

In What Ways Do Perceptions by Faculty, Students, and Advisors in an Urban University
Contribute to Undergraduate Student Success?

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A Dissertation Submitted to The Graduate School at the University of Missouri-St. Louis
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy in Education with an emphasis on the Teaching and Learning Process

May 2024

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ABSTRACT

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to investigate perceptions of academic advising among faculty, advisors, and undergraduate students at an urban university in the Midwest, and the implications for student success. Drawing upon Creswell's research design framework, the study integrates both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex relationship between academic advising and student outcomes.

Guided by Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, the research explores how individual beliefs, behaviors, and environmental factors interact to shape academic experiences and success. The study utilizes George Kuh's student engagement framework, specifically the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), as a quantitative tool to assess student engagement and perceptions.

The research aims to address three primary objectives: investigating differences in perceptions of student success among stakeholders, understanding factors influencing academic challenges, and examining the impact of interactions on student success. Research questions focus on perceptions of student success and retention among stakeholders, as well as the influence of faculty and advisor interactions on student success.

Data collection procedures involve both quantitative analysis of NSSE survey data and qualitative exploration through a custom-designed instrument. The NSSE survey provides insights into student perceptions, while the qualitative instrument gathers faculty and advisor perspectives. Thematic analysis is employed to identify patterns and themes within qualitative data, enriching the understanding of academic advising dynamics.

Ethical considerations are paramount throughout the research process, ensuring participant confidentiality and compliance with data privacy regulations. The research timeline outlines key activities from familiarization with the NSSE survey to data analysis and interpretation.

By combining quantitative and qualitative approaches, this study seeks to contribute to the enhancement of academic advising practices and student success initiatives. The findings aim to inform evidence-based decision-making and support the ongoing improvement of the educational experience for undergraduate students at the university.

This study illuminates the complex interplay of perceptions among faculty, advisors, and students regarding academic advising and its impact on student success at an urban university. By integrating quantitative data from the National Survey of Student Engagement with qualitative insights, the research delineates how these varied perceptions influence student engagement and retention strategies. The findings underscore the necessity for tailored advising approaches that resonate with the diverse needs of the university community, aiming to enhance student outcomes and institutional effectiveness.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To the many students with whom I have had the privilege to walk alongside on this path called life, your journeys inspire me and continually renew my passion for teaching and learning. Each of you has sparked in me a deeper commitment to nurturing dreams and encouraging the pursuit of personal and academic excellence. It is my sincere hope that you continue to embrace who you are, share your unique gifts and talents, and make impactful contributions to your communities and to the global society. Watching you grow and strive towards your aspirations inspires me as an educator.

I firmly believe that academic advising is a form of teaching, fundamental to the ecosystem of higher education. I take my role in this ecosystem with the utmost seriousness and honor. It is a privilege to guide and support each student through their academic journey, playing a part in shaping the future of our society.

I am profoundly grateful to my dissertation committee members - Helene Sherman, Ed.D., Charles Granger, Ph.D., and Phyllis Balcerzak, Ph.D. - whose guidance and support have been instrumental in my academic journey. My deep appreciation goes to Keith Miller, Ph.D., Committee Chairperson, who often said, "One word, one sentence, one paragraph, incremental progress" at each of our meetings. His stability and invaluable wisdom provided immense comfort and were pivotal to reaching this point.

Special thanks also to Dr. E. Paulette Savage, Dr. Shawn Woodhouse, Dr. Michael Elliott, Charlie Hoffman, Dr. Malaika Horne, Sherry Fantroy-Ross and many others for their invaluable contributions to my growth and understanding.

Additionally, I am thankful to the College of Education and College of Business Administration at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. Your ongoing guidance and support have nurtured my academic and personal growth, enabling me to innovate and expand my horizons in ways I had never imagined.

None of this would have been possible without the grace and guidance of God in my life. Throughout this journey, my faith has been a cornerstone of my resilience and success.

To all who have touched my life, I am eternally indebted. Your influence is a lasting presence in my life and work, and for that, I am eternally grateful.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my cherished family, whose steadfast support has been the cornerstone of my academic and personal growth.

To my husband, David Jordan Sr., thank you for your unwavering belief in me and your constant reassurance that I could achieve this. You have been my rock, providing love and stability throughout this journey.

To my mother, your encouragement of my curiosity and academic pursuits has profoundly shaped my development as a researcher and as the individual I am today. Thank you for inspiring me every step of the way.

To my children, Myra, Michala, and David Jr., your love and support have been enduring. Your patience, zest, and humor have brightened my path and continually remind me of the joys that extend beyond academic pursuits.

To my beloved Bigma in heaven, your unconditional love still guides and motivates me, strengthened by my deep faith. The values you instilled in me light my way every day.

To my siblings, Rita, Nikki, and Man, your love, sacrifices, and humor have provided comfort and support throughout this journey.

To all my family, friends, and loved ones not individually mentioned: your prayers and words of encouragement have been crucial. I am deeply thankful for each of you.

This achievement, obtaining this degree, reflects our shared dedication and spirit. I am honored to be the first in our family to earn a terminal degree and am grateful to you all for being my constant inspiration and greatest joy.

The words of Lamentations 3:22-23 resonate deeply with me: "Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." This passage has been a personal testament throughout my journey, as His mercies and compassion have carried me through each challenge and triumph to completing this degree.

Chapter 1: Introduction

In what ways do perceptions by faculty, students, and advisors in an urban university contribute to undergraduate student success? Why is this question important now? The Education Policy Institute reports that the cost of student attrition amounts to a loss of \$16.5 billion in revenue for colleges (Raisman, 2013). This figure has remained constant for the past decade, underscoring the significance of this issue for student retention. This question may be central to the retention of students.

Significance of the Research

This dissertation delves into the perceptions of faculty, students, and advisors at a Midwest public urban university and examines their influence on undergraduate student success—a concern that extends well beyond the confines of any single institution. The importance of addressing this issue is highlighted by the substantial financial and social costs associated with student attrition, which annually amounts to billions in lost revenue nationally. By exploring these perceptions, the study seeks to uncover factors that could significantly enhance student retention strategies across diverse educational settings.

Investigating All Student Populations and Developing Inclusive Strategies

At a Midwest Public Urban University (MPUU), the advising experiences of all student populations serve as a focal point of this research. The study investigates barriers and opportunities to academic success for all students while paying particular attention to those who are marginalized and underrepresented. This analysis provided an understanding of how resources and programming are being distributed and how these can be optimized to reach all students effectively. While the initial observations and assessments have highlighted differences among student groups, particularly those who are marginalized and underrepresented, this investigation strives to transcend these distinctions by focusing on universally applicable solutions.

The research began by investigating the differences in perceptions of student success among advisors, faculty, and undergraduate students. This exploration allowed me to discern

varying perspectives, facilitating the development of inclusive strategies that address the needs of all students, ensuring no group is disproportionately underserved.

Research Focus and Research Questions

Additionally, insights were sought into how faculty, students, and advisors respond to academic challenges in college. Students face the task of balancing academic demands with personal life, advisors struggle with high student-to-advisor ratios and a lack of resources, and faculty must accommodate diverse learning styles while integrating technology and managing their own work-life balance. By delving into these responses, potential barriers and facilitators to student success were identified, thereby providing valuable insights for improving the overall educational experience.

Furthermore, this research examined how interactions between students, faculty, and advisors impact student success. This examination enabled the identification of key factors that contribute to students' experiences in higher education and allowed for the development of targeted interventions to enhance student support and engagement.

Research Questions

The research study is designed to address the following questions:

1. To what extent do perceptions of student success differ among undergraduate students, their faculty, and their advisors? Understanding these differences will inform the development of tailored support systems that cater to the unique needs of each stakeholder group.
2. To what extent do perceptions of student retention differ among students, their faculty, and their advisors? Examining these differences will help identify factors influencing student persistence and degree completion.
3. What aspects of undergraduate students' interactions with faculty and advisors either help or hinder student success? Identifying these aspects will contribute to the creation of strategies that enhance student support and engagement.

Economic Consequences and Educational Investment

The importance of addressing this issue persists to this day, as disparities and inequities still exist for undergraduate students pursuing their degrees. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2019), minority students graduate at a slower rate than white students (De Brey et al, 2019). For instance, between 2009 and 2019, the number of Black students who enrolled in college right after high school decreased from 2.5 million to 2.1 million (Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2022). Bachelor's degree attainment has increased more slowly for Black people than for the US population, with only 24% of the Black population aged 25 and older hold a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 36% for Whites, 16% for Hispanics, and 55% for Asians (Pew Research Center, 2020).

Enrollment and degree attainment remain as important and relevant today as they were fifty years ago. To support African American students as a moral and economic imperative, it is essential. The disparities in higher education that minority students face have not been completely resolved (De Brey et al., 2019). The ongoing achievement gap between African American and White students continues to exist, posing a significant challenge for higher education institutions to address. According to data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), only 27% of Black students aged 25-29 had earned a bachelor's degree or higher compared to 47% of White students in 2019 (NCES, 2019).

Furthermore, dropping out of college has severe economic consequences for students and the broader economy. Georgetown University Center on Education and Workforce (Marcus, 2021) revealed in a report that student college dropouts cost the US economy nearly \$1 Trillion per year in lost earnings, consumer spending, and tax revenue. This number includes the potential savings on social services that would not be necessary if students were able to earn a degree and increase their earning potential (Hanson, 2021).

Investing in education is not only crucial for the individual student's success, but also for the health and well-being of the country's economy. Higher enrollment and degree attainment, particularly for underrepresented groups, can lead to increased economic growth, decreased poverty rates, and a more equitable society.

Personal Journey and Commitment to Student Success

College marginalizes African American students, causing them to experience isolation, negative stereotypes, stress, anxiety, and lack of motivation. Specific student populations, such as first-generation, marginalized, and underrepresented students, suffer particularly from these barriers (Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2022).

Drawing on my own personal journey as a first-generation college student, I developed an approach centered on assessing student needs based on their feedback. This approach, combined with a student-centered philosophy, allowed me to design effective programming that addressed the challenges faced by diverse student populations and facilitated a more inclusive and supportive learning environment. This approach led me to switch careers to higher education and focus on adults and college students for over 20 years, helping them achieve their career aspirations and educational goals.

I supported adults and students in exploring their vocational dreams while working in two Employment Security Commission Offices, also known as the unemployment office. As I progressed through various roles, I realized my passion for listening to and informing people about how to identify and navigate necessary resources. During my tenure at St. Louis Community College and University of Missouri-St. Louis (UMSL), I discovered my passion for retention and advising by assisting students who desired additional services and resources.

Addressing Common Challenges with Data-informed Decisions

Throughout my various roles in higher education, I have observed some commonalities among students, such as feeling isolated, experiencing a lack of connection with faculty, struggling with the comprehension of higher education jargon, and facing difficulties in

navigating the college process. These experiences, particularly among first-generation college students who often encounter systemic barriers, underscore the importance of understanding and addressing these challenges to enhance student success (Chen & Carroll, 2020b). Additionally, factors such as motivation and social connectedness are critical to retention and academic achievement, suggesting that feelings of isolation and disconnect can significantly impact students' ability to thrive in a college environment (Allen et al., 2016). To address these challenges, I developed an approach that began with assessing student needs based on their feedback and using research studies. From that point forward, I led the development of programming that embraced a holistic, student-centered approach. This philosophy prioritized the unique needs, aspirations, and challenges of each student, ensuring that our strategies were adaptable and responsive to the diverse student body. By focusing on student-centered methods, we tailored our initiatives to not only enhance academic success but also to support personal development and well-being across the student population.

In collaboration with the Institutional Research office, specifically with the Senior Research Analyst, we embarked on a comprehensive data analysis endeavor. This partnership allowed us to delve into extensive student profiles and performance metrics, utilizing over 22 variables to inform our retention strategies. The insights gained from this data-driven approach enabled us to design and implement targeted interventions that proactively addressed potential barriers to student success. The culmination of our research and applied strategies was documented in our publication, 'Career and Technical Education (CTE) Student Retention Beyond Year One: Using Predictive Modeling to Improve Outcomes at Community College' (Klotz et al., 2015), which detailed the methodologies and outcomes of our retention models.

The effectiveness of our approach gained broader institutional recognition and support, particularly as the Director of Institutional Research was kept informed of our progress and strategic direction. Our efforts were recognized nationally when our team was honored with the 'Innovation of the Year' award by the League of Innovation (League for Innovation in the

Community College, 2016). Furthermore, we shared our findings and methodologies at several national conferences, contributing to the wider academic and professional community's understanding of effective retention strategies. This recognition affirmed the value and effectiveness of our student-centered, data-informed approach to enhancing student retention and success.

Using Student Input and Conducting Surveys

As a result of student input, I observed a close connection between advising, retention, and student engagement. The input from students, combined with data, revealed that all student populations, particularly Black students, were often hesitant to ask questions or unaware of what they needed to know. Utilizing my communication skills, I supported students in navigating these complexities. To further address this issue, I conducted a project with undergraduate Business students in an entrepreneurship class in the fall of 2018. This pilot project included a pre-survey and post-survey, along with a question-and-answer session for clarification, followed by a review of the results with the class.

The project was implemented in collaboration with the course instructor and was designed as part of the class curriculum to enhance educational outcomes and student engagement. Due to the nature of the project, which was conducted within the normal educational framework of the class and did not involve sensitive personal data or pose risk to the students, this activity did not require Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. This exemption aligns with typical academic guidelines, which do not necessitate IRB review for educational assessments conducted strictly for in-class purposes.

The survey questions were informed by the work of leading theorists on student success and retention, including Habley (1981), Tinto (1993), Strayhorn (2012), and Kuh et al. (2010). These theorists have significantly shaped the field's understanding of the factors that influence student retention and success, providing a theoretical framework that underpinned both this pilot project and the conceptualization of my dissertation research.

This focus on student perceptions is critical not only for understanding specific institutional challenges, but also for addressing a universal concern within higher education globally. Student attrition presents a significant problem in the U.S., costing institutions valuable resources and students potential career advancements. By integrating direct student feedback into the analysis, a deeper understanding of the factors that influence student engagement and retention is gained. This approach not only helps in formulating targeted interventions that can significantly reduce dropout rates but also emphasizes the importance of student voice in developing effective educational strategies. The recognition of this issue's significance and the proactive steps taken to address it underscore the necessity of observing and responding to educational challenges with data-informed strategies that are deeply informed by student insights.

The project's purpose was to support first-time-in-college students in working through their academic and personal goals. The reason I selected this project and survey was that I noticed in my advising role that students were not aware of advising services or other valuable campus resources critical to their academic success; therefore, I included questions to ascertain their awareness of campus resources and academic advising services. One student shared that because of taking the survey, they visited the advising office and made an appointment with their assigned advisor. The conclusion of this project and observation of the class was the culminating group project where the students presented their ideas on the solution to the "freshman problem" (see Figure 1).

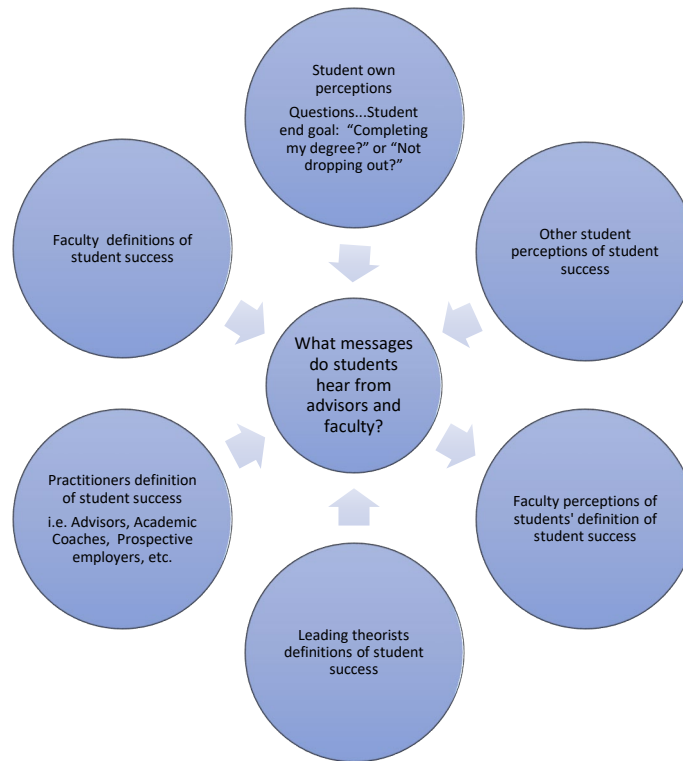


Figure 1 Student Trajectory Messages. Note: depicts the messages and people that impact students along the trajectory to degree completion.

In the entrepreneurship class, a total of 49 students actively participated, engaging in both the survey component and the development of programming solutions. Notably, for the programming segment addressing the freshman problem, students organized into eight groups and collectively delivered group presentations. These presentations showcased programming solutions characterized by their student-centric approach, innovative methodologies, and palpable energy. Witnessing the students' creative solutions was personally inspiring and fueled my desire to delve deeper into this field. The programming solutions that the students presented were student-centered, innovative, and energetic, inspiring me to explore the field further. The quality of the students' work did not go unnoticed; they underwent evaluation by a group of cross-campus panelists, including the Dean of the Business School, advisors, and directors. The feedback received from this diverse group of evaluators, spanning faculty, administrators, advisors, and fellow students, proved invaluable. I found it to be an excellent two-way mode of

communication, providing insights into what students hear and what we as educators think they hear regarding retention and student success.

Pursuit of Equitable and Inclusive Higher Education

Throughout this study, I recognized the importance of addressing disparities and inequities faced by specific student populations, such as Black students, while also acknowledging the significance of understanding how these issues impact *all* students pursuing their degrees. By considering the economic implications of college dropout rates and the positive outcomes of investing in education, I have underscored the urgency of finding effective strategies to promote student success and improve degree attainment for all.

