

**EFFECTIVENESS OF THE STUDENT SUCCESS COURSE ON PERSISTENCE,  
RETENTION, ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT, AND ENGAGEMENT**

**by**

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**ABSTRACT**

**EFFECTIVENESS OF THE STUDENT SUCCESS COURSE ON PERSISTENCE,  
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University of Houston-Clear Lake, 2015**

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The purpose of this mixed methods study was to determine if participation in a Student Success Course (SSC) influences persistence, retention, academic achievement, and engagement on a community college campus. Despite a great increase in the numbers of students enrolling in higher education, specifically at community colleges, the successful completion rates for these students has remained static since the 1970's. Pressures on community colleges to improve student outcome measures continue to intensify, as do pressures to be both effective and efficient in implementing student success strategies. The Student Success Course has become a popular strategy implemented by community colleges to address the continued low persistence, retention, academic achievement and graduation rates that community colleges experience.

Survey data were collected from a purposeful sample of 197 SSC participants at a middle sized community college in Texas from the 2012-2013 academic year and compared with a similar group of 235 non-SSC participants. Interviews were conducted with 12 participants to obtain student perception of the influence of participating in the SSC on staying in college (persistence and retention) and student engagement. Quantitative data were analyzed using chi square test of independence analysis as well as frequencies, percentages and cross tabulations. The qualitative data was analyzed using an inductive coding process, revealing 3 major themes: (a) perception of self and course; (b) course content and; (c) instructor influence. Results of this study indicate a relationship does exist between participation in the SSC and persistence, retention, and academic achievement in Math and Science. The results also indicate a significant correlation between SSC participation and student engagement.

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

**Postsecondary enrollment has grown steadily and significantly in the last three decades. Undergraduate enrollment increased 47% between 1970 and 1983, when it reached 10.8 million, of those, 8 million were in two-year colleges further burgeoning to 18.1 million students in 2009 (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2012). Unfortunately, growing enrollment has not resulted in an increase of college graduates. Integrated Postsecondary Educational Data Systems (IPEDS) reports indicate that even though more students are entering postsecondary education, graduation rates have remained fairly static since the 1970's (Barton, 2002; Horn & Berger, 2004; NCES, 2012). Retention and student success are critical issues to multiple stakeholders across the postsecondary education sector and are supported by both the Lumina and Gates Foundations by providing funding for extensive research in higher education related to efforts of increasing retention and student success among college students (Braxton & Lein, 2000). At the institutional level, the research is articulated into practices, programs, and initiatives designed to retain students and increase graduation rates.**

**The fact that retention and graduation rates have not significantly changed in the past several decades amidst an era of extensive research and investments in campus based efforts to enhance student success is alarming. In order to combat static retention and graduation rates, national and state governments have initiated policies that award funds to colleges based on student success, as opposed to enrollment figures. Community**

colleges, in particular, face many challenges in regards to these new funding policies, as community college students tend to have more barriers to completing their education than do their university counterparts. According to McClenney and Waiwaiiole (2005), some of those barriers include: (a) a higher percentage of students requiring developmental education; (b) coming from lower socio-economic and/or first generation backgrounds; (c) enrolling part-time; (d) functioning as a single parent; (e) and working full-time. Research pertaining to the effectiveness of various practices, programs, and initiatives focused on increasing student success and retention are often oriented towards students at four-year colleges and universities, especially research on Student Success Courses (SSC). This chapter will further explore the relationship between increased access to postsecondary education, the limited growth of student graduation, and the effectiveness of SSC's at community colleges. A research problem will be established, a purpose proposed, and key questions designed in order to provide a serviceable outline for this study. Additionally, key terms will be defined to further clarify the subject matter of this study.

### **The Research Problem**

The successful implementation of access programs, prevalence of open admissions policies, and changes in the national mindset regarding postsecondary education since the 1950's has led to increased student enrollment at college campuses in the United States (U. S.). Initiatives such as the GI Bill, National Defense Education Act of 1958, Basic Educational Opportunity Grant or Pell Grant, and Higher Education Act of 1965 reinforced the U. S.'s efforts to provide increased access to higher education and promote economic prosperity through an increasingly educated workforce (Cohen,

Brawer & Kisker, 2014). The enrollment at U. S. colleges burgeoned from over 3 million in 1958 (Gumport, Iannozzi, Shaman, & Zemsky, 1997) to 13 million in 1981 (Snyder & Dillow, 2013) and resources at most colleges were spent on recruitment and filling the dormitories.

Although more students were permitted access to postsecondary education, an alarming amount did not stay or earn a degree. Research focused on the reasons students leave postsecondary institutions and how to counteract that trend have become prevalent (Astin, 1999; Bai & Pan, 2009; Bers, & Smith; Choate, & Smith, 2003; Jacobs & Archie, 2008). The data shows that the successful completion rate has not kept pace with enrollment despite the increased numbers of students enrolled in colleges (Joyce, 2010). The U. S. has fallen from first to sixteenth in the world in the number of students who complete degrees (Joyce, 2010). In addition to the slide in world ranking, completion rates are now becoming a primary concern for colleges at all levels because state and federal funding is aligning with completion rates, not just enrollment numbers, as they were in previous decades. This has become increasingly true in regards to community colleges (Joyce, 2010).

According to the 2012 IPEDS information, at four-year colleges and universities, approximately 58% of first-time, full-time students who began seeking a bachelor's degree in fall 2004 completed a bachelor's degree at that institution within 6 years or 150% of normal completion time (NCES, 2012). In comparison, 55% of first-time, full-time students who began seeking a bachelor's degree in fall 1996 earned a bachelor's degree within 6 years at that institution. At two-year institutions, approximately 30% of first-time, full-time students who enrolled in fall 2007 completed a certificate or

associate's degree within 150% of the normal time required to complete such a degree. For the cohort that enrolled in fall 2000, the completion rate was about 31% (NCES, 2012). This is significant in higher education, as the percentage of graduates at community colleges, however slight, actually decreased in those 7 years.

Alarming, this decrease in the percentage of community college graduates was seen during a period of significant resources being spent attempting to increase these rates at both four-year and two-year institutions by developing and implementing student success strategies, such as the SSC (Kotkin, 2010). This is significant because in the last two decades increased accountability measures focused almost specifically on graduation rates were used as a performance indicator for community colleges.

While widespread attention on retention and persistence theories evolved to address this issue, the development of student success strategies and programs were much more pervasive at four-year institutions. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) posit that SSC's were developed in traditional four-year colleges, and the preponderance of existing research on SSC's was also conducted at four-year colleges. SSC's are not standardized across the country, as different curriculum is used in different colleges; however, they all have similar characteristics that include assisting the student in transitioning into the college environment. Student Success Courses Student Learner Outcomes (SLO's) commonly include: (a) identifying effective strategies and skills that lead to **personal success**; (b) demonstrating knowledge of strategies leading to **personal responsibility**; (c) demonstrating understanding of **self-motivation** through the knowledge of goal setting and life planning; (d) identifying strategies that lead to **mastering self-management**; (e) demonstrating knowledge of personal strategies that lead to

**interdependence; (f) demonstrating knowledge in self-awareness; (g) identifying strategies for becoming an effective lifelong learner; (h) demonstrating knowledge of effective strategies for managing emotions in self and others (Upcraft & Gardner, 1989, pp. 201).**

Much research supports SSC's as effective in improving student outcomes in the four-year college environment (Barefoot, 2002; Cuseo, 1997; Koch, Griffen, & Barefoot, 2014; Kotkin, 2010; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The Gardner Institute founded by John N. Gardner, a leader in the movement in higher education to enhance the first and senior years on campuses throughout the U. S. and abroad, has identified pathways to successful completion for students from the initial contact through admissions, orientation, advisement and placement, and all curricular and co-curricular experiences (Foundations of Excellence [FOE], 2014). Gardner and his colleagues from the Gardner Institute created the FOE, a program that includes a first-year focus inventory, identifies a first-year task force within the institution, conducts a current practice inventory and first-year surveys, provides performance indicators, and records the results of the first-year surveys. The FOE also develops plans for using data to improve services geared toward first-year experience initiatives.

In comparison to the four-year student, the community college student is typically non-residential or a commuter student, often academically underprepared, of non-traditional age, functioning as single parents, come from low income and/or first generation backgrounds, and attends college part-time versus the full-time status of their counterparts at a four-year institution (McClenney & Waiwaiiole, 2005). Research shows that these characteristics are negatively associated with educational attainment

(Achieving the Dream, 2013; Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count, 2006; Astin, 1993; Community College Survey of Student Engagement [CCSSE], 2012; McClenney, 2007). Recent widespread adoption of SSC's on community college campuses indicates that SSC's are regarded as valuable and effective in retention strategies by professionals and administrators in the two-year sector of postsecondary education. However, empirical evidence supporting the positive effects of SSC's in two-year institutions is sparse and has yielded mixed results (Bailey & Alfonso, 2005; Karp, O'Gara, & Hughes, 2008; Kotkin, 2010).

