased their GPAs from 2.70 to 2.88 (UNC, Greensboro, 2010). As the current study also focused on students who completed a minimum of three tutoring hours in an academic year, findings that their increase in grades due to tutoring resulted in reduced likelihood of not completing their degrees is relevant to this study. Laskey and Hetzel (2011) concurred with the Bean, Astin and Pascarella & Terenzini studies. They found that tutoring had a positive influence on students' retention and GPA and students in their study who used tutoring services had higher grades and were retained at higher rates at the institution than students who did not use tutoring services. Fowler and Boylan (2010) similarly found in a study of "at-risk" students enrolled in program for academically underprepared students that students' cumulative GPA experienced statistically significant increases when tutoring was used in combination with interventions that address nonacademic and personal issues. Conversely, Rheinheimer and McKenzie (2011), in a study of undeclared students at a university in

Pennsylvania found that tutoring had a positive impact on retention but not on GPA. However, the basis of this was a comparison of GPAs of tutored and non-tutored students where the tutored students had lower pre-college characteristics than the non-tutored. The authors therefore concluded that tutoring had some possible positive influence on the GPA.

Most literature finds that tutoring has a positive influence on the GPAs of students who receive tutoring. Research shows this to be particularly true for students seen as at-risk, including those with lower pre-college characteristics and those who enter college without a declared major. While none of the participants in this current study indicated whether they had weaker pre-college characteristics or entered as undeclared students, they did indicate that tutoring helped improve their grades.

*Strengthening Self-confidence and Knowledge.* A second theme that emerged under the broader theme of *SSC helpfulness to students* is the way in which being at the SSC can build one's overall confidence in their subject area(s). Participants reported that attending tutoring and SI sessions at the SSC allowed them to strengthen their sense of confidence and achievement in the tutored material. This is an important consideration since several of the participants indicated a prior weakness with the particular subject for which they sought tutoring. Research shows that the level of academic preparedness is a key factor in determining a student's likelihood of staying in college and eventually graduating (Tinto, 1997; Haycock & Huang, 2001; Perin, 2004). Tutoring as an intervention shows itself to be an effective remedy for underpreparedness, allowing these students to improve their competence and self-confidence in particular disciplines and translating into an increased likelihood of completing college (Topping, 1996; Hodges,

2001; Rittschof & Griffin, 2001; Vogel, Fresko, & Harding 2007). Finally, Fowler and Boylan (2010) found that "the 'high-touch' environment provide by the Pathways to Success (PWAY) Program implemented at the institution used for their study in 2004 seemed to set the stage for increased student success and retention" (p. 9) by giving the students an increased sense of self-confidence and ability.

In addition to combating potential pre-college weaknesses students may have, tutoring also serves as a way for students to engage with the institution at which they enroll. Increased connection and engagement with one's institution has also been shown to improve success rates of students (Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003; CCSSE, 2005; Tinto, 2008). Pascarella and Terenzini (1977) found specifically that informal positive interactions with members of one's college community outside of the classroom contributed to student persistence.

Findings from participants in the current study echoed the results of previous research (Cooper, 2010; Rheinheimer, Grace-Odeleye, Francois, & Kusorgbor, 2010; Laskey, & Hetzel, 2011; Rheinheimer, & McKenzie, 2011). Overwhelmingly, respondents indicated that receiving tutoring not only improved their grades but also made them more confident in the material and in themselves. This finding occurred both in areas where participants already felt confident and in areas in which they did not have significant confidence. Participants who also tutored at the center indicated that working as tutors also increased their confidence in the foundations of the subject(s) in which they tutored.

