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AT THE HEART OF POLICIES AND PROGRAMS: COMMUNITY COLLEGE FACULTY MEMBERS AND PEER MENTORS AS HUMAN LEVERS OF RETENTION

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DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Education in the College of Education at the
University of Kentucky

By
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2019

ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

AT THE HEART OF POLICIES AND PROGRAMS: COMMUNITY COLLEGE
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RETENTION

Student attrition prior to the completion of a credential is an issue that has increasingly demanded the attention of stakeholders in higher education, particularly in the community college sector, in which less than half of all students complete a credential after six years. The costs of student attrition are high and widespread, ranging from the financial costs for institutions and federal and state governments to the personal and monetary costs paid by those students whose personal and professional goals are not achieved. With the ever-increasing focus on accountability for institutions of higher education and the growing movement toward performance-based funding, institutions are seeking to find ways to support all students on the path to completion of a credential. Building upon Braxton's theory of powerful institutional levers that serve to promote student completion, Rendon's validation theory, and Schossberg's theory of marginality versus mattering, this two-part companion dissertation seeks to progress conversation beyond levers of retention as programmatic approaches to increasing student success. Through interviews with community college students serving as peer mentors in a student ambassador program and community college faculty identified by peers and supervisors as high performing in the area of student retention, the researchers seek to identify common characteristics, behaviors, backgrounds, conditions, and values possessed by effective human levers of retention. In doing so, the researchers hope to identify common characteristics among successful human levers of retention in the form of peer mentors and faculty members. This dissertation was created in collaboration with Kyle Barron, whose dissertation "It's Not the Programs; It's the People: Building Human Levers of Retention in Community Colleges" serves as a companion to this dissertation.

KEYWORDS: Retention, Levers of Retention, Mattering, Validation, Community College Faculty, Community College Students, Attrition

Kimberly Russell

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June 24, 2019

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Date

AT THE HEART OF POLICIES AND
PROGRAMS: COMMUNITY COLLEGE FACULTY
MEMBERS AND PEER MENTORS AS HUMAN
LEVERS OF RETENTION

By

Kimberly Russell

Dr. Jane Jensen
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March 29, 2019
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Date

Now as I am just a few meters short of the summit of my mountain, I am able to begin to reflect on this past four years, though I imagine it will be quite some time before I fully realize the impact this experience has had on my life and on the person I am today in 2019 as I scramble to finish this "race for the puffy hat." I will not even begin to share how inspired I have been by the readings, the class discussions, the projects, and the writing assignments over the past four years. Someone told me before I applied for the program that doctoral work was mostly reading, writing, and thinking; so if one enjoyed those activities, that would be a huge advantage. In truth, I assumed I would feel relatively comfortable with the reading and writing, but I wasn't entirely convinced that I could keep up with everyone else in terms of the kinds of thinking that this kind of program demands.

From the very first class meeting in January of 2015 until I sit here drafting this final part of my dissertation, the truth is that I continue to worry that I am actually an impostor. I still question whether or not I am worthy of the puffy hat and all that the puffy hat symbolizes. In fact, I keep expecting that moment to come…that moment when someone finally tells me that the jig is up. Fortunately for me and for my puffy hat dreams, my doubting voice is the only negative voice I've experienced when it comes to my work in this program over the last four years.

As I write the manuscripts that are based on my study of faculty members as human levers of retention in community colleges, I have started to realize that my experience as a doctoral student bears some remarkable similarities to what the literature says about the challenges and fears often encountered by students in community colleges. I too have sat in a classroom full of strangers and wondered if any of them would notice

or care if one day I left class and just never came back. I have driven to campus with

knots in my stomach, worried that I would not be able to figure out how to find the

building where I was supposed to be or how I was going to legally park my car. I have

had to figure out how to manage my time between my full time faculty job, my family,

my friends, my church, and the five million other commitments that define my life. And,

like many community college students, I wondered if my work would be good enough, if

I myself would be good enough to succeed. Many times over the years I've wondered if

it might be a good idea to require faculty members to take part in things that take them

out of their comfort zones, if nothing else but to remind them how it feels to be new,

vulnerable, and maybe a bit incompetent at times. If I've received nothing else from this

experience other than the knowledge of how it feels to be a new student beginning a scary

and somewhat mysterious journey, that's OK. I saw firsthand the importance and the

power of a sense of mattering and the need for validation in students' lives. Without a

doubt, I know that I would not be writing my acknowledgements this afternoon if I had

not been made to feel that I mattered to my classmates, my professors, and my partner in

this collaboration. I would not have made it to the second semester of my coursework

had my professors and classmates not helped to validate me, finding ways to

communicate to me that I was not an impostor, that I did belong just as much as anyone

else.

Of course, this experience has given me more than a sense of empathy for

community college students. From the faculty who have taught me and facilitated my

learning to my family and colleagues who have supported me in more ways than I can

even begin to count, I have experienced the essential nature of the network, a network

that encourages, helps, and believes. This part of the dissertation has been perhaps the most challenging to write because I feel so overwhelmed when I begin to think about all the debts of gratitude I owe. However, I'm resigning myself to the idea that I'm never going to be able to include all the people I want to acknowledge and all the reasons I want to acknowledge them. And, let's be honest, the vast, vast majority of the people I am agonizing about thanking here…they're never going to read this anyway.

So I'll forgive myself for not including everyone by name who deserves my appreciation and not discussing everyone wonderful deed that has been done for me over the past four years. The fact is that, from friends and family volunteering to entertain my daughter so that I could read or write yet not feel the guilt that comes with abandoning my child to colleagues leaving encouraging notes under my door or sending me emails to encourage me to "just keep swimming," I am surrounded by a loving network that has helped make my summit attempt possible.

Thinking of these past few years as a doctoral students, I think the Everest analogy helps me to make sense of what the work and the people have meant to my journey, so I want to take this opportunity to extend my analogy a bit. If my binge watching of Everest documentaries has taught me one thing, it is that it's basically impossible to make it to the summit of Everest with no assistance from others. Climbing Everest may appear to be an undertaking that people do as individuals, but the fact is that it's really a team endeavor, particularly if a climber wants to reach the summit and then return to base camp alive. Though the climber's photographs tend to show one proud, beaming soul standing with a flag in his or her hand at the top of the largest mountain,

what is not seen in that photograph is the large team whose support and work made that photo possible.

So, if this is my Everest expedition, then these are the team members who made my summit bid a successful one, or this team at least made it possible for me to believe I could reach the top of the mountain and make a genuine effort to achieve my goal.

First, Dr. Jane Jensen, who from day one has served as the overall leader of my expedition. Before I was ever admitted into the program, it was Dr. Jensen who fielded each and every question I had. Once I was admitted into the program, it was Dr. Jensen who taught my very first class and helped me to understand a bit more about how one goes about climbing this mountain. She guided my training, helping me learn the moves and techniques I would need if I hoped to leave base camp and make it to each of the different stages of the long climb. It was her feedback that helped me to believe that maybe I was actually capable of accomplishing my goal and her instruction that helped me to begin to think like a mountaineer. Her greatest gift as a teacher and the main reason I selected her as the chair of my dissertation committee is her ability to instill confidence by guiding a student's progress in a way that allows the student to imagine that she herself had seen very clearly where the path should lead. And it is this gift that I hope I can emulate as I work with my own students.

The University of Kentucky faculty members with whom I have worked over the past four years have been my guides. Their wisdom and experience has helped to train and inspire my mind and my heart throughout my expedition. From helping me to understand the complicated history and the important but not always clear roles of

community colleges to facilitating the kind of thinking that has allowed me to see the bigger picture and more carefully evaluate both what I read and what I write, my guides have directed my attention to things I might not have ever noticed without them. They've selected readings and created assignments that have inspired me and allowed me to be better than I ever thought I could be. Whether it involves understanding and evaluating the organizational charts of a college, discovering that Title IV is more than financial aid and Title IX is more than women's basketball, or identifying the ways in which social and cultural capital impact a student's ability to successfully navigate higher education; my guides have changed the way I see my job, my institution, and my world.

My classmates, particularly my partner in this collaborative dissertation, have comprised my team of climbers. They too had a dream of reaching the summit, even knowing the cost and the dangers. My teammates are, in many ways, the reason that I am still climbing. They have encouraged me and reminded me that I absolutely can reach the summit. They have celebrated my victories with me and given me opportunities to feel as if I have valuable contributions to make to our team. As we have endured the challenges, frustrations, and the doubts together; we have also experienced the joys of this journey as a group. I know that people complete doctoral programs all the time without a cohort, but I'm glad I didn't have to be one of those people. The fact is that there were many times that nobody but my teammates could understand my experience and help me to make good decisions. I'm so grateful I have had them with me.

I also consider the participants in my study to be my teammates in this expedition. Without their willingness to share their expertise, experiences, and passions, these manuscripts would not exist. I have learned from them and been inspired by the lengths

they go to in order to help their students make a better life for themselves and their families. This project gave me an opportunity to engage with my colleagues, some of whom I had never actually met before, and it added to my sense of pride in being part of a strong, compassionate, and dedicated team.

However, my deepest thanks goes to the people in my life who have made the most sacrifices, received the least glory and praise, and done the most to help me on my expedition. To extend the analogy a bit further, though perhaps this analogy will seem silly to everyone but me, my family and my friends have served as my team of Sherpa. They are the group who carry the gear from place to place, keep the paths clear and safe for me to climb, meet my practical needs, and quietly stand to the side or just behind me as they do whatever they can to make it to the summit. Like the Sherpa on Everest, their job is the least glamorous of all, their pay is inadequate, and they take a great deal of joy in knowing that they helped to bring someone's dream to fruition.

My mom, Francie Gregory, has played the role of Sherpa in my life since before I was born, and she has continued to be my greatest supporter, doing the work behind the scenes that has made it possible for me to achieve everything I have achieved. She believes me, she is proud of me, she defends me, she helps me find solutions to my problems, and, perhaps most importantly, she reminds me that no matter what happens, she understands. I can't count how many last minute, panicked phone calls she has received from me, asking for everything from chauffeur service for my daughter to a pep talk that will encourage me to keep going. And she's always ready to help.

To my dad Brent Gregory and stepmother Renee Gregory, two more of my favorite Sherpa. I want to say thank you for your hospitality over the past four years. One of the best things about my time in this program was getting to spend one weekend a month with you. Thank you Renee for having beautiful suppers ready for me on Friday evenings, buying Panerra bagels for my pre-class breakfasts, and for keeping my glass full after long Friday afternoon class meetings.   Thank you to my dad for allowing me to whine and then reminding me that "it's just part of it…get over it and do what you need to do." I have loved the memories I've gotten to make with you two, and I am hoping you will still let me come spend the occasional Friday night just for old times' sake.

My husband Chris Russell has perhaps taken on the most demanding Sherpa position in my expedition. He has spent over four years taking up my slack and never once treating me as if he resents the extra work, the weekends as a single parent, the often distracted wife who is sometimes a very poor conversationalist, and the piles and piles of books and papers strewn throughout our house. Though he does not always understand the language or the customs associated with doctoral studies and programs, he has always encouraged me to talk about what I'm reading, writing, or thinking about. And I have loved knowing this whole time that he is proud of me.

My daughter Ava is no stranger to the sacrifices involved when a parent has chosen to take on this kind of expedition. I have been working on my degree for a big portion of her life. In fact, I imagine that in most of her memories thus far, "student" has helped to comprise the definition she has of her mother. In some ways, that has been difficult. I've missed several important things in her life: school concerts, academic team meets, and friends' birthday parties. More times that I can count I have had to tell

her, "Not now. I have got to finish this article (or this paper, this book, this email)."
There are nights when my mind has been too tired to play with Barbie dolls or watch an
episode of Bob's Burgers with her, and I have gotten pretty grouchy during homework
time on more than one occasion because my mind is tired and being pulled in a lot of
different directions. And even though I disappoint her sometimes, she understands and
continues to encourage me.

In spite of the disappointments that she has experienced because of my
commitment to this program, I hope that the example I have tried to show her throughout
these four years is one that will help to shape the way that she lives her life. I hope she
has learned the value in doing hard things and sticking with them even when it's not fun
or it begins to feel borderline impossible. I hope that she realizes that, even though we
love our families and especially our children, people sometimes must do things that may
be meaningful only to themselves. Finally, I want her to know that it is never too late,
and we can make choices for the rest of our lives that will allow us to grow, to learn, and
to become better versions of ourselves.

As I complete this dissertation, I am now ready to make my summit bid and
defend my work before my committee and (gulp) anybody else who chooses to show up,
knowing full well that I would not be here without all of the members of "my team." In
the end I've realized it's not even about conquering the mountain. It's not about the
mountain at all. It's actually about conquering one's fears, discovering and overcoming
one's weaknesses, and learning the lessons that the journey can teach.

And while, obviously, my hope is to be able to enjoy the view from the top of the world for a few moments, no matter how this part of the expedition ends, I would not trade this experience for anything. I have learned both intellectual and practical lessons, and I have done something that a relatively small part of the population will do. I've seen the very best in many wonderful people and occasionally in myself. I'll be eternally grateful.

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Chapter 1
Introduction

Persistence of community college students toward the completion of a credential is a subject that has received a great deal of attention from researchers in the past several decades due to the economic, social, political, and personal impacts of college student attrition. The ever-growing emphasis on institutional accountability and the trend toward linking student outcomes to institutional funding has led to even greater interest in working out what Braxton (2000) called "the student departure puzzle. In recent years, "educators, policy-makers, researchers, and foundations have all increasingly turned their attention to the actual experience of students enrolled in community colleges [and] this focus has revealed that community college students have low persistence and completion rates" (Bailey and Alfonso, 2005, p. 5).

The community college, for many traditionally underrepresented populations, represents one of the only opportunities for people to have a chance at a better life for themselves and their families. However early departure is more common in community college than in other institutions of higher education, citing that community colleges enroll around half of all undergraduates in the United States each year, but less than one-third of those students actually earn a credential within three years of enrollment (Barnett, 2011). A recent report by the Community College Research Center (2019) cited data from the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, which indicated that, of the students who enrolled in community college for the first time in 2012, less than 40% had earned a credential from a two-year or four-year institution within six years.

The ease of access combined with low tuition rates have contributed to the fact that "the typical community college student possesses different characteristics than the traditional university student" (Fike and Fike, 2008, p. 69). Community college students often bring with them unique challenges that can potentially impact their ability to persist toward degree completion. Community colleges have significantly overrepresented populations of students at risk of attrition, such as "minority students, first-generation students, students with lover levels of academic achievement in high school, and students from low-income families" (Bailey and Alfonso, 2005, p. 5) and students who attend part-time, work long hours at off-campus jobs, and have dependent children.

Abigail Hess (2018) reported that a study of 43,000 college students conducted by Temple University and the Wisconsin HOPE Lab found that 42% of community college students are considered "food insecure," meaning that their food supply is inadequate. Further, the study found that nearly half of all community college students could be designated as "housing insecure," while 12% of community college students in the study reported being totally homeless in the past year. Describing how the population of community college students breaks down according to income, the Community College Research Center (2019) indicated that 47% of community college students with independent status had an income of less than $20,000 per year and that students with incomes below $30,000 per year graduated at a rate of 14% within six years. Clearly, community college students are more likely than their counterparts in four-year institutions to be from a low socioeconomic background, which, as Bonet and Walters (2016) explain, is related to additional challenges that often result in attrition for community college students. Obviously, "when students are forced to worry about when

their next meal will be or where they will sleep at night, their academic performances suffer" (Hess, 2018).

Though community colleges welcome all students, no matter their income level, the level of their academic preparation for higher education, or their family's educational history. However, the question is, are community colleges actually prepared to support students with the characteristics that have been demonstrated time and time again to put them at risk of failure? Sadly, in spite of a deepening understanding of the nature of today's community college students and the factors that complicate their dreams of attaining a college-level credential, the open doors of the community college are not matched by equal progress of all entering students toward completion of credentials, suggesting that this lack of success can be attributed to "the complex ways in which social and educational inequalities affect specific students and the institutions of higher education designed to serve them." (Goldrick-Rab, 2007).   Beach (2011) argues that the community college has great potential to be a truly equitable institution that provides not only access for all but also equal opportunities for success for all. In order to reach that potential, however, it is essential that community colleges understand the needs of their students and meet those needs.   Understanding why college students do not complete post-secondary education is a question that scores of scholars have tried to answer.

One of the most influential models of student retention is that of Vincent Tinto's (1975), which described how understanding students' needs can help institutions understand how and why some students leave higher education, sometimes never to return. According to Tinto's Interactionalist Theory of student retention, student persistence depends upon the student's perceptions of their interactions, both social and

academic, within the institution. Tinto's theory suggests, "Satisfying and rewarding encounters with the formal and informal academic and social systems of the institution are presumed to lead to greater integration in those systems and thus to student retention" (Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991, p. 51).

In Braxton et al.'s (2014) revision of Tinto's model, particularly as it relates to commuter students, the authors noted that empirical evidence from their study of commuter students, rather than residential students, does not necessarily support Tinto's findings because of the unique challenges associated with living and often working off campus. Research focused on commuter students has sought to explain the unique needs and concerns of the commuter student and how those needs and concerns can serve as barriers for those students. Bonet and Walters (2016) echo Braxton's findings that commuter students face obstacles less common for students attending residential and/or more selective institutions. They suggest that persistence among community college students is often dependent upon "extensive academic and emotional support" (p. 224). Noting that commuter students are at risk for missing out on important relationships with peers and faculty, the authors suggest that community college students in particular require "focused counseling and advisement interventions, alongside student-friendly pedagogical strategies" (p. 224).

Rendon (1994) reported both in and out of class interactions can help to validate students and foster academic and social integration into the institution, which occurs when someone actively reaches out to support students in their academic endeavors and affirms their ability to be successful, powerful learners. Students feel more committed to

an institution when they that an institution if true to its mission and makes students feel as if they are valued (Braxton et al., 2014).

Similar to Rendon's validation theory, Schlossberg's (1989) theory of college students' mattering and marginality argues that "when college students believe that they matter to others, their feelings of marginality diminish" (Rayle and Chung, 2007), and they are more likely to succeed when they feel they are appreciated by others. Schlossberg's research indicates that when adult students feel that they matter, they are more likely to be more engaged in their learning (Shelly, 2014). For many adult learners, the feeling of mattering, "may be the single element that makes the difference in their completing their degrees and developing a feeling of satisfaction and a sense of belonging" (Schlossberg et al., 1991, p. 201). Becoming a college student marks a role change or transition for an individual, and these sorts of changes pose a risk for an individual to feel marginalized (Schlossberg, 1989). Describing a learning community model used at Kingsborough Community College since 1966, Bonet and Walters (2016) describe how the program at Kingsborough groups students into cohorts and provides student development seminars designed to provide both academic and social support. The authors note that these regular interactions between students and faculty help to build positive relationships between the two groups and have contributed to an increased graduation rate for students who participate in the learning communities.

Creating an environment that encourages students to feel validated and believe that they matter requires a system of practices and policies that are affirming to students. Most importantly, constituencies within the college such as members of the faculty and students who serve as peer mentors, are the most effective instrument for creating such an

environment of validation and mattering. Braxton and Mundy (2001) propose that institutions can possess powerful "levers" that help support students and promote retention, particularly in the first year of college. The authors recommend 47 different practices that their research suggested could reduce student departure.   Based on Tinto's (1993) three principles of effective retention— which include a commitment to student service, a commitment to student learning, and a focus on the academic and social integration of all students—Braxton and Mundy (2001) describe levers such as training of faculty and staff, effective communication strategies, advocacy for students, engaging teaching practices, orientation and mentoring programs, campus environment design, curricula tied to students' lives beyond the classroom, holistic advising practices, and opportunities to interact meaningfully with peers.

What each of these types of recommendations has in common is the importance of the human element that underlies each of these policies, programs, and practices. Without the efforts of key constituencies on a campus, not even the most responsive programs, policies, and practices will serve to support student success. At the heart of retention efforts are the people with whom community college students interact on campus.   Lundberg (2014) analyzed data collected from 239 students who completed the Community College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CCESQ) to test the extent to which peer interactions and interactions with faculty connected with student learning and discovered that both types of interactions, in and out of the classroom, have a profound effect on community college students' success. Connections between students and faculty contribute not only to students' intellectual development but also their attitudes, goal setting behaviors, and career orientations (Hoffman, 2014).   In addition, it is

essential that students become engaged with their peers to reduce the potential of marginalization in and out of the classroom (Roberts and Styron, 2010).

If human interactions in and out of the classroom often mean the difference between attrition and retention for community college students, then it is important to understand the people behind the "levers." Indeed, if colleges can identify which of their students and faculty serve as the most effective human levers of retention, they can use this knowledge to provide the training and support needed to identify and train other students and faculty members to be effective levers of retention, and they can conduct conversations with those "human levers" to discover how institutions might better facilitate the important work that they do. Since both faculty and peer relationships can help students to navigate the academic and social realms of college and successfully make the transition to "college student," it is important to understand what motivates a human lever, how human levers work to build relationships and encourage positive interactions between themselves and the students they serve, and how those identified as "levers" seek to help students to persevere.

Today's community college, however, faces numerous challenges in developing human levers of retention. When considering faculty as levers it is important to understand that the majority of community college faculty members did not receive formal training in teaching, and most have no formal preparation for teaching specifically in community college (Eddy, 2010). Many faculty members often resort to ineffective teaching methods because they are simply trying to "survive" (Braxton et al., 2000); however, the nature of the community college today requires that faculty be prepared to meet the challenges of working with a diverse body of students.

Unfortunately, community college faculty members often do not feel that they are able to devote the time necessary to engage in meaningful interactions in or out-of-class with students. Hoffman (2014) explained, "Institutional pressures for serve to departments […] and the profession, to engage in scholarly activity, and to maintain a high level of teaching can impact the amount of time a faculty member has to afford a student" (p. 15). The typical teaching loads of community college faculty combined with committee assignments and other forms of expected service to the institution result in little available time to know and validate students (Lundberg, 2014).

Peers who serve as levers of retention for other college students face similar challenges. Lundberg (2003) found that adult students who engaged in educationally related peer discussions experienced greater success related to learning. Lundberg asserted that "when peer relationships have an educational focus, they are vitally important to learning for all students" (p. 682). However, commuter students are often limited in the amount of time that they are able to spend interacting with peers due to off-campus commitments such as work and family. Additionally, not all institutions intentionally strive to help commuter students make connections with their peers either in or out of class. Formal programs that match students, for example, with a peer mentor who can help them navigate the transition to becoming college students do not yet exist at every community college. Further, even when these programs do exist, not all peer mentors will excel as levers of retention for their peers, and even those who do will typically leave the institution in just a few semesters.

Because research indicates that both faculty and peers serve as powerful levers of retention, perhaps the most vital levers of retention in fact, it is essential to identify the

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people who have distinguished themselves in this capacity and learn more about the ways in which these people have helped to positively influence retention and student success. Understanding how these individuals define their roles at the institution, how they were prepared to take on their role, how they navigate the challenges of their roles, and how they specifically approach the task of promoting student retention can potentially assist institutions to encourage greater numbers of faculty and students to serve as these vital human levers of retention.

The purpose of this exploratory study was to investigate the specific ways in which peer mentors and faculty seek to positively influence retention and student success in community colleges. Because the literature on commuter student retention emphasizes the importance of engagement in the classroom, the value of positive interactions between faculty and peers, and the need for students to feel a sense of validation and "mattering", this study focused on the ways in which those faculty and students identified as "human levers" actually understand and approach their roles.

By studying the individuals who have been identified as effective "human levers of retention," we explore the less frequently considered aspects regarding the human element in community college student retention. Research on community college retention often provides readers with information on policies and practices that support retention and student success, and retention scholars also consistently remark on the importance of faculty and peer interactions in the success of community college students. Many sources offer general criteria that can be used to evaluate the quality of teaching in colleges or general characteristics or behaviors that can be used to describe effective mentoring relationships. A number of studies have described students' perceptions

regarding their interactions with faculty members or peers, highlighting what works for them.

However, the voice that is often missing in the conversation is a voice that could perhaps offer the most insight, a perspective which is based on thousands of interactions with students and years of experience working in a community college. This study, then, gives voice to the peer mentors and faculty members themselves, who can offer the "boots on the ground" perspective and provide specific illustrations of how and why they approach their work with students the way that they do. This research seeks to provide readers with richer, more specific information about the nature of people as levers of retention with the hope that this information can potentially be used to identify other potential human levers, develop the skills in current and future faculty and students, and support the endeavors of those who act as human levers of retention.

Three manuscripts comprise this dissertation. The first manuscript is a collaborative piece created in partnership with my colleague, Kyle Barron. In this piece, we examined characteristics and behaviors shared by both faculty and peer mentor human levers, combining our companion studies of the two groups. The goal of this manuscript is to provide practitioners with information that may assist them in the hiring process for faculty and/or peer mentors as well as information that could help to guide and structure orientations, faculty development programs, and ongoing training for both faculty members and peer mentors. This manuscript seeks to highlight the common elements shared by faculty levers as well as peer mentor levers, further supporting the suggestion that human levers of retention engage in similar activities based on common motivations and attitudes.

The second manuscript, "Community College Faculty Levers of Retention and the Philosophies and Behaviors that Define Them," serves several purposes. It introduces readers to the faculty participants and identifies common characteristics and behaviors among the participants. With the goal of describing the ways in which faculty perceive their roles as human levers of retention and providing concrete examples of the ways in which these faculty members interact with students through their policies, curriculum, in and out of class exchanges, and teaching strategies, this manuscript is meant to show from a faculty member's perspective how and why human levers of retention approach their work with students in the ways they do. The manuscript suggests ways that such behaviors help to instill a sense of both mattering and validation in community college students.

The final manuscript, "Multiple Missions of Community College Faculty Members: Chinks in the Armor," compares the challenges that both institutions and individuals face when trying to serve multiple missions and the potential consequences of trying to be "all things to all people," a problem that is common among community colleges as a whole as well as the faculty members employed by community colleges. This manuscript describes various expectations that national, state, and local entities have had both historically and contemporarily for today's community colleges as well as the expectations and goals that community colleges have for themselves. Mirroring the challenges faced by an institution expected to serve a number of missions, faculty members also are expected to distribute their own time and effort among numerous missions. This manuscript describes the institutional expectations for the faculty members in the study and discusses specific reasons that these particular faculty members

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question their ability to excel across all the areas that comprise their "mission" as a faculty member.

The choice to work in a community college, similar to the choice to attend a community college, involves the acceptance of challenges and a willingness to use one's resources, talents, and skills to triumph over the adversity that comes with such a choice. In order for both students, faculty, and peer mentors to persist in the pursuit of their personal and professional goals, there are certain requirements, but the most important of these is hope. Hope allows individuals to envision the possibilities and sometimes navigate their way through dark, difficult places. Hope also gives individuals the vision to see the potential in not just themselves but in others they encounter. Community college faculty members and peer mentors are the most important agents of hope for community college students.

Chapter 2
Attrition and Community College Students: Open Access for All, Success for Few
Kimberly Russell and Kyle Barron

Introduction

In 2009 President Barack Obama extolled the virtues of the American community college, known for their affordability, open admissions policies, responsive course scheduling, convenience of locations, and responsiveness to business and industry ("Building American skills through community colleges", 2009). Obama, who set two important national goals of once again leading the world in proportion of college graduates and graduating and additional five million community college graduates, contended that, in order to increase the economic strength of the nation, it is essential to educate American workers ("The American graduation initiative: stronger American skills through community colleges", 2009).

The largest segment of the nation's higher education system, enrolling around six million students annually, the community college has great potential to be a truly equitable institution that provides not only access to higher education for all but also equal opportunities for success.   However, today's community college does not currently accomplish those goals (Beach, 2011). Less than half of the students who enroll at a community college will complete any kind of credential. Two-year associate degree-granting public colleges, which enroll around half of all undergraduates in the United States, suffer the most significant student attrition rate, with approximately half of all students nationally leaving college before the second year (Barefoot, 2004). The Center for Community College Student Engagement (CCCSE) (2010) stated, "The United

States, long ranked first worldwide [in proportion of college graduates] now ranks 10th in the percentage of young adults who hold a college degree" ("The heart of student success: Teaching, learning, and college completion"). Further, CCCSE indicated that only around one-fourth of the full-time community college students seeking associate's degrees complete a certificate or degree within three years, and less than half of community college students who seek a degree or certificate have earned one six years later. In 2018, the Community College Research Center (CCRC) cited data from the National Student Clearinghouse, which indicated that around 40% of those students enrolling for the first time in community college in 2012 had completed any kind of credential six years later, with completion rates being significantly lower for students attending part time, students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, and students from underrepresented minority populations. Indeed, as Ma and Baum (2016) observed, completion rates across the sector have remained stagnant for a number of years in spite of increased attention to the problem.

Ma and Baum (2016) reported that the National Student Clearinghouse found in 2011—2012 that community college students were significantly more likely to come from the lowest family-income bracket and were also more likely to be a first-generation college students. Both of these factors are correlated with an increased likelihood of attrition. In addition, a much higher percentage of community college students worked either full or part time when compared with students attending four-year institutions. Again, this characteristic makes community college students less likely to successfully complete coursework and earn a credential.