Thus, the remainder of this dissertation focuses on helping all students, regardless of their demographics. By helping all students, I am convinced that particular groups of students, such as Black students, will be helped. There may be effective strategies for helping particular subgroups of students, but this dissertation does not explore those strategies.

Organization of Chapters

Chapter 1, the Introduction, sets the stage for the study by outlining the background, objectives, and significance. It introduces the key research questions, establishing the scope and aims of the research. At the end of Chapter 1, the “Glossary of Terms” is provided to clarify terminology used throughout the study. Chapter 2, the Literature Review, delves into the theoretical frameworks relevant to student engagement, success, and retention, synthesizing previous research to build a foundation for the study's methodology. Chapter 3, the Methodology, details the research design, data collection methods, and analysis techniques used to investigate the research questions. This chapter ensures that the study's approach is appropriate for addressing the research objectives. Chapter 4, the Findings, presents the results from the data analysis, providing an empirical basis for discussing how the results align with existing theories. Finally, Chapter 5, the Discussion, Conclusion and Future Implications, interprets the findings, discusses their implications for educational practice and policy, and suggests areas for further

research. This final chapter aims to bridge the gap between research and practice, offering recommendations for enhancing retention and student success based on the study's outcomes.

Conclusion and Research Aims

In conclusion, this study is an exploration of the solutions to support all student's success in college. Furthermore, this is an exploration and understanding of how factors impact undergraduate student populations, i.e., first-year and seniors, while considering the broader implications for all students, these constructs have contributed to an understanding of student success in a Midwest public urban university setting. By addressing the unique needs and challenges encountered by first-year and senior students, the aim is to enhance access to success for all students, including those from underrepresented backgrounds. Additionally, the hope is that this research will inform strategies beneficial for all student populations.

Glossary of Terms

Term	Meaning
Advisor	An academic advisor is a professional committed to helping students understand and make the most of their educational opportunities, guiding them in making decisions that align with their academic, career, and personal goals. Advisors facilitate student success by providing informed advice on institutional policies, degree requirements, and available support resources (Folsom, Yoder, & Joslin, 2015).
Faculty	The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) categorizes faculty in postsecondary institutions as professors, associate professors, assistant professors, instructors, lecturers, assisting professors, adjunct professors, and interim professors. These roles are crucial to the educational objectives of institutions, engaging in teaching, research, and service, with variations in responsibilities and tenure status depending on their specific designation (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.).
First-year student	According to NSSE, “first-year” students as those who are in their first year of enrollment at an institution, having typically completed fewer than 30 credit hours. They are usually in their first full academic year following high school graduation and have no prior full-time enrollment in higher education (National Survey of Student Engagement, n.d. -a).
HIPs	High Impact Practices (HIPs), as defined by George Kuh and the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), are designated undergraduate opportunities associated with significant positive impacts on student learning and retention (National Survey of Student Engagement, n.d. - b).
LRC	NSSE Advising LRC Scale is part of the Academic Advising Topical Module updated in 2020, which incorporates the core values and competencies of the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA). The scale includes three items that measure the extent to which advisors demonstrate interpersonal attention to students. The “Advising LRC Scale” is scored from 0 to 60, similar to the NSSE Engagement Indicators, and reflects the advisory support perceived by students from those they consider their advisors.
MPUU	Midwest Public Urban University, MPUU, a public institution of higher education located in an urban Midwestern setting, well-known for its commitment to accessibility, diversity, and community engagement within its academic programs.
NSSE	The National Survey of Student Engagement, NSSE (pronounced “nessie”) provides educators with an estimate of how undergraduates spend their time and what they gain from attending college. The George Kuh student engagement framework is a widely recognized framework for assessing student engagement in higher education (National Survey of Student Engagement, n.d. - a).
Retention	Undergraduate student retention in higher education is defined as the ongoing enrollment and academic progress of students from one academic year to the next, aiming towards the completion of their degree programs (Manyanga et al., 2017).
Seniors or Senior Students	The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) categorizes “senior students” as those who are in their fourth year or beyond in their undergraduate studies. This classification helps in assessing student engagement and educational practices as part of the survey’s focus on learning and personal development outcomes in higher education (National Survey of Student Engagement, n.d. -a).
Student Success	Student success in higher education involves not only achieving key academic goals such as degree completion and excelling academically but also extends to comprehensive personal development across multiple dimensions like intellectual, emotional, and social growth (Cuseo, 2007). This expansive definition of student success incorporates educational theories such as Gardner's multiple intelligences and emotional intelligence, aligning with the broad educational aims of many institutions (Cuseo, 2007).

Table 1: Glossary of Terms

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature review underscores the diverse landscape of student populations within higher education, ranging from first-generation students and underrepresented minorities to business students and undergraduates in STEM fields. Each group brings its own set of experiences, challenges, and perspectives to the college experience.

First-generation students, whose parents have not completed a four-year college degree, often encounter unique hurdles in navigating the complexities of higher education. Similarly, underrepresented minorities face systemic barriers that impede their access to and success within academic institutions.

Business students pursue degrees in fields like management, finance, and marketing, engaging with curricula tailored to prepare them for various career paths. Likewise, undergraduates in STEM fields, spanning disciplines such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, confront rigorous academic requirements and specialized training aimed at fostering innovation and problem-solving skills.

Recognizing the distinct needs and challenges of these diverse student populations is essential for promoting inclusivity and equity within higher education. By acknowledging the intersectionality of factors such as race, socioeconomic status, academic discipline, and generational status, institutions can develop targeted support initiatives and implement inclusive practices that empower all students to thrive academically and personally.

Moreover, the literature reveals the emergence of several theories, including Lent's social cognitive career theory, Bandura's social cognitive theory, Astin's theory of persistence, and Tinto's theory of departure. These theories share common characteristics focusing on a college student's pursuit of academic goals, overcoming obstacles, achieving success, and persevering, as highlighted by research conducted by Moakler & Kim (2014), Gonzales (2016), and Hardin & Longhurst (2016).

Theoretical Frameworks Guiding Higher Education Research

As part of the exploration of diverse theoretical perspectives that inform the understanding of student experiences in higher education, Table 2.1, titled 'Key Theoretical Frameworks and Their Implications in Higher Education,' provides a succinct overview of the primary theoretical frameworks discussed in this chapter. This table categorizes the theories into distinct themes, highlighting their principal proponents and the core principles each theory advances. These frameworks collectively underscore the complexities of student engagement, choice, integration, motivation, and behavioral influences in the academic environment. Refer to this table as a quick reference when navigating through the detailed discussions that follow, to facilitate a deeper understanding of how these theories interconnect and the implications they hold for educational practices and policies.

Philosophical Assumptions and Theoretical Framework

Based on the works of Bandura and Tinto, the following theoretical frameworks and philosophical assumptions are considered in the context of student departure, student engagement, and the roles of academic advisors, faculty, and undergraduate college students.

Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986)

Social Cognitive Theory emphasizes the reciprocal interactions between an individual's behaviors, personal factors (such as beliefs and self-efficacy), and environmental factors (Bandura, 1986). In relation to student departure and engagement, suggests that students' self-efficacy beliefs, outcomes expectations, and social support from academic advisors and faculty can influence their decisions to persist or disengage from their educational pursuits. The philosophical assumption of this theory assumes individuals are active agents in their own learning and development. It also assumes that personal factors, such as self-efficacy and beliefs about the importance of education, play a crucial role in shaping behavior and outcomes.

Additionally, it recognizes the influence of social interactions and support systems, including the guidance provided by academic advisors and faculty (Bandura, 1986).

Table 2: Key Theoretical Frameworks and Their Implications in Higher Education

Category	Theoretical Framework	Theorist(s)	Major Principles
Student Engagement & Success	Social Cognitive Theory	Albert Bandura	Interplay of personal behaviors, factors (self-efficacy, beliefs), and environment.
	Student Engagement Theory	Vincent Tinto	Importance of student involvement in academic and social life for engagement and retention.
	National Survey of Student Engagement	George Kuh	Assesses engagement across dimensions like academic challenge and student-faculty interaction.
	Academic Advising & Success	Wes Habley	Role of proactive, comprehensive academic advising in student success.
Career and Major Choice	Social Cognitive Career Theory	Robert Lent et al.	Influence of personal and environmental factors on career decisions; role of self-efficacy.
	Vocational Personality & Work Environment	John Holland	Career choices align with personality types and work environment characteristics.
Student Integration & Persistence	Theory of Student Departure	Vincent Tinto	Reasons for student attrition; emphasizes academic and social integration.
	Sense of Belonging Theory	Terrell Strayhorn	Critical nature of belonging for performance, persistence, and well-being.
Motivational & Behavioral Theories	Self-Determination Theory	Deci & Ryan	Autonomy, competence, and relatedness are key to intrinsic motivation and growth.
	Goal Theory	Paul Pintrich	Impact of goal orientations on motivation and engagement.
	Expectancy-Value Theory	Eccles & Wigfield	Expectancy of success and value placed on outcomes predict motivation and achievement.
	Input-Environment-Outcome Model	Alexander Astin	Effects of inputs (student and institutional) and environment on outcomes.

Table 2: Categorization of the major theoretical frameworks into distinct themes.

Student Engagement Theory (Tinto, 1993)

Student Engagement Theory highlights the importance of students being involved and connected to both academic and social aspects of college life (Tinto, 1993). According to this theory, when students are engaged, they are more likely to stay in college and succeed academically). In context of student departure and engagement, the theory emphasizes the role of

academic advisors and faculty members in helping students feel connected to their students and campus life, which increases their engagement and likelihood of staying in college (Tinto, 1993). Philosophical assumption is that this theory assumes students' participation and integration into the college community, including their interaction with academic advisors and faculty, are critical for their success. It also assumes that students' sense of belonging, identification with the institution, and supportive relationships positively influence their engagement and retention (Tinto, 1993).

Theory of Student Departure (Tinto, 1975)

The Theory of Student Departure relates to why students leave or stay in college. It suggests that the extent of their academic and social engagement, with the guidance of academic advisors and faculty, can impact their decision to leave (Tinto, 1975). This theory highlights the importance of supportive relationships and effective guidance provided by academic advisors and faculty members. This theory assumes students' integration into the academic and social aspects of college life, including their experiences with academic advisors and faculty, significantly influences their likelihood of success. It also implies that the college environment, the relationships students have with their advisors and faculty, and the support they receive from them, all play a critical role in influencing students' experiences and choices to either to leave or stay in college (Tinto, 1975).

According to Vincent Tinto (1993), "Three major sources of student departure can be identified: academic difficulties, the inability of individuals to resolve their educational and occupational goals, and their failure to become or remain incorporated in the intellectual and social life of the institution" (p. 89). Tinto's "Model of Institutional Departure" asserts that for students to persist, they require integration into both formal systems, such as academic performance and faculty/staff interactions, and informal systems, such as extracurricular activities and peer-group interactions (p. 90).

Student Populations

First-generation undergraduate students face unique challenges in higher education. According to Stephens, Hamedani, & Destin (2014), first-generation students are more likely to come from low-income families, attend community colleges or non-selective universities, and work while in school (Stephens et al., 2014). They also tend to experience a lack of social and cultural capital, making it a challenge to navigate the academic and social aspects of college life. First-generation students often lack the family support and guidance that their peers may receive, which can impact their academic success and well-being. According to Soria and Sebleton (2012), programs and initiatives that offer mentorship, academic advisors, and student services can significantly impact the success of first-generation students in higher education.

Underrepresented minority students in higher education, including Black, Hispanic, and Native American students, face significant barriers to academic success (Hurtado & Alvarado, 2015). Research suggests that these students may experience discrimination, isolation, and lack of representation in higher education (Harper & Quaye, 2009). Additionally, students from historically underrepresented groups may come from families of lower socioeconomic status and attend under-resourced schools, which can significantly affect their academic preparedness for college.

Business students in higher education often have unique goals and motivations for pursuing a degree. Business programs are designed to prepare students for careers in fields such as finance, marketing, and management, which require specific skills and knowledge. According to research, business students tend to have higher levels of career ambition and focus on financial and material success compared to students in other fields (Liao et al., 2017). Additionally, business students may face challenges such as intense competition, high workload, and a lack of connection to faculty and peers. Initiatives encompassing internships, professional networking

events, and mentorship programs can bolster the career preparedness and subsequent success of business students.

Undergraduate students in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) disciplines face unique challenges in higher education due to the demanding nature of these fields. Chronic experiences of academic stress may be linked with self-doubt and impair performance, lower interest in a science career, and increase attrition from STEM majors (Rice et al., 2015, p. 728). Furthermore, the lack of diversity in STEM fields can contribute to feelings of alienation and exclusion among students from historically underrepresented groups.

Career Choice

Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1994) introduced the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), positing that an individual's career decision-making process is influenced by personal and environmental factors. SCCT asserts that an individual's career choices are shaped by their personal characteristics, encompassing interests, values, and goals, alongside environmental factors like cultural and social norms, social support, and the availability of opportunities (Lent et al., 1994). Furthermore, SCCT emphasizes the significance of self-efficacy, referring to an individual's belief in their ability to succeed in a specific career path. The SCCT theory suggests that individuals with higher self-efficacy are more inclined to select challenging career paths and demonstrate resilience in the face of obstacles (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994).

Additionally, Holland's (1997) theory of vocational personality and work environments provides insight into career choice. Holland proposed six dimensions of vocational personality types: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional. These personality types correspond to distinct vocational themes, guiding individuals toward careers that align with their personality types and work environments (Holland, 1997).

In addition to these theoretical frameworks, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, family background, and experiences in education and the workplace also contribute to career

choice. Research indicates that women are more likely to choose careers aligned with traditional gender roles, such as caregiving and teaching, while men tend to select careers associated with power and status, such as business and engineering (Blustein et al., 2002). Furthermore, individuals from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups may face unique challenges and barriers in accessing and succeeding in certain career paths, influencing their career choices (Fouad & Bynner, 2008).

Ultimately, understanding the complex factors that influence career choice is crucial for developing interventions and initiatives that promote equity and access in the workforce. Social cognitive career theory, which is grounded in Bandura's cognitive career theory (Bandura et al., 2001), plays a pivotal role in examining the development of career and academic interests, the process of making career choices, and the translation of those choices into action (Deemer et al., 2014). Furthermore, social cognitive career theory highlights those contextual barriers, such as gender, minority status, parental occupation, and STEM major choice, can potentially impede career choice by undermining self-efficacy and the intention to pursue career goals (Moakler & Kim, 2014).

Major Choice

Akbulut (2016) highlights the importance of role models and mentoring in shaping students' career choices and academic development. According to the study, having role models as environmental support factors positively impacts students' interest and choice behavior in the Information Sciences domain. Similarly, Bandura et al. (2001) suggest that parental aspirations positively affect children's perceived self-efficacy, which is crucial for career development.

The literature further discusses the factors that influence undergraduate students' choice of major. Astin's (1993) input-environment-outcome (I-E-O) model explains that student inputs, such as institutional environment, and student outcomes influence their choice of major. Research

has found that gender, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and academic achievement are key factors in this process (Robbins et al., 2004; Byars-Winston et al., 2010; DeAngelo et al., 2011).

The literature also suggests that self-efficacy plays a critical role in choice of major and development. Lent et al. (1994) proposed that self-efficacy influences individuals' beliefs about their abilities and the value they place on different career paths. Higher levels of self-efficacy are associated with greater interest and commitment to particular majors (Robbins et al., 2004; Lent et al., 2007). Additionally, other factors such as academic and career interests, extracurricular activities, and social support from peers and family members also impact undergraduate students' choice of major (Allen et al., 2016; Kim et al., 2019).

Motivation

Lyons and Berge (2012) argue that Bandura's social learning theory suggests that people learn through observation, imitation, and modeling. Along with this theory, the correlation between social cognitive career theory and motivation is essential in determining how career and academic goals relate to achieving academic and career success. Moreover, motivation plays a crucial role in determining students' success in gateway courses and STEM careers (Kassae & Holmes, 2016). A study examined first-time, full-time freshman STEM majors at a university, using a motivational assessment to create interventions for improving college success and retaining STEM majors. The research found that participants had higher retention rates and better grades than non-STEM majors.

Several tenets of motivation have been identified in the literature, which is crucial in understanding and enhancing students' motivation. One such tenet is self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which suggests that fulfilling individuals' psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness can lead to self-motivation, better performance, and greater well-being. Another tenet is goal theory (Pintrich, 2000), which suggests that individuals' goal orientations and achievement goals influence their motivation and behavior. Finally,

expectancy-value theory (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002) proposes that individuals' beliefs about their ability to succeed and the value they place on the outcome influence their motivation and behavior. Overall, motivation is a complex and multifaceted construct that plays a critical role in undergraduate college students' academic success and achievement.

Sense of belonging

A sense of belonging and a sense of community are critical constructs for undergraduate college students as they influence their academic performance, persistence, and well-being. Sense of belonging refers to the perception that an individual feels valued, accepted, and supported within a specific context or group, while the sense of community refers to the shared sense of identity, belongingness, and commitment among individuals within a group (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Strayhorn, 2018).

Several studies have demonstrated the importance of a sense of belonging and a sense of community in promoting positive academic outcomes for undergraduate college students. For instance, Walton and Cohen (2011) conducted a study that revealed students who received a sense of belonging intervention had higher grade point averages and were less likely to drop out of college than those who did not receive the intervention. In a separate study, Tinto and Pusser (2006) found that students who perceived a strong sense of community within their college were more likely to persist and graduate.

Furthermore, various factors, such as faculty support, peer support, and institutional culture, influence the development of a sense of belonging and a sense of community among undergraduate college students. For example, a study by Strauss and Volkwein (2004) found that faculty support, particularly faculty-student interaction, was positively associated with students' sense of belonging and persistence in college. Another study by Hurtado et al. (2012) found that peer support, particularly social interactions with peers from diverse backgrounds, was positively associated with students' sense of belonging and academic engagement. Finally, a study by Astin

and Astin (2000) found that institutional culture, particularly the presence of a supportive and inclusive campus climate, was positively associated with students' sense of community and academic achievement.

