Student Voices: Factors, Characteristics, and Qualities that Lead to Success for Potential Graduates at a Public Four-Year University

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by

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ABSTRACT

In the United States, college degree completion rates in higher education are a major concern, and completion is a key issue tied to higher education performance and accountability. The current study was designed to identify and explore institutional factors and student characteristics and qualities that lead to the success of potential college graduates at a public four-year university. The study was a mixed methods analysis of institutional factors, student characteristics (i.e. gender and race) and qualities that support graduation rates. Participants were prospective student graduates identified by a college or department within the university. Student academic experiences and outcomes, as well as personal and social skills, were incorporated in the analysis examining their influence on graduation rates. The study included student perspectives, definitions and clarification of the institutional factors, personal characteristics, and other attributes that affect increasing college degree completion. The primary goal of the study was to identify and understand, from a student viewpoint, actions and interventions that positively contribute to completing a degree. The current study provides information and research on effective strategies and programmatic activities that lead to the success of potential college graduates.
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Increasing graduation rates has become a primary goal and an integral part of higher education’s measure of institutional effectiveness in the United States. Best practices and effective strategies for increasing graduation rates have become a subject of much debate and have been discussed on many levels; from higher education officials, to educational organizations, to the office of the President of the United States. The concern for increasing the number of college graduates has been focused on the ability of the United States to compete globally, to maximize the abilities of the workforce, to increase flexibility and transferable skills, and to develop a more educated citizenry.

President Obama (2009) has called for an increase in college graduates by the year 2020. The concern centered on poor graduation rates in higher education has not only been viewed as a direct correlation between an educated citizenry and the future ability of the United States to compete globally, but also as an important factor in developing a strong economy and an informed, socially conscious society. Duderstadt (2008) has asserted that the power, affluence and the welfare of a nation in a global knowledge economy requires a well-educated society.

According to DeAngelo, Franke, Hurtado, Pryor and Tran (2011), higher education institutions have also felt pressure from regional accrediting associations to improve student outcomes. The National Commission on Higher Education (2013) has
challenged colleges and universities to increase graduation rates. The commission contends that since the United States has not addressed the need for retention and college completion, social upward mobility, as well as the economic well-being of the nation, is at risk (National Commission on Higher Education, 2013). The commission further also asserted the value of a college education extends far beyond economic benefits; college graduates are happier, healthier, more tolerant, and tend to be involved in social and civic affairs. The commission is resolute about the need for a better educated citizenry.

The graduation rates for the United States adult population show that in 2009, completion rates rose to 30%, up from 11% in 1970 (United States Census Bureau, 2012). According to The College Completion Agenda (2010), recent figures from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) indicate that the United States is not a world leader in terms of postsecondary degree attainment among adults in developed countries. The report also noted a similar trend in terms of the number of overall postsecondary degree and credential holders as the quantity of postsecondary degree and credential holders continues to decline.

The news is no better for the older population. Compared with all other nations in 2008, the United States was ranked third in terms of postsecondary attainment for citizens of ages 55 to 64 (College Board, 2010). The OECD also noted that the United States was ranked fifth in postsecondary attainment among 25 to 64-year-olds.

Callan (2008) also concluded that other countries have been advancing more quickly in college degree completion rates, and the lack of advancement by the United States is due to inadequate college opportunities for residents. Adding to this decline is
the issue of demographic shifts. According to Kirsch, Braun, Yamamoto and Sum (2007), demographic changes to an older and more diverse population and an influx of immigrants has occurred. Students from disparate cultures, including international students, have become prevalent in higher education. The student population is heterogeneous, encompassing several ethnic backgrounds; this influx of a new demographic has presented hurdles to United States educational advances.

These sweeping demographic changes have produced new challenges, such as a wide disparity in literacy and competency in mathematical skills among school-age and adult populations. DeAngelo et al. (2011) stated that only 19% of African Americans and 12% of Hispanics, compared to 37% of the white population between the ages of 25-29, have a college degree. This data supported Callan’s (2008) earlier findings that there are differences in higher education performance by race and ethnicity, income levels, and by state. Duderstadt (2008) also underscored that changing demographics, an information society, and technology are instrumental factors that have been shaping the need for a more highly-skilled and educated United States population.

Stressing the importance of a higher education degree, Carnevale, Smith, and Strohl (2010) reported that achieving a postsecondary education provides more accumulated earnings over a life span for individuals. The gap in earnings for high school dropouts and individuals with professional degrees is $3,452,000. According to Carnevale et al. (2010), “A Bachelors’ degree is worth about $1.1 million more than an Associate’s degree and a Master’s degree $457,000 more than a Bachelor’s degree and a Doctoral degree is worth about $193,000 more than a Master’s degree” (p. 5). They also
noted individuals with college degrees have had the lowest unemployment rates over the past three years preceding their study.

Schneider and Yin (2011) declared that, in addition to students forfeiting large earnings by not completing a degree, the economy also suffers lost income and lower revenue for federal and state governments. For full time students who failed to graduate in fall 2002, Schneider and Yin (2011) lamented that the United States lost “3.8 billion dollars in lost income, 566 million in federal income taxes and 164 million in lost state income taxes” (p. 6).

Graduation rates must be improved to address the growing demand for a skilled workforce and an increase in individuals’ earning capacity. Increasing graduation rates will also as to serve as a springboard for social and economic opportunity and will sustain United States competition on a global level. Across the nation, the pressure to increase college graduation rates has continued to grow. If graduation rates do not increase, the United States will not be able to respond to the growing need for college graduates in the workforce. One prediction is that by 2018, 22 million new college degrees will be necessary to fulfill the demand by employers for workers with a college degree (Carnevale et al., 2010).

A major proponent of higher education achievement, the Lumina Foundation, has joined in the effort to find solutions to the problem of insufficient graduation rates. Specifically, the Lumina Foundation has refocused its efforts to center on student success. The foundation’s primary focus has been to achieve student success through advocacy for policy development. The agency’s goals also include engaging and
collaborating with the community to gain support for postsecondary efforts, to encourage access to research and data to improve student outcomes, and to create an understanding of institutional change (Lumina Foundation, 2004).

The United States Department of Education (2006) maintains that United States colleges and universities are pivotal in developing human and intellectual capital to boost and grow workforce efficiency. The report continued by stating that that colleges and universities must remain key avenues for Americans to attain social mobility. The report emphasized that the demand to increase graduation rates has been emanating from the public, employers, legislators, parents, and students; this crisis has become every stakeholders’ concern. This research study will provide data that will assist higher education in continuing to cultivate human potential as well as identify strategies that will assist in increasing graduation rates.

**Statement of the Problem**

Given the information and reports citing the crisis in poor graduation rates, a national urgency has arisen. The United State must find solutions to improve college outcomes. The Association of American Colleges and Universities (2007) has called upon all institutions to prepare graduates to the greatest extent possible for employment, the responsibilities of citizenship, and for the ever-changing and evolving society. It is important to involve students in the quest for solutions to improve graduation rates. Students have a primary stake in the goal of improving college graduation rates, and they also have a role in determining which strategies most effectively aid in their success. The present study will provide the opportunity for students’ voices to be a part of the dialogue.
to identify strategies and institutional factors that are essential to providing resolutions to this important issue.

Harvey (2011), as well as Shah and Nair (2006), argued that assumptions have been unchallenged about the value of student feedback in behavioral change or in facilitating improvements, and the value has been taken for granted (as cited in Seale, 2010, p. 996). But Public Agenda (2012) emphasized that regardless of the college’s position on the reform continuum, the student voice, specifically the stories, concerns, and advice have been useful in the discussion of how to assist more students to complete degrees.

Student voices have been critical in promoting change, innovation, and accountability. At most institutions, research has focused on institutional strategies and, in most cases, Seale (2010) asserted, what small amount of research utilizing student input that has been compiled in higher education has been reported in conference papers or included in institutional reports.

According to Withers (2009), student perspectives have been central to producing institutional change. Likewise, Withers (2009) advocated for student voices in educational reform and emphasized that these are the voices that matter the most. Wilson, Fuller, and Mykhaylichenko (2011) further stressed that student success in postsecondary education should be the responsibility of all stakeholders. Students, the authors continued, are expecting to receive the skills they need to compete in the workforce and for career upward mobility. It is important to allow their viewpoints to
contribute to the development of programs, strategies, and knowledge to facilitate student
achievement.

From the student perspective, the current study sought to identify institutional
factors, academic experiences, and student social and personal characteristics that have
been beneficial in increasing graduation rates. The students’ viewpoints are of value to
both higher educational institutions in general and to the institutions whose personnel and
students participated in the study. Exploring students’ assessment and evaluation in the
context of institutional factors, as well as student social and personal skills that
contributed to degree attainment can aid in institutional change and eventually, in the
number of degree holders. Behaviors, attitudes, and campus climate will be affected as
students identify factors that are linked to producing college graduates.

There can be direct benefits to the university to incorporate the student viewpoint
and input as a stakeholder into programs, services, operational procedures, and policies.
Revealing student experiences and viewpoints as well as institutional factors can
precipitate a review of the college and university vision, mission statement, and values.
If the college review of strategic priorities has not been student focused, the present study
can be the impetus for a greater emphasis on students as important stakeholders.

**Significance of the Study**

The information provided by the current study will assist college and university
personnel in improving services. Students who aspire to develop their personal/social
skills to support their educational goals, as well as educational institutions that are
seeking strategies and ideas to improve their graduation rates, will find this information useful.

This information can also be of assistance to legislators in setting public policy, and to parents as well as students in their selection of a college. Students will be better served as the data are shared and the study can provide higher education with new information to further enhance services and programs. Institutional change can include curriculum and faculty roles in student life. The value of this study will be the identification of key elements that increase college graduation rates so that the benefits of a college degree can be enjoyed by more individuals.

It was hoped that this study will be shared by the institution, specifically among the leadership. This can lead to “turnaround leadership,” described by Fullan and Scott (2009), as the ability to listen, to model, to teach, and importantly, to understand that leaders are not exempt from learning.

Other indirect benefits include developing a communication strategy that cultivates an understanding of change necessary for action. Curry (1992) emphasized that the change can benefit the college by encouraging engagement in, and the promotion of collaborative leadership (as cited by Kezar & Eckel, 2002, p. 299). Hopefully, the conversation focus will move from “I to We,” a concept introduced by Kezar (2005), which underscores teamwork and cooperation in order to strengthen the change process.

Lumina Foundation’s Collision Course report (2004) laid the foundation for the study and advocates for solutions from all stakeholders:
Solutions to issues require an understanding of four basic points. No single party bears responsibility for the solution. No simple solution will suffice. Solutions based on evidence and experience offer greater promise for success. Solutions that are cost-effective are more likely to secure approval in tight fiscal times (p. 2).

**Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of the present study was to explore the factors from students’ perspectives that contribute to their success as potential college graduates at a public four-year university. To achieve this objective, the influence of student characteristics and qualities, such as gender, race, social and personal skills, and student academic experiences were examined.

A mixed methods research design was used and involved collecting and assessing quantitative and qualitative data. In the first phase of the study, a survey was developed as a self-report data instrument and administered to a sample of students at San Diego State University (SDSU), a research university (see Appendix A for support letter from SDSU Vice President of Student Affairs and Appendix B for approval letter from SDSU Institutional Review Board). In order of importance, students assessed their experiences and how they perceived their graduation goals would be impacted by these experiences. These students appraised factors that support or impede their ability to reach the goal of graduation. In the second qualitative phase, one-to-one interviews were conducted to more fully analyze these experiences.
The study addressed the following quantitative research questions:

- What were the major student characteristics and qualities that contribute to the success of potential college graduates in a public four-year university?
- How were students’ academic experiences related to graduation rates in a public four-year university setting?

In the qualitative analysis, students were involved in a dialogue centered on effective practices and factors perceived to lead to successful graduation. It was an assumption of this research that the student voice would reveal strategies and valuable factors that contribute to improving graduation rates.

The qualitative research questions were:

- Which institutional practices have potential college graduates at a four-year university perceived as contributing to their success?
- How have potential college graduates at a four-year university perceived or defined challenging and beneficial institutional factors that support college graduation?

The combined question was:

- Is there a correlation between the interview data from the students’ experiences and perspectives and the quantitative results from the survey?
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This review of selected literature was relevant to the research questions and the main topics of this study. The literature review focused on the following themes: graduation rates, college outcomes assessment, educational attainment, race and gender, socioeconomic status, as well as student voices and their relationship and impact in higher education. These themes were included in the study as a foundation and support for new insights into the solutions to improve graduation rates.

Graduation Rates, Educational Attainment, and College Outcomes Assessment

Liu (2011) examined the leading issues in higher education, such as performance and accountability. The author discussed enrollment and performance citing the gaps in college enrollment and outcomes, for example, retention and completion by ethnicity. Liu (2011) identified retention as an obstacle for higher education particularly from the first year to the second; citing 74% of freshmen return at public universities. It was asserted that there is a great disparity in academic performance between Whites and other groups, such as Hispanic and Blacks in certain majors and in degree attainment. Furthermore, the author purported that graduation rates are low for all types of higher educational institutions, such as public and private colleges and universities.

Knapp, Kelly-Reid and Ginder (2011) provided findings from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data (IPED). According to the report, graduation rates were
estimated at 57% for first time bachelors or equivalent degree attainment. The time spent pursuing a degree was approximately six years from the initial year at college. Statistics related to gender and ethnicities were also included. Full time undergraduate female students exceeded males in the same enrollment category by 5.9%.

Schneider and Yin (2011) stated there are pressing reasons that legislators want more college graduates, such as the potential increased taxable revenue from those who are employed and hold a college degree. College graduates earn, on average, more than college dropouts. The authors stated in California, college dropouts are losing earnings of nearly 15 billion dollars over their work life.

A report by College Board (2012) concluded that despite some advances in postsecondary degree attainment, there are still great hurdles to overcome. The report cited improvement needed in the number of bachelors’ degrees awarded and for populations that are historically underrepresented in higher education, such as Hispanics and African-Americans.

Another report challenged all segments of United States education to improve its delivery of services, programs and outcomes (College Board, 2008). The report specifically called attention to poor college graduation rates and declared the United States needs a “wake-up call.” College completion rates have dropped “dramatically” which has affected the ability of the United States to meet workforce needs and has jeopardized the preservation of a quality life for all citizens. The report included data from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, which stated that the United States slipped from second to 11th in university completion ranks. The report
continued by stating that it is likely that individual institutions within the major
categories of higher education, public and private universities produced graduation rates
from 10 to 20% above or below the group average of 60%. In addition, there was
advocacy for the use of data-based approaches to address the problem of inadequate
college completion rates.

Cook and Hartle (2011) stated graduation rates vary because factors in
determining rates were not controlled and many students were excluded from the current
calculation for graduation rates. Cook and Hartle (2011) asserted the data from the
Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) came with a disclaimer that
many students were excluded and that graduation rates may have been inaccurate. The
authors proposed the dilemma of why graduation rates mattered and why graduation rates
were not meaningful.

Wang (2008) questioned whether college is worth the price. Wang contended
college costs have been increasingly limiting student access to higher education.
Institutions cited lack of support from federal and state governments and demands for
degrees as the culprits. The United States Department of Education, according to Wang
(2008), has voiced concerns indicating that if college costs continue to rise, the
investment may not be worth it; there has been great uncertainty about the value and
return on a college degree.

**Race and Gender**

Consuelo and Amaury (2007) stated Hispanic students who begin their degree
attainment at a 4-year college immediately after high school are more likely to obtain a
degree than those who begin at a 2-year college. Hoachlander, Sikora, Horn and Carroll (2003) indicated that of the 25% of Hispanic students that enrolled in a community college, only 6% had transferred at the end of six years (as cited in Consuelo & Amaury, 2007, p. 248). Of these Hispanic students, 7% of the community college students versus 44% of the students who began at a 4-year college obtained a degree by the end of the same period. Nora and Cabrera (1996) and Nora (2003) (as cited in Consuelo & Amaury, 2007, p. 248) suggested that external factors contribute to Hispanic and African-American women leaving college. Eighty-three percent of the women in this study who reported taking care of family members were more likely to abandon college.

The Chronicle of Higher Education (2009) reported a college degree has been valuable in that it provided data that indicated a great disparity of earnings between male and female graduates. At all levels of education, males, on average, earned 12,000 dollars more than women. The report questioned whether or not the cost of the degree has been worth its value; in the current job market, a third of the jobs still require no college degree and only a month or less of on-the-job training.

Wilson, Fuller, and Mykhaylichenko (2011) cited disparities in enrollment and graduation rates at the University of California (UC) and California State Universities (CSU), and recommended developing plans and goals for reducing these disparities. CSU graduation rates for the percent of graduates in 2009 were White students at a rate of 64.9%, Black students at 44.9% and Latino at 53.9%.
Astin and Oseguera (2004), as well as Kane (2004), proclaimed just 19% of African-Americans and 12% of Hispanics between the ages of 25 and 29 have a college degree compared to 37% of Whites (as cited in DeAngelo et al., 2011, p. 3).

Zamani (2000) asserted minority college student retention and attrition continue as challenges in higher education. Zamani (2000) cited several research studies, such as Upcraft (1994), who outlined factors that impacted student success. These factors included gender, race, socioeconomic status, and institutional characteristics, which included location, curriculum, and campus climate. For African-Americans and other underrepresented students in higher education, the author cited research which indicated that poor retention rates could be attributed to a lack of a “good fit” for the students and the college. Zamani (2000) advocated for research centered on investigating innovative strategies and programs. In addition, programs and services should be implemented to promote the educational success for students of color.

Gil-Flores, Padilla-Carmona, and Suárez-Ortega (2011) acknowledged that gender and corresponding relationships with family and others influences students’ educational aspirations. These aspirations included obtaining a four-year degree and subsequent graduate studies. However, the authors contended that the value of these predictors was not as important as the educational level of the parents, the individual student’s own academic performance, and the resources in the home, such as access to books. One instance that supported this theory was that students were more likely expected to attend college if they had parents that graduated college. Of those students who had parents with a college degree, 88.6% of mothers and 85.5% of fathers had
higher expectations for their children to attend college. For parents without a degree, mothers had a 49.4% expectation level and fathers, 49.3%.

**Socioeconomic Status**

Hebel (2007) stated that the number of degrees awarded varies at colleges that serve low income students. For example, graduation rates ranged from a low end of 11%, to a middle statistic of 39.4%, and to a high of 77%. Hebel (2007) cited many barriers which ranged from lack of faculty support, limited budgets, as well as multiple priorities and college missions. Other roadblocks to degree attainment included student academic preparation and financial needs. In addition, institutional characteristics such as connecting with students and monitoring students’ progress also served as obstacles. Additionally, Hebel (2007) cited a study by the National Center for Education Statistics which indicated that as the proportion of financially needy students increased, graduation rates declined.

Trostel (2010) supplied evidence that college attainment benefitted the individual as well as society. The author supported college as a good investment and asserted that the payoff has had significant positive economic ramifications for the government. Utilizing data from the United States Census Bureau’s Current Population Survey (CPS), Trostel (2010) illustrated that a college education provides a significant amount of revenue in state and local taxes. Individuals with bachelor’s degrees paid 2.5% more in state income tax than an individual with a high school diploma. Over a lifetime, state and local taxes increased with the amount of college education; an individual with an
associates’ degree, contributed 55,000 dollars, and an individual with a bachelor’s degree contributed more than 118,000 dollars.

College Board (2010) has contributed to the growing body of literature centered on the United States and its decline in graduation rates and the impact on the economy. The literature also included the benefits associated with a college degree. These benefits included public and professional mobility, and suggested that those who attended college have better job opportunities and more transferable skills. The report also supported the need to identify effective strategies to address the challenge of ensuring that students have been provided a quality education that improved social standing and socioeconomic status.

Eggens, Werf, and Bosker (2008) explored the effect of personal and social networks on students’ behavior and academic performance in an educational setting. It was found that these two variables did not play an interceding role, but that these factors are still relevant. Personal networks influenced the students’ behavior through peer pressure and control of their social interactions, connections, and friends. Personal networks, such as peer groups and peer relationships, played a significant role in student degree attainment. When students compare themselves to others in their peer group who are performing well, this evaluation may lead to greater motivation to achieve.

Auwarter and Aruguete (2008) examined the perceptions of teachers on gender as well as the socioeconomic (SES) backgrounds of students. It was conceded that students’ performance was linked to their socioeconomic status and gender. Students from families with significant economic and social means fared better academically than students
without these contributing factors to support scholastic success. However, teacher perceptions also played a role in student achievement. The study found that teachers favored young men of low socioeconomic status more so than young women of the same stature, and the same favoritism was applied to men of high SES. Future expectations by teachers for men from a low SES was 47% versus 46% for women, and 38% for men versus 34% for women with high SES.