Despite the lack of empirical evidence promoting its positive effects, SSC's at community colleges have been supported through national student success initiatives such as Achieve the Dream (McClenney, 2004), Center for Community College Student Engagement (CCSSE, 2003-2012) and the Gardner Institute (Koch, Griffin, & Barefoot, 2014) and have become increasingly common. This emphasis on SSC's in community colleges has great momentum, as 75% of all community colleges offer such a course (CCSSE, 2009; McClenney, 2004). The National Survey of Student Success Initiatives at Two Year Colleges (2014) indicates 80% of the 295 respondents offered SSC's. This positive trend indicates community colleges are furiously trying to identify ways to significantly impact their students' academic achievement and completion rates.

Implementing programs that positively affect student outcomes is a necessity, as colleges are being held accountable for the student success initiatives they choose to utilize. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board has developed a performance based funding model to be implemented in the fall semester of 2016, setting aside \$1.72 million that must be "earned" by colleges through a student success point model. In



regard to community colleges, 1 point is earned when students successfully complete a developmental math courses, while .5 points are earned for passing developmental English or reading. One point is earned by passing their first college math course, while college level reading intensive or English course earns .5 points each. Completing 15 semester credit hours is worth 1 point, as is completing 30 semester credit hours. Two points are also earned by students completing a degree or certificate, with 2.25 points being awarded for graduates in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM). Finally, additional points are earned by a student transferring to an accredited university after successfully completing 15 semester credit hours (Texas Association of Community Colleges [TACC], 2013).

This new model of funding is the first step, as community college leaders anticipate broader measures over the next decade. During a presentation in a Contemporary Issues in Higher Education course, Dr. B. Hellyer, Chancellor of San Jacinto College, stated that a consortium of community college presidents in the state of Texas anticipate that more of the state funding will be dependent upon student success measures (B. Hellyer, personal communication, October 8, 2013). Hellyer's comments were consistent with Eaton's (2009) perspective of increased accountability affecting funding. This necessitates increased attention and focus on the successful completion and academic achievement of students if two-year colleges are to remain competitive and fiscally solvent.

With the demand for increased accountability by state and federal legislatures, the pressures on community colleges to improve student outcome measures continue to intensify. In a data driven accountability environment, all practices are being evaluated

for effectiveness and efficiency. The question becomes whether the strategies in use are really the best practices for meeting the goals they address, or whether they are simply the most familiar or popular. When reviewing strategies to increase student retention and successful completion, the SSC appears to be a promising and prominent strategy for community colleges. These courses have been widely adopted on community college campuses in the last decade; however, additional research is necessary to validate the adoption and effectiveness of these courses amongst community college students. Current research focuses predominantly on the effectiveness of SSC's in the four-year college and university setting, creating a gap in research at the community college level that requires further examination by scholars.

### **Significance of Study**

Increasing human and financial resources are spent in community colleges each year to develop and expand SSC's with the goal of improving retention and academic achievement, ultimately resulting in a more educated workforce (Derby & Smith, 2004). However, the relationship between campus-based success initiatives, such as the SSC, and the cost of developing and implementing these courses and studying the effectiveness of these programs over a long period of time has been minimally explored. Utilizing scarce resources in the community college on these efforts without significant research based data to inform decisions may have devastating consequences for administrators when planning strategically for the pending performance based funding era, especially if the data does not support the effectiveness of SSC's (McLendon, Hearn, & Deaton, 2006).

The increase in population of college students and the flat completion rates since the 1970's suggest that without determining the relationship between student success initiatives, such as the SSC, and retention and academic achievement, our country will continue to lag behind other countries with a college educated workforce (Kotkin, 2010). The U. S. is currently sixteenth among recognized world leaders as it relates to college graduates, juxtaposed to the 1970's, when the U. S. was ranked first among world competition in higher education (Joyce, 2010). Continuing on the same path and not increasing college completers could result in an uneducated workforce and potentially drain the economy through an unprepared, low wage earning society. The consequences could potentially be devastating to the economy and overall status of the U. S. as a world leader.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Engagement has been linked with student retention, academic achievement and successful completion for decades (Astin, 1999; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993). Astin's (1999) theory of involvement proposes that student learning is a function of a student's level of academic and social involvement with the institutional environment. Tinto's (1975) model of student departure emphasizes the role of integration, described as the extent to which students share values and norms of other individuals in the institution, in persistence in college. Despite important differences in these theoretical perspectives, student engagement plays an important role in each of the theoretical frameworks, so the frameworks provide impetus for measuring engagement.

The conceptual model developed by Tinto (1975) is the most widely recognized and tested model of student retention and attrition (Pascarella, & Terenzini, 2005; Webb,

1989). Tinto's model is a longitudinal institution-specific model of dropouts in which emphasis is placed on integration and engagement. Integration into both social and academic systems of the college leads to new levels of commitment to the institution and therefore to the completion of the educational goal (Tinto, 1975). Tinto's model examines both background characteristics and a student's goal and institutional commitment. Goal commitment impacts grade attainment and intellectual development, which impacts academic integration in the academic realm. Greater integration in the academic domain leads to greater goal commitment, which reduces the likelihood of dropping out. In the social sphere, institutional commitment improves peer group interactions, extra-curricular activity involvement and increased interactions with faculty and staff. These increased interactions on campus decrease the likelihood of dropping out. The relationship between academic and social engagement and integration has been supported by research (Pascarella & Terrenzini, 2005). While social integration is important, researchers have found that academic integration is most important for subsequent dropout decisions (Pascarella & Terrenzini, 2005; Pascarella, Smart, & Ethington, 1987; Tinto, 1975).

Astin's (1999) theory of involvement, presents a theory of student development which is comprehensive and relatively simple. This theory explicates findings that emerged from research on student development while also offering tools for educators in designing more effective learning environments. Astin explains that student involvement refers to the quantity and quality of the physical and psychological vigor that students devote to the college experience. This involvement includes tutoring, study time, participation in extracurricular activities, interactions with faculty members, student

services professionals and other college personnel. Astin posits that the more the students engage in these activities, the more the student will learn and develop personally. Astin stresses that college policies and procedures should positively influence students' ability to have increased participation in these activities, emphasizing the motivation and behavior of the student as opposed to the pedagogy of the subject matter. Astin asserts that all policies, procedures, and the performance of all faculty and student services employees can be evaluated in terms of how effective they are at increasing or reducing student involvement within the institution of higher education.

### **Research Purpose and Questions**

Pressures on community colleges to improve student outcome measures continue to intensify, as do pressures to be both effective and efficient in implementing student success strategies. The SSC has become a popular strategy implemented by community colleges to address the continued low persistence, retention, and graduation rates that community colleges experience; however, there is a lack of research finding it to be effective in increasing successful student outcomes in the community college. The SSC was adapted from a four-year college model to the community college in hopes of increasing the static persistence, retention, and academic achievement rates. Community colleges must address the low persistence, retention, and graduation rates in order to continue to be relevant, viable options for students seeking higher education. The following research questions will guide this study.

### **Quantitative**

1. Is there a relationship between participation in the SSC and persistence?
2. Is there a relationship between participation in the SSC and retention?
3. Is there a relationship between participation in the SSC and academic achievement?
4. Does participation in the Student Success Course influence student engagement?

### **Qualitative**

5. How has the SSC influenced student decisions to remain in college?
6. How has the SSC promoted student engagement?

### **Definitions of Key Terms**

The key terms guiding this study are listed and defined below:

**Academic Achievement.** Academic achievement is defined as successfully completing a gatekeeper course (ENGL 1301 or MATH 1314) with a grade of “C” or better.

**Community College.** Community college and two-year college are used interchangeably to refer to postsecondary institutions where the associates degree is primarily the highest degree offered (NCES, 2012).

**Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE).** An instrument used to assess student perception of engagement at the community college.

**Graduate, Complete, and Succeed.** All of these terms are used to refer to completion of courses of study at a postsecondary institution, including earning a certificate or degree.

These terms are used interchangeably in this study.

***Persistence.*** Persistence rate refers to an institutional rate at which students remain at the same institution where they start in a fall semester until the following spring semester (Erwin, 1991).

***Retention.*** Retention refers to an institutional rate at which students remain at the same institution where they start in a fall semester until the following fall semester (Erwin, 1991).

***Student Success Course.*** Student Success Course (SSC), for the purpose of this study, is used to include a course that is offered with the primary goal of supporting students in making the academic and social transitions to college through learning personal responsibility, personal success, self-motivation, self-management, interdependence, self-awareness, managing emotions, and becoming a life-long-learner (Achieve the Dream, 2013; Gardner & Barefoot, 2011; Koch et al., 2014).