Working with Peers. A second major theme, *working with peers,* emerged from the interviews as important to the participants in the study. Each of these participants

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related the various ways working with another student allowed them an environment in which they were able to learn material without the constraints of being in a classroom with many other students or fear of potential backlash by their instructors. This finding is in line with previous studies on tutoring (Potts & Schultz, 2008; Laskey & Hetzel, 2011). Within this theme, several sub-themes emerged as participants spoke about the role of peer interaction in their tutoring sessions, including *seeing different ways to solve problems, making you think for yourself,* and *developing positive relationships.*

*Seeing Different Ways to Solve Problems.* In chapter four, several of the participants noted that working with tutors helped them see ways to solve problems or get past roadblocks in their thinking. This was important to the participants because often the instructor's method for solving the problem was not working, and the tutoring session helped the student see different ways to an answer. A study conducted by Rittschof and Griffin in 2001 determined that although tutoring did not necessarily improve students' understanding of course material, it was effective in allowing them new ways to think about the material, which resulted in increased learning. Similarly, Topping (1996) found that, for tutors engaged in tutoring, the act of tutoring allowed tutors to look at material in new and different ways, allowing for greater depth of understanding. The participants in this study concurred. Both those who worked as tutors and those that did not found that having multiples ways to approach issues and problems helped them with understanding the material being reviewed.

*Making You Think for Yourself.* A second sub-theme that emerged from working with peers was that of *making you think for yourself.* Participants in this study frequently commented that one of the most important factors in their tutoring sessions was that the

tutors did not do the work for them, but guided them through the work and helped them discover answers for themselves. The concept of being made to think for oneself is important in helping students succeed in that it fosters a sense of accomplishment and independence, and engages the student more actively in the learning process (Topping, 1996).

Participant responses in the current study aligned with literature indicating that requiring independent learning is essential for academic success (Topping, 1996; Rheinheimer, Grace-Odeleye, Francois, & Kusorgbor, 2010). Among the conclusions of both of these studies was the concept that by using tutoring, students were able to take greater control over their own education. This manifested itself in the current study by responses to interview questions in which participants stated that tutors did not do work for them during sessions but made them work out questions and problems for themselves. They stated that making them do their own work forced them to think about the subject more deeply and gave them the ability to work with the material on their own.

*Developing Positive Relationships.* The final sub-theme related to the theme of working with peers is that of developing positive relationships. Participants here spoke of their ability over time to develop strong working and personal relationships with particular tutors within the SSC who helped them build their knowledge base and sense of self-confidence. Research finds that students who build relationships with their institutions and others at those institutions are more likely than their counterparts to feel connected and to succeed (Schlossberg, 1989; Tinto, 1999; Hausmann, Feifei, Schofield, and Woods, 2009; Hu, 2010; Hu, 2011). Laskey & Hetzel (2011) found that tutoring not only provides academic help to students but also serves to create positive relationships

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between tutors and students, enhancing student self-confidence. Finally, Rheinheimer and McKenzie (2011) found in a study of the impact of tutoring on undeclared students that tutoring allowed these students greater social integration because tutoring is based in the theory that knowledge is socially constructed. Laskey and Hetzel (2011) also concluded that creating connections between students and university personnel, even if they are peer tutors, enhances student confidence and sense of ability.

The sub-theme of positive relationships developed at many points during the interviews. Participants spoke about working with peers (as opposed to instructors), which allowed them to be more open. They also found that a personal relationship developed, which created stronger connections with tutors providing verbal support and encouragement. One participant related that her tutor turned things into stories, allowing her to understand the material in a much more personal and long-term way. Finally, participants talked about working with specific tutors over time allowing long-term relationships to develop. This in turn fostered continuity, which built trust and allowed knowledge and confidence to build. Examples exist in literature of storytelling within tutoring and how it fosters comprehension, learning, and understanding. In a paper presented in 1999 at the Michigan Reading Association annual meeting, Sheila Dailey Carroll told of her work in an adult literacy program. In the program, Ms. Carroll worked with tutors and two groups of adults; one a group of Chinese English as Second Language (ESL) adults and the second of adults with slight mental impairments. The goal of the project was to explore "the effectiveness of using storytelling to facilitate literacy learning" (p. 4). The study found that the use of storytelling by tutors and the development of storytelling skills in the adult learners gave the learners "greater

confidence in speaking in a group, greater mastery of the language, and increased comprehension" (p. 5). The researcher also noted that self-esteem grew and friendships developed because of being able to communicate clearly (Carroll, 1999).