**Student Voices**

Stieha (2010) provided an opportunity for the voice of a first generation freshman student, the first in their family to attend college, to be heard. The goal was to assist in identifying relevant factors, such as the primacy of family relations in student degree attainment. Stieha (2010) stated that in pursuing a student’s perception or voice, an end result may have been a better understanding into the decisions that students make as they matriculate through the university system.

Miles, Miller, and Nadler (2008) advocated for more student involvement in shared governance. Students’ lack of knowledge of politics and institutional issues, as well as their age and maturity and responsibility, has been questioned in higher education. Miles et al. (2008) continued, however, by stating most institutions have bought into shared governance or have decided that the pursuit is worthwhile.

Withers (2009) also asserted that conversations in higher education excluded students. Higher education often does not comprehend what students need and want. With so many issues, such as shrinking funding, globalization and changing student demographics, Withers (2009) stated the loss of the student experience is understandable.
In a separate report analysis, Miles et al. (2008) concluded that student involvement in institutional decision-making has been greatly affected by the role students have been delegated by authorities. The authors stated that student involvement in governance was disjointed and not seen as integral to institutional shared governance. Furthermore, Bergan (2003) emphasized that student engagement was predicated upon students’ ability to participate in major decisions about what they are learning and how they are learning.

Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) asserted that student engagement has been essential, especially when students are now tuning out, disengaging, and ultimately not succeeding in their goal attainment on any level. It was emphasized that educators must determine the factors that motivate and engage students both individually and collectively. The importance of student engagement for implementing student-centered learning was also stressed. This engagement involved providing opportunities for choice, control, and collaboration with students in the classroom and in the governance of the college.

Keeling (2006) asserted that learning is no longer confined to the classroom and in an academic context. Obtaining information and organizing it in a relevant lesson or pattern does not occur in the same place, but may occur at the same time. Therefore, examining and exploring student perceptions, and institutional factors that contribute to graduation rates added to the learning environment. Keeling (2006) also stated that learning has “physiological, social, emotional, cognitive and developmental dimensions” (p. 5).
Rhee (2013) emphatically stated that educators must put students first. This underscores the need for laws and policies that make students and their education a priority. Those in power must understand that they will be held accountable for considering the needs of the students. Decisions should be based on the best interests of the students and not the interests of the institutions or legislators. The primary focus of education must be on the advancement of learning. Students may know of effective strategies and practices more so than anyone else, and engaging students has been critical to their success and in understanding their needs.

Axelson and Flick (2011) asserted that there is still a great deal that is not known about student engagement. The authors supported the theories of dual responsibility for the quality of learning; for both the institution and the student. Axelson and Flick (2011) advocated for more research on the interaction between engagement and learning, and on the relationships among different type of engagements. This research should include, according to the authors, examining the causes of why some students and subgroups of students become disengaged, as well as solutions that institutions may implement to prevent this disengagement.

**Assumptions and Limitations**

Assumptions for the present study include the possibility that student feedback may create some tension between the institution and students, which may lead to action or improvements in programs, services, or a change in behaviors. Not all feedback might have be received as positive or meaningful, and the importance and validity of the student voice is predicated based on how it is defined by the administration. In addition, the roles
assigned to students might have determined, it was assumed, how important and relevant the student voice was accepted in affecting change.

Assumptions also included that students were forthcoming and unrestrained about their college experiences and were willing to risk sharing their own personal stories. It was assumed that not all change would happen quickly or at all. However, the current study might have provided the opportunity for dialogue and ongoing communication at all levels. Effective and positive communication was anticipated to occur between students and administration, between students and faculty, and among students.

Other data discovery assumptions were that student voices would support the need to include students in conversations centered on student success. It was expected that students would identify factors, strategies, and practices that are effective in achieving greater success for potential college graduates. The current study was expected to provide additional information and research to benefit higher education centered on effective strategies and programmatic efforts that would increase and improve student outcomes and accountability.

Limitations to this study could have included reluctance by institutions to release data and student information. In addition, the institution may wish to be cautious about the outcomes of the study and how the information is presented and utilized. It is important to gain trust at the top level of the administration to gain access to the institutional database, key administrators, and students. Informing the institution and participants about how the data would be applied to benefit higher education, and their specific institution, might impact their willingness to participate.
Students may have had some trepidation about the study and their participation. This was circumvented by garnering the support of the evaluation office, other administrative offices, and the Associated Student Organization. Students’ trust was pivotal to the successful implementation of Phase II, the one-to-one interviews. During the process of soliciting participation in the study, citing support from students and from the institution was important. Gaining approval and support for the study from the President of the University and department administrators was also invaluable (Appendix A and B).
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

To achieve the purpose and goal of this research proposal, a mixed methods approach was utilized which included a survey research design (quantitative method, Phase I) followed by one-to-one interviews (qualitative method, Phase II). The purpose of the mixed method framework was to generate data assessing personal, social, academic experiences, and institutional factors for their impact upon learning and educational outcomes, specifically their effects, upon the success of potential college graduates in higher education.

Rationale for Research Design

The use of a mixed methods design was to ensure that the student characteristics, personal qualities, and individual student academic experiences form a comprehensive analytical structure for linking educational and social and personal factors to potential success as a graduate. The quantitative survey was used to access quantifiable educational and learning factors contributing to the success of potential college graduates. Students were asked to identify specific educational and learning factors impacting their educational paths. Moreover, students were asked to rank, from least important to most important, those personal and social attributes, traits or characteristics of relevance that supported their progress toward completing their degree.
The qualitative analyses captured educational and social factors that could not be quantified or are sometimes overlooked or underestimated by a quantitative approach. Personal stories, in the form of interview narratives, were utilized as an important informational resource for connecting the relationship between student experiences, institutional settings, and educational outcomes. The qualitative data enhanced the analytical robustness and validity of the quantitative data.

In the qualitative phase, students participated in one-to-one interviews designed to encourage them to share their views on the institution, specifically their perspectives on factors that contributed to their success as a graduate. Wilson, Fuller, and Mykhaylichenko (2011) noted that the California Postsecondary Commission (CPEC) recommended that researchers incorporate more qualitative methods for assessment and that this type of research be encouraged.

The objective was to initiate a study that provides potential solutions and addresses the growing need for improved graduation rates. As students are the institutional stakeholders most affected by campus practices, incorporating their perspectives, from both an objective and subjective viewpoint, was critical in identifying institutional characteristics that contribute to college graduation outcomes.

Incorporating student voices added a unique viewpoint and opportunity for an inclusive assessment of student experiences. Ultimately, study findings may have augmented research highlighting effective strategies and programmatic efforts that increased and improved student outcomes and institutional accountability.
Population and Sample

A regional public four-year university was identified and selected based on two major considerations: (1) the relative proximity to prominent educational institutions within a specified geographic area (i.e. “feeder colleges”), and (2) the recognized or historical relationship, such as strong curriculum articulation agreements, and guaranteed admission policies with regional colleges. The results of the current study will be made available to the administration and to students within the selected four-year institution.

Once the study was approved by the resident institutional review board, students were identified and contacted to determine their interest in taking part in a research study. During the recruitment phase of the study, the purpose and goals of the study were made public to students, the departments and the university. The institutional data base served as the vehicle for recruitment along with support from the university (i.e., sharing the dissertation proposal with the research office and other university departments).

The study incorporated several criteria to ensure reliability and validity in regards to the selection of a suitable sample frame: (1) students with 20 units or less remaining in their respective major fields of study, (2) students who were native students (students who have completed a substantial amount of their units toward graduation at the university), (3) a broad cross-section of academic majors within the targeted four-year institution, and (4) a sufficiently large sample to ensure that students and majors would be substantively represented and yield a response to support the sampling frame. A sample frame was generated to form a representative sample of 60 students for the quantitative phase, which was the goal. However, 78 students completed the survey. The
rationale for the preceding sampling scheme was based on the organizational structure of public four-year universities. Institutions of higher learning are typically organized by colleges (or departments) and are primarily responsible for the recruitment and oversight of students within specified fields of study—for example, the SDSU College of Business Administration provides support services, such as mentoring and academic advising.

In generating the sampling frame, the stratified sampling component as referenced by Creswell (2008), incorporated selection by gender and race, followed by random sampling to assess academic experiences and other factors related to student graduation success. In the recruitment phase of the study, the purpose and goals of the study were made public to students, the departments, and the university.

The sampling frame made use of the following grouping and selection scheme:

- Divide the population by stratum to include college seniors with 20 or fewer units to complete graduation requirements.
- Draw a sample proportional to college/department size within the institution of study.
- Select subsets by gender, race, and units remaining to graduate.
- Draw a random sample of the sampling subsets.

**Instrumentation**

**Phase I-Survey**

The survey design included administering a cross-sectional survey in which data were collected at one point in time through SurveyMonkey (an online service that allows users to create web browser based surveys). The survey contained questions related to
institutional factors, personal and social factors, and academic experiences that lead to potential college graduation (Appendix E). Academic experiences included activities which promoted intellectual and social development, supported engagement in academic life, and supported student success on all levels. These experiences involved academic advising, career services, tutoring, student programs including orientation, learning communities, and first-year experiences. Open-ended survey questions queried as to what is important in the support of individual graduation goals.

The survey categories were selected based on current factors identified as critical to student success. These factors include financial aid (Hebel, 2007), and other factors such as technology (Kuhlenschmidt & Kacer, 2010), communication (Hensley & Burmeister, 2004), and social and personal skills (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2002). The dimensions were determined by the organizational structure at San Diego State University (SDSU). The University is organized by major areas such as student affairs or support and academic affairs (San Diego State University Organizational Chart, 2014). Each of these areas is responsible for programs and services or institutional roles that correspond to the dimensions analyzed in the current study. The factors were then clustered and associated with each dimension. Financial aid was aligned with the Student Resource Access dimension, quality customer service with Institutional Support, and curriculum relevancy, which is an academic affairs function, was aligned with the Academic Experiences dimension.

The questionnaire was developed as a self-report measure utilizing a five-point Likert rating scale for items belonging to eight different dimensions. In order to
standardize participant responses and mitigate any potential misinterpretation of items, each dimension was clearly defined and examples were provided for any items that could have been interpreted as ambiguous. The Likert scale ratings ranged from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). Numerical coding allowed for summated measures for each dimension identified in the study. A statistical comparison of means and standard deviations was conducted utilizing two sample t-tests and ANOVAs (Analysis of Variance). Other questions on the survey included ranking scales for social and personal skills and open-ended questions. The ranking scales for social and personal skills ranged from 1 as high and 5 as low.

The internal consistency for each of the eight dimensions was also calculated in order to ensure reliability of the measure. Internal consistency is normally measured with Cronbach’s alpha (α), a statistic that measures the correlations between items belonging to a particular test or subscale. The present study utilized a survey consisting of eight different subscales (Instruction, Proficiencies, Student Support, etc.), and therefore, it was important to determine whether items belonging to each subscale were measuring the same intended construct. Higher Cronbach’s alpha (α) values indicate that items within a subscale are more highly correlated, which is an indicator of greater internal consistency and reliability. The common established standard suggests that values greater than 0.7 indicate acceptable internal consistency.

The majority of the dimensions had relatively high internal consistency: Instruction (α = .873), Student Support (α = .758), Academic Experiences (α = .805), Institutional Support (α = .832), Support Staff (α = .898), Supplemental Support (α =
.798), and Student Resource Access (α = .831). The Proficiencies dimension had slightly lower internal consistency (α = .673); however, Cronbach’s alpha only fell slightly below the acceptable range. Therefore, all of the dimensions appeared to measure the constructs of interest related to student success, and were appropriate for assessing student opinions.

**Phase II-Interviews**

A maximum of six college seniors were selected from the final pool of students to participate in one-to-one interviews, which were conducted in person (Appendix F). Ritchie and Lewis (2003) asserted that samples for qualitative studies are typically much smaller than those used in quantitative studies. The researchers emphasized that there can be a point of dwindling return to a qualitative sample—how frequent data is presented or more data does not necessarily lead to more information; one occurrence of the data is theoretically as valuable as many in understanding the process behind a topic.

Therefore, six participants yielded diverse opinions and were a large enough sample to assure that most or all of the perceptions that might be important were uncovered. Creswell (2008) stated it is characteristic of qualitative research to study a few individuals and agreed with Ritchie and Lewis (2003) that more participants may diminish the ability to provide an in-depth picture by the researcher.

The purpose of the interviews was to gain an understanding of the motivating factors and elements which encouraged the students to persist toward the goal of graduating. Gender and ethnicity were considered as factors in the selection of the participants during this phase, utilizing the self-report data to identify students. The
individuals selected included a male and a female from the following racial groups: White, Non-Hispanic, Hispanic and African American, for a total of six participants.

The interviews were audio recorded; participants could opt to review the transcript responses. If students chose to review the transcripts, this gave them the opportunity to clarify and/or elaborate on any responses. The one-to-one interviews were produced in the form of notes, including word-for-word transcripts, and additional interviewer notes. All students who participated in this process decided to allow the researcher to proceed without their review of the interview notes and corresponding summary. The summary was developed and common themes and patterns were identified. According to Creswell (2008), utilizing a qualitative approach allowed for an analysis of the text which involves descriptions and themes, and the interpretation consisted of stating the larger meaning of the findings.

Interviews via personal contact or email were scheduled and the researcher conducted in-depth interviews in a private office provided by the university site. During this time, the researcher explained the process and secured signatures on a mutual agreement consent form, which served as a secondary consent. The audio files were sent for transcription to an experienced transcriber. The transcriber signed a confidentiality statement regarding the content of the files. Audio files were maintained and safeguarded on a password-protected hard drive by the researcher for the duration of the project for consultation, and will be erased after the research project is completed.

Following the in-depth interviews, identities of the participants were protected; the participants could choose an identifier utilizing a pseudonym throughout coding and
the analysis. In addition, audio recording data, notes, memos, drafts, and formal writings were kept locked in the researcher’s office or at the researcher’s home office. Computer files were kept on the researcher’s computers on password-protected files.

These procedures were to ensure confidentiality and minimize the risk of compromising the participants’ identity in any form of communication, reporting of data, or publications. Participants were assured that their responses would remain anonymous and survey data would only be reported in aggregate form. Any potential risk of the participants experiencing distress or anxiety based on the interview experience was mitigated by allowing the participants the option not to participate—in whole or in part—and by providing a written statement and reiterating the procedures verbally.

The final research component was a written comprehensive summary of the findings that were assembled with an analysis of the survey and the interviews. The conclusion entailed investigating universal patterns, themes, and findings that establish important strategies and practices that lead to increasing graduation rates, according to the student perspectives.

The results of the current study will be disseminated at the university level to the administration and made available to faculty, staff, and students through the research department of the university. As college administration reviews the data, the strategies identified by students may be incorporated into the operations, procedures, and policies at colleges and universities. Institutional behavior at the faculty and administrator levels, in addition to the perception, value, and treatment of students may improve, based on the students’ input.
The students, who are most impacted by institutional decisions and policy, had an opportunity to have their voices heard. It was expected that the students’ participation identified factors that will be valuable and beneficial in discovering solutions and strategies that may have a positive impact on increasing graduation rates.
CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The mixed methods research design involved collecting and assessing quantitative data (Phase I) and qualitative data (Phase II). In the first phase of the study, a survey served as a self-report data instrument and was administered to a sample of students at San Diego State University who were participants in Department of Educational Opportunity and Ethnic Affairs. In the second qualitative phase, the researcher conducted structured one-to-one interviews with student participants to more fully analyze student experiences. Students were selected from the pool of students in Phase I.

Participants

Survey participants consisted of 78 students. Of the 78, 10 students declined to answer the questions on the identifiers of race and gender. Participant demographics are summarized in Table 1. Students answered survey questions that aligned with eight unique dimensions which centered on factors and academic experiences that support the success of potential graduates. Students also ranked, in order of importance, social and personal skills that support the success of potential graduates. For a detailed breakdown of student responses to all survey items, see Appendix E.

The research analysis examined overall participant responses to the eight dimensions, which included instruction, proficiencies, student support, academic experiences, institutional support, support staff, supplemental support, and student
resources access. An investigation was also conducted to analyze the responses by race and gender.

Table 1

*Participant Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>30.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>56.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American-Indian/Alaskan Native</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian &amp; Pacific-Islander</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>51.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White, Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12.80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondent ratings and opinions according to gender and race were compared statistically utilizing independent samples t-tests and ANOVAs (Analysis of Variance) for the eight dimensions. Independent samples t-tests were used to compare differences in ratings based on gender. ANOVAs were conducted to examine potential differences in ratings according to race.

The survey questions also prompted respondents to rank social and personal skills in order of importance that support success as a potential graduate. Frequency of assigned rankings for each of the skills was summarized to determine which of the skills were more commonly assigned higher ranks of importance.
Analysis of Dimensions

Students were requested to respond to items represented by the following academic dimensions using a Likert scale ranging from *Strongly disagree* to *Strongly agree*: Instruction, Proficiencies, Student Support, Academic Experiences, Institutional Support, Support Staff, Supplemental Support, and Student Resources Access (refer to Appendix C for a copy of the survey instrument).

Respondents indicated the extent to which they agreed that items within each dimension contributed to their success as a potential graduate. Agreement for each of the items within each dimension were summed and averaged to determine a composite score for each dimension. Figure 1 depicts the average agreement for all respondents to the dimensions, with 1 representing *Strongly disagree* and 5 representing *Strongly agree*. Overall, the students tended to report that all of the dimensions contributed positively to student success, as average agreement for all dimensions fell above the neutral position on the scale.

Dimensions with the highest reported student agreement included Student Resource Access ($M = 4.74$), Supplemental Support ($M = 4.38$), and Student Support ($M = 4.02$). The Instruction dimension ($M = 3.35$) and Proficiencies dimension ($M = 3.54$) were rated lowest among the eight dimensions. Average agreement and standard error for responses to each of the dimensions are summarized in Table 2. Standard error values indicate the degree to which responses deviated from the computed average ratings.
Figure 1. *Average Agreement to Dimensions Across all Respondents*

Table 2

*Average Agreement to Dimensions Across All Respondents*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SEM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instruction</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proficiencies</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Support</td>
<td>4.02</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Experiences</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Support</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Staff</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supplemental Support</td>
<td>4.38</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Resource Access</td>
<td>4.74</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Instruction: What Behaviors Do You Believe Instructors Exhibit that Have Led to your Success as a Potential College Graduate?

Out of the five survey items in the Instruction dimension, respondents tended to agree most with the items, “Students and instructors treat each other with respect” and “Instructors respect diversity”. The item, “Instructors are interested in what is best for all students” was rated third-highest, followed by the items, “Instructors value what students have to say” and “Instructors are excited about teaching and communicate this to students”.

Gender Analysis. Independent samples t-tests were conducted to assess potential gender differences in responses for the Instruction dimension. A marginally significant trend suggested that females tended to rank all Instruction dimension items with higher agreement than males, $t(66) = 1.764, p = .082$, indicating that females may feel that instructors play a slightly larger role in contributing to student success than males. However, this effect was only marginal, and overall, average agreement for both males and females tended to fall slightly above "Neither Agree, Nor Disagree." Average agreement for males and females with standard error values are listed in Table 3.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>SEM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When items within the Instruction dimension were analyzed individually, females were found to assign significantly more importance to the item, "Instructors are excited
and communicate this to students," compared to males, \( t(66) = 2.346, p = .044 \).

Therefore, females may value instructor enthusiasm more so than males.

**Race Analysis.** Individuals did not significantly differ in average responses to the Instruction Dimension according to race \( (p = .290) \). Asian and Pacific Islander individuals tended to report highest agreement in the Instruction Dimension, but this effect was not statistically significant. Opinions for the Instruction dimension ranged from “Neither Agree, nor Disagree” \( (M = 3.00) \) to just below “Agree” \( (M = 3.70) \) for all races. Average agreement to the Instruction dimension with standard error is listed in Table 4 for all races.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>( M )</th>
<th>( SEM )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>0.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian &amp; Pacific-Islander</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White, Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>0.21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When agreement to the individual items in the Instruction dimension was examined, ratings did not statistically differ according to race, although Asian and Pacific Islander respondents tended to give higher ratings for all of the items compared to other races.
Proficiencies: How Well Do You Think the University Has Prepared You for the Following?

Within the Proficiencies dimension, the most favorably rated item was “To graduate”, followed by “To gain life skills (i.e., successful management of personal affairs)”, and “To prepare for a career”.

**Gender Analysis.** On average, females tended to report higher feelings of preparedness from the university in all three areas compared to males; however, these differences were not statistically significant ($p = .468$). Agreement for males and females fell between “Neither Agree nor Disagree” and “Agree.” Average agreement for males and females and standard error are listed in Table 5.