***Student Engagement.*** Student engagement is defined as the amount of time and energy students invest in meaningful educational practices, both inside and outside the classroom, as well as the institutional practices and student behaviors that are highly correlated with student learning and retention. Research shows the more actively engaged students are with college faculty, staff, or other students on campus and with the subject matter the more likely they are to learn and to achieve their academic goals (CCSSE, 2012; McClenney, 2007).

### **Conclusions**

There is little doubt that community colleges need to address poor completion rates. It is encouraging that most are making serious attempts at helping their students achieve success as evidenced by the large numbers of colleges offering SSC's. A

carefully developed SSC can tie together and efficiently present various elements deemed helpful in supporting a student's academic and social transition to college; however, does the SSC really make a difference? Is the trend toward offering SSC's just that- a trend, or does it move the student toward achieving educational goals? In light of ever tightening budgets and strict accountability for all programs, the SSC should be objectively evaluated.

Chapter II will present existing literature regarding the adaptation of the SSC from four-year colleges and universities to community colleges, as well as the SLO's for community college based SSC's. This chapter will also present literature related to persistence and retention in community colleges and policies and practices implemented to address low persistence and retention rates in community colleges. Changes in funding for community colleges that now incorporate outcome measures for student success will also be further discussed in chapter two. Academic achievement and the effects of student engagement on student success outcomes in community colleges will also be further discussed in Chapter II.



## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

**Pressures on community colleges to improve student outcome measures continue to intensify, as do pressures to be both effective and efficient in implementing student success strategies. The Student Success Course (SSC) has become a popular strategy implemented by community colleges to address the continued low persistence, retention, and graduation rates that community colleges experience. The purpose of this study was to determine if participation in a SSC influences persistence, retention, academic achievement, and student engagement.**

**After a brief overview of the evolution of the SSC, this literature review will provide a synopsis of previous research on the relationship between: (a) student learner outcomes for the SSC; (b) challenges and barriers faced by the community college; (c) the influence of participation in SSC's and student persistence from the fall to spring semester in a community college and the influence of student participation in SSC's and first-year college retention from fall to fall; (d) the impact of student participation in SSC's on academic achievement; and (e) the influence of student participation in SSC's on student engagement. The literature review will ultimately demonstrate the existing voids in academic research on SSC's in the community college setting and the need for further research on the topic. This study seeks to fill these research voids and progress academic understanding on the effects student initiatives like the SSC really have on community college student populations.**

### **Evolution of the Student Success Course**

Retaining and graduating students in college has been a focus of attention for decades, resulting in a plethora of support services designed to meet the various needs of the students enrolled. The SSC is one way in which a range of student support services can be delivered. The SSC, which began surfacing in the early 1970's to address retention and graduation rates at universities, is aimed at new students (Fidler, 1991). It usually provides participants with information about the college, help in academic and career planning, and techniques to improve study habits and other personal skills. The goal is to orient students to the various services offered at the college, help them acclimate to the college environment, and give them the tools necessary to be successful in postsecondary education (Gardner & Barefoot, 2011; O'Gara, Karp, & Hughes, 2009).

The primary point of the SSC is to provide students with tools that will help them succeed and help colleges retain them from semester to semester and academic year to academic year; however differences between four-year and two-year institutions increase the difficulty of measuring the effectiveness of the SSC. Cohen, Brawer, and Kisker (2014) indicate that studies of student dropout are difficult when dealing with community colleges, as their emphasis is on accessibility and ease of entrance, exit, and re-entry whereas four-year institutions focus on entry and matriculation through graduation. Success in SSC's, in relation to retention efforts at community colleges, will differ depending on the institution due to the varying factors that influence persistence, retention, and academic achievement (Upcraft, Gardner, Barefoot, & Associates, 2005; Cohen et al., 2014).

Even though success of SSC's vary from institution to institution, these courses are still pivotal to most colleges and universities retention efforts (Upcraft et al., 2005). The importance of SSC's are reflected through the various course models and instruction styles; institutions recognize that SSC's are vital to retention and have gone to great lengths to create effective course programming for their students. Student Success Course construction can include academically based seminar style courses and expansion of learning community clusters that integrate support services and learning community seminars with integrated support services (success coaching and peer mentoring). Assuring that faculty are appropriately equipped to work with millennial students and are trained in effective teaching strategies for first-year students was another component of SSC's (Achieving the Dream, 2013; Blimling, Whitt, & Associates, 1999; Kuh, 2009).

#### **Student Learner Outcomes for the Student Success Course**

Student Success Courses are not standardized across the country, as different curriculum is used in different colleges; however, they all have similar characteristic that include assisting the student in transitioning into the college environment. Student Success Course Student Learner Outcomes (SLO's) commonly include: (a) identifying effective strategies and skills that lead to **personal success**; (b) demonstrating knowledge of strategies leading to **personal responsibility**; (c) demonstrating understanding of **self-motivation** through the knowledge of goal setting and life planning; (d) identifying strategies that lead to mastering **self-management**; (e) demonstrating knowledge of personal strategies that lead to **interdependence**; (f) demonstrating knowledge in **self-awareness**; (g) identifying strategies for becoming an effective **lifelong learner**; (h) demonstrating knowledge of effective strategies for **managing emotions** in self and

others (Upcraft & Gardner, 1989, pp. 201).

Universities and colleges utilize SSC's to provide students with learner outcomes that will help them progress in their studies, engage them with the campus at large, and ultimately retain them. The curriculum used to impart these skill-sets, however, is very pointed and specific. Course activities that assist students in identifying effective strategies and skills that lead to personal success include developing and using study strategies and skills, which are assessed using study guides. Activities that lead to demonstrating knowledge of strategies leading to personal responsibility include personal and class journals that are assessed by instructor feedback. Activities that demonstrate understanding of self-motivation through the knowledge of goal setting and life planning include completing career projects that focus on finding direction in college. Self-management projects utilizing critical thinking skills to identify strategies that lead to mastering self-management and develop and maintain motivation for college success. A campus connection project using both oral and written communication skills demonstrates knowledge of personal strategies that lead to interdependence and building community and connection to campus resources. In order to demonstrate knowledge in self-awareness and identify strategies for becoming an effective life-long learner, social responsibility and teamwork are used to complete a movie project. Finally, journals are utilized to demonstrate knowledge of effective strategies for managing emotions in self and others (Downing, 2013).

### **Challenges and Barriers Faced by Community Colleges**

While SSC's were embraced by most four-year colleges and universities, they were not immediately implemented at community colleges. The community college is

unique from universities. The mission of community colleges since the 1970's has been providing access to postsecondary education for students who may not otherwise be able to attend college. Therefore, retention and successful completion of students attending community colleges were not the primary focus for many decades (Cohen et al., 2014). This can be traced back to World War II, where expansion dominated American policy toward higher education. The passage of the federal GI Bill led to the formation of hundreds of community colleges during the 1950's and 1960's. The remainder of the twentieth-century focused almost exclusively on open access and increased admissions into community colleges. Around the turn of the century, accountability pushed aside expansion and the focus of persistence, retention, academic achievement, and completion took center stage (Zarkesh & Beas, 2004). Pressure from legislators and taxpayers forced community colleges to refocus attention on support programs and the development of student success initiatives that would assist students in matriculating towards successful completion of their higher education goals (McClenney, 2004).

According to the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) College Completion Fact Sheet (2015), only 3 in 10 community college students complete a degree. Given their convenient location, low cost, and open access, community colleges tend to enroll students who are academically, economically, and socially disadvantaged. Student success rates at community colleges remain low. According to Shapiro, D., Dunder, A., Chen, J., Zisken, M., Park, E., Torres, V., & Chiang, Y. (2012), the national average two-year graduation rate is 4.8%. It was not until the late 1990's and early 2000's that community colleges began to offer SSC's in an effort to address the

alarmingly low percentage of students who successfully complete their education (O’Gara et al., 2009).

The change in focus and implementation of student success initiatives like SSC’s came with problems. Many community colleges felt at a disadvantage, as community college students often face distinct barriers to successful completion of their higher educational goals. In 2013, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) outlined some of the disadvantages that cause increased hardships on community colleges to provide appropriate support services. First, many students who enroll at the community college are academically underprepared and are not ready for the rigor of college coursework. Second, many students are first generation and do not have role models to follow when pursuing higher education. Third, most students attending community colleges are low income and do not have adequate financial support to meet their needs. Finally, students at community colleges frequently carry other responsibilities into the classroom. This often results in students attending part-time versus full-time, as well as frequently enrolling, un-enrolling, and re-enrolling, or “swirling”, as Cohen et al. (2014) characterize the trend in students “stopping- out” for personal reasons.