Class Concerns. The third theme that emerged from the study is that of class concerns. This theme related to students' concerns about either their abilities within a certain class or aspects of the class such, as size or ability to engage directly with the instructor. As such, the three sub-themes that emerged are *weakness in subject area* and *large classes.*

*Weakness in Subject Area.* Several participants in the study mentioned that they sought tutoring based on a perceived weakness in a particular subject area or a personal dislike for that discipline. This sub-theme relates again to a sense of academic underpreparedness as a factor in determining success or lack thereof in college. Often, students who indicate weakness in a subject do so based on poor pre-college preparation within that subject (Haycock & Huang, 2001; Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003; Rheinheimer, Grace-Odeleye, Francois, & Kusorgbor, 2010). The participants in this study found that the tutoring services helped them overcome perceived weaknesses in the tutored subjects and their dislike of the material. Although none of the participants in the current study indicated they entered college as "at-risk," many spoke about feelings of weakness in certain subjects. This may have been due to lack of confidence of participants in those subjects before college. The participants who mentioned this frequently spoke about ways in which tutoring helped them overcome that perceived weakness. Additionally, although the participants in this study did not indicate weakness in academic content preparation, their perceived weakness in or dislike of certain disciplines may stem from weakness in

academic strategies, including study habits and time management skills. As tutoring can

provide guidance in these skills, it can provide academic improvement (Balduf, 2009).

*Large Classes.*  Many of the comments made by participants in this study related

to the fact that the classes they were receiving tutoring in were particularly large. In this

particular institution, large classes (those with more than 150 students) have become

increasingly common as both a cost-cutting measure and a way to increase access to first-

year common courses (Institution's BANNER student database, 2013). Participants often

spoke about feeling disconnected from the course and their instructor in the larger classes

and the reconnection that occurred in one-on-one tutoring. As connection is an important

factor in college success (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1977l; Tinto, 1997; Tinto, 1998; Hu &

Wolniak, 2010), the connection students built to their courses through the tutoring

provided at the SSC was invaluable to their eventual sense of achievement and success.

Successful versus Less Successful Appointments. One finding of the current study

is that participants indicated benefits even in tutoring sessions that they perceived as

unsuccessful. Participants found that in these less successful sessions, learning still

occurred. This seems to be a finding that is somewhat unique to this study as the current

literature does not address benefits of tutoring sessions deemed less successful. However,

Rheinheimer, Grace-Odeleye, Francois, and Kusorgbor (2010) found that "peer…tutors,

who are trained in interpersonal and effective communication skills, are well positioned

to provid[e] clear parameters for what the undergraduate can expect from the tutoring

experience" (pp. 24-25). This may provide some explanation for the participants'

perceptions of benefits in less successful appointments. The tutors were able to articulate

their own abilities and limitations and provide strategies to assist the tutee in being

successful. In addition, since tutoring as a form of learning incorporates both content and process issues (Brown, Roediger, & McDaniel, 2014), participants were not dependent solely on tutors' content knowledge, but also their processes for how they learn through various study strategies. Finally, the use of student peers as tutors in the center provides opportunity for more active engagement in learning and allows for a cooperative relationship to develop between tutor and tutee (Topping, 1996).

In speaking about the less successful appointments, participants discussed challenges faced in working with particular tutors. For example, one participant mentioned that the appointment was too short for her to get the help she needed. Although she did not specifically address the reason for the length of the appointment, past practice indicates that the reason may be lack of tutor availability. This SSC continually faces this issue with an increasing demand on its services and decreasing budgetary support (McDaniel, James, & Davis, 2000, Dykshoorn, 2001). The SSC has seen a marked increase in demand for its services from its first full year of operation in 2007-2008 of 9,000 appointments to more than 13,000 appointments in 2009-2010. This number has remained fairly steady since 2009, even though overall enrollment has dropped and the SSC's budget has shrunk (SSC Effectiveness Report).