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>SEM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although females tended to report higher agreement to the separate items in the Proficiencies dimension, the differences in ratings for males and females were not statistically significant for any of the individual survey items.

**Race Analysis.** Students did not significantly differ in opinions regarding how well the university has prepared them in the three Proficiencies areas according to race ($p = .222$). White, non-Hispanic individuals tended to report the highest levels of preparedness for all three items in the Proficiencies domain ($M = 3.92$), but this effect
was not statistically significant. Average ratings given by Hispanic individuals ($M = 3.68$) and Asian and Pacific Islander individuals ($M = 3.67$) followed closely. African American and Other respondents reported agreement closer to the neutral anchor.

Average agreement to the Proficiencies dimension for each race is reported in Table 6, along with standard error.

Table 6

*Average Agreement to Proficiencies Dimension by Race*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>SEM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>0.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian &amp; Pacific-Islander</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White, Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>0.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When items in the Proficiencies dimension were examined separately, there were no significant differences in agreement according to race. Overall, all races tended to report higher ratings for the university's ability to prepare students to graduate compared to career preparation and life skills attainment. However, these differences were not statistically significant.

**Student Support: What Factors Have Contributed to Your Motivation for Wanting to Graduate?**

In the Student Support dimension, survey respondents rated the item, “Information is readily available about graduation requirements” with the highest agreement. The item with the second-highest rating was “The college environment
supports student learning”, which was followed by the item “Instructors are committed to student learning” and lastly, “Instructors have high expectations for all students”.

**Gender Analysis.** A marginally significant trend suggested that women rated the Student Support dimension as more important in contributing to student success than men, $t(66) = 1.929, p = .058$. Reported agreement for females fell slightly above “Agree” ($M = 4.15$), whereas reported agreement for males was slightly below “Agree” ($M = 3.82$). Average agreement to the Student Support dimension for each gender is reported in Table 7, along with standard error.

Table 7  

*Average Agreement to the Student Support Dimension by Gender*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>SEM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When Student Support items were examined individually, women were found to rate items, "Instructors have high expectations for all students" ($p = .038$) and "Instructors are committed to student learning" ($p = .031$), as significantly more important in contributing to motivation for wanting to graduate than men. Overall, both men and women tended to rate the highest agreement with "Information is readily available about graduate requirements", in contributing to their motivation to graduate.

**Race Analysis.** Agreement on importance of items in the Student Support domain did not significantly differ based on race ($p = .360$). All races tended to rate agreement near or above the “Agree” anchor. Asian and Pacific Islander Individuals rated the highest agreement ($M = 4.22$), followed by Hispanic individuals ($M = 4.11$), White, non-
Hispanic individuals ($M = 4.00$), African American individuals ($M = 3.78$), and Other individuals ($M = 3.63$). Average agreement to the Student Support dimension and standard error according to race are listed in Table 8.

**Table 8**

*Average Agreement to Student Support Dimension by Race*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>SEM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>0.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian &amp; Pacific-Islander</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White, Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>0.31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When items in the Student Support dimension were analyzed individually, there were no significant differences in ratings given by the different races. Across all races, individuals tended to rate higher agreement to the item, "Information is readily available about graduate requirements" compared to other items, but this difference was not statistically significant.

**Academic Experiences: Academic Experiences That Have, or May Contribute to Success as a Potential College Graduate**

Within the Academic Experiences dimension, participants reported the item, “The curriculum is relevant and useful,” as most important in contributing to student success. The item, “Instructors or staff mentoring contributed to my student success”, was rated second-highest, followed closely by the items, “Instructors are sufficiently available” and “Classes are available to assist in meeting requirements”.
**Gender Analysis.** Males and females did not significantly differ in ratings given to items pertaining to academic experiences that have contributed to student success as a potential college graduate. Females assigned slightly higher ratings to the Academic Experiences dimension ($M = 4.09$) compared to males ($M = 3.76$), but this difference was not statistically significant ($p = .119$). Average agreement to the Student Support dimension and standard error for males and females are listed in Table 9.

Table 9

*Average Agreement to the Academic Experiences Dimension by Gender*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>SEM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4.09</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Examining the items individually revealed a marginal trend suggesting that females assigned higher importance to the third item, “Instructors are sufficiently available”, compared to males, $t(66) = 1.953, p = .055$.

**Race Analysis.** Agreement to the Academic Experiences dimension did not significantly differ as a function of race. White, non-Hispanic survey respondents reported slightly higher agreement to the Academic Experiences dimension ($M = 4.25$) relative to other racial groups, however this effect was not statistically significant ($p = .711$). Most groups tended to give ratings that fell close to “Agree” on the scale. African American and Asian and Pacific Islander groups ($Ms = 4.03$) gave the second highest ratings, followed by Hispanic individuals ($M = 3.98$), and Other individuals ($M = 3.54$).
Average agreement to the Academic Experiences dimension and standard error according to race are illustrated in Table 10.

Overall, across all races, survey respondents tended to report the highest agreement for the specific item pertaining to relevant and useful curriculum compared to other items. However, there were no statistically significant differences according to race for the individual items in the Academic Experiences dimension.

Table 10

*Average Agreement to the Academic Experiences Dimension by Race*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SEM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>0.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian &amp; Pacific-Islander</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White, Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>0.23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Institutional Support: Institutional Factors Important to My Success as a Potential College Graduate**

The survey item, “Interaction by college staff supports student success (e.g., Admissions, Financial Aid)” was rated as the most important Institutional Support factor that contributes to student success by survey respondents. The item with the second-highest agreement was “There is evidence that the college values students”, followed by “There is evidence that the college provides quality customer service to support students” and lastly, “The university initiates frequent contact with students to support academic success”.

53
**Gender Analysis.** Males and females did not significantly differ in their level of agreement to the Institutional Support dimension \((p = .177)\). Average ratings for males \((M = 3.64)\) and females \((M = 3.90)\) were just below the “Agree” anchor on the Likert scale. Average agreement to the Institutional Support dimension and standard error according to gender are described in Table 11.

Table 11

*Average Agreement to the Institutional Support Dimension by Gender*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SEM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When items in the dimension were analyzed individually, there were no statistically significant differences in ratings according to gender. Across both males and females, the item within the dimension pertaining to the importance of interaction with college staff was rated with the most agreement.

**Race Analysis.** White, non-Hispanic individuals tended to rate the highest overall agreement to the Institutional Support dimension than other races, with ratings falling just above “Agree” \((M = 4.25)\). However, this effect was only marginally significant \((p = .072)\). Average ratings for Hispanic respondents \((M = 3.97)\), Asian and Pacific Islander respondents \((M = 3.55)\), African American respondents \((M = 3.40)\), and Other respondents \((M = 3.38)\) were between “Neither Agree, nor Disagree” and “Agree”. Average agreement to the Institutional Support dimension and standard error for each race are shown in Table 12.
White, non-Hispanic individuals and Hispanic individuals rated significantly higher agreement to the statement, "There is evidence that the college values students" (Item 3 in the Institutional Support dimension), than individuals who identified their race as Other, $F(4, 67) = 2.978, p = .026$. Therefore, White, non-Hispanic and Hispanic respondents may particularly believe it is important that the college values students. No other significant differences among races for Institutional Support measures were observed.

Table 12

*Average Agreement to the Institutional Support Dimension by Race*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>SEM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian &amp; Pacific-Islander</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White, Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>0.42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Support Staff: Institutional Factors Important to my Success as a Potential College Graduate

The four items in the Support Staff dimension inquired about respondent opinions regarding quality and quantity of professional staff (e.g., clerical, maintenance) and also quality and quantity of instructional support staff (e.g., teaching assistants, lab assistants) in supporting student success. Quality of professional staff was rated most favorably out of the four items. The other three survey items in the Support Staff dimension were rated similarly, with the second most important item being the quality of instructional support
staff, followed closely by the quantity of professional staff and quantity of instructional staff.

**Gender Analysis.** A marginally significant trend suggested that females tended to rate the Support Staff dimension as more important in contributing to student success than males, $t(66) = 1.770, p = .081$. However, this effect was only marginal, and average ratings for both males ($M = 3.72$) and females ($M = 4.07$) were rated similarly near the “Agree” position on the Likert scale. Table 13 lists the average agreement to the Support Staff dimension and standard error according to gender.

Table 13

*Average Agreement to the Support Staff Dimension by Gender*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>SEM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When items in the Support Staff dimension were examined individually, there was a marginally significant trend, suggesting that females reported the quality of instructional support staff in supporting students (Item 2), as more important than males, $t(66) = 1.933, p = .058$. No other significant differences were observed between genders for items in the Support Staff dimension.

**Race Analysis.** Individuals did not significantly differ in responses to Support Staff dimension items according to race. White, non-Hispanic individuals tended to report higher agreement ($M = 4.38$) in the Support Staff dimension than other races. However, this effect was not statistically significant ($p = .265$). Average ratings for Asian and Pacific Islander respondents ($M = 4.05$), Hispanic respondents ($M = 4.01$), African-
American respondents ($M = 3.72$), and Other respondents ($M = 3.38$) were near the “Agree” position on the Likert scale. Average agreement to the Support Staff dimension and standard error according to race are listed in Table 14.

When items in the Support Staff dimension were examined individually, all survey respondents tended to rate moderately higher ratings to quality of instruction and professional staff compared to quantity of instructional and professional staff. However, these differences were not statistically significant ($p = .265$).

Table 14

**Average Agreement to the Support Staff Dimension by Race**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>SEM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian &amp; Pacific-Islander</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White, Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>4.38</td>
<td>0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>0.35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Supplemental Support: Physical Resources Important to my Success as a Potential College Graduate**

The four survey items in the Supplemental Support dimension referred to the quantity and quality of equipment for student success (e.g., computers and workstations) and also the quantity and quality of instructional materials for student success (e.g., library books and book store supplies). All four items were rated fairly similarly, with quality of instructional materials receiving the highest rating. Quality of equipment was
rated second-highest, followed by quantity of equipment and quantity of instructional materials.

**Gender Analysis.** Females rated the Supplemental Support dimension as contributing significantly more to student success compared to males, $t(66) = 2.174, p = .033$. The average rating for females was halfway between “Agree” and “Strongly Agree” on the scale ($M = 4.49$), while the average male rating was closer to the “Agree” position ($M = 4.15$). Average agreement to the Supplemental Support dimension and standard error according to gender are shown in Table 15.

**Table 15**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>SEM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4.49</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When the items in the dimension were analyzed individually, a marginally significant trend suggested that women tended to report higher agreement to quality of equipment as adequate to support student success, compared to men, $t (66) = 1.866, p = .067$. There were no other significant differences between men and women for Supplemental Support items.

**Race Analysis.** There were no significant differences in agreement to Supplemental Support items as a function of race ($p = .797$). Overall, average agreement for all items across all racial groups tended to fall slightly above "Agree." Respondents that identified as Other gave the highest ratings ($M = 4.46$), while African American
individuals gave the lowest rating ($M = 4.09$). Average agreement to the Supplemental Support dimension and standard error according to race are shown in Table 16.

When survey items within the Supplemental Support dimension were analyzed individually according to race, there were no significant differences in agreement. Ratings for all of the items fell at or above "Somewhat Agree” to Supplemental Support items.

Table 16

*Average Agreement to the Supplemental Support Dimension by Race*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>SEM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>4.09</td>
<td>0.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian &amp; Pacific-Islander</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White, Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>4.38</td>
<td>0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4.46</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Student Resources Access: Institutional Accessibility Important to My Success as a Potential College Graduate**

For the seven items in the Student Resource Access dimension, “Financial Aid support and availability” and “Availability of classes to complete my degree” were rated with the most agreement by survey respondents. Survey items, “Variety and scheduling of classes”, “Ease of enrolling in classes”, and “Access to student support services (e.g., EOP, Career Services, Military and Veterans Services)” were rated subsequently. Lastly, although rated favorably, survey items, “Access to Counseling Services” and “Access to academic support services (e.g., tutoring)” were rated lowest in the dimension.
Gender Analysis. Both males ($M = 4.78$) and females ($M = 4.72$) tended to rate high agreement in the Student Resource Access dimension, but there was not a statistical difference in agreement between males and females ($p = .603$). Agreement for both genders were near the “Strongly Agree” anchor on the scale. Table 17 shows average agreement to the Student Resources Access dimension and standard error according to gender.

Table 17

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>SEM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>4.78</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4.72</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were no significant differences in agreement on the specific items in the Student Resources Access dimension according to gender. Both males and females tended to report the highest agreement for Financial Aid support and availability, availability of classes to complete degree, ease of enrolling in classes, and variety of scheduling of classes, as contributing institutional accessibility factors in student success.

Race Analysis. There was a significant effect of race on average agreement in the Student Resource Access dimension for the five racial groups, $F (4, 67) = 3.67, p = .009$. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that mean agreement for Hispanic respondents ($M = 4.82$) and Asian and Pacific Islander respondents ($M = 4.86$) was significantly higher than agreement for White, non-Hispanic individuals ($M = 4.25$). This suggests that Hispanic and Asian and Pacific Islander individuals rated the Student
Resource dimension as contributing significantly more to student success compared to White, non-Hispanic individuals. Additionally, all races generally tended to report high levels of average agreement (near “Strongly Agree”) to the Student Resource Access dimension. Average agreement to the Student Resources Access dimension and standard error according to race are listed in Table 18.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SEM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>4.46</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian &amp; Pacific-Islander</td>
<td>4.86</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>4.82</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White, Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>0.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4.79</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were also significant differences in ratings by race for specific survey items in the Student Resource Access dimension. Survey respondents that identified as Hispanic or Other reported access to student support services as significantly more important for student success compared to White, non-Hispanic individuals, $F(4, 67) = 2.691, p = .039$. Additionally, Hispanic, Asian, and Other individuals rated access to academic support services as significantly more important than White, non-Hispanic individuals in terms of contributing to success as a potential college graduate, $F(4, 67) = 4.298, p = .004$.

**Social and Personal Skills Ranking**

Students identified and appraised in rank order social and personal skills instrumental in their success as a potential graduate from the university. On a scale of one
as the highest ranking and five as the lowest score, students ranked social and personal skills. The outcomes and student assessment in the following charts illustrate the ranked importance of social and personal skills. Sixty-nine responses were received for both categories.

**Social Skills.** Figure 2 represents the percentage breakdown of rankings assigned to each of the five social skills. Skills were ranked in order of importance from one to five, with one being most important, and five being least important. Therefore, a skill that was ranked as a lower number on the ranking scale indicates that the respondent viewed that skill as more important in contributing to student success as a potential college graduate.

Percentages in Figure 2 refer to the percent of students that gave a particular ranking for each skill. For example, 38% of the students assigned Self-Management Skills the number one rank, 19% of students assigned it the number two rank, 20% ranked it as the number three, 9% ranked it as number four, and 14% ranked it as number five.

Overall, Self-Management skills were frequently ranked as the most important skill, with 38% of students assigning Self-Management Skills as number one in rank. Communication seemed to be fairly distributed across ranks one through four, but was most commonly ranked as the second-most important skill relative to the other skills, with 23% of the students assigning the skill with a rank of two. Twenty-nine percent of students ranked Decision-Making as the third-most important skill, and 28% of students
designated Problem-Solving as the fourth-most important skill. Lastly, Peer Relation Skills was ranked as the least important by nearly 40% of the students.

Figure 2. *Ranked Importance of Social Skills Contributing to Student Success*

**Personal Skills.** Personal skills were also ranked in order of importance from one to five, with one being most important, and five being least important (Figure 3). Therefore, a skill that was ranked as a lower number on the ranking scale indicates that the respondent viewed that skill as more important in contributing to student success a potential college graduate.

Percentages in Figure 3 refer to the percent of students that gave a particular ranking for each skill. For example, 41% of students assigned Goal Setting skills the number one rank, 17% of students assigned Goal Setting the number two rank, 26% of students ranked it as the number three, 9% of students ranked it as number four, and 7% students ranked it as number five.
Overall, Goal Setting Skills was frequently ranked as the most important personal skill, with 41% of students assigning Goal Setting Skills with a rank of one. The majority of rankings for Time Management (63%) fell at numbers one or two, but it was more commonly ranked as the second-most important skill relative to other skills, with 33% of individuals assigning the skill with a rank of two. The Planning skill tended to be reported somewhat evenly across all ranks, but most commonly was reported at Rank two or three. Flexibility was most frequently ranked as the fourth-most important skill, with 42% of individuals designating Flexibility with a number four rank. Lastly, just over half of the students (55%) ranked Self-Appraisal as least important of the five skills.
Quantitative Research Question 1: What were the Major Student Characteristics and Qualities that Contribute to Success of Potential College Graduates in a Public Four-Year University?

The student characteristics and qualities assessed by students were social skills and personal skills. The top three skills identified by students as contributing to success of potential graduates in each category are detailed below. Additionally, select student comments from the open-ended survey questions are included to validate the major characteristics and qualities. Among the social skills category, students identified self-management skills, communication and decision-making as major contributors to their success. In this analysis, Self-Management skills were ranked as the most important skill that contributed to potential student success. Self-Management skills for purposes of this study were defined as the ability to manage activities and priorities to achieve educational goals. Student comments in the survey open ended questions that support the importance of this skill included:

I think some of the greatest challenges are finding the balance between making students self sufficient versus helping them a lot more. For me personally, I would of loved more help from careers services and also more personal development stuff, but the services were offered it just took me until senior year to realize I needed them. Also to what capacity should students be self driven compared to faculty led, there comes a point when a student has to get it for themselves because there are not prerequisites or maps in life and we are the ultimate decision makers.
Communication was frequently ranked as the second-most important skill. This skill could be interpreted as university communications in the form of written or oral communication, instructor communication in the classroom or interpersonal and intrapersonal communication.

Student comments:

Communication is an important skill that needs to be addressed in relation to helping students graduate. Students should feel confident when talking to a counselor. Communication about when to decide to graduate and how to achieve it.

Students designated Decision-Making as the third important skill. Decision-making was defined as making a choice between several alternatives which ends in a conclusive choice. Making a decision can result in an impact on others or some action.

Student comments related to decision-making included:

Showing them a flow chart of the classes that they need to take in order to graduate by a specific date. Students who aren't as motivated as others to know the different departments and resources on campus should be reached. Like an email should be sent to all students with the most important resources offered that will help with ensuring students are prepared to graduate.

The three primary personal skills were: goal setting, time management, and planning. In the personal skills category, Goal Setting Skills ranked as the most important. This skill was described as planning and pursuing a goal to completion.
Student responses included, “Students should be given the adequate tools to decide which career path to select. They also should know the various job options for that particular career.”

Time Management was determined by the students as the second most important goal and was defined as scheduling time. An example of a response included:

I believe that the most important issue that helps a student graduate is planning. Taking a moment and deciding on what the individual wants to achieve during a time period is a fundamental step towards graduation. A contingency plan is crucial when things do not turn out as expected. Planning leads to preparation which in turn makes graduation a possibility.

Planning, which was categorized as preparation for a task or goal was ranked two or three, and was reported somewhat evenly across all rankings. A student response included, “Better long-term planning with students. Students should be able to talk to an adviser and talk year long goals and classes they can take so that they are better prepared for future classes.”

**Quantitative Research Question 2: How Were Students’ Academic Experiences Related to Graduation Rates in a Public Four-Year University Setting?**

In response to: “Academic experiences that have or may contribute to my success as a potential graduate”, students rated these factors described as academic experiences: class availability to meet requirements, curriculum relevancy and usefulness, instructor availability, as well as instructors and staff mentoring as contributors to success.
On a ranking scale from one to five, students reported that curriculum relevancy and usefulness, as well as instructors and staff mentoring, were on average, more important in contributing to student success for graduation. These two factors may impact the student’s ability to compete in the job market and/or in pursuing an advance degree. Outdated curriculum and the lack of pertinent and applicable curriculum hamper student ability and academic preparation. Mentoring is considered an important asset when staff or instructors can provide insight, guidance and support as mentors and/or advisors.

Table 19 reflects student evaluations of the factors that were significant to their academic experiences.