The impact of students leaving college before completing a credential is often negative for institutions and students alike. Institutions of higher education lose thousands of dollars in unrealized revenue for each student who leaves without completing a credential (DeBerard, Spielmans, and Julka, 2004). Loss of student tuition dollars, particularly for privately funded institutions can have a catastrophic effect on budgets, and state-funded institutions may also lose state funding if state legislatures tie funding to graduation rates (Barefoot, 2004). Departure rates affect enrollment stability, institutional budgets, and public perception of the quality of institutions (Braxton et al, 2004). Additionally, in today's age of performance-based funding, colleges must be prepared for the consequences of the trend toward performance-based funding, which "continues to hold great appeal to state policymakers who struggle with the tension between growing dissatisfaction with student completions rates on the one hand and limited state tax revenues on the other" (Palmer, 2014, p. 127). Finally, as community college students are more likely to default on their student loans (19.1% default rate for the community college sector compared to 7.6% for public four-year institutions) institutions could potentially face high penalties or even risk losing the ability to distribute federal financial aid (Ma and Baum, 2016).

Regarding students, Kuh et al. (2005) reported, "virtually all forecasters agree that to be economically self-sufficient in the information-driven world economy, some form of postsecondary education is essential, with a baccalaureate degree being much preferable" (p. xiii). For many individuals, particularly those from traditionally underserved populations, community college represents their best if not their only hope for achieving that essential economic self-sufficiency.

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Student persistence should also be a public concern because college educated citizens are more likely to contribute to societal good and less likely to engage in "harmful behaviors" (Barnett, 2011, p. 193). Further, CCCSE (2010) argued that college completion has both financial and democratic benefits, stating, "The higher a person's educational attainment, the more likely he or she is to be gainfully employed, pay taxes, and be capable of taking care of the health and educational needs of his or her children. Conversely, higher levels of education make it less likely for individuals to be publicly dependent" ("The heart of student success: Teaching, learning, and college completion").

 Further, as success rates vary greatly across demographic groups, today's students who complete a credential, particularly a baccalaureate degree, are more likely to have their children successfully complete a credential in future (Ma and Baum, 2016).

Braxton et al. (2004) encouraged readers to think beyond the financial consequences of student attrition and consider the moral obligation that institutions have to their students. Often those who drop out of college decide never to return, forever constraining their opportunities in life. Considering student retention an issue of developing human potential, Braxton et al. (2004) lamented, "Individuals who do not continue may lead vastly different lives from those they would lead if they had completed their course of study" (p. xi).

Postsecondary administrators must be "cognizant of the reasons why students depart from institutions of higher learning prematurely and what can be done to help students overcome these barriers so they can achieve their academic and career goals" (Roberts and Styron, 2010, p. 2). Upcraft, Gardner, and Barefoot (2005) suggested, "When a proper balance is maintained between challenge and support, students are

positioned to succeed in college" (p. 11). In order to find the balance, the authors urged

that institutions of higher education are responsible for creating learning environments

that will support these two goals. Ma and Baum (2016) encourage policy makers to

develop policies that will "incorporate an understanding of who the students enrolling in

community colleges are and under what circumstances they are most likely to succeed, in

addition to the investment of the resources required to diminish the financial and

nonfinancial barriers facing many students in this sector" (p. 21).

Persistence of community college students toward the completion of a credential

is a subject that has received a great deal of attention from researchers in the past several

decades due to the economic, social, political, and personal impacts of college student

attrition. The ever-growing emphasis on institutional accountability and the trend toward

linking student outcomes to institutional funding has led to an even greater interest in

working out what Braxton (2000) called "the student departure puzzle." According to

Fike and Fike (2016), "Understanding why student choose to leave or choose to stay is

essential to those wanting to make a difference in students' lives" (p. 68).

Factors Influencing Attrition among Commuter Students

The community college, for many traditionally underrepresented populations,

represents one of the only opportunities for people to have a chance at a better life for

themselves and their families.   The ease of access combined with low tuition rates have

contributed to the fact that "the typical community college student possesses different

characteristics than the traditional university student" (Fike and Fike, 2016, p. 69).

Community college students often bring with them unique challenges that can potentially

impact their ability to persist toward degree completion. Community colleges serve

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significantly overrepresented populations of students at risk of attrition, such as "minority students, first-generation students, students with lower levels of academic achievement in high school, and students from low-income families" (Bailey and Alfonso, 2005, p. 5) and students who attend part-time, work long hours at off-campus jobs, and have dependent children. Goldrick-Rab (2007) suggested that consistently low community college persistence and completion rates could be attributed to "the complex ways in which social and educational inequalities affect specific students and the institutions of higher education designed to serve them." McClenney (2013) expressed that today's community college students are a "wildly diverse" (p. 26) group, making it difficult to create, deliver, and sustain initiatives that will serve the population well and encourage more widespread success across the sector.

The traditional characteristics that influence college completion for community college students are not necessarily the same as those students enrolled in residential colleges and universities; though the majority of research related to college student retention does not specifically address the issues faced by commuter students in open access institutions. Commuter students—often enrolled only part-time—typically have multiple life roles that often take priority over their role as a college student and face challenges that often do not exist for traditional students at residential institutions. Commuting is negatively related to completion of a degree, and institutions must seek to understand the unique needs of these students to implement strategies that will reduce attrition (Jacoby and Garland, 2004). As Hess (2018) explained, community college students, the vast majority of whom are commuters, are much more likely than their counterparts to face housing and food insecurity, further complicating students' ability to

successfully complete academic tasks. In addition, community college students are much more likely to work (both part-time and full-time) or enroll in coursework on a part-time basis, with both serve as risk factors for attrition (Ma and Baum, 2016).

Yet often institutions and researchers continue to "believe the myth of what works for traditional on-campus residential students works equally well for commuter students if they would just be a little more serious about their education" (Jacoby and Garland, 2004, p. 63). The authors categorized the core needs and challenges of commuter students: transportation, a variety of life roles, limited support networks off campus, and a sense of belonging on campus. Referring to adult commuter students (those over 25 years of age), Schlossberg et al. (1991) noted that these students make a great deal of both emotional and financial sacrifices to attend college and "struggle with situational, personal, and institutional barriers at considerable self-sacrifice" (p. 220).

Commuter Student Persistence Models

In Braxton et al.'s (2014) revision of Tinto's model, particularly as it relates to commuter students, the authors noted that empirical evidence from a study of commuter students does not necessarily support all parts of Tinto's model. According to Braxton (2014), Tinto's theory of student persistence "puts emphasis on the student's interpretation of their interactions with the academic and social communities of a given college or university" (p. 73). Tinto suggested that "students enter a college or university with varying patterns of personal, family, and academic characteristics and skills, including personal dispositions and intentions with respect to college attendance and personal goals" (Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991, p. 51). Then, according to Pascarella

and Terenzini, interactions between the individual and the institution help to shape the students' intentions and commitments toward the institution longitudinally.

The authors explain that Tinto's theory suggests "Satisfying and rewarding encounters with the formal and informal academic and social systems of the institution are presumed to lead to greater integration in those systems and thus to student retention" (p. 51). Braxton et al. (2014) explained that Tinto "postulates that academic and social integration influence a student's subsequent commitments to the institution and to the goal of graduation" (p. 74). Braxton and his colleagues, however, question the validity of the Tinto framework to explain the student departure process, particularly as it relates to commuter students. According to Braxton, Hirschy, and McClendon (2004), Tinto's interactionalist theory does not adequately address the unique characteristics of commuter institutions, which the authors state "lack well-defined and –structured social communities for students to establish membership" (p. 35) and are attended by students who "typically experience conflicts among their obligations to family, work, and college" (p. 35).

Tinto (1997) later acknowledged that students who commute to college, particularly those who have numerous external obligations, do not have the opportunities for social integration that students in residential colleges are given. In their discussion of the campus environment, Braxton et al. (2014) observed that commuter students typically spend their time on campus hurrying to attend classes and engage in activities necessary to meeting degree requirements, and the authors observed that students typically then leave campus in a hurry to meet personal or work obligations off campus, limiting the kinds of social involvement for students at these institutions. According to Braxton et al.

(2014), "These forms of comings and goings create a 'buzzing confusion'" (p. 113) that students must learn to adjust to if they are to make progress toward completion. The buzzing confusion contributes to commuter students' need "to believe that attending college will result in academic success and graduation" (p. 114). Further, the authors asserted that "the lack of well-defined and ill-structure student social communities poses difficulties to students with a need for social affiliation" (p. 115).

Understanding the factors that influence both attrition and persistence among community college students can help policymakers to better serve those students. Goldrick-Rab (2007) concluded her literature review of studies related to commuter study persistence that students' "family backgrounds, prior education experiences, and educational expectations" [often fail] to "intersect with colleges' institutional structures, practices, and policies" (p. 1). Attrition can be related to factors such as poor academic progress or financial problems, but research has also suggested that attrition can also stem from "a poor academic self-concept, a lack of motivation, and minimal social integration and adjustment" (Hoffman, 2014, p. 13). Students have also shown that students are more committed to an institution that appears to be true to its goals and mission and displays concern for the students' welfare (Braxton et al, 2014; Kuh et al., 2005).

Policymakers, college administrators, faculty developers, student affairs personnel, and a variety of other stakeholders can better serve commuter students when they are informed by empirical studies that are focused upon those who work regularly with commuter students in community colleges. By first understanding the challenges traditionally faced by the community college commuter student and the becoming informed about successful approaches to meeting the unique needs of community college

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students, stakeholders have a much stronger chance to have a positive impact on student persistence toward a credential.

The Community College Student Departure Puzzle: No Single Solution

"College student departure poses a puzzle to college and university administrators" (Braxton and Mundy, 2001, p. 91), a complex and ill-structured puzzle that requires numerous solutions that complement one another and meet a variety of student needs rather than a single solution that strives to meet every need of every student. Various theoretical perspectives can help scholars to understand the problem of student attrition, perspectives that consider the impact of a variety of forces at work in students' educational experiences. In Pascarella and Terenzini's (1991) synthesis of a body of research related to college outcomes, the authors concluded that a singular, institution-wide solution is considerably less effective than a combination of endeavors across many influential, diverse sub-environments in impacting student persistence.

Braxton and Mundy (2001) classified 47 different recommendations provided by several articles included in a special issue of the *Journal of College Student Retention*. Categorizing the recommendations into three specific areas based upon Tinto's (1993) highly influential book *Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition (2nd ed.)*, Braxton and Mundy echoed Tinto's finding that "principles of effective retention must also guide institutional practices designed to reduce student rates of departure" (p. 94). The authors found that 44 of the 47 recommendations embraced at least one of Tinto's three principles, and Braxton and Mundy argued that such recommendations "hold substantial promise for reducing institutional rates of student departure" (p. 103) based upon the fact that each of the recommendations has empirical

support, and all but three of the recommendations can be classified as embodying one or more of Tinto's three principles.

According to Tinto (1993), the first principle of effective retention is a consistent and ongoing institutional commitment to student welfare that is demonstrated by the entire college community. In other words, students in this environment clearly understand that the institution is student-centered. The second principal of effective retention is a clear commitment on the part of the institution to the quality education of all students. Finally, social and academic integration into the campus community is the third principle of effective retention. According to this principle, institutions strive to help students to build strong bonds between themselves, their peers, the faculty, and the staff of the institution.

At the heart of these institutional levers described and categorized by Braxton and Mundy (2001), though, is the importance of the people within institutions. Without people willing to help these levers to function effectively, the policies and programs outlined by Braxton and Mundy cannot serve as powerful levers that positively influence student persistence. Two groups that have a substantial influence on retention of students are faculty and peers, making it imperative that studies be conducted that seek to understand more deeply the individuals who serve in these roles.

Mattering and Validation as a Framework for Understanding the Roles and the Value of Human Levers

Two theories that provide at theoretical framework for understanding student departure and Rendon's (1994) Validation Theory and Schlossberg's (1989) mattering theory. Both theories serve to explain the way in which both faculty-student interactions

and student-student interactions help students to successfully make the transition to college and persist toward the completion of a credential. Though both theories are most often connected with faculty-student interactions, the theories can also be applied to the understanding of the role of interactions between students and their peers.

Rendon (1994) discussed both in and out of class interactions that can help to validate students and contribute to supporting academic and social integration into the institution. Validation occurs when someone actively reaches out to support students in their academic endeavors and affirms their ability to be successful, powerful learners. Rendon's (1994) theory of validation provides insight into the importance of student-faculty interactions. For example, today's diverse student body is more likely to feel alienated by traditional college culture in which competition and passive learning are the common practice. Rendon's data from interviews collected from diverse community college students found that faculty who fostered academic validation in interactions with students both in and out of class helped students to "trust their innate capacity to learn and to acquire confidence in being a college student" (p. 40).

Rendon's (1994) study indicated that students were transformed by "incidents where some individual, either in-or out-of-class, took an active interest in them—when someone took the initiative to lend a helping hand, to do something that affirmed them as being capable of doing academic work and that supported them in their academic efforts and social adjustment" (p. 44). In Rendon's keynote address to the American River Community College (1994), she noted that students, particularly non-traditional and culturally diverse students, will be more likely to persist if faculty members help students to develop positive attitudes about their capacity to learn, actively support students in

their academic endeavors, and affirm their ability to be successful, powerful learners. Further, she urged that this validation must occur in a student's critical first semester.

Validation may actually be more important than academic and social integration (Barnett, 2011). Barnett's study of community college students suggested that "higher levels of faculty validation modestly predicted increases in students' intent to persist, with three sub-constructs of validation (caring instruction, students feeling known and valued, and students being mentored by faculty members) showing significant impact on students' intent to persist.

Similar to Rendon's validation theory is the concept of mattering, originally introduced by Morris Rosenberg in 1981, which is "defined as the perception that, to some degree and in any variety of ways, we are a significant part of the world around us" (Elliott and Kao, 2004, p. 339). Schlossberg's (1989) theory of college students' mattering and marginality proposed that when adult students feel that they matter, they are more likely to be more engaged in their learning (Shelly, 2014). Schlossberg et al. (1991) argued that, for many adult learners, the feeling of mattering, "may be the single element that makes the difference in their completing their degrees and developing a feeling of satisfaction and a sense of belonging" (p. 201). Mattering has four components—attention, importance, ego-extension, and dependence; and reflexive practitioners within institutions can encourage students' feelings of mattering by considering each of these elements (Schlossberg, 1991).

Becoming a college student marks a role change or transition for an individual, and these sorts of changes pose a risk for a person to feel marginalized (Schlossberg, 1991). Applying the concept of mattering to higher education, Schlossberg suggested

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that commuter students have been made to feel marginalized by the institutions, which is the opposite of mattering. Further, she contended that in a period of transition, feeling marginalized puts students at risk of attrition. As Schlossberg (1989) explained, often commuter students themselves as well as college personnel can view students' transition to higher education as a "non-event," it is important to understand the challenges that occur during transitional periods. Further, many students enroll in community college due to other transitions in their lives such as changes in employment or divorces. She explained that commuter students often do not feel control over their lives or a sense of confidence in their ability to meet standards set by professors.

Students need to feel that others have noticed them and are interested in them, that others care about what happens to them, that other people are proud of their successes and concerned about their failures, that they are needed by others, and that others notice their efforts (Shelly, 2014). According to Shelly (2014), "Knowing that we matter helps us to persist through our discomfort when we change roles or when we move from a familiar and safe environment to a new and challenging one" (p. 3).

Faculty as Levers of Retention

Without faculty who are willing to participate in and then actively use training in areas such as active learning, collaborative learning, or knowledge of campus resources; these levers cannot function to support retention of students. Institutions depend upon faculty who are committed to supporting a student-centered environment that demonstrates to students that the institution is committed to their welfare and their learning. Further, if faculty are not willing to build supportive, strong relationships with students, then meeting the needs of a diverse student population, particularly in the

community college sector, is difficulty if not impossible. Pascarella and Terenzini's

(1991) asserted, "There can be little doubt about the need for faculty members'

acceptance of their roles and responsibilities for student learning and for their active

involvement in students' lives" (p. 655).

Teachers "are at the heart of the community college mission and serve the

learning needs of their communities in essential and unique ways" (Miller, 1997, p. 83).

However, theories of student persistence often ignore the impact of the classroom or at

least "have not seen it as the centerpiece of their efforts to promote student persistence,

preferring instead to locate those efforts outside the classroom in the domain of student

affairs" (Tinto, 1997, p. 599—600).

Barnett (2010) echoed Tinto's observation that little research has focused

specifically on retention in the community college, particularly as it relates to the

classroom experience. According to Barnett, commuters are typically present on campus

only during class meetings, and "the only college representatives with whom they

regularly interact are faculty members" (p. 194). McArthur (2010) noted that, for

commuter students, "The faculty members represent the authority figure, the mentor, and

the role model that may not appear anywhere else in the student's life" (p. 2), and

besides peers, are the most important factor in a student's development.

Kuh et al. (2005) discussed Chickering and Gamson's (1987) "Seven Principles

of Good Practice in Undergraduate Education," pointing out that along with active

learning and good teaching practice, other indicators include cooperation among students,

"prompt feedback, time on task, high expectations, and respect for diverse talents and

ways of learning" (p. 8). According to Kuh et al. (2005), these conditions correlate with

student satisfaction and persistence, and, thus, "educationally effective colleges and universities—those that add value—channel students' energies toward appropriate activities and engage them at a high level in these activities" (p. 9). A longitudinal study of 19 institutions and found that "overall exposure to organized and clear classroom instruction during the first year of college has a net positive influence on the probability of reenrolling at an institution for the second year of college" (Pascarella et al, 2011, p. 16).

According to the Braxton, Milem, and Sullivan (2000), comparing students who experience active learning to the students who do not participate in classes in which active learning is a component, those "who infrequently experience active learning in their courses may become socially isolated in order to improve their academic performance in their courses" (p. 572). Students experience disengagement and dissatisfaction when they find no meaning an relevance in their learning experiences (Roberts and Styron, 2010, p. 5).

Braxton et al. (2014) described the importance of faculty-student contact to help support student persistence. The authors suggested that all first-year students should have access to full-time, tenure- track faculty. Both in and out of classroom interactions with such faculty can significantly influence student persistence (Baker and Griffin, 2010). Therefore, faculty approachability is vital to student persistence. Komarraju, Musulkin, and Bhattacharya (2010) argued, "Student-faculty interactions can be crucial in developing students' academic self-concept and enhancing their motivation and achievement" (p. 332). The authors suggested that institutions that promote quality student-faculty interactions reap a variety of benefits from the practice because students

have a fundamental human need to belong and to feel cared for. Fuentes et al. (2013) suggested that faculty should initiate early and regular contact with students, particularly those who are *not* necessarily considered "rising stars," because these students are typically less likely to seek out interactions with faculty.

According to Komarraju, Musulkin, and Bhattacharya (2010), student-faculty interactions have a "multidimensional influence on the cognitive and emotional needs of students" (p. 334), including promoting high academic self-confidence, competence in the academic field, communication skills, and general problem solving ability. The authors described various aspects of positive student-faculty interactions, including respect, guidance, approachability, concern, connectedness, accessibility, and interactions outside of class. Hoffman (2014) described the qualities of an approachable faculty member, explaining, "Professors who are perceived as approachable and caring make themselves available for conversations outside of their academic role, focus on life lessons, and are more willing to answer questions" (p. 14). Shelton (2001) reported that the outcomes of positive faculty-student interactions include "professional socialization, self-actualization, self-fulfillment, improved self-concept, and enhanced motivation for learning" (p. 70). According to Shelton (2001), students describe a variety of faculty behaviors as supportive and helpful, including

> helping them gain a sense of competency and self-worth […], being approachable, encouraging students, demonstrating interest in students, having realistic expectations, listening, conveying confidence in and respect for students, being nonjudgmental, being honest and direct, being open to different points of view, and wanting students to succeed. (p. 71).

There is no substitute for human contact between faculty and students, and faculty members must make interactions with students a priority (Kinzie 2005). Additionally, interactions with students assist faculty members in better knowing and understanding their students so that they can more effectively connect course content with students' prior knowledge, talents, and experiences (Kinzie, 2005). Hoffman (2014) pointed out that, when faculty fail to build respectful and caring relationships with students, students sense that faculty members have given up on them, which "often results in diminished self-esteem, disengagement from classroom activity, and possible failure to complete the course" (p. 14).

In reflecting upon the body of research describing the impact faculty members have upon student persistence, it becomes apparent that research should be conducted that is focused upon studying the faculty members as potential levers of retention. If institutions seek to leverage the power of faculty members as a resources that positively impact the retention of students, then it will be important to know more about the background traits, values, professional development experiences, classroom behaviors, educational philosophies, and strategies for working with students of faculty members who are successful at this task. This information can then inform hiring processes, orientation and training of faculty, and the evaluation criteria for community college faculty.

Peer Mentors as Human Levers of Retention

Tinto's (1993) model of student retention hinges on the importance of social integration, notably that there is a direct relation between the interaction with a peer and the likelihood of success and retention of a student. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991)

discussed the power of peers to positively influence student persistence, citing that interacting with peers "enhances one's social integration and interpersonal bonds with the institution," (p. 390) when serves to intensify a student's "commitment and likelihood of persisting at the institution and completing one's degree" (p. 390). The authors explain that interactions with peers expose students to supportive social networks that influence students' educational aspirations as well as provide students with knowledge of personal and educational resources.

One of the levers that many community colleges have chosen in order to address the need to support student completion is the development and implementation of peer mentoring programs. Pairing new students with more experience peers can "help ease their transition and show them a way to persist when the path gets tough" (Pasket et al, 2018, p. 48). And as the literature on community college students indicates, the path is often fairly tough from the very beginning of their college journey. The authors explained that first-generation college students, which Nomi (2005) reported make up nearly half of the nation's community college student bodies, are often left to try to figure things out on their own when it comes to postsecondary education, and this approach does not always end well.

First generation college students, in particular, often have little or no guidance and "cannot rely on family members' insider knowledge of higher education to guide them on the path to college" (Paskett et al, 2018, p. 47). Rivera et al. (2013) presented study results that demonstrated lower academic performance among first generation students when compared to their non-first generation peers. The authors also discussed a correlation between first generation students and limited financial literacy, which can

lead to additional stress and hardship. Additionally, their review of literature led them to conclude that first generation students tend to work more hours per week than their peers and often report a lack of family support of their educational plans and goals. Finally, Rivera et al. (2013) explained that first generation students can struggle to integrate socially with peers on campus and make connections with faculty members and "may experience feelings of confusion, isolation, and shame at being a FGS and may not feel comfortable transitioning to and engaging with their new community" (p. 16), possibly contributing to a student's poor sense of belonging, feelings of loneliness, mental health problems, and inability to make the transition to college student, which can ultimately lead to attrition.

Bonin (2013) defined a peer mentor as a "guide who helps first year students navigate through academic, social, and personal difficulties" with the goal of transitioning a mentee from high school into college by "decreasing stress through informal, caring relationships" ("Effect […]").   Bonin reported that the studies she reviewed suggested several outcomes for mentees in peer mentoring relationships: improved socialization and learning experiences for mentees, enhanced academic skills, more effective time management, improved communication skills and problem-solving skills, and increased self-efficacy. Paskett et al. (2018) determined that peer mentoring has the potential to produce numerous benefits for new college students: improved financial literacy, better informed ability to select courses and academic programs, increased involvement in campus organizations and activities, improved study skills, and improved self-confidence.

Paskett, et al. (2018), who studied an undergraduate peer mentoring program at the University of Pennsylvania, pointed out that high schools, colleges, and universities often have limited human resources to meet the array of needs and address the variety of problems and concerns of first-year students. They observed that students, particularly first-generation college students, often must adopt a "learn as you go" approach to getting started in college because they do not have adequate family modeling. However, the authors suggest, "Trial and error is hardly a recipe for sustained success, especially when students confront challenges that they don't know how to manage. If anything, this persistent state of insecurity can lead to imposter syndrome (i.e., feeling fraudulent, inadequate, and incompetent among peers)" (p. 48).

Lessons from Faculty and Peer Mentors Identified as Potential Levers of Retention

The Study

During the 2017-2018 academic year, we conducted an explorative qualitative study with the goal of examining, from the perspective of faculty and peer mentors, ways in which community colleges might positively impact student persistence by leveraging their existing resources, namely their faculty and students themselves. By conducting companion studies at two institutions of the ways in which peer mentors and faculty members conceive of their roles within those institutions, we hoped to determine what traits, behaviors, attitudes, and skills held by these campus players could potentially positively influence retention. Our goal was to discover common themes and

characteristics among those faculty members and peer mentors in order to better understand the knowledge, skills, preparation, and behavior of a human lever of retention.

Glesne (2006) explained that qualitative research seeks "to make sense of personal narratives and the ways in which they intersect" (p. 1). Qualitative methods, particularly interviewing, allows researchers "to acquire a rich understanding of other people's lives and experiences" (Rubin and Rubin, 1995, p. vii). According to Glesne (2006), "Qualitative research methods are used to understand social phenomena from the perspectives of those involved, to contextualize issues in their particular socio-cultural-political milieu, and sometimes to transform or change social conditions" (p. 4).

Qualitative methods allow researchers to explore and make sense of "the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (Creswell, 2014, p. 4). The assumption in this study, then, is that the peer mentors and faculty members who have been identified as being the human levers of retention would provide the best insight into the phenomenon of actually being one of those individuals. They are the best sources of data to explain their backgrounds, their experiences, their philosophies, their challenges, and their approaches to their work.

Interviews were conducted during the spring 2018 semester at both sites of the study. The first set of interviews—focused on participants' backgrounds, duties, and careers—were conducted from late January through the end of February. The second set of interviews, which asked participants to share more about their personal philosophy as it relates to their work as well as their specific experiences and approaches when working with students, took place in late March and early April. The final interviews were group interviews in which all faculty participants met with both researchers in one meeting.

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Then all peer mentor participants met as a group with both researchers in the same meeting. These meetings took place in May after final exam week was over.

It is difficult to determine whether or not the timeline of the study had an effect on the participants and/or the data. Each part of a semester offers its own specific challenges and opportunities. For example, in the first part of the semester when the first interviews took place, faculty and peer mentors were just getting used to new students and new routines. They had recently emerged from three weeks to a month of time off from classes. The second interviews, however, took place after midterm for all faculty and peer mentors, giving them a bit more perspective in regard to that particular semester. At that time in the semester, typically, there is a sense that the honeymoon is over, meaning that both faculty and peer mentors had already encountered a number of situations in which students were struggling or leaving classes. However, at that point in the semester, the participants had been given the time to build relationships with their students and encourage them to continue toward course completion. Finally, the group meetings had quite a celebratory yet reflective tone. Both faculty and peer mentors seemed demonstrably relieved to have completed the spring semester, and both groups expressed both a need for a break as well as a sense of excitement for upcoming semesters and endeavors. In fact, the final interview could be likened to a gathering on New Year's Eve, during which people reminisce about the year that has passed and also set goals and look forward to what the next year will bring.

The following questions guided the research:

A. In what ways do those identified as human levers of retention intentionally seek to positively influence retention and student success?

B. What common background characteristics, behaviors, motivations, strengths, priorities, attitudes, and approaches to working with students are shared by those identified as human levers of retention? In what ways do they feel they are distinguished from their colleagues in this area?

Site and Participant Selection: Peer Mentors

We selected Southcentral Kentucky Community and Technical College (SKYCTC) as the site for the peer mentor study because the college has an established peer mentoring program and has collected several semesters' worth of student retention data that indicate that the program may correlate with some of the gains in student persistence semester-to-semester. Since developing and implementing the peer mentoring program, retention of first-semester students at SKYCTC has increased up to 15% when compared to the retention rate prior to the program.

The Student Ambassador Program SKYCTC is the first of its kind in KCTCS. Student Ambassadors at SKYCTC have completed at least 12 credit hours at SKYCTC, maintained at least a 3.0 GPA, and have obtained a letter of recommendation from a faculty member in order to be considered for employment as a peer mentor. Student Ambassadors are paid $10 per hour for 15 hours per week to serve as peer mentors for incoming students to the college. They are provided with 30 hours of training focused upon how to be a successful peer mentor and what their role in retention and student success will consist of. All 43 current and former Student Ambassadors as of August 2017 were invited to participate in the research study. Each of the peer mentors was provided with a list of criteria describing effective mentoring behaviors and practices that

we generated based upon an extensive review of literature. Potential participants then were asked to self-select for participation if they felt that these criteria accurately described them as peer mentors.

<center>Site and Participant Selection: Faculty</center>

The faculty population for this study consisted of general education faculty at West Kentucky Community and Technical College (WKCTC). The faculty at this institution have been recognized by the Aspen Institute four times between 2011 and 2017 for their role in promoting student success as demonstrated by graduation rates, transfer rates, and student learning outcomes data. Participation was limited to general education faculty members because students earning any associate's degree must complete several general education courses in order to complete their academic programs, and institutional data suggests that these courses typically possess higher rates of attrition than do courses in career and technical education programs (such as welding, collision repair, and industrial maintenance) and particularly selective admission programs (such as nursing, dental assisting, or physical therapy assistant). We made the decision to focus on faculty who teach in courses typically considered "gate keeper" courses that are required by many transfer, technical, or selective admission programs.

Participants in the faculty study were recruited based recommendations from several parties representing a variety of constituencies on campus. Those constituencies were selected based upon their knowledge of and experience with the general education faculty either through supervision, collaboration, evaluation, or reputation. The following parties provided recommendations: Vice President of Academic Affairs, Vice President of Student Development, Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs,

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Director of TRiO (Student Support Services), Chair of the Faculty Council, Dean of Humanities/Fine Arts/Social Sciences, Director of the School of Art, Dean of Mathematics and Science, and Dean of Distance Learning. Those asked to recommend were given an instrument we developed based on an analysis and synthesis of the literature focused upon the role of faculty with regard to student retention. They were instructed that they could recommend up to ten potential participants. We determined after receiving recommendations from all ten of those invited to submit recommendations that we would invite faculty members to participate if they were recommended by seven or more of the individuals. Based upon this requirement, nine faculty members were identified and invited to participate; all accepted the invitation and completed each stage of the study: two individual interviews and one group interview with all faculty participants and both researchers.