In conclusion, the constructs of a sense of belonging and a sense of community play a crucial role in influencing the academic success, persistence, and well-being of undergraduate college students.

Academic Preparedness

Harding and Longhurst (2016) argued that understanding how introductory undergraduate courses impact minority students' academic preparedness is crucial for designing targeted interventions that enhance the persistence of underrepresented groups in STEM majors. This study highlights the importance of identifying the factors that contribute to students' academic preparedness, as it can affect their performance and persistence in college.

In a study on math and science attitudes, Osborne, Simon, and Collins (2003) found that although females reported higher science value than males, males reported higher self-concept, which was the best predictor of math and science achievement. The study emphasizes the role of attitudes in academic preparedness, suggesting that negative attitudes toward math and science can hinder students' academic success.

According to Rodríguez-Hernández, Cascallar, and Kyndt (2020), various factors can influence academic preparedness in higher education. These factors include the quality of students' high school education, socioeconomic status, and access to academic resources such as tutoring and academic counseling (Adelman, 2006). Students who attend high schools that offer rigorous academic programs are more likely to be academically prepared for college than those who do not (Gamoran & Hannigan, 2000).

Additionally, providing academic support services such as tutoring and academic advising, and offering developmental courses in areas where students may be lacking, can help

students become academically prepared for college-level coursework (Bailey & Alfonso, 2005; Kuh, 2003). These resources and support systems can assist students in bridging any gaps in their academic skills and knowledge, ensuring they are adequately prepared for the challenges of higher education.

Campus Environment

The campus environment plays a crucial role in shaping the college experience for undergraduate students, impacting their academic, social, and personal growth. Studies have shown that specific tenets of the campus environment can have a positive influence on students' outcomes. One of these important factors is a sense of belonging, which refers to students' feelings of connection and being valued as members of their college community (Hurtado et al., 2020). Research by Strayhorn (2012) has demonstrated that a strong sense of belonging is associated with higher academic achievement, increased retention rates, and overall well-being among undergraduates.

In addition to fostering a sense of belonging, colleges and universities offer a wide array of support services to assist students in navigating various challenges they may encounter during their academic journey. These support services encompass academic advising, career counseling, mental health resources, and tutoring, among others (Pascarella et al., 2014). Access to such support services is particularly crucial for student success, especially for individuals from underrepresented backgrounds who may face unique obstacles (Chen & Carroll, 2020a).

A third tenet of the campus environment is an inclusive and diverse community. College campuses are increasingly diverse, and institutions that promote a welcoming and inclusive environment can benefit all students. Inclusive campus environments can promote cross-cultural understanding, challenge stereotypes, and promote student engagement (Harper et al., 2020). According to Gurin et al. (2002), exposure to diversity has the potential to enhance critical

thinking and problem-solving skills, thus equipping students with the necessary preparation for success in a globalized society (p. 330).

In conclusion, the campus environment is a crucial factor in the undergraduate college experience, influencing students' academic, social, and personal development.

Barriers

Undergraduate college students in urban universities encounter multiple barriers that can impede their academic success. One significant hurdle is financial insecurity, as many students hail from low-income backgrounds and face difficulty paying for college tuition, housing, and textbooks (Gonzales & Banning, 2016). Financial stress can lead to anxiety and poor academic performance, increasing the probability of dropping out (Hossler et al., 1999).

Inadequate academic preparation is another obstacle that urban university students face. Students from low-income families and under-resourced high schools may not have received the necessary academic preparation to succeed in college-level coursework (Museus, 2011). This lack of preparedness can lead to lower grades and reduced persistence (Karp & Bork, 2017). However, there are barriers that limit the success of African American women in STEM majors. According to Perna et al. (2009), inadequate preparation in elementary and secondary school, insufficient attention to psychological barriers, and inadequate support by universities contribute to a lack of persistence in STEM fields. Perna et al further emphasizes the role of key factors, including institutional characteristics, peer support, faculty encouragement and involvement, and academic support services, in promoting the achievement and success of African American females in STEM fields at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).

Another barrier students face is a lack of understanding about the relationship between education and economic success. Davis-Maye et al. (2013) found that students are often placed on a path without a clear educational trajectory, and some students face literacy challenges or enroll in non-credit remedial courses, particularly students of color. Additionally, Russell and Russell

(2015) identified a lack of classroom preparation and a feeling of alienation as reasons why students switch from STEM majors. Without adequate preparation or connection to their chosen field, students may elect to abandon the STEM field altogether, even if they initially showed an interest (Russell & Russell, 2015).

Lastly, the lack of access to academic support services is a significant barrier. Urban universities may have limited resources to provide essential academic support services, such as tutoring, counseling, and mentorship programs (Museus, 2011). Without these services, students may struggle to handle the academic demands of college, causing increased stress and decreased academic performance (Hossler et al., 1999).

National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is a widely used survey instrument that assesses the extent to which undergraduate college students are engaged in their educational experiences. The NSSE was developed based on the tenets of engagement theory, which suggests that student engagement involves “the time, effort, and other resources students devote to activities that are empirically linked to desired college outcomes” (Kuh, 2003, p. 5). The following will explore some of the key tenets of NSSE.

One of the key tenets of NSSE is that student engagement is multidimensional. The survey measures five key dimensions of student engagement: “academic challenge, and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, enriching educational experiences, and supportive campus environment” (NSSE, 2021). These dimensions reflect the notion that student engagement is not a single, unitary construct, but rather a complex set of activities, experiences, and relationships that students have in their college environment.

Another tenet of NSSE is that student engagement is linked to positive educational outcomes. NSSE has been shown to be a reliable predictor of a range of educational outcomes, including critical thinking, writing, and problem-solving skills, as well as overall satisfaction with the college experience (Kuh, 2003). By measuring students' engagement in a range of educational

activities and experiences, NSSE provides colleges and universities with important information that can be used to improve the quality of the educational experience for students.

Finally, NSSE recognizes the importance of context in shaping student engagement. While the survey measures engagement across a range of institutions, NSSE acknowledges that student engagement may differ across different types of institutions, including urban and non-urban institutions and institutions serving predominantly minority students (NSSE, 2021).

Conclusion and Summary

In conclusion, the chapter's literature review reveals that several theories, including Lent's social cognitive career theory, Bandura's social cognitive theory, Astin's theory of persistence, and Tinto's theory of departure and student engagement, share the common characteristic of applying to a college student's pursuit of academic goals. Factors that influence undergraduate students' choice of major are varied and complex, including individual, institutional, and environmental factors. Understanding these factors is critical to developing effective interventions aimed at promoting equitable access and success in higher education. Educators and policymakers can utilize Self-Determination Theory (SDT), Goal Theory, and Expectancy-Value Theory to design and implement interventions aimed at enhancing students' motivation, academic success, and overall well-being. Self-Determination Theory emphasizes the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in fostering intrinsic motivation, suggesting that when students feel empowered, capable, and connected, they are more likely to engage deeply and persistently in their learning tasks. Goal Theory contributes to this framework by focusing on the setting, pursuit, and attainment of learning objectives, which can shape students' behavior and effort in educational settings. Additionally, Expectancy-Value Theory provides a valuable lens by examining how students' expectations of success and the value they assign to achieving specific educational outcomes influence their motivation and decision-making processes.

By integrating these theories, interventions can be strategically tailored to address various aspects of student motivation, thereby supporting their educational trajectories, and enhancing their psychological well-being. The development of a sense of belonging and community is influenced by various factors, including faculty and peer support and institutional culture. Academic preparedness is critical to academic success, and institutions can design targeted interventions to enhance academic preparedness and mitigate barriers faced by underrepresented groups. To promote positive outcomes for undergraduate students, institutions can foster a sense of belonging, access to support services, and an inclusive and diverse community by investing in campus resources and prioritizing student well-being. Interventions such as financial assistance, academic preparation programs, and comprehensive academic support services can improve the academic success and persistence of undergraduate students in urban universities. See Figure 2 for representation of themes and theories explored in the literature. Finally, understanding contextual differences can help institutions tailor their efforts to enhance student engagement and improve educational outcomes for all students, as recognized by NSSE.

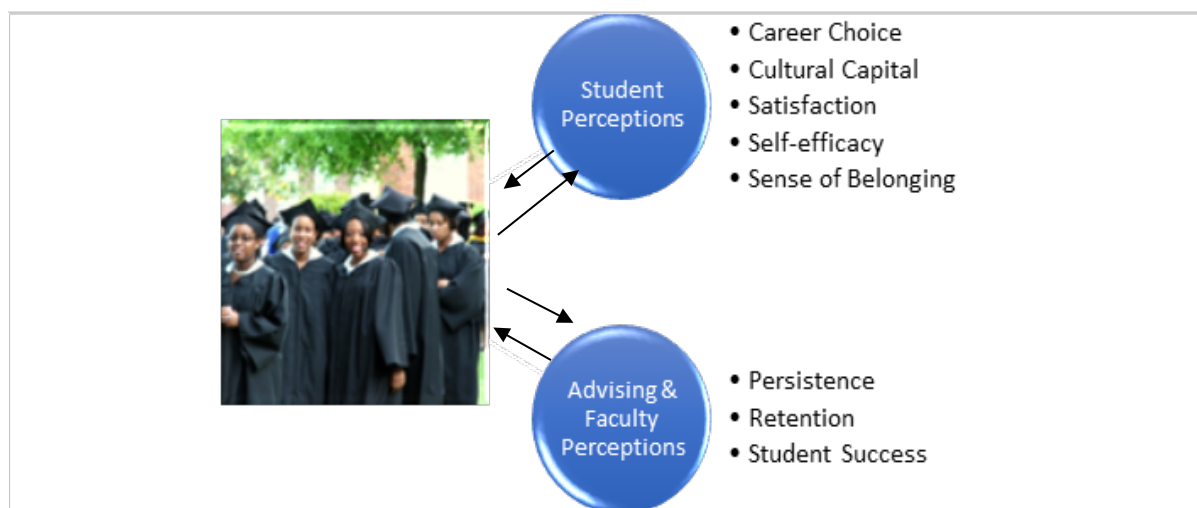


Figure 2: Perceptions Categories Based on Initial Literature Review Concept Map-Author's own construction based on synthesis of theories discussed in literature review.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Chapter 3 presents the research methodology employed to investigate and explore the perceptions of academic advisors, faculty, and students and their implications on the academic advising profession. It provides an overview using Creswell's research design framework for mixed methods, research design, data collection procedures, data analysis techniques, ethical considerations, and research timeline. The George Kuh student engagement framework (National Survey of Student Engagement, NSSE) was used for the quantitative portion of the mixed methods design.

Theoretical Framework and Research Design

A social science theory framework was used to investigate the relationship between academic advising and student success, focusing on the perceptions of academic advisors, faculty, and students and their impact on the advising process. Figure 3 illustrated how the framework guided that analysis, utilizing a mixed methods approach to gather and integrate both qualitative and quantitative data. The study aligned with the philosophical assumptions and theoretical frameworks outlined in the literature review.

Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory framework informed the study, emphasizing the role individuals played in their own learning and development. The theory highlights the importance of behavior, personal factors such as beliefs and self-efficacy, and environmental factors interacting in a reciprocal manner (Bandura, 1986). The theory underlines the importance of individuals as agents in shaping their cognitive processes, social interactions, and environmental influences.

The underlying philosophical assumption is that the combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches offers a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem (Creswell, 2014, p. 4). This mixed methods approach allowed for a deeper exploration of the

complex dynamics between academic advising and student success, considering both the subjective experiences and objective outcomes.

Creswell (2014) defined mixed methods as an approach to inquiry that involves the collection and integration of both quantitative and qualitative data which would provide a more complete understanding of the research problem. The use of this approach is particularly relevant in the social sciences where complex relationships and contexts are often investigated. The George Kuh student engagement framework (National Survey of Student Engagement, NSSE) is a widely recognized framework for assessing student engagement in higher education and served as a useful tool for providing relevant quantitative data.

By utilizing a mixed method (see Figure 3) approach and the George Kuh student engagement framework, this design provided a better understanding of the complex relationship between academic advising and student success, yielding valuable insights for the academic advising profession.

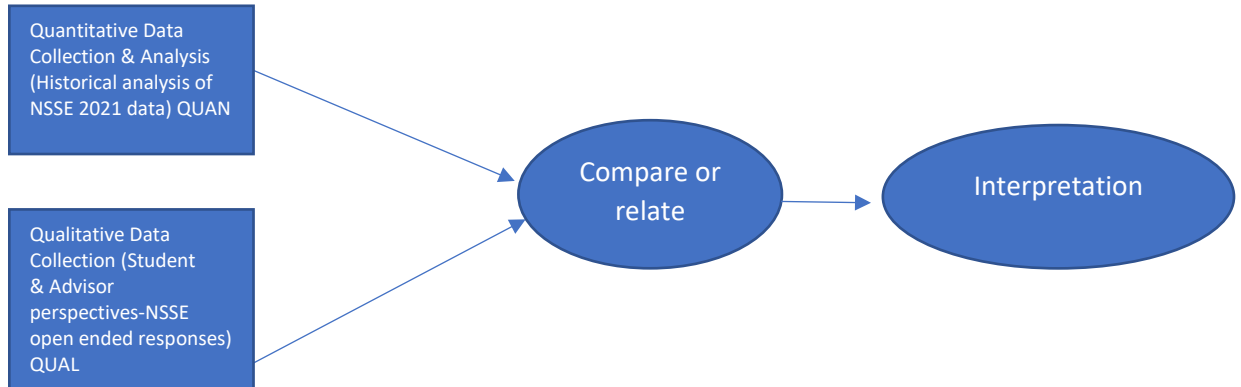


Figure 3: Social Science Theoretical Framework Undergraduate Student Perceptions -Convergent Parallel Mixed Methods (Creswell, 2014, p. 220).

The study was designed with three specific purposes in mind: investigate the differences in student success perceptions among advisors, faculty, and undergraduate students at a MPUU. Second, gain insights into why faculty, students, and advisors respond to academic challenges the way they do in college. Lastly, the study examined how respondents' interactions impact student success, ultimately contributing to students' experience in higher education. The results aimed to

identify strategies that would improve access to student success in higher education. The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent do perceptions of student success differ among undergraduate students, their faculty, and their advisors?
2. To what extent do perceptions of student retention differ among students, their faculty, and their advisors?
3. What aspects of undergraduate students' interactions with faculty and advisors either help or hinder student success?

Data Collection Procedures

To address these research questions, both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies were utilized using NSSE data as the primary source of analysis. The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) was selected for its national recognition and extensive use, providing data from faculty, advisors, and students on various aspects of the college experience such as engagement, student satisfaction, and faculty interactions. Notably, the Midwest Public Urban University (MPUU) has participated in the NSSE since its inception in 2000, administering the survey biennially since 2007. This longstanding engagement with the NSSE ensures a comprehensive and historical dataset, which is crucial for analyzing trends and changes in student engagement over time.

Both quantitative and qualitative research were conducted using NSSE data as the primary analysis tool. Faculty, advisors, and student perceptions and trends were explored. The perceptions of faculty, and advisors regarding aspects of the educational experience, as well as students' overall experience, satisfaction with different aspects of their academic journey, and engagement in co-curricular activities were examined by mixed methods. The information helped identify areas for improvement and inform faculty development initiatives by understanding the perceptions and experiences of faculty, advisors, and students. This research serves as a

foundation for enhancing teaching practices, refining support services, and fostering an enriching educational environment.

The perceptions of advisors regarding their roles, effectiveness in supporting students' academic progress and the quality of advising services were explored. This exploration aimed to understand advisors' perspectives, which had the potential to lead to advances in advising practices and enhance student success.

NSSE data was analyzed to gather insights into students' perceptions of their overall education experience, satisfaction with aspects of their academic journey, and engagement in co-curricular activities. This insight had the potential to inform strategies for enhancing student engagement and promoting a positive campus environment. Furthermore, the NSSE data allowed for the identification of trends and patterns over time, enabling the analysis of the longitudinal data to determine changes in perceptions and engagement levels among faculty, advisors, and students. This analysis provided valuable information on the effectiveness of interventions and initiatives implemented at a MPUU. By combining quantitative and qualitative approaches and leveraging NSSE data, the research provided a comprehensive understanding of faculty, advisor, and student perspectives, which enabled evidence-based decision-making and contributed to the enhancement of the overall educational experiences of students.

The research design adopted a strategic methodological approach designed to capture and analyze perceptions of faculty, advisors, and students regarding academic advising and its impact on student success. A custom instrument was developed by researcher for this purpose, specifically designed to parallel the open-ended questions utilized in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). This alignment facilitated a direct comparison of responses from these interconnected groups within the academic community and provided a basis for analysis.

To develop these insights, both quantitative and qualitative research methods were employed. The NSSE data served as the primary tool for quantitative analysis, exploring trends and perceptions of faculty, advisors, and students concerning the educational experience, overall

satisfaction, and engagement in co-curricular activities. This exploration was instrumental in identifying areas requiring improvement and shaping faculty development initiatives.

Qualitatively, the custom instrument solicited perceptions from faculty and advisors using the same open-ended questions posed to students. This methodological choice enabled a multifaceted exploration of shared perceptions and experiences, fostering a comprehensive understanding of the academic advising landscape.

The thematic analysis of qualitative data from the custom designed NSSE based instrument was central to this investigation. This approach, known for its effectiveness in identifying and analyzing data patterns, allowed for a detailed examination of how academic advising is conceptualized and experienced across the MPUU. By comparing these qualitative insights with quantitative NSSE data, the study offered a holistic view of the advising ecosystem, underscoring the diverse yet interconnected experiences of faculty, advisors, and students.