Table 19

**Ranked Factors for Academic Experiences**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree, Nor Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Average Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classes are available to assist in meeting requirements.</td>
<td>29.73% (22)</td>
<td>41.89% (31)</td>
<td>10.81% (8)</td>
<td>13.51% (10)</td>
<td>4.05% (3)</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The curriculum is relevant and useful.</td>
<td>43.24% (32)</td>
<td>40.54% (30)</td>
<td>4.05% (3)</td>
<td>4.05% (3)</td>
<td>1.35% (1)</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructors are sufficiently available.</td>
<td>33.78% (25)</td>
<td>39.19% (29)</td>
<td>9.46% (7)</td>
<td>9.46% (7)</td>
<td>4.05% (3)</td>
<td>3.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructors or staff mentoring contributed to my success.</td>
<td>33.78% (25)</td>
<td>37.84% (28)</td>
<td>4.05% (3)</td>
<td>4.05% (3)</td>
<td>2.70% (2)</td>
<td>3.96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Quantitative Data Summary

Overall, students tended to agree that all of the survey dimensions were important contributors to student success. However, three particular dimensions received the greatest average ratings: 1) Student Resource Access, 2) Supplemental Support, and 3) Student Support. When analyzed by gender, there were marginal trends which suggested that women may place greater importance on items in the Instruction, Student Support, and Support Staff dimension. Specifically, women reported greater agreement to items pertaining to the role that instructors play in student learning. In addition, women also responded more favorably to items in the Supplemental Support dimension compared to men. Specifically, a moderate trend suggested that women reported valuing the quality of equipment compared to men.

The results also supported the idea that students may have differing views of contributors to student success based on race. Moderate trends in the data suggested that non-Hispanic individuals rated higher agreement to Institutional Support dimension items compared to other races. Within this dimension, another effect was observed, which revealed that White, non-Hispanic and Hispanic respondents especially reported feeling that it important that the college values students. Furthermore, Hispanic, and Asian and Pacific Islander individuals rated the Student Resources dimension as contributing significantly more to student success compared to White, non-Hispanic individuals.

Lastly, when students were asked to rank social skills in order of importance, self-management and communication skills tended to most frequently receive high rankings, which was corroborated by student input for the open-ended survey questions. When
asked to rank personal skills, goal setting and time management skills received the highest rankings. These findings were also supported by student comments on the open-ended survey questions, listing time management as important to student success.

**Qualitative and Interview Phase**

In the qualitative phase, six students participated in structured one-to-one interviews allowing students to share their views on the institution, focusing on factors that contributed to their success as a potential graduate. The interviews were held at a preselected office at San Diego State University.

The students were selected from a pool of participants based on the following criteria: (1) A cross-section of diverse students to ensure representation and input from different perspectives, experiences and backgrounds, and (2) gender and ethnicity were considered as factors in the selection of the participants during this phase; the self-report data on the survey conducted during Phase I was utilized to identify students.

The six students interviewed shared several common characteristics: All were current commuter students. Two attempted resident life; one of the two students found the cost prohibitive and the other found campus living too distracting. Each student was a participant in the Educational Opportunity (EOP) program. The program resides in the Office of Educational Opportunity Programs and Ethnic Affairs. According to the department mission, the office is committed to supporting first-generation, low-income students through a variety of programs, including retention programs designed to encourage students to persist and achieve the goal of a university degree (San Diego State University, 2014).
During the interview phase, two students, a male and a female, were selected from each of the racial categories: African American, Hispanic, and White, non-Hispanic. The students discussed their academic experiences and their perspectives on factors and social and personal characteristics that led to their success. Appendix F lists a copy of the interview questions for the qualitative phase.

**Qualitative Research Question 1: Which Institutional Practices do Potential College Graduates at a Four-Year University Perceive as Contributing to their Success?**

In response to the first research question, the participants cited the university commitment to counseling services and its promotion and support of faculty as mentors for students as important contributors to their success. In some cases, students cited several mentor programs as an institutional commitment to student success. In summary, the interviews revealed students significantly perceived counseling services and faculty involvement as instrumental in their success.

Counseling services, specifically EOP counselors, were identified as meaningful and instrumental in providing direction and guidance for students. The direction and guidance described in the interviews included advisement for graduation requirements and how to maneuver through the college environment. Faculty involvement included supportive relationships that were formed with students as well as faculty serving as mentors and/or advisors.
Qualitative Research Question 2: How do Potential College Graduates at a Four-Year University Perceive or Define Challenging and Beneficial Institutional Factors that Support College Graduation?

Participants identified access to services, the university’s environment, and the opportunities for student engagement as challenging yet beneficial factors that support potential college graduation. Student access to services included the library and tutoring. Tutoring was cited as helpful in most situations; however the tutors were cited as needing skill training and development to adequately address students’ needs. Students indicated that tutoring in general subjects, such as math, was available and accessible. However, tutors were not prepared or there was not assistance in specialty areas, such as business. Students valued the opportunity to participate in workshops supporting student learning, such as writing.

For several participants, the college environment was problematic and challenging, sharing their experiences as being treated as an anomaly, or feeling as “the only one”. Participants also described rewarding experiences when engaging in campus life and found support through programs, such as Summer Bridge. These programs cultivated and encouraged student involvement in on and off-campus activities.

In the final analysis, seven themes emerged from the conversation with the students: five related to institutional factors, including access to services, counselor and faculty involvement, student engagement and the college role in supporting student learning. Two ancillary themes, family and peers, were identified as motivating factors in success as a potential graduate.
During the qualitative research segment, student participant profile details are followed by student assumption descriptions. These student assumption descriptions validated and corresponded to the seven themes. Together, these themes and the student comments were consistent with the students’ association and appraisal of institutional practices and the challenging and beneficial institutional factors that support college graduation.

**Student Profiles.** The first interviewee, “Lily” (L), was a Hispanic female who preferred to be identified as a human being and not a part of any racial group. Her response was an intriguing and motivating factor in selecting her as an interviewee. After introductions, I inquired about Lily’s preferred disassociation from racial identification. Lily explained that although her parents were born in Mexico, she was born in the United States. Her perspective was that emphasis on color is too great and that “we are all Americans”. Lily also emphasized that she is proud to be an American and that this pride served as the reason why she declined an association with a race on the survey.

Lily explained that she was raised in, using her words, “a typical, traditional Hispanic family”. Her father was the dominant figure in the household, and closely monitored the women in the family. Out of respect for her father, Lily lives at home. Commuting daily, however, has made it difficult for her to socialize and become a part of the college campus. After classes, Lily studies in the library, but she would appreciate having the option to take an occasional rest period in a dormitory or other private residence, located closer to campus.
Lily also shared that her major is Public Health; she is in her fifth year of school and is expecting to graduate in 2015. Originally her major was Biology, but working with a Public Health Advisor motivated her to change it. Interestingly, at one point of time, Lily was placed on academic probation. At that time, Lily’s mentor advised her to declare her major as Public Health, although, at the time, she did not meet the academic requirements. With assistance from tutors and the guidance and advisement from the Public Health department, Lily’s Grade Point Average is now 3.7 and she expects to graduate with honors.

The next interviewee, “Carlos” (C), was a male Hispanic student whose major is Africana Studies and is interested in “breaking down” stereotypes and relearning the history he was taught in his high school education. Carlos became interested in the Africana Studies major after completing a class about the history and culture of African Americans. With opportunity to discuss the philosophy, history and culture, Carlos often finds himself immersed in the stories centered on the experiences of African Americans. Carlos believed that the class dialogues and discussions have provided new learning experiences.

Carlos relayed his greatest motivators. One of Carlos’s greatest motivations, for completing his degree is his brother, a graduate of the University of California at Riverside. Since they were children, there has always been sibling rivalry between Carlos and his brother; therefore, Carlos’s goal is to complete his college education, just like his brother. In addition to the faculty in the Africana Studies department, another
important motivator is Carlos’s family. He wants to please his parents, who are Mexican immigrants, and be a role model for his younger sister, who is currently in the 7th grade.

Carlos once lived in the college dormitories, but found residence living costly and distracting due to noise, primarily from other students. Carlos currently lives off-campus, but stays involved with a number of clubs and associations to remain engaged and connected to the college. He has also struggled with academic challenges and was once placed on academic probation; however counseling services and the learning communities within his major have assisted him to achieve his scholastic success. Carlos expects to graduate in 2015.

“James” (Ja), the next participant, is a white male student who has survived several challenges in his lifetime to achieve his goal of a college education. James was a child within the foster care system, during which time he endured an abusive childhood. As an adult, James was denied admission to San Diego State University (SDSU) three times. James wants to earn a college degree because, he believes that achievement will break the cycle of failed beginnings by setting an example for his parents and all of his siblings, including his step siblings. James is determined to have a good life and a healthy family; his goal is “to make the world a better place to live”.

James’s major is Sustainable Tourism and he viewed this major as compatible with his values of supporting the local economy, helping indigenous people of a country controlling more aspects of their own lives by governing the industries within their country.
With the assistance of EOP and the Guardian Scholars’ Program, James is nearing the completion of his college education. He also credited the environment at SDSU, citing the opportunity to become involved on campus at all levels, including traveling to conferences as a student representative, paid internships, and his fraternity. James’s current GPA is 3.067 and expects to graduate in May 2014. Considering that James dropped out of high school in his junior year, he considers his GPA to be a major accomplishment.

“Katie” (K), another participant, is a white female student. Katie was a former resident student of SDSU, but after facing academic probation, she took a leave of absence from school. She moved back home to Los Angeles and attended a community college to improve her grade point average before returning to SDSU.

Katie’s older sister and younger brother also attend college; one at a community college and one at UC Santa Cruz. Many of her friends attend college as well. Influenced by her parents, grandparents, as well as her older sister and her friends; Katie felt college was a requirement, not an option. Katie enjoyed college, and felt that SDSU is “spirited”. She also believed that most students are happy to attend. Katie was proud to share that since she returned to college, she has not missed a single class. However, since she lives off-campus, she has not been as engaged in campus activities. While there are activities available, she prefers to spend her time with her friends off campus.

Although Katie has found working part time and attending school full time to be a challenge, her current GPA is 3.19. Although the availability of classes has hindered the achievement of her goal, the availability of technology and counseling services has
enhanced her success. Katie also attributed her success to EOP counselors and other academic services, such as tutoring. Her major is Psychology with a minor in Sociology, and, after five years, she looks forward to graduation.

The next participant, “Morgan” (M), is an African American female student majoring in Child Development. She hopes to become a Master Teacher and eventually own a business. Morgan was inspired to major in Child Development after volunteering at a Pre-School where her mother also works. A Los Angeles resident, Morgan frequently returns home to visit her family.

Morgan’s inspiration to attend college was her sister, who attended a community college, graduated from UCLA, and is currently working on her Master’s degree. Morgan had no college advisor until her senior year of high school and had to scramble to prepare for the college entrance exams. Although her parents encouraged Morgan and her siblings to attend college, their knowledge of navigating through the college system was limited. Upward Bound was also financially instrumental in supporting her college goals by granting Morgan vouchers to take the college entrance exams.

Morgan was enrolled in Advance Placement classes and graduated from high school with a 5.7 Grade Point Average. She received early admission to SDSU, but experienced culture shock when she arrived at the campus. As a recent graduate of a predominately black high school, she was surprised at the low number of African Americans on the college campus. She was expecting a larger number African Americans in the student body.
Morgan cried a great deal the first year because she felt alone and isolated. In many situations, she was the only African American present. Morgan became involved in the African American Student Union and other activities through EOP, which helped her overcome such feelings of isolation. She is currently on the Dean’s list with a 3.6 grade point average. However, she felt the recognition is slow in coming; she had to fight to obtain that grade point average and did not in her opinion, receive appropriate acknowledgment. She expects to graduate in 2014.

“Jordan” (Jo), the final student interviewee, expects to graduate in May of 2014. His major is Business with a minor in Psychology. He has had many opportunities at the college, including a paid internship from 3M, a major manufacturer of adhesives and electronic materials. Jordan believes that 3M is best known for their quality of office products. In addition, Jordan has had several job offers after graduation and is currently deciding between options.

Jordan’s has been involved in many aspects of campus life and attributes his success in networking to SDSU Career Services, the Aztec Mentor Program and the Black Business Society. Jordan and was recently elected Campus Homecoming King after being interviewed by a panel of judges and competing against stiff competition.

As an African American male, Jordan feels being successful is important. Jordan intensely dislikes failure. In addition, he competes with his older brother, a graduate of SDSU, and wants to meet his parents’ expectations, who both have advanced degrees. Jordan graduated from high school with a 4.3 GPA and currently has a college GPA of 3.4.
After making a decision to become involved in campus life, Jordan felt as though he was “just another number,” until his sophomore year, which became turning point in his life. Along with his family, EOP, counseling services and the EOP Summer Bridge program also made significant impacts on his college and personal life. These programs provided the opportunity to get what he termed “a jumpstart” on college and to be exposed to college early, which assisted in his academic success and adjustment to college.

Jordan is deeply rooted in his faith and attends church regularly with his parents, whom are ministers at their church. He believes in his faith and that God has also been instrumental in his achievements. He believes in “doing the best and being the best that you can be”.

During the qualitative phase the interviewees specifically addressed the questions below as follow up to the survey. From the responses, the seven themes emerged during the interaction with students. Excerpts are included from student interviews that validate the importance of these themes.

One-on-One Interview Questions, Themes, and Interpretations

The following sections summarize student responses during the interview phase of the current study, and the emergence of specific themes arising from each question.

Theme 1: The Importance of Access to Services

Students were asked about the single most important institutional factor that contributed to their success and 42 inferences were identified.
Counseling services and academic advising are important to have around. Especially when you get a good advisor like the one I had in Compact Scholars. EOP counselors and the services are very good. Each of the services contributed to my success. A combination of counseling and academic advising are a good start. Especially at a big university like SDSU. Being able to have these services available is very important to students. The EOP counseling services keeps you on track and the advisor helps with things like major requirements.

(H-Cop services were important). The program is no longer here because it didn’t receive any funding. I struggled a lot, with, and calculus but more chemistry. They had a tutor two times a week, and that tutor would go through and pretty much like give us another lecture with a focus on what we had already studied, reinforcing the concepts. The program and its support services really helped me with my math skills and helped me become a better student. The college needs more services like this in the different departments since SDSU does not have a tutoring program for all students, just EOP. Students have to pay for tutoring on their own.

And I also like having the library open twenty four seven. There’s a quiet area where I can study, and it's kind of like the gym, everyone’s working out you’re going to work out and in the library, everyone’s studying so you’re going study. So, I love that, and during finals week they have breakfast, so it’s like a mini party for people studying. I was able to become a better student and I met people at the breakfast that I would have never met.
I don’t know if I would’ve been successful, (without Summer Bridge services) they helped me start out with that strong foundation of what college is about. I mean they really helped me out with my study skills and time management, because, I didn’t know anything about college and, what it was going to demand of me. I didn’t know study habits. I had a pretty high GPA so I thought I knew how to study but, you know, college is another level.

Summer Bridge assisted me with tutoring, I did tutoring, when we had to take the writing assessment. These services helped me to be a more organized student. The university does not know how important tutoring is and how students need to have something without a program to help them at a big university, you can become lost.

Another service was the Writing Proficiency Assessment workshops. You have to pass the WPA to graduate. They have workshops, I went to those, I went to two of those and I was like, I have to do better than this, I have to pass this test. The workshops were helpful.

**Theme 2: The Significance of Student Engagement**

Respondents were asked if there was a particular program that was instrumental in assisting in their success as a potential college graduate. Fifty-nine inferences were identified.

And it’s really cool to be part of Guardian Scholars, when you’re a part of a prestigious organization like this (Guardian Scholars) donors and alumni
recognize that. Through the organization I’ve been able to travel to the California Foster Youth Convention Sacramento to be a keynote speaker and just to be able to travel. (Wow)!

This program helped be more confident about my situation as a foster youth and what I had to deal with and I am a now a great student. I’ve met with the CEO of Costco, Craig Jelinek, who recently donated 20 million dollars to Guardian Scholars, I got to meet him, and he was an inspiration.

I have come into my own as a result of this program, and really became an individual. At this age I have still have friends who are constantly asking “Who am I?”

We meet once a month currently. I am one of the founding members of the Guardian Scholars student advisory board and that meets every week, and that was founded last semester, we’re working on connecting. We have become very strong individuals. We have service events, and we’re required to do community service. This involvement has changed my life for the better.

(Jo) Being a part of the campus community including the ASO has helped me to come out of my shell. I have really become self-motivated and more community minded. I have become more aware of my community of African Americans and I see African Americans in the community just not believing or having a person that can represent what it means to be African American and be successful. That is one of reasons I ran for Homecoming King. I remember one thing I love was
winning Homecoming King, a lot of the guys and girls that were African American, they were like thank you so much and they think they can do things now; they are now motivated to become involved and try new things.

My winning Homecoming King was based off of leadership, community service, extracurricular involvements, and commitment to leaving SDSU better than when you found it. The interview process was one of the most thorough interview processes that I’ve ever went through. I am so proud and so are my friends and people who I don’t even know are proud of me. It is a great experience. I am even more confident in my ability to achieve anything!

Theme 3: Peer Influence

Nineteen inferences were identified from students’ responses to the question, “What motivated you to continue (and persist) toward your goal of graduation?”

(M) I have two friends that I look up to. One of them is my friend that’s a girl, she used to go here, and she’s actually graduating from Dominguez Hills. Yay! Her graduating has motivated me to graduate from SDSU. And I have a male friend that, I knew him since I was in high school and he is very goal oriented. He started college, but is working now. He’s been my friend since freshman year and although he is not in school, encourages me to stay in school. They are very motivated and much directed. Much like me now!

I got here my freshmen year and I did extremely well. But then the semester after that, the people I decided to become friends with, didn’t have the same goals, to go to medical school but I feel like on the way, we got distracted, with, things we
could do. We thought that, oh, we can miss today’s lecture. But we didn’t see that, it would increase from, missing lecture once a week, to now, two times a week and then all of a sudden, there was a midterm and there was no way you could catch up. But then again, I can’t blame them for that because, that’s who I chose to be friends with.

(C) My fraternity has been a positive influence. The organization stresses graduating. So they get grade reports at the end of every semester and this is what qualifies you to be potential member. (Rights are waived) and that’s how they can check to see if you can hold an executive position in the organization. They also encourage members to be involved in the campus – to hold leadership positions and to take the lead on activities. I look up to them and view them as role models.

**Theme 4: Family Influence**

Sixty-seven inferences were identified.

(K) My family, more like my sister was the first person in my family actually to graduate from college. She’s always been my kind of role model. I always looked up to her, and my grandparents, actually came over from Denmark, so I’m like first generation American in this side of my family, so they are proud and want us to graduate.

My grandparents have been like great, my parents have been supportive and they trust me to make the right decisions. It’s something that actually matters and they want the kids to be better and be more motivated to graduate since they never
attended college. Both my parents and grandparents try so hard to help when they can. I am sure they will be at graduation cheering me on!

(L) Yeah, I feel like it always my parents; especially my father doesn’t understand that sometimes I have to do, for example, stay here, late at the library and they call me constantly. They don’t believe me because they were never in college and they do not understand the time it takes, but then again, I have to understand that. They are, paying my way into college. So, they do deserve to know what I am doing. It’s like an investment they are making in me for my future.

I do have a strong relationship with my parents. I do. We talk about a lot of things, especially what I learn academically.

At this point my parents had already paid for most of my college education and because, I knew that, and I knew what I had to do. I have to stay in school for them and for me. Growing up, there was no option but to go to school. I come from a type of parents that I would get spanked, if, I had a, ‘C’ in class and my citizenship grades were not of, like an ‘A’. Like, every time a report card came back, it’s like, you have a ‘C’ but, your daughter talks too much in class, she doesn’t turn in homework. So that’s what they didn’t like. Because they knew how, if I fixed those areas, then the academic grade will go up so, academics was very important to them.

I feel that they want me to have a better life, they grew up very poor because they didn’t have the opportunity to go to school, and they both longed to go to school.
So, my parents are very driven. And always being around someone that’s driven, just kind of makes you, be driven too. If I don’t do well, it is like me not appreciating what my parents have done for me. They do want to me do what they want. I said I wanted to go to college to become a doctor, but then they were like you should become an engineer and I said, “No, No. I’m doing it my way, I’m doing bio.” In the end, they believed in me so I have to keep my word.

(Jo) My biggest motivator was probably having an older brother. We always competed on everything. And my god sister, she grew up in Chicago with me as well, we moved to San Diego together, and so she was kind of a motivator. Everything my brother did, I wanted to do better. My god sister is just a positive person; whenever I am down, she can bring me up!

(C) My older brother graduated from UCR and it definitely it’s a proud thing. And both my parents you know, they, they definitely did come here with a purpose that their children get their degree and, and do something with their lives, as in you know definitely stressing that our only job should be school. So not being able to finish school, college and get my degree, that alone would be a huge disappointment and definitely I would have had to carry a lot of shame, which would suck! My sister, she’s a sophomore at Dominguez Hills. My parents and my older brother have set the foundation and if I can’t do that, and surpass him then, I’ve failed.
Theme 5: Faculty Involvement

Forty-nine inferences were identified.