<center>Data Collection and Analysis</center>

Two individual interviews were conducted with each of the participants on each campus with the first interview focused upon background characteristics such as educational pathways, educational experiences, and professional aspirations; and the second round focused on participants' specific approaches to and strategies for working with community college students. Participants were also questioned about the ways in which they conceived of their role as faculty members or peer mentors as well as the benefits and challenges associated with working in a community college setting. Kim Russell conducted all individual interviews with faculty members, and Kyle Barron conducted all individual interviews with peer mentors. Audio from the interviews was recorded and then transcribed using an electronic transcription service. The researchers

then compared the original recordings with written transcripts to ensure accuracy, and transcripts were then corrected if errors were discovered.

Following each interview, the researchers composed a short memo to record initial impressions and a brief, overall summary of each interview, and a physical file for each participant held individual transcripts for each interview. In addition, transcripts and summaries were electronically shared between the researchers. Independently, we reviewed each transcript and generated initial open codes based upon criteria such as repetition by individuals or repetition between individual interviews, relationship to retention literature reviewed by researchers, and connections to Mattering theory and Validation theory. We worked collaboratively to "debrief" each other's experiences and first impressions of the interviews and to unpack each iteration of our analysis.

By viewing faculty and peer mentors' work with community college students through the lens of Validation and Mattering Theories, we were able to interpret the information shared by the participants in the study by considering the ways in which the participants seek to influence student success by demonstrating to students that they can indeed be successful and that they matter to at least one person in the academic environment. Validation and Mattering theories, thus, provided a common context for interpreting the behaviors, approaches, attitudes, and strategies reported by the study participants; and we are able to conclude that, in some way, each of the participants in the study strives to contribute to students' sense of Validation and Mattering, whether or not the participants intentionally and explicitly seek to communicate those feelings to the students with whom they work.

Once we open coded each transcript and then reviewed, we met to make connections between the open codes, and those open codes considered both valid and important by both researchers were aggregated, creating axial codes that were more thematic in nature. For example, codes such as "assisting students with financial aid questions," "taking students to an office that can help them," "letting students know about counseling on campus," and "helping students learn to navigate the college website" were all combined (with other related open codes) to generate the axial code "connecting students to college resources." The axial codes were then used to again code each transcript, and interviewers worked together to generate a document in which emergent themes were described. This document then served as the basis for discussion that took place in group meetings.

All participants were invited to participate in a group meeting/interview—one for faculty participants and one for peer mentors— attended by both researchers in order to discuss and review the document describing the emergent themes, which allowed for member checking of that data and coding of that data to take place. Participants in both meetings were asked to provide any additional information or suggest revisions or clarifications to the initial findings. In both sessions, participants provided further examples related to the findings that were shared. Both group interviews lasted approximately two hours, with participants in both meetings supporting the findings that were shared with them, which helped researchers to feel more confident about their findings.

Role of Researchers

As each of us is an employee of the college we selected as the sites for our studies, it was important to the integrity of our work that we examined our roles within the institutions and our reasons for the selection of the two sites. Though we acknowledge that convenience played a role in our site selection process, we argue that the two sites we selected met our selection criteria in that both institutions offered subjects—faculty in one case and students in the other—who were part of a group that had demonstrated effectiveness. Because we wanted to learn about the people who represented a "best case" type of scenario, these two sites met our needs.

It is essential for us to have an understanding of the ways in which our positions and roles impact a number of aspects of our study. Knowing ourselves and acknowledging the factors that influence our own biases and expectations have allowed us to more clearly and objectively interpret our data and make meaning from it. For the sake of our audience, it was important that to make a genuine effort to describe our backgrounds and roles so that readers can further contextualize the information we share and hopefully develop enhanced confidence in the validity and trustworthiness of our work.

Kim Russell is a faculty member at West Kentucky Community and Technical College (WKCTC) who has taught college-level English full-time for 13 years and served as the English Program Coordinator for 10 years. A third-generation community college graduate, she began planning to teach English on the community college level during her junior year in high school. In 2014 she became the chair of Professional and Organizational Development at WKCTC, and in that capacity she became the leader of the team of faculty who are responsible for the New Faculty Orientation program at

WKCTC. She also coordinates all campus professional development activities and programs for both faculty and staff. She is passionate about teaching, faculty development, and the power of community colleges to make a difference to the lives of individuals as well as to communities and the nation as a whole.

Kyle Barron, who served at the time of the study as the Director of Student Life and Engagement at SKYCTC is also a community college graduate who has a passion for the community college as an institution. Kyle worked in student affairs at a Texas Community College for several years before moving to Kentucky to accept his position at SKYCTC. He helped to develop, organize, and supervise a peer mentoring program at the Texas community college; and he was asked to develop a similar program when he came to SKYCTC. He spent over four years handling all aspects of the Student Ambassador Program at SKYCTC, including structuring, budgeting, hiring, training, assessing, recruiting, and marketing. Kyle's passion for student development and student affairs have determined his career path, and he believes that by developing and maintaining collaborations between academic affairs and student affairs, institutions can serve their students most effectively.

As we embarked our research project, there were several ethical questions and other issues to consider, and perhaps the most important one is to be able to understand ourselves as researchers. We needed to consider how our own experiences and beliefs shape the way we perceive what we saw and heard. In addition, we needed to accept that our positions at our respective institutions could have some impact on the information that our participants chose to share with us. Also, because we conducted "backyard" research, we needed to be careful not to let any preconceived notions about these human

subjects affect our data collection and ability to listen and observe carefully. Both in the interviews and in the reporting of data, it was important not to project ourselves on the participants. By both researchers independently coding all data sets and then comparing codes and findings, we feel that we were able to have a perspective on the data that was not influenced by either personal relationships with the participants or prior knowledge of the participants.

We also realized that it would be important to assure participants that the information they shared would not be specifically linked to them, and their identities would be protected. Discussing the need for our participants to be both candid and honest, we discussed specific ways we could encourage participants to feel comfortable being "real" with us. With that in mind, we determined that our demeanor in the interviews needed to be relatively informal. We would also be very mindful of ever appearing judgmental or disdainful if participants shared information we did not necessarily agree with or enjoy. In fact, we discussed the need to share our own weaknesses and challenges with participants in order to encourage them to share freely. Though we can never truly know if our positions within these institutions impacted the way in which participants shared information with us, we can say that we intentionally developed interview strategies that would encourage participants to be themselves and to know that what they shared would not be linked to them.

We feel that the information participants shared during their interviews indicates that participants were comfortable being both candid and open with the researchers. Participants often shared details about their pasts, particularly related to past academic failures or poor decision making in their personal lives, which demonstrated their trust in

the researchers. Further, we believe that by providing participants with a detailed background of the study and its purposes, we were able to communicate to participants the value of the study. Perhaps because all of the participants have demonstrated through their work that student success is important to their work, the participants understood the need for the data to be reliable and accurate.

Several procedures and practices were structured to allow us to maintain the ethical integrity of the study. First, we allowed other parties to identify the participants within the parameters of the research design. Also, the criteria used to identify the participants was based upon a review of literature completed by both researchers and could, therefore, be used to identify participants in any community college, not just the two with which we are affiliated. Working as a team we provided support and an internal "audit" for one another's subjectivity. Finally, by involving participants in activities designed to serve as "member checking," we further ensured our data was accurately represented and communicated.

It is unrealistic to expect that researchers come to a project with a completely blank slate. It is also undesirable that a researcher is a completely blank slate, as his or her previous experiences and knowledge about the topic can serve to enrich the researcher's understanding of the data. However, what is essential is that researchers acknowledge these factors to themselves as well as to their audiences and subjects, and ethical researchers demonstrate how their ethics helped to shape the design process in order for the work to meet the standards of quality research.

Findings

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After analyzing our coded data using Matter and Validation Theories as our lens for contextualizing the information we collected from our participants, we discovered four common themes that emerged from our conversations with faculty members and peer mentors:

1. Both faculty members and peer mentors shared a sense of responsibility that drove them to want to help others and a sense of satisfaction from feeling that their help made a difference in the lives of another person.

2. Both faculty members and peer mentors were committed to approaching their duties in professional ways, perhaps motivated to maintain their professional standards by a desire to help others most effectively.

3. Every participant in the study understood the importance of building positive working relationships with students, though not all participants used the same strategies for building such relationships, and the relationships built most likely varied depending upon the faculty member's or peer mentor's attitudes and personal characteristics. However, all participants expressed the importance of specific attributes in a good relationship with one's students or mentees: trust, respect, understanding, and concern.

4. A belief in the importance of and a commitment to being informed regarding campus (and, in some cases, community) resources that could benefit students and assist them in meeting the needs that could potentially impact their academic persistence as well as a desire and effort to connect

students with such resources was a final characteristic shared by both faculty members and peer mentors in the study.

Theme One: A Sense of Responsibility to Help Others

Perhaps the most foundational characteristic we discovered among the participants was sense of personal responsibility to help others. The participants as a whole shared that they care about helping others to achieve their goals and, as a result, improve their quality of life. Each one felt he or she could play a role in providing the support or assistance that could help rather than hinder students on their academic journey. Though there were differences among the participants in the ways in which they approached their goal of helping students, all of the participants communicated a sense of personal responsibility for helping students, a desire for being a positive force in their academic lives, and a sense of professional and sometimes personal satisfaction resulting from helping others.

In the interviews with the faculty members, each of the participants pointed out specific ways in which they dedicated their efforts to help students be successful, whether through providing support in the specific academic discipline they teach or assisting students in other aspects related to their academic performance. Faculty members who teach courses that are considered particularly challenging or high stakes for students, in particular, demonstrated their passion for helping students by providing examples of how they aid students in successfully mastering course content and completing course requirements.

For example, Tasha, who primarily teaches anatomy and physiology—an established gatekeeper course that serves as the primary prerequisite course for acceptance into competitive selective admission allied health and nursing programs—shared that she sees her role as "the person who stands between students and their goal acceptance into a program that will allow them to earn a wage that will improve quality of life." Tasha acknowledged that people consider her course a "weed out" course that is extremely challenging for most students, requiring a significant time commitment on the part of the students, many of whom juggle a number of life roles and external responsibilities. Therefore, with the goal of helping these students to learn the content and earn the grades they need to earn in order to be admitted into selective admission programs, Tasha takes a number of steps. She has invested a great deal of her time in learning to use various software programs that she integrates in her courses that provide students with extra support in learning the material. She also dedicates several hours each week meeting with students in small, non-required study groups in which she reviews course materials and provides assistance with study skills. Tasha also dedicates time outside of class meetings and office hours to creating practice examinations for both the lecture and lab components of the classroom, explaining that she sets up the exams and invites students to participate in the practice examinations in order to be better prepared for the format and content of the exams and to reduce students' test anxiety, a problem that she has observed among many of her students.

Similar to Tasha, Jake also teaches a course which typically has a pass rate below 70% and serves as an intimidating gatekeeper course for students: college algebra. This course, which is required for many transfer students as well as students working toward

admission in many selective admission technical programs, is often "feared and dreaded" by students, according to Jake. Like Tasha, Jake's passion for helping students be successful in his course is demonstrated in a variety of ways. First, Jake focuses a great deal of his effort on issues related to math curriculum, serving as chair of the Kentucky Community and Technical College System's Math Curriculum Committee. He explained, "My job is to make sure that none of our decisions hurt students." With this goal in mind, Jake has been the principal force in developing a system of "math pathways" that will more specifically prepare students for their intended discipline, rather than requiring them to struggle through courses that they might not actually need for their majors. In spite of the time that this project entailed, Jake reported that he felt a deep sense of responsibility to current and future students, observing, "These math pathways may be the single biggest thing I'll do in my career to help students be successful. I can't think of anything else I could ever do that has a better chance to positively impact more lives."

In his own classes, Jake also strives to help students successfully learn the content and complete the course requirements. He explained that perhaps one of the most important ways in which he helps students is by understanding the typical challenges faced by community college students, challenges which may impact their attendance in this classes, and then developing his course policies and procedures based upon this understanding. Therefore, he posts all lecture notes, handouts, and practice assignments or quizzes on his class's Blackboard page so that students always have access to any material they may have missed in class. Additionally, he understands that many of his students have had negative experiences in math classes before coming to his class, and

many have a fear of math class and a sense of dread about having to take the course. "From the first day of class I try to disarm them and let them know that I am there to help them to succeed. I tell them that I believe they can all do the work, and I remind them throughout the semester that I am available when they want help. They can call me, email me, or come to my office; I'll drop whatever I'm doing to work with them," Jake explained.

Though all faculty members in the study indicated ways in which they work to help students be successful in mastering the content taught in their classes, several faculty members also shared ways in which the seek to help students in other areas. Karen, a foreign language teacher and sponsor of the college's Multi-Cultural Club, sees herself as a mentor for the college's Hispanic and international student populations. She explained that she works to help these students feel more comfortable with and integrated into both the social and academic aspects of college life. Karen shared that she provides to students (Hispanic students in particular) opportunities where they can speak their native language, share stories of home, talk about homesickness, and meet other students with whom they can form common bonds. Speaking about her approach to helping students, both in and out of her classroom, Karen noted, "My strength on this campus is about much more than my discipline. I've always felt I can offer a listening ear and maybe some perspective for them that can help them on their journey."

Like Karen, Eliza is also passionate about helping students to have a successful academic journey. As the coordinator of the college's First Year Experience (FYE) program and the lead teacher for the FYE 105 course required of all transfer students, Eliza believes that she can help students in meaningful ways that can impact their overall

success as students. From helping students to build peer networks in the courses she teaches to working very closely with all of her students to provide each one with individualized academic advising, Eliza shared that she feels a deep sense of both professional and personal satisfaction when she is able to make a difference in the lives of her students. While she is passionate about helping students to determine their career pathways, she is equally passionate about sharing other knowledge and skills with her students that will help them to be successful both in her classroom and outside of it. She discussed how she requires students to engage in individual conferences with her because she wants to help them develop their ability to communicate with faculty members, and she hopes to build their confidence in their ability to engage with faculty and other authority figures.

<div align="center">Professionalism</div>

The sense of personal and professional responsibility that the faculty and peer mentors described is possibly one of the main driving forces in a set of behaviors and attitudes that we characterized as "professionalism". Each of the faculty members and peer mentors in the study described a commitment to what we defined as "professionalism," a term which served as an umbrella for numerous behaviors, practices, and attitudes described by participants. That "professionalism" took many forms, both among faculty participants and peer mentor participants, but the common thread woven throughout the profiles of each person in the study was that each one took very seriously his or her job in working with students. Each one shared a belief that he or she could play an important role in helping another person succeed at college, and therefore, approached his or her job in what would be considered a professional way.

For faculty members, professionalism manifested itself in a number of ways. For Laura, for example, professionalism is what drives her every action and decision as a faculty member. It is her sense of professional responsibility that drives her to continually "re-tool" as a teacher, attending discipline-related and teaching-focused conferences each year. She also spoke of the professional image she seeks to cultivate, never socializing with students or engaging with them on social media, for example. Believing that she best serves her students by serving as an example of professionalism, she intentionally dedicates herself to modeling her definition of a professional: a person who continually strives for excellence in her career and takes a great deal of pride in the work that represents her. To Laura, this professionalism means everything from arriving early to class, to carefully proofreading all documents and communications, to "dressing the part," and to learning new skills and content that can keep the class both fresh and timely.

Several faculty members discussed that a key aspect of professionalism for them was the belief that their work speaks for them and, therefore, must be of excellent quality. Adam provided the example of his syllabi for his courses as a way in which the documents he provides to students serving as a reflection of his professionalism. Adding that he believes these documents can encourage his students to trust in his professionalism and dedication to his work, Adam explained that he very carefully reviews and updates his syllabi and continually evaluates the content of his syllabi to ensure that the policies and assignments continue to line up with his teaching philosophy as well as current practices in his discipline. Discussing the potential impact of errors or

outdated information in his syllabus, Adam described his belief that carefully developing documents for students was as important aspect of professionalism for him:

> I see syllabi from colleagues sometimes that have the wrong semester at the top of the document. Or they have the wrong dates in the schedule of assignments and due dates. Sometimes syllabi have a typo or a spelling or grammatical error. My concern when I see these things is that I don't know how we can ask students to give us their very best if we don't truly give them ours. Many of my students are business majors, and we talk often about how we cultivate a professional image. How can they respect that lesson and take it to heart if my work is sloppy? And what message am I sending about how much I value them if they aren't even worth the time it takes to review a document? How could I deduct for such errors in their papers and projects if the written directions I gave them for the project are full of mistakes?

Like Adam, Jake's sense of professionalism is reflected in his approach to delivering high-quality materials to his students. In his case, Jake invests a significant amount of time creating what he feels are the best materials that will enable students to master his content. Jake shared that, after reviewing a number of software and textbook options for his college algebra students, he decided that none of them met his standards, and all were cost prohibitive for his students. He, therefore, decided to build his own program that would allow him to create materials for students and develop a content collection that would meet students' needs and be free of charge to his students. Explaining that upon completing all of the program, he then spent months testing the accuracy and functionality of the program because he considered the program a reflection

of his professionalism, and he did not want students to encounter difficulties or observe errors because he feared that would undermine his image as a professional who takes pride in his work and wants to be his best for his students.

For each of the faculty members of the study, professionalism meant different things. For some, professionalism meant wearing a tie or pantsuit to class each day, while others felt that they were able to demonstrate professionalism wearing jeans or other casual attire to teach their classes. In other cases, professionalism meant a less casual approach to interactions with students and a clear reminder of the distinctions between a student role and a teacher role; however, others were comfortable being on a first-name basis with students and having a snack with students in the school's café. Where all the faculty members agreed, however, is the role professionalism plays in their commitment to do their best work as a faculty member. In other words, whether they chose to attend academic conferences, read professional publications regularly, receive training in educational technologies, or take classes related to their field of study; each of these faculty members articulated that professionalism means continual improvement and growth along with a commitment to lifelong learning. Also, these faculty members expressed that an important aspect of their sense of professionalism is their dedication to student success, which is manifested in a reflective and often recursive approach to structuring curriculum, assessments, or class activities in ways that best serve students.

Similarly, the peer mentors identified professionalism as a key character trait possessed by all who were identified as a successful human lever of retention. In comparison to the faculty members, the peer mentor's take on professionalism looks somewhat different. They did not show up to work in a suit, though they did take pride in

their appearance and their standardized uniform. Peer mentors described a number of behaviors they felt were important for a successful peer mentor to have: being organized, arriving early or on time to job and school related activities, taking responsibility to learn new things in order to be able to better serve clients, presenting oneself in a respectful and pleasant manner, serving as a role model, and projecting a positive image for the institution as well as the peer mentor program.

One peer mentor, Aza, focused on being professional within the classroom. For Aza, his studies were a true reflection to his mentees on how he was as a student and why other students should see him as someone who can help them in their studies.

> I take on the personal responsibility of making sure that I go to class at every opportunity that I can. I don't like to miss classes, and I make sure that I complete any homework or extra credit opportunity that's presented to me. I feel like my responsibility as a student is to put forth my best effort, always, and take as much knowledge from my instructors as possible in the course work that they provide and to strive for good grades.

Aza would go even further in showing his dedication and professionalism, stating on multiple occasions that he chose to engage in further research outside of the provided materials to ensure that he fully understood the course.

Julia noted how she had grown immensely as a professional in the role as a peer mentor. She also noted how it translated into her own personal successes and those of her students as they watched her continue to grow. She shared that the way in which she carried herself and greeted a person had changed substantially. Also, the role as a peer

mentor allowed her to enhance her ability multi-task and still perform at a high level, according to Julia. She learned how to take more seriously her time management skills, even though she stated she had the skills before the job, but still her job as a peer mentor encouraged her to develop them more.

Rachel noted that her professionalism and communication also improved while she was in the roll of a peer mentor. To some extent this is a direct representation of many of the peer mentors having this role as one of their first jobs. However, the attention to the intentional growth in professionalism resulted in her mentees being able to learn more and grow alongside her. Rachel's acknowledgement that she grew substantially in this area while in the role speaks to her dedication to being a professional and focusing on continual learning and growth.

Overall, the peer mentors expressed an acknowledgement for the professionalism that was necessary for the role and developed throughout their experience in being a human lever of retention.

Relationship Building

The relationships students build and maintain in the community college environment can have a significant impact on students' academic experiences and can potentially mean the difference between course and credential completion versus attrition or academic failure. Faculty, as the main source of social and academic interaction for many community college students, can play an essential role in student success by seeking to build relationships with students that will enable students to feel both a sense of validation as well as a sense of mattering to the institution. In addition, relationships

with peer mentors characterized by empathy, respect, and trust have been shown to positively impact student academic success and retention from semester to semester (Plasket et al., 2018).

Often the perception of "building relationships with students," for some faculty members, carries with it the notion that faculty members who "build relationships" do so by getting to know personal details about students, engaging in long sometimes emotional conversations with students, or developing "friendly" rather than "professional" interactions with students. However, what we discovered in this study is that the faculty participants strive to build relationships with students that will encourage student success. And while several of the faculty members in the study do work to make connections with students by learning about who they are as people and spending time engaging in conversations both in and out of class, not all of the faculty members in the study felt either comfortable or interested in taking part in these kinds of interactions with students.

Ultimately, though, the faculty members and peer mentors in the study, regardless of how they individually went about connecting with their students and building relationships with them, found ways to create relationships that were built upon certain common foundational principles that are present in most any functional relationship. The faculty members and peer mentors sought to establish trust from the students and hoped to demonstrate that they care about the welfare of each student. They worked to establish fair, compassionate standards and endeavored to choose words and actions that communicated a sense of respect for students.

Certainly, several of the faculty participants shared their feelings about the importance of building relationships with students, with faculty members such as Adam, Eliza, and Katie expressing that this aspect of their work with students is perhaps the most important thing they do because it allows them to better serve the students with whom they work if they know and are known by their students. Adam explained that by prioritizing relationship building from the first day of class, he is able to connect with students, begin to build their trust in him, and let them know that he is invested in each of them as individual students and as people. He has several different strategies for building relationships with students, including a questionnaire activity that students do on day one that allows him to know more about who they are and what their goals are. This document also encourages students to ask questions about the college, and he addresses each of those questions by the second class meeting. In addition, Adam learns the names of each of his students, sometimes more than 120 students per semester, by the second day of class by taking a photograph of the full classroom on the first day and then matching names to faces and studying the names and faces until he knows each one.

The strategy he considers one of his most effective for connecting with students is a series of required office visits that all of his students must do throughout the semester, with the first visit taking place in the first two weeks of the semester, and the two later visits taking place around midterm and then in the weeks leading up to final exams. Summing up his motivation for dedicating so much time to relationship building, Adam expressed, "Lots of our students are day-to-day or week-to-week, and it doesn't take much for some of them to give up. If they know that there is at least one person at school who believes in them, stands up for them, and cares about them; that might be the

difference between walking out the door and crossing the stage in May."

Similar to Adam, Eliza requires office visits with her students during which she works with students to define their academic and professional goals and then plan for future semesters. As a teacher in the First Year Experience (FYE) courses, Eliza believes she has the opportunity to help her students, particularly those who are undecided in regard to a major, to make sound decisions regarding their academic and career pathways. She also believes that she can use her knowledge of campus and community resources to help students who experience common barriers that can potentially derail their academic pursuits, issues such as financial problems, domestic abuse, unreliable childcare, or mental health problems. Eliza explains, however, that without having a personal connection with a student, she cannot hope to see a need and then work to meet that need.

Anatomy and physiology professor Katie shares Adam and Eliza's philosophy about the importance of making personal connections to students. A high school valedictorian who wanted to drop out after her first semester of college, Katie reported,

> If I had made even one connection with a faculty member or felt like even one of them cared whether I lived or died, I might have been a little more eager to come back. But that's not how it was. Fortunately, my dad, who was a college graduate and a teacher, insisted I go back. Otherwise, I wouldn't be here right now.

Katie, however, believes that many community college students do not have someone at home who will make them go back after a rough semester or even a rough week. She described one of her strategies for communicating to them that she cares for each of

them, explaining her approach to inspiring and motivating students, particularly after the first test in her course, a test that many of the students do not pass. One of her "motivational speeches" involves showing students a video about "Faith, the two-legged dog," demonstrating to students that it is possible to overcome challenges with a bit of courage, persistence, and positivity. "I tell them, 'Look, if a little dog can keep going even when it's really hard, then you definitely can!'"

Katie also sets aside time to meet with students individually and in groups, encouraging the students to form small "study pods" that she meets with several times a semester in order to help them in small-group settings. According to Katie, one of the biggest advantages that community college faculty members have over faculty who teach for larger institutions and often teach very large classes is that, "We can know our students and connect with them so that they know we really do care about them. We can learn who they are and what they want to do with their lives, and we can better meet their needs and communicate with them when we do that," Katie suggested.

Not all of the faculty participants, though, shared the same philosophies of or approaches to relationship building. Three of the nine participants reported that they, unlike many of their colleagues, were not the "touchy-feely" type of faculty member. In fact, two of the faculty participants expressed surprise that they were included in the study because they did not consider themselves "touchy-feely" enough with the students. The question, then, that presents itself is, what does relationship building between faculty and students look like when those relationships do not consist of the "typical" interactions that can come to minds of faculty members when considering this issue?

Laura, a psychology professor, reported that she does not feel comfortable engaging in what she considers "personal" conversations with students, particularly if those conversations are not specifically related to course content. Describing a recent interaction with a pregnant student, Laura noted that she would never feel comfortable asking the student how the pregnancy is going or what the baby's nursery was going to look like. However, she did encourage the student to please communicate with her in order to make plans for an upcoming exam that was scheduled very close to the baby's due date. Laura, who considers "professionalism" her top priority as a faculty member, believes that it is essential to have a clear boundary between students and faculty members, a line that can be crossed when faculty members engage personally with students. What, then, does Laura's relationship look like with her students?

Laura shared that she feels the best way she can serve her students is by teaching them, in the context of her content, useful and transferrable skills that will help them throughout their academic career and will help to prepare them for professional success. Intentionally teaching listening skills, organizational strategies, and lessons about professionalism, Laura hopes to show students that she cares about their futures beyond her class. Providing an example of one of the strategies she uses in her classes, Laura described the way that she teaches her students to use the Cornell notes structure to organize their information and prepare for an exam. When asked why she takes class time for this kind of instruction in study skills, Laura answered, "I just want to give them that extra edge, so that when they go on to a different class or a different institution, they *know* they can succeed. I try to give them lots of opportunities to do different things so that they will believe in themselves and know that they can be successful."

Jake, like Laura, would not describe himself as a "touchy-feely" faculty member. Yet he too engages in behaviors with his students that help to build a relationship that communicates to students that they matter and that they can be successful. Though he readily admits that he does not always know the names of all of his students, and he rarely engages in conversations unrelated to course content with students; Jake uses his strengths as a faculty member to attempt to build a sense of trust and respect with his students. "My hope," Jake articulated, "is that they will always know that they come first with me." To communicate this belief to his students, he described the way in which he makes sure to always be "present" when his student talk to him, always putting aside anything else that he is working on in order to give his full attention to students. He also shared how he feels his class policies communicate to students that he cares about their welfare, understands the challenges some of them face, and will treat them with fairness.

Jake described the anxiety he observes in a large number of his math students, particularly those students in college algebra, which is a dreaded graduation requirement for many students. Though Jake does not know how many pets his students have or even necessarily what their chosen field of student is, he does understand the fear many of them have, and he feels a sense of responsibility to help students have a positive experience in a math class. In an attempt to communicate to students that he cares about their success and understands their fears related to math is through his practice exam policy, Jake creates a practice examination for every test to help reduce students' test anxiety and prepare students to be successful on the exam. Jake spelled out his practice exam approach:

It looks exactly like the real exam that they will take the next class period. It has the same kinds of questions and even the same number of questions they will have on the real test. It lets them know exactly what kinds of material will be covered. The students work through the exam, and then we take a few moments to go over their questions. They are also encouraged to come by my office and ask questions and work through the problems if they need more help. Many of them let me know that this really helps them.

What is clear in all of these examples is that the faculty participants understand that they must connect with their students if they want to be truly effective in their faculty position. Though these faculty members did not explicitly describe their approach to relationship building as a strategy to communicate a sense of mattering and validation to their students, example after example demonstrate that their relationships with students are, in fact, intended to convey those very ideas to students. In addition, while some of the faculty members in the study do indeed fit the description of a "touchy-feely" faculty member who intentionally seeks to get to know students and work closely with each one; others in the study occupied various points on the continuum between deeply connected to individual students and quite distant from individual students, with some choosing to be professionally approachable and caring but not personally involved. No matter where in the continuum a faculty fell, however, the unifying characteristic is that all faculty members used their strengths to demonstrate a desire for student success, knowledge and understanding of students' academic challenges, and a commitment to helping students succeed.

Similarly, peer mentors seek to build relationships with all their student mentees from day one. Where the peer mentor differs from the faculty member, though, is noticeable from the very first meeting that they have with their mentees. While some faculty may be hesitant to develop a personal relationship with their students and know about their lives outside of the college, this is the first thing that the peer mentor seeks to accomplish. By learning about the new student's personal life, the peer mentors feel that they can better assist the student in developing a sense of belonging at the college. For example, if from their initial conversation they learn that their mentee is a fan of gaming and host a weekly *Dungeons and Dragons* session at their house, they then are able to help connect that student to a student club on campus that will hopefully provide them more of a sense of belonging on campus than even the peer mentor alone can provide, more to come on how they connect their students to the campus.