Research that is articulated into practices, programs, and initiatives to retain students and increase graduation rates has increased dramatically since the change in focus at community colleges. Some of the best practices cited by the Achieving the Dream Initiative and others include: (a) mandatory placement testing and new student orientations; (b) supplemental instruction; (c) learning communities; and (d) SSC’s and

non-course based options for those not ready for the rigor of college-level coursework (Achieving the Dream, 2013; Cohen et al., 2014).

Despite all of the efforts and attention focused on persistence, retention, academic achievement, and successful completion, these rates have remained static over the past decade (Barton, 2002; Horn & Berger, 2004). In order to combat static retention and graduation rates, national and state governments have initiated policies that award funds to colleges based on student success points as opposed to enrollment numbers. A consortium of community college presidents in the state of Texas anticipates that more of the state funding will be dependent upon student success measures (B. Hellyer, personal communication, October 8, 2013). Dr. B. Hellyer (personal communication, October 8, 2013) outlines that “Performance-based funding is centered on “momentum Points” such as students completing a developmental education course, completing 15 college credit hours, completing 30 college credit hours, earning some sort of credential, and transferring to a four-year institution”.

#### **Persistence and Retention of Student Success Course Participants**

Much of the research on SSC's emphasizes the connection between the SSC, student retention, and GPA. Engberg and Mayhew (2007) provide a closer examination of the impact of the for-credit SSC on student learning and democratic outcomes. The researchers administered the Student Thinking and Interaction Survey (STIS) to students during the first and fourteenth weeks of class. The survey was administered to undergraduate students enrolled in three different SSC's, engineering courses, and communications courses.

Response rates for all three classes yielded a total of 1538 participants. Engberg and Mayhew (2007) tested for three main outcomes that were derived from factor analyses: (a) commitment to social justice; (b) multicultural awareness; and (c) attribution complexity. Their findings concluded that students enrolled in the SSC had significantly higher mean scores on the Social Justice Post-test scale compared to students enrolled in the engineering and communication course. Despite having no differences on the Commitment to Social Justice Pretest measure, at the end of the semester, students who enrolled in the SSC scored significantly higher than students in either the engineering or communication course on the post-test. Similar to the Social Justice test, there were significant differences on the Multicultural Awareness scales also. The mean differences showed that student's post-test scores in the SSC were significantly higher than those in either the engineering or communication course, suggesting that the SSC is very successful in helping students understand group differences and developing their awareness of multiple perspectives on issues of culture and diversity compared to either the engineering or communication course. This study is relevant to persistence and retention, as it ties closely to a study conducted by Williams and Butler (2010), which demonstrated that students with a higher Social Justice Scale score were found to have higher Grade Point Averages (GPA), higher persistence rates, and higher retention levels than those who scored lower on the Social Justice Scale.

In another study focusing on persistence and retention of SSC participants, Bai and Pan (2009) conducted a comprehensive review of intervention programs designed to increase retention at a large urban university in the Midwest. First-time, full-time students ( $n = 1305$ ) who participated in twenty different intervention programs in fall



2000 provided the sample for the study. Intervention programs were categorized into four categories: (a) advising; (b) academic help; (c) SSC's; and (d) social integration programs such as learning communities. The study used a multilevel approach to assess the effects of intervention program participation on student retention, interaction effects on student characteristics, and type of intervention.

Analysis of the data revealed that SSC's worked better for older students and male students. The results suggest that older students were 11% more likely to stay in school and male students were 12% more likely to stay in school for 3 or more years if they take the SSC. This study provided empirical evidence of the positive effect of SSC's on retention, suggesting that such programs are more beneficial than general programs like orientation.

D. S. Fike and R. Fike (2008) differentiated community college retention from a university's student retention by identifying unique characteristics of the community college student in predicting retention. They retrospectively studied 4 years of data from a Texas public urban community college with an annual academic student population of approximately 10,000. The following seven items were examined in the data review: (a) age and ethnicity of student; (b) student completion status for developmental mathematics, reading, and writing courses; (c) participation in the TRiO Student Support Services program; (d) receipt of financial aid; (e) enrollment in SSC courses; (f) semester hours enrolled in the first semester; (g) semester hours dropped in the first semester; and (h) the educational level of parents (pp. ).

The data was collected by historical evaluation of student records from 4 years of data for FTIC students ( $n = 9200$ ), who first enrolled in the fall 2001, 2002, 2003, and

2004 semesters at the community college. No qualitative data was collected for this study. The findings from this study revealed significant predictors of retention. One of the key findings is the importance of developmental education to college success as measured by retention. The strongest predictor for retention is passing a developmental reading class. Students analyzed in the study who had “college ready” reading skills upon entering as a FTIC also showed predictors of retention. Passing a developmental math course is another indicator of fall-to fall student retention, though not a statistically significant predictor for fall-to-spring retention. Participation in a SSC was not a predictor of persistence or retention.

#### **Academic Achievement of Student Success Course Participants**

For the purposes of this study, academic achievement was defined as successfully completing a gatekeeper course (ENGL 1301 or MATH 1314) with a grade of “C” or better. A large scale study by Zeidenberg, Jenkins, and Calcagno (2007) looked in-depth at SSC’s and their effectiveness on academic achievement in community colleges. They expanded an earlier qualitative study conducted by the Florida Department of Education (2006), which found that SSC completers were more likely than students who did not take the SSC to improve GPA’s.

Individual student record data was provided by the Florida Department of Education to follow a cohort composed of all students who entered a Florida community college for the first time in fall 1999. The researchers tracked these students for seventeen terms and examined the percentage of these students who completed a credential during that time period and tracked the GPA’s of SSC participants and non-participants. An important difference from the Florida Department of Education’s (2006)

study, the researchers examined all students who enrolled in the SSC, not only those who successfully completed the SSC.

The regression results suggest that students who enrolled in the SSC were 8% more likely than their peers to earn a credential, holding all else the same. Students who enrolled in remedial courses were 7% less likely to graduate than were students who did not take such courses (Zeidenberg, et.al, 2007). Just 17% of students in this sample who enrolled in remediation earned a credential in 17 terms as compared to 41% of students who enrolled only in the SSC and did not have remediation needs. Zeidenberg et.al, (2007) also found that students who enrolled in both the SSC and remediation were only 2% less likely to complete a credential than students who enrolled in neither the SSC nor remediation. For almost all of the 28 colleges in the study, the marginal effects of SSC enrollment on completion are positive and statistically significant. Finally, this study found that enrollment in SSC's was also associated with increased chances of persisting from fall to spring and being retained from fall to fall in school and transferring to a Florida State University System FSUS.

Specifically focusing on the community college population, Fowler and Boylan (2010) examined the effectiveness of participation in a SSC by comparing data for success rates in developmental education courses, GPA's, and academic standing from fall 2003 to spring 2004 (prior to the implementation of the SSC) to fall 2008 to spring 2009 (the SSC's 5<sup>th</sup> year). The researchers also examined first-year college students who participated in the SSC versus non-participants to determine program effectiveness. Two distinct student groups were identified for this study. Student data from fall 2003 to spring 2004 for students with parallel entry characteristics enrolled prior to the SSC's

implementation were compared to fall 2008 to spring 2009 student data for those enrolled in the SSC during its 5<sup>th</sup> year of operation.

A total of 453 non-course participants and 434 SSC students were included in the study. Transcripts were inspected to determine if the student would have been placed into the course, had it existed. The percentage of students in good academic standing increased from 46% to 70% for students in the SSC, while those placed on probation slightly decreased from 31% to 24%. In addition, the percentage of students academically dismissed at the conclusion of spring decreased from 19% to 3%. Success in developmental courses were also examined with increases in successful completion of developmental English and developmental mathematics. Similarly, increases were also found in college level Algebra and English. Fowler and Boylan (2010) also found that one year fall to fall retention rates were improved significantly for SSC participants.

Pike, Hansen, and Lin (2010) conducted a study using instrumental variables to account for selection effects in research on SSC's to assist in explaining why some studies found that participation in a SSC did not have statistical significance in student retention or GPA. They posit that because student's chose to participate in SSC's, self-selection effects prevent researchers from making causal claims about the outcomes of these retention programs. The purpose of this study was to determine if participation in a SSC significantly and positively relates to higher GPA's. The analyses revealed that there was a statistically significant relationship between participating in a SSC and fall semester GPA.