(Jo) My role model is an African American female professor in a college of business and she is amazing. She’s definitely instrumental, she actually came just a year ago, and she’s changed mindsets of so many students including mine, she actually helped me start the black business society. We also started a brand new business organization that hasn’t existed for African Americans, in the college of business because I think she’s the only professor that’s African American, and especially for me in my class I’m usually one of two African Americans in my class for business.

(Ja) They push you (Guardian Scholars faculty and counselors), just like a good administrator will provide leadership. We need down to earth people; we need mentors at that level. They need to connect with us, like at orientation, and be present. They need to connect with students regularly. The counselors and faculty stay involved and always follow up. They also stay connected and involved.

(C) (In Summer Bridge) we’re friends, we’re family. The faculty and counselors are is here to help. They touch base with you and invite you to come to talk. They are friendly and caring and this makes me want to come in and just talk. Even though they are mandatory counseling appointments, I can come in anytime.

Theme 6: Counselor Involvement

Forty-one inferences were identified.
(K) For me personally like counseling is been, very beneficial, like the academic aspect of it because, you don’t like you don’t know what classes to take, what major, I didn’t know I can take a leave of absence and come back and so for me personally that was probably the most important thing cause’ I’ve might of left and never came back if I hadn’t known. The only program I really been involved with is EOP but not a huge extent just the counselors because its easy access cause I know people have to wait in line for hours to see their counselor. I mean I can call and get an appointment pretty easily and, they’re not exactly psychology major driven, but they are still helpful just in general. If I don’t come in twice this semester they’ll call and be like, “You need to come in, you have to do your twice semester counseling,” like, they motivate you. Yeah, they give you options because I might come in say, oh I think I want to do this and then they’ll say “oh well here’s A B C, did these sound good? Maybe that’s an option for you.” If you’re not necessarily on top of it, they make sure that you’re on top of it.

(M) The one thing that just pops into my head is, my advisor, my college advisor especially my academic advisor for my major. My academic advisor from the Child and Family department, she was the one that organized all my classes which really helped, cause’ I had no idea what to do. I would have to say EOP. I would definitely have to say EOP for that one. Both the counselors in EOP and my academic advisor are very positive. They care about you, what is happening to you personally and academically. We need them.
Theme 7: College Environment Supports Learning

Students were asked if the university had created a supportive culture that aided in degree attainment or persistence as a potential college graduate and 92 inferences were identified.

(Jo) It’s been, it has it has its ups and downs, I graduated high school with a 4.3 GPA and then, so I’m on a full ride academic scholarship to San Diego State. I’m a commuter student as well. And that’s probably, one of my biggest challenges. I think part of the plan of the university should be to reach out more to them because on a GPA level commuter students are kind of, underperforming everyone else.

Across campus and then I think part of it too, that’s really important in terms of your representation is, that now people understand that black males are motivated, they are attractive. I don’t think people believe that. When I won as a black male for homecoming king, most African Americans were excited. It helped to change negative feelings about the university and how we are treated.

Another thing too is when I got accepted into a college I got accepted into USC, there was an experience I had with this lady and we were at a table cause’ I was sitting next to and she was Caucasian, somehow we were at a table at lunch and we were talking about USC and her daughter didn’t get in and I got in and her immediate question was, “What sport do you play?,” and I didn’t really understand that and when we walked, my mom was like, you know she thought you gotten into USC cause you play sports. I did not get that feeling or hear that at
SDSU, but there are some strong feelings about not being supported at SDSU by African American students and by me as a black male.

I don’t know if it’s because if the CSU system if it’s the budgetary constraints, scheduling a class can be a hassle, just meeting with a counselor can be a hassle at times, and trying to make sure you’re on track can be a hassle at times. There are so many things I know now that I wish I knew when I was a freshman like simple things like credit, no credit classes, they might have been said but I wasn’t paying attention in the initial greeting.

Yeah, and just information saturation, everyone’s texting, everyone’s sending out an email, there’s a flyer everywhere, it’s hard to sniff out what matters and what doesn’t.

And I mean, I understand everyone has their own mission or own goal thinking they can benefit everyone but you kind of get to the point to where it’s like, you are just stuck and you’re like, I’m just not going to read anything.

Then I think another part of it too is that they need to revisit the quantity of personnel that they have, you shouldn’t be waiting in long, long lines.

(C) If I understood that question right, I have to say no because I did do two years in the dorms, and not one, of those, years, or semesters, was there ever an introduction or a workshop on anything about the social life. There was no warning you know, speed limit is sixty five on this freeway. There were no
warnings, there were no signs, and that whatever you jump into, you must follow someone who knows what they are doing. And the truth is guys want to get together with girls and girls want to get together with guys. The easiest thing is people come in with alcohol, or whatever it may be there’s dancing, there’s music, and there was never a workshop about, hey be careful about this or focus on this, and again we are big kids and I’m not putting the blame on them but a positive culture was never there.

(M) I had to fight for my classes, I had to fight for getting, you know, my way, into, my major, knowing where I needed to go and knowing the resources I had. It wasn’t just, hi, here it is, you had to know.

And for somebody that didn’t know anything about college, for someone that came to the college not knowing that much, so glad I had EOP, so glad all those, little, you know, programs along the way because, it I would not have had that, I wouldn’t know anything.

Like financial aid, I didn’t feel so bad about financial aid; I felt like I wasn’t help or liked. I’m used to having that, you know, office staff not liking me or other people that sell me my cookies or my chips or something that they don’t look a lot like me, or people that are, you know in the, library don’t look like you. I was a little more accustomed to this cause’ at my high school we didn’t have, believe it or not, we didn’t have a lot of black teachers.
I wear my hair in braids and everybody just looks at me like, well, how do you do your hair like that? I’m like, oh my gosh, I would never ask that. Or when I wore my hair, I wear my hair like a natural afro, a lot of times and people look at me and you would think I forgot to wear shoes. Or, I forgot to wear, like my shirt was backwards or something. I’m like, what? And they would look at me; they were really staring at me. I was not used to that. I was not used to people staring at me, seriously staring like, like, I’m like, really?

So I had to really fight to get there, I had to really, just be like, I’m going to’ finish! … and I have to finish in four years and I don’t care what you guys are trying to tell me that I can’t do this and that I can’t do that. No! I have to finish, I’m going to do whatever I have to do. And that’s what I did ….

**Qualitative Data Summary**

The qualitative and interview phases of the present study revealed several themes regarding the contributing factors to student success. Survey participants cited the university commitment to counseling services and the promotion of faculty as mentors as important for student success. In addition, counseling services, namely EOP counselors, were also identified as influential and helpful to students. Other factors that were identified included access to institutional services (i.e., library, tutoring), and involvement and engagement with the university. Lastly, the emergence of two additional, unique themes occurred during the interview phase, suggesting the importance of family and peers as motivating factors for student graduation.
Relationship between Students’ Perceptions and Experiences and Quantitative Survey Results

Overall, the interview data and the quantitative results were linked in many aspects. There was a significant association between the students’ views on institutional factors that influenced potential student graduation rates and the quantitative data. In addition to survey data, student qualitative interview comments were aligned with the open-ended comments in the quantitative analysis (Table 20).

Themes identified as ancillary to student success; the effect of family and peers was not measured in the quantitative analysis. However, these two factors emerged as key to student success in the qualitative analysis. Family and peer influence generated the most student reactions and comments during this phase.

The open ended questions in the quantitative analysis revealed the influence of family and other students/peers as important. However, these factors were more prevalent or mentioned more frequently as a recurring principal influence during the qualitative phase.
Table 20

*Correlations between Quantitative Results and Interview Data*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quantitative Results</th>
<th>Interview Data Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faculty behaviors led to success for potential graduates.</td>
<td>Faculty treatment, nurturing and classroom preparedness is primary in student potential success as a graduate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The university preparation for graduation and career readiness is critical to student success</td>
<td>Planning with appropriate staff and providing career services is a necessity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty involvement is an important asset for student success; specifically mentors and advisors.</td>
<td>Faculty play a key role in promoting student graduation completion – often being in actual roles providing students with opportunities such as internships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to classes; scheduling is a key factor to students graduating in a timely manner.</td>
<td>Planning and scheduling classes is priority for students to meet degree requirements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality customer service and interactions with staff is important to students feeling valued.</td>
<td>Certain ethnic groups; especially African Americans are not feeling valued and appreciated on many levels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The quality of staff support is more important than quantity of staff.</td>
<td>Competent, caring and prepared instructors are necessary. More counselors are needed to address the lack of access for career and graduation planning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall instructional equipment and materials is adequate.</td>
<td>Access to equipment is not problematic; instructional materials are costly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student resources such as counseling, access to services are important to the success of a potential graduate.</td>
<td>More counselors are needed. Access to services such as tutoring should be reviewed and evaluated to provide better quality services to students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social skills such as communication and self-management skills are paramount to degree success.</td>
<td>Communication skills across all segments of the campus are also important (instructors, staff and students).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal skills such as goal setting and planning are highly important.</td>
<td>Planning, time management and goal setting should be collectively addressed by the university with a focus on providing better degree and life planning.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter includes a discussion of the quantitative and qualitative research results and also incorporates conclusions and recommendations. Included are the research limitations and recommendations for dissemination of the study.

This study was a mixed methods analysis of institutional factors, student characteristics (i.e. gender and race) and qualities that support graduation rates. Student academic experiences and outcomes, as well as personal and social skills, were incorporated in the analysis examining their influence on graduation rates. The hypothesis of the study was that students’ voices provide an additional source of information that is critical to exploring solutions to the dilemma of higher education poor graduation rates.

The premise was that as the primary stakeholder in their educational success, the student’s viewpoint is invaluable to higher education in understanding student needs. An outcome of the study was an increased awareness of student needs. The participants provided insight into their perspectives of current institutional practices, programs, and staff and faculty attributes that contribute to increasing graduation rates. Additionally, the study served as a platform to provide the prospect of incorporating the student viewpoint and input as they are important investors in programs, services, operational procedures, and policies.
Quantitative Discussion

Survey Dimensions

It was significant that the students reported that all dimensions contributed positively to their success. This suggests that students want an educational experience that encompasses and supports all eight dimensions. These findings imply that students tend to value each dimension as vital to student success and that all of the factors are important contributors to increasing graduation rates.

However, three categories tended to average the highest agreement as the primary contributor to student success in the following order: 1) Student Resource Access, 2) Supplemental Support, and 3) Student Support. In each category students ranked several factors; the major two factors in each category are discussed below. Understanding these factors may assist higher education institutions in determining priorities in the midst of dwindling resources and fiscal challenges. It may also be the impetus to further comprehend student needs as institutions seek solutions to increase graduation rates.

Of the two major success factors identified in the Student Resource Access dimension, “financial aid support” and “the availability of classes to complete my degree,” financial aid support was not unexpected. This finding is consistent with previous research centered on financial aid and its impact on student success. Hebel (2007) asserted that roadblocks to degree attainment included student academic preparation and financial needs. The author cited a study by the National Center for
Education Statistics that included data which indicated that as the proportion of financially needy students increased, graduation rates declined.

The lack of financial aid support affects student access to higher education as well as their ability to complete their degree. College Board (2012) noted a direct correlation to college completion rates and financial assistance. With the continued rising cost of tuition, as indicated in the report, students and families require financial aid to assist with college costs. Creating innovative financial aid solutions and advocating for expanded and varied general financial aid support will increase access and retention for low income and middle income students.

The results of the survey in the Student Resource Access dimension also revealed that the availability of classes is important to student success. Based on the survey results, it can be concluded the availability of classes is related to student goal completion and graduation rates; students must have access to classes at various days and times to meet needs of a diverse student body.

This diverse student population also includes working adults who would benefit from the university offering classes at different times and days to include evenings, weekends and online courses. The US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2000) reported more students are working to support themselves while pursuing their university degree. Therefore, there is a need to provide options for students that extend beyond the traditional class schedule.

Duniway (2012) supports the concept of effective class scheduling which includes the appropriate number of course sections and the availability of classes that are essential
for students to complete their degree. In addition, Duniway (2012) reiterates that enrollment management not only encompasses the functions of admissions, retention and completion and graduation, but other components as well. The author includes financial aid, retention, graduation rates, student academic progress and the management of course offerings as important “benchmark” processes that are critical to successful enrollment management which impacts student success.

Duniway (2012) further argues that to effectively manage enrollment, each of these enrollment “benchmarks” is important in evaluating the success of the institution’s enrollment management process. The university may review its enrollment management process and incorporate these benchmarks to change and transform its enrollment management model to serve students efficiently and to increase the probability for improving graduation rates.

In the second highest-rated category, the Supplemental Support category, students overall supported an “adequate quality of equipment”, including computers, workstations, and desks as the number one factor contributing to student success. “Quality of instructional materials”, including library books and book store supplies, ranked number two in importance. From these rankings, the message from the students is clear: equipment that is functional, current, and in good condition contributes to their success. If colleges and universities are to serve students efficiently and effectively and remain competitive in the educational network and community, then equipment, especially computers and other technology must be viewed and accepted as an essential function in education. This finding is supported by Kuhlenschmidt and Kacer (2010). The authors
stress students are utilizing technology in every facet of their lives and that students expect to be connected through technology. Technology, the authors reiterate, allows people to connect with one another nearly any place and at any time. Students arrive, the authors continue, "with cell phones, small computers; from programmable calculators, to laptops, to e-book devices" (Kuhlenschmidt & Kacer, 2010, p. 27).

It is imperative that institutions address the rate of degree attainment, which will entail employing new methods to retain and reach students. This will require seeking new approaches and techniques to connect with a new generation of scholars. It also involves determining how the educational system can embrace and provide technology and close the access gap for minority and low income students. All students must be able to compete and have the necessary tools to successfully maneuver through the new wave of learning and the technology based education environment.

According to Tapscott and Williams (2010) the traditional method of education is being decimated. The authors further state that the digital age has arrived and with advent of the internet, there is a profusion of information, and a mass proliferation of participation in many venues including education. The university must, as it determines educational priorities, set and maintain technology standards which include current computers and peripheral systems to address the requirements of a technology based environment. There is no longer a question of whether or not technology is relevant, but a question of how the university will procure and sustain a technologically based environment. It is essential that the university provide state-of-the-art equipment and
tools to support student success to ensure students have the latest skills to compete in a national and global economy and workplace.

Students also agreed in the Supplemental Support category that the quality of instructional materials was a factor in student success. Considerations for such materials may include the age of textbooks and related materials such as recent education periodicals and the variety of the periodicals. University considerations may also include reviewing periodical holdings, access to articles and academic databases, and library resources and bookstore supplies with a specific emphasis on ensuring that relevant information is available. By safeguarding the quality of materials, students are provided the necessary indirect academic support for class projects, assignments, and research.

Matthews (2013) endorsed the value of the library and information access. The author stated that the library is a useful tool for the community and for education. The value of the library and access to information was stated by Matthews (2013) to include the availability of trained professionals to assist in locating quality information and to provide access to a number of periodicals, reference materials, and electronic resources. In addition, as reiterated by Matthews (2013), the library provides free or low cost access to computers, copiers, software, meeting rooms, and instructional classes. Library resources are an invaluable service for students. The library not only provides quiet time and a place to study, but its personnel are an important as an indirect academic resource for guidance and general support for instruction. Library personnel provide assistance such as library orientations and aid students and faculty in locating materials and related information for classroom instruction, assignments and research.
In Student Support, which was ranked third, “Information is readily available about graduation requirements” and “The college environment supports student learning” were identified as important factors that support student success. Information that is readily available about graduation requirements, suggests that students want information available on various platforms and conveyed in as many ways as possible. This factor can be interpreted in several ways including how institutional messages are transmitted and received and how information is disseminated. This includes information between departments. According to the article, *Meeting the Needs of Women Students* (2008), information must be timely. An example cited in the article was the importance of communication between financial aid and students accounts; a delay in relaying a student’s financial aid status could impact their ability to enroll in classes.

Within the Student Support dimension, students also agreed that the college environment is relevant in supporting student learning. This may be interpreted to suggest that the campus environment may affect student performance and outcomes. Kezar (1999) purports as the current research study indicates, that the college environment is important contributor to student success. According to Kezar (1999), the college environment extends outside the classroom and can involve peer groups, campus activities, student government and college housing and depending on the experience, may have a positive impact on student success. The institutional factors that provide for positive campus interactions thus promote a nurturing and welcoming campus environment, according to Hurtado, Kezar, and Carter (as cited in Kezar, 1999, p. 27) include high levels of faculty-student interaction, living on campus, an environment with
the student as the center, and more resources targeted toward student affairs and student involvement. Student involvement could include student government, athletics, and social and community organizations.

The importance of campus climate will be explored further in the qualitative phase review.

**Gender and Race**

The dimensions also included data analyzed by gender and race. The goal of this section in the present study was to explore gender as well as race to identify any specific differences in responses and rankings between males and females and between racial groupings. Additionally, if any pronounced differences were discovered, these findings would aid the university enhancing and/or developing services and programs to address any disproportionate impact as a result of a lack of assistance to these students.

In the comparison between males and females, females tended to report higher agreement ratings across most dimensions, however these differences were not significant. There were some slight differences noted when each dimension item was analyzed separately. For example, females tended to rate significantly higher agreement on the item; “Instructors are excited and communicate this to students”. Over half of the females (54.5%) agreed with this statement, while only 37.5% of males agreed. Furthermore, only 6.8% of females disagreed with the statement, while a higher percentage of males disagreed with the statement (29.2%). Females also tended to agree that they perceive value in instructors having high expectations for students and a commitment to learning as significant contributors to motivation for wanting to graduate.
To establish a learning environment that encourages women to excel, Gallos (1995) promotes a supportive classroom atmosphere. In this setting, instructor behaviors include providing more praise openly, emphasizing participation, and smiling to relay acceptance. Implementing these strategies may, as the current study implies, reinforce an important factor that females suggested as a significant contributor to student success, which is that instructors communicate their enthusiasm to students (e.g., “Instructors are excited and communicate this to students”). *Meeting the Needs of Women Students* (2008) includes commentary that supports the importance of engaging women in the classroom. The report also indicates that women must be challenged and seek personal growth that is motivating.

Similarly, when analyzed by race, students did not significantly differ based on the function of race in each of the dimensions. Students overall tended to agree on contributors to success with no differences in ratings according to race. However, when dimension items were examined individually, certain racial groups reported specific items as significantly more important for student success.

When analyzed individually, access to student support services was reported by those students who identified with Other as a race designator as significantly more important compared to White, Non-Hispanic students. Hispanic, Asian, and Other individuals rated access to academic support service as significantly more important than White, non-Hispanic individuals in terms of contributing to success as potential college graduates.
The designation of support services as an important factor in student success implies that these students need additional support outside the classroom environment to increase the likelihood of their success in terms of retention and access. The research data in this study supports the hypothesis of Zamani (2000) that advocates for the implementation of programs and services to promote the educational success of students of color. The author’s conclusions are aligned with the research data results that indicate that access to support services for students is an important contributor to student success. Zamani (2000) concluded higher education continues to be challenged when serving minority students; retention and attrition are among these hurdles. Zamani (2000) cited several research studies, such as a study by Upcraft (1994) that outlined factors that impacted student success. These factors included gender, race, socioeconomic status and institutional characteristics, such as curriculum and campus climate; factors that were identified in the data results.

**Social and Personal Skills**

Participating students also ranked social and personal skill in order of importance regarding student success as a potential graduate. The ranking of these skills in order of importance provides the university insight into the student perspective of additional attributes that are essential to graduate. Recognition of these skills is critical for the university to understand that student needs extend beyond subject matter content. These skills are also important to student acclimation into a learning environment and play a key role in student engagement and success.
Students ranked self-management and goal setting as two of the most important social skills. Exceptional self-management skills, such as managing activities to achieve objectives, may assist students in coping with a myriad of challenges, such as instructional timelines, university imposed requirements, and competing priorities. Personal skills, such as goal setting assists students to work effectively to achieve their objectives by developing a plan. As a result, students may improve their decision-making skills. They are more focused and make more realistic and wiser decisions, skills that are essential for the college graduate. Reason, Terenzini and Domingo (2007) acknowledged the critical nature of developing social and personal competence and the value of these skills to student learning and cognitive development. However, the authors asserted that these skills must be introduced during the first year experience. During this formative year, social and personal skill development is shaped by student experiences such as the peer environment, the faculty culture, and student engagement. The authors advocated for an all-inclusive integrated first year experience that addresses multi-student, faculty, and institutional influences to mold first year student learning.