Population

The study conducted at Midwest Public University (MPUU) involved a detailed examination of a diverse and comprehensive group of participants, which included 601 faculty members and 2009 students engaged in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) across the campus, complemented by an additional group comprising 67 faculty members and 15 advisors who participated in a custom survey. The faculty and students were purposively selected for their direct involvement in undergraduate teaching and learning, with faculty chosen due to their extensive experience in student affairs and educational backgrounds, and students selected to represent a wide cross-section of the undergraduate community.

In 2021, the NSSE survey was administered to 2,248 first-year and senior students at MPUU, achieving a 19% response rate. This survey provided a foundational assessment of the undergraduates' experiences, focusing on academic challenges, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interactions, and other key engagement indicators. The collected data were

rigorously analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative analysis involved z-tests to examine the proportionality of responses across different groups, which helped identify variations and similarities in engagement levels. Qualitatively, 209 student comments were coded and analyzed in conjunction with feedback from advisors and faculty, employing the Dedoose platform to integrate and evaluate the textual responses alongside quantitative demographic data. This mixed-methods approach provided a comprehensive understanding of the academic advising landscape at MPUU.

Additionally, the study made use of proportional tables, charts, and detailed commentary tables to visually represent the findings, thereby enhancing the interpretability of the comparative results between the NSSE benchmarks and the responses from MPUU's custom survey conducted in fall 2021.

Despite the provision of comprehensive demographic data for the entire university population, a significant limitation was encountered as the data were not specifically linked to individual student responses, which restricted the direct correlation of demographic variables to perceptions of academic advising and student success. The demographic data collected for faculty and advisors were limited to their professional titles, which provided basic insight but limited the depth of demographic analysis possible. Nevertheless, this demographic information was utilized to contextualize the responses and inform targeted recommendations aimed at enhancing academic advising practices at MPUU.

Thematic Analysis of Qualitative Data

In this study, Dedoose software was pivotal in the thematic analysis for its advanced capabilities in handling complex qualitative data. The application of multiple codes to individual statements via Dedoose was a key technique used to capture the diverse and complex nature of the data. This approach facilitated a more thorough exploration of the research themes, allowing for deeper insights and the identification of relationships within the data. The choice of this

coding strategy was instrumental in addressing the research questions effectively and grounding the analysis in the rich context provided by the participants. Although this method added complexity to the coding process, the depth of understanding gained was justification for the increased effort.

To capture the perspectives of faculty and advisors, a custom-designed instrument was developed and deployed. This approach allowed for the exploration of specific themes and questions relevant to MPUU's unique academic and social environment, offering insights into the roles of faculty and advisors in facilitating student success. The creation of this tailored instrument was guided by preliminary research objectives and informed by a preliminary review of existing literature on student success factors, aiming to fill the gaps not covered by the NSSE survey.

To ensure the validity of this custom instrument, it was evaluated by five experts in the field of education, each holding doctoral degrees and over 20 years of experience in higher education, specifically with undergraduate students at urban public universities. Their extensive experience and specialized knowledge were crucial in assessing and refining the instrument's design and content. The feedback provided by these experts enhanced the instrument's relevance and precision in measuring the targeted constructs, thereby substantiating its capability to provide reliable and contextually appropriate data. This expert validation process added an additional layer of credibility to the research methodology and significantly contributed to the mixed-methods approach utilized.

This dual-methodology approach ensured a comprehensive understanding of the undergraduate experience at the MPUU research site from multiple vantage points, allowing for an analysis of the interplay between student, faculty, and advisor interactions and their collective impact on student success.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study employed both quantitative and qualitative techniques to provide a multi-faceted examination of student engagement. The quantitative component primarily involved descriptive analysis, utilizing data sourced from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). This data was explored through NSSE Tableau interactive dashboards, which facilitated a detailed review of patterns, frequencies, and distributions of responses. The analysis encompassed responses from 56,812 first-year and 58,202 senior students across 217 bachelor's degree-granting institutions in the United States and Canada. These institutions had participated in the NSSE Academic Advising Topical Module during the springs of 2020 and 2021, thereby providing a broad overview of perceptions regarding academic advising from the perspectives of undergraduate students, faculty, and advisors.

The NSSE instrument itself is strategically designed to collect extensive data on several critical aspects of student engagement, including academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, among other pivotal engagement indicators. In the context of this study, NSSE data collected in 2021 from 2,248 first-year and senior students at a large public university in the Midwest — with the institution's identity kept confidential — achieved a 19% response rate. This significant body of data provided an essential foundation for assessing the undergraduate experiences specific to this institution, enabling a focused analysis of the effectiveness of academic advising practices. The results and specifics of this data are comprehensively detailed in the “Engagement Indicators Report” for an anonymized university, published by the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research in 2021. This report serves as a critical reference in understanding the broader impacts and effectiveness of academic advising as perceived by the stakeholders involved (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2021).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were of utmost importance throughout the study. The use of the NSSE survey instrument ensured compliance with data privacy and confidentiality regulations, as participant responses were anonymized and securely stored. Necessary permissions and approvals were obtained from relevant institutions and governing bodies to access and utilize the NSSE survey instrument for research purposes. The research adhered to ethical guidelines to protect the rights and well-being of the participants.

Research Timeline and Data Sources

The research timeline and data sources are presented in Figure 4, outlining the procedures and activities conducted throughout the research process, including familiarization with the NSSE survey instrument, acquisition of the necessary dataset, data cleaning and preprocessing, exploratory analysis, and summarization of findings. The data sources included the NSSE survey instrument, university-specific data, and other relevant sources specific to the selected institution.

The researcher familiarized themselves with the NSSE survey instrument and its variables. Reviewed the survey questions and understood the data provided. The specific research questions or hypotheses that were to be addressed using descriptive data analysis were determined refined. The necessary NSSE dataset was obtained for analysis from MPUU Institutional Research. Once the dataset was obtained, it was cleaned and preprocessed. This involved checking for missing values, outliers, and inconsistencies in the data.

The NSSE survey instrument and its variables were thoroughly reviewed. Survey questions were carefully examined, and the data was comprehensively analyzed. Specific research questions and hypotheses were formulated to be explored using descriptive data analysis, establishing a clear direction for the research. The necessary NSSE dataset for analysis was secured, with proper permissions and access ensured. Subsequently, data cleaning and preprocessing were undertaken. This involved checking for missing values, outliers, and inconsistencies in the data. Through these efforts, the integrity of the analysis was upheld.

The exploratory phase of this analysis initiated exploring the variables in the dataset and basic descriptive analyses was performed. This included calculating frequencies, means, and standard deviations to understand the distribution and central tendencies of the data. Additionally, subgroups of interest, such as demographic characteristics or institutional factors, were identified, and subgroup analyses were conducted to gain deeper insights into the data. Throughout this process, the data was visualized using appropriate charts, graphs, and tables. Visual representations helped to effectively present the descriptive statistics and patterns discovered in the data. By interpreting the descriptive findings, the formation of initial conclusions related to research questions were facilitated.

The descriptive findings in the research were summarized. The researcher documented the procedures followed for data analysis, including any transformations, or recording of variables and reflected on the implications of the descriptive data analysis and considered any limitations that should be addressed. Finally, potential avenues for future research based on the insights gained from the descriptive analysis were outlined.

Through the collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data diverse perspectives and experiences related to academic advising were determined. The NSSE survey instrument served as a valuable resource, offering a rich dataset that encompasses the perceptions of faculty, advisors, and students. Thematic analysis of the qualitative data provided deeper insights and uncovered underlying meanings within the responses.

The findings contribute to the knowledge base of the academic advising profession and shed light on the factors that influence student success and campus engagement. By presenting the results in the subsequent chapter, the researcher aimed to offer valuable insights into the perceptions and experiences of key stakeholders, informing future research and practice in academic advising.

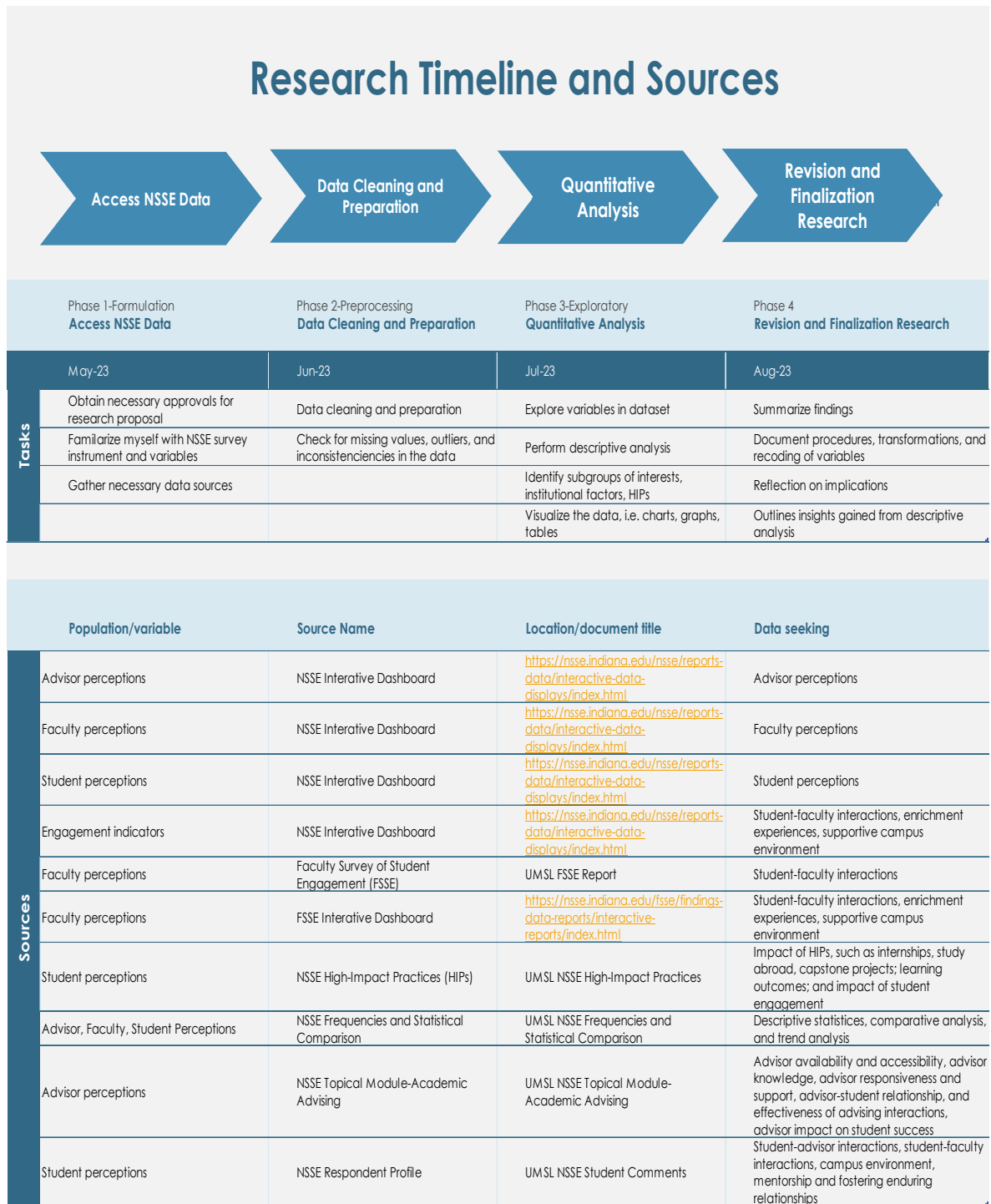


Figure 4 Research Timeline and Data Sources from National Survey on Student Engagement

Chapter 4: Findings and Analysis

This chapter presents an analysis of faculty, advisors, and students' perceptions of student success. Utilizing the Dedoose analytical tool, this study carefully examined over 200 comments to provide a holistic view of the academic community's opinions. This integrated method, which merges qualitative and quantitative data, revealed the complex nature of student success.

The analysis was built upon the methodological foundation established in Chapter 3, employing Dedoose's analysis of the feedback's sentiments. According to Dr. Eli Lieber, of UCLA's Center for Culture and health, Dedoose's ability to combine different data types ensures a complete exploration of all viewpoints, intuitive, efficient, and effective qualitative and mixed methods research (SocioCultural Research Consultants, LLC, 2021). Moreover, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) contributed significant, genuine insights from the academic world, enhancing the analysis with a wide range of perspectives.

The data analysis process was both iterative and reflective, with Dedoose's dynamic coding system enabling a detailed examination of the academic community's sentiments. The combined narratives and experiences of students, faculty, and advisors created a cohesive understanding of student success, highlighting a common focus on holistic development. This consensus on the importance of both academic achievement and personal growth underscores the academic community's collaborative role in creating an environment conducive to comprehensive student success. These findings form a robust basis for developing tailored support systems, consistent with the collective aim of promoting an environment that facilitates student achievement and well-being.

To ensure clarity and maintain focus, the research questions from Chapter 1 are reiterated below. This approach keeps the analysis aligned with the study's objectives and allows for a seamless connection between the findings discussed in this chapter and the overall research aims,

enhancing narrative flow and easing the reader's understanding without the need to refer to earlier chapters.

The research questions addressed and explored through the data in this chapter were:

1. To what extent do perceptions of student success differ among undergraduate students, their faculty, and their advisors?
2. To what extent do perceptions of student retention differ among students, their faculty, and their advisors?
3. What aspects of undergraduate students' interactions with faculty and advisors either help or hinder student success?

Next Steps: Interpreting the Data's Narrative

In deciphering the narrative presented by the data and its relevance to the research questions, the objective was to report specific insights, patterns, and trends that not only addressed the initial research probes but also guided the enhancement of student support mechanisms.

Data Analysis: Student Perceptions of Listening, Respecting, and Caring

This section of the analysis addresses student responses to the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) at a MPUU, focusing on how academic advising has encompassed listening to concerns, respect for identity and culture, and care for overall well-being. Extracted from over 217 bachelor-granting institutions, the data provides a comparative lens to understand how student perceptions at the MPUU align with or diverge from broader trends.

Specifically, this analysis examines the “very much” segment of responses from first-year students and seniors, as compared to NSSE benchmarks. This focus was selected to highlight a subset of the student population that demonstrates a high level of engagement and connection to their educational environment. By concentrating on this aspect, a great understanding of the elements of academic advising that significantly contribute to student engagement and success can be identified or attained.

Student responses to a specific NSSE question regarding academic advising, “Thinking about academic advising, how much have people and resources at your institution done the following?” are as follows. The responses are categorized into three areas: active listening to concerns, caring for overall well-being, and respecting identity and culture. To ensure a valid comparison between the MPUU data and NSSE benchmarks, “not applicable” responses in the urban university data are excluded from the analysis. This methodological adjustment ensures that the datasets are aligned, focusing only on relevant and comparable responses.

Furthermore, the decision to focus on first-year students and seniors is intentional, aligning with the survey's original design. This targeted approach ensures that the findings are directly relevant to these pivotal stages of the academic journey, providing insights into the impact of academic advising at critical transition points in the educational experience. The comparative analysis yields a clear and accurate reflection of student perceptions, enhancing understanding of the broader trends in academic advising across the sampled institutions.

Comparison of Student Responses on Academic Advising

Title	NSSE Academic Advising: Listening	Midwest Public Urban University	Student Count	NSSE Advising Dashboard	Student Count
First-Year Students					
listened to your concerns	Very little	8%	5	10%	571
	Some	24%	16	28%	1585
	Quite a bit	39%	27	37%	2063
	Very much	21%	14	25%	1409
	Not applicable	9%	6	NDL	
Senior Students					
listened to your concerns	Very little	10%	28	15%	957
	Some	23%	67	28%	1744
	Quite a bit	25%	71	32%	1971
	Very much	35%	98	25%	1550
	Not applicable	8%	19	NDL	
First-Year Students					
Respected your identity and culture	Very little	2%	1	3%	159
	Some	9%	6	16%	860
	Quite a bit	37%	25	38%	2066
	Very much	38%	26	43%	2317
	Not applicable	15%	10	NDL	
Senior Students					
Respected your identity and culture	Very little	5%	11	6%	337
	Some	12%	34	16%	929
	Quite a bit	23%	65	36%	2023
	Very much	42%	123	42%	2397
	Not applicable	19%	49	NDL	
First-Year Students					
Cared about your overall well-being	Very little	5%	3	7%	414
	Some	17%	12	25%	1400
	Quite a bit	39%	26	36%	2075
	Very much	29%	20	32%	1796
	Not applicable	10%	7	NDL	
Senior Students					
Cared about your overall well-being	Very little	8%	22	13%	779
	Some	19%	55	26%	1594
	Quite a bit	26%	71	32%	1946
	Very much	39%	113	30%	1834
	Not applicable	9%	21	NDL	

Table 3: Comparison of Student Responses on Academic Advising between Urban University and NSSE with not applicable responses included.

NSSE provided “Not Applicable” counts for the MPUU results, but did not provide “Not Applicable” counts for the NSEE benchmarks. The tables that follow this analysis will omit the “Not applicable” responses, enabling more accurate comparison between the MPUU data and the NSSE benchmarks. This refinement enhances the clarity of the evaluations, clearly highlighting areas where the MPUU's practices align with or differ from national averages. By examining

how academic advising meets the varied needs of first-year and senior students, the table provides valuable insights into the strengths and potential areas for enhancement within the university's advising practices.

Comparative Analysis of Academic Advising Feedback

Title	NSSE Academic Advising: Listening	Midwest Public Urban University	Student Count	NSSE Advising Dashboard	Student Count
First-Year Students					
listened to your concerns	Very little	8%	5	10%	571
	Some	26%	16	28%	1585
	Quite a bit	44%	27	37%	2063
	Very much	23%	14	25%	1409
Senior Students					
listened to your concerns	Very little	11%	28	15%	957
	Some	25%	67	28%	1744
	Quite a bit	27%	71	32%	1971
	Very much	37%	98	25%	1550

Table 4: Comparative Analysis of Academic Advising Feedback from First-Year and Senior Students at an Urban University with NSSE Benchmarks

This table compares the effectiveness of academic advising between first-year and senior student populations at a MPUU, specifically regarding how well advisors actively listened to their concerns. The displayed percentages and student counts have excluded 'not applicable' responses to ensure comparability with the NSSE Advising Dashboard. The data are organized into four levels of perceived effectiveness—'Very little,' 'Some,' 'Quite a bit,' and 'Very much'—showcasing the response distribution across the two student groups.