Taking the perspective of student engagement and integration, Malik (2011) assessed the impact of attending a SSC by reviewing student integration, academic

achievement (GPA), and retention of first-time, full-time students. Malik studied freshman enrolled in the business and hospitality bachelor's degree programs in fall 2008. Student Success Course participants were invited to complete a survey during the eighth week of the ten week course. Ninety-nine students completed the survey (56.3%). Analysis of the data found that there are no statistical differences in the academic achievement, engagement, and GPA of SSC participants. Results of the study found no statistical significance of academic and social integration and GPA to retention and participation in a SSC.

Similar results were found by Purdie and Rosser (2011), who conducted a study to determine if participation in a SSC course was related to first-year students earning higher grades and/or the likelihood that these students would persist into the sophomore year at the university studied. The researchers retrospectively examined 858 students who first matriculated during the fall 2003, 2004, and 2005 semesters and enrolled in a SSC course. Students who were placed in the SSC were classified as "at risk" as they had at least one developmental need. The outcome variables from this study were retention and first semester GPA. Students were assigned to one of seven categories corresponding with their major and dummy coded accordingly. The authors found that students who participated in SSC's did not earn higher grades. The second phase of this study showed that participating in SSC's did not increase the likelihood that a student would be retained into the sophomore year at the same institution. The lack of affect for SSC participation on retention contradicts previous research, according to the authors. Although this study did not measure the degree to which SSC's integrate the in-class and out-of-class experience, the authors posit that perhaps there was low interaction between

students and faculty who taught this course, which may explain the variance in their findings.

In a similar study, Clark and Cundiff (2011) investigated the impact that a SSC had on students' first-year GPA's and retention. Participants in the study consisted of 435 first-year undergraduate college students enrolled in an introductory psychology course. From the total sample, 109 students were identified who were either currently or previously enrolled in the SSC. These students were designated as the treatment group and the remaining 326 students made the control group.

The participants were given a battery of tests to assess a variety of traits thought to be related to academic success and college retention. There was no difference between treatment and control groups in their retention rates or GPA. This study found that students who took the SSC did not have higher GPA's than those who did not take the course. They also found that the course had no statistically significant impact on retention rates.

### **Engagement and Student Success Course Participation**

A study conducted by Hoffman, Richmond, Morrow, and Salomone (2003) attempted to ascertain if there is gender differences in adjustment to college, academic achievement, attitudes and intent to persist in those who participated in a SSC versus those who did not. Nine hundred-sixty first-year students from Old Dominion University (ODU) were solicited for participation in the study, with 75 SSC students and 81 non-SSC participants agreeing to participate. Sense of Belonging was assessed to determine the student's level of engagement using the Sense of Belonging Scale. Results indicated that males reported more perceived isolation compared to females. This study found few

significant differences between SSC participants and non-participants. Greene, Marti, and McClenney (2008) found similar outcomes when studying minority males.

Retaining students once they are enrolled is a challenge most colleges and universities struggle with. Jacobs and Archie (2008) attempted to shed light on why students leave college and how colleges can retain them by determining what influence first-year college students' engagement had on their intent to return to college. The population studied included approximately 4000 first year students at a predominantly undergraduate university in the western U. S. Findings indicated that sense of community had a significant positive influence on intent to return. Engagement was shown to be a positive predictor of student persistence. This study identified several sub-groups that influence sense of community of the overall campus community. Membership in fraternities and sororities, residence, ethnicity, campus club membership employment status, and desire to change major significantly influence sense of community and engagement.

A qualitative study conducted by Barbatis (2010), assessed factors that contribute to persistence and retention. This research was based at a large, urban community college and examined the effect of engagement on student persistence and retention. Barbatis' study found that students who are engaged on campus in different clubs and organizations and their interactions with faculty members and other students positively influenced persistence and retention at a community college. This research is consistent with Astin's (1993) findings that involvement outside of the classroom contributes positively to student success. Similarly, Bers and Smith (1991) replicated a study for community college students that was previously conducted with four-year college

students to determine the extent to which social and academic integration are predictors of persistence. The study found that student educational objectives and intents were most positively correlated with student persistence and retention; however, engagement was also found to be a significant contributor to student persistence and retention.

While many quantitative studies focusing on the SSC have been conducted, with the results being mixed (Barbatis, 2010; Bers, & Smith, 1991; Carini et al., 2006; Fike & Fike, 2008; Kuh, 2009; Malik, 2011; Purdie & Rosser, 2011), the qualitative literature to determine the impact of the SSC on students has been sparse. Bowman (2006) completed a qualitative study to understand the effects of the SSC on students in a community college in California. The results of this study found that the SSC was successful at meeting the needs of first-time in college (FTIC) students in navigating the community college environment while providing resources to assist them towards persistence in reaching their academic goals. Choate and Smith (2003) and Duggan and Williams (2011) found similar results, indicating that students perceived the SSC enhanced their transition to college life by evaluating their goals and motivation for success. Students indicated that they found the SSC led to increased self-efficacy and confidence, which encouraged them to stay on their academic path.

Similarly, O’Gara et al. (2009) found that through analysis of student interview data, the SSC is an essential resource for community college students, specifically FTIC students. They found that the various benefits of the course reinforce one another, magnifying their effect. Some of the benefits included: (a) learning about college classes and study skills; (b) building important relationships with faculty, staff and peers; (c) effectively adjusting to the college environment; and (d) increasing the students’



academic confidence (pp.212). The authors recommend that instructors for these classes should also be the students permanent academic advisor, which will help the students connect and focus on his/her academic goals. O’Gara et al. (2009) also recommend that the SSC be mandatory for all entering community college students, as the timing when students take the course was found to be important. Students who took the class after the first 12 credit hours did not benefit as much as those who took the class their first semester.

### **Student Self-Efficacy and the SSC**

Student views about themselves are critical in academic performance and success. Bandura’s (1986) self-efficacy theory led to extensive research on self-efficacy and advances that student self- perception and their environment influence performance in college courses. Bandura (1994) goes on to say that self-efficacy beliefs determine how students feel, think, motivate themselves and behave. These beliefs effect cognitive, motivational, and affective and selection processes. Chemers, Hu, and Garcia (2001) found that academic self-efficacy was significantly and directly related to academic expectations and performance. Students entering college with a higher level of academic self-confidence perform slightly better than those students entering college with a lower academic self-confidence. Students who believed they would perform well in college did perform better than their counterparts who did not have high expectations of their academic performance when entering college.

Chemers, Hu, and Garcia (2001), concluded that student psychological orientations regarding their experience in college are critical to their success.

Wernersbach, Crowley, Bates, and Rosenthal (2014) found that “addressing academic

self-efficacy in college is critical to retention and academic achievement. They posit that “the combination of improved skills and greater confidence is a combination that may launch academically underprepared students toward greater success” (p. 23). They found that students who took the SSC had higher academic self-efficacy than those who did not take the SSC and that the curriculum design of the SSC should integrate self-efficacy and be woven into the very fabric of the course. The effects of student self-efficacy on performance is well documented and supports that students who have higher academic self-confidence and expectations are retained at higher levels and outperform those that have lower academic self-confidence and expectations (Chemers et al., 2001; Wernersbach et al., 2014; Windham, 2012). The importance of weaving self-efficacy in the SSC curriculum is critical for improving persistence, retention, and academic achievement. However, students perceived motivation as a student owned state, yet when motivation is lacking, students pointed to the instructors as the cause (Christophel & Gorham, 1995).

### **Instructor Influence on Student Performance**

Students often discuss their professors and skills that enhance the classroom and learning environment and one fundamental aspect of engagement in higher education is student/faculty interactions. Many researchers have studied the influence of instructors on student learning and academic success (Astin, 1993; Christophel & Gorham, 1995; O’Keeffe, 2013; Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005). Students feeling cared for by instructors are critical for success in college (O’Keeffe, 2013; Wirt, 2010). O’Keeffe (2013) suggests that students getting to know even one faculty member closely are more likely to have increased engagement and more successful outcomes in college. Faculty

characteristics that students report enhance quality communication and relationship building include kind; virtuous, good and caring; empathetic; understanding; and responsive (O'Keeffe, 2013). Conversely, O'Keeffe (2013) also found that a negative relationship can have a vastly negative impact on student motivation.

Additionally, Tinto (1993) emphasizes the importance of faculty/student relationships and interactions and adds that students must feel a genuine connection with the faculty member in order to achieve improved academic performance and retention. Interestingly, in a study conducted by Christophel and Gorham (1995), negative teacher behaviors are perceived by students as more influential to student demotivation than positive faculty behaviors are perceived to their motivation. Instructor's use of verbal feedback to students, specifically using encouraging student interaction and participation in class; having open dialogue in class about issues or points raised by students; and having individual conversations both inside and outside of the classroom increased student satisfaction and performance in the course (Christophel & Gorham, 1995). Appropriate use of self-disclosure and humor were also cited as positive techniques instructors can use to improve engagement in the classroom and improved performance by Downs, Manoochehr, & Nussbaum (1988). They indicate that when instructors used personal stories, humor and narratives that closely relate to the material being taught, students were more engaged and perceived learning more than with only traditional lecture. The purpose behind the use of humor and self-disclosure was of utmost importance, as when used to clarify course material and relevant to course content, students perceived it to be more effective.