Qualitative Discussion

During the qualitative phase, student responses were coded and seven unique themes were identified. The qualitative analyses captured educational and social factors that could not be quantified or were sometimes overlooked or underestimated by a quantitative approach. In the final analysis, seven themes emerged from the conversation with the students: five related to institutional factors, including access to services, counselor and faculty involvement, student engagement and the college role in
supporting student learning. Two ancillary themes, family and peers, were identified as motivating factors in success as a potential graduate. The themes of access to services, counselor and faculty involvement and the college role in supporting student learning were consistent in the ratings of importance in both quantitative and qualitative data.

Two unexpected themes were discovered during the qualitative phase that was not as prevalent in the quantitative phase. The influence of family and peers was more highly emphasized during the one to one interviews with students. These two themes along with the “College Environment Supports Learning” theme emerged more commonly than others.

Interestingly, the influence of family dominated all of the student responses; however, this influence was more prevalent in the Hispanic and African American educational experiences. These students mentioned family more frequently during the one-to-one interviews than the other participants. Nora and Crisp (2009) found that verbal, emotional, and financial support from family were important factors and contributed positively in the academic achievement specifically to Hispanic students. Similar findings were determined for African American students, although Miranda, Webb, Brigman, and Peluso (2007) supported additional research on the influence of family on educational outcomes. Future studies, according to Miranda et al. (2007), should focus on personal, family, and environmental factors to assess their effect on student achievement. Examining these factors may lead to the development of effective strategies that may impact positive change on the university’s learning paradigm.
It can be surmised that the inclusion of family to the greatest extent possible may increase students’ probability to graduate. The inclusion of family may require more resources and a commitment from staff and the university. Existing programs and services would need to seek ways to incorporate the family into activities such as orientations, special family nights, and select major department open houses.

Students suggested that, similar to the influence of family, at times, peers also played an influential role, although frequently the pressure leads to poor decision-making. These peer influences could include interactions through relationships, both personal and professional, and connections and relations with students in campus events and activities, such as clubs and other related campus activities. Peer relations could also include resident life or friendships formed as a result of race and or gender. Based on peer group influences, membership and pressure, many students mentioned they sometimes succumbed to faulty decision-making when faced with making academic choices. Eggens, Werf, and Bosker (2008) explored personal and social networks on students’ behavior and academic performance in an educational setting. The research results were consistent with their findings that indicated that personal networks influenced the students’ behavior through peer pressure and control of their social interactions, connection and friends.

In addition to family and peer influence, the campus environment (climate) and how it affects student success emerged as a significant factor. Student engagement and the campus environment are inextricably related; students engage in activities as a result of exposure in the campus environment. The rationale is justifiable. When students
participate and engage in all aspects of the university the probability of their retention, as well as achievement toward their goal, is greater. The university benefits from dedicated alumni who enjoyed positive experiences during their educational pursuits. The barriers may include resistance on many levels from faculty who just want to teach, and to administration with budget concerns and who question their role and the university’s role in student engagement. Culver (2012) asserts students are saddled with an additional burden when they are faced with an unfamiliar setting and it is the university’s responsibility to help them succeed. Culver (2012) further states that all college personnel, faculty, staff and administrators must stay informed and be engaged with all students to ensure student success and for each student to flourish in a college environment.

There were differences between the responses during the qualitative phase in relation to student experiences and student engagement and campus climate. Caucasian and Hispanic students seemed to enjoy the campus activities, engaged in many of the campus activities and viewed the campus as a pleasant place which offered many opportunities. African American students sought campus engagement through targeted clubs, such as the African American Student Union. African American students reported that when they became involved in other campus activities, many of the events led to first-time experiences, such as becoming homecoming king. The students who were interviewed did not express the same enthusiasm as Caucasian and Hispanic students, and reported feeling uncomfortable at times in particular situations and circumstances. In a study conducted by Nora and Cabrera (as cited by Harper & Hurtado, 2007), it was
concluded that all races did not view the campus climate as positive. Similar to the experiences of the African Americans in this study, disparate treatment were revealed as a source of perception and feelings in the previous study.

To address the needs of a diverse student body, improve the success of retention, and increase progress toward goal completion, Crockett (as cited in Lorenzetti, 2010, p. 3) listed ten elements that may support student success. These elements included developing programs and services centered on students’ specific and diverse needs, and focusing more on students when creating institutional systems, policies, and procedures. Other elements included systematically reviewing and evaluating student learning and educational outcomes, and assessing student expectations and satisfaction with services, programs, and processes. Implementing an assessment tool such as a climate survey may identify different student needs and experiences such as those communicated by African American students. By assessing students and soliciting their input, the university may be provided with an opportunity to create a college environment that truly supports all students.

Other themes that emerged were counselor and faculty involvement, and student engagement. Students indicated that counselor and faculty involvement was significant in their success. EOP counselors, specifically, were consistently cited as instrumental to student success. Students frequently mentioned faculty as advisors and mentors as another positive impact on their academic success.

Additional support for student success was emphasized by Henning (2012) who asserted everyone plays an important role in promoting and nurturing student engagement
and assisting students in achieving success. He continued by stating that the entire university may utilize student engagement to increase institutional success. By assessing student learning outcomes that are tied to student engagement, a better understanding of the importance, and the application and value of student engagement is determined. Therefore, investing in fostering student engagement may also be beneficial to the overall success of the institution, in addition to individual student success.

**Implications**

**Quantitative Data Implications**

In the analysis of the quantitative data, Student Resource Access, and more specifically, financial aid support and availability of classes, was identified as one of the major contributing factors to student success. This may imply that student success is predicated on the need for more resources for students and the expansion of financial assistance, including scholarships, grants, and paid internships. The need for increased and expanded financial assistance challenges the university to seek creative and different solutions to meeting students’ financial needs. This may necessitate increasing ties with private industry, developing corporate partnerships, and networking outside of the university to meet this need.

In addition, availability of classes also has direct implications for enrollment management. An analysis of class scheduling may provide important information to establish if there are gaps in the types of classes offered. In addition, the analysis may assist in determining if scheduling parameters such as the day and time of class offerings
provides a variety of options for students. This evaluation of class rotations may ensure that students have adequate access to required classes.

The Supplemental Support category received the second-highest ratings which included, as the students indicated, updated equipment and computer needs. To maintain and purchase the latest equipment and technology, there may be budget implications as well as other resource implications, such as staff to maintain and service equipment as well as to supervise areas where students have access to equipment. In addition, the quality and recency of equipment also has implications for staff training to provide the services necessary for faculty, staff, and students.

Lastly, responses to the Student Support dimension items have implications for institutions to consider. One way to address this student need would be to provide institutional resources such as staff to oversee and direct a communication network. This allows the institution to enhance or develop multiple avenues or methods to communicate with a goal of improving communication channels about graduation requirements.

**Gender Implications.** Implications for faculty include the importance of being aware of gender differences in their approach to learning which may include modifying or incorporating instructional methodologies that appeal to different learning styles. In addition, implications include the development of self-awareness of individual instructor strengths. Acknowledging the importance of identifying classroom techniques and personal areas that may benefit from development may include the value of understanding the instructional needs of students and the ability to interpret student behaviors. An awareness of gender differences in the classroom may further enhance
student motivation which ultimately may lead to higher retention and student goal completion.

The university may consider incorporating staff development workshops that provides an opportunity for faculty to assess their learning attributes. This may allow faculty to gain a better understanding of their own teaching style as well as to expand their classroom knowledge of integrating techniques and teaching approaches that excite and motivate all students. The present findings corroborated the findings of Toshalis and Nakkula (2012), which emphasized the importance of the faculty role in the development of students. The authors stressed that educators must determine the factors that motivate and engage students; individually and collectively. The authors continued by underscoring the importance of student engagement for implementing student-centered learning. This engagement involved providing opportunities for choice, control, and collaboration with students, which includes the classroom environment.

**Race Implications.** Direct implications of differing survey responses based on race include the need for the university to more closely assess the needs of students in these areas to determine students’ needs in more detail. This may impact the university resources, such as staff time. This may also expand the university’s research agenda to delve more deeply into what services can enhance and improve student support and academic support services for students.

According to Kirsch et al. (2007), there is a new wave of students entering higher education. Therefore, it is important for educators to be prepared to face new challenges and seek new strategies to improve and increase graduation rates. The authors state that
student demographics are rapidly changing with more ethnic students arriving on college campuses and those changes in higher education demographics will continue. With persistent shifts in the student population, Kirsch et al. (2007) asserted that higher education is faced with the challenge of learning about new cultures, student experiences, and different student needs.

**Social and Personal Skills Implications.** Student ranking of social and personal skills may have implications for curriculum improvement, such as incorporating instructional techniques that strengthen student communication skills and may enhance or add opportunities for student personal development and staff development. Mastery of these skills may yield higher goal achievement and support persistence toward graduation. The Association of American Colleges and Universities (2002) stated that the United States needs students who intend to learn and take responsibility for their actions and civic values. The “intentional learner” also possesses discernment qualities of ethical consequences regarding their decisions and actions, effective communication skills and an understanding of self-respect and respect for others.

**Qualitative Data Implications**

An important finding from the qualitative phase of the present study indicated some key differences in how students of different racial groups viewed the importance of university engagement and participation. The implications of this finding suggests that enhanced communication and an increase in an understanding among faculty, staff, and minority students may develop with the implementation of strategies such as targeted
dialogues with students. The goal of the strategies may be the continued improvement in multicultural understanding and race relations.

Hensley and Burmeister (2004) stated that communication is powerful, and effective communication is an art, which is demonstrated by the ability to transmit meaningful and important messages. The authors further stated that by employing skillful communication, any vision can be achieved. Redistributing or redirecting or seeking funds to improve the campus environment which may include enhancing communication and student experiences may be included in the implications. However, this goal must first be established as a campus priority.

Additionally, counselor and faculty involvement with students also emerged as a prominent theme. Therefore, the development of faculty as mentors and advisors, as well as increasing access to counselors may be influential factors in student success. However, many faculty may resist because they view their role as purely to teach. Baker and Griffin (2010) suggest that learning is social process and faculty, serving as advisors, can build influential and powerful relationships that may aid in students’ personal and professional development. The authors continued by asserting that faculty advisors can help students navigate the academic requirements by providing advisement on academic procedures and regulations, specifically, major and degree requirements. As a result, fostering the important role that faculty play in student development may be beneficial to students on both an individual and institutional level.
Limitations

One primary limitation is that this is self-report research, with the potential for bias when students respond. In addition, this was an internet survey and the environment and the conditions under which the survey was administered could not be controlled. For example, student responses could have been impacted by their experiences that day or their disposition. Perhaps the survey was completed in a noisy environment and the student’s concentration was not at its peak or perhaps they were rushed to complete the survey due to another time conflict.

Another problem with self-report written measures is that it is difficult to know how a participant interpreted each item. To mitigate these potential problems each dimension was defined and examples were provided for items that may have been potentially unclear or ambiguous. The survey was also developed so that it was brief and easy to complete.

An additional noteworthy limitation was that the racial group samples were relatively small and disproportionate. Because some of the groups had as few as six to eight participants, this restricted the power of the statistical analysis and the ability to draw conclusions.

Although the data and research study were interesting and provided information and data to support change, a follow-up study on the six students in the qualitative phase should prove beneficial in determining how personal and social factors aided in student success. In addition, long term results will not be available on any institutional change as a result of this study.
The study also does not provide an avenue for feedback at the institutional or student levels; all discussed outcomes are theoretical and based on the results of external research. For example, although the priorities at the institutional and departmental levels may change, the university may also review its mission, goals, and values for greater consideration and accommodation of student needs.

Future limitations include not knowing whether partnerships were established such as greater collaboration and support of student engagement, to the integration of family into university activities and program. Other limitations include not being privileged to whether or not the data encouraged internal evaluation and discouraged domestic resistance for the benefit of the university and students.

There are additional challenges: “Economic conditions, eroding public confidence, accountability demands and demographic shifts” (p. 1) as cited by the American College Personnel Association (2008), are a few of the external threats that higher education must confront. These threats affect the entire university as stakeholders struggle to maintain programs and services as well as leverage resources and relationships to serve students effectively.

Conclusions

For purposes of this section, conclusions are presented within each of the two topics in the research study and their importance in increasing graduation rates. These topics are: 1) institutional factors and 2) student social and personal skills.

The conclusions are based on the institutional factors in the three highest rated dimensions that students perceived as contributing to their success. Conclusions are also
included for social and personal skills identified as important to influencing graduation rates.

Although the study measured eight dimensions, students reported the greatest agreement to the following as significant in increasing graduation rates: Student Resource Access, Supplemental Support, and Student Support. Factors were associated with and described in each dimension. Based on student responses, there are specific factors that the most important in increasing graduation rates.

Students rated the dimension Student Resources Access: Institutional Accessibility as the most important dimension to their success as a potential college graduate. For the seven items in the Student Resource Access dimension, “Financial Aid support and availability” and “Availability of classes to complete my degree” were rated with the most agreement by survey respondents. Survey items, “Variety and scheduling of classes”, “Ease of enrolling in classes”, and “Access to student support services” were rated subsequently. Lastly, although rated favorably, survey items, “Access to Counseling Services” and “Access to academic support services” were rated lowest in the dimension.

Students require financial assistance and access to classes to meet their degree requirements and have concluded these two factors are the most critical to their success. Based on the student ratings, the factors in this dimension are the most important to student success and in increasing graduation rates. In conclusion, it is essential that the university support student success and increase the potential for more graduates by adding resources to areas in this dimension.
Students also rated Supplemental Support described as physical resources as important to their success as a potential college graduate. The four survey items in the Supplemental Support dimension referred to the quantity and quality of equipment for student success (e.g., computers and workstations) and also the quantity and quality of instructional materials for student success (e.g., library books and book store supplies). All four items were rated fairly similarly, with quality of instructional materials receiving the highest rating. Quality of equipment was rated second-highest, followed by quantity of equipment and quantity of instructional materials.

Based on the students’ ratings, quality is more important than quantity. Students appear to prefer less equipment that is of high quality and a better quality of materials rather a large amount of equipment and materials that is not in good condition. Similarly, it can be concluded that materials factored into student success must be recent.

In the Student Support dimension, students identified factors that have contributed to their motivation to graduate. Survey respondents rated the item, “Information is readily available about graduation requirements” with the highest agreement. The item with the second-highest rating was “The college environment supports student learning,” which was followed by the item “Instructors are committed to student learning” and lastly, “Instructors have high expectations for all students.”

Students must have information that is easy to access and in as many forms as possible to address a variety of student needs, including the visual and auditory learner. This includes electronic and paper forms of distribution. An additional conclusion is that students are motivated by an environment that values and respects them. The results of
the study also indicate that students also elect to be engaged with instructors who are
dedicated to students and who expect excellence.

Students reported that personal and social skills are important to student success
and essential for student development in increasing graduation rates. Self-Management
skills were frequently ranked as the most important social skill, along with
Communication, Decision-Making Problem-Solving, and Peer Relation Skills. Students
reported Goal Setting Skills as an important personal skill, as well as Time Management,
Planning, Flexibility, and Self-Appraisal.

An important conclusion is that institutional factors are not the only contributors
to academic success and graduation rates. Students value and understand the importance
of personal development in achieving their goals. Student needs extend beyond the
classroom and the university can benefit from understanding the significance of student
personal development. Students must be adept at these skills to become successful in
many aspects of their lives, including improving their likelihood to graduate.

Based on the findings of this research, students are aware of the factors that
impact academic success and that are most likely to lead to graduation. By soliciting
input from students and allowing such input to guide policy, universities may increase
graduation rates. The awareness of student needs examined in this study must be met by
the faculty, staff, and administration if student graduation rates are to improve.

Finally it must be noted that the student voice is pivotal in providing feedback
specifically in identifying factors, and student social and personal skills that support
graduation rates. The student, as a primary stakeholder in education, is the voice that is
critical to institutional change which can lead to student success and improved graduation rates.

**Recommendations for Further Study and Dissemination**

Future studies may include a follow up inquiry on the students who participated in the qualitative phase of the initial study to evaluate their progress. This follow up may also be used to determine whether the university has effectively prepared the students to graduate. In addition, further research may continue to assess dominant qualitative themes that were identified by students:

- The Family and its Role in Graduation Success
- Student Engagement and its Role in the Potential Success of Graduate
- Life Skills and their Impact on Student Success
- The Campus Environment and its Role in Student Success
- Developing a Multicultural Environment that Supports Student Success
- The Faculty Advisor and their Role in Student Success

Research studies on these topics will assist universities by examining student needs and provide recommendations for expanding or prioritizing campus resources. Further research will also assist in determining the validity of the themes in facilitating student learning and in the achievement of the ultimate goal: implementing meaningful reform in higher education as well as improving student retention, goal completion and graduation rates.
**Dissemination of Results**

The study will be disseminated to the administration at SDSU and Benedictine University and will be made available according to both institutions’ protocol and procedures. In addition, the study may be presented pending the university recommendation in public venues such as conferences and forums.

The study may also be presented at select conferences as identified by the researcher and other appropriate settings such as Governing Board meetings and Chief Instructional Officers and Chief Student Services Officers’ meetings. The study will be made available upon request to individuals and professionals in the field and higher education organizations.

An abstract of the study may be published as requested in newsletters and/or summarized for other educational purposes and may be submitted to relevant academic and professional journals.
REFERENCES


Meeting the needs of women students. (2008). Distance Education Report, 12(18), 6-8.


APPENDICES

Appendix A

Support Letter from Vice President
APPENDIX A: SUPPORT LETTER FROM VICE PRESIDENT

MEMORANDUM

DATE: August 6, 2013
TO: Dr. Ailene Weller-Clarke, Chair of the Institutional Review Board
    Benedictine University
FROM: Dr. Reginald Blaylock, Associate Vice President for Student Affairs
    San Diego State University
RE: San Diego State University, Educational Opportunity Program
TITLE: "A Mixed-Methods Study of Factors, Student Characteristics, and Qualities that Lead to Success for Potential Graduates at a Public Four-Year University"

I write to express my support for Donna Dudley in her dissertation proposal "A Mixed-Methods Study of Factors, Student Characteristics, and Qualities that Lead to Success for Potential Graduates at a Public Four-Year University," to analyze data collected expressly for her dissertation project.

This study is designed to identify and explore institutional factors, student characteristics, and qualities at a public four-year university that lead to the success of potential graduates. The study is a mixed methods analysis of institutional factors, student characteristics (i.e., gender and race) and qualities that support graduation rates. The quantitative analysis will include student academic experiences and outcomes as well as personal and social skills examining their influence on graduation rates.

The qualitative analysis will explore these attributes and factors at a four-year university from the student perspective. The student point of view will be examined to determine what is instrumental in the success of potential graduates. The study will highlight the student voice in higher education and include their perspectives on what is effective in increasing the number of college graduates.

Participants are prospective student graduates identified by a college or department within the university who are scheduled to graduate. The study focuses on students in higher education and includes their analysis and perspectives of what is effective in increasing the number of college graduates. An additional goal of the study is to understand the student viewpoint and provide an opportunity for student voices, experiences, and perspectives to be heard.

The proposal will be submitted to the San Diego State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) once approved by Benedictine University.

Under the supervision of Acting EOP Director Beverly Warren, Donna Dudley will be provided data from the student database for the purpose of this study to perform this analysis.

If you have further questions, please contact me at blaylock@mail.sdsu.edu or (619) 594-5211.

CC: Donna Dudley
    Benedictine University Doctoral Student
    Higher Education and Organizational Change
    (Student ID: 521583199)

*Note: Title was later changed to "Student Voices: Factors, Characteristics, and Qualities that Lead to Success for Potential Graduates at a Public Four-Year University*
Appendix B

Approval Letter from SDSU Institutional Review Board
Dear Ms. Arnold-Dudley,

I apologize for the delay in my response. I looked at your submitted materials. Everything looks good and you are good to go! You may now conduct this research project at San Diego State University.

Good luck with your research!

Sincerely,

Vicki Jakushokas  
Research Affairs Analyst  
Division of Research Affairs  
San Diego State University  

Office Location: Gateway Center, 3505-A  
Mail Code: 1933  
Direct Line: (619) 594-3380  
vjakushokas@mail.sdsu.edu
Appendix C

Survey
### General Questions

Please select one answer for each factor that best corresponds to your opinion.

3. **Student Support:** What factors have contributed to your motivation for wanting to graduate?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree, Nor Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instructors have high expectations for all students.</td>
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<td>Instructors are committed to student learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Information is readily available about graduation requirements</td>
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<tr>
<td>The college environment supports student learning.</td>
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4. **Academic Experiences:** Academic experiences that have, or may, contribute to my success as a potential college graduate:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree, Nor Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classes are available to assist in meeting requirements.</td>
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<td>The curriculum is relevant and useful.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Instructors are sufficiently available.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Instructors or staff mentoring contributed to my success.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### General Questions

Please select one answer for each factor that best corresponds to your opinion.