In another respondent's experience, one tutoring session was conducted in a lecture format more similar to being in class than a traditional tutoring session. This was a challenge in that tutoring was seen by participants as something to counteract the more impersonal classroom setting, and this session did not provide the personal setting the participants found effective (Rheinheimer, Grace-Odeleye, Francois, & Kusorgbor 2010).

Additional Findings of Note

One interesting finding in this study was that there appeared to be no difference in perception of tutoring as it relates to academic success based on student gender or race. I noted this by the similarity of responses to tutoring from participants, regardless of race or gender of the participant. Although this was not directly considered as part of this study, the participants included both White and African American, and male and female students. Responses to the questions, however, did not seem different based on either of these factors. Most of the recent research that considers this question agrees with this finding. For example, Rheinheimer et al., (2010) found gender was not a factor in determining likelihood of degree completion. Cooper (2010) also found that the number of times visiting the tutoring center was a significant factor in improving retention and GPA, and that this held across race/ethnicity and other pre-college characteristics. Finally, Laskey and Hetzel (2011) found that the study data "did not support the contention that gender, ethnicity and high school profile affect the retention or college GPA of at-risk students," and "ethnicity did not make a difference in the achievement of at-risk students" (p. 39).

A final finding of note in this study is the passion exhibited by the participants for the tutoring they received and the SSC in general. As participants responded to questions and spoke of their experiences, I saw and heard how much these services meant to them and their academic success. As I listened, I watched for non-verbal cues, such as body position and facial expression, either to confirm or contradict what was being said. In all cases, these cues served to confirm the positive expressions the participants gave of the tutoring services of the SSC. This also alleviated concerns I had about students

responding honestly to my questions. If I had seen discrepancies between what they said and how they acted, I would have been more concerned that they were telling me what they thought I wanted to hear. I saw no indication of that.

Contribution of the Conceptual Frameworks.

Astin's (1993) I-E-O Model and Astin's (1999) Theory of Involvement were the conceptual frameworks that underpinned and informed the design of this qualitative study. All participants in this study spoke of the connections made with their peers in tutoring, making the sessions and their academic career more successful in a way that mirrors Astin's Theory of Involvement. Astin (1968) stated, "from the point of view of the prospective college student, the stimuli provided by his peers may represent the most significant aspect of the college environment" (p. 15). Furthermore, Astin (1985) found that involved students are those who participate in campus activities and interact regularly with instructors and fellow students. He found that more involved students learned more. Astin (1993) found similar results. At this time, Astin stated, "the student's peer group is the single most potent source of influence on growth and development during the undergraduate years" (p. 398.). I found the importance of the peer group to be true with the participants in this study. Many spoke of the ability to work one on one with peers as a primary factor in their success.

According to Astin (1985), a second important form of involvement for students in college is interactions with faculty. However, he notes that direct interaction with instructors is often limited due to large class size and limited office hours. Astin offers several means to address this problem, such as involving students in learning communities or faculty research projects. However, for many students, particularly, as

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Astin points out, those struggling in certain subjects, these activities are not always an option. An alternative, he states, is to offer peer tutoring. The results of the interviews in this study align with Astin's belief in peer tutoring. Participants spoke about interactions with instructors, which led them to tutoring. They also spoke about the difficulty of making connections with instructors, prompting them to find peer connections that would be beneficial to their success.

Astin's (1999) I-E-O Model purports that pre-college characteristics and abilities mixed with environmental factors while in college combine to create specific outputs. This model assumes that pre-college characteristics, including socio-economic status, employment status, age, and academic preparation, in combination with environmental factors within the learning institution combine to affect learning outcomes for students.

The influence of the I-E-O was partly borne out in the interviews as several participants spoke about their perception of weakness in subjects for which they received tutoring and how the tutoring served to increase their understanding of and confidence in those subjects. Since all the participants in the study entered college directly from high school, were of traditional age, and did not work full-time, the study did not show an influence of these issues on the students' success.