Umbach and Wawrzynski's (2005) study found that "faculty do matter." They determined that institutions where faculty engage students both in and out of the classroom and place a high priority on enriching academic experiences both in and out of the classroom had students who were more connected and engaged with the institution, positively affecting retention and academic achievement. They went on to explain that faculty who practiced active learning and had positive attitudes in the classroom created an environment that positively affects student engagement behaviors. Umbach and Wawrzynski (2005) posit that "faculty behaviors and attitudes affect students so profoundly, which suggests that faculty members may play the single-most important role in student learning (p. 174).

Possible strategies for faculty members to engage students are almost as numerous as colleges themselves. Social media is promoted as an effective tool to engage students by Junco, Heiberger and Loken (2011). They posit that Twitter can engage students in a way that is important for their psychological and academic development while incorporating tools students are familiar and comfortable using. The use of Twitter meets all the criteria outlined by Chickering and Gamson (1987) as essential for engaging with students on a college campus and include: (a) improve contact between students and faculty members; (b) encourage cooperation among students in the classroom; (c) promote active learning; (d) provide prompt feedback; (e) maximize time on task; (f) communicate high expectations; and (g) respect for diversity (pp.4).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Engagement has been linked with student retention, academic achievement, and successful completion for decades (Astin, 1999; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto,

1975, 1993, 1998). Astin's (1999) theory of involvement proposes that student learning is a function of a student's level of academic and social involvement with the institutional environment. Tinto's (1975, 1993, 1988) model of student departure emphasizes the role of integration, described as the extent to which students share values and norms of other individuals in the institution, in persistence in college. Despite important differences in these theoretical perspectives, student engagement plays an important role in each of the theoretical frameworks, so the frameworks provide impetus for measuring engagement.

The conceptual model developed by Tinto (1975) is the most widely recognized and tested model of student retention and attrition (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Webb, 1989). Tinto's model is a longitudinal institution-specific model of dropout in which emphasis is placed on integration and engagement. Integration into both social and academic systems of the college leads to new levels of commitment to the institution and therefore to the completion of the educational goal (Tinto, 1975). Tinto's model examines both background characteristics and a student's goal and institutional commitment. Goal commitment impacts grade attainment and intellectual development, which impacts academic integration in the academic realm. Greater integration in the academic domain leads to greater goal commitment, which reduces the likelihood of dropping out. In the social sphere, institutional commitment improves peer group interactions, extra-curricular activity involvement, and increased interactions with faculty and staff. These increased interactions on campus decrease the likelihood of dropping out.

The relationship between academic and social engagement and integration has been supported (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). While social integration is important,

researchers have found that academic integration is most important for subsequent dropout decisions (Pascarella & Terrenzini, 2005; Pascarella, Smart, & Ethington, 1987; Tinto, 1975). Astin's theory of involvement (1999), presents a theory of student development which is comprehensive and relatively simple. This theory explicates findings that emerged from research on student development while also offering tools for educators in designing more effective learning environments. Astin explains that student involvement refers to the quantity and quality of the physical and psychological vigor that students devote to the college experience. This involvement includes tutoring, study time, participation in extracurricular activities, interactions with faculty members, student services professionals, and other college personnel. Astin posits that the more the students engage in these activities, the more the student will learn and develop personally. Astin also stresses that college policies and procedures should positively influence student's ability to have increased participation in these activities, emphasizing the motivation and behavior of the student rather than the pedagogy of the subject matter. Astin outlines that all policies, procedures, and the performance of all faculty and student services employees can be evaluated in terms of how effective they are at increasing or reducing student involvement within the institution of higher education.

### **Summary of Findings**

The literature illuminated mixed results regarding the effectiveness of SSC's on retention, persistence, and academic achievement. Some researchers found no statistically significant difference in retention or academic achievement of students who participate in a SSC versus those who do not participate in a SSC (Baldwin, Bensimon, Dowd, & Kleiman, 2011; Clark & Condiff, 2011; Engberg & Mayhew, 2007; Malik,

2011; Pike, Hanson, & Lin, 2010; Purdie & Rosser, 2011). Interestingly, all of the studies that found no relationship between participating in a SSC and increased retention and academic achievement were all conducted at four-year universities and not community colleges. Students found the course to be effective in assisting them in successfully adjusting to the college environment.

Other researchers found that there was a statistically significant relationship between participating in a SSC and retention and academic achievement (Fike & Fike, 2008; Fowler & Boylan, 2010; Jacobs & Archie, 2008; Zeidenberg, et.al, 2007). Zeidenberg et al. (2007) found that students who enrolled in a SSC were 8% more likely to be retained and earn a degree or credential. This study also found that students who participated in a SSC and a developmental course were more likely than peers who did not take the SSC course but were enrolled in developmental education to be retained and transfer to a four-year college or university. Fowler and Boylan (2010) found that retention rates and academic achievement in both gateway courses and developmental courses increased when students participated in a SSC. Passing a developmental course was another strong predictor of increased retention and academic achievement according to Fike and Fike (2008).

Students' engagement with their educational institutions and their learning was also shown as having important significance. Karp, O'Gara and Hughes (2008) found students who felt a sense of connectedness at their college had a positive influence on persistence and retention. Bowman (2006) found that the SSC was successful at meeting the needs of FTIC students in navigating the community college environment while connecting students with resources to assist them towards persistence in reaching their

academic goals. The qualitative studies, while minimal, found that the SSC was most beneficial to FTIC students when taken within the first twelve credit hours of enrollment. Students also report that the SSC was beneficial in helping them navigate the community college environment while providing them with resources to persist in reaching their academic goals. There are no studies that combine the quantitative and qualitative data to uncover the student perspective of the important components of the SSC. This study fills that gap in research.



## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship of participation in the Student Success Course (SSC) on persistence, retention, academic achievement, and student engagement of community college students. Survey data was collected from a purposeful sample of 432 SSC participants and non-participants at a middle sized gulf coast community college from the 2012-2013 academic year. Interviews were conducted to obtain student perception of the influence of participating in the SSC on persistence, retention, academic achievement, and student engagement. Quantitative data was analyzed using Chi-Square Test of Independence, cross-tabulations and frequencies and percentages, while an inductive coding process was utilized to analyze the qualitative data. This chapter will present an overview of the research problem, operationalization of theoretical constructs, research purpose and questions, research design, population and sampling selection, instrumentation, data collection procedures, data analysis methods, and privacy and ethical considerations.

#### **Overview of Research Problem**

Pressures on community colleges to improve student outcome measures continue to intensify, as do pressures to be both effective and efficient in implementing student success strategies. The SSC has become a popular strategy implemented by community colleges to address the continued low persistence, retention, and graduation rates that community colleges experience; however, there is a lack of research finding it to be

effective in increasing successful student outcomes in the community college. The SSC was adapted from a four-year college model to the community college in hopes of increasing the static persistence, retention, and academic achievement rates. Community colleges must address the low persistence, retention, and graduation rates in order to continue to be relevant, viable options for students seeking higher education.

### **Operationalization of Theoretical Constructs**

This study consisted of the following constructs: (a) SSC; (b) persistence; (c) retention; (d) academic achievement; and (e) student engagement. For the purposes of this study, a SSC is defined as a course that is offered with the primary goal of supporting students in making the academic and social transitions to college through learning personal responsibility, personal success, self-motivation, self-management, interdependence, self-awareness, managing emotions, and becoming a life-long-learner. The SSC was measured by whether a student participated in the course (either PSYC 1300 or EDUC 1300) in the fall or spring semester of academic year 2012-2013.

Persistence was defined as an institutional rate at which students remain at the same institution where they start in the fall semester until the following spring semester and will be measured by determining the student's enrollment status in the spring 2013 semester. Retention was defined as an institutional rate at which students remain at the same institution where they start in the fall semester until the following fall semester and will be measured by determining the student enrollment status in the fall 2013 semester in academic year 2012-2013.

Academic achievement was defined as successfully completing a course with a grade of "C" or better and will be measured by assessing grades in gatekeeper courses

college algebra (MATH 1314) and English Composition I (ENGL 1301) at the end of the fall 2012, spring 2013, and summer 2013 semesters. Finally, student engagement was defined as the amount of time and energy students invest in meaningful educational practices both in and outside of the classroom (CCSSE, 2012). Examples of meaningful educational activities include meeting with a faculty member or peer to discuss class-related material, engaging in study groups, and participating in clubs, organizations or other school affiliated group that facilitates integration into the college community. Student engagement was measured by the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE), specifically Items 4, (a, b, f, g, l, m, n, and q) which focused on interacting in and out of the classroom with faculty members and peers regarding course materials; and Item 9 (b, d, and e). These questions focused on the college emphasizing utilization of support systems within the college to assist the students in engaging with the institution.