If the peer mentor does not learn about the student's personal support systems, motivations, and hobbies, then it is very difficult for the peer mentor to connect to their students and the participants noted that the odds of the student continuing to participate in the optional program decrease substantially. The participants even noted taking the lead on moving the conversations beyond merely conversations and into a form of relationship building by first letting the student mentee know what their hobbies, home situation, and successes and failures at the college level have been. They reported being very intentional about this in an effort to help make the student feel more comfortable to share in return and thus enter into more of a relationship than merely a provided resource of the college. While all of the peer mentors discussed how they took this approach, four of the ambassadors shared more noteworthy examples.

Trenton, a peer mentor and vocational student who did not get a chance to meet with many of his mentees outside of the classroom because many of them were already employed and would go straight from their car to class and return to their car to drive to work, had to get creative in how he got meetings with his mentees. Many of his first meetings occurred in the classroom or during their lunch break that many of these programs take on a daily basis. For him, he was able to impress upon the students how much he cared for their success and he stressed the importance of being able to develop a relationship with his students that was based on something other than academics, otherwise he noted that they had no interest in meeting again.

When Trenton was asked what qualities make him an excellent human lever of retention he focused on the ability to build relationships with his mentees. He viewed his ability to develop relationships with his mentees as a skill set that he not only grew but helped his mentees develop and grow, stating:

> I think by ultimately building the relationship if the student has a relationship with their mentor that's really strong, it's going to branch out into the school, the instructors and hopefully maybe plant the seed with them to where they can [build relationships with others]. They'll go out and they don't even have to be a student ambassador, by title. This is another student that sees another new student coming in that maybe they're struggling or something and they can step in and be like, well, let me tell you what I can to help you out.

His approach to developing relationships with students was based on the hope that not only would they develop a relationship with him but also with their peers.

Julia had a shared goal of developing relationships with her mentees as she sought to be their support system. She noted that while the role of faculty on campus is undeniable with regard to academics, the perspective of the peer mentor is not necessarily better but more "fresh". The peer mentor is able to "speak into the life of" her mentee from the perspective of one who just went through, or maybe even is currently going through, the same situation as their mentee. Further, she viewed how she went about creating relationships with her mentees, those same students who were high achieving human levers or retention were also trying to develop a relationship with, was always for the greater good of the student. She believes that the differences in perspective helped make the whole, and provided the student with a greater sense of belonging at the college from all different angles. The work of the peer mentor and the faculty member together truly made a big impact for her and she sought to do the same with her mentees.

Ashley worked to become friends with her mentees and help with their classes as well as with other tasks and challenges. She related her personal experiences in college and reported how her transition was easier because she no longer felt like she had to go at her studies alone, as she did in high school. In college, there was not competition for different rankings within the classes, and she was able to come alongside her peers and work together for their joint educations. She sought to instill this in her students that she mentored too. When she would explain to her students why it was important for them to develop relationships, she wanted them to know that they were not alone and they could turn to her for just about anything. She relished the opportunity to "just to talk" or "being there and pushing (them) along and helping (them) through it."

Due to her ability to build relationships with her mentees, Ashley was able to provide key support to one of her mentees, a man in his sixties whose technology related skills Ashley described as "non-existent." At first, Ashley, being only 17 when she started the job as a peer mentor, was unsure that she would be able to connect with her new mentee, but once they were able to form a relationship, thanks in part to her constant "just being there for them" and "helping them through it", she was able to help that student get to a point where he was comfortable with computers and in his abilities to be a successful college student. That student came back semester after semester until Ashley graduated and they still stay in touch periodically. Her ability to focus on relationship building allowed her to break through to a student that otherwise likely would not have succeeded without her help.

Bill is another peer mentor who stressed the importance of relationship building as it related to how he was a successful human lever of retention. Bill recounted multiples instances in which he would find himself mentoring a student while he was "off the clock," but this was not important to him. Rather, what was important was that he was able to help the student and that his mentors had developed a relationship with him in which they felt they could come to him at any time and seek his guidance and advice. Bill focused on how peer mentors can be a moral support: "We can be there to just listen to, we can be just an ear or a shoulder to cry on." He cared deeply about being part of his mentees' support system he saw how successful it was in his role as a mentor.

Further, Bill stated that the one thing he wished he was better at was building relationships with all different types of students. He expressed that he would like to be able to relate to every student, giving the example of the single mothers whom he

assisted. He struggled to identify how to connect with all of his students, though his acknowledgement of this and desire to improve on this area of his job above all else speaks to how valuable he perceived the role of relationship building in creating a sense of belonging for the student at the college. He was not the only peer mentor to articulate this recognition as relationship building being both vital to the success of the student and also one of the areas for improvement for the individuals that were high achieving human levers of success, consistently striving to better themselves to help more students.

Facilitating Connections to Resources

Community college students often bring with them to college a variety of life roles and personal challenges that complicate their academic journey. Whether those challenges are financial, intellectual, emotional, or a combination thereof; faculty members and peer mentors are often in the best position to help students connect with the resources that will provide them the support that can allow them to better navigate through challenges and overcome difficult circumstances that could potentially threaten their chances at success. As faculty members and peer mentors work closely with students and typically have more access to students than any other constituency on a campus, they may be the only group on campus who has the power to make students aware of important resources that are available to them.

Connecting students to helpful resources seems a natural extension of the characteristics demonstrated by the faculty members and peer mentors in the study. As we have established, both faculty members and peer mentors are committed to helping others and engaged in building relationships with their students. Therefore, connecting

students to resources that can make a positive difference in their lives both on and off campus would be a logical action for such faculty members and peer mentors.

Community colleges often offer a variety of services and resources that can meet many different sorts of students' needs. From food pantries to free tutoring and childcare financial assistance to career counseling services; many campuses have numerous programs, personnel, and funding to assist students. The problem? Often students are unaware of the existence or availability of such resources, or they have absolutely no idea how to take advantage of them. Further, when a student is the only member of his family to attend college or even step foot on a college campus, it is understandable that such a student would be quite unfamiliar with the services that are typically available for students. And while orientation programs may expose students to these resources, often students are not able to recall such information when a need arises because they were overwhelmed with all the information presented in an orientation, a problem that Eliza often observes in her FYE courses.

"Nobody ever told me about work study. I didn't know there were grants that could help me pay for school. I once *paid* for the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid)! I didn't know how to get tutoring or talk to a career counselor. So these kinds of things are what I wish I had known about when I was an undergraduate," Eliza pointed out. A member of the board for the local United Way, Eliza took the position so that she could learn more about agencies in the community who might be able to help her students and meet needs they have that threaten their ability to be successful in classes. "I know they get tired of hearing about this stuff, and they probably think I'm nuts when I actually escort them different places on campus, but I really believe in the importance of

knowing about what resources are available and taking advantage of them," Eliza explained.

John too believes in the importance of knowing a campus and what it has to offer. A club sponsor who considers himself to be active in "student life" initiatives, John makes sure to let his math students know about different student organizations, leadership opportunities, and ways that they can serve the campus and community. Helping students connect with activities outside the classroom is one of John's passions because, according to John, "Students need a space, a place where they can come together and feel like a family. They need to be able to ask questions of each other and not feel silly. If they can connect with others, then when sometime goes badly or they are struggling, I think they're less likely to quit." He also thinks that student activities can give all students an opportunity to distinguish themselves, build confidence, and develop leadership abilities that will serve them well in the future.

Each of the faculty participants in the study provided at least one example of helping to connect students with campus resources. From reminding students of upcoming registration dates and encouraging students to meet with their academic advisors to helping students connect with staff in the financial aid office, the faculty members demonstrated a knowledge of available resources and a desire to help students take advantage of those resources. Two faculty members remarked that they invite representatives from the Academic Support Center (free student tutoring service) and TRiO (Student Support Services) to deliver quick presentations in their classes in order to get students exposed to the services and hopefully connect with at least one person from those offices. Half of the faculty participants reported that they had written an

application for a student to receive emergency funding from the college's student emergency fund for a need such as emergency housing or transportation expenses. Nearly all of the participants shared that they had written a referral for mental health counseling for a student, which is another free resource available to students of the college. When asked how they themselves were aware of such services and how to take advantage of them, the faculty members explained that they had attending training sessions and formal meetings about different campus resources. Many had also sought out information on using certain resources by exploring the college's website or simply visiting offices themselves and asking questions.

Pamela, one of the peer mentors who was returning to college later in life, was especially intent on serving in the role of "connector to the resources available" for her students. Being a mother of two young children, Pamela had a personal knowledge base of the resources that were available and necessary to allow students like herself to be successful. Unfortunately, this was not the case the first time she came to college 15 years prior. Her first attempt was not a successful one, and she went on to credit resources as a large reason she was successful this time. Her number one priority in her role as a peer mentor was, "trying to make sure that all my mentees have gotten all the resources they need." She viewed connecting her students to the resources as providing for that which she did not have her first time around.

Bill also saw his role as connecting students to resources as one that was of the utmost importance. While many of the resources would fall into the category of student services, Bill, much like John the faculty member, believed strongly in the opportunity for campus life to connect students to the college and create a sense of belonging at the

institution that allowed the student to flourish and be retained semester to semester. Bill would try to conclude every meeting he had with students by letting them know of a campus club that he thought either matched what they were seeking in a degree or aligned well with their hobbies. Bill was also an officer for three clubs on campus and attended many more on a less frequent basis. Bill stated that he would try to invite his mentees to attend a Movie Club viewing or Student Government Association meeting and that he would join them because he was going there too. He noted that the personal invitation had a large amount of success as the Movie Club, for which he was president, had the largest participation of any club on campus, and many of the members started as mentees of his or were one of the mentee's friends.

Implications

Traditionally community college students as a group face a number of challenges that are less common in their counterparts enrolled in four-year institutions. These students are often first-generation college students from low socioeconomic backgrounds who are academically underprepared for college-level work. Besides their academic commitments, they often have numerous responsibilities: a full-time job, children or other dependents, or a home. The more affordable, open access institution is frequently the only opportunity for a student to pursue post-secondary education. However, put simply, several circumstances come together to make the average community college student of today vulnerable to failure. The challenges faced by today's typical community college student are often cited as a significant reason that such a low percentage of those who enroll in community college actually emerge with a credential or even continue beyond their first semester or academic year.

To provide students the support that will help them to persist toward graduation and/or transfer, community colleges must understand the resources they have and then leverage those resources in a way that will allow institutions to better serve students. Community college faculty members and peer mentors have the potential to be among the most influential forces in a community college student's academic life. Because their actions can help to instill a sense of both mattering and validation in the students with whom they encounter, faculty members and peer mentors should be both selected and trained by institutions based upon the characteristics, philosophies, knowledge, and behaviors that help these groups to encourage persistence among the students they serve.

In our study of faculty members and peer mentors, we hoped to uncover characteristics and behaviors that the participants had in common in order to better understand the experience of being what we called "a human lever of retention," meaning basically a mechanism or resource that the institution can harness in order to influence student persistence. As practitioners who work in faculty and student development, our hope was that by learning from those who had been identified as "human levers," we could then apply that knowledge to our work with faculty members and peer mentors in the community college setting.

When comparing the data from the faculty participants and the peer mentor participants, several common themes/characteristics emerged: a passion for helping others, efforts dedicated to building relationships with students, a desire to connect students with resources that could help meet both academic and non-academic needs, and a commitment to values associated with professionalism. We propose that institutions should consider these themes both when making hiring decisions and when orienting or

providing ongoing professional development to faculty members and peer mentors who are employed by the institution.

The Hiring Process

Because each of the four common themes can related to an individual's personal and/or professional sense of ethics and values, we suggest that institutions develop prompts and questions in both the application and interview process that will allow them to discover if a candidate displays ethics and values that are consistent with those shared by faculty and peer mentors who serve as "human levers of retention."

Applications, for example, could include questions related to helping others and building relationships. Candidates could be given written prompts on an application that could ask them to provide examples of ways in which they have helped and supported others in their personal or professional lives. Additional documents could provide insight into a candidate's values and behaviors related to the support of student persistence. For example, individuals and search committees could review and analyze a candidate's vita or resume to look for ways in which that document might indicate that the candidate possesses the qualities of a "human lever." A candidate might, for instance, belong to an organization in the community that provides help or support for others, or the candidate might indicate that he or she does volunteer work. This information could serve to inform the reviewer that the candidate dedicates his or her time to helping others and/or understands the importance of resources and the power of certain resources to make a positive difference in the lives of people.

In addition, search committees and others involved in the hiring process could analyze letters of reference provided by candidates for ways in which the letters reflect the traits and behaviors that are common in faculty and peer mentor "human levers." For example, when reviewing a reference, one could look for key ideas related to a candidate's commitment to helping others or building relationships. Finally, individuals or search committees seeking to hire new faculty members or peer mentors could prepare specific topics for conversations with a candidate's references, and such topics could help to provide a picture of a candidate's sense of professionalism or ability to build relationships with students.

Prior to interviews with prospective employees, interviewers can develop a bank of questions that will allow them to get a better sense of the way that a candidate does or does not match up with the criteria that have been linked with being a potential "human lever." Candidates, for instance, might be asked to describe an instance in which they helped another individual to be successful. Or, to better understand a candidate's interest in and ability to build relationships with students, the interview(s) could ask a candidate to talk about strategies he or she intentionally uses or has used in the past in an effort to connect with students. Also, to learn more about a candidate's philosophy of and approach to professionalism, the committee could ask the candidate to describe a role model, mentor, or other individual who best illustrates the candidate's definition of professionalism; the committee could also ask the candidate to do the opposite and describe an unprofessional example or create a scenario that describes what would be unprofessional in their eyes.

Finally, remembering that at the heart of each of these themes is the importance of instilling a sense of mattering and validation in students, those responsible for hiring faculty members or peer mentors in community colleges should communicate this value to potential employees and then try to get a sense of how a candidate views these two concepts. In an interview, candidates might be asked to share a personal experience in which they felt marginalized or invalidated or vice versa. The candidate also could be asked to share ideas about he or she would validate students and communicate to students that they matter.

Reviewing materials and asking questions that help to illuminate whether or not a candidate's attitudes and approaches are consistent with the expectation that the candidate be a "human lever" that supports community college student persistence will allow those responsible for hiring faculty members and peer mentors to determine if an individual can meet that expectation. By prioritizing these types of attitudes and behaviors in the hiring process, institutions have the opportunity to acquire and nurture the faculty and peer mentors who will be a vital resource in the battle to help all students persist and complete.

In Faculty and Staff Development

Of course, the hiring process is only the first step in creating a faculty or staff of peer mentors that can best serve students and support a college's student retention efforts. With regard to staffing, many community colleges, especially those in rural areas are also challenged by a small labor pool from which to recruit faculty and staff. Institutions have an opportunity to provide ongoing, meaningful professional development that can help to support the goal of increasing student retention and completion rates. We suggest

that institutions consider the themes that emerged from this study when considering the topics and tracks for professional development programming for both faculty and for peer mentor staff members.

The first interaction the majority of new faculty or new peer mentors will engage in is an orientation program designed to prepare them to start their new jobs and acculturate with the institution in general. Most orientation programs, academic or otherwise, seek to teach new employees the basic skills that will allow them to navigate the new workplace: using technology, learning about the employer (mission, vision, values, history, etc.), studying expectations for employees, getting to know colleagues and supervisors, and reviewing policies and procedures related to the job. We suggest that institutions should consider adding content to orientations that is related to the characteristics of human levers of retention. For example, orientations could discuss the importance of mattering and validation and how building relationships with students and connecting students to resources can help to support students' feelings of mattering and validation.

Another common professional development program on many campuses is a learning community. Milton D. Cox (2004), Director of the Center for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching at Miami University, provided the following definition of a faculty learning community (FLC): "a cross-disciplinary faculty and staff group of six to fifteen members (eight to twelve members is the recommended size) who engage in an active, collaborative, yearlong program with a curriculum about enhancing teaching and learning and with frequent seminars and activities that provide learning, development, the scholarship of teaching, and community building" (p. 8). Cox suggested that

participation in a faculty learning community offers many benefits for both faculty members and for the students they serve. As many FLCs choose a theme around which to build the curriculum for the academic year and plan readings and other activities based on that theme, we suggest that designing faculty learning community curriculum based upon the characteristics of the human levers would provide faculty members with multiple opportunities to engage in the study and practice of attitudes and behaviors that could positively impact student persistence.

However, faculty members are not necessarily the only groups on campus who could benefit from participation in a learning community. In Cox's description of an FLC, he noted that staff members are also part of this group. Therefore, peer mentors could be invited to participate in some or all functions of an institution's FLC, or they could form their own learning community. We do suggest, though, that learning communities be open to constituencies on campus, rather than exclusive to faculty members. With that in mind, institutions should consider choosing a different name for this form of professional development, as non-faculty members may feel disenfranchised by the term FLC, which implies that the group is not inclusive of other groups on campus.

Often professional development on college campuses can take the form of guest lectures, presentations, workshops or seminars led by external trainers, or activities led by faculty members or different entities on a campus. In many cases, these types of professional development activities take place during beginning of semester "convocation" programs or during designated professional development days on a campus. When planning the topics and themes for such events, faculty and staff

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developers could focus on providing professional development that supports student persistence by offering programs that help faculty and staff members to better understand and serve as human levers of retention.

One important factor to consider, though, is that it is important not to alienate faculty members or peer mentors who might consider themselves more introverted or less social than their colleagues who seem to easily and comfortably connect with students. Therefore, professional development related to relationship building must provide a variety of strategies and a flexible definition of "relationship building," emphasizing and validating that there are many ways in which all faculty members or peer mentors can hope to connect with students.

Another important way that professional development and training for faculty and peer mentors can help to support retention is by encouraging faculty members and peer mentors to be observant about students' needs and challenges and be prepared to connect students with resources that can help them to persist. Representatives from departments or offices that provide various forms of support to students (tutoring, financial aid, counseling services, or other programs that represent resources for students) should be encouraged to develop presentations that can be given during faculty or staff meetings or during professional development programming for faculty.

By using the professional development mechanism and resources that institutions already have in place, it is possible to reach every faculty and staff member with knowledge about ways in which they can support student persistence by serving as a human lever. From orientations for newly hired faculty and staff members to learning communities related to developing traits associated with human levers, to ongoing

professional development in the form of workshops and lectures; institutions have or can readily have activities in place that can better prepare employees to serve as human levers.

Further Research

While much has been learned with regard to how these human levers of retention perform at these individual institutions, this is merely their story of successes and what they believe helped make an impact on retention. Further research, both qualitative and quantitative, should be conducted to test the effectiveness of these four practices and attitudes to impact student retention at community colleges at large.

Additionally, our research focused on institutions that were already successful and known for their successes within the state of Kentucky. More specifically we picked the two levers of retention that each college was most known for and most effective with. Further research could be done at institutions in which they are not known for their successes with faculty engagement and peer mentoring and then compare the better performing institutions practices and attitudes to those espoused by institutions that have not been as effective with these levers of retention.

Finally, further research could explore the student perspective on experiences working with faculty or peer mentors who have been identified as potential human levers of retention. Students, for example, could be asked to compare and contrast their experiences with these faculty and staff members with experiences with other faculty and staff who have not been designated as such. While we have gained an understanding of the faculty and peer mentor perspective, we have not studied the students with whom our population works. This information could, therefore, add depth to a further study.

Chapter 3
Community College Faculty Levers of Retention and the Philosophies and Behaviors that Define Them

Introduction

The headline in the *Washington Post* declared, "Community college professors often fail at teaching" (Matthews, 2015). The article praises the work of Rebecca D. Cox (2009), who spent five years observing and interviewing community college students about their experiences with faculty. Cox's work revealed that first-year community college students struggled to "weather the indifference they felt from many of the college faculty they encountered" (Matthews, 2015). Cox reported that often the professors she observed appeared to, whether intentionally or not, create a learning environment that inspired fear among their students: fear to ask questions, fear to interact one-on-one, fear to seek help from professors, fear to admit confusion, and fear to fail. Much of the problem, Cox suggested, could be attributed to the way in which professors had been taught to rely proudly on their content knowledge while all but disregarding their strategies in teaching that content. When Matthews contacted Cox in 2015 to inquire what kind of progress, in regard to community college teaching, she had observed since writing the book, Cox reported, "There is still very little research…on what is happening, or not happening, in those vital exchanges between professors and students."

In a study focused on student perceptions of interactions outside the classroom between faculty and students Alderman (2008) interviewed 25 college students who had interacted with faculty members outside of the classroom and concluded that "colleges and universities should strengthen and refine institutional commitment to practices that

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foster the undergraduate experience, including that of faculty-student interaction" (p. iv).

She described four criteria that identify strong, meaningful student-faculty interchanges:

"(1) faculty members were approachable and personable; (2) faculty members had

enthusiasm and passion for their work; (3) faculty members cared about students

personally; and (4) faculty members served as role models and mentors" (Alderman,

2008).

Though these criteria are certainly helpful in identifying general faculty behaviors

that promote student success, they do not necessarily capture the specific evidence that

Cox and other researchers are seeking in order to better understand the specific nature of

faculty-student interactions. Teaching typically falls into "the elusive category of 'I can't

define it, but I know it when I see it'" (Jones, 2008, p. 95). However, by analyzing

faculty members' specific behaviors and the attitudes associate with those behaviors and

using theory to understand why those particular attitudes and behaviors might encourage

student success, it may be possible to provide specific guidance that can improve and

enhance the teaching that takes place in community colleges.

The term "student success," though, like the idea of "good teaching" is elusive in

terms of assigning a clear, concrete definition with which everyone can agree. In some

ways the term "student success" invites deep, philosophical debate and cannot be

quantified by numerical data. Achieving the Dream, a non-profit organization focused on

institutional improvement in post-secondary education, argued that student success is

about more than the achievement of personal goals. Rather, success as defined by this

organization relates to skills enhancement, improved employability, economic

improvement for families as well as for communities and the nation as a whole.

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However, the metrics that inform the organization's determination of whether or not an institution's students are successful include several pieces of quantitative data. Metrics used by Achieving the dream include course completion, advancement to credit-bearing courses from remedial courses, retention from semester to semester, and the attainment of certificates and degrees (Gnage and Drumm, 2010).

While defining student success in the traditional terms of certificate and degree completion, transfer, graduate employment and earnings, and student learning outcome performance; Broward County Community College in Florida, a Finalist with Distinction in the 2017 Aspen Institute's Prize for Community College Excellence, reports that they define student success and their own institutional success by how they are able to "have a positive impact in our community and the wider society by producing graduates who exceed average expectations, both in their academic achievements and in what they are able to accomplish after they leave" (Proctor and DeSanctis, 2017, p. 1-2).

In a 2010 report entitled *The Heart of Student Success*, the Center for Community College Student Engagement (CCCSE) urged that effective teaching and meaningful learning are what define student success, observing that degree completion alone does not guarantee that students are actually prepared to experience success either in the job market or in future studies. Providing suggestions for defining student success, the report argues that both college completion and evidence of deeper levels of learning are the two key elements that define student success. The organization suggests that strategies that engage students, support their learning experiences, increase professional development related to student engagement, and develop policies that create learning conditions that are conducive for learning.

Clearly, faculty are what drive an institute's pursuit of student success. No matter how success is defined and how it is measured, it cannot occur without the support of a faculty that is committed to engaging and supporting students as they pursue their personal, academic, and professional goals. For the purposes of this particular study, participants were identified using an instrument that identified traits and behaviors of faculty members that have been linked with student success as it is defined by CCCSE. The Executive Summary of the CCCSE report *The Heart of Student Success* (2010) explained, "Just as access to college is an empty promise without effective practices that promote student success, improved completion will have real meaning only with serious and sustained attention to the quality of what goes on between teachers and students." Therefore, though college completion is the concrete measure of student success, it is also essential that the credential reflect meaningful learning that will serve students well as employees, citizens, or students pursuing further education.

By identifying participants based upon behaviors and traits linked with effective teaching while also considering the course completion rates of students in the courses taught by the faculty members, the faculty who were selected to participate in the study each demonstrate both the qualities that have been identified, based on a literature review related to teaching practices and student persistence/student success, as those conducive to promoting student completion of courses and credentials as well as the qualities that promote meaningful interactions with students that promote deep learning and student engagement (see Nomination Form for Faculty Participation).

In this study of general education faculty members who were identified as highly effective in promoting students' persistence toward course and credential completion, my

goal was to develop a greater understanding of the backgrounds, attitudes, and behaviors

of faculty who are recognized for their students' successes. In multiple interviews with

the study participants I was able to gather information about specific faculty behaviors

and the motivations behind those behaviors, which allowed me to match concrete

illustrations of day-to-day practices with the general criteria that describe meaningful,

beneficial interactions between students as faculty that have been described by other

studies. Ultimately, my hope is that providing specific examples of what these faculty do

and why they do it, that other practitioners as well as those responsible for the education

and professional development of those practitioners will be able to both adopt specific

practices and philosophies of effective faculty members and will also be able to identify

which of their own behaviors best serve to promote persistence in community college

students.

The ease of access combined with low tuition rates have contributed to the fact

that "the typical community college student possesses different characteristics than the

traditional university student" (Fike and Fike, 2016, p. 69). Community college students

often bring with them unique challenges that can potentially impact their ability to persist

toward degree completion. Community colleges have significantly overrepresented

populations of students at risk of attrition, such as "minority students, first-generation

students, students with lower levels of academic achievement in high school, and students

from low-income families" (Bailey and Alfonso, 2005, p. 5) and students who attend

part-time, work long hours at off-campus jobs, and have dependent children.

Consistently low graduation and transfer rates may be attributed, at least in part, to "the

complex ways in which social and educational inequalities affect specific students and the institutions of higher education designed to serve them" (Goldrick-Rab 2007).

Faculty, particularly in commuter institutions, play a crucial role in supporting student persistence. Teachers are "at the heart of the community college mission and serve the learning needs of their communities in essential and unique ways" (Miller, 1997, p. 83). It is important to understand that community college faculty play such an influential part in students' trajectories because of the nature of the institution and its student body. Community college students are often present on campus only during class meetings, and therefore their interactions with campus representative are limited to those with faculty members (Barnett, 2010; Braxton and Mundy, 2001; Braxton et al. 1997; Jacoby, 2000; Jacoby, 2015). Feeling some sense of connection to the institution is vital to student success, even if that connection is with only one key person on a campus, noted O'Keefe (2013), and faculty are typically in the best position to be that key person for a student.

The importance of faculty-student interactions is "not often considered by policymakers, the leaders of our colleges and universities, and other key constituencies in higher education" (Kezar and Maxey, 2014, p. 29), yet they noted that over 50 years of research clearly indicates that "faculty-student interaction is a key factor in promoting student success, "particularly among those students who need most support, such as first-generation college students and students of color" (p. 30).

While policymakers and administrators do not necessarily acknowledge the importance of the faculty-student relationship in promoting student success, the benefits of meaningful interactions between faculty and students both in and out of the classroom

are extolled throughout the literature. Connections between students and faculty contribute not only to students' intellectual development but also to their attitudes, goal setting behaviors, and career orientations; and positive interactions with faculty members can help students to navigate both the academic and social realms of college (Hoffman 2014; Kommaraju et al., 2010). Turner and Thompson's (2014) qualitative study of 30 college freshmen, some of whom lived on campus while others commuted from off campus, found that students who are able to develop relationships with faculty early on have an increased chance of academic success because these kinds of relationships make students feel safe while also providing them with a sense of academic support. The amount of time students spend with faculty along with the quality of the interactions ultimately reduces student attrition (Kezar and Maxey, 2014).

Faculty serve as the face of the institution for students and have an opportunity, through their behaviors, to demonstrate that an institution is both true to its student-centered mission, which Braxton (2008) contends is key to students' satisfaction and their intent to persist. Positive student-faculty interactions are correlated with "increased persistence and completion rates, better grades and standardized test score, and the development of leadership, critical thinking, a sense of worth, career and graduate school aspiration, and self-confidence" (Kezar and Maxey, 2014, p. 30). They also pointed out that a large body of research has found that the relationships between faculty and students "promote student engagement and a passion for learning, increase motivate to learn […], and provide validation for students" (p. 32).

Considering the important role faculty members play in student persistence toward completion, it would seem essential that community college faculty members

receive the preparation necessary to best serve their students. However, research into the career backgrounds of community college faculty suggests that the majority of community college faculty members, unlike secondary teachers and university faculty members, did not intend a career in community college teaching (Eddy, 2010). In her case study of six community college lead faculty members, Eddy observed that "serendipity brought them to their current positions" (p. 17). Eddy's findings are not unique. Jones' (2008) review of literature related to new college faculty members concluded that, when they embark upon a career in community college teaching, they are starting in a brand new profession, a profession in which they most likely have no educational background or training. Many are not familiar with the language of the profession and have not had any formal practice in structuring instruction or assessment. The fact is that these professionals may be drawn to the idea of teaching, and they are also in a unique position to inform and enhance their instruction using their professional experiences; but if they do not receive the necessary support from the institution and their colleagues in the early years of their career, all stakeholders will suffer, including the teachers themselves.

Ironically, community colleges, with their espoused commitment to teaching and learning, often do not require their faculty members to have any formal teacher training or teaching experience before they begin working with students. In an institution that is expected to serve numerous roles in society and meet the needs of an ever-diversifying student body, faculty continually encounter circumstances that threaten their ability to best serve the students who have been entrusted to them. Grubb (1999) observed, "The inclusiveness of the comprehensive community college brings a range of pedagogical

issues, as virtually all instructors recognize" (p. 7). Grubb (1999) adds, community colleges face greater difficulties than any other educational institution. Therefore, it would seem that the realization that content knowledge is not enough to effectively support student learning would be an obvious one. It is a deeply flawed assumption that a good degree guarantees the ability to impart knowledge to others (Jones 2008). Effective teaching is an intentional act, and knowledge of one's subject does not guarantee one the ability to teach that subject effectively, or all great scholars would also be excellent teachers, which is certainly not the case (Bain, 2004). And for better or for worse, good teaching is not an innate ability talent bestowed upon some but not all, which the implication being that teaching is "serious intellectual and creative work […] that benefits from careful observation, close analysis, from revision and refinement, and from dialogues with colleagues and critiques of peers" (Bain, 2004, p. 21).