5. **Institutional Support: Institutional factors important to my success as a potential college graduate:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Neither, Nor Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The university initiates frequent contact with students to support academic success.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Interaction by college staff supports student success (e.g., Admissions, Financial Aid)</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>There is evidence that the college values students</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>There is evidence that the college provides quality customer service to support students.</td>
<td>X</td>
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</table>

6. **Support Staff: Institutional factors important to my success as a potential college graduate:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Neither, Nor Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quantity of instructional support staff is adequate to support students (e.g., teaching assistants, lab assistants).</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Quality of instructional support staff is adequate to support students (e.g., teaching assistants, lab assistants).</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantity of professional staff is adequate to support students (e.g., clerical, maintenance).</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of professional staff is adequate to support students (e.g., clerical, maintenance).</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

**General Questions**

Please select one answer for each factor that best corresponds to your opinion.

7. **Supplemental Support: Physical resources important to my success as a potential college graduate:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Neither, Nor Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quantity of equipment is adequate to support student success (e.g., computers, workstations, desks).</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of equipment is adequate to support student success (e.g., computers, workstations, desks).</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Quantity of instructional materials is adequate to support student success (e.g., library books, book store supplies).</td>
<td>X</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of instructional materials is adequate to support student success (e.g., library books, book store supplies).</td>
<td>X</td>
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</table>

8. **Student Resources Access: Institutional accessibility important to my success as a potential college graduate.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Moderately Important</th>
<th>Of Little Importance</th>
<th>Unimportant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Financial Aid support and availability.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Access to Counseling Services.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to student support services (e.g., EOP, Career Services, Military and Veterans Services).</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Access to academic support services (e.g., tutoring).</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ease of enrolling in classes.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Variety and scheduling of classes.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Availability of classes to complete my degree.</td>
<td>X</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
## Rank Order Questions

Please rank the following items from highest (1) to lowest (5) from the drop-down box (options will move up/down after individual ranking entries are made).

### 9. Ranking of Social Skills: Rank in order the most important social skills that supported your success as a potential college graduate.

- Communication
- Decision-making
- Peer-relation skills (def., working well with other students)
- Problem-solving
- Self-management skills (def., managing your activities to achieve objectives)

### 10. Ranking of Personal Skills: Please rank the most important personal skills that supported your success as a potential college graduate.

- Goal setting (def., planning and pursuing a goal to completion)
- Time management (def., scheduling your time)
- Self-appraisal (def., taking inventory of goals and skills)
- Flexibility (def., able to adapt to change)
- Planning (def., preparation for a task or goal)

## Open-Ended Responses

Please limit responses to no more than one small paragraph (approximately 500 characters).

### 11. What do you think are the most important issues that need to be addressed in relation to helping students graduate?

### 12. Recall the most effective instructor you had. What were the qualities that would support student success in obtaining a degree?

### 13. Additional comments (please include any other experiences or observations on your path to obtaining a degree):
### Demographic Information

Please select the appropriate demographic for each category.

**Please indicate your gender:**
- [ ] Male
- [ ] Female

**Please indicate your race:**
- [ ] African-American
- [ ] American-Indian/Alaskan Native
- [ ] Asian & Pacific-Islander
- [ ] Hispanic
- [ ] White, Non-Hispanic
- [ ] Other (please specify) [ ]

---

### Supplemental Question: Are You Interested in a Follow-Up Interview?

Your participation in the second phase of this study will further enhance and contribute to the value of the research. If you are interested in participating in a follow-up interview, please complete the "Follow-Up Interview Contact Information" portion of this page.

Otherwise, please select "Done" to submit your completed survey.

**Follow-Up Interview Contact Information (Optional)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First name</td>
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<td>Last name</td>
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<td>Phone</td>
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<td>Best time to call</td>
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<td>Preferred e-mail address</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D

Student Responses to Open-Ended Survey Questions
APPENDIX D: STUDENT RESPONSES TO OPEN-ENDED SURVEY QUESTIONS

11. What do you think are the most important issues that need to be addressed in relation to helping students graduate? (63 responses total)

- I think students need to be more informed of the resources provided for them on the campus. I also believed students need more than just one counselor for 100 students and be able to meet with their counselor one on one for more than fifteen minutes.
- Flexibility among the professor to the students.
- What units and classes to take, the time set up of what to take in the fall and spring.
- Financial aid and motivations
- I noticed the quality of my education greatly improved from freshman to senior year, I think smaller class sizes as well as more experienced instructors for essential 100-200 level classes might be helpful in building a foundation of success.
- Don't just help them graduate, help them become more educated. There seems to be a focus on getting students out through the "machine" with a diploma. But that doesn't mean they learned anything. The adage "Cs get degrees" is somewhat of a testament to that. Part of the issue is that most of the time GEs seem like a waste of time. Seeing as they really serve no purpose, they just become a burden on the student. Another thing on the checklist, and therefore they look for the easiest way out. I'm not saying that students should be strong-armed into taking classes. But, there's something broken with the approach that we've been taking for a while now. Just because students are graduate, doesn't mean they're becoming educated; which is the ultimate purpose of college.
- Receiving help such as financial aid for more students to qualify.
- Offering classes on Fall and Spring not just one semester because if you don't take it then you have to wait a year to take it and that is just more time and money that one has to spend.
- Making sure they have signed up for the right classes in order to graduate.
- Internships and volunteering are topics that I believe should be addressed because it is important and necessary to have once you have completed your career and start seeking for a job.
- No real problem, but maybe having better access to counselors who connect with students and explain the path to a successful graduation.
• Quality instructors, availability of financial aid/assistance, sufficient amount of classes with a good variety that are needed to graduate, and adequate resources (books, lab equipment, desks, etc.) are integral to helping students graduate.
• Cost of books and supplies, class availability and accurate counseling.
• I think there should be more help with tutoring not just in math and English but more complex majors example engineering, business, and other majors.
• Showing them a flow chart of the classes that they need to take in order to graduate by a specific date.
• Access to a variety of academic resources.
• Students who aren't as motivated as others to know the different departments and resources on campus should be reached. Like an email should be sent to all students with the most important resources offered that will help with ensuring students are prepared to graduate.
• Make sure you take classes you need
• Make sure to keep up with your counselor
• Start adding more professors and classes.
• Having someone that can help the students find career opportunities and more professors available per class.
• More tutors should be available and promoted so that students know tutoring is an option.
• There needs to be more classes available to students. Some students like myself have to wait a whole semester for a class to be offered.
• I believe that the most important issue that helps a student graduate is planning. Taking a moment and deciding on what the individual wants to achieve during a time period is a fundamental step towards graduation. A contingency plan is crucial when things do not turn out as expected. Planning leads to preparation which in turn makes graduation a possibility.
• I believe that the costs of attending a university need to be addressed. Even after financial aid and assistance through organizations, the cost of books, tuition, and housing really adds up. This requires students to take out loans and/or work while going to school. Speaking from experience, working and going to school really puts a strain on my well being, most notably with my inability to sleep enough.
• Making required classes readily available. The shortage in professors and classes has cost me 4 additional semesters before being able to graduate.
• I think there has to be more flexibility in class schedules in order for students that work to not have to go out of the way to pick any classes just to make sure they meet the unit requirements. Also, there has to be more classes because sometimes
students have to wait until next semester to do some prerequisites and are unable 
to take the classes that require those prerequisites.

- Giving them the information they need in order to help students graduate.
- Teachers need to be more involved in helping students with questions not just 
  lecture out of a book.
- Students should be given the adequate tools to decide which career path to select. They also should know the various job options for that particular career.
- A smaller learning community and developing relationships with professors.
- Better long term planning with students. Students should be able to talk to an 
  adviser and talk year long goals and classes they can take so that they are better 
  prepared for future classes.
- Discipline and flexibility.
- Communication is an important skill that needs to be addressed in relation to 
  helping students graduate. Students should feel confident when talking to a 
  counselor.
- More class availability without a doubt. Every semester it seems like every class 
  I need is only available at 9:30 on Tuesday/Thursday.
- The most important issues that need to be addressed in relation to helping students 
  graduate, in my personal opinion, is positively changing faculty perspective 
  towards the students. In particular, the sense of age discrimination. One of the 
  major issues I have experienced is faculty discrimination.
- Financial aid and cost of books.
- Students need to talk to advisors to fully understand their requirements for 
  graduation.
- The issues of allowing graduating students higher maximum limit of classes they 
  can register for during the registration process is extremely important so that 
  students can graduates on time and be able to plan well for their oncoming future.
- Communication about when to decide to graduate and how to achieve it.
- The availability of classes has a strong role in helping students graduate. Classes 
  that are offered only once a year definitely held me back, especially because I 
  changed my major in between the fall and spring semester.
- I think making sure there are good counselors to reach. My EOP counselor has 
  helped me more than my major counselor and that was important for me to reach 
  where I am at. Also making sure the school support different programs with the 
  resources they need helps and sometimes the school overlooks that. Otherwise I 
  feel my teachers have really tried everything they could and support their students 
  in everywhere they can.
• Class availability is a major issue. Fortunately, classes are "reserved" for nursing students but I know other non-nursing who didn't/will not graduate on time because a GE/major course is already full. Crashing is another main issue as well, especially when you have seniors trying to get into a limited amount of spots.

• Often times colleges and universities look at the academic support as the focal point in helping students graduate but I think that campus climate and inclusion is a huge factor that isn't always addressed at the university level. For many students, especially non-local students, the campus climate that the university fosters affects their everyday life outside of the classroom.

• Help the students with their curriculum for which classes to take in order to graduate. By helping the student in the right path to graduate in a timely manner. In order to do this, we have to have more counselors.

• Mandatory meetings in advisory office.

• I believe students need more guidance and advice from their counselor or whoever so that they can come up with a plan or have some sort of direction after graduation. It is not okay that so many students are lost after they graduate or they have not set themselves up for a career.

• I think that in order to prepare students for potential careers the university needs to offer classes that prepare students for theses careers. Those classes need to teach students how to use programs that are needed, the skills that are required, what the structure of their new is and how to move up in it.

• One major issue that should be addressed that would greatly help students graduate is the variety of classes offered during each semester. Registration time can be very stressful due to the fact that there are not enough classes to meet the needs of the students who need to enroll in them. Many times the classes are too large and there are few lectures available to students. This forces students to have to "crash" courses which in my experience has been a complete disaster. Thankfully I was able to eventually get into the required courses that I needed to graduate, but I cannot say the same thing for many of my peers. Another issue is the diversity of the instructors and students. It is clear that SDSU has a lot of work ahead of them in getting more students and instructors from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds to come to this school. Those who are of ethnic minorities tend to be taught by instructors outside of their ethnicity and are in classes with students who are once again ethnically different. This creates a problem in that students do not feel welcome and are discouraged from continuing on with their studies. Providing a more diverse campus will help students feel like they belong and will increase their chances of not only coming to college but also graduating.
- Advising and graduation requirements.
- Support from family and friends. A lot of motivation
- More accessibility to Counseling, guidance and resources for students in crisis or having financial or family problems.
- Being able to address the importance of having a map plan and taking classes at a cc to graduate on time.
- Financial aid, student to instructor ratio, outside resources.
- Students need to be more aware of resources available. More importantly, students need to be encouraged to utilize resources.
- Better student teacher relationship in the classroom.
- All students should have access to academic counselors on the same basis as EOP students. We absolutely need more academic counseling availability especially for commuters and transfer students. Students should also be given more hands on experiences related to their major early on instead of only allowing upper division students opportunities to get experiences in their field. This can help student make more solid decisions on their major of choice and what to do with it.
- There needs to be more access to scholarships and financial aid. Every year the number of scholarships that are offered every semester diminish. There are many students in SDSU who wouldn't be able to graduate if it weren't for those scholarships, so I think there needs to be more scholarships for students.
- Information access to students about how to and what to. Also a lot more personal development.
- Involvement on a college campus to let the student know of the involvement and how it can increase their motivation to stay on campus. Therefor knowing more about the resources and then making use of them.
- The EOP counselors need to be better prepared, they misguided me twice.
- Help students prepare for what they are going to do when they graduate.
- Providing them an education based on facts and statistics that are relevant, not feeding them ideals professors have about a particular subject. Also, to not deprive students of their education by being disorganized, unable to convey information about the subject due to their communication skills.
- Tutoring.
12. Recall the most effective instructor you had. What were the qualities that would support student success in obtaining a degree? (64 responses total)

- He was a great listener and the way the class was taught was more effective because everyone was participating and the subjects were of great interest to me. He also took his time to get to know his 80 students and interact with each and one of them.
- My human physiology instructor
- He teaches the class as if it was the most interesting in the world, he motivates students to follow him, and in that matter engages the student in the subject.
- My history professor. Even though I am not a history major, his lectures are amazing and very entertaining. He remembers every detail about the WWI and WWII. All he does is stand there and talk about the events, but somehow it is very interesting. I ended up taking WWII for just interest.
- Knowledgeable, helpful, and great communicator.
- The best instructor I had had passion and enthusiasm when discussing the subject. Her curriculum was very demanding and strict, but this helped me to learn to focus and manage my time appropriately and gave me a great understanding of the material.
- Being approachable, straightforward, flexible, and honest. He asked that students be honest with him at all times, and that would open doors for them. For instance, he said that if you needed to take the test earlier or later, to just let him know in advance. It didn't matter if it was because of your 21st birthday was the day of the test, or if a family emergency occurred. All he asked was that students be honest, and proactive about their education. He was also, more than willing to help students outside of the classroom. Whether it was going over material, getting notes, or going over the test to see what had gone wrong.
- Well organized and planned ahead. Has the semester schedule ready and teaches with a passion, that is they are not boring.
- He used real life examples to explain the concepts and he was funny and kept the class engaged which made the class fun and learning the material much easier.
- My RWS instructor used many methods to help in learning. He also was passionate with his students and wanted them to succeed.
- The most effective instructor that I had was one of my Spanish teachers. What makes her stand out is her enthusiasm for teaching and her willingness to help her students achieve a good grade in class, she always made herself available for students and always had a motivating attitude.
I had a professor who really tied in the material we were learning in class to the real world. This helped us business students since we need more real world experiences to prepare us for post-graduation. This professor was very enthusiastic and we could tell she loved the material and teaching it, this was a big plus, makes it easier to learn and retain material.

This instructor was very approachable and willing to help. They were invested in their students, passionate about what they were teaching, and more than willing to answer questions and help students to understand content.

Wanted success for all students, fair and enriching curriculum.

The most effective instructor showed so much enthusiasm for the subjects she taught and also gave real life advise.

Reminding them of the tasks that they need to get done and the deadline as well.

A teacher whom is a leader, who has the ability to critically think and problem solve. The instructor must be an effective communicator and must demonstrate a clear understanding of cultural competence.

My sociology professor was the most effective because he constantly engaged the students in constant dialogue. We were able to come up with our own ideas and contribute to the class and had it move on our own learning style. He was also very enthusiastic about the subject and his passion was addicting and it made everyone in the class love the subject.

A caring instructor who is helpful teacher and always has time for her students.

A professor that will take all the time they need to help a student when they ask for it. Professors that are available for the students.

Someone who cares about teaching the students to be globally aware and self-reliant. Another important aspect is that he remembers his students by name.

That the teacher always asked us and reminded us of our assignments and offered to help us. I know teachers have office hours to help us out but sometimes students forget that.

My professor was always there when we needed help. Not only did he have office hours but virtual office hours where we could set up meeting and talk about grades. He was very helpful and was interested in helping students find a career and graduate.

The ability and desire to make each class session an experience rather than a lecture is a quality owned by an effective instructor. Their genuine desire to teach is easily perceptible and their desire to. In other words, they actually make the learning subject interesting and turn it into a memorable experience.

The most effective instructor I had obviously loved BOTH teaching itself and the subject that they taught. This excitement towards their subject made me want to
learn and it also allowed them to better explain to the students. Also, it is important that professors make themselves available for questions. I've had professors that are technically available for questions during office hours, but there are so few office hours and so many people needing help that you don't get a chance to ask your question.

- Public Health Epidemiology instructor is the most effective instructor I have had. He was very clear in speaking and communicating lectures. He was very experienced and knowledgeable and knew how to transmit the information to his students to keep them engaged.
- The most effective instructor I've had genuinely cared about his students and motivated us to learn.
- Brutally honest, willing to help, prepared me for problem-solving.
- This instructor did minimal lecture and did real life projects and tests were focused on real life not just text book.
- The most effective instructor I had is passionate about what he teaches and exerts that passion in each lecture. His energy is contagious and it makes any student want to learn.
- Letting the student think for themselves instead of lecturing and having them regurgitate it back out
- My ornithology instructor and he was one of the best instructors that I have had during my time at school. He was very organized and knew his material very well. He would help us learn by asking us different types of questions that would help us learn to identify the birds we were to suppose to learn. He was very helpful when we asked questions and in guiding us during our research project. He was always easy to approach with questions we had and available to us.
- Good communication skills and clarify what he expected from students.
- His goals were clear. He was open to student's ideas and thoughts. Was never too inclined to his believes. Took participation in group activities by relating topics to his own personal experience.
- This instructor was extremely passionate about their field. They also were very focused on student success. The professor made us dig deeper than just the surface of the material. He was extremely inspiring and I truly believe that if every teacher could impose his qualities there would be no such thing as a (heavily quoted) "bad" teacher.
- The most effective instructor I have had was flexible to meet for her office hours. She was open-minded and culturally sensitive to our class's diverse views. Unlike many professors, she encouraged questions and created a sense of secureness in the class room. She also created a sense of unity with our different perspectives.
and facilitated amazing class discussions that allowed for students to see the views of others. Learning was fun with this professor because of her passion for public health was reflected in every lecture, her positive and overall professional character reflected from myself and my colleagues.

- Office hours, homework aid, flexible, nice, caring, approachable.
- My most effective instructor was a very interesting and accomplished man. The fact that he was relatively.
- Made me value his lessons. He was something of an eccentric personality.
- An effective instructor would possess characteristics of creativity to present the material in an appealing manner, assertiveness to communicate to students what is expected of him or her, understanding to establish quality relationships with his or her students and humor because it allows students to learn better when the instructor can enjoy himself with the materials he is presenting.
- Reliability.
- My engineering instructor who taught the most difficult engineering course: Hydraulics. Although this class was tough, it was mine and many of my classmates’ favorite class. He really had a passion for what he taught and he definitely knew what he was talking about. He made sure everyone knew the current topic before moving on to the next. By asking random students surprise questions throughout the class, we were kept on our toes and made sure we had looked over our notes previous to the class time.

- The instructors that I had that push me into my success are the ones that challenge me, but also are encouraging and care. They like to gain a deep connection with their students and help with obtaining goals and making them realistic for what you need.
- My Acute Care Nursing clinical instructor. She is ALWAYS willing to help, VERY responsive to e-mails, collaborates with other nursing faculty to make sure we are all getting the same quality of experience at hospitals, and communicates very well. Every time we were on the unit, not only does she test us on every medication we have to administer or procedures our patient/s has/have for that day; she also emphasizes the importance of effective communication between nurses-doctors, nurses-nurses, etc. She treats us as though we are already practicing nurses, not just students. She was the most challenging, yet I've learned so much from her in that clinical rotation that'll help me prepare for Critical Care Nursing and my career as well.
- The most effective professor I have has sat down with me and told me what I needed to improve both in and outside of the classroom. This professor taught me
how to make a clear point and how to express myself in a way that others can understand and process what I'm saying.

- The most effective instructor I had was the professor in Bio 326 of Drugs, herbs, and medicines. He was an inspirational instructor. He cares for the student and that is the quality that would help students become for successful. His class was the one class I come to enjoy and would wish that the class would continue. If we have more professors that are inspirational, many more students will have a better chance of obtaining a degree.

- Making information as simple as possible and instead of 3 exams in a semester, 5 quizzes so we don't get quizzed on too much info at a time.

- A passionate and motivated instructor. He wants students to succeed and be positive productive members of society. He used different types of media and instructional tools to teach us as well. It also helped that he had field knowledge of Criminal Justice.

- She is the most effective because she is so passionate and showed me materials that were relevant to my potential career, she showed me what types of programs I would need and most importantly she cared about me and my classmates lives and showed us respect.

- The most effective instructor that I can recall was the English professor that I had my first semester in college. What I remember most about her was that she was stern and she demanded respect. She was honest and clear about her high expectations for her students. It was obvious that she knew what the subject matter for the course and although she was a tough grader, I appreciated that she actually took that time to give constructive feedback. Throughout the entire semester she was supportive. If a student had questions about a concept or a comment she made on their essay, she would set time aside in class or after class to address each students' concerns. She was also future oriented. She always had us thinking about our futures and she gave great advice. She would say that learning to write well would be one of the keys to our success in college and she was right.