### **Research Purpose and Questions**

The purpose of this study was to determine if participation in a SSC influences persistence, retention, academic achievement, and student engagement. The following research questions guided this study:

1. Is there a relationship between participation in the SSC and persistence?

Ha: There is a relationship between SSC participation and persistence.

2. Is there a relationship between participation in the SSC and retention?

Ha: There is a relationship between participation in the SSC and retention.

3. Is there a relationship between participation in the SSC and academic achievement?

**Ha: There is a relationship between participation in the SSC and academic achievement.**

- 4. Does participation in the Student Success Course influence student engagement?**

**Ha: Participation in the Student Success Course influences student engagement.**

- 5. How has the SSC influenced student decisions to remain in college?**
- 6. How has the SSC promoted student engagement?**

### **Research Design**

For this study, a sequential mixed methods research design was implemented (Ivankova, Creswell, & Stick, 2006). This design consisted of two phases: first, a quantitative phase and second, a qualitative one that added breadth and meaning to the quantitative findings. The significant advantage of this design is that it allows for a more thorough and in-depth exploration of the quantitative results through the integration of the qualitative phase. Archived data on student persistence, retention, and academic achievement were collected on a purposeful sample of participants who took the SSC in school year 2012-2013 and who also completed the CCSSE in spring 2013. A matched sample of students who did not take the SSC, but did take the CCSSE were used as a comparison group. A purposeful sample of the students who took the SSC were asked to participate in semi-structured interviews to ascertain how their experiences in the SSC influenced their persistence, retention, and engagement. Quantitative data were analyzed using a Chi-Square Test of Independence and cross-tabulations, while the qualitative data were analyzed using an inductive coding process.

### **Population and Sample**

This study was conducted at a medium sized community college located in the southwest United States. The population for this study was all of the students enrolled during the 2012-2013 academic school year. During the 2012-2013 academic school year, this particular campus enrolled approximately 4100 students. The average age of students enrolled was 27 (range 18 to 65+). The demographic makeup of the population was comprised of: 56% female and 44% male, 61% White, 27% Hispanics, 10% African-American, and 2% other. Having over 25% full-time enrolled Hispanic students makes this college a Hispanic Serving Institution (U. S. Department of Education, 2014). Seventy-eight percent of all students enrolled were eligible to receive the federal Pell Grant; however, only 34% applied and were awarded the Pell Grant. The retention rate for this college in 2012-2013 was 47% for full-time equivalent (FTE) students and 40% for part-time students (NCES, 2012). The CCSSE survey is only administered every other year, during odd years. Therefore, the latest CCSSE data that is available is from the 2012-2013 academic year.

### **Participant Demographics**

Two participant sample groups were used in this mixed method study. The quantitative portion of the study included a total of 432 participants (SSC = 197; non-SSC = 235) responding to the school conducted CCSSE questionnaire. The qualitative data was obtained from a total of 12 participants who participated in individual, in-depth interviews. Demographic data were collected from both the qualitative and quantitative samples. This section provides an overview of each sample demographics.

### **Quantitative Survey Participants**

The quantitative sample consisted of a total of 432 students (SSC = 197; non-SSC = 235) responding to the CCSSE questionnaire. The participants represented a wide range of age, gender, and racial/ethnic demographics. In terms of age, 64% were between the ages of 18 and 24. Despite the predominance of students aged 18-24, which is expected in a college setting, age representation was given in every age group up to 65 years and over (see Table 3.1 and Table 3.2). There were fairly even numbers of female and male participants, most of who were not married (84.5%). Over 85.0% were native English speakers, which aligned with the majority (42.4%) being White, non-Hispanic participants; however, 28.0% were of Hispanic origin. Racial representation was evident in all of the reported categories, although highest among White (84.5%), Black (18.8%), and Hispanic groups (28.0%). Table 3.1 represents demographic data from SSC participants, while Table 3.2 represents demographic data from the non-SSC participants.

Table 3.1

*SSC Participant Demographics*

Demographic Characteristic		Frequency	Percent
1. Age	18-19	58	29.4
	20-21	40	20.2
	22-24	28	14.1
	25-29	28	14.1
	30-39	34	17.2
	40-49	6	3.0
	50-64	3	1.5
	65+	1	.5
2. Gender	Male	96	48.5
	Female	102	51.5
3. Marital Status	Married	31	15.7
	Not Married	167	84.3
4. First Language	Native English Speaker	169	85.4
	English not First Language	29	14.6
5. Race/Ethnicity	American Indian or other native American	3	1.5
	Asian, Asian-American, or Pacific Islander	9	4.6
	Black, African American, non-Hispanic	38	19.2
	White, non-Hispanic	84	42.4
	Hispanic, Latino, Spanish	56	28.3
	Other	8	4.0

Table 3.2

*Non- SSC Participant Demographics*

Demographic Characteristic		Frequency	Percentage
1. Age	18-19	68	29.1
	20-21	47	20.1
	22-24	34	14.5
	25-29	33	14.5
	30-39	40	17.1
	40-49	7	3.0
	50-64	4	1.7
	65+	0	0
2. Gender	Male	114	48.7
	Female	120	51.3
3. Marital Status	Married	36	15.4
	Not Married	198	84.6
4. First Language	Native English Speaker	199	85.0
	English not First Language	35	15.0
5. Race/Ethnicity	American Indian or other native American	3	1.3
	Asian, Asian-American, or Pacific Islander	11	4.7
	Black, African American, non-Hispanic	44	18.8
	White, non-Hispanic	99	42.3
	Hispanic, Latino, Spanish	67	28.6
	Other	10	4.3

*Note.* Missing age data from one participant.



### Qualitative Interview Participants

The qualitative data was obtained from a total of 12 participants who participated in individual, in-depth interviews. Data in the form of race/ethnicity, gender, and age were gathered at the time of the interview. Table 3.3 presents this demographic data.

Table 3.3

#### *Interview Participant Demographics*

Demographic Characteristics		n	%
1. Race/Ethnicity	Asian	1	8
	Black, African American, non-Hispanic	3	25
	White, non-Hispanic	2	17
	Hispanic, Latino, Spanish	6	50
2. Gender	Female	6	50
	Male	6	50
3. Age	21	3	25
	20	3	25
	22	2	17
	27	2	17
	28	1	8
	29	1	8

### Instrumentation

The CCSSE survey was developed to meet higher expectations from governing boards, state and federal governments, accrediting organizations, and the public for higher quality, improved performance, and increased accountability (Eaton, 2009). According to McClenney, Marti, and Adkins (2007), to meet these higher expectations, community colleges could not simply adopt data models from four-year institutions. In response to needed assessment tools and improvement strategies that are unique to community colleges' strengths and trials, in 2001, the CCSSE (see Appendix A) was

developed by adapting the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) to provide tools to address the unique challenges of community colleges. The NSSE was developed in 1999 for use in four-year colleges and universities (Kuh et al., 2001). According to McClenney et al. (2007), there is a 71% overlap between the two instruments. The psychometric properties of the NSSE instrument have been extensively explored, demonstrating that the instrument is reliable and valid (Kuh et al., 2001; Kuh, 2002). From 2001 to 2007, the CCSSE surveyed more than 700,000 students from approximately 550 different community colleges in 48 states. Students have also been surveyed from the Marshall Islands, Palau, British Columbia, and Canada.

A three pronged research project was conducted in 2007 to validate the CCSSE, linking responses to CCSSE surveys with three external, student-level data sets that were established for the purposes of the research project. The external data sets included: Florida community colleges; the CCSSE Hispanic Student Success Consortium (HSS); and twenty four of the twenty seven initial colleges that participated in the national Achieve the Dream Initiative (McClenney et al., 2007). Results from three studies validate CCSSE's use of student engagement as a proxy for student academic achievement and persistence. Community College Survey of Student Engagement benchmarks consistently exhibited a positive relationship with outcome measures and confirm a long convention of research on student engagement, lengthening that research for the first time to large-scale community college student samples.

The survey has 38 questions and a CCSSE 2013 special-focus questions section that consists of 20 additional questions. There are five CCSSE benchmarks that include: active and collaborative learning; student effort; academic challenge; student-faculty

interaction; and support for learners. The special-focus questions augment the core survey and help the participating colleges further explore fundamental areas of student engagement. The 2013 special-focus questions elicit new information about students' experiences associated with promising educational practices such as early registration, orientation, freshman seminars, organized learning communities, and the SSC.