"College teacher is the only high level professional who enters upon a career with neither the prerequisite trial of competence nor the experience in the use of the tools of [the] profession" (Jones, p. 94). Unfortunately, taking a few moments to browse students' comments on the "Rate My Professor" website would very quickly illustrate that the issue of "smart professors who can't teach" is a frustrating and common complaint among students. Unfortunately, in this scenario everyone suffers. Students suffer when teaching is ineffective. Faculty members experience decreasing job satisfaction and may receive poor evaluations or even eventually be terminated. Institutions experience lower retention of students and faculty members alike, resulting in unrealized potential on all fronts.

However, the reverse is also true.   Effective interactions between faculty and students can inspire both the intellectual and moral development of students. They can help students achieve more than they ever imagined for themselves and help students discover that they possess abilities and interests they never knew they had. Excellent teachers have a "sustained, substantial, and positive influence on how those students think, act, and feel" (Bain, 2004, p. 5). These interactions can change the ways in which students understand themselves and the world in which they live. Positive faculty-student interactions can help prevent students' "demographics from becoming their destiny" (Dunn, 2017). An online survey of college students who were asked about their favorite professors indicated that students' favorite teachers often helped them to see the beauty in a subject in which they had previously had no interest or perceived that they had no ability. The students in the survey often noted that their best teachers instilled in them a passion for learning about a certain subject and then inspired them to continue to enjoy learning (Ruel, 2017).

While positive interactions can have profound benefits for students, and possibly for faculty as well, there are potentially devastating consequences of poor faculty-student interactions. This idea drove me to want to understand more about what Rebecca D. Cox declared was still a bit of a mystery, the mystery of what faculty members perceived to be what actually happening between faculty and students and what the interactions between the most effective faculty and their students actually look like from the perspectives of the faculty members.

With this question in mind, I designed a qualitative research project in which I sought to discover specific evidence that would help to describe and contextualize the

behaviors, motivations, values, and approaches of faculty members who had been identified as exemplary in the area of promoting student success. Bain (2004) observed that, since human cloning is not yet an option to bring better teaching into institutions, seeking to understand more about the practices, beliefs, and strategies used by the best is the most effective way to ensure that their wisdom and skill can be shared and can have a broad influence on the art and science of teaching.

While faculty members typically arrive equipped with content knowledge, they are not necessarily prepared to use both the "art" and the "science" of teaching to convey that knowledge to students. It is my assumption, though, that the faculty members who are recognized as the most highly effective in supporting student success possess both content knowledge and an understanding of the art and science of teaching. Therefore, I hoped to learn more about the faculty members who are consistently regarded as the group on one campus who have the most positive impact on the retention of their students.

I selected West Kentucky Community and Technical College (WKCTC) as the site for this study because its graduation rate (42.8% in 2015—2016) has consistently been the highest of any community college in its state, with a retention rate of 63.8% from fall 2016 to fall 2017. WKCTC is a rural comprehensive community college located in the Southeast United States enrolling around 6100 students (2140 full-time students) in fall 2017. Around half of WKCTC's full-time student population is seeking an associate's degree in arts, science, or fine arts. It is a four-time finalist for the Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence, and its three-year graduation/transfer rate is above the national average. The college's "focus on access, retention, and student

success enabled [it] to achieve its vision of being recognized as a preeminent community college nationwide (*Fact Book* 2017).

WKCTC has been recognized for an "exceptional culture to get faculty engaged in improving teaching/learning that has led to measurable improvements in student success (Aspen Prize 2017). I felt that choosing an institution recognized for excellence, with relatively high retention and graduation/transfer rates would allow me the opportunity to engage with faculty members who were regarded among the strongest of a group of faculty whom Joshua Wyner, Executive Director of the Aspen Institute College Excellence Program and author of *What Excellent Community Colleges Do* (2014), remarked were "constantly working hard to improve their teaching and get students on the path to a better future" (Aspen Prize 2015). Wyner also expressed that the college impressed the Aspen Institute's prize jury, who visited the college four times between 2011 and 2017, with its commitment to student success and dedication to improving the lives of students (Aspen Prize 2017).

My desire was to choose a highly regarded, successful institution and then study the faculty considered most effective because a group that has established itself as the strongest of an already strong group of faculty has a compelling record of success that would support the idea that the knowledge and information they share comes from a source that is both valid and valuable. In other words, by choosing what could be classified as "the best case," I believe that their track record of student achievement will be a compelling argument for the value of the information they share.

The study was limited to general education faculty members because these faculty members interact with nearly all students enrolled at the college, unlike faculty members

in technical and/or selective admissions programs. Further, general education faculty members teach courses traditionally considered "gatekeeper" courses, which typically possess higher rates of attrition than do courses in technical fields. In addition, students in general education courses, as opposed to technical courses, are more likely to be undecided majors, which is another risk factor for attrition. Finally, students enrolled in selective admissions programs have successfully completed their pre-requisite coursework, demonstrating that the students in these programs have already been successful in general education courses.

I solicited recommendations from the Vice President of Academic Affairs, the Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs, the Vice President of Student Affairs, the Faculty Chair, the director of TRiO (Student Support Services), the Dean of Distance Learning, the deans of two academic divisions, and two interim academic deans. These administrators were selected to recommend participants because their positions enabled them to have exposure to one or more indicators of faculty performance, ranging from information gathered through direct observation of the faculty to access to the faculty member's student evaluations and distribution of grades reports to student learning outcome data for all general education faculty members to anecdotal knowledge formally or informally shared by students or other faculty members. Each administrator was asked to submit the names of five to ten general education faculty members using an instrument I created based upon my review of the literature about effective faculty behaviors and student success described above. To be invited to participate in the study, the faculty member had to be identified as meeting best practice behaviors by a minimum of seven of ten recommenders. Upon receiving feedback from all ten recommenders, nine faculty

members met the required standard for inclusion in the study, and all nine agreed to participate.

The participants included three associate professors, four professors, and two instructors. WKCTC uses the designation of "faculty member" for all ranks of instructional staff, and I will do the same. The participating faculty were equally distributed across STEM, Humanities and social science disciplines and included two faculty involved in developmental education in math and writing (see Table 1). All of the faculty except one had at least ten years of college teaching experience with four of the participants teaching at WKCTC for more than twenty-five years. This group, which included four men and six women, one African-American, faculty who varied a good deal in regard to years of experience, and a representation of eight different disciplines is representative of the full time faculty as a whole at WKCTC, which has a majority female faculty and a small percentage of non-Caucasian faculty members. Though this group does include an overrepresented population of faculty members with more than 20 years or more (over half compared to around one-third of the faculty as a whole with 20 or more years' experience), this is perhaps the only characteristic that is not reflective of the faculty as a whole. Of the nine faculty members in the study, four were originally from the counties that comprise the college's district in Kentucky, and seven of the nine were from Kentucky. This demographic is also reflective of the faculty as a whole, where the vast majority of faculty members are local to the state and/or service area of WKCTC.

Name	Subject Area	Years' Experience in Community College Teaching
Eliza	First Year Experience	10
Adam	Economics and Leadership	25
John	Math	8
Katie	Biology	30
Jake	Math	20
Laura	Psychology	25
Tasha	Biology	10
Karen	Spanish	15
Stacy	English	25

Table 1

Each participant was interviewed two different times using two different interview guides as the source of topics of discussions and specific questions. Conversations were relatively structured in order to ensure that comparable topics and questions were discussed in each interview. During the first set of interviews I provided participants with a brief overview of the purpose of the study along with an explanation of how and why, as individuals, they were selected. I asked questions related to their educational background, their career path, their preparation and professional development related to their current positions, their job duties, their feelings about community college as an institution, and the aspects of their jobs that they found the most challenging as well as those they found most fulfilling and enjoyable (see appendix). The first interviews ranged from 58 minutes in length to 75 minutes in length.

In the second set of interviews, I focused on questions related to their specific approaches to working with their students and the motivations behind these approaches. We discussed what they considered their greatest success stories in regard to working with their students as well as what they considered their weaknesses as well as their students' weaknesses (see appendix). Participants were asked about the student outcomes that they considered to be their most important priorities as well their approaches to promoting student persistence toward completing both the individual courses they taught as well as persistence toward completing credentials, as well as (in some cases) achieving admission to selective admission programs such as nursing, physical therapy assistant, or dental assisting (as many of the courses taught by these faculty members serve as prerequisites for such programs. Because the second set of interview questions encouraged participants to illustrate the information they provided with examples, and all of the participants seemed passionate about the information they shared and eager to discuss the issues brought up in the interview questions, these interviews were much longer than the first set, ranging from 90 minutes to 185 minutes in length.

After the first two sets of individual interviews were completed, transcribed, and open coded by myself as well as my colleague who was engaged in a companion student with peer student mentors as the population being studied, we collaborated in determining more thematic codes that represented an aggregate of the open codes we initially used. And after reviewing the data and analyzing it a second time based on axial codes, we determined emergent themes based on the data, which we presented to both sets of participants (faculty members and student peer mentors) in two different group interviews, one with faculty and one with student peer mentors. Both my colleague and I

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attended each group interview, which included all faculty participants and all but one of the peer mentor participants. After presenting our findings to both groups, we asked the participants for feedback, explaining to both groups the importance of member-checking to further validate our findings.

Throughout the interview process I remained mindful of the fact that I was conducting "backyard" research with my colleagues. Realizing that I would have to create an environment in which participants would feel comfortable sharing information about themselves as well as feelings they might not want known by other colleagues or administration, I emphasized the fact that their identities would be kept confidential, and I encouraged them to be candid to help ensure the integrity of the study. In addition, I communicated to participants both a sense of empathy and open mindedness on my part by sharing my own weaknesses and personal as well as professional challenges in order to establish rapport and encourage open and honest discussion of the topics.

Upon completion of all interviews and member-checking procedures, the following common characteristics, behaviors, and beliefs were apparent among the faculty participants:

    a. Because they recognize and value the community college as an institution for individuals as well as for society and understand the variety of challenges and life circumstances common to community college students, they develop responsive policies and teaching practices that are responsive to students' needs, and they intentionally become familiar with campus and community resources that they can share with students in order to encourage student persistence.

b. They possess a "students always first" attitude as well as a belief that all students can achieve success if given the right tools and support, and these beliefs govern their approach to working with students, including making learning relevant to students' lives and futures.

c. Recalling their own educational and life experiences, they allow their own past struggles to inform their teaching philosophies and behaviors as well as their manner in relating to students. They are focused on approachability and the creation of a welcoming environment in and out of the classroom, intentionally building relationships with their students as well as helping students to create connections with their peers both in and out of class.

Understanding the Institution and its Students, Developing Responsive Policies and Teaching Practices, and Knowledge and Connection to Resources for Students

The Community College and Its Students

The faculty in the study consistently expressed the belief that the community college represents a place of hope for large numbers of the students enrolled, students who might not otherwise have access to higher education opportunities. As the literature indicates, community college enroll over half of the nation's first-time college students and have significantly overrepresented populations of students who are from low socioeconomic backgrounds, are academically underprepared, are first-generation college students, have physical or learning disabilities, or are from underrepresented minority groups: factors that put these students at a higher risk than their peers for attrition.

Each of the faculty members in the study expressed the importance of ongoing support for students whose backgrounds and lives outside of the college create hurdles

that they have to find ways to overcome in order to be successful. "We have a lot of students who are here on a week-to-week basis because if they are given one opportunity to leave or to think they are a failure, they will go; and we may never see then again," Adam, a professor of economics and leadership, warned. According to Adam, "Part of our purpose must be to build students up and let them know that they can do this."

Jake, who teaches a variety of math courses, argued that the community college serves as a deeply important part of a free and democratic society because, "it serves those who are not always well served by the university system." This belief in the important role community college plays in society as well as in the lives of individual students and their families is one that was repeatedly expressed by faculty members during their interviews, and several participants connected their feelings of respect and value for the institution with their motivations for designing policies and instructional practices that would best meet the needs of community college students. Jake, who teaches a variety of math courses, argued that the community college serves as a deeply important part of a free and democratic society because, "it serves those who are not always well served by the university system."

Tasha, an associate professor in the biology department who primarily teaches courses in the anatomy and physiology sequence of courses, explained that her course often serves as a gatekeeper for many allied health fields, with students being required to earn at least a C in her courses before they can be admitted into an allied health program such as nursing, dental assisting, or radiography. She is motivated by the idea that her students, once they complete their credentials in an allied health field, are in a better position to be able to provide for their families.

"Faculty members who understand the learning needs and interest of their students can appropriately tailor assignments, expectations, and conversations," explained Duberstein (2018). In order to best support students as they work to achieve a credential, the participants seemed to recognize that an understanding of the students themselves played a vital role in their ability to best work with their diverse student population. Each of the participants made note of specific challenges faced by the various students in their classrooms. Eliza, who teaching and coordinates the college's First Year Experience courses, noted that she observes students dealing with issues such as unreliable childcare, inconsistent housing situations, unaffordable or unpredictable childcare arrangements; and each of these issues can threaten students' abilities to successfully complete their assignments or attend class regularly.

Tasha, who attended a four-year university, noted that she was caught by surprise during her first few semester of teaching in a community college because the students were different from the ones recalled from her own undergraduate experience. She explained, "Our students work full time, and many have more than one job. Some have children, and a lot of those are single parents. They are taking care of aging parents or grandparents. Sometimes they don't have time or money for lunch, or they can't afford to put enough gas in the car to get to class." With those types of situations in mind, Tasha cited the importance of both flexibility and compassion when working with students whose life situations can sometimes conflict with the demands of their coursework. Therefore, she strives to accommodate her students' schedules and financial challenges by making herself available outside of class to meet with students who missed class or lab meetings, putting lecture notes and instructional materials and activities

online, and helping students to connect with financial resources and student services that can assist them.

Stacy, an associate professor in English, pointed out many of her students have disabilities, substance abuse issues, and mental illness. Some come from environments in which they are abused or feel unsafe for a variety of reasons. She expressed, "Many are scared to be there, and rightly so." Fear is also common in the students with whom Karen works. As a Spanish teacher, she often serves as an academic advisor or a mentor for the Hispanic students at the college, and she highlighted some of the challenges faced by the Hispanic community college students with whom she works, such as issues with immigration, difficulty comprehending course materials due to language barriers, self-consciousness about their ability to communicate with others on campus or with future employers, and family or cultural conflicts that can affect the support they receive from family and friends.

According to Jake, he often observes students who are extremely willing to work hard but generally have things happening in their lives that make it difficult for them to put in the time and energy needed to master the course content, and, therefore, what he realized they needed "was not dumbing down the material, but what they needed was a lot more flexibility in terms of things like making up missed assignments when possible or having more access to materials that were covered during class." As Karen puts it, "Community college faculty have to be able to understand and then find ways to adapt to crazy student life situations, and we must help them find ways to succeed."

First-generation college students or students who do not come from a background in which education is valued may only receive encouragement from the faculty who teach their classes, and this is a concern for Katie, a professor of biology who herself had a difficult transition from high school to college. She explained that her father, a history and gym teacher, made her go back; but she fears for students who do not have that voice in their lives, so she strives to be the person who will encourage them to keep going.

Academic under-preparation is another issue that community college faculty members must understand and be prepared to confront if hope to retain students in greater number. A number of faculty members in the study pointed out that many of their students' lack of college readiness in areas such as reading comprehension or basic math skills make it difficult for them to prepare for class or complete course assignments or assessments. Katie noted that a number of her anatomy and physiology students have never before taken a biology class or a medical terminology class, but knowing about such deficits makes it easier for her to then adapt her materials and methods in ways that can help students to master the content.

Katie's colleague in the biology department, Tasha, has created an assignment that she uses as the beginning of the semester to gauge students' basic knowledge and skills in biology so that she can figure out how to best approach the subject matter. "I keep it simple, which makes a huge difference. I talk to them like they talk and use different analogies that relate to know they know about in their daily lives. I've found that big words can be scary for them, and I never want those words to cause them to shut down and think, 'I'm too stupid for this,'" explained Tasha.

The faculty members' understanding of the students served by the college could possibly be attributed to the fact that the majority of the participants in the study were either from the community of Paducah itself, or they were originally from the nearby counties also served as part of the college's district. Those who were not actually from the region served directly by WKCTC were also from the state of Kentucky, with the exception of one faculty member, who was originally from the southeast United States but came to Paducah over 25 years ago. These faculty members were clearly invested in the community and its people. They saw their work at the college as a way that they themselves could make a positive contribution to the region by helping their "neighbors" to take better care of their families financially and have expanded professional opportunities.

It is a combination of pride in the institution and a clear sense of the culture of the region served by the college that seems to drive the way that the faculty members in this study interact with their students and help their students to succeed. The faculty seem to be quite aware of the demographics of the institution as well as the challenges that can often accompany those demographics, but they are also keenly aware that they have the power to serve their students effectively and thereby serve the institution and the community through their work.

Knowing the Resources and Connecting Students to Them

Community college campuses have numerous resources in place to assist students in reaching their educational goals, but such resources are of little use to students who are either unaware of the existence of such resources or are too uncomfortable to seek out help

from various entities on campus. These resources are many and varied, ranging from food pantries, emergency funds that can help with expenses related to transportation or housing, childcare services, tutoring, mental health, counseling, career services, student veteran services, TRiO (Student Support Services), and transfer advising. And though many college websites have pages dedicated to such resources, it is often up to faculty members to observe a need in students, make students aware of campus resources, and often connect students with the resources available to them.

The faculty members in the study demonstrated both an awareness of the array of resources for students and the desire to connect students with such resources. Laura, a professor of psychology who has a passion for networking on campus, explained that faculty members should build networks across campus, both with other faculty members but also with staff members in order to know what different departments do and what they have to offer students. She expressed that the connections she has intentionally built throughout her career give her the ability to better serve her students and advisees because she can direct students to specific programs and offices if she senses that students have a need.

Students in Eliza's FYE 105 course have several assignments during the semester in which they investigate various campus resources. For one assignment, students are sent to different offices on campus to gather information about what each office has to offer them, and a component of the assignment is that students actually have to document that they visited each office by using their cell phone to take a photo of themselves in the office. "They are probably really sick of hearing me talk about resources all the time because I am constantly telling them, 'We have all these great resources available to you,

resources I never had or never knew about when I was a college student. You may not need them right now, but you might need them in the future," Eliza reported. And she makes it a practice to take it one step further by actually physically escorting students to different departments and offices on campus.

Each of the faculty participants spoke of the role and value of a number of campus resources that support students and help students to navigate challenging situations that could threaten their persistence toward completion of courses and credentials. From the academic support offered by the campus's tutoring center, which was the most commonly discussed referral that faculty made, to the mental and emotional support offered by the college's free counseling center; the faculty members in the study demonstrated that they possessed knowledge of the different services as well as procedures for referring students. All of the participants noted that they included information about campus resources in their syllabi, often sharing information with the students that was not required by the college's Academic Affairs administrators, who ultimately determine the required content that must be listed in all syllabi.

Over half of the participants mentioned actually making appointments for students or escorting students to the appropriate offices to ensure that they could find their way and actually seek the help they needed. Explaining why they choose to personally ensure students connect with resources, Eliza and Katie both revealed that they would have felt uncomfortable trying to locate a new place on campus and meet with unfamiliar people when they were already feeling vulnerable. Katie, remembering her awkward and difficult transition to college, explained, "If one little thing had gone wrong when I tried to get help from someone, I would have just given up, even if it meant that I knew I was

missing out on something important." Both these faculty members as well as four of the other participants recognized that the lack of confidence and inability to advocate for themselves that they observe regularly in their students could negatively impact their ability to seek assistance from campus resources on their own, even if they were aware of the existence of the resource.

The open door policy that defines the community college and allows it to be a place of hope for those who might not otherwise be able to pursue higher education represents both a source of inspiration and a source of challenge for community college faculty members. The foundation upon which a faculty member's ability to serve his or her students is built is based largely upon a faculty members' ability to understand and value the nature of the community college while also comprehending the background characteristics and life circumstances of community college students, particularly those who are most at risk for attrition. In addition, an optimistic attitude and a belief in students' ability to succeed given the right support were commonly expressed by the faculty participants. The faculty members' optimistic belief in their students' ability to succeed determined a faculty member's ability and desire to find ways to best support student success in the community college.

A "Students Always First" Attitude and a Belief in Students' Potential that Impacts Practices and Decisions; Making Learning Relevant to Students' Lives and Futures

Students First Attitude

"Students First" is a phrase that is common on community college students, but what does that actually look like in practice? The faculty members in this study consistently gave examples of ways in which a "Students First" philosophy impacts the

ways in which they do their jobs. By putting students' needs ahead of individual faculty

members' comfort, interests, convenience, and preferences; faculty members not only

promote student success by doing what is right for students but they also send the

message to students that they are the most important aspect of their work.

Jake's "Students First" philosophy appears to guide nearly every aspect of his

approach to working with this students, and he dedicates considerable time to doing what

he feels is best for his students in spite of the time required to engage in certain practices.

This belief in putting students first dictates his choice of course materials and his decision

to use an open source textbook, which could potentially save his students hundreds of

dollars. Rather than using software programs created by publishing companies, Jake

chose to use a system provided by an open source textbook that allowed him to program

his own problem sets for students to practice, which he says is very rewarding because he

knows that he can trust the homework he created to prepare students to meet the course's

learning outcomes while also saving the students a lot of money. He expressed,

"Whatever we can do to make it more affordable and convenient for them, we need to do

it if we can. It doesn't mean making our classes easier in the academic sense, but we

need to find ways, logically and strategically, to make it easier for them to succeed."

Additionally, his conviction that students must come first is a determining factor

in the topics he teaches in courses, particularly college algebra, which he says is a

"kitchen sink" course that can potentially be a barrier for large numbers of college

students as they work toward a credential. He explained that faculty must consider

curriculum critically and remove topics that are not necessary for their future coursework

or career, even if they really enjoy teaching those topics. "We must consider that their time is valuable. It's not about us and what is fun to teach," he urged.

Like Jake, Laura approaches her course with a critical eye, letting student learning data help to dictate how she teaches certain concepts, making choices based upon her students' success rather than her own preferences. She illustrated this aspect of her work with students by sharing an anecdote about a project she loved to assign for students and had done so for multiple semesters. In order to teach students about neurons in her psychology course, she assigned her students to actually build a model of a neuron, which she explained was one of her favorite things her classes did all semester. She explained that some students made them out of food, while others welded, sculpted, or built them from things they found in a craft store. However, after conducting an experiment to see if the neuron models actually made a difference in the students' performance on the exam, she discovered that the models did not impact their performance, and, therefore, she needed to find more effective ways to impact their learning.

Other faculty members practice a "Students First" approach by dedicating their time to assisting students outside class, both during office hours and in their time outside work. Both Katie and Tasha, despite spending around 20 hours per week in the classroom with students, voluntarily lead special study sessions for small groups of students. Each also use time outside class to help students prepare for tests by setting up mock lecture and lab examinations that allow students to practice for the tests, reinforcing the content for them while reducing their anxiety about the high stakes assessments.

Adam and Eliza also give generously of their time outside of class, making one-on-one office visits a requirement of their classes. With well over 100 students each, this requirement is a huge time commitment for the faculty members, even if students spend only five to ten minutes in their offices; but both report that this activity is one of the keys to their success in working with their students because it establishes rapport and trust with the students and provides them with the opportunity to better serve students by getting to know them individually.

Believing in Students and Encouraging Them to Believe in Themselves

Many students enter community college with background characteristics and life situations that may leave them feeling unconfident in their abilities to be successful in college. Today's student body is more likely to feel alienated by traditional college culture, in which competition and passive learning are the common practice (Rendon, 1994). Rendon's (1994) theory of validation provides insight into the ways in which faculty can foster individual and social integration for college students by validating students' abilities, allowing students to "trust their innate capacity to learn and to acquire confidence in being a college student" (p. 40). According to Rendon (1994), students, particularly non-traditional and culturally diverse students, are much more likely to persist if faculty members help students to develop positive attitudes about their capacity to learn. A focus on validation could help institutions retain students more effectively (Barnett, 2010).

Adam helped to explain the importance and power of faculty members' belief in students' ability to succeed and to make a difference in the world. He shared the following philosophy, which he says guides the ways in which he approaches his work with students:

Every community, every one, has a population of people who might be brilliant but may never realize it. And every community has a population that has either lost or has never had hope for their lives. So many people do not understand that they have something worthwhile to contribute to our society, and we have the opportunity to give them that understanding.

The belief in students' ability to be successful learners who have an important contribution to make in the world helps to guide the ways in which the participants in the study think about students and work with them. Several of the faculty members, for example, observed that their students rarely fail because of an inability to do the work. Further, the faculty members expressed the belief that students can be successful if they have access to the tools they need and if they have the ability to believe in their own ability to be successful.

Believing in her students' ability to succeed yet knowing that her course represents a huge challenge to the majority of them, Katie considers her role of encourager and motivator to be one of her key responsibilities. "A big part of my job is encouraging my students and letting them know that, if they put in the work, they can reach their goals," Katie remarked. One way in which she encourages students is to be prepared to inspire students with inspirational pep talks and videos in moments in which they most begin to doubt their abilities, namely after doing poorly on the first exam.

Like anatomy and physiology, students in college algebra and other mathematics courses often struggle to believe in themselves and their capacity to do well. Jake understands that many of his students approach his class with dread or even fear, so helping students build their confidence in their math abilities is an important part of his work with

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students, explaining that if they don't have confidence in themselves and the belief that they can learn the content, then they will struggle when they leave the classroom and have to do work on their own. One way in which he works to help his students develop more confidence is though creating activities in class that help students to feel prepared for their exams:

> I give them practice exams that look exactly the same as the real exams, with different problems of course. They have the same amount of problems, they use the same format, and they cover the same objectives. This really seems to reduce their stress and make them feel that they are ready for the test. I don't believe in throwing curve balls.

Jake also makes it a point to share with students that the ability to do math is a skill like any other skill, explaining to students that he is really good at math because he has had a whole lot of practice. Jake shared, "Every time I hear them say they aren't smart enough to do it or that they just weren't born with the math gene, I correct them. There is no math gene, and they can do well if they will come to class, ask for help when they need it, and believe in themselves."

Believing in students and helping them to believe in themselves serves the students well beyond the classroom. Laura discussed that she knows her students have the potential to accomplish great things academically and professionally if they receive the best preparation that college can give them. One of her goals as a faculty member is for her students to be prepared to take advantage of the many opportunities that an education allows them, explaining, "I want to give them that extra edge so that when they finish community college, they will be comfortable knowing that they absolutely can

succeed. I design my courses so that they have the chance to do things they didn't know they could do before, which lets them know that they have more potential than they ever thought possible."

Each of the faculty members in the study exhibited a sense of confidence in their students' ability to succeed in spite of common characteristics and circumstances that threaten many of their students' potential success. Noting that students typically fail for reasons beyond an inability to successfully master course content, these faculty members each seek to provide students with a learning environment that is supportive, empathetic, and often forgiving. This belief in students' ability to be successful learners drives them to understand their students' challenges and needs and find ways in which they can develop policies and practices that enable students to successfully navigate their courses.

Making Learning Relevant and Transferrable to Students' Lives and Futures

Each of the faculty members in the study has certain content that students must master in order to successfully complete the course, yet each of them expressed a desire to transcend the "trivial" level of the content, merely asking students to memorize facts and details purely for the sake of passing the course. Rather, the participants communicated a desire to make their content relevant to students' lives and even to enhance the students' quality of life. They also expressed the desire to equip students with transferrable skills that could help them be more successful in future courses as well as in their careers. They went about achieving these goals in various ways.

Katie's goal in her anatomy and physiology courses is that students understand how the content applies in real life situations, so she uses real-life scenarios to reinforce

class concepts. She reported that she reads both news articles and professional journals regularly with the purpose of finding ways to illustrate to students the ways in which her course's content is applicable to their future careers in healthcare. "I recently had a discussion with students about the importance of precision in anatomy. Dumb mistakes can kill people. For example, students need a solid understanding of positioning because we don't want to amputate the wrong limb," Katie explained. She added that seeing how the information applies to the real world gets students more engaged with the course content and helps them to see the need for a deeper understanding of the concepts in the course.

Teaching transferrable skills in her psychology class is one of Laura's top priorities. Helping students learn to sort through and organize information in order to learn more efficiently and effectively is a skill she intentionally covers in her classes. One way in which she helps students learn to listen and organize content is by instructing students in note-taking strategies such as the Cornell note-taking procedure.

Both John and Jake, in their math classes, point out to students why they need to learn certain concepts and how those concepts actually apply to their daily lives. John also makes it a point to tell them why quantitative reasoning skills in general are important to their lives and the ways in which math regularly presents itself in ways they may not even realize. Karen, too, strives to make her course content feel more "real and relevant" to students. With this goal in mind, she has developed different class activities such as setting up "live settings" in classrooms such as markets and restaurants, where students can practice the new language in a real context. In addition to her classroom activities that encourage students to use the language in a more authentic setting, Karen

also communicates to students the value of learning a foreign language, particularly in today's world. "I let them know that learning a foreign language opens lots of doors potentially…socially, culturally, and professionally," Karen remarked. She gives them examples of how foreign languages are useful in various careers so that students from all majors and programs can see the way foreign language can potentially benefit them in future.