Limitations

An important aspect of trustworthiness in qualitative research is an acknowledgement of a study's limitations, allowing readers to make some determination of the credibility of the study's findings (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). The first limitation relates to sample size. Patton (2002) states that the decision on sample size "depends on what you want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what's at stake…" (p. 244). This

study included five participants and I collected information about them through participant interviews and review of tutor appointment forms. Although I attempted to obtain a cross section of students represented at the study site, all students were studying at the same university in South Georgia and that, while using this type of purposeful sample can provide rich detail, it is also a limitation. My intention was to interview closer to ten students for the study, but due to difficulty with recruitment, I was unable to secure that many interviewees.

A second limitation is the difficulty in generalizing the results for all similar student success centers on college campuses and the design of similar centers which may not exactly match that of the research site. Although most include tutoring as a foundational service, many other services offered are not the same. Some centers offer counseling, some offer advising of varying sorts, and still others offer supplemental instruction or are responsible for teaching success courses. In addition, different campuses locate the center in varying areas of the campus. This can affect the perception of the center's importance on campus and therefore how students utilize it and perceive its usefulness.

The goal of this study, however, was not to influence practice at other centers, but to understand practice at the study site only. In addition, many factors influence a students' desire to stay in college until completion and can also have an influence on how well they do academically. The use of the services of the SSC is only one of these factors. Other forms of involvement that have an influence on students' achievement include participation in extracurricular activities and interaction with faculty and other personnel within the institution (Astin, 1999). These influences were not addressed in this study. As

I conducted this study primarily as an evaluation of a specific set of services provided by one SSC at one college campus, the intention to generalize the results was limited. Finally, as this study and many prior to it suggest, several factors are involved in a student's level of achievement and decision to complete or not complete a college degree.

Although the goal of the study was not to inform practice at centers other than the study site, it was the intention of the study that the findings might be transferable to other centers on some level. Transferability of the findings of a qualitative study's test conditions to other test conditions under similar contexts is an important factor in establishing the trustworthiness of a study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Simpson, 2000). For the current study, several findings might be of use in informing practice in other similarly structured centers. One finding that may be transferable is the benefit of receiving tutoring from one's peers. Assistance by someone with similar experiences can personalize the tutoring. In addition, peer tutors have often taken the same classes with the same instructors and can use that knowledge to inform their tutoring sessions. Another finding that can be transferable is making one think for oneself. If tutors require their tutees to find their own answers to questions or problems, they help them to develop independent learning strategies. Similarly, the finding that tutors gave the participants different ways to solve a problem is a transferable concept. When a tutor gives a tutee the tools to attack questions and problems from multiple perspectives, they have a greater likelihood of overcoming obstacles and being successful.

Two of the five participants worked as tutors at the center. This is a limitation in that being employed by the center may have affected their perception of the center and the way they answered the questions. As employees of the researcher, they may have felt

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unable to bring up negative ideas about the tutoring services or the center in general. As the researcher, I made efforts to reduce this likelihood by creating an atmosphere of informality in the interviews and by reminding participants that all information was confidential. Finally, I indicated to participants that negative information about the center or its services was just as useful to future practice as positive information.

A final limitation relates to the questions asked and, therefore, the information gained as a result. Although I attempted to recruit students of different races and genders and was at least somewhat successful in that, I did not directly ask whether participants' race or gender had any influence on the perception of the tutoring or its connection to their success. Similarly, I did not investigate specific pre-college characteristics of my participants to see if these characteristics had any influence on their decision to seek out tutoring or on their perception of that tutoring. While research shows that pre-college characteristics do not play a significant role in tutoring success, this information could be valuable.

However, despite these limitations, this study was able to provide useful data to both the center and the institution it serves. It will allow the institution to see what influence the center's services has on its students. It may also give the institution data to assist in making future decisions about expanding and centralizing other vital services such as advising into one campus-wide center, which it is currently considering. Finally, while no two institutions are alike, other institutions may consider using the data from this study when considering whether to offer services within a similar setting.