The Role of Active Listening in Perceived Student Success

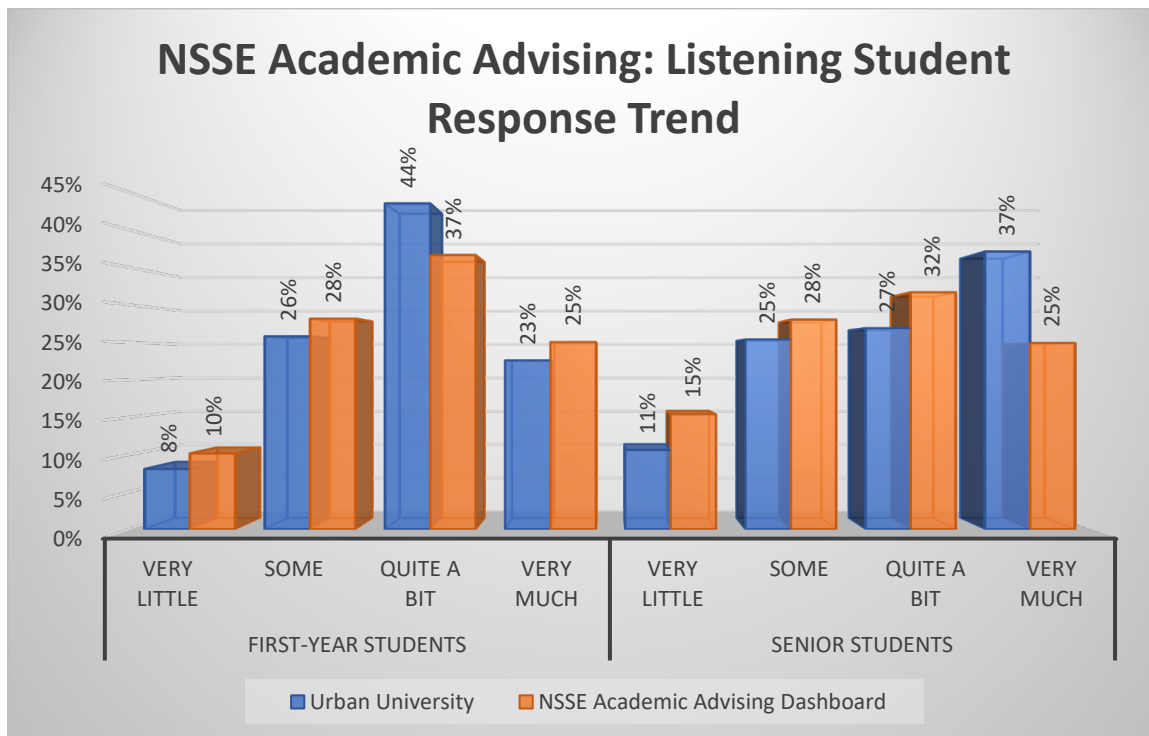


Chart 1: Student Responses to NSSE Question – Thinking about academic advising, how much have people and resources at your institution done the following? Measurable variable: listening utilized by academic advisors according to students.

The NSSE Academic Advising Dashboard reveals significant insights into how undergraduate students perceive the effectiveness of academic advising at a MPUU. A notable portion of students—23% of first-year students and 37% of senior students—reported the feeling that their advisors extensively addressed their concerns, as indicated by the “very much” responses. These figures underscore the critical role that academic advising plays in shaping students’ educational experiences and their perceptions of institutional support.

Integrating Tinto's Student Engagement Theory into this analysis illuminates the importance of these interactions. According to the theory, student engagement in both the academic and social spheres is crucial for their success and persistence in college. The high level of engagement indicated by the “very much” responses suggests that when advisors listen and

respond comprehensively to students' concerns, they significantly enhance students' connections to the academic community. This form of engagement is essential for fostering a sense of belonging, identification with the institution, and supportive relationships—all factors that the theory posits as critical to student retention and success.

This focused examination also addresses the first research question regarding variations in the perceptions of student success among undergraduates and their advisors. The progression in the percentage of positive responses from first-year to senior students may reflect an increasing sense of belonging and connection to the MPUU facilitated by ongoing, supportive interactions with academic advisors.

Moreover, the data aligns with the third research question, which explores how interactions with faculty and advisors influence student success. The substantial “very much” responses highlight the pivotal role of effective academic advising and faculty engagement in enhancing student engagement, as postulated by the Student Engagement Theory. This engagement is not just a matter of addressing academic concerns but also involves fostering a welcoming and supportive environment that encourages students to fully invest in their collegiate experience.

In conclusion, the analysis of the “very much” responses through the lens of Student Engagement Theory supports the hypothesis that and engaged advising is integral to fostering perceptions of student success at the MPUU. This detailed examination is pivotal for understanding how strategic enhancements in faculty and advisor engagement can significantly improve student retention and success, effectively addressing key aspects of the research questions posed.

When these findings are related to the first research question—To what extent do perceptions of student success differ among undergraduate students, their faculty, and their advisors?—it becomes clear that active listening transcends basic communication; it is a fundamental aspect of the advising process that profoundly affects undergraduate students'

perceptions of their success. The data reveals a dynamic in which initial advising interactions potentially lay the foundation for ongoing student success, which appears to solidify as students advance in their academic careers. These observations call upon the institution to reflect and evaluate the quality of its advising interactions and their consequent impact on student success, with the goal of enhancing the academic journey for all students.

The Role of Well-being and Caring in Perceived Student Success

In this analysis of the “very much” responses from the NSSE Academic Advising: Caring survey at MPUU, a significant correlation was observed between students' perceptions of being cared for and their retention decisions. This aspect directly responded to the research question concerning the extent to which perceptions of student retention differ among students, their faculty, and their advisors.

Comparative Analysis of Academic Advising Feedback: Caring

Title	NSSE Academic Advising: Caring	Midwest Public Urban University	Student Count	Dashboard	Student Count
First-Year Students					
Cared about your overall well-being	Very little	5%	3	7%	414
	Some	20%	12	25%	1400
	Quite a bit	43%	26	36%	2075
	Very much	33%	20	32%	1796
Senior Students					
Cared about your overall well-being	Very little	8%	22	13%	779
	Some	21%	55	26%	1594
	Quite a bit	27%	71	32%	1946
	Very much	43%	113	30%	1834

Table 5: Comparative Analysis of Academic Advising Feedback from First-Year and Senior Students at a Midwest Public Urban University with NSSE Benchmarks, well-being responses.

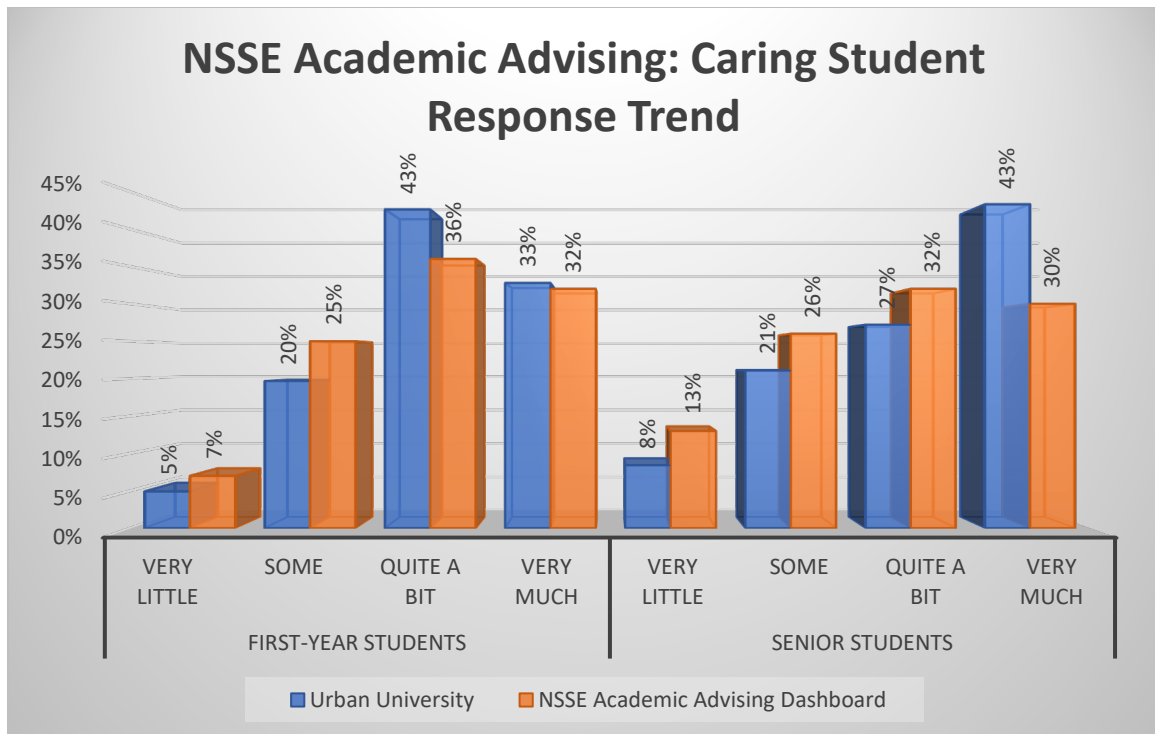


Chart 2: Student Responses to NSSE Question – Thinking about academic advising, how much have people and resources at your institution done the following? Measurable variable: cared about overall well-being by academic advisors according to students.

Among first-year students, 33% felt “very much” cared for, a figure slightly above the NSSE average of 32%, indicating that a considerable number of new entrants felt well-supported. However, despite this positive indicator, the slight discrepancy from the average suggested room for improvement in engagement and support strategies at the onset of the academic journey. Conversely, the fact that only a small percentage of these students reported feeling “very little” cared for indicated a robust foundational care system at the MPUU.

For senior students, the percentage who felt “very much” cared for rose to 43%, significantly exceeding the NSSE average of 30%. This increase suggested that the perceived quality of care improved as students progressed through their academic careers, potentially contributing to a higher inclination to remain at the university. Nonetheless, the 8% of senior students who felt “very little” cared for highlighted an ongoing need for targeted well-being support.

This analysis demonstrated that students who perceived a high level of care were more likely to feel a strong sense of belonging and commitment to the institution, thereby influencing their decision to continue their studies. This relationship was underscored by the presence of students feeling minimally cared for at both the entry and later stages of their education, emphasizing the critical need for interventions aimed at enhancing perceptions of care.

Integrating key theoretical perspectives further enriched this analysis. Tinto's theories on student departure and engagement (Tinto, 1975; Tinto & Pusser, 2006) suggested that the integration of students into academic and social systems is crucial for retention. Similarly, Strayhorn's work on the sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2018) argued that feeling valued within the community significantly affects educational success. Additionally, Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986) highlighted the role of self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and social support from academic advisors and faculty in influencing students' academic behaviors and decisions.

In conclusion, the focused examination of the “very much” responses not only illuminated how well students felt cared for but also how this perception impacted their retention and academic success. By ensuring that students feel genuinely cared for, universities can significantly enhance retention rates, thereby improving overall institutional effectiveness and student outcomes.

Understanding Student Perceptions of Well-being and Retention

Title	NSSE Academic Advising: Respecting	Midwest Public Urban University	Student Count	Dashboard	Student Count
First-Year Students					
Respected your identity and culture	Very little	2%	1	3%	159
	Some	10%	6	16%	860
	Quite a bit	43%	25	38%	2066
	Very much	45%	26	43%	2317
Senior Students					
Respected your identity and culture	Very little	5%	11	6%	337
	Some	15%	34	16%	929
	Quite a bit	28%	65	36%	2023
	Very much	53%	123	42%	2397

Table 6: Comparative Analysis of Academic Advising Feedback from First-Year and Senior Students at a Midwest Public Urban University with NSSE Benchmarks, respect responses.

Respecting Identity and Culture in Academic Advising

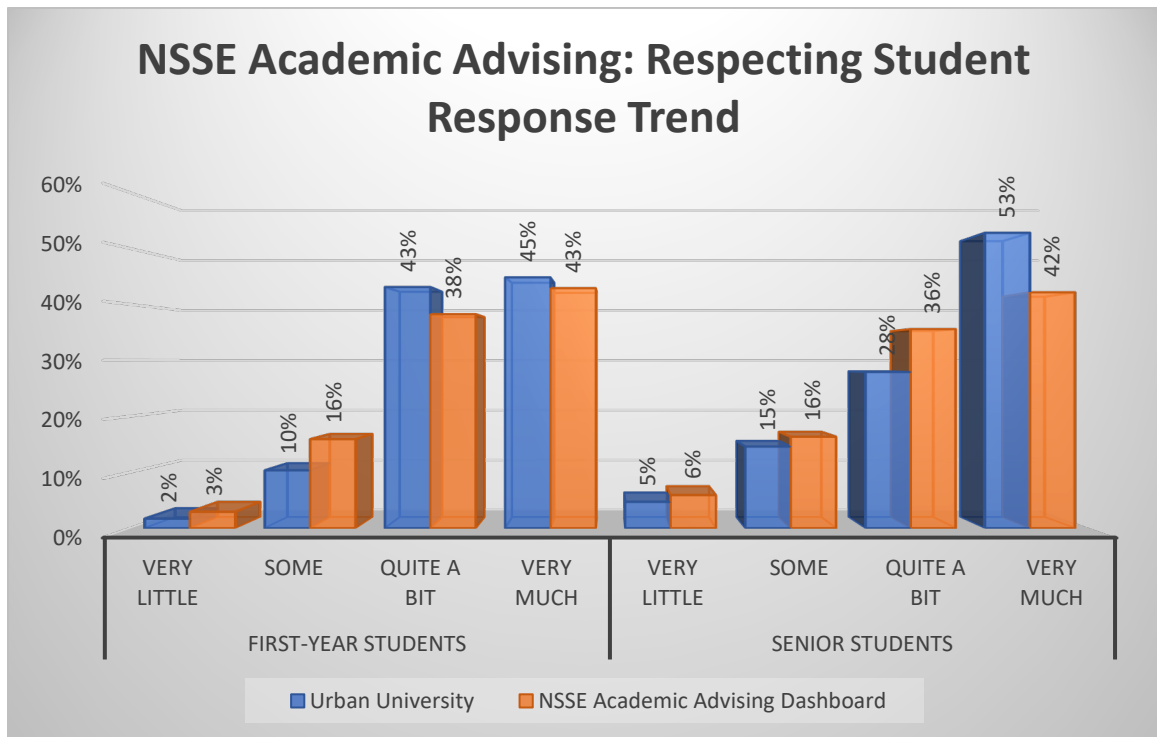


Chart 3: Student Responses to NSSE Question – Thinking about academic advising, how much have people and resources at your institution done the following? Measurable variable: respecting students' identity and culture.

In analyzing the data regarding respect for identity and culture as captured in the NSSE Academic Advising survey, the third research question is addressed: “What aspects of undergraduate students' interactions with faculty and advisors either help or hinder student success?” The data from the MPUU reveals that perceptions of respect for identity and culture form a significant component of the academic advising experience and, by extension, affect student success.

Among first-year students at the MPUU, 38% reported feeling “very much” respected in terms of identity and culture, which closely aligns with the 43% reflected in the broader NSSE data. This suggests a strong starting point for these students, as feeling respected is likely to contribute to a positive educational experience and support student success. However, there is a noted discrepancy in those who reported feeling “very little” respected—2% at the MPUU versus 3% in the broader data—indicating a marginal but positive difference in the university environment.

The senior students' responses indicate a slight increase in the feeling of being “very much” respected, at 42% compared to the same percentage in the broader data. This continuity suggests that the sense of respect for identity and culture is maintained throughout the students' academic progression. However, the proportion of senior students who felt “very little” respected is higher (5%) than among first-year students (2%), which could highlight specific challenges or changes in perception as students navigate through their academic careers.

Significantly, the percentage of senior students who found the question “not applicable” is noteworthy at 19%. This may indicate a segment of the student population that is either less engaged with the university's cultural and identity initiatives or who may not perceive these initiatives as relevant to their personal experience, a factor that could potentially hinder their sense of full participation in the academic community.

The analysis suggests that while the majority of students at the MPUU feel their identity and culture are respected—a factor known to help student success—there are opportunities to

address the nuances in the data, such as why a higher percentage of seniors feel “very little” respected and the implications of the “not applicable” responses. Understanding and addressing these aspects can provide a more supportive environment that validates all aspects of student identity, thereby enhancing student success.

Senior Student Engagement: A Comparative Analysis of Integration and Outcomes

Midwest Public Urban University		Listened to your concerns	Respected your identity and culture	Cared about your overall well-being
First-Year Students	Very Much			
P1	Sample 1 proportion	0.23	0.45	0.33
N1	Sample 1 size	62	58	61
NSSE				
P2	Sample 2 proportion	0.25	0.43	0.32
N2	Sample 2 size	5628	5402	5685
Z-Test Results	z-statistic:	-0.36180	0.30600	0.16652
	p-value (one-tailed)	0.35875	0.3798	0.43387
	p-value (two-tailed)	0.7175	0.7596	0.86774
		listened to your concerns	Respected your identity and culture	Cared about your overall well-being
Senior Students	Very Much			
P1	Sample 1 proportion	0.37	0.53	0.43
N1	Sample 1 size	264	233	261
NSSE				
P2	Sample 2 proportion	0.25	0.42	0.3
N2	Sample 2 size	6222	5686	6153
Z-Test Results	z-statistic:	4.38204	3.30913	4.46668
	p-value (one-tailed)	0.00001	0.00047	0.0000
	p-value (two-tailed)	0.00001	0.00094	0.00001

Table 7: Z-Test Analysis of Student Engagement: Midwest Public Urban University and NSSE Comparison.