Like his colleagues, Adam views his content as a vehicle to teach important life skills and life lessons. He declared, "An understanding of economics is not my end game. My goal is that they have figured out how to think about where they are in the world, what their role is in the world, and how to use economics as a tool to help navigate the world. If economics is all they get from me, then I've failed them." Like his colleagues, Adam brings current materials from many different sources into his classroom and encourages students to use what they are learning in his class as a lens for understanding what is happening in the world. Outside of class students are required to read about current events and apply economic concepts and critical thinking strategies to gain a deeper understanding of their world.

It is human nature that people need a reason to engage in work. In order to dedicate their time and effort to doing the work required of a successful college student, the students must see how the content is both applicable and beneficial to their lives. Effective faculty members understand this truth, and they dedicate a good deal of time, creativity, and thought to finding ways to connecting students to course content in meaningful ways. This practice, they believe, will better equip students to be successful in their current courses as well as in their future endeavors.

Empathy, Approachability, and Community Building

Empathetic Teaching Behaviors Based Upon Their Own Past Struggles

One surprising theme that emerged from the data gathered in the interviews was that each of the faculty participants shared stories about their own personal struggles as college students, and each one noted that the struggles they encountered in their own lives helped to inform and inspire the ways in which they understood and worked with students. Because each of these faculty members is known for being a highly motivated, high-achieving member of the faculty, it was indeed surprising that more than one of the participants reported that they did not want to return to college after the first semester or first year. However, it is perhaps due to the adversity that these faculty members faced as students that they are able to respond to students in an empathetic and supportive manner, informed by their own struggles and thus able to put themselves in the place of their students. Perhaps the faculty members who are best equipped to provide students with the kind of instruction and support they need are those who have an understanding and appreciation for the kinds of challenges, frustrations, and barriers students face.

As Laura observed about herself and her colleagues, "We tend to be nerds, weirdos who enjoy school and feel at home there;" therefore, it was quite unexpected to hear stories involving academic failures, difficulties with their own professors, lack of direction in college, and an inability to socially or academically integrate on a college campus. Upon reflection, though, the fact that each of the participants struggled to "fit in and figure it out" as college students helps to explain their attitudes and behaviors in helping their own students overcome similar challenges.

One of the most compelling stories of adversity in college was shared by Eliza, who was programmed by both her high school and her family to pursue a career in the field of healthcare. A high-achieving high school student, she chose pharmacy as her major, and enrolled in numerous pre-pharmacy courses at a large four-year university. She admitted that, though she was not a strong student in science, she believed that the pharmacy path made sense; however, after a really difficult first year, a year in which she experienced terrible bouts of loneliness and feelings of failure, she realized that, "There was absolutely no way I could make it through the undergraduate coursework, much less pharmacy school."

After changing her major to nursing and the realizing that she lacked the ability to handle what she called the "gore" involved in nursing, Eliza felt completely lost and ashamed and was only motivated to continue with her education because her father warned her not to come home without a degree. In spite of seeking assistance from professors, advisors, and career counselors, Eliza remarked that she did not feel as if anyone at her university was able to or even interested in helping her find her path.

Upon realizing that the classes in which she felt happiest and most competent were her English classes, Eliza changed her major and finished a degree in English, deciding to pursue teaching. After nearly ten years at the community college, Eliza's passion and mission when working with students is to help them to know themselves and the opportunities "out there" and find the right path for them. Her FYE class emphasizes both self-discovery and the investigation of available programs and careers. She meets with students individually two to three times per semester and talks to them about their strengths and interest, she helps students use the college website and other websites to

look at specific academic plans as well as occupational information, and she has a passion for Bloom et al.'s (2008) Appreciative Advising approach to academic advising, an approach that considers advising to be a multi-stage process that requires an advisor to do a great deal more than help students register for courses..

Like Eliza, Stacy also had difficulty feeling connected to her institution and developing a sense of her purpose for attending college. A commuter student, she remarked that it was a miracle she finished her first semester, which left her feeling disconnected, lost, and hopeless. Recalling those feelings, Stacy strives to help students build a sense of community in her classes and on campus, and she purposely speaks to students about figuring out where they belong academically and socially on campus. She integrates career exploration into several of her research assignments in her English classes, hoping students will learn more about fields in which they have interest and aptitude and that perhaps students can even help each other learn more about different academic programs and career opportunities.

Katie also shared that she wanted to drop out after the first semester of college because she felt unprepared both academically and socially for the university. A science major, she explained, "My classes felt like they were being taught in a foreign language. I had never even heard of a syllabus, and I threw them away because I didn't know they were important. I had never even seen a crosswalk before coming to the university!" Now a professor in the biology department, Katie remembers those feelings she experienced as a new college student and approaches her work with students keeping those memories in mind. She acknowledges that many of the students at the college come from academic and family backgrounds that have not prepared them to "do"

college, and she seeks to help them make that transition more smoothly than she herself did.

Many of the faculty members had first semesters that, in Tasha's words, "didn't go so hot." Both Adam and Jake shared that they had difficulty in adjusting to the freedom of college, explaining that they often skipped classes during the first semester because they had nobody who made them go to class. Interestingly, both changed their habits when a college approached them personally and expressed concern about their attendance and belief in their potential to be highly successful college students. Adam and Jack each reach out to students who have poor attendance or who seem less than engaged in their classes because they recall the difference that this made for them. Adam described his approach in working with students having trouble adapting to college, telling them, "Look, I've been where you are right now, and now I'm on the other side of the desk, and I want to help you achieve your dreams for yourself."

Several faculty members also reported struggling with balancing their academic work with the other demands in their lives, and these types of struggles have helped the faculty members to be more empathetic with their students', many of whom have multiple life roles to juggle. Tasha, for example, was an athlete in college, and she also worked overnight shifts at the job she had to have in order to help pay for her education. She noted that understanding students' challenges to balance academics with the other demands they have in their lives informs many of her decisions and policies, like her choice to select course materials and technologies that will allow students to work individually and at their own pace. Stacy, too, remembers her own struggle to pay her rent and negotiate transportation dilemmas during her college, and not only does her past

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allow her to be empathetic with her students, but it also serves as a way for her to motivate her students by letting them know that she endured the same sorts of difficulties, but she was able to succeed in spite of them.

Though each of the faculty members in the study expressed that their struggles in their own academic careers helped them to work more effectively with community college students, they were also careful to point out that this empathy and desire to help students succeed in spite of adversity did not cause them to lower the standards they set for students. Rather, it impacted the ways in which they worked with students as individuals and took such factors into account when considering issues such as classroom policies, course materials, and even course assignments. Laura made an observation that was common among the faculty in the study: "We our students fail or withdraw, it's not usually due to academics. It's more about life issues."

Adam, who talked about the importance of faculty presence and enthusiasm during events that recognized student success, described his feelings during the college's commencement exercises: "For every student who walks across that stage, I envision some of the challenges that I had to face as a student, and I recognize that, for most of those students, my challenges would be nothing compared to theirs, yet somehow they have made it."

Cultivating an "Air of Approachability" and Communicating to Students that They Matter

Describing his thoughts on student success and retention, Adam explained that college tend to focus on grand totals and aggregated statistics based upon large groups of students, but he believes that institutions must also remember that each of those numbers

represents a real person with a family, with a dream, with a talent, and with a desire to succeed. He recommended that faculty members adopt the perspective that each student matters and should be more a more important consideration than the grand totals. With that in mind, Adam strives to remind students that they matter to him and to the college.

Commuter students often feel like "strangers in a new world" who do not feel control over their lives or a sense of confidence in their ability to meet standards set by professors (Schlossgerg, 2989). She suggests that student who felt they mattered to an institution or an individual within the institution were more engaged in learning. Shelly (2014) outlined five aspects of mattering identified by Schlossberg, which include attention, importance, ego-extension, dependence, and appreciation. Students need to feel that others have noticed them and are interested in them, that others care about what happens to them, that other people are proud of their successes and concerned about their failures, that they are needed by others, and that others notice their efforts (Shelly, 2014). She explains, "Knowing that we matter helps us to persist through our discomfort when we change roles or when we move from a familiar and safe environment to a new and challenging one" (p. 3).

The faculty participants in the study described their efforts to make students feel as if they matter to the college and to their professors. Whether implicitly or explicitly communicating to students that they matter, faculty members in the study shared a desire to let students know that they are important. Communicating an "air of approachability" appears to be an important aspect letting students know that they matter.

Several of the faculty members in the study described the discomfort they themselves experienced as college students approaching faculty members. Jake reported

that he was uncomfortable speaking with faculty members and asking questions in or out of class because he perceived that the "math department attitude" was, "Let's see if you are good enough to get through this work," so he felt it would show weakness to ask questions and risk humiliation. He shared that one way he lets his students know that they matter is by having a "drop everything" attitude when students come to his office to seek assistance. He intentionally puts aside any work he is doing in order to focus on the student in his office.

Several of the faculty members shared that they ask students at the beginning of each semester to complete questionnaires about themselves, and they use this information to build rapport with students, learn more about their concerns and interests, and structure the course activities. In his beginning of the semester survey, Adam asks students what questions they have about the college or the course, and he makes sure that these questions get answered during the first week of class. Also, he makes a commitment to learn each student's name by the end of the first week. With over 100 students enrolled in his classes, this is not a simple task, and it involves a bit of creativity on his part. He uses his phone to take a group photo of each class and then studies the photos until he can call each student by name before the second class meeting. In recent years he has also instituted the practice of writing a personal note to each student and mailing that note to each of his students' homes. In the notes he expresses that he is excited to have them in his class, he believes in them, and there is at least one person at the college who cares about them. Desiring to let his students know that he is willing to be "their person" on campus drives many of Adam's behaviors.

Stacy communicates to students that they matter by trying to be what she calls a "noticer." She noted that everyone has been in a classroom in which they feel invisible and unimportant, and she expressed that effective faculty members need to be observant and figure out "the ones who really need to be noticed, even more than their classmates." She explained that, as a writing teacher, giving encouraging feedback has been her "secret weapon" throughout her career. She explained, "We have to find the beauty in their work, even if that is not easy sometimes, and then we have to show students we see them and appreciate their contribution, and if we do that, then we can begin to helping them make the rest of their work just as beautiful as the part we've noticed."

Communicating to students that they matter is sometimes as simple as speaking to them in the hallways or remembering details that they have shared in class, or it might involve noticing when students are feeling discouraged or stressed. Laura, for example, asks students questions about their favorite things, and then she engages them in conversations about those things and tries to relate them to her course's content. John shared that he approaches students individually when he notices that they are struggling with the class or with issues outside the class. "I got into full cheerleader mode, telling them things like, 'If anyone can do this, it's you.'" He also continually reminds them that he's happy to work with them one-on-one if they are having trouble with the course material, and he noted that he has at least one tutoring session with about three-fourths of his students.

Facilitating the Building of Classroom Communities among Students

The faculty members in the study affirmed the importance of building their own relationships with their students, but each of the participants also communicated their

desire to help students make connections with their peers. Often, due to what Braxton et al. (2014) call the "buzzing confusion" (p. 113) of commuter institutions, occurring when students basically hurry from place to place on and off campus without the luxury of free time to socialize or participate in activities outside of class, students do not have many opportunities outside of class to develop peer networks. "The lack of well-defined and ill-structure student social communities poses difficulties to students with a need for social affiliation" (Braxton, et al., 2014, p. 115). Faculty members who understand this challenge for students use their classrooms to encourage students to interact with one other.

Stacy, who teaches Native American literature described her approach as "tribe building," which she explained as a way of creating a culture in which "as a group we care about the outcome for everyone, and everyone benefits." She expressed that the type of classroom culture encourages the belief that all members of the tribe have something of value to contribute to the group, which can help students gain confidence in themselves and build relationships with others in the tribe.

Several of the faculty members shared specific examples in which they deliberately encourage peer-to-peer connections in their courses. Stacy's approach includes group projects, but she argued that the most effective way for her to nurture her students' connections to one another is to participate in service learning projects. She has adopted a 12-mile stretch of highway on behalf of her Native American literature classes, and each semester her students are invited to participate in picking up litter as a service learning opportunity that helps to create a common foundation upon which students can build their connections to each other. She shared, "By the end of the day we

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are so filthy and happy, and students have learned lessons that a lecture simply cannot adequately teach them."

In Eliza's FYE courses, helping students develop their own peer networks is one of her top priorities. Much of the work in her classes is done in groups, and she also meets with small groups both in and out of class in order to both advise students and help them get to know one another. Describing the activities in her class, Eliza explained that all of the interactivity in the class makes it possible for students to talk to one another and work together both in class and outside of class. She observed that her students seem to be more comfortable in class and on campus, more confident in themselves, and much more informed because of the relationships that they build with the peers in FYE.

In anatomy and physiology courses, both Tasha and Katie strive to help students connect with one another. In such a demanding and high-stakes course, both faculty members believe that helping students to create networks makes an enormous difference in students' ability to successfully complete the course. Tasha reported that, early in the semester, she assigns students to groups and encourages them to get one another's contact information in order to form study groups. She has also created interactive exams that encourage students to teach and take care of one another. Recalling her own experiences in graduate school, she attributed her success in her academic programs to working with peers. Both she and Katie spend time outside the classroom with small groups, helping them learn the course content and prepare for exams, and they each shared that these small group sessions also serve to assist students in building connections with peers who have similar goals.

Math courses are also traditionally a source of fear for many students, and John recognizes that having a network of peers to lean upon during challenges can help increase students' ability to successfully complete a course. As an undergraduate in an engineering program, John observed that he and his classmates helped one another in a variety of ways, making made the experience less stressful and more manageable. John's approach to community building in his classes is built upon his belief in the importance of humor and personality in creating a culture. One method John uses to engage his students and lighten the mood is what he calls his "strike policy," in which students are encouraged to find mistakes in his work as solves problems on the board. He explained, if students catch an error, they call out "strike," and if he has three strikes in one day, the class is dismissed for the day. According to John, his class has ended early due to strikes only four times in John's career, and the benefit of such an activity is that his students have a great time working together to try to catch him in a mistake.

In each of these instances, the faculty members demonstrated that they understand the benefits of connecting students with one another in and out of the classroom, and because they value the ways in which such interactions can enhance students' satisfaction and academic performance, they intentionally create opportunities for students to network. Kuh et al. (2005) observed, "Students perform better and are more satisfied at colleges that are committed to their success and cultivate positive working and social relations among different groups on campus" (p. 13).

Conclusion

Looking at faculty-student interactions through the eyes of faculty members who have been identified as effective in supporting community college student persistence has

allowed me to better understand how the experiences, priorities, and attitudes of faculty members inform and impact their choices in regard to behaviors, strategies, and policies when working with their students. Though the faculty members in this study had personalities and past experiences that often bore little if any resemblance to their peers', the data I gathered in talking with each of them led me to conclude that there are certain elements that they shared.

The participants in the study clearly communicated a sense of pride in the community college as an institution generally as well as pride in WKCTC specifically. They each illustrated specific ways in which the college itself has been able to have a positive impact on the lives of individuals as well as on the community in which they live and/or work. In many ways, faculty in the study spoke about their students as if they were actually helping their "neighbors" to have better opportunities, better choices, and better overall quality of life. Seeing their former students in the community, now employed as professionals, when they visited medical facilities or when they picked up children or grandchildren at local schools, these faculty members took pride in the ways in which they were able to contribute to their students' futures.

This sense of ownership that the faculty members appear to feel of the college and the college's accomplishments could help to explain why these faculty members are so invested in their work as a faculty member. Though these faculty members certainly are invested in their various academic disciplines, perhaps they are actually more committed to working closely with their students and helping the institution to achieve its mission and vision.

And important distinction has presented itself when considering the data that were generated in the study—a difference between what could be considered an effective teacher versus what could be designated an effective human lever of retention in a community college. Certainly, faculty members in both groups will share certain characteristics and behaviors. Both will demonstrate knowledge in their subject area, both will use effective and engaging methods of presenting material, both will exhibit a commitment to professionalism, and both will find ways in which they can connect their content to students' lives and make the content relevant to students. However, an effective lever of retention exhibits these behaviors but will also serve the students as human beings who have needs and challenges beyond the classroom and course content.

An effective human lever of retention certainly must be effective as a teacher, but retention of community college students depends also on the ability to understand and support the students served by the institution. Therefore, an effective lever is called to understand and value the nature and role of community colleges and today's community college student. In addition, an effective lever will demonstrate the ability to build relationships with students in order to be understand and serve them. Effective levers, in order to best equip students with the knowledge and skills they will need to successfully complete a credential, take it upon themselves to learn about resources that can assist students, and they dedicate time and effort to helping students know about and use such resources.

Institutions who wish to provide students with opportunities to interact with faculty members who serve as effective human levers of retention must come to understand the clear distinction between a good teacher and a good lever. Then

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institutions should develop approaches to intentionally hire and/or develop faculty members as human levers. Certainly, in the hiring process, search committees and administrators can engage in a variety of practices that will help them to identify and hire faculty who demonstrate the potential to be an effective lever for an institution or whose professional experiences indicate that the candidate has previously served as an effective lever of retention.

However, an institution cannot depend merely on its new and recent hires to lead the way as human levers of retention. Therefore, existing faculty can be encouraged and trained to understand the role of a human lever and to adapt their own practices in order to serve students' needs more effectively. Administrators and faculty developers can encourage conversations about the faculty role in retention, they can promote more awareness of ways in which to serve students most effectively, they can provide faculty with training that relates to various aspects of retention in community colleges and strategies for promoting retention, they can develop programs and activities that can showcase faculty achievements that relate to retention, and they can create programs such as mentoring programs or learning communities that will encourage collaboration between established human levers and those faculty who would like to develop their knowledge and skills related to student retention. By identifying their own local "human levers of retention" among their faculty, administrators and other campus leaders can identify a local resource that can assist an institution in helping to transform more professional into true human levers of retention. Indeed, though cloning is not yet possible, it is possible to study the best and adapt in order to more closely resemble those we would love to be able to clone if we could.

Chapter 4
Multiple Missions of Community College Faculty Members: Chinks in the Armor

Community colleges are a place of hope. They represent an opportunity, sometimes the only realistic opportunity, for individuals to carve out a better economic future for themselves and their families. However, they have also been chosen as the institution that can most efficiently meet the numerous demands of a society that seeks other services: English-language instruction, vocational training, re-tooling of dislocated workers, continuing education, workforce development, remedial education, and sometimes baccalaureate-level education. Community college, as a point of access to all, appeals to the principle of democratic education by offering a chance "even for poor and immigrant students, of movement from the lowest rung of the educational ladder to the highest…" (Dowd, 2007, p. 408), while also appealing to "the principles of meritocracy, equal opportunity, and social mobility" (p. 408).

Community colleges are "indispensable to meeting national goals for educational attainment as well as for the development of a productive workforce" (Baime and Baum, 2016). They are essential institutions of higher education, serving over half of all first-time undergraduates as well as striving to meet the workforce demands of the communities they service (Dowd, 2007). In 2004, President George Bush stated that community colleges are a "strategic weapon in higher education" providing access to education for all, offering job training, and assisting underprepared students successfully complete credentials (Gilroy, 2005).

However, many question whether it is possible for these essential institutions to maintain such an assortment of missions successfully. J.M. Beach (2011) suggested that

one reality of the "capitalist economic system it [the community college as an institution] was embedded in" (p. xxxii) is that "an optimistic society…generates more ambition than it can structurally satisfy" (p. xxxii).

The multiple missions that define community colleges underscore both the benefits and the challenges associated with the institution, creating opportunities for both great successes and monumental failures for the community college as an institution. Bailey and Averianova (1999), in a report for the Community College Research Center's Institute on Education and the Economy, observed that community college is the institution that has demonstrated "so much flexibility in adapting to the community's needs" (p. 5). The authors described the numerous functions and missions of community colleges:

Community colleges continue to provide educational opportunity and access for minorities and other disadvantaged groups. They have also developed and extended their vocational function because both employers and students look to them to provide the range of skills needed in the labor market. They provide remedial education because the clientele they serve is likely to lack the basic literacy skills necessary both for academic and vocational education. As publicly funded institutions, they also are expected to provide a variety of community services. In addition, they need to develop entrepreneurial functions in search of new revenues to make up for increasingly scarce state resources (Bailey and Averianova, 1999). Community colleges also provide dual-credit opportunities for high school students, online education, training for welfare recipients, non-credit instruction, continuing education and enrichment programs for senior citizens, and small business development (Gilroy, 2005)

Community college missions have not only increased in number since the founding of the first junior college, but they have also become increasingly complicated as well as more important to the nation (Arney, 2017). Dougherty and Townsend (2006) provided a theoretical and historical overview of the American community college, noting that the community college is in a continual state of change, as is the mission of the community college. Reviewing past and present missions associate with the community college, the authors reviewed several of the missions in a historical context:

The workforce and economic development mission appeared as early as the 1910s but really flowered only in the 1960s (Brint and Karabel, 1989; Dougherty, 1994). Similarly, the mission of providing adult education and community services emerged in the 1930s but did not command much attention until the 1970s (Ratcliffe, 1994). More recently, the long-standing mission of facilitating education opportunity—particularly the pursuit of the bachelor's degree—has changed as several states…have permitted community colleges to confer their own baccalaureate degrees (Floyd, 2005) (p. 8).

A number of forces have shaped community college missions since the inception of the institution, citing both "external society changes and demands" (Dougherty and Townsend, 2006, p. 8) and the "values and interests of government and community college officials" (p. 8) such as "facilitating educational opportunity and serving the needs of the community" (p. 8). The authors also argue that the self-interests of politicians, policy makers, and community college leaders have played a significant part in determining the mission of community colleges. Because community colleges have established themselves as responsive and flexible service providers, they are an attractive solution for a number of social and economic problems. The affordability, convenience,

and willingness to serve their communities and their nation that have defined the community college have created a scenario in which the institution is often called upon to be "all things to all people."

Today's community college is not equipped to be all things to all people, and it is unrealistic to expect that community colleges can effectively meet all the demands that are placed upon it. The conflict between the competing missions can be attributed to "the simple fact that community colleges—like all organizations—have limited amounts of money, time, and energy; serving one mission may thus entail cutting into the resources available for others" (Dougherty and Townsend, 2006, p. 9). In trying to be all things to all people, community colleges have "abandoned missions that should form the foundation of a democratic society and have squandered effort and resources" (Bailey and Averianova, 1999, p. 1).

Arney (2017), considering the role of community colleges in the United States, observed, "Community colleges have an implied social contract with the public to act as 'the people's college,' serving whatever are the local and perhaps regional needs, and fulfilling this contract requires deeply understanding each individual college's mission(s) and enacting it strategically" (p. 95). The author questions, though, whether it is actually possible to maintain the multitude of missions assigned to them and whether community colleges must accept that "the days of being all things to all people have passed" (p. 95). They question is, then, do community colleges, in an attempt to serve everyone actually end up serving no one?

Arthur Levine (2004), president of Columbia University Teacher's College, argued that the limited funding and resources that are stretched too thin to provide the necessary support for community college missions are going to lead community colleges to choose among the competing demands that pull then in so many different directions. While each of the intended missions may be desirable for society, according to Levine, it is simply unrealistic and even foolish to expect that community colleges can continue to meet all of the needs they are being asked to meet. In fact, Templin fears that unless community colleges begin to receive significant increases in financial support, their ability to provide "an open door for excluded and underrepresented populations to enter higher education" ("The biggest challenge […]") will be significantly eroded as they strive to meet all demands placed upon them.

Community colleges cannot sustain multiple missions, though they seem reluctant to prioritize certain functions and limit others (McPhail and McPhail, 2006). According to the authors, community colleges must limit their missions to enhancing and enriching the quality of student learning, and they propose a model for strategic thinking that can help community colleges to make critical decisions regarding their missions. Missions that prioritize student learning, as explained by the authors, "will help community colleges fulfill their important promises to students and local communities to provide and promote access, improve student achievement, focus on student learning, embrace accountability, and close achievement gaps between haves and have-nots" (p. 98).

The challenge of multiple missions of the community college provides a lens through which to view the challenges faced by community college faculty members. Clear parallels can be drawn between the institution itself and the people who work in

those institutions, with both parties experiencing frustration caused by the expectation of being "all things to all people," providing an analogy that demonstrates the difficulty associated with the position of a faculty member in a community college. Just as countless stakeholders depend upon the community college to meet an enormous list of demands effectively with ever-decreasing resources and support, community colleges themselves rely on their faculty members to make their goals a reality and bring their missions to fruition. Indeed, it would be impossible for community colleges to accomplish their array of missions without the efforts of individual faculty members.

Community college faculty members, more than any other constituency at an institution, play a crucial role in supporting student persistence. Faculty members are "at the heart of the community college mission and serve the learning needs of their communities in essential and unique ways" (Miller, 1997, p. 83). Because community college students are often present on campus only during class meetings, interactions with campus representative may be limited primarily to those they have with faculty members (Barnett, 2010).

Faculty, in the experience of most community college students, serve as the face of the institution and have an opportunity, through their behaviors, to demonstrate that an institution is true to its student-centered mission, which Braxton (2008) contends is key to students' satisfaction and their intent to persist. Research by Komarraju, Musulkin, and Bhattacharya (2010) found that interactions between students and faculty members "can be crucial in developing students' academic self-concept and enhancing their motivation and achievement" (p. 332). Student-faculty interactions can be connected with "increased persistence and completion rates, better grades and standardized test score,

and the development of leadership, critical thinking, a sense of worth, career and graduate school aspiration, and self-confidence" (Kezar and Maxey, p. 30). They also pointed out that a large body of research has found that the relationships between faculty and students "promote student engagement and a passion for learning, increase motivate to learn […], and provide validation for students" (p. 32).

Desiring to understand more about the ways in which community college faculty approach their roles and seek to impact the success of their students, I embarked upon a study that would allow me to better understand how a select group of community college faculty understand and view their position as a community college faculty member and how each individually chooses to meet the needs of his or her students. Simply put, what can colleagues, administrators, and other stakeholders learn from the information shared by the faculty on one campus who are considered most effective in helping students achieve success?

With this question in mind, I designed a qualitative research project in which I sought to discover specific evidence that would help to describe and contextualize the behaviors, experiences motivations, values, and approaches of faculty members who had been identified as exemplary in the area of promoting student success. Using an instrument I created based upon my review of the literature about effective faculty behaviors and student success (Tinto, 2012; Kinzie, 2005; Shelton, 2003; Pascarella, 2011; Tinto, 1997; Braxton et al., 2000; Braxton and Mundy, 2011; Braxton et al., 2008; DuBois, 1993; Corbin, 1998; Outcalt, 2000; Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2010; Fuentes et al. 2013; Komarraju et al., 2010; McArthur, 2005; Roberts and Styron, 2010; Hoffman, 2014; Darling, 2015; Braxton, 2004; Stevenson et al., 2006;

Richmond, 1986; Goldrick-Rab, 2007; Dixon-Rayle and Chung, 2007; Schlossberg, 1989; Engstrom and Tinto, 2008; Lundberg, 2014; Kuh et al., 2005), I sought to recruit faculty whose work with students had clearly demonstrated their commitment to student success. The study was limited to general education faculty members because these faculty members interact with nearly all students enrolled at the college, unlike faculty members in technical and/or selective admissions programs. Further, general education faculty members teach courses traditionally considered "gatekeeper" courses, which typically possess higher rates of attrition than do courses in technical fields. In addition, students in general education courses, as opposed to technical courses, are more likely to be undecided majors, which is another risk factor for attrition. Finally, students enrolled in selective admissions programs have successfully completed their pre-requisite coursework, demonstrating that the students in these programs have already been successful in general education courses.

WKCTC Community and Technical College, a rural comprehensive community college enrolling around 6100 students (2140 full-time students) in fall 2017, that is located in the Southeast United States was selected as the site for this study because its graduation rate (42.8% in 2015—2016) has consistently been the highest of any community college in its state, with a retention rate of 63.8% from fall 2016 to fall 2017. Around half of the full-time student population is seeking an associate's degree in arts, science, or fine arts. It is a four-time finalist for the Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence, and its three-year graduation/transfer rate is above the national average. The college's "focus on access, retention, and student success enabled [it] to achieve its vision of being recognized as a preeminent community college nationwide (Fact Book 2015).

WKCTC has been recognized for an "exceptional culture to get faculty engaged in improving teaching/learning that has led to measurable improvements in student success (Aspen Prize 2017).

General education faculty members at WKCTC Community and Technical College were recommended for participation by the Vice President of Academic Affairs, the Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs, the Vice President of Student Affairs, the Faculty Chair, the director of TRiO (Student Support Services), the Dean of Distance Learning, the deans of two academic divisions, and two interim academic deans. These administrators were selected to recommend participants because their positions enabled them to have exposure to one or more indicators of faculty performance, ranging from information gathered through direct observation of the faculty to access to the faculty member's student evaluations and distribution of grades reports to student learning outcome data for all general education faculty members to anecdotal knowledge formally or informally shared by students or other faculty members. To be invited to participate in the study, which consisted to two individual interviews and one group interview upon completion of all individual interviews, participants had to be designated by a minimum of seven of ten recommenders, who were asked to submit the names of five to ten general education faculty members who best met the criteria described in the instrument with which they were provided. Upon receiving feedback from all ten recommenders, nine faculty members met the required standard for inclusion in the study, and all nine agreed to participate (see Table 1, p. 108)

Upon completion of the 18 different individual interviews, I coded the data generated in the interviews, developed emergent axial categories, and then re-coded

based upon those themes. Several different common themes emerged from the interviews, and these themes were then shared with all participants in a group interview setting, which allowed member-checking among the participants in the study.