Implications of the Study

Based on participant responses to the interview questions, several conclusions may be drawn from the study. First, the results of this study indicated that tutoring had a positive influence on the participants in the study. This result is in line with research (Vogel, Fresko, & Wertheim, 2007) that indicates tutoring services are very beneficial to tutees and that these tutees' level of satisfaction with tutoring is generally very high. In addition, this study supported research which showed that learning different ways of thinking about the material students study allows learning to occur (Topping, 1996). Responses to this study supported this research as participants often cited learning perspectives different than those offered in class were beneficial to them. Finally, this study is in line with prior research showing that tutoring is not only beneficial to the tutees but to the tutors who provide the assistance (Topping; Tinto, 1998). The two respondents who indicated that they tutored at the center commented that tutoring increased their own confidence in their classes and served to strengthen their foundations in their major areas of study.

Respondents further supported research that learning assistance centers or student success centers on college campuses provide additional benefits beyond tutoring itself (Gribbons & Dixon, 2001; Dvorak, 2004; Perin, 2004). Respondents used statements describing the SSC on the campus such as "positive" and "very important" to the success of the campus.

An important aspect of a student's success is his or her engagement in the culture of the institution and level of interaction with social and academic resources of the campus (Tinto, 1975; Bean, 1981; Astin 1993; Astin, 1999) Increased and more positive

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engagement results in greater academic success and likelihood of retention. Responses to questions posed in this study indicated that the participants' positive interactions and engagement with the tutoring services of the SSC and their peers at the center played a major role in their perception of continued academic success. Tinto (1975) found that students who integrate to the social and academic systems of their institutions are more likely to persist. The respondents to this study confirmed that involvement with the academic support services of the university increased their retention and persistence likelihood.

Much research exists related to factors that influence success in college. Among these are the race and gender of students enrolling in college. Recent studies show, for example, that women have less positive interactions with students, staff and faculty at their institutions (Clifton, Perry, Roberts, & Peter, 2008) and, when controlling for academic performance, are more likely to leave school than their male counterparts (Johnson, 2006). Research also shows that race plays a role in the academic success of students in terms of academic performance, retention, and persistence (Kiser & Price, 2007; Johnson, 2008; Rivas-Drake, & Mooney, 2008). The research has shown that although minority students are attending college at a higher rate than in the past, their interactions with their institutions are not as positive as those of white students, and they are less likely to complete their degrees (Rodgers & Summers, 2008). Responses in this study, however, showed no apparent difference in perception of the interaction with the services or staff of the SSC by participants based on their race or gender. Finally, research has shown that pre-college characteristics are important in determining the success of students throughout college. These pre-college characteristics can include any

number of traits that a student develops before entering college, such as high school preparation and scores on standardized college entrance exams. However, it can also include additional skills, such as time management and study skills. In his I-E-O Model, Astin (1993) determined that input variables such as those developed in high school worked together with environmental variables while in college to determine a student's output. Balduf's (2009) study found that students who were high achieving in high school often entered college without having developed needed skills, such as time management and study skills. Participants in this study indicated that although they felt academically prepared for college as a result of high school, they entered college without time management or study skills, and the SSC helped them to develop these skills.

Funding of institutions, particularly public ones, is being tied more closely to retention and graduation rates (Barefoot, 2004; Fike & Fike, 2008; Jamelske, 2009), Institutional programs that promote retention of students can help justify continued funding of their institutions. The findings of this study showing that participants believed using the tutoring services of the SSC was a factor in their intention to continue in college support the continued funding of the center and the university of which it is a part. These findings can likewise be used by institutions with similar centers to justify continued funding.

As practitioners in higher education, we often are immersed in what we do to assist students and focus more on numerical data than on what is happening on our campuses. The results of this study remind us that it is important to talk to students and to learn from them, in their own words, how institutional practices are influencing them (Astin, 1999). Staff in similar centers can use the results of this study to remember to

speak with students who use the services of their centers and learn from them how well those services are working.

Recommendations for Future Research and Practice

In reviewing the findings of this study, I can make several recommendations regarding possible future research opportunities. First, although I attempted to have a larger sample size, this study focused only on five students at the university and their perceptions of the SSC. In future, other studies looking to learn about student perceptions of the SSC may benefit from having more participants.