In this study, the researcher investigated student engagement levels at a MPUU, specifically targeting responses classified as 'Very Much' from first-year and senior students. This targeted focus allows the researcher to uncover the attributes of those deeply embedded within the

university's academic and social spheres. The engagement of this segment of the student population provides a framework to understand the elements within the university setting that encourage profound involvement and lay the groundwork for academic success.

A data analysis reveals a significant difference in the engagement experiences of first-year and senior students when juxtaposed with a broader dataset from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), encompassing a wide spectrum of institutions. Notably, the engagement levels of senior students at the MPUU, as demonstrated by z-statistics of 4.38204, 3.30913, and 4.46668 in areas of feeling actively listened to, identity and culture respect, and overall well-being concern, respectively, with corresponding p-values far beneath the standard alpha level of 0.05, indicate a heightened sense of connection and attentiveness within their university environment compared to the national data provided by NSSE.

When comparing first-year and senior students within the MPUU, the researcher finds that senior students exhibit significantly higher levels of engagement, particularly in feeling that their concerns are actively listened to, as evidenced by a z-statistic of -2.08917 and a two-tailed p-value of 0.03669, which is statistically significant. This distinction underscores an appreciable development in the quality of the student experience from the initial year through to senior standing.

Midwest Public Urban University		Listened to your concerns	Respected your identity and culture	Cared about your overall well-being
First-Year Students	Very Much			
P1	(sample 1 proportion)	0.23	0.45	0.33
N1	(sample 1 size)	62	58	61
Seniors				
P2	(sample 2 proportion)	0.37	0.53	0.43
N2	(sample 2 size)	264	233	261
Z-Test Outcomes	z-statistic:	-2.08917	-1.09078	-1.42912
	p-value (one-tailed)	0.01835	0.13768	0.07648
	p-value (two-tailed)	0.03669	0.27537	0.15297

Table 8: Z-Test Analysis of Engagement: Comparing First-Year and Senior Students at an Urban University

The considerable engagement levels among senior students align with Tinto's (1993) theory that successful student retention is a function of their integration into the life of the university, and Astin's (1984) proposition that the extent of student involvement is directly linked to their academic and personal growth. These theories are bolstered by empirical research, such as Kuh's (2009) investigation into engagement and Pascarella and Terenzini's (2005) studies on the impact of college on students, which together affirm the crucial role of engagement in achieving educational success.

The analysis establishes a critical link between the engagement of senior students and the core research questions of the study, addressing how perceptions of student success and retention diverge among different university stakeholders, and identifying the dynamics of student-faculty and advisor interactions that are essential to academic success. The perspectives of senior students, shaped by their considerable levels of engagement, suggest a more positive view of their educational journey, potentially affecting the perceptions of faculty and advisors regarding the efficacy of retention strategies.

In exploring the efficacy of academic strategies at MPUU, particular attention has been given to High-Impact Practices (HIPs) due to their proven impact on student engagement, retention, and success. This analysis draws on the latest data from the National Survey on Student Engagement (NSSE), comparing MPUU's performance against national averages and a narrowed peer group.

For first-year students at the MPUU, the participation rate in one HIP aligns with the NSSE 2020 & 2021 average, both at 45%, while the participation in two or more HIPs, at 7%, falls slightly below the NSSE average of 8%. This suggests a foundational engagement in HIPs at the MPUU that is comparable to national levels, although it also highlights a potential area for enhanced support and advising in encouraging more involvement.

Analysis of High-Impact Practice (HIP) Participation Rates

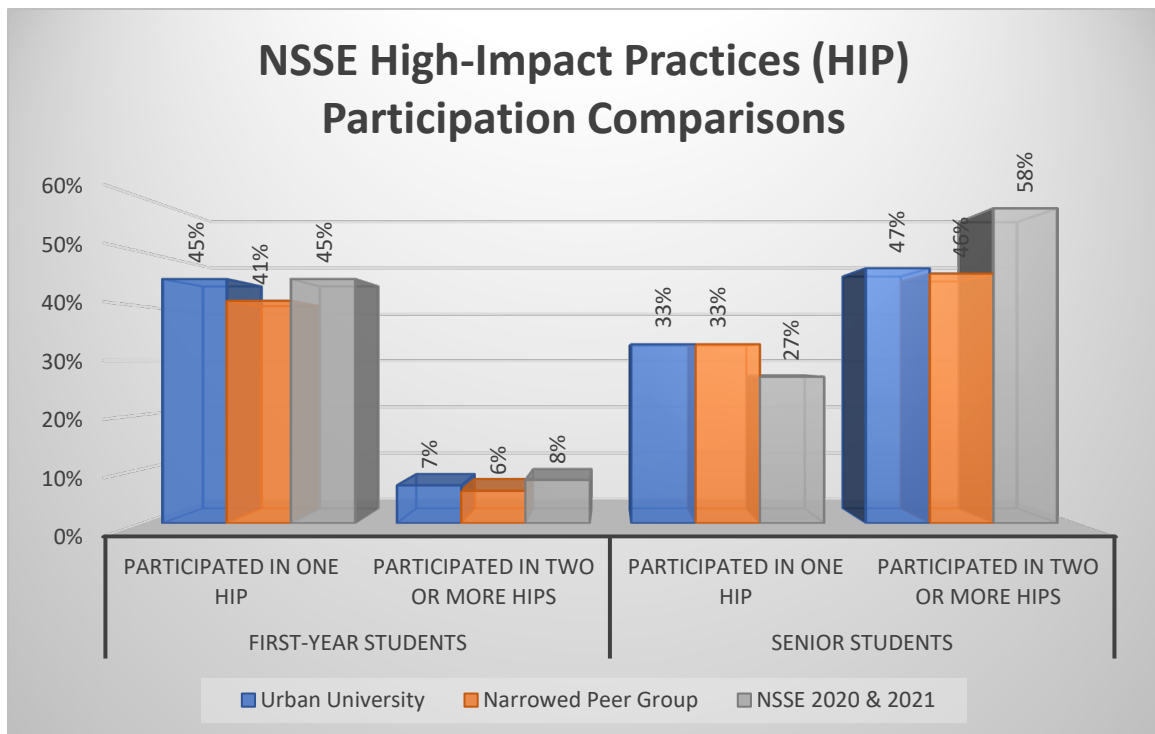


Chart 4 NSSE High-Impact Practices Comparisons from National Survey on Student Engagement Report.

Among senior students, the participation in one HIP at 33% exceeds the NSSE average of 27%, indicating a positive engagement as students' progress through their academic careers. However, the participation in two or more HIPs at 47%, although substantially higher than that of first-year students, remains below the NSSE average of 58%. This indicates that while senior students are increasingly involved in HIPs, there is a need to deepen engagement in HIP's to better support retention and graduation outcomes.

The integration of theoretical frameworks such as Tinto's theories of Student Engagement and Student Departure (Tinto, 1993), Strayhorn's Sense of Belonging (Strayhorn, 2012), Astin's Student Involvement Theory (Astin, 1984), and Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986) enriches the understanding of these data. These theories collectively underscore the importance of social integration, personal involvement, and the influence of faculty and advisor support on students' academic journeys. They advocate that increased participation in HIPs likely

fosters deeper institutional commitments and enhances students' sense of belonging, both of which are critical for student persistence.

Conclusion

This section underscores the utility of integrating established educational theories to interpret data on student engagement through HIPs. The theoretical perspectives provided by Tinto, Strayhorn, Astin, and Bandura reveal that beyond academic achievements, the social and personal aspects of student experience are vital for fostering enduring student success and institutional loyalty. MPUU's strategic enhancement of HIPs, supported by effective academic advising, is positioned as a critical approach to not only meet but potentially exceed national benchmarks in student engagement and retention.

Exploring Qualitative Perspectives

Following the quantitative analysis of senior students' engagement levels, it becomes essential to explore the qualitative aspects that enrich our understanding of these statistics. The perspectives gathered from faculty, advisors, and students provide valuable insights into the subtleties of student success and retention strategies. As detailed in Table 2, these stakeholder comments reveal the practical implications of academic theories and the nuanced experiences within the university setting. This qualitative exploration serves to humanize the data, providing a deeper narrative that captures the lived experiences of those directly involved in the educational process at MPUU. By examining these personal and detailed perspectives, we gain a more comprehensive view of how various retention strategies are perceived and the dynamic interactions between students and university staff that significantly influence academic success.

Faculty, Advisor, and Student Voices on Student Retention

Table 9 and accompanying comments illustrate the diverse ways in which stakeholders define and experience student success and retention. These insights are critical as they not only validate the quantitative data but also expand upon it by highlighting specific examples of how

academic engagement and support mechanisms are implemented and received across the campus community. Figure 5 is a word cloud that illustrates the most common words in the comments.

For a comprehensive overview of all stakeholder comments and detailed interpretations, please refer to Appendix B, titled “Common Themes in Defining Student Success, Retention, and Support Differences.” This appendix includes a broader array of comments from faculty, advisors, and students that further illuminate the diverse perspectives within our university community. These additional insights support and expand upon the findings presented here, offering deeper context and a fuller understanding of the factors influencing student success and retention at MPUU.

In summary, the analysis presented in Chapter 4 delves into the multifaceted perceptions of student success, retention, and the pivotal interactions between students, faculty, and advisors within the academic environment of MPUU. Through an examination of qualitative and quantitative data derived from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and the innovative use of the Dedoose analytical tool, this chapter has illuminated the complex dynamics that underlie academic achievement and personal growth. The findings underscore the importance of holistic development, personalized support, and engagement as key components of student success, revealing a consensus among students, faculty, and advisors on the critical role of nurturing academic and personal development in tandem.

Common Themes in Defining Student Success

Stakeholder	Comment	Interpretation	Keywords/Themes	Research Question Addressed
Faculty 1	“Doing great in school is using your learning to do cool stuff, like building a robot.”	Highlighted the practical application of academic learning as a measure of success.	Practical application, academic learning	1 (student success), 3 (interactions)
Faculty 2	“Faculty like us who connect with students personally can offer advice that truly resonates.”	Valued personal connections between faculty and students in fostering success.	Personal connections, faculty advice	1 (student success), 3 (interactions)
Faculty 3	“Faculty engaged in cutting-edge research offer students insights into emerging trends.”	Linked faculty research to providing students with contemporary academic advantages.	Faculty research, emerging trends	1 (student success), 3 (interactions)
Faculty 4	“Success for high-achieving students involves a holistic understanding of their field.”	Emphasized a comprehensive understanding of academic fields as critical to student success.	Holistic understanding, academic fields	1 (student success), 3 (interactions)
Faculty 5	“Success is seeing our students thrive both in and out of the classroom.”	Advocated for a well-rounded approach to student success, involving academic and personal well-being.	Well-rounded success, personal well-being	1 (student success), 3 (interactions)
Faculty 8	“Our goal is to help students apply academic theories to real-world problems.”	Stressed the importance of practical application of academic knowledge.	Academic theories, real-world applications	1 (student success), 3 (interactions)
Faculty 9	“We encourage interdisciplinary studies to broaden perspectives and enhance critical thinking skills.”	Advocated for interdisciplinary studies to broaden academic and personal viewpoints.	Interdisciplinary studies, critical thinking	1 (student success), 3 (interactions)
Faculty 10	“Academic success is not just about grades; it’s about developing the ability to question, analyze, and create.”	Defined success through the lens of critical thinking and creativity.	Critical thinking, creativity	1 (student success), 3 (interactions)
Student 1	“All of my advisors have actually been equally helpful in different ways, offering support and solving concerns on time.”	Reflected a positive student perception of advisory support, aiding in academic and personal success.	Advisory support, problem-solving	1 (student success), 3 (interactions)

Table 9: Common Themes in Defining Student Success, Retention, and Support Differences.

Chapter Conclusion

Chapter 4 serves as a pivotal section serves as the cornerstone for the entire research study, presenting a comprehensive analysis of the meticulously gathered data. It offers a multifaceted perspective on student success, incorporating insights from faculty, advisors, and students themselves. This in-depth analysis of the perceptions of student success among faculty, advisors, and students at MPUU, utilizing over 200 comments analyzed through the Dedoose analytical tool. This chapter integrates qualitative and quantitative data, offering a holistic view of student success that highlights the importance of both academic achievement and personal growth. Insights from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) enrich the analysis, providing a broader perspective of academic viewpoints.

The research explores three main questions: the extent of variance in perceptions of student success and retention among students, faculty, and advisors; and the influence of faculty and advisor interactions on student success. The analysis indicates a strong consensus on the importance of a supportive environment that fosters both student achievement and well-being, laying a foundation for tailored support systems.

Subsequent sections interpret the data's narrative concerning the initial research inquiries, uncovering specific insights, patterns, and trends that inform the enhancement of student support mechanisms. This is further explored in Chapter 5, which discusses the recommendations and implications derived from the findings. The qualitative data collected answers the pivotal question on the definition of student success, revealing it as a multidimensional concept that transcends academic accomplishments to include personal and professional growth.

A detailed examination of NSSE responses at the university focuses on aspects such as listening, respect for identity, and care for well-being, comparing these with broader benchmarks to gauge the effectiveness of academic advising. This comprehensive exploration aids in understanding the aspects of student success and the factors influencing it, guiding the development of effective strategies to support student achievement and well-being.

Theoretical frameworks such as Tinto's Student Engagement Theory (Tinto, 1975), Strayhorn's sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012), Tinto's (1993) Theory of Student Departure, Astin's (1984) Student Involvement Theory, and Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory enrich the analysis. These theories emphasize the importance of engagement, belonging, and the reciprocal interactions between students' behaviors, personal factors (like beliefs and self-efficacy), and environmental factors. Specifically, Social Cognitive Theory underscores the role of students' self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and social support from academic advisors and faculty in influencing their decisions to persist or disengage from their educational pursuits. It posits that students are agents in their own learning, with personal beliefs about education playing a crucial role in shaping their behavior and outcomes, while also recognizing the significant influence of social interactions and support systems.

Additionally, the Two Proportion Z-Test was employed to statistically analyze the differences between the proportions of first-year and senior students who felt that their concerns were listened to, their identities respected, and their well-being cared for, as reported in the NSSE survey responses. This statistical test helped to validate the differences in engagement levels between the groups, providing a rigorous methodological approach to confirm the findings. The Z-Test results indicated significant differences, highlighting how engagement varies at different stages of the educational journey and among different demographic groups, thereby reinforcing the theories applied in the analysis.

In conclusion, Chapter 4 illuminates the complex dynamics of student success and retention within the academic community, using a robust integration of quantitative and qualitative data. The findings underscore the necessity of fostering an environment conducive to holistic student development, setting the stage for the forthcoming discussions in Chapter 5 on enhancing student engagement and retention through targeted interventions.

Chapter 5: Conclusions, Implications, and Future Directions

“Don’t ever underestimate the importance you can have because history has shown us that courage can be contagious, and hope can take on a life of its own.” - Michelle Obama

Since the inception of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) in 2000, its insights have significantly advanced our understanding of student engagement in higher education. This chapter synthesizes insights from the NSSE explored within the context of a MPUU, directly addressing the pivotal research questions posited at the outset of this dissertation. Through examining the tapestry of faculty, advisors, and student perspectives, coupled with the NSSE insights and theoretical frameworks, the researcher advocates pathways toward enhancing student engagement, retention, and success.

Summary of Key Findings and Significance of the Research Question

The pressing question at the heart of this dissertation—In what ways do faculty, students, and advisors’ perceptions of public urban university contribute to student success?—is not only academic but critically vital for higher education today. With student attrition representing a significant economic challenge, as highlighted by the Education Policy Institute (Raisman, 2013), understanding and addressing the multifaceted perceptions of student success becomes essential for devising effective support strategies.

Addressing the Research Questions

1. Differing Perceptions of Student Success

The study revealed marked differences in perceptions of student success among faculty, advisors, and students. These varied perspectives underscore the necessity for tailored support systems that can adapt to the unique needs of each stakeholder group. Understanding these differences is crucial for developing initiatives that resonate with and effectively support all members of the university community.

2. Perceptions of Student Retention

Similarly, perceptions of student retention varied significantly among students, faculty, and advisors. This variation highlights the importance of identifying key factors that influence student persistence and degree completion. Insights gained from examining these differences will be instrumental in refining strategies to improve student retention rates.

3. Impact of Interactions on Student Success

The study also focused on how interactions between students, faculty, and advisors either facilitate or hinder student success. Identifying positive and negative aspects of these interactions has led to the recommendation of strategic approaches designed to enhance student support and engagement, thereby contributing to a more conducive learning environment.

Discussion of Findings: Bridging Perceptions and Practices for Student Success

The exploration of varied perceptions among students, faculty, and advisors regarding student success and retention has unearthed significant insights into the dynamics of student engagement within a Midwest public urban university context. Chapter 5 synthesizes these findings, grounding them in the theoretical underpinnings of Bandura's self-efficacy, Tinto's social integration theory, and Strayhorn's sense of belonging, while also considering the practical implications for enhancing educational practices.

Divergent Perceptions of Success and Retention

The results of this study revealed the marked differences in perceptions of student success among faculty, advisors, and students underscores a critical challenge within higher education: the need for a cohesive understanding of what constitutes student success. These differences highlight the importance of developing support systems that are adaptable and tailored to meet the diverse needs of the university community. The multifaceted perspectives captured in this research echo the foundational elements of Bandura's self-efficacy theory, suggesting that belief in one's capabilities plays a pivotal role in navigating the academic landscape. This finding

prompts a call for interventions that not only address academic skills but also bolster students' confidence in their abilities.

Furthermore, the variability in perceptions of student retention emphasizes the complexity of student engagement and persistence. This aligns with Tinto's social integration theory, which posits that students' connections to their academic and social communities are crucial for retention. The findings suggest that enhancing these connections through personalized advising and mentorship could significantly impact retention rates, particularly by addressing the unique needs and perspectives of each stakeholder group.