Early in the data analysis process, a variety of common themes began to emerge among the participants. I observed that nearly all of the participants had a deep and passionate respect for community college as an open-door institution that serves as a place of hope for its students and communities. Along with having strong beliefs about the role and identity of community colleges, faculty in the study also shared an understanding and appreciation of the diversity in today's community college student population; and this understanding and respect for the student population informed their everyday practices as well as their teaching philosophies. Participants shared a "students first" philosophy that provided the basis for nearly every decision they made as faculty members, from textbook selection to assessments given to the selection of times for group study sessions outside of class. Each faculty member in the study also spoke a great deal about the importance of cultivating an "air of approachability" with their students so that students might feel more comfortable interacting with them. Finally, participants shared a powerful belief in all students' ability to contribute to the classroom and the campus and to succeed as students and professionals, and this belief that all students can be successful, even in spite of the many challenges community colleges students face, inspires them to approach their jobs thoughtfully and compassionately, developing materials and policies created with community college students' needs and challenges in mind.

Though many of the attitudes and behaviors common to effective community college faculty members are not necessarily surprising or new, one common trait among the participants was somewhat surprising to me. In spite of being considered among the most successful and capable faculty members on a high-achieving community college campus, each of the faculty members in the study expressed a feeling that I had not expected to encounter with this population: Discomfort. The faculty members in the study— in spite of numerous Teacher of the Year awards, hundreds of top scores on yearly evaluations by their supervisors, excellent student evaluation results, promotions, special recognitions, and reputations for excellence both on campus and often on a regional or even national level—expressed concerns about their own weaknesses in various areas of their position responsibilities.

The duties for faculty at WKCTC Community College are outlined in a document called the Performance Planning and Evaluation (PPE), which is part of a "standardized process of annual performance review" (KCTCS website) for all full-time faculty and staff employed by the state system of community and technical colleges in Kentucky. According to the KCTCS Human Resources website, "The purpose of the annual performance review is to set forth job expectations and corresponding goals […]". The document serves to make clear the position responsibilities for faculty, to identify the quality of performance by faculty, to serve as a mechanism for feedback and recognition for faculty members, and to generate documentation needed for the purpose of promotion and other "administrative personnel decisions." The PPE for full-time faculty requires that faculty set goals in five different areas: position responsibilities such as teaching and academic advising, internal service (service to the institution), external service (service to

the community), professional development, and educational leadership. Thus, there is a standard template by which all faculty jobs at WKCTC are structured and all faculty members are evaluated. The question is, is this template the most effective way to utilize the time, abilities, and efforts of faculty members? Ultimately, are students best served by faculty members who are required to excel in numerous areas, or would the faculty members be more effective if they were allowed to focus their efforts on the aspects of their job in which they felt they could best contribute to the college and its students?

During the interviews with the faculty in the study, I spoke with each about their various responsibilities as faculty members and discovered that, while each participant in the study expressed a passion for teaching and a love of working with students, nearly all shared what they felt were chinks in their armor. While some faculty members expressed that they were uncomfortable with certain job duties, particularly the requirement for external service; others confided that they did not feel either comfortable or particularly effective with difference aspects of their job, such as student guidance/advising or educational leadership. In addition, several of the participants noted that internal service duties, such as committee assignments, took up a good deal of their time, though it often seemed as if little was actually accomplished by the committees to which they were assigned. Regarding committee services, other participants noted that they did not feel as if they made significant contributions to the committees on which they served, with many lamenting that their time would be much better spent, in many cases, working directly with students.

Full time faculty members at community colleges acknowledge that their jobs extend far beyond teaching students. Each of the faculty members in study

acknowledged that they have a responsibility to engage in ongoing professional development and service to the institution. However, many question if the existing template that exists for all faculty members is the most realistic and most effective way to structure the expectations for the position of full time faculty member. Can an institution expect all full time faculty members to excel in all roles, or does this expectation lead to a culture in which many faculty members simply "go through the motions" in certain aspects of their job in order to satisfy a requirement of their position? Are the campus and, most importantly, the students best served when faculty members must allocate their time and efforts to wide variety of pursuits, or could the institution function more effectively if faculty could dedicate themselves to the roles and responsibilities in which they are more suited, engaged, and prepared?

The faculty who participated in this study were selected upon receiving numerous recommendations from administrators and campus leaders based upon their effectiveness in promoting retention of students. However, even these faculty member, considered to be among the strongest faculty at the institution, report that there are aspects of their jobs with which they feel either uncomfortable, disinterested, or ill-suited. Certainly, in every job, professionals have areas in which they excel but other areas they would rather not engage or spend time and effort. Every job entails tasks that employees do not enjoy; yet certain tasks, whether enjoyable to employees or not, must be done. However, is the model of a full time faculty position at the institution in which this study took place the most effective way to structure all full time faculty positions at the institution, or might there be other structures or expectations that would promote faculty effectiveness and institutional success? Is it realistic to expect that full time faculty members can deliver

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excellent results in every area of the duties that are outlined in their job description and in the structure by which they are evaluated? The faculty members who participated in the study shared a number of concerns they have about the institutional expectation that they excel in a variety of areas, particularly external service, leadership, and academic advising. Emerging from this study of faculty members who are considered to be the strongest, most valuable among their colleagues is the idea that even the most formidable faculty members have chinks in their armor.

Chinks in the Armor: External Service

Community colleges, by definition, serve the communities in which they are located. According to the KCTCS Administrative Policies and Procedures manual, "KCTCS colleges have responsibility for service across the broad spectrum of the community to meet those needs not met by formal degree programs." According to this manual, individual faculty members' specific responsibilities for community service vary, but "community service shall be reflected in the overall responsibility […] and evaluation of an employee's contribution to the college."

The manual provides examples of possible community service that faculty members can provides such as facilitating workshops in the community, providing continuing education courses or training for industry, serving on community boards or commissions, participating in community meetings or forums, arranging cultural or recreational events in the community, partnering with K—12 schools, or providing professional assistance.

Several of the participants in the study shared ways in which they engaged in the external service aspect of their job. Eliza, for example, serves on the board for the local United Way, assisting in allocation of funds to community organizations and participating in service projects throughout the year. She shared that her involvement with United Way has been beneficial to her ability to serve her students because she is more aware of community resources that can assist her students if a need arises, noting "I've had students who needed help keeping their electricity or heat turned on, students who needed assistance with childcare, or students who just don't have enough food to eat. Since I know about United Way programs in our community, I can connect our students to people and agencies who can help them."

Stacy, too, finds a great deal of meaning and value in external service. For a number of years, she has adopted a highway in a local county, and she incorporates the clearing of litter from this stretch of road into her Native American literature course as a service learning project for her students. "I think it's important that we model to our students that we are all part of this community, and we can all contribute to it. They need to see that they can make a difference through volunteerism, and doing these kinds of activities together help to create community among the students," she observed. In the past Stacy has also spent time volunteering on Indian reservations, which she feels was an excellent professional development experience for her, helping to prepare her to more effectively teach students about Native American culture.

Karen, a professor of Spanish and the coordinator of foreign languages at the college, discussed the service learning projects that she has developed and facilitated for students. In the past her students have participated in a service learning trip to El

Salvador, where they feed the hungry and work in orphanages for one week. Funding this trip required Karen to work closely with community organizations and develop partnerships that would assist students in paying for their travel expenses. In addition, Karen herself reaches out to the local Hispanic community in the college's service region and assists both English and non-English speakers in the college registration process.

Some faculty participants, however, do not share their colleagues' devotion to community service as it is defined in the PPE document. Tasha, for instance, believes her time is better spent preparing her students to be successful in her anatomy and physiology course. Working individually with students, using time outside of the classroom to set up in-depth lab and lecture practice exams, meeting with small study groups, developing course materials, and learning new software for her students are the activities she feels are the most effective uses of her time outside the classroom. Tasha explained that anatomy and physiology is not only one of the most challenging courses at the college, in her view, but also it serves as a gatekeeper course for the majority of the high-wage, high-demand allied health and nursing programs offered by the college. Tasha observed, "My students work full time, they have children, many are single parents, and they'll do anything to make it through this class [anatomy and physiology]. It's the gateway to the degree they are dreaming of, the degree that will allow them to provide for their families."

Tasha noted that helping students to successfully complete her course is her top priority, and she suggested that the best community service she can provide is helping her students, many of whom are displaced workers or single parents, to attain the credentials that will allow them to get good jobs and contribute to the workforce and tax base in the

community. She finds the community service requirement a distraction and a poor use of her time, adding that she has rarely found any of her community service activities truly rewarding or important. Rather, to Tasha, the effort to find an activity she can use to meet the requirement and the setting aside of time to do the activity feel meaningless to her, as if she is simply playing the game in order to "check the box."

Tasha is not alone in this view of the community service requirement. Jake, a professor of mathematics at the college, also laments that the evaluation process demands that he finds and participates in community service outside of the college. Jake explained that between teaching an average of 18 hours per semester, chairing the statewide math curriculum committee, and developing course materials that allow students to use open-source textbooks for free; he does not feel he can or should allow time to participate in external service.

"I'm not a big joiner. I don't like the spotlight, and I've never been comfortable in those kinds of situations," Jake shared. He expressed that the work he does with instruction, curriculum, and programming is what is meaningful to him in his faculty position, and he suggested that he is at his best when he is able to focus on those things. According to Jake, the evaluation process would be much more meaningful if individuals were able to have more input into the actual descriptions of their positions, and the work of faculty members would be much more effective if, "people could contribute in the ways that mean more to them and in the areas where they are actually strong." Jake believes that faculty need to focus their time on activities that allow them to do their best work because that is the work that has the most impact on the students, the college, and the community.

Community colleges can be a wonderful asset to the community that they serve, and the mission of WKCTC Community College reflects that commitment to contributing to the welfare of the community. Many faculty members have embraced the community service aspect of their faculty positions, and they believe they have found meaningful and impactful ways in which they can use their skills and efforts to contribute to groups and individuals outside of campus. Many have incorporated community service in their courses and have connected their students with opportunities to engage in service learning in local and even international locations.

However, not all faculty members have the same experience with external service nor the same desire to allocate their time and effort to engaging in external service activities. A number of faculty participants suggested that the requirement serves as a distraction from what they view as their true duties as faculty members, namely the duties that they feel directly lead to the success of their students. These faculty members believe that requiring all faculty members to find ways in which they can meet the external service requirement is not an efficient or effective use of time. As one faculty member observed, "We [the faculty] all have different strengths and interests. We all have something to contribute. But there needs to be more flexibility in the definition of faculty jobs because work that is done just so that we can say we have met a requirement is not going to be everyone's best work. And we are too busy, and our work is too important to waste time."

Chinks in the Armor: Leadership

Academic leadership is a requirement of all faculty members at WKCTC Community College. To fulfill this duty, faculty members are expected to chair college

committees, hold administrative positions such as program coordinator or division chair, lead major college-wide initiatives, serve as an officer of a professional organization, or serve on system-level committees. Faculty members are expected to distinguish themselves as campus or even statewide or nationwide leaders, and each academic year, their goals must include leadership activities, and their annual evaluations are partially based upon their role as a leader. Holding leadership roles becomes even more important to a faculty member's career at WKCTC when faculty members are considered for promotion to the rank of both associate and full professor.

Stacy, who has taught English for the college for over 25 years, expressed that she feels a great deal of pressure to serve as a leader, though she feels neither comfortable with nor particularly suited to a leadership role. In Stacy's view, she can make meaningful contributions both to the campus and to her students by "seeing what needs to be done and then doing those things." She provided several examples of ways in which she uses her skills and efforts to contribute to the campus, such as providing workshops on wellness for her colleagues or volunteering in the college's writing lab for students who choose to seek extra assistance with writing assignments. "The pressure to be a leader makes people like me feel inadequate and unappreciated, but not everyone is suited for a leadership position. I can support the college and make a difference without needing to be in charge," Stacy argued.

The leadership requirement can also create competition and resentment among faculty members. For example, a finite number of college-wide committees exist; therefore, only a limited number of faculty members can chair a committee. Further, those positions typically are assigned to faculty members who have been employed by

the college for a number of years. John expressed that the most difficult part of meeting the job requirements of a faculty members is finding some way to carve out a leadership role for himself. The associate professor of math, who was chosen as a past Faculty Member of the Year by his students, serves on several campus-wide committees and is the faculty sponsor for the campus ministry, which he says, "provides students with a way to connect to one another and to the campus and gives students who might otherwise struggle socially a place to establish themselves and meet other students outside of class."

John, who dedicates a great deal of his efforts to mentoring students and helping students successfully complete their mathematics course requirements, has struggled to establish himself as a leader on campus, at least as it is defined in the PPE document. "I think that has been the hardest and most frustrating part of my job," John shared. He explained that it is difficult to get certain positions on campus that are considered "leadership" positions because those positions are typically occupied by colleagues who have been with the college longer and do not wish to give up their positions, such as program coordinator or division chair. Additionally, since many of the leadership positions are selected by elections, John explained that newer faculty are at a disadvantage because they do not have the name recognition or campus connections that more visible or experienced faculty members have. He noted that he has run unsuccessfully for faculty senate, competing to be the one "general education" representative from the campus and losing.

Unlike John, some participants in the study have clearly defined themselves as leaders, both on campus as well as on state and national levels. Several of these participants shared a different kind of concerned about the across-the-board leadership

expectation. Adam, a faculty member who is renowned for his work as a campus leader who also teaches leadership courses for the college, shared his concerns related to the leadership requirement. Adam, who has held numerous leadership roles at the college during his nearly 25 year career at the college, considers leadership to be an enormous responsibility that must be undertaken with the utmost seriousness and respect for the importance of the task. His concern, therefore, is that faculty members sometimes seek leadership roles for the wrong reasons, namely for the purpose of "checking the box" on the PPE document or for consideration for promotion. Adam argued that requiring all faculty members to seek leadership roles can potentially promote a culture in which people take on such roles for the wrong reasons and then are ineffective in the role because they lack the passion or skills to do the job effectively. "We need committee chairs, senators, board members, program coordinators, etc. who genuinely want to serve in those positions. But if someone is taking on one of those positions only to meet a requirement or get promoted, then I don't think they are likely to do the job as well as someone who genuinely wants to serve," Adam explained.

Of course, eventually the experienced faculty members who have established themselves as campus leaders will vacate those positions due to retirements, and Laura shared her concern that the college must make it a priority to prepare newer faculty to assume those roles through mentoring and professional development. For a number of years Laura served on the small team of experienced faculty members who lead the New Faculty Orientation program at WKCTC Community College, and she described her approach for helping new faculty members begin to develop a foundation upon which they can build their role as a campus leader. Laura noted that she shares with new faculty

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members the importance of networking on campus and establishing name recognition outside of their own academic departments. Laura shared that she explains to new faculty members that they will be expected to take on leadership roles on committees or in elected positions, so she encourages new faculty members to find ways to get involved in campus activities, seek out chance to get to know faculty across the campus, and build networks with colleagues. "At some point you are going to need to run for a position for something at the local or state level, and people need to know your name and a little about you. If nobody knows you, you're not going to get the position," she tells new faculty members. She also helps new faculty members to find mentors and shadow their more experienced colleagues so that they can learn about different duties and positions.

Certainly academic leadership is essential to the functioning of an institution. Faculty are responsible for participating in numerous aspects of an institution, such as the curriculum process or shared governance. There must be capable, dedicated faculty members who are willing to serve as program coordinators, committee chairs, senators, members of boards, or leaders of campus-wide initiatives. Additionally, faculty leaders serve as an important voice for faculty and can represent the institution or their discipline on a state or even national level.

However, a number of questions arise when considering the blanket leadership expectation for all faculty members. Should all faculty members be expected to distinguish themselves as leaders? Is an institution more likely to have the most effective faculty in leadership positions when all faculty members are expected to define themselves as leaders? Does this expectation create a culture in which all faculty members take on leadership roles for the "right" reasons, and if some faculty members

take on leadership roles merely to satisfy one of the requirements for the position, do colleges create a situation in which the right people are not necessarily in the right positions? Does the expectation of leadership create an environment of competition, pressure, and resentment among faculty members in which colleagues must scramble amongst themselves to determine who will occupy a limited number of leadership positions, and new faculty members must often simply wait for more experienced faculty members to vacate certain positions? And, perhaps most importantly, should every faculty member be expected to take on a leadership role when many faculty members do not find themselves inclined toward leadership and do not feel that they have the skills and demeanor that will allow them to be truly effective in those important positions?

Chinks in the Armor: Academic Advising

Teaching faculty members at WKCTC Community College are required to serve as academic advisors for students. In their role as academic advisors, faculty are expected to meet with students and build relationships with those students in order to provide the best possible support and guidance for students as they work toward an academic credential and, in many cases, transfer.

The approach to advising the college has adopted reaches far beyond assisting students in registering for courses. Rather, as participants in the study reported, advisors are expected to mentor assigned advisees, assist advisees in connecting with campus resources, provide guidance related to major selection, support advisees in the transfer process, and help students complete various tasks such as applying for graduation or changing their majors. In 2016, WKCTC Community College formally adopted the Appreciative Advising (Bloom and Ye, 2008) model to serve as the template that would

guide interactions between academic advisors and their students. Faculty and staff members have participated in a number of professional development seminars and workshops designed them teach them about Appreciative Advising and assist them in using the framework as they work with their advisees. Bloom and Ye (2008) explained that Appreciative Advising establishes and honors "a deep personal relationship between advisors and students through an emphasis on the intrinsic, ontological value of each student encountered" (p. 7). Bloom and Ye (2008) described in detail the framework that defines an Appreciate Advising approach:

Embracing the Appreciative mindset, advisors intentionally use positive, active, and attentive listening and questioning strategies to build trust and rapport with students (Disarm); uncover students' strengths and skills based on their past successes (Discover); encourage and be inspired by students' stories and dreams (Dream); co-construct action plans with students to make their goals a reality (Design); support students as they carry out their plans (Deliver); and challenge both themselves and their students to do an become even better (Don't Settle). (p. 11)

Modeling advising interactions with students based up on the Appreciative Advising framework clearly requires a significant time commitment on the part of the advisor. To engage in each of the steps of the process with each advisee ideally would involve multiple meetings with advisees each semester in order to devote the time to the conversations that need to occur between advisor and student. The model is dependent upon a relationship that is built between advisor and advisee; and building the trust, the knowledge, and the rapport between those two parties is not something that can happen in

a single meeting of 30 to 45 minutes in which students also need to schedule courses for the next semester.

Eliza, an early adopter of the Appreciating Advising model and the facilitator of the Advising Partnership (a group of faculty and staff advisors selected each academic year to undergo more extensive Appreciative Advising training and meet monthly to discuss issues related to advising), reported that she typically meets with advisees at least three times per semester, with each meeting having a specific purpose. In the first meeting she typically speaks with students about their strengths, goals, and career aspirations. In the second meeting, she checks in with students to find out how their semester is going and begin planning for upcoming semesters. Finally, in the third meeting, she helps students build course schedules and discusses a variety of tasks and deadlines with them, such as applying for financial aid or declaring a major. If Eliza limited each of the three meetings with students to 30 minutes each (though she reports that they often last closer to an hour each), then she would spend around 90 minutes with each of her 53 advisees each semester, which is nearly 80 hours per semester spent in advising sessions. Unlike the other eight participants in this study, however, Eliza has a reduced teaching load due to other administrative assignments, which may put her in a better position to allow for the time commitment needed for Appreciative Advising.

Meeting with students, though, is not the only task for advisors at WKCTC. Many of the participants reported that they also reach out to advisees several times throughout the semester to offer encouragement, send reminders, or simply check in and see how the semester is going for students. Adam reported that he enjoys sending emails to each of his advisees several times during the semester because he feels this can be a

high-impact practice that can help retain students. According to Adam, these kinds of communications provide students with a sense that someone on the campus knows them and cares about their welfare, and he hopes that he can serve as "that person" for his advisees. "At least they will know that one person at the college is invested in them and concerned about them. And maybe that's all it takes to help some students decide to stay here," he suggested.

With a full teaching load and an advising load that hovers around 100 students per semester, Adam somehow finds the time to build relationships with his advisees as well as stay current with ever-changing policies and procedures related to advising. A former chair of the college's Central Advising Council, Adam appears equally comfortable with the interpersonal and procedural aspects of the advising role. He shared that a great advisor needs to have both a deep concern for students and the ability to follow through and help students find and the follow a path: "My number one goal is that they know that somebody is here who cares about their dreams and wants to help them discover and achieve those dreams. They need to know that their advisor is going to follow through and give them the best information." Adam illustrated his approach to advising, sharing a story about one of his advisees in a recent semester who was listed as a business major, but after a number of conversations with the student, he and the student decided that the student needed to consider a career in the health field. After doing research together about different career options and academic programs at the college, Adam set up an appointment for the student with the dean of the college's nursing program, and he escorted the student to the appointment and introduced the student and the dean in order to make the student more comfortable.

WKCTC also uses an early alert system that notifies advisors if one of their advisees is struggling in a class. Instructors can "flag" students for attendance concerns, academic achievement concerns such as low test scores, missing or late assignments, or even behavioral issues. Once a student has been flagged, several entities on campus, including the assigned academic advisor will receive notification of the flag. The majority of the advisors in the study noted that they contact their advisees who have flags, and they work with students to resolve the flags, make decisions, and handle whatever problems they are having.

The participants in the study have varying numbers of assigned advisees, with some faculty members having as few as 20 advisees and others having as many as 100 or more. Adam, a professor of economics and leadership, had 102 assigned advisees, most of whom had declared a major in a business-related field, in the fall 2018 semester. Eliza, who teaches First Year Experience courses, is the assigned advisor for all the students in her FYE courses. In fall 2018, she had 53 assigned advisees, representing a variety of declared majors and programs. The two math faculty members, Jake and John, were each assigned around 30 advisees who declared associates in sciences as their major; the same was true for the two biology faculty members, Katie and Tasha. Finally, in the humanities and social sciences, Karen was assigned nearly 50 advisees, while Stacy and Laura had 25 students assigned to them.

Several of the participants in the study reported that they do not feel, due to their other professional responsibilities, they are able to devote the time necessary to advise students in the way the college is now training advisors to work with each of their advisees. They recognize that there is merit in the Appreciate Advising model, and many

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remarked that they would feel comfortable building these types of connections with their advisees if they had adequate time in their schedules to do so. However, with full teaching loads, internal and external service commitments, participation in professional development, and leadership responsibilities; several participants stated that there simply are not enough hours in the day. Laura, who shared that she was misadvised as an undergraduate and completed nearly 30 hours of coursework that did not actually apply to her intended major, does not feel comfortable with advising because her other responsibilities as a full-time faculty member limit her ability to devote what she considers an adequate of time not only to working with her advisees in one-on-one meetings but also to receiving adequate training for advising. Laura expressed that advising causes her to feel anxious because, "Things are always changing, and I worry that I don't have the most up-to-date information. I don't want to give an advisee outdated information and then cost that student extra time or money. The stakes are really high."

Because of her discomfort with the advising role, Laura, an award-winning faculty member and long-time champion of the college's mentoring program for teachers, explained that she would be more effective and contribute more to the college and its students by teaching another course each semester or taking on more faculty mentees rather than serving as an advisor for students. Suggesting that her apprehension about properly fulfilling the duties of an advisor limits her ability to serve her advisees in a manner in which she feels they should be served, Laura believes that the job would be performed better by colleagues who are more comfortable in the role and better prepared to play that role.

Jake, a professor of mathematics, disclosed a different kind of discomfort with the advising role. "I'm not a real touchy-feely guy. I place a high value on privacy, and I respect my students' right to privacy as well," he explained. Explaining that he is uncomfortable with the kinds of conversations that he feels he would be encouraged to have with students as an Appreciative Advisor, Jake feels ill-suited to this role. Jake, who has a deep interest in policy and curriculum, did not share Laura's concern with keeping up with the latest curricular changes, placement policies, and transfer requirement. Rather, Jake is concerned that the interpersonal communication required of an Appreciative Advisor creates a scenario in which he cannot meet the standard.

Like Laura and Jake, Tasha also shared that she would prefer not to serve as an academic advisor for students. A teacher of anatomy and physiology courses, Tasha suggested that her time is better spent assisting students in preparing for exams in her course. She echoed Laura's concern that it is extremely difficult to keep up with all the changes each semester, and not being aware of certain changes could lead to errors which could potentially cost students both time and money. Tasha expressed, "There's just no way to keep track of all that information and still be the kind of teacher I need to be, so I just don't feel confident that I can be the kind of advisor my students need." Tasha also suggested that she is not passionate about advising, which could help to explain why she does not feel dedicated to investing her time in professional development related to advising. A former member of the college's Advising Partnership, Tasha allocated a number of hours during the 2017-2018 academic year to receiving training in Appreciative Advising, and this training served to confirm that she does not have a great

deal of interest in serving as an advisor. "It's just not my thing. My thing is to teach," she explained.

Academic advising responsibilities appear to serve as a lightning rod among the participants in the study, operating as a tangible example of what some participants feel is among the most essential duties and privileges of a faculty member but others feel is a role they are neither suited nor prepared to fill. Faculty members such as Eliza and Adam embrace their role as advisors, while others like Tasha and Laura do not feel that they are able to fulfill their duties as an advisor in a way that best serves the students assigned to them. While some faculty members view advising as a difficult and even unpleasant part of their job because they lack the passion for the task, others are not comfortable serving as an academic advisor because their other duties demand so much of their time and attention that they do not feel they can competently do the job.

Conclusions

Pursuing success across multiple missions is a daunting and possibly unrealistic task for community colleges as well as for the faculty members who directly carry out those missions. Indeed, the burden of bringing a college's vision and mission to fruition weighs most heavily on the faculty, the group of professionals who interact most closely and most often with the constituencies served by community colleges. Just as community colleges have been advised to prioritize their missions (McPhail and McPhail, 2006; Bailey and Averianova, 1999) and focus on their efforts on student learning and student success, so must the faculty who work in community colleges.

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The variety of functions of community colleges "are in conflict if they are based on insufficient resources or are not properly integrated" (Bailey and Averianova, 1999), and considering the low graduation and transfer rates of community colleges nationwide, clearly very few colleges are equipped to accomplish even their most basic missions. McPhail and McPhail (2006) suggest that prioritizing their missions will allow community colleges to "fulfill their important promises to students and local communities" (p. 98). Perhaps the same is true for community college faculty members.

Community college faculty members, like the institution itself, are pulled in numerous and sometimes competing directions. As the group within the community college workforce who bears the primary responsibility for the majority of the missions, faculty members are expected to demonstrate effectiveness in a number of areas, including external (community) service, leadership, and academic advising. When added to teaching schedules that can be comprised of up to 21 hours of instruction per semester, institutional service such as committee work, and the need for ongoing professional development and training; community college faculty members are often forced to compromise their performance in one area in order to ensure that they are engaged in all areas described in their position responsibilities.

Resources are finite, and often time is the most precious and limited resource of all for community college faculty members. In addition, the individuals who occupy these positions are like all people in that they have different strengths, abilities, preferences, personalities, and priorities. Though professionals in every field find that they enjoy certain aspects of their jobs more than others and are stronger in some areas and weaker in others, the fact is that workers would likely be more productive and morale

would be much higher if employees could dedicate the majority of their time and effort to tasks they are most suited to.

Perhaps the most damaging consequence of having too many missions, for institutions as well as the faculty members within those institutions, is the impact that this kind of pressure has on morale. A number of the faculty participants in the study confessed that they believe they do a lot of things each day but often question whether or not they do any of those things well. The frustration and sense of shame that many expressed when reflecting upon the way in which they perform their jobs each day is a direct result of being expected to excel in numerous areas without adequate time, preparation, or desire to do so. Many confessed that they fear burnout, while others described feelings of exhaustion or bitterness. Some mentioned they do not get enough rest, and the majority lamented compromising time with their families and friends, their physical and mental wellness, and relationships with their students.

The biggest question of all, then, is that if the faculty members who have been identified as the most effective in their work with students feel that they are struggling to keep their heads above water, what does this mean for inexperienced faculty members who are just entering this workforce or faculty members who do not necessarily have such a distinguished record of performance? If even the most driven and dedicated faculty members do not feel that they can adequately perform all that is expected of them, perhaps it is time to consider the idea that community colleges should prioritize faculty duties based on the strengths, interests, and values of individual faculty members rather than create "one size fits all" job descriptions that carry unrealistic expectations. Faculty are the most important resource a community college has in its pursuit to accomplish its

missions; thus, this resource must be utilized in thoughtful ways if it is to perform

effectively in its support of the missions.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

The semester that I spent conducting interviews with the participants in this study who are also my colleagues at the community college where I teach and coordinate professional development was one of the most rewarding of my career. As I waited to receive the approvals that would allow me to begin working with my subjects, I was eager to begin collecting data, but in many ways I was anxious. Several concerns weighed on me, and I became increasingly nervous about actually *doing* the study I had been planning and organizing.

I worried about things like time. Trying to imagine how I was going to carve out the hours needed to sit down repeatedly with the participants in order to have the conversations that would generate the data for the study, I worried that I might not have enough time to do the rest of my job the way my students and colleagues need me to do my work. Also on the subject of time, I felt guilty asking my colleagues, who were likely to be regarded as the faculty members who are most "busy" on my campus, to give me a few hours of their already very limited time.

I feared that my instrument I had created to identify potential participants might fail, leaving me with an enormous list of potential "faculty levers" but no real consensus from those giving recommendations. I dreaded the possibility of having 50 faculty names suggested to me, with no names appearing more than once or twice on everyone's lists. Or worse, I wondered if all of the people I had asked to recommend participants for the study would actually take the time to look over the criteria I provided to them and then thoughtfully generate a list of potential subjects for the study.