- She maintained communication with me in regards to assignments and helped me improve my writing skills. She showed interest in my success when I was struggling in her class.

- My human physiology professor. He had the most unique style of teaching. His main objective was for students to learn and he would repeat the concept until he was sure everyone understood. He taught and tested students to succeed, not to fail. He was approachable, helpful, friendly and very knowledgeable. He was the best professors I had at SDSU.
- Clear curriculum and goals. Objective and always teaching relevant material and excellent writing skills.
- The professor challenged us in class and asked direct questions to help us understand the material instead of plain lecturing.
- Passionate, articulate, available for help, thorough.
- My academic advisor for my major. They were supportive, insightful, and empathetic.
- Availability of the instructor to give one on one attention.
- My instructor was approachable, relatable and straight forward. She paired empathy with reality never allowing me to wallow in frustration and always challenged my thought process forcing me to think more constructively.
- Use a lot of pictures and real life examples as well as bring in materials to show information.
- My professor was very accessible and when I made a mistake, he wouldn't make me feel uncomfortable. Rather, he would suggest ways that I could improve. He would also be very helpful in providing materials I could learn more about a specific topic and referred me to interesting websites as well. Lastly, his approach to the topic was easy to relate to and was almost never confused by the material being presented.
- They cared more for me as a person than a student.
- They taught me life lessons and not as much by the book lessons, their stuff mattered.
- I have a few but the qualities they had were engaging, inspiring, and was a hands on experience.
- Explaining how the classes relate to grad. Requirements and how they can take a lot of the general requirements at community colleges to save time and money.
- I would have access to his office hours and will give me advice for internships
- My epidemiology professor. He has the following qualities: organized, no curve, because unlike other professors he takes time to make exams weeks before he hands them out to us and proof reads them. He covers all material in class. Although the exams are challenging the mean is around 75 percent which distributes grades in a “fair” way, has office hours twice a week, is willing to answer any question, and is never offended if we think some of the information he provides is biased. He is willing to clear any doubt. Is professional at all times, and has great communication skills
- Passion for the subject. Notes on blackboard
13. Additional comments (please include any other experiences or observations on your path to obtaining a degree): (38 responses total)

- Having more time with professors, such as more office hours.
- N/A
- Overall, the school has a wealth of resources available help students achieve academic success. EOP counseling greatly helped me in my beginning years on knowing what classes to take and how I should pace the requirements.
- Personally, I found myself to be self motivated and figured out a lot of the things I needed to do within my first year. That really helped me. For instance, before my freshman year officially started; I came to campus every day for a week, looked for my classrooms and just walked around campus every day for a few hours. This allowed me to become acquainted with the layout of the campus, and the best way of getting to my next destination. During that time I also learned how to use the library, got my library username and school ID. So by the time school started I didn't really feel like a newbie, since I kind of had a sense of what I was doing and where I was going.
- Having professors that make the time for students is important, instead of being busy with their research.
- Study groups were the best way to A's a test and meet new friends.
- One thing I wish they would encourage more is shadowing and having the career services department partner with several people working in different fields. This way if students are not very sure what career path they want to take they can always shadow someone already in the field to help them make a decision.
- I've notice that there is a lack of support among my peers to obtain college degrees.
- I find all of the counselors very helpful and have been able to guide me throughout my path of obtaining a degree.
- I work with SDSU alumni who helped me graduate by focusing on my grades so that I could improve my GPA, which helped me greatly because I had the support of people who've been in my situation before.
- I noticed the school stopped caring so much for students and spending the money in other ways that would make them more profit. We no longer have an urgent care at Capulli, and that was a major help to some of my friends and myself when we really needed help. Considering the age group 18-22, most of the students lose medical insurance as soon as they step on campus, so that was a great benefit. There are more buildings that are being built for students to spend money instead of investing in themselves.
I find parental motivation an influential portion of student's academic career. My parents constantly grant me advice and words of encouragement. Friends can offer support but uplifting words coming from parents efficiently refuels a student's moral.

As much as there are things that need to be changed within the institution, I believe that a lot of change needs to happen within the student. They need to learn to motivate themselves and strive for the best. Some possible ways that this can be assisted is through more opportunities for hands on experiences to show what they should be striving for. I also think it is important to educate students on successful study habits.

I think remedial classes are a disadvantage to minority students. For instance, I did half a semester of remedial classes which means I will be graduating a bit later. Most students that take these classes are minority students from public schools.

Keep working hard.

Having to do a lot of it on my own or getting in groups because instructors at SDSU are only available during "office hours" and even then that only gives you five minutes of their time.

Experience in your field of study is crucial. Taking it beyond the books and beyond lectures to the "real world" and seeing how the principles we learn in classrooms is applied in the field is important.

The prices of textbooks are too darn high!

I think other than academic support, moral support is greatly needed because many youth at this point in time, including myself, are going through life changing decisions. Counseling programs other than academic counseling would be more useful for first generation college students like myself.

My Financial aid was cut off for fall 2013- spring 2014. Apparently, my mom makes too much money which is not true in reality since my dad declared bankruptcy. That’s the only thing that has made my college experience horrible. Affording tuition is not easy on my mom since she is supporting out entire 6 person household right now. I’ve tried to petition at the financial aid office and they denies me which makes me very upset because all my other colleagues are getting financial aid except for me and we are all 5th year college students.

Determination, goals, advisors, financial aid.

Positive attitude, being thankful, enjoy what I do.

A difficult part of obtaining my engineering degree is the language barrier between the students and the professors. Although they are very knowledgeable
of the subject, it is very difficult to understand a good 75% of the Engineering Department.

- So far, my path to obtaining a degree is hard because I had no help and now I am behind on my degree. So if I would have had more help with my classes, I would have graduate earlier.
- Many students are kind of on their own when it comes to school. Many low income students are struggling to pay for university and their counterparts are studying abroad and have all the time in the world to be extremely involved on campus. It is sad that low income students cannot be involved because they are busy working or helping support their families.
- I've noticed that as freshman we are given extensive amounts of information that quite frankly most of us do not process. Once we become upperclassmen the information and the eagerness to help us seems to dwindle. Maybe students would be more prepared for life after college if the university continued to want to help us throughout college.
- My experience in the summer bridge EOP program was a great starting tool that paved the way for success as a college student. I knew very little about college when I first came to SDSU and that program gave me a strong foundation that I built on as I continued in my college career. The financial and educational support that the EOP program provided was also what helped me make it to my last semester at this university.
- It's been extremely difficult for me due to personal situations. I have struggled very much. I felt alone the whole process of being reinstated back into the university. After that process I realized that here on campus one frets only for oneself unless you find a person that sincerely cares in your success. I found that person freshmen year, then he retired. After that it's been only myself through all of the struggle. Life lesson maybe?
- In times of distress graduation counselor not helpful, felt like a number rather than a student. Never took the time to look into alternative plans to achieve graduation.
- Being able to set our own agendas based on the advice of our counselors earlier in our college careers.
- Students need to network and connect with professionals.
- Plan ahead; start with “Victory.”
- One of the biggest challenges in college is finding where you belong and what to do with your major. I strongly believe that if there were more programs dedicated to helping students find their passions early on universities would have more motivated students compared to those who are just going through the motions of
getting a degree. Universities should inspire passion, passion leads to motivation and the academic structure will create the discipline needed to accomplish goals.

- It really helps when professors are passionate and motivated about what they are teaching. Although education is what you make of it, having a passionate educator will always help students improve their grades and get closer towards graduation. However, the most important thing that a student can do to graduate is to be self-motivated. It's not something that many people have but if a teacher can motivate a student to be proactive, then she/he is doing his job.

- I think some of the greatest challenges are finding the balance between making students self sufficient versus helping them a lot more. For me personally, I would of loved more help from careers services and also more personal development stuff, but the services were offered it just took me until senior year to realize I needed them. Also to what capacity should students be self driven compared to faculty led, there comes a point when a student has to get it for themselves because there are not prerequisites or maps in life and we are the ultimate decision makers.

- I felt kind of lost and did not know any other students who were close to graduating. I would’ve liked having a fellow student help me out (connecting freshmen to upper classmen as mentors?)

- None.

- Professors may start out with the passion to teach, but it dies out. It dies out when no one holds them accountable for how they teach, or when no one revises the material. Most of the time I have professors present data that is 7 years old!!!! They are depriving me of an education, and NO ONE CARES!!!! ..... Obtaining a degree is now like memorizing ideals someone that is teaching has, taking a test, getting an A then obtaining a degree. If you want an education, one must take the time to find it because isn’t not in an institution.

- Major advisor and EOP counselor helped me plan out my schedule each semester.
Appendix E

Survey Data Tables
APPENDIX E: SURVEY DATA TABLES

*Instruction: What behaviors do you believe instructors exhibit that have led to your success as a potential college graduate? (n = 75, no answer = 3)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students and instructors treat each other with respect.</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree, Nor Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Average Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>57.33% (43)</td>
<td>32.00% (24)</td>
<td>2.67% (2)</td>
<td>6.67% (5)</td>
<td>6.67% (5)</td>
<td>4.32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Instructors value what students have to say.            | 46.67% (35)    | 36.00% (27)    | 4.00% (3)                  | 2.67% (2)         | 2.67% (2)         | 4.13           |

| Instructors respect diversity.                          | 57.33% (43)    | 22.67% (17)    | 10.67% (8)                 | 4.00% (3)         | 4.00% (3)         | 4.24           |

| Instructors are interested in what is best for all students. | 50.67% (38)    | 30.67% (23)    | 8.00% (6)                  | 5.33% (3)         | 5.33% (4)         | 4.16           |

| Instructors are excited about teaching and communicate this to students. | 46.67% (35)    | 34.67% (26)    | 8.00% (6)                  | 5.33% (4)         | 5.33% (4)         | 4.12           |
Proficiencies: How well do you think the university has prepared you for the following? 
\( n = 75, \) no answer = 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Extremely Well</th>
<th>Very Well</th>
<th>Somewhat Well</th>
<th>Not Very Well</th>
<th>Not At All</th>
<th>Average Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To graduate.</td>
<td>28.00% (21)</td>
<td>36.00% (27)</td>
<td>32.00% (24)</td>
<td>2.67% (2)</td>
<td>1.33% (1)</td>
<td>4.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To prepare for a career.</td>
<td>9.33% (7)</td>
<td>37.33% (28)</td>
<td>37.33% (28)</td>
<td>13.33% (10)</td>
<td>2.67% (2)</td>
<td>4.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To gain life skills (i.e., successful management of personal affairs).</td>
<td>12.00% (9)</td>
<td>34.67% (26)</td>
<td>36.00% (27)</td>
<td>14.67% (11)</td>
<td>2.67% (2)</td>
<td>4.24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Student Support: What factors have contributed to your motivation for wanting to graduate? (n = 74, no answer = 4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree, Nor Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Average Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instructors have high expectations for all students.</td>
<td>20.27% (15)</td>
<td>50.00% (37)</td>
<td>17.57% (13)</td>
<td>9.46% (7)</td>
<td>2.70% (2)</td>
<td>3.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructors are committed to student learning.</td>
<td>31.08% (23)</td>
<td>48.65% (36)</td>
<td>12.16% (9)</td>
<td>5.41% (4)</td>
<td>2.70% (2)</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information is readily available about graduation requirements.</td>
<td>47.30% (35)</td>
<td>32.43% (24)</td>
<td>16.22% (12)</td>
<td>2.70% (2)</td>
<td>1.35% (1)</td>
<td>4.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The college environment supports student learning.</td>
<td>39.19% (29)</td>
<td>39.19% (29)</td>
<td>14.86% (11)</td>
<td>6.76% (5)</td>
<td>0.00% (0)</td>
<td>4.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Academic Experiences: Academic experiences that have, or may, contribute to my success as a potential college graduate: (n = 74, no answer = 4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree, Nor Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Average Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classes are available to assist in meeting requirements.</td>
<td>29.73% (22)</td>
<td>41.89% (31)</td>
<td>10.81% (8)</td>
<td>4.05% (3)</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td></td>
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<td>The curriculum is relevant and useful.</td>
<td>43.24% (32)</td>
<td>40.54% (30)</td>
<td>10.81% (8)</td>
<td>1.35% (1)</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Instructors are sufficiently available.</td>
<td>33.78% (25)</td>
<td>39.19% (29)</td>
<td>13.51% (10)</td>
<td>9.46% (7)</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructors or staff mentoring contributed to my success.</td>
<td>37.84% (28)</td>
<td>37.84% (28)</td>
<td>21.62% (16)</td>
<td>2.70% (2)</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
**Institutional Support: Institutional factors important to my success as a potential college graduate: (n = 73, no answer = 5)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree, Nor Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Average Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The university initiates frequent contact with students to support academic success.</td>
<td>20.55% (15)</td>
<td>36.99% (27)</td>
<td>30.14% (22)</td>
<td>10.96% (8)</td>
<td>1.37% (1)</td>
<td>3.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction by college staff supports student access (e.g., Admissions, Financial Aid).</td>
<td>39.73% (29)</td>
<td>36.99% (27)</td>
<td>19.18% (14)</td>
<td>4.11% (3)</td>
<td>0.00% (0)</td>
<td>4.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is evidence that the college values students.</td>
<td>21.92% (16)</td>
<td>46.58% (34)</td>
<td>21.92% (16)</td>
<td>8.22% (6)</td>
<td>1.37% (1)</td>
<td>3.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is evidence that the college provides quality customer service to support students.</td>
<td>21.92% (16)</td>
<td>39.73% (29)</td>
<td>27.40% (20)</td>
<td>10.96% (8)</td>
<td>0.00% (0)</td>
<td>3.73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Support Staff: Institutional factors important to my success as a potential college graduate: (n = 73, no answer = 5)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree, Nor Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Average Rating</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quantity of</strong></td>
<td>26.03%</td>
<td>49.32%</td>
<td>10.96%</td>
<td>13.70%</td>
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<td><strong>support staff</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>adequate to</strong></td>
<td>26.03%</td>
<td>49.32%</td>
<td>10.96%</td>
<td>13.70%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>3.88</td>
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<td><strong>support students</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>(e.g., teaching</td>
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<tr>
<td>assistants, lab</td>
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<tr>
<td>assistants)</td>
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<td><strong>Quality of</strong></td>
<td>35.62%</td>
<td>36.99%</td>
<td>17.81%</td>
<td>9.59%</td>
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<td><strong>adequate to</strong></td>
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<td><strong>support students</strong></td>
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<td>(e.g., teaching</td>
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<td>6.85%</td>
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<td><strong>Professional</strong></td>
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<td><strong>staff</strong></td>
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<td><strong>adequate to</strong></td>
<td>24.66%</td>
<td>50.68%</td>
<td>17.81%</td>
<td>6.85%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>3.93</td>
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<td>(e.g., clerical,</td>
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<td><strong>Quality of</strong></td>
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<td>45.21%</td>
<td>10.96%</td>
<td>8.22%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>4.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Professional</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>staff</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>adequate to</strong></td>
<td>35.62%</td>
<td>45.21%</td>
<td>10.96%</td>
<td>8.22%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>4.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>support students</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e.g., clerical,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maintenance)</td>
<td>(26)</td>
<td>(33)</td>
<td>(8)</td>
<td>(6)</td>
<td>(0)</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Supplemental Support: Physical resources important to my success as a potential college graduate: (n = 71, no answer = 7)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree, Nor Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Average Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quantity of equipment is adequate to</td>
<td>52.11% (37)</td>
<td>39.44% (28)</td>
<td>4.23% (3)</td>
<td>4.23% (3)</td>
<td>0.00% (0)</td>
<td>4.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>student success (e.g., computers,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>workstations, desks).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of equipment is adequate to</td>
<td>56.34% (40)</td>
<td>35.21% (25)</td>
<td>2.82% (2)</td>
<td>5.63% (4)</td>
<td>0.00% (0)</td>
<td>4.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>student success (e.g., computers,</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>workstations, desks).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantity of instructional materials</td>
<td>50.70% (36)</td>
<td>35.21% (25)</td>
<td>9.86% (7)</td>
<td>2.82% (2)</td>
<td>1.41% (1)</td>
<td>4.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>is adequate to support student</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>success (e.g., library books, book</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>store supplies).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of instructional materials</td>
<td>53.52% (38)</td>
<td>36.62% (26)</td>
<td>7.04% (5)</td>
<td>1.41% (1)</td>
<td>1.41% (1)</td>
<td>4.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>is adequate to support student</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>success (e.g., library books, book</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>store supplies).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Student Resource Access: Institutional accessibility important to my success as a potential college graduate. (n = 71, no answer = 7)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource Access</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Moderately Important</th>
<th>Of Little Importance</th>
<th>Unimportant</th>
<th>Average Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Financial Aid support and availability.</td>
<td>94.37%</td>
<td>4.23%</td>
<td>1.41%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>4.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to Counseling Services.</td>
<td>70.42%</td>
<td>19.72%</td>
<td>8.45%</td>
<td>1.41%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>4.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to student support services (e.g., EOP, Career Services, Military and Veterans Services).</td>
<td>71.83%</td>
<td>21.13%</td>
<td>5.63%</td>
<td>1.41%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>4.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to academic support services (e.g., tutoring).</td>
<td>67.61%</td>
<td>21.13%</td>
<td>9.86%</td>
<td>1.41%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>4.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ease of enrolling in classes.</td>
<td>80.28%</td>
<td>16.90%</td>
<td>2.82%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>4.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety of scheduling of classes.</td>
<td>85.92%</td>
<td>8.45%</td>
<td>5.63%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of classes to complete my degree.</td>
<td>88.73%</td>
<td>9.86%</td>
<td>1.41%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>4.87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Ranking of Social Skills:** Rank in order the most important social skills that supported your success as a potential college graduate: \((n = 69, \text{no response} = 9)\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill Description</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Average Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>21.74% (15)</td>
<td>23.19% (16)</td>
<td>21.74% (15)</td>
<td>18.84% (13)</td>
<td>14.49% (10)</td>
<td>3.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision-making</td>
<td>13.04% (9)</td>
<td>20.29% (14)</td>
<td>28.99% (20)</td>
<td>24.64% (17)</td>
<td>13.04% (9)</td>
<td>2.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer-relation skills (def., working well with other students)</td>
<td>8.70% (6)</td>
<td>18.84% (13)</td>
<td>13.04% (9)</td>
<td>20.29% (14)</td>
<td>39.13% (27)</td>
<td>2.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem-solving</td>
<td>18.84% (13)</td>
<td>18.84% (13)</td>
<td>15.94% (11)</td>
<td>27.54% (19)</td>
<td>18.84% (13)</td>
<td>2.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-management skills (def., managing your activities to achieve objectives)</td>
<td>37.68% (26)</td>
<td>18.84% (13)</td>
<td>20.29% (14)</td>
<td>8.70% (6)</td>
<td>14.49% (10)</td>
<td>3.57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ranking of Personal Skills: Please rank the most important personal skills that supported your success as a potential graduate: \(n = 69\), no response = 9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill Description</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Average Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goal setting (def., planning and pursuing a goal to completion)</td>
<td>40.58% (28)</td>
<td>17.39% (12)</td>
<td>26.09% (18)</td>
<td>8.70% (6)</td>
<td>7.25% (5)</td>
<td>3.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time management (def. scheduling your time)</td>
<td>30.43% (21)</td>
<td>33.33% (23)</td>
<td>21.74% (15)</td>
<td>8.70% (6)</td>
<td>5.80% (4)</td>
<td>3.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-appraisal (def., taking inventory of goals and skills)</td>
<td>1.45% (1)</td>
<td>10.14% (7)</td>
<td>13.04% (9)</td>
<td>20.29% (14)</td>
<td>55.07% (38)</td>
<td>1.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility (def., able to adapt to change)</td>
<td>11.59% (8)</td>
<td>11.59% (8)</td>
<td>17.39% (12)</td>
<td>42.03% (29)</td>
<td>17.39% (12)</td>
<td>2.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning (def., preparation for a task or goal)</td>
<td>15.94% (11)</td>
<td>27.54% (19)</td>
<td>21.74% (15)</td>
<td>20.29% (14)</td>
<td>14.49% (10)</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix F

Interview Questions
APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What was the single most important institutional factor that contributed to your success?

2. Was there a particular program that was instrumental in assisting you to succeed as a potential college graduate?

3. What motivated you to continue (and persist) toward your goal of graduation?
   Describe what motivated you.

4. Did the university create a supportive culture that aided in your degree attainment or your persistence as a potential college graduate? If so, what was the supportive culture and what was significant about this to you?