The Role of Faculty-Advisor-Student Interactions

The impact of interactions between students, faculty, and advisors on student success cannot be overstated. Positive interactions serve as a linchpin for student engagement, contributing to a sense of belonging and community within the university setting. For example, an advisor's view of success underscores the importance of resilience and engagement, suggesting that genuine achievement encompasses thriving in various facets of university life, "Success for the students means not just meeting their academic targets but thriving through resilience and engagement." (Advisor1).

This is particularly resonant with Strayhorn's emphasis on the importance of fostering a sense of belonging for student retention and success. The strategic approaches recommended based on the findings—such as increasing opportunities for meaningful engagement with faculty and advisors—aim to enhance these critical interactions, thereby creating a more supportive and conducive learning environment.

Integrating Insights for Strategic Enhancements

In response to these insights, the dissertation advocates for a series of strategic enhancements aimed at aligning university practices with the needs and expectations of its diverse student body. The emphasis on first-year engagement strategies, for example, draws directly from the identified need for supportive systems that cater to the unique challenges and

aspirations experienced by new students. Similarly, the focus on senior engagement strategies acknowledges the pivotal role of preparing students for post-graduation success, highlighting the value of continued participation in HIPs.

The call for a systematic process of monitoring and evaluation, alongside the exploration of longitudinal trends and qualitative student perspectives, underscores the importance of evidence-based strategies in educational improvement. These recommendations not only seek to bridge the gap between differing perceptions but also aim to foster an environment of continuous learning and adaptation, reflecting the dynamic nature of student engagement and success.

Future Directions and Collaborative Potential

Looking forward, the results set the stage for a broader examination of stakeholder perspectives and the systemic factors influencing student success. It advocates for a collaborative approach to educational enhancement, where sharing best practices and learning from comparative analyses become integral to institutional development. The commitment to acknowledging limitations and pursuing transparency in research and practice further solidifies the foundation for impactful, informed strategies that can navigate the complexities of higher education.

Conclusion

In summary, the discussion of the findings not only contributes to the academic discourse on student success but also lays a groundwork for practical interventions. By bridging the gap between theoretical insights and real-world applications, the study paves the way for strategic enhancements that promise to elevate the educational experience for all students within the urban university context.

Implications

Integrating the perceptions of student success, retention, and the dynamics of interactions between students, faculty, and advisors, this study brings forth substantial theoretical and practical implications. The weaving of Bandura's self-efficacy theory, Tinto's social integration,

and Strayhorn's sense of belonging with empirical insights from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) casts a revealing light on pathways to bolster student engagement and success within a public urban university framework.

Theoretical Implications

The exploration uncovered a tapestry of perceptions surrounding student success and retention that underscores the need for a multipronged understanding and approach to educational support. Echoing Bandura's emphasis on self-efficacy, one student remarked, "The encouragement I received from my academic advisor was transformative. It made me believe in my ability to succeed, aligning perfectly with the idea that believing in oneself can significantly influence educational outcomes." (Student11).

The critical role of fostering a sense of belonging, as advocated by Tinto, was reflected in comments highlighting the value of connections within the academic community. "My relationship with faculty has been crucial. Their guidance goes beyond academics; it's about making us feel part of something bigger," a senior student noted, underscoring the importance of creating inclusive environments that promote retention.

Strayhorn's focus on belonging was vividly illustrated through students' experiences of support and connection. "Finding my group within the college community turned my experience around. It wasn't just about the classes; it was feeling like I mattered," shared another student, highlighting how positive interactions contribute to a supportive campus culture.

Practical Implications

The practical recommendations that emerged align closely with the voices of the university community. The emphasis on first-year engagement strategies is corroborated by students' reflections on the crucial role of orientation and mentoring programs. "Starting university was overwhelming, but the orientation program and my mentor made it manageable. It's why I'm still here," expressed a first-year student (Student11), pointing to the necessity of acclimating students to university life from the outset.

According to Miller & Benton (2020), coaching is effective as a student support for undergraduate students across multiple domains as it is founded in positive psychology and explores the “strengths, values, goals, and dreams of students, while addressing how to overcome barriers [and] find purpose and identity” (Lefdahl-Davis et al., 2018).

Student Comment to support this: “My success coach was instrumental in helping me set realistic goals and achieve them.” (Student6).

Regarding senior students, the call for sustained engagement in high-impact practices (HIPs) finds resonance in their reflections on preparation for post-graduation life. “The study abroad trip [HIPs] I participated in not only enriched my academic experience but also equipped me with skills for the real world,” (Student12) a soon-to-be graduate mentioned, emphasizing the long-term benefits of such engagement.

The need for a systematic approach to evaluating HIP initiatives is underlined by advisors' insights into the process. “Continuously assessing our strategies allows us to identify what truly benefits our students, ensuring we adapt and improve our support systems,” shared an academic advisor (Advisor11), echoing the study’s call for evidence-based practices.

Collaboration and transparency were themes that emerged strongly from both faculty and advisors. “It’s a team effort. Academic advising, faculty, and even industry partners play unique but complementary roles in guiding students through their academic and career paths,” noted an advisor (Advisor12), highlighting the multifaceted nature of support necessary for student success.

Concluding Reflections

Integrating students', faculty's, and advisors' comments, this study not only elucidates the theoretical underpinnings of student success but also propels forward practical strategies for enhancing engagement and retention. The rich tapestry of experiences shared by the university community reinforces the importance of a collaborative, inclusive, and adaptable approach to education. By bridging the gap between diverse perceptions and fostering environments that support self-efficacy and belonging, urban universities can significantly amplify their impact on

student outcomes, aligning closely with the visionary framework laid out by Bandura, Tinto, and Strayhorn.

In sum, the voices from the Midwest public urban university community not only enrich the understanding of the complexities surrounding student success but also serve as a clarion call for actionable change. Through the lens of theory and the prism of real-world experiences, this study offers a roadmap for cultivating educational environments where every student has the opportunity to thrive.

Strategic Enhancements for Student Engagement and Success

Synthesization of the findings of the research with the implications for urban university practices, especially focusing on enhancing student engagement and success through High Impact Practices (HIPs), is a pragmatic focus of this study. Drawing from the insights of Kuh (2008), it becomes evident that the development and implementation of targeted strategies aimed at first-year student engagement are imperative. Orientation programs, mentoring initiatives, and course designs tailored to the unique needs of these students are essential to encourage their participation in HIPs. Concurrently, addressing the participation gap among senior students is crucial. Echoing the sentiments of Kilgo, Sheets, and Pascarella (2015), researchers recognize the importance of emphasizing the long-term benefits of HIPs, designing strategies to motivate seniors towards engaging in additional HIP activities in preparation for their post-graduation endeavors.

The necessity of establishing a systematic process for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of these HIP initiatives over time is underscored, building on the recommendations of Kuh (2003). This continuous assessment is pivotal in identifying successful strategies and pinpointing areas for improvement. Furthermore, the practice of peer benchmarking, as advised by Kuh (2008), offers a pathway to enhance HIP participation through the comparison of practices and interventions between the urban university and its narrowed peer group, as well as NSSE national averages. This approach not only fosters a culture of best practice sharing but also encourages the adoption of successful interventions identified through these comparisons.

The value of longitudinal studies to explore multi-year trends in HIP participation cannot be overstated. Such studies, recommended by Kilgo, Sheets, and Pascarella (2015), are instrumental in providing insights into how participation rates evolve over time, thereby informing future strategies. Additionally, the inclusion of qualitative research to capture student perspectives on their experiences with HIPs, as suggested by Flett, Khan, and Su (2019), offers a deeper understanding of the choices students make regarding these programs. This insight is invaluable in refining and improving program offerings to better meet student needs.

Emphasizing the importance of continuous improvement and institutional learning is critical. Inspired by Kuh (2008), the evidence for the urban university to foster a culture of assessment and data-driven decision-making, which is responsive to the changing needs and preferences of its student body. Collaboration with peers and other institutions sharing similar missions and student populations, as Kuh (2008) recommends, serves as a catalyst for mutual growth and enhancement of HIP participation rates through the sharing of best practices and lessons learned.

Lastly, the acknowledgment of limitations in research and practice, emphasizing transparency in the process, follows the recommendations from Flett, Khan, and Su (2019). This acknowledgment not only ensures the integrity of the recommendations but also highlights the importance of considering these limitations when interpreting findings and formulating strategies for enhancing student success.

By weaving these recommendations into the fabric of the discussions, it underscores a commitment to a multifaceted, data-informed approach to enhancing student engagement and success within the urban university context. This approach is not only reflective of the research findings but also resonates with the broader academic discourse of these on effective higher education practices.

Enhancing Student Success in Urban Universities — A Roadmap for Future Research

Building upon the foundational insights provided by this study into the multifaceted perceptions of student success within an urban university context, several avenues for future research emerge as critical for deepening the understanding and enhancing support mechanisms for students. Expanding the range of stakeholders involved in the research to include more diverse groups could enrich the understanding of student success, drawing from the recommendations for inclusive program development as noted by Kuh (2008) and Flett, Khan, and Su (2019). Longitudinal studies, as suggested by Kilgo, Sheets, and Pascarella (2015), represent another pivotal area, offering the potential to trace the evolution of student engagement and the enduring effects of various support strategies over time.

Moreover, the effectiveness of High-Impact Practices (HIPs) in diverse urban settings warrants further investigation. Kuh (2008) and Kilgo, Sheets, and Pascarella (2015) provide a strong foundation for comparing the impact of HIPs across different urban university contexts, highlighting how institutional and demographic variables influence student engagement and success. The role of technological innovations in student support also presents a promising research direction. Assessing digital platforms and educational technologies can contribute significantly to offering flexible and inclusive support mechanisms, aligning with the ongoing shift towards digitalization in education (Flett, Khan, & Su, 2019).

Addressing systemic and institutional barriers to student success is crucial, with an emphasis on identifying and tackling financial constraints, racial and socioeconomic disparities, and other structural challenges within urban universities. This approach is essential for devising effective interventions aimed at mitigating these barriers, a concept echoed by Kuh (2003) and Flett, Khan, and Su (2019) in their advocacy for comprehensive and adaptive support strategies.

The importance of mental health and well-being in the context of student success underscores the need for future studies to assess the contribution of mental health services and wellness programs to academic persistence, retention, and overall student well-being.

Additionally, exploring the impact of community engagement and service learning on student success in urban environments offers valuable insights into how external interactions and practical experiences enhance academic and personal development.

Finally, investigating the effects of faculty and advisor training programs on student success could provide essential guidance on the professional development needs necessary to improve the advising relationship and academic support. This area of exploration aligns with the call for continuous improvement and institutional learning highlighted by Kuh (2008) and emphasizes the role of qualitative research in understanding student perspectives on HIPs, as suggested by Flett, Khan, and Su (2019).

By pursuing these research directions, scholars and practitioners can build upon the groundwork laid by the current study, advancing the theoretical understanding of student success and informing the development of more effective, evidence-based strategies that support students in realizing their academic and personal aspirations.

A Visual Representation of Academic Collaboration and Synergizing Student Success

As we consider the multifaceted path to enhancing student success in urban universities, it is helpful to visualize the main ideas expressed in the data that underpin the findings in this study. Figure 6 is a word cloud that highlights the themes, key words, and stakeholders central to this research.



Figure 6: This word cloud highlights the themes, key words, and stakeholders central to my research.

Investing in Student Success - Navigating the Economic Landscape of Student Attrition

Chapter 5 outlines the imperative to anchor the discourse within the contemporary economic realities confronting higher education. The latest data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) for the 2020-21 academic year unveils a staggering financial impact of student attrition, quantified at \$61,146,232,458. This substantial figure, juxtaposed against the \$16.5 billion loss reported by Raisman in 2013, vividly encapsulates the escalating economic

stakes at play, thereby magnifying the imperative for the strategic enhancements and interventions this dissertation has advocated.

The revelation of such profound economic data underscores the lasting relevance of the central research question and casts a forward-looking gaze on the path ahead. It compels stakeholders across the educational spectrum—ranging from policymakers to educators and institutional leaders—to embrace the call for urgent, evidence-based strategies aimed at reducing student attrition. The stark financial ramifications highlighted by the latest IPEDS data underscore the necessity for a unified, collaborative effort to address the complex dimensions of student engagement and retention.

This analysis not only reveals a discernible increase in the total annual revenue loss attributable to student attrition, signifying a persistent and intensifying fiscal challenge within the higher education sector but also underscores the compounded effects of rising tuition costs against the backdrop of fluctuating enrollment patterns and escalating operational expenses. This trend emphasizes the critical need for institutions to prioritize and refine their retention strategies. By focusing on identifying at-risk students, enhancing academic support services, and fostering engaging campus environments conducive to student success, institutions can not only mitigate the significant revenue losses resulting from attrition but also enrich the educational experience for their student bodies.

It is essential to reflect on how this analysis bridges historical data with the current fiscal realities of student attrition, emphasizing attrition's dual nature as both an academic and economic challenge. Such a perspective necessitates concerted efforts toward retention to safeguard institutional financial health. Through this lens, this study highlights the critical need for ongoing research, innovative policy formulation, and the implementation of strategic interventions aimed at curtailing attrition rates. In doing so, we not only enhance the educational experience for students but also contribute to the economic stability and sustainability of higher education institutions, ultimately benefiting society and communities at large.

Conclusion

This chapter has unfolded a comprehensive exploration into the dynamics of student engagement, success, and retention within an urban university, anchoring its insights in the potent combination of empirical data from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and theoretical frameworks. This concluding section underscores the study's significance, its contributions to academic discourse, and its practical implications for enhancing higher education practices.

The research embarked upon a critical inquiry into the differing perceptions of student success among faculty, advisors, and students, shedding light on the necessity for adaptable and multiple support systems. This divergence in perceptions not only highlights the complexities inherent in the academic ecosystem but also underscores the importance of a collaborative, informed approach to fostering student success. By delving into the factors that influence student retention and the pivotal role of faculty-advisor-student interactions, this study provides a rich, multidimensional understanding of the factors contributing to a conducive learning environment.

The theoretical implications of this research resonate deeply with Bandura's concept of self-efficacy, Tinto's social integration theory, and Strayhorn's sense of belonging, offering a robust framework for interpreting the findings. The practical recommendations derived from these insights—ranging from the development of targeted first-year engagement strategies to the implementation of comprehensive advising and mentoring programs—reflect a strategic approach to enhancing student engagement and success.

The study's call for future research directions, including the expansion of stakeholder perspectives, longitudinal studies, and the exploration of High-Impact Practices (HIPs) in diverse settings, outlines a roadmap for ongoing inquiry. These avenues promise to enrich the understanding of the multifaceted nature of student engagement and success, offering valuable insights for policy-makers, educators, and institutions committed to fostering academic achievement and well-being.

In synthesizing the findings and recommendations of this dissertation, it becomes evident that the path to enhancing student success in urban universities is multifaceted. It requires a commitment to continuous improvement, evidence-based practices, and a deep understanding of the diverse needs and aspirations of the student body. This research contributes to the academic discourse on higher education by providing a multifaceted analysis of student engagement and retention, offering actionable strategies for educators and institutions.

It is essential to circle back to a critical theme that has permeated this dissertation—the economic cost of student attrition. Highlighted in Chapter 1, revisited at the outset of Chapter 5, and now underscored again, this theme serves as a bookend to our exploration of the challenges and opportunities in higher education. The latest data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) for the 2020-21 academic year reveals a staggering financial impact of student attrition, quantified at \$61,146,232,458. This substantial figure, starkly contrasting with the \$16.5 billion loss reported by Raisman in 2013, not only underscores the financial implications but also the moral and societal responsibilities we hold.

By failing to employ innovative solutions and problem-solving strategies, as practitioners, we are doing a disservice to both students and the broader community. Our current and future generations deserve better—we owe it to them and to the trailblazers who have paved the way to harness the full potential of higher education. It is not merely a financial drain but a clarion call to action, compelling us to adopt innovative solutions and proactive strategies to mitigate these losses and enhance student success.

Looking to the path forward, it is essential to remember the transformative power of education—not merely as a financial instrument, but as a cornerstone of freedom and ingenuity. Nelson Mandela’s words resonate profoundly within the context of the findings: “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.” His reminder that “Everyone can rise above their circumstances and achieve success if they are dedicated to and passionate about what they do,” reinforces the call for strategic enhancements and interventions. This dissertation

advocates reshaping the educational landscape into one where every individual has the opportunity to succeed and to contribute meaningfully to society, aligning efforts with these timeless values.

In conclusion, this study not only highlights the critical role of personalized, strategic support systems in enhancing student success but also serves as a call to action for urban universities. By embracing the insights and recommendations outlined herein, these institutions can pave the way for a transformative educational experience, one that is inclusive, supportive, and conducive to the success of all students. Let this chapter serve as a testament to the potential for meaningful change in higher education, inspired by a comprehensive understanding of the complexities of student engagement and success.

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Appendix A

Appendix A: NSSE Data Analysis for a Midwest Public Urban University (MPUU)

This appendix provides an in-depth look at the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) data for MPUU. The NSSE survey, since its inception in 2000, has been instrumental in enhancing the understanding of student engagement across higher education institutions. It allows for an examination of engagement through various lenses, offering insights that are crucial for continuous improvement in educational practices.

Introduction to the NSSE

The NSSE has collaborated with over 1,700 institutions and gathered data from more than 7 million students, establishing itself as a key tool for understanding and improving student engagement. In addition, the MPUU's engagement with the NSSE survey demonstrates its commitment to evaluating and enhancing the student experience within its unique urban setting.

NSSE Data Collection at Midwest Public Urban University

In 2021, the MPUU administered the NSSE survey to 2,248 students, achieving a response rate of 19%. This participation provides valuable insights, particularly when the responses of MPUU's students are compared with those from similar institutions and the broader NSSE findings.