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Community colleges a busy, busy place for everyone who works there. They are filled with employees who are each trying to do a job that should actually be done by two or three people. My colleagues approach most every day, every week, every month with enormous "to do" lists that may or may not ever quite get finished, and most likely, they will never feel that they did everything on that list to the best of their ability because there just is not time. I cannot begin to list the times that one of my co-workers has shared that he did not sleep well the night before because he could not get his mind off everything he needed to do.

To describe my approach to my daily work, I use the analogy of operating in "triage mode." In other words, I organize my efforts based on what is most critical and can be salvaged. Then when those tasks have received at least a bit of my attention, I am able to work on things that are still serious but are neither as time-sensitive nor as critical as others. Of course, there is another aspect of triage that is often the hardest, most haunting part of the task: determining which "patients" are most likely hopeless and turning away from those things so that those with a better chance of survival might make it. Then, either during the routine of classifying tasks and determining which ones most need my attention, I am interrupted. Over and over. The phone rings, twelve emails come in from students or colleagues who need assistance or answers, three different people come to the door, and then I am adding things to the list or totally disregarding the list and focusing on whatever situation is immediately before me. By the end of the day, I am fortunate if I feel that I actually managed to do any of the things I had stayed up the night before planning to do. I once told a colleague that I often felt like each morning I was shot out of a cannon, and then, flying through the air, I was expected to perform

brain surgery. In other words, there is a frantic pace that comes with teaching five or six

classes, advising 30 or 40 students, chairing two committees, trying to work on a

doctorate, coordinating professional development for the colleges, attending trainings and

conferences, chairing a department that includes around 30 English faculty members, etc.

And most of the time I fear that I am about as effective as a brain surgeon who is trying

to operate while flying through the air at 120 miles per hour.

Embarking on this study scared me in many ways, but I loved the idea of sitting

down with the faculty members on my campus who were considered the most effective in

supporting student success. I was eager to learn about their backgrounds, their strategies

for encouraging students to persist and achieve, and their philosophies of teaching and

possibly of life in general. When the recommendations came back and nine faculty

members had been identified over and over, I felt excited, curious, and a bit nervous

about contacting the different individuals to invite them to take part in the study.

Some of the names, to be honest, did not surprise me, belonging to colleagues

whom I had labeled "The Usual Suspects." These were the faculty members who are the

most visible, seemingly the most active. They lead large initiatives on campus, and they

occupy leadership positions both on campus and across the state and even the nation: they

are the often outspoken and seem to be somehow involved in every event and activity

that happens at the college. However, there are other names that showed up, a couple of

them on each one of the ten lists, that I recognized but did not expect. Three of the

participants, in fact, were strangers to me. I had literally never exchanged one word with

them. Of course, on many campuses this might be common, but on my campus, with

only around 110 full-time faculty members, most of us know a large percentage of our

colleagues. We serve on committees with them, we see them at faculty meetings and in workshops, we see them at campus events, and we run into them on campus. It was surprising to me that, after 13 years at the college, I still had colleagues who were strangers to me, especially because nearly all of the participants had been employed nearly as long as me or much longer.

I was pleasantly surprised when each of the nine faculty members I invited to take part in the study accepted the invitation, and during the first set of interviews, I realized a few things. One, I was quite glad that I had included so many questions related to the backgrounds and duties of the participants because I knew so very little about some of them. Two, I realized that this kind of research was enjoyable in the sense that I loved the act of engaging with conversations and looking for meaning and theme within those conversations. Three, I began to understand some of the factors that make this kind of research challenging, particularly when one is inexperienced with collecting and thinking about qualitative data. I worried about whether or not I was asking the right questions, questions that would allow me to develop the insights I hoped to achieve. Four, my time with my colleagues taught me a powerful lesson: though we may share certain common beliefs about our students and our work, there isn't necessarily a template upon which all "effective faculty members" are based. The participants in this study have different strengths, personalities, and styles of interactions with students.

Once I began listening to the interviews and the reading the transcriptions of the interviews and felt even more inspired by the words of the teachers who talked with me, I started thinking about what sorts of pieces I wanted to write as the manuscripts that would make up this dissertation. My first thought was that I wanted to tell their stories,

creating profiles of each of the participants and sharing their experiences, thoughts, and specific strategies so that other community college faculty might simply be inspired by them and might be able to learn from them. I saw myself as a cheerleader for community college faculty members, shining a light on a group of educators who work in an environment that is challenging by nature and yet continue to approach their work with optimism and a sense of hope, assuming a large part of the burden for helping people achieve their dreams.

However, in the end, I realized that what I needed to do involved something a bit more thoughtful and more practical than creating a document that beckoned with the promise of, "Hey! Check out this wonderful group of people. This article will make you feel good and may inspire you to be your best self." In the end that idea perhaps seemed a bit "fluffy" and "touchy feely," even for me.

The first manuscript I wrote about focused on the common traits and behaviors shared by the faculty members in the study. My goal was to illustrate that—even though these faculty members each bring different interests, attitudes, and skills to the table— this group of "potential human levers" shared a number of elements that helped to inform and shape the ways in which they interacted with students and approached their job duties. As someone who writes with other practitioners in mine, my goal was to provide readers with specific examples of behaviors that reflect a desire to support student success on the part of the faculty member. I hoped to be able to illustrate what these kinds of interactions actually looked like on an average day in a community college classroom or in the hallways or offices at a college. I have spent the past several years reading about characteristics and "best practices" of effective faculty members in higher

education, but often what I read describes behaviors in general, as in "creates a welcoming environment for students." However, it doesn't show what that actually looks like on a day to day basis, particularly from the perspective of the faculty member. My goal is that the first manuscript depicts, from the faculty perspective, how and why faculty do certain things in the name of promoting student success.

When I received my first round of feedback on the first manuscript, one question haunted me for quite some time. In truth, it made me wonderful if what I had written might seem silly to my audience. It made me wonder if my voice sounded "singsong" and if the work might have been more appropriate had it been composed using a yellow crayon rather than a keyboard. The comment asked me if all of the nine participants were "on board with the 'hopey,' 'feely' stuff." The reviewer, who serves as the chair of my dissertation committee, asked me, "Is a faculty lever by definition a Pollyanna?"

The question stung. My intention was never to paint a portrait that bore more resemblance to a Disney movie than it did to a read life, particularly real life at a community college, a place that can sometimes seem bleak, especially if one chooses to listen to one's inner cynic. I was ashamed that, in telling aspects of their stories as faculty members, I had somehow characterized these educated, ambitious, talented colleagues of mine as something that might be considered adorable but perhaps a bit naïve. This is not who my subjects are.

I did a lot of thinking over the next few weeks about what I was trying to say about a faculty lever of retention, and I think perhaps the writing of my second manuscript— which focused on "chinks in the armor" of the faculty levers—helped me to articulate my response to the "Pollyanna Problem." And though my immediate

response was to take offense at the idea that these faculty members could be perceived as Pollyannas, the truth is that, well, they kind of are.

Recalling *Pollyanna*, both the children's book and the film, the title character Pollyanna Whittier is a young orphan who is sent to live with a grouchy aunt who really does not want her. She has taught herself, after a lifetime of hardship, to see the good in every situation and to try to focus on the good things she has rather than the (many) things she lacks. She is sincere, empathetic, generous, and optimistic. In the film, Pollyanna shares a piece of wisdom that was given to her: "When you look for the bad in mankind expecting to find it, you surely will." So she chooses to do the opposite and looks for the good in people instead. She brings out the best in people, often in people who have been written off or harshly judged by the others. She gives a sense of hope to those who had become bitter with hopelessness.

The character Pollyanna, in spite of what some might say, is neither naïve nor frivolous. It is not that she does not see the bad things that happen to her and to those in her world. It is not that she is in denial of the fact that the world can be a very difficult place, and life can disappoint us. Rather, she chooses to adjust her attitude to the unpleasant things she encounters, allowing herself to serve as a positive force, a symbol of goodness and hope. A "Pollyanna," then is perhaps a good way to describe how human levers approach their work in the community college.

No, they are not darling 11 year old girls who teach the kitchen staff to play the "glad game," but they do choose to focus on the possibilities and to believe in the potential of people. They are not, in most cases, excessively or annoyingly cheerful, as the term "Pollyanna" has come to connote. They know what the odds are for community

college students. They hear stories several times every semester that break their hearts.

They experience frustration and disappointment when their students do not succeed, even

if that failure seems to be caused by a student's lack of motivation or interest. They

know quite well that they occupy the very lowest place on the higher education totem

pole. They work with students who have so many strikes against them that it seems

inconceivable that they could ever dig themselves out of a hole created by poverty,

academic under-preparation, ignorance of the nature of higher education, disability, or a

combination of circumstances. But they persist.

Yes, community college faculty members can see all the reasons that a student

simply cannot succeed. But they also know from experience that students do persevere,

they do overcome the odds, they do amaze everyone who thought there was no chance.

Every semester community college faculty members sit at graduations and watch students

cross the stage who had every card in the deck stacked against them. But somehow they

have managed to stay the course. Community college faculty members *know* that it can

be done, in spite of every barrier that presents itself. And it is their optimism, their

empathy, and their hopefulness that drive these faculty members, like their students, to

persevere.

In spite of the environment, a place where resources are continually being cut and

faculty are constantly reminded that they work in an institution that does not inspire a

whole lot of respect from most of the population, community college faculty members

keep climbing the mountain. They know what they are up against, but they also

understand the value in what they do and the value of the institution they serve and the

people they serve. If this is what defines a Pollyanna, then I am now quite proud to say

that, yes, a faculty member who acts as a human lever of retention is indeed a Pollyanna.

Recalling the story, Pollyanna was able to transform many lives, and she made her

community a better place. She gave people hope, even when it seemed foolish to hope

for better. It is my hope that all community college faculty members will take a page

from her book.

Appendix I: Informed Consent Forms
RESEARCH SUBJECT INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Project Title:	Sponsors:
It's Not the Programs; It's the People: Building Human Levers of Retention in Community Colleges	Dr. Jane Jensen Educational Policy Studies and Evaluation University of Kentucky
Principal Investigators: Kyle Barron Kimberly Russell	**Organization:** University of Kentucky College of Education Educational Policy Studies and Evaluation Lexington, KY 40506
Location: Lexington, KY	**Phone:** 859 257-1929

1.   **PURPOSE OF THIS RESEARCH STUDY**

   You are being invited to take part in a research study designed to look at the experiences of grassroots leaders in higher education. If you volunteer to take part in this study, you will be one of about five people to do so. Kyle Barron or Kimberly Russell will be the Principal Investigators (PI) for this study. They are being guided in this research by Dr. Jane Jensen of the University of Kentucky, Department of Educational Policy. By doing this study, we hope to gain insight into the characteristics that create successful human levers of retention.

2. **PROCEDURES**

   The research procedures will be conducted at Southcentral Kentucky Community and Technical College (SKYCTC) or West Kentucky Community and Technical College (WKCTC). The PI will contact you via email and telephone to arrange an interview time. You will be asked to answer questions regarding how you are a human lever of retention.

3. **POSSIBLE RISKS**

   Risks to participating in this research study are unknown. To the best of our knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would experience in everyday life. However, any new information developed during the study that may affect your willingness to continue participation will be communicated to you.

4. **POSSIBLE BENEFITS**

   There are no known benefits from taking part in this study. Your participation will allow for a greater understanding of the characteristics, motivations, and actions of human levers of retention in a higher education setting.

5. **FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

   There are no costs associated with taking part in the study. There is no financial compensation for your participation in this research.

6. **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Your identity in this study will be treated as confidential. We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information or what that information is. Your information will be combined with other people taking part in the study. The results of the study may be published to share with other researchers, but we will not give your name or include any identifiable references to you.

7. **TERMINATION OR RESEARCH STUDY**
   You may voluntarily choose not to participate in this study or withdraw at any time. You will not be treated any differently for deciding not to participate or for deciding to withdraw.

8. **AVAILABLE SOURCE OF INFORMATION**
   Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please do not hesitate to contact the staff in the Office of Research Integrity at the University of Kentucky at 859-257-9428 or toll-free at 1-866-400-9428.

9. **AUTHORIZATION**
   I have read and understand this consent form and I volunteer to participate in this research study. I understand that I will receive a copy of this form. I voluntarily choose to participate, but I understand that my consent does not take away any legal rights in the case of negligence or other legal fault of anyone who is involved in this study. I further understand that nothing in this consent form is intended to replace any applicable Federal, state, or local laws.

Participant Name: _____

Participant Signature: _____   Date: _____

Appendix II: Human Lever of Retention (Faculty) Study Participant Identification

In a review and synthesis of literature on the subject of the role of faculty in student success, a number of common characteristics and behaviors were identified. Please consider the following characteristics and behaviors and provide the names of general education faculty members who, based upon your observation and experience, most consistently and completely meet the criteria listed below. You may also consider your own work as a faculty member and include your own name on your list. Deans, please note that faculty members do not have to be members of your academic division. However, they should be faculty members who teach primarily general education/transfer courses.

- Promotes and communicates high academic expectations that are clear and consistent (Tinto, 2012; Kinzie, 2005; Shelton, 2003; Pascarella, 2011)
- Is open to feedback from students regarding classroom practices (Kinzie, 2005)
- Provides timely, frequent, and meaningful feedback to students regarding academic performance (Tinto, 2012; Kinzie, 2005)
- Promotes academic and social engagement in the classroom for student (Tinto, 1997; Braxton et al., 2000; Braxton and Mundy, 2011; Braxton et al., 2008)
- Appears to view teaching as a vocation or "calling" rather than as a "job" (DuBois, 1993; Corbin, 1998)
- Collaborates with colleagues to develop more effective instruction, assessments, policies, and/or interventions (Outcalt, 2000)
- Uses data to set goals, monitor progress, and improve practice (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2010)
- Maintains standards while affirming that all students can learn (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2010)
- Builds formal and informal mentoring relationships with students (Fuentes et al., 2013; Komarraju et al., 2010)
- Serves as a resource for students (Komarraju et al.m 2010; Braxton and Mundy, 2001; Tinto, 2012)

- Engages in ongoing faculty development/professional development related to teaching and student engagement (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2010; Braxton and Mundy, 2001)

- Provides quality academic advising to help students define goals, navigate college policies and procedures, and (if applicable) understand the transfer process (McArthur, 2005; Roberts and Styron, 2010)

- Demonstrates respect for students (Hoffman, 2014)

- Demonstrates compassion and concern for students on and off campus (Hoffman, 2014; Darling, 2015; Braxton, 2004; Braxton et al., 2008; Braxton and Mundy, 2001)

- Engages in informal interactions with students outside of the classroom (Komorraju et al., 2010)

- Replies to student communications in a timely manner (Hoffman, 2014)

- Experiments with engaging pedagogy and shares work with colleagues (Stevenson et al., 2006)

- Helps students successfully transition into college (Goldrick-Rab, 2007; Dixon-Rayle and Chung, 2007; Komarraju et al., 2010; Schlossberg, 1989; Braxton and Mundy, 2001)

- Helps students to develop strong networks on campus with peers, faculty, and staff (Tinto, 1993; Dixon-Rayle and Chung, 2007; Braxton et al., 2000)

- Helps students to feel that they matter to the college (Scholssberg, 1989; Dixon-Rayle and Chung, 2007; Shelly, 2014)

- Promotes academic integration of students by promoting active and collaborative learning in the classroom (Tinto, 1997; Braxton and Mundy, 2001; Braxton et al., 2008; Engstrom and Tinto, 2008; Lundberg, 2014;)

- Provides procedural assistance to students who require it (Lundberg, 2014)

- Helps student to find their purpose (Roberts and Styron, 2010)

- Provides and/or communicates with students opportunities for social engagement on campus (Schlossberg, 1989; Tinto, 1997; Braxton and Mundy, 2001; Braxton, 2004)

- Is both approachable and available to students inside and outside of class (Kuh et al., 2005; DuBois, 1993)

- Creates both valuable and enriching learning experiences for students (Roberts and Styron, 2010; Braxton and Mundy, 2001)

- Demonstrates knowledge of campus support programs and encourages students to take advantage of support programs (Braxton and Mundy, 2001; Styron and Roberts, 2010)

- Exhibits a strong command and organization of the subject being taught (Pascarella et al., 2011; DuBois, 1993)

- Demonstrates enthusiasm about the discipline and the class (DuBois, 1993; Pascarella et al., 2011)

- Derives and demonstrates satisfaction from successes of students (Corbin, 1998)

- Connects content knowledge and educational experiences with the rest of students' lives (Richmond, 1986; Braxton and Mundy, 2001; Kuh et al., 2005).

- Demonstrates knowledge of common characteristics and barriers that put students at risk for attrition (Kuh et al., 2005; Darling, 2015;)

- Assists students with monitoring their academic progress (Darling, 2015)

- Helps students develop a sense of belonging on campus (Jacoby, 2000; Braxton and Mundy, 2001; Kuh et al., 2005)

- Clearly identifies for students what they need to know and be able to do in order to successfully complete course work (Kinzie, 2005; Pascarella et al., 2011)

- Builds on students' prior knowledge, experiences, abilities, and talents in instruction (Kinzie, 2005; Kuh et al., 2005)

- Demonstrates a genuine interest in students and their success (Shelton 2003)

Please list names of faculty members you feel best reflect these characteristics and behaviors below.

Appendix III: Nomination Form for Faculty Participation

First, please read through the entire list and then select individuals to nominate.   These may be faculty members in your division who teach at least one general education course (or FYE course) or faculty members outside your division who teach at least one general education course (or FYE course). There is no maximum number nor minimum number of faculty you can nominate.

Please consider which behaviors and characteristics you have observed in each high performing potential lever of retention and/or which you are aware of due to evidence such as student evaluations of instruction, "word of mouth," or other means of communication. The criteria listed below were collected from a review of literature focusing on the impact/role of faculty in student retention. Please let me know if you have any questions. Your responses will be kept confidential and are used strictly for identifying participants, not for data collection purposes. Thank you for your participation!

- Promotes and communicates high academic expectations that are clear and consistent (Tinto, 2012; Kinzie, 2005; Shelton, 2003; Pascarella, 2011)
- Is open to feedback from students regarding classroom practices (Kinzie, 2005)
- Provides timely, frequent, and meaningful feedback to students regarding academic performance (Tinto, 2012; Kinzie, 2005)
- Promotes academic and social engagement in the classroom for student (Tinto, 1997; Braxton et al., 2000; Braxton and Mundy, 2011; Braxton et al., 2008)
- Appears to view teaching as a vocation or "calling" rather than as a "job" (DuBois, 1993; Corbin, 1998)
- Collaborates with colleagues to develop more effective instruction, assessments, policies, and/or interventions (Outcalt, 2000)
- Uses data to set goals, monitor progress, and improve practice (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2010)
- Maintains standards while affirming that all students can learn (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2010)
- Builds formal and informal mentoring relationships with students (Fuentes et al., 2013; Komarraju et al., 2010)
- Serves as a resource for students (Komarraju et al.m 2010; Braxton and Mundy, 2001; Tinto, 2012)
- Engages in ongoing faculty development/professional development related to teaching and student engagement (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2010; Braxton and Mundy, 2001)

- Provides quality academic advising to help students define goals, navigate college policies and procedures, and (if applicable) understand the transfer process (McArthur, 2005; Roberts and Styron, 2010)
- Demonstrates respect for students (Hoffman, 2014)
- Demonstrates compassion and concern for students on and off campus (Hoffman, 2014; Darling, 2015; Braxton, 2004; Braxton et al., 2008; Braxton and Mundy, 2001)
- Engages in informal interactions with students outside of the classroom (Komorraju et al., 2010)
- Replies to student communications in a timely manner (Hoffman, 2014)
- Experiments with engaging pedagogy and shares work with colleagues (Stevenson et al., 2006)
- Takes a "talent development" approach in advising (Stevenson et al., 2006; Richmond, 1986)
- Helps students successfully transition into college (Goldrick-Rab, 2007; Dixon-Rayle and Chung, 2007; Komarraju et al., 2010; Schlossberg, 1989; Braxton and Mundy, 2001)
- Helps students to develop strong networks on campus with peers, faculty, and staff (Tinto, 1993; Dixon-Rayle and Chung, 2007; Braxton et al., 2000)
- Helps students to feel that they matter to the college (Scholssberg, 1989; Dixon-Rayle and Chung, 2007; Shelly, 2014)
- Promotes academic integration of students by promoting active and collaborative learning in the classroom (Tinto, 1997; Braxton and Mundy, 2001; Braxton et al., 2008; Engstrom and Tinto, 2008; Lundberg, 2014;)
- Provides procedural assistance to students who require it (Lundberg, 2014)
- Helps student to find their purpose (Roberts and Styron, 2010)
- Provides and/or communicates with students opportunities for social engagement on campus (Schlossberg, 1989; Tinto, 1997; Braxton and Mundy, 2001; Braxton, 2004)
- Is both approachable and available to students inside and outside of class (Kuh et al., 2005; DuBois, 1993)
- Creates both valuable and enriching learning experiences for students (Roberts and Styron, 2010; Braxton and Mundy, 2001)
- Demonstrates knowledge of campus support programs and encourages students to take advantage of support programs (Braxton and Mundy, 2001; Styron and Roberts, 2010)
- Exhibits a strong command and organization of the subject being taught (Pascarella et al., 2011; DuBois, 1993)

- Demonstrates enthusiasm about the discipline and the class (DuBois, 1993; Pascarella et al., 2011)
- Motivates students to set and reach goals (DuBois, 1993)
- Derives and demonstrates satisfaction from successes of students (Corbin, 1998)
- Connects content knowledge and educational experiences with the rest of students' lives (Richmond, 1986; Braxton and Mundy, 2001; Kuh et al., 2005).
- Demonstrates knowledge of common characteristics and barriers that put students at risk for attrition (Kuh et al., 2005; Darling, 2015;)
- Assists students with monitoring their academic progress (Darling, 2015)
- Helps students develop a sense of belonging on campus (Jacoby, 2000; Braxton and Mundy, 2001; Kuh et al., 2005)
- Clearly identifies for students what they need to know and be able to do in order to successfully complete course work (Kinzie, 2005; Pascarella et al., 2011)
- Builds on students' prior knowledge, experiences, abilities, and talents in instruction (Kinzie, 2005; Kuh et al., 2005)
- Demonstrates a genuine interest in students and their success (Shelton 2003)

Appendix IV: Interview Guides

Interview Guide for Faculty

Interview #1 (Background Information)

1. Current professional role
   A. What do you teach?
   B. How long have you been teaching this subject?
   C. How long have you been at WKCTC?
   D. Briefly describe your responsibilities including instruction, advising, internal service, special projects, leaderships, etc.

2. Background as a student
   A. Describe your approach to your own studies throughout your own education
   B. How would your teachers and peers have described you?
   C. What were your strengths and weaknesses as a student? Best subjects? Worst?
   D. Who were your role models and mentors as a student? How did they help you?
   E. What challenges did you face as a student?
   F. Describe your college experience. What do you remember about the transition, the difficulties, the most helpful/influential forces for you?
   G. What other careers did you consider?

3. Professional pathway questions
   A. Educational background and schools attended
   B. Choice of major
   C. Path to community college
   D. Prior experience with community college
   E. What would you do professionally if you didn't do this?

Interview #2 (Community College and Working with Students)

1. Questions regarding the community college
   A. What was your view of the community college when you arrived?
   B. What do you consider the role of the community college for students? For society?
   C. How would you describe the student body at your college?

2. Teaching in the community college
   A. What do you see as the role of the faculty member in a community college?
   B. What are the challenges you face as a community college faculty member?
   C. What are the personal and professional benefits of teaching at a community college?
   D. What qualities should an effective community college faculty member possess?
   E. What qualities should a "human lever of retention" possess?
   F. Do you intentionally consider your role in the retention process, and how does this affect your daily work?
   G. How would your students describe you?

H. How would your advisees describe you?

3. Non-completion issues
   A. What kinds of academic challenges do your students face?
   B. What kinds of non-academic challenges do your students face?
   C. For what reasons do students fail your courses or fail to complete your courses? For what reasons do you observe students failing or failing to complete other courses?
   D. Describe how you feel when students do not successfully complete your course.

4. Retention efforts
   A. What strategies have you observed on the part of the institution and on the part of your colleagues to support retention?
   B. What do you feel are the most successful approaches to supporting retention?
   C. What do you feel is your role in supporting student retention?
   D. In your view, what is the importance of student retention?
   E. You have been identified as a "lever of retention". Why do you think this is the case? What do you think might set you apart from some of your colleagues?
   F. In the classroom, how do you specifically and intentionally support student persistence?
   G. Outside of the classroom, how do you specifically and intentionally support student persistence?
   H. If you had to choose one thing to be the single most effective practice you have in terms of retention, what would it be?
   I. In what ways do you feel that you have improved as a faculty member and as a lever since you began your career?
   J. What motivates you to go "above and beyond?"
   K. How has the institution helped to support you as a lever of retention?
   L. In what ways does the institution make it more difficult to be a lever of retention?
   M. If you could make adjustments to your job that would allow you to better serve students, what would those be? Why?
   N. How might institutions better prepare faculty members to be levers of retention?

5. Questionnaire Reflection
   A. Looking over your responses to the questionnaire, can you discuss the factors you noted as most important?
   B. Which items reflect your greatest strengths as a faculty member?
   C. What items would you add to the questionnaire?

6. PPE Reflection

   A. How do you decide what types of activities to include on your PPE?

B. What items on your PPE do you consider your most significant achievements or plans? What on your PPE makes you proud?

C. Are there things in your PPE that perhaps set you apart from your colleagues? If so, what?

D. What activities outlined in your PPE do you feel are most impactful on student success and completion?

Interview Guide for Students

Interview #1 (Background Information)

1. Current professional role

A. What are you majoring in?

B. How long have you been studying this subject?

C. How long have you been at SKYCTC?

D. Briefly describe your responsibilities as a student and peer mentor, and any other contributions you make on the campus

2. Background as a student

A. Describe your approach to your studies throughout your education

B. How would your teachers and peers describe you?

C. What are your strengths and weaknesses as a student? Best subjects? Worst? Characteristic traits?

D. Who are your role models and mentors as a student? How do they help you?

E. What challenges do you face as a student?

F. Describe your college experience. What do/will you remember about the transition from high school to college, the difficulties, the most helpful/influential forces for you?

G. What career are you considering?

4. Professional pathway questions

A. Educational background and schools attended

B. Choice of major

C. Path to community college

D. Prior experience with community college

E. What would you do professionally if you didn't do this?

F.   Questions regarding the community college

G. What was your view of the community college when you arrived?

H. What do you consider the role of the community college for students? For society?

I. How would you describe the student body at your college?

J. What motivated you to become a peer mentor?

Interview #2 (Community College and Mentoring Students)

1. Mentoring in the community college
    A. What do you see as the role of the Student Ambassador in a community college?
    B. How does this role differ, in your view, from the faculty member as a student mentor?
    C. What are the challenges you face as a Student Ambassador?
    D. What are the personal and professional benefits of being a Student Ambassador at a community college?
    E. What qualities should an effective Student Ambassador possess?
    F. What qualities should a "human lever of retention" possess? (provide the participant with a definition)
    G. Do you intentionally consider your role in the retention process, and how does this affect your daily work?
    H. Of your colleagues, whom do you consider your mentors or role models? What have you learned from them?
    I. What qualities, attitudes, and behaviors do you feel would be beneficial for your colleagues to emulate?
    J. How would your mentees describe you?
    K. How would your co-workers describe you?

2. Non-completion issues
    A. What kinds of academic challenges do your mentees face?
    B. What kinds of non-academic challenges do your mentees face?
    C. For what reasons do mentees fail courses or fail to complete courses?
    D. For what reasons do you observe students failing or failing to complete other courses?
    E. Describe how you feel when mentees do not successfully re-enroll for the next semester.

3. Retention efforts
    A. What strategies have you observed on the part of the institution and on the part of your colleagues to support retention?
    B. What do you feel are the most successful approaches to supporting retention?
    C. What do you feel is your role in supporting student retention?
    D. In your view, what is the importance of student retention?
    E. How do you specifically and intentionally support student persistence out of the classroom?
    F. How do you specifically and intentionally support student persistence in the classroom?
    G. If you had to choose one thing to be the single most effective practice you have in terms of retention, what would it be?
    H. Provide examples of particular scenarios in which you served as a "lever of retention"

I. In what ways do you feel that you have improved as a Student Ambassador and as a lever since you began your position?
J. You have been identified as a high impact "lever of retention". Why do you think this is the case? What do you think might set you apart from some of your colleagues?
K. What motivates you to go "above and beyond?"
L. How has the institution helped to support you as a lever of retention?
M. In what ways does the institution make it more difficult to be a lever of retention?
N. If you could make adjustments to your job that would allow you to better serve students, what would those be? Why?
O. How can others become more effective levers of retention?
P.   How might institutions better prepare Student Ambassadors to be levers of retention?

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High School English and Journalism Teacher, North Pemiscot High School, Wardell, Missouri.
August 2004 to May 2005.

High School English and Journalism Teacher, Leopold R-III High School, Leopold, Missouri.
August 2001 to May 2004.

Adjunct Faculty Member, Three Rivers Community College, Poplar Bluff, Missouri, January 2001 to May 2005.

Scholastic and Professional Honors

Nominated for WKCTC Teach of the Year each year from 2008 to Present

Nominated for KCTCS New Horizons Faculty Award of Excellence, 2011—2012

Article of the Year in the Southern Association of Community, Junior, and Technical Colleges Journal, 2011

WKCTC Faculty Member of the Quarter, Spring 2010.

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