Several possible issues may have arisen from the limited sample size. With only five students involved, the sample was not fully representative of the campus as a whole. For example, although there were both male and female participants and students of white and African American races, having students of additional racial backgrounds may have found different perspectives than this study was able to. In addition, due to the small sample, the study did not explore perceptions of students in all of the colleges or majors available at the university. Participants in this study were enrolled in majors in only two of the five undergraduate colleges; Arts and Sciences and Education. If the study had involved students in the other colleges (Nursing, Arts, and Business Administration), it may have found different perceptions, especially as the SSC on this campus primarily tutors in Arts and Sciences disciplines. Finally, all the students who participated in this study were full-time, traditional age students who had few additional environmental issues to face. If this study had been able to include part-time and non-traditional age students, there again may have been new insights gained. Although it was not the intent of this study specifically to be representative of the research campus, students in different

majors and with different academic backgrounds have different responses to tutoring and reasons for seeking tutoring help (Rheinheimer & McKenzie, 2011). If my sample included a greater cross-section of the student population, I may have been able to target the services more accurately for all students.

Another way in which the study may have been able to delve deeper into overall perceptions of the SSC by students would be to have considered the center's other services. While tutoring is the primary focus of this center, it also offers a number of general advising services, including academic skills workshops, probation interventions, and general procedural information about the university. If the study had included students who had used any of these advising services and had talked about how these services played a role in their academic career, I may have achieved a greater understanding of the center's influence.

Support exists for the majority of findings in this study through literature; past studies have discussed the benefits of tutoring. However, one finding in the current study stands out as a unique contribution: the perception by students who received tutoring that even less successful tutoring appointments provided benefits to them in achieving academic success. Although the study touched on this concept, time did not allow for in-depth consideration of it. Future research may be able to look further into this as it relates to students' perceptions of academic success.

Finally, the themes generated from this study can form the basis of future quantitative studies. Researchers may want to examine how the themes discussed in this study may or may not be generalized to the experiences of students at other tutoring centers on college and university campuses across the nation.

In conclusion, the findings of this study reveal that the SSC plays an important and central role in providing the students it serves with a path to academic success. However, further research on a broader group of students would provide valuable insights. In addition, as the center provides several academic support services, a study examining the experiences of students using other services would also be extremely beneficial.

Summary and Conclusion

Overall, the study found that tutoring had positive results for the students engaged in this exploratory study. The results of the study indicate that participants came away with: a positive impression of the center at which the tutoring took place; an increased comfort with their own knowledge of and confidence in the material they reviewed with the tutors; a better connection with their institution; better overall grades; and more likelihood of completing their degree. Specifically, this study found four major themes related to students' perceptions of tutoring within an SSC on their academic success: *SSC helpfulness to students, working with peers, class concerns,* and *successful versus less successful sessions.* The study, however, failed to show any differences in results for participants based on race or gender. This would be an area for future research.

It is important to view these four themes within the context of Astin's (1993) I-E-O Model and Astin's (1999) Theory of Involvement. Astin's I-E-O Model shows the connection between pre-college characteristics and effects of institutional interventions such as tutoring on outputs including student perceptions, grades and retention. Astin's Theory of Involvement confirms that students who engage with their institutions and

others at the institution are more likely to succeed. Understanding these models helps educators understand the participants' perceptions of their tutoring experiences.

The findings of the current study closely align with those of current literature indicating the importance of having centralized learning centers on college campuses and the benefits provided to students from tutoring. Previous research indicates that offering multiple learning assistance services in a centralized location on college and university campuses is beneficial to students in allowing them easy access to both the center and the services. Research further confirms that tutoring provides a number of academic benefits to the students who use it, including increased study and time management skills, greater sense of connection with their institutions, increased sense of confidence in their academic abilities, and finally, increases in grade point averages and rates of retention and graduation.