NSSE Data Overview

The NSSE survey covers a wide array of topics, including but not limited to:

- **Educational Aspirations:** Insights into students' future academic goals and how they align with national trends.
- **Family Educational Background:** Information on the educational achievements of students' families, offering context for first-generation student experiences.
- **International and Diverse Identity Representation:** Data on the representation of international students and diversity in gender identity.

- Living Arrangements: Variations in students' living situations, providing a glimpse into their day-to-day college life.
- Disability and Mental Health: Statistics on students with disabilities and mental health conditions, emphasizing the need for supportive educational environments.
- Sexual Orientation: Diversity in sexual orientation among the student body.

Detailed NSSE Data for Midwest Public Urban University

The data presented here are selected for their relevance to the research questions posed in the dissertation, focusing on areas that illuminate aspects of student success, retention, and the impact of faculty and advisor interactions:

Student Educational Expectations and Demographic Characteristics: A Comparative Analysis of NSSE Data

NSSE Question/Number	Response option	MPUU First-Year Students	MPUU Narrowed Peer (First-Year)	NSSE 2020 & 2021 (First-year)	MPUU Seniors	MPUU Narrowed Peer (Seniors)	NSSE 2020 & 2021 (Seniors)
30. What is the highest level of education you expect to complete?	Bachelor degree	37%	45%	38%	37%	39%	36%
	Master's degree	30%	30%	34%	37%	35%	37%
	Doctoral or professional degree	22%	17%	20%	16%	17%	19%
31a. What is the highest level of education completed by either of your parents (or those who raised you)?	Less than associate degree	37%	40	33	39	42	36
	Associate degree	6%	0	9	8	11	10
	Bachelor's degree or higher	58%	52	58	52	48	54
31b. First-generation status (neither parent holds a bachelor's degree).	Not first-generation	58%	51%	58%	52%	48%	54%
	First-generation	42%	49%	42%	48%	52%	46%

Table 10: Comparative Analysis of NSSE Responses by First-Year and Senior Students at MPUU and Peers

NSSE Question/Number	Response option	MPUU First-Year Students	MPUU Narrowed Peer (First-Year)	NSSE 2020 & 2021 (First-year)	MPUU Seniors	MPUU Narrowed Peer (Seniors)	NSSE 2020 & 2021 (Seniors)
33a. Are you an international student?	No	92%	97%	95%	97%	96%	96%
	Yes	8%	3%	5%	3%	4%	4%
32. What is your gender identity?	Man	47%	44%	41%	43%	45%	41%
	Woman	48%	53%	56%	54%	52%	56%
	Another gender identity	2%	1%	1%	2%	1%	1%
	I prefer not to respond	3%	2%	1%	1%	2%	2%
36. Which of the following best describes where you are living while attending college?	Campus housing	26%	30%	55%	3%	5%	13%
	Off-campus residence within walking distance to campus	9%	6%	6%	4%	12%	21%
	Off-campus residence farther than walking distance to campus	59%	56%	29%	88%	77%	54%
	Not applicable: no campus, entirely online program, etc.	6%	7%	9%	5%	6%	10%
	Not applicable: homeless or in transition	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%
39a. Do you have a disability or condition that impacts your learning, working or living activities?	No	73%	81%	81%	78%	81%	81%
	Yes	22%	12%	14%	18%	14%	14%
	I prefer not to respond	4%	6%	5%	5%	5%	5%

Table 9: (Continued)

NSSE Question/Number	Response option	MPUU First-Year Students	MPUU Narrowed Peer (First-Year)	NSSE 2020 & 2021 (First-year)	MP UU Seniors	MPUU Narrowed Peer (Seniors)	NSSE 2020 & 2021 (Seniors)
39b. [If answered yes] Which of the following impacts your learning, working, or living? (top five percentages)	Mental health or developmental disability						
	Anxiety	66%	62%	65%	74%	61%	64%
	Attention deficit or hyperactivity disorder (ADD or ADHD)	34%	35%	39%	42%	37%	36%
	Depression	41%	49%	52%	68%	52%	53%
	Another disability or condition						
	Chronic medical condition (asthma, diabetes, Crohn's disease, etc.)	27%	12%	18%	6%	20%	21%
	No disability or condition	73%	82%	81%	78%	82%	81%
40. Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation?	Straight (heterosexual)	78%	77%	80%	78%	79%	81%
	Bisexual	3%	9%	8%	10%	7%	7%
	Gay	5%	2%	2%	1%	3%	2%
	Lesbian	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
	Queer	1%	1%	1%	2%	1%	1%
	Questioning or unsure	1%	3%	2%	1%	1%	1%
	Another sexual orientation	1%	2%	2%	2%	2%	1%
	I prefer not to respond	10%	6%	5%	6%	7%	5%

Table 9: (Continued)

This table is crucial for understanding the detailed dynamics of student engagement at Urban University, comparing it with a Narrowed Peer group and the NSSE 2020 & 2021 averages.

Analysis and Discussion

The NSSE data highlights both strengths and areas for improvement at Urban University. For instance, the alignment of educational aspirations with national averages underscores a strong

academic ambition among students. The detailed breakdown of family educational backgrounds, diversity in student identities, and living arrangements enriches the understanding of the student experience, pointing towards areas where targeted support can further enhance student success and retention.

Conclusion

This addendum serves as a critical component of the dissertation, offering a comprehensive view of the NSSE data as it relates to an MPUU. It supports the analysis provided in Chapter 4, underscoring the importance of multifaceted engagement strategies to meet the diverse needs of the student population.

Appendix B

Appendix B: Common Themes in Defining Student Success, Retention, and Support Differences

Appendix B compiles responses on key aspects of student success, retention, and support differences. It gathers feedback from stakeholders within the educational community, including insights from students, advisors, and faculty members. 9 out of 15 advisors, 20 out of 67 faculty members, and 209 student comments were sourced through the MPUU NSSE Data request, approved by the Institutional Review Board.

Furthermore, this appendix provides a detailed perspective on how academic advisors, faculty, and undergraduate students at MPUU define and support student success, highlighting critical components essential for fostering an effective educational environment.

It delves into the varied perceptions of academic advisors, faculty, and undergraduate students at MPUU regarding student success. This analysis aims to articulate differing definitions and expectations of success, examine strategies and support systems influencing student retention, and explore the impact of interpersonal interactions within the university environment. Research questions indicated in the tables below:

1. To what extent do perceptions of student success differ among undergraduate students, their faculty, and their advisors? This investigates how different university groups define and measure student success across stakeholders.
2. To what extent do perceptions of student retention differ among students, faculty, and advisors? This examines the perceptions held by stakeholders about retention and degree completion and the impact of perception differences and commonalities.
3. What aspects of undergraduate students' interactions with faculty and advisors either help or hinder student success? This highlights how these interactions can serve as insights on student success and retention strategies that either support mechanisms or barriers in the educational environment.

Insights on Student Success and Retention Approaches

Results: Student Retention

Stakeholder	Comment	Interpretation	Keywords/Themes	Research Question Addressed
Advisor 6	“Transfer student coordinators offered specialized guidance for transfer students' academic plans.”	Highlighted specialized advising's role in enhancing retention for transfer students.	Specialized advising, transfer students	2 (student retention), 3 (interactions)
Advisor 7	“Graduation is a visible sign of success, but critical thinking and resource access are crucial too.”	Emphasized critical thinking and resource access as underpinnings of successful graduation and retention.	Graduation, critical thinking, resource access	1 (student success), 2 (student retention)
Advisor 8	“Empowering students involved equipping them to navigate complex challenges and adapt to changing landscapes.”	Discussed adaptability and problem-solving skills as crucial for retention.	Empowerment, adaptability, problem-solving	1 (student success), 2 (student retention), 3 (interactions)
Faculty 6	“Success was defined by whether a degree led to employment or further education.”	Linked academic outcomes to employment and educational opportunities, crucial for retention decisions.	Employment, education, academic outcomes	1 (student success), 2 (student retention)
Faculty 7	“Successful and timely graduation with jobs lined up showed our effectiveness.”	Used employment post-graduation as a key indicator of educational success and retention.	Graduation, employment, retention	2 (student retention)
Student 4	“The support from my advisors enabled me to navigate through difficult periods and stay on track with my studies.”	Appreciated advisor support, crucial for navigating academic challenges and staying enrolled.	Advisor support, academic challenges	2 (student retention), 3 (interactions)
Student 6	“My success coach was instrumental in helping me set realistic goals and achieve them.”	Highlighted success coaching as a pivotal element in student retention through goal setting and achievement.	Success coaching, goal setting	2 (student retention), 3 (interactions)
Student 7	“The academic resources provided, including tutoring and study groups, were crucial to my learning experience.”	Access to academic resources was essential for maintaining enrollment and academic success.	Academic resources, tutoring, study groups	2 (student retention), 3 (interactions)
Student 12	“Starting university was overwhelming, but the orientation program and my mentor made it manageable. It's why I'm still here.”	Highlights how orientation and mentoring effectively support students in overcoming initial university challenges, influencing their decision to stay.	Orientation, Mentorship, Student retention	2 (student retention), 3 (interactions)

Table 11: This table summarizes stakeholder comments on strategies for student retention, highlighting key themes and related research questions.

Results: Student Success

Stakeholder	Comment	Interpretation	Keywords/Themes	Research Question Addressed
Advisor 1	“Success for the students meant not just meeting their academic targets but thriving through resilience and engagement.”	Emphasized resilience and active engagement as key components of student success.	Resilience, engagement	1 (student success), 3 (interactions)
Advisor 2	“It was about empowering students to face and overcome life’s challenges, engage in their community, and prepare for a meaningful career.”	Stressed the importance of empowerment and community engagement for career preparation.	Empowerment, community engagement	1 (student success), 3 (interactions)
Advisor 3	“For the students, success transcended the classroom; it was about applying what they had learned to make meaningful contributions in diverse urban settings.”	Connected learning application to making a social impact, broadening the scope of success.	Learning application, social impact	1 (student success), 3 (interactions)
Advisor 4	“Student success in academic advising was achieved when students were empowered to take ownership of their educational journey.”	Advocated for student autonomy in education planning as a success factor.	Autonomy, educational planning	1 (student success), 3 (interactions)
Advisor 5	“Success was achieving a balance where students not only excelled academically but also grew personally and professionally.”	Highlighted the balance between academic excellence and personal growth.	Balance, personal growth	1 (student success), 3 (interactions)
Advisor 9	“We strove to foster an environment where students were engaged in meaningful learning experiences that extend beyond the classroom.”	Focused on engaging and expansive learning environments.	Learning environments, engagement	1 (student success), 3 (interactions)
Advisor 10	“True success is about enabling students to connect their academic pursuits with their personal and career goals.”	Linked academic achievements to personal and career aspirations.	Academic pursuits, career goals	1 (student success), 3 (interactions)
Advisor 11	“Continuously assessing our strategies allows us to identify what truly benefits our students, ensuring we adapt and improve our support systems.”	Emphasizes ongoing assessment and strategy adaptation as essential for improving student support systems, impacting both student success and retention.	Strategy Assessment, Student Support, Success, Retention	1 (student success), 2 (student retention)

Table 12: This table summarizes stakeholder comments on strategies for student success, highlighting key themes and related research questions.

Results: Student Success continued

Stakeholder	Comment	Interpretation	Keywords/Themes	Research Question Addressed
Advisor 12	“It’s a team effort. Academic advising, faculty, and even industry partners play unique but complementary roles in guiding students through their academic and career paths.”	Highlights the collaborative nature of academic and career guidance, emphasizing the integral roles of academic advising, faculty, and industry partners in student support.	Collaboration, Academic Advising, Faculty Involvement, Industry Partners	1 (student success), 2 (student retention), 3 (interactions)
Faculty 1	“Doing great in school is using your learning to do cool stuff, like building a robot or fixing a problem.”	Highlighted the practical application of academic learning as a measure of success.	Practical application, academic learning	1 (student success), 3 (interactions)
Faculty 2	“Faculty like us who connect with students personally can offer advice that truly resonates.”	Valued personal connections between faculty and students in fostering success.	Personal connections, faculty advice	1 (student success), 3 (interactions)
Faculty 3	“Faculty engaged in cutting-edge research offer students insights into emerging trends.”	Linked faculty research to providing students with contemporary academic advantages.	Faculty research, emerging trends	1 (student success), 3 (interactions)
Faculty 4	“Success for high-achieving students involves a holistic understanding of their field.”	Emphasized a comprehensive understanding of academic fields as critical to student success.	Holistic understanding, academic fields	1 (student success), 3 (interactions)
Faculty 5	“Success is seeing the students thrive both in and out of the classroom.”	Advocated for a well-rounded approach to student success, involving academic and personal well-being.	Well-rounded success, personal well-being	1 (student success), 3 (interactions)
Faculty 8	“The goal is to help students apply academic theories to real-world problems.”	Stressed the importance of practical application of academic knowledge.	Academic theories, real-world applications	1 (student success), 3 (interactions)
Faculty 9	“We encourage interdisciplinary studies to broaden perspectives and enhance critical thinking skills.”	Advocated for interdisciplinary studies to broaden academic and personal viewpoints.	Interdisciplinary studies, critical thinking	1 (student success), 3 (interactions)
Faculty 10	“Academic success is not just about grades; it’s about developing the ability to question, analyze, and create.”	Defined success through the lens of critical thinking and creativity.	Critical thinking, creativity	1 (student success), 3 (interactions)

Table 12: (Continued)

Stakeholder	Comment	Interpretation	Keywords/Themes	Research Question Addressed
Student 1	“All of my advisors have actually been equally helpful in different ways, offering support and solving concerns on time.”	Reflected a positive student perception of advisory support, aiding in academic and personal success.	Advisory support, problem-solving	1 (student success), 3 (interactions)
Student 2	“My academic advisor has been the most helpful in picking classes effectively for my degree program and guiding me towards a minor in the process.”	Emphasized the advisor's role in academic planning, crucial for student success.	Academic planning, advisor guidance	1 (student success), 3 (interactions)
Student 3	“Student success encompasses more than academic accolades; it's about holistic growth—academic, personal, and social.”	Showed student perspective on success as multidimensional, stressing the significance of personal and social development.	Holistic growth, multidimensional success	1 (student success), 3 (interactions)
Student 5	“Having access to mentors and support networks has significantly improved my academic outcomes and well-being.”	Mentoring and support networks were identified as critical to student success.	Mentoring, support networks	1 (student success), 3 (interactions)
Student 8	“Guidance from faculty and peers has been essential in helping me overcome academic challenges.”	Highlighted the importance of faculty and peer support in navigating academic challenges.	Faculty support, peer guidance	1 (student success), 3 (interactions)
Student 9	“Regular feedback from my professors has helped me improve my performance and focus on areas needing development.”	Underlined the role of continuous feedback in academic improvement and success.	Continuous feedback, academic improvement	1 (student success), 3 (interactions)
Student 10	“Participation in study groups and academic clubs has significantly enriched my learning experience and social interactions on campus.”	Pointed out the benefits of active participation in campus activities for academic and social enrichment.	Study groups, academic clubs	1 (student success), 3 (interactions)
Student 11	“The encouragement I received from my academic advisor was transformative. It made me believe in my ability to succeed, aligning perfectly with the idea that believing in oneself can significantly influence educational outcomes.”	Highlights how crucial the advisor's support was in enhancing the student's self-confidence and motivation, key factors for academic success.	Self-efficacy, Academic advising, Student success	1 (student success), 3 (interactions)
Student 12	“The study abroad trip [HIPS] I participated in not only enriched my academic experience but also equipped me with skills for the real world.”	Pointed out how participation in a study abroad program, a high-impact practice, enhances both academic and practical skills, contributing to student success.	High-Impact Practices, Study Abroad, Student Success	1 (student success), 3 (interactions)

Table 12: (Continued)

Aspects that Hinder Student Success

Stakeholder	Comment	Interpretation	Keywords/Themes	Research Question Addressed
Student 69	“Academic advising has been close to nonexistent.”	Highlighted a significant lack of advising support, indicating a gap in academic support services.	Advising challenges, support gaps	3 (interactions)
Student 70	“No one.”	Expressed a total absence of effective advising, pointing to severe deficiencies in support.	Lack of advising	3 (interactions)
Student 71	“This is the WORST school I have ever gone to. They seem to just not care about their students and only want their money.”	Voiced extreme dissatisfaction with the overall educational experience, suggesting institutional neglect.	Institutional neglect, dissatisfaction	3 (interactions)
Student 72	“None of them. Academic advising at this school is terrible.”	Indicated a uniformly poor advising experience across the board, highlighting systemic issues.	Poor advising, systemic issues	3 (interactions)
Student 73	“The academic advisor in the business dept. First one I visited gave me wrong incorrect information when I initially signed up at this institution.”	Reported receiving incorrect information from an advisor, reflecting issues with advisor competence or training.	Incorrect information, advisor error	3 (interactions)

Table 13: This table summarizes students comments that may hinder student success and retention.

Aspects that Help or Hinder Student Success

Stakeholder	Comment	Interpretation	Keywords/Themes	Research Question Addressed
Student 74	“The first assigned academic advisor I had was absolutely amazing, knew everything about the program and required classes. Then there was a fill-in after they left who was not very helpful and kinda rushed me.”	Highlighted a contrast in advisor quality, pointing to inconsistencies in advising that can impact student success.	Advisor inconsistency, quality variation	3 (interactions)
Student 75	“(NR) when she was advising, but it seems like the work environment there is so bad people are desperate to leave it constantly, and that falls on the students to be diligent constantly.”	Suggested that a poor work environment for advisors leads to high turnover, adversely affecting consistent student support.	High turnover, poor work environment	3 (interactions)

Table 14: This table summarizes students comments that may help or hinder student success and retention.

Conclusion

Appendix B provides a comprehensive examination of factors affecting student success and retention at MPUU. By analyzing these critical areas, the university can better understand and enhance the educational experiences of its students, using insights to potentially improve advising practices, support systems, and the overall student-faculty interaction dynamic.