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APPENDIX A:

Interview Consent form

Consent for Student Interviews:


You are being asked to participate in a research project entitled *The Role of Campus Student Success Centers in Supporting Student Academic Success,* which is being conducted by *Terence A. Sullivan, MA, a graduate student in the doctoral program in leadership at* ▇▇▇▇ *State University*.  The purpose of this study is to determine if tutoring services provided by the SSC in a comprehensive public university in Georgia influence student academic success as determined by the students who utilized these services during the 2012-2013 academic year. You are being asked to participate in an interview of approximately 60-90 minutes regarding your experiences with the Student Success Center during the 2012-2013 academic year. Although the researcher will be able to associate your identity with the information you provide, you will not be asked to divulge any personal or private information about yourself. The researcher will keep your responses confidential; information you provide will not be shared with anyone else in any way in which your responses can be associated with your identity. Results will be reported from all participants as a whole; participants will not be individually identified in any reports or publications.

Your participation in this project is voluntary. You may choose not to participate in the interview, to stop participating in the interview at any time, or to skip any questions that you do not want to answer. You must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study. Your participation in the interview serves as your voluntary agreement to participate in this research project and your certification that you are 18 or older.

All interviews will be audiotaped to ensure accuracy of transcription. However, pseudonyms will be used to protect participant privacy. Once the project is complete and the dissertation is successfully defended, the audiotapes will be destroyed.

Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed to *Terence A. Sullivan, MA at* ▇▇▇▇▇ *or tasullivan@*▇▇▇▇.  This study has been exempted from Institutional Review Board (IRB) review in accordance with Federal regulations.  The IRB, a university committee established by Federal law, is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of research participants.  If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB Administrator at ▇▇▇▇ or irb@▇▇▇▇.  You may keep this consent statement for future reference.

APPENDIX B:

Interview Guide

Interview Guide

1. Can you tell me about your experience using the Student Success Center?

2. What made you decide to use the Student Success Center?

3. What are your reasons for returning for multiple tutoring sessions?

4. Can you describe what a typical tutoring session is like for you?

5. In your opinion, what is an example of a successful tutoring session?

6. What would a less-than-successful tutoring session look like to you?
7. What role do you think the SSC plays in your overall success in college?

8. How do you think you would have done in the class (es) for which you came for tutoring if you had not been tutored?

9. Is there anything else you wish I would have asked but didn't?

Exploratory and explanatory questions will be developed as the interview progresses based on how participants answer each question either to delve further into their responses or to clarify meaning on issues I misunderstood or were vague.

APPENDIX C:

IRB Exemption

# Institutional Review Board (IRB)
## for the Protection of Human Research Participants

## PROTOCOL EXEMPTION REPORT

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**PROTOCOL NUMBER:** IRB-02860-2012          **INVESTIGATOR:**   Terence Sullivan

**PROJECT TITLE:**          The Role of Campus Student Success Centers in Supporting Student Academic Success

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**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD DETERMINATION:**

This research protocol is **exempt** from Institutional Review Board oversight under Exemption Category(ies) 1 and 2.  You may begin
your study immediately.  If the nature of the research project changes such that exemption criteria may no longer apply, please consult with the IRB Administrator (irb@&#9608;&#9608;&#9608;&#9608;&#9608;&#9608;&#9608;&#9608;)
before continuing your research.

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**ADDITIONAL COMMENTS/SUGGESTIONS:**

Although not a requirement for exemption, the following suggestions are offered by the IRB Administrator to enhance the protection of participants and/or strengthen the research proposal:

**Please consider noting in the consent statement that interview will be audiotaped but pseudonyms will be used and explaining what will become of the tapes after either transcription or the conclusion of the research project.**

If this box is checked, please submit any documents you revise to the IRB Administrator at irb@&#9608;&#9608;&#9608;&#9608;&#9608;&#9608;&#9608; to ensure an updated record of your exemption.

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Barbara Gray                    9/19/12          *Thank you for submitting an IRB application.*
Barbara H. Gray, IRB Administrator          Date          *Please direct questions to irb@&#9608;&#9608;&#9608;&#9608;&#9608;&#9608;*
*or* &#9608;&#9608;&#9608;&#9608;&#9608;&#9608;*.*

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*Revised:  08.02.2012*