Demographic information, such as age, sex, marital status, English language speaking, full or part-time status, race, first generation status, and major is gathered at the end of the survey. The survey has a total of 38 questions. Questions 1-3 are answered by choosing between two options: (a) started here or started elsewhere; (b) full-time or part-time; and (c) yes or no. Question 4 asks 21 sub-questions about various engagement activities and is scored by a Likert Scale that includes very often, often, sometimes, and never. Question 5 focuses on mental activities engaged in and consists of 6 sub-questions scored by a Likert Scale that includes none, 1-4, 5-10, 11-20, and more than 20.

Question 7 addresses the student perception of the level of challenge of examinations in the current school year. It is answered on a 7 point Likert Scale with 1 being extremely easy and 7 being extremely challenging. Question 8 focuses on determining activities a student has done or plans to do while attending this college. This question has 9 sub questions and is scored by I have done, I plan to do, and I have not done nor plan to do. Question 9 has 7 sub-questions and focuses on the emphasis the college places on various support systems that emphasize student engagement. This question is answered by a Likert Scale ranging from very much, quite a bit, some, and very little. Question 10 has 5 sub-questions, asking about how many hours students spend in various class, college, and home related activities. The answers include none,

between 1-5, 6-10, 11-20, 21-30, and more than 30. Question 11 has three sub-questions that discusses the relationships with various people on campus and are answered by a 7-point Likert Scale with 7 being friendly, supportive, sense of belonging, available, helpful, sympathetic and helpful, considerate and flexible and 1 being unfriendly, unsupportive, and sense of alienation, unavailable, unhelpful, unsympathetic, unhelpful, inconsiderate, and rigid, which directly supports student engagement.

Question 12 of the CCSSE has 15 sub-questions and focuses on the student experience at the college. It is scored by a Likert Scale including very much, quite a bit, some, and very little. Question 13 has 11 sub-questions and has three parts. The students are asked to indicate how often they use the services listed, how satisfied they were with the services provided, and how important the services are to the student at this college. The respective responses are: often, sometimes, and rarely/never/ and don't know/ non-applicable (NA); verry, somewhat, and not at all and NA; very, somewhat, and not at all. Question 14 focuses on how likely certain issues are to cause a student to drop out. There are 5 sub-questions, which are scored by very likely, likely, somewhat likely, and not likely.

Questions 15 and 16 relate to supportivcness and are answered with extremely, quite a bit, somewhat, and not very. Six sub-questions are part of question 17 and focus on the student's goals for attending the college. The responses include primary goal, secondary goal, and not a goal. Question 18 has 6 sub-questions and focuses on sources used to pay for college. Answers include major source, minor source, and not a source. Questions 19-37 are multiple choice response options and question 38 asks for the student's identification number. All of the special focused items are multiple choice

responses and are designed to enable colleges to explore more deeply certain issues that are vital to improved student engagement and student success. The special focus item 1 asks if the respondent registered before the first class session. Question 2 relates to the respondent's experience in new student orientation, while question 3 asks about participating in a structured first-year experience program. Question 4 asks about experiences with learning communities and question 5 asks if the survey respondent participated in a SSC.

Question 6 relates to accelerated course enrollment, while question 7 asks about attendance policy explanations being provided to the respondent. Questions 8-16 ask about the respondent's experiences with the placement test(s) and subsequent placement into courses. Question 17 and 19 relate to support services used by the respondent and questions 18 and 20 relate to group instruction including supplemental instruction. For the purposes of this study, only survey items 4, 9 and 11 and their associated 33 questions were used to answer the research questions. These questions were chosen, as they are most closely associated with student engagement, measuring active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction and support for learners. Table 3.4 outlines the Chronbach's alpha and Pearson's  $r$  scores for the CCSSE survey (Marti, 2008).

Table 3.4

*Reliability Measures for the CCSSE*

Latent Construct	Alpha	Pearson's <i>r</i>
<b>1. Model of Effective Educational Practices (MEEP)</b>		
Active and Collaborative Learning	.66	.73
Student Effort	.56	.74
Academic Challenge	.80	.77
Student-Faculty Interaction	.67	.73
Support for Learners	.76	.73
<b>2. Model of Best Fit (MBF)</b>		
Faculty Interactions	.73	.72
Class Assignments	.65	.68
Exposure to Diversity	.73	.70
Collaborative Learning	.60	.67
Information Technology	.59	.69
Mental Activities	.83	.73
School Opinions	.78	.73
Student Services	.65	.61
Academic Preparation	.56	.76

**Data Collection**

The researcher obtained all necessary permission from University of Houston-Clear Lake's Committee on Protection of Human Subjects (CPHS), and written approval from the President of the college being studied. The researcher collected data from an archived database with the assistance of the participating college's Institutional Research Office (IR). Data from the 2012-2013 school year related to participants in the SSC was requested of IR, who provided the data requested. Subsequent semester enrollment status

was collected, as were grades received in gatekeeper courses English Composition I (ENGL 1301) and College Algebra (MATH 1314), to assess academic achievement. The IR office also provided data from the archived CCSSE data from spring 2013.

The researcher then obtained a list for each student currently enrolled at the participating institution who took the SSC in the 2012-2013 academic year. These students were contacted and invited to an informational meeting held in November 2014 to explain the purpose and processes of this study. This informational meeting included: purpose of the study; explanation of the interviews; amount of time the interviews should take to complete; types of questions that will be asked in the interviews; and where results of the study can be found at the conclusion of the research study. The meetings were held at various times of the day and evening to ensure students have an opportunity to attend. Ten participants were to be chosen from the meetings; however, only 12 students signed up to participate in the interviews; therefore, all 12 were used in the qualitative portion of this study.

The researcher scheduled individual interviews during the fall 2014 semester. The interviews were held in the college's board room, which was comfortable, climate controlled, and well lit. All participants signed an informed consent to participate in research form prior to the interview sessions. The interviews were scheduled for 60 minutes; however, none lasted over 30 minutes. The interviews were semi-structured. Consistent with Rubin and Rubin (2005), this allowed for the researcher to elicit depth and detail about the research topic by following up on answers given by the interviewee during the discussion. Participants were encouraged to clarify and expound upon information provided. The interviews asked open-ended questions to ascertain the student

perception of the SSC in their academic career, their decision to stay enrolled at the college and matriculate towards successful completion. Questions asked also attempted to ascertain if the SSC impacted student engagement within the college being studied. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. The interview questions are listed in Appendix C. All data is being kept securely in the primary researcher's office on a pin drive and locked in a filing cabinet for a period of 5 years, at which time all data will be destroyed.

### **Data Analysis**

#### **Quantitative**

All quantitative data obtained was uploaded into SPSS for further analysis. Research question one, two, and three were answered using a Chi-Square Test of Independence to determine the relationship of participation in the SSC (independent variable) on persistence, retention, and academic achievement (outcome variables) as compared with a group of non-SSC participants. The SSC was measured by whether a student participated in the SSC course or not. Persistence was measured by determining the student's enrollment status in the spring 2013 semester after taking the SSC in the fall of 2012. Retention was measured by determining the student enrollment status in the fall 2013 semester after taking the SSC in academic year 2012-2013. Academic success was measured using archived student data to determine if participants earned an A, B, or C grade in gatekeeper courses, English Composition I and College Algebra. The grades of A, B, or C were used as successful completion, as a student must earn an A, B, or C in order to transfer those gatekeeper courses to a four-year college or university. To answer research question four frequencies and percentages were calculated on the responses to



the CCSSE survey Item 4 (a, b, f, g, l, m, n, and q) and Item 9 (b, d, and e) reflecting student perceptions of engagement. A statistical significance of .05 was used for this study.

### **Qualitative**

To answer research questions three and four, all of the data collected was placed into NVivo for initial organizing and categorizing of data. The researcher then analyzed the data by coding, categorizing, and sub-categorizing data. Throughout this process, the researcher referred back to literature to ensure the validity of data analysis. Categories were moved into concepts and analyzed further for emergent patterns and themes. Triangulation of data sources were used, as was peer-review, to ensure the validity of data analysis. Rubin and Rubin (2005) offer a short guideline to evaluate interviews, which was used by the researcher. The emphasis of this evaluation was on the researcher's personal feelings and understanding of what the interview has disclosed. The individual interviewee responses and a mutual understanding were of prime importance in validation.

### **Ethical Issues**

The researcher obtained all necessary permission from University of Houston-Clear Lake's Committee on Protection of Human Subjects (CPHS), and written approval from the President of the college being studied. All participants completed the informed consent to participate in research form prior to interviews taking place. The researcher redacted all identifying information and numbers were used to protect the identity of all participants. All data collected is being kept securely in a locked file cabinet and on a pin drive in the primary researcher's office, as well as on a flash drive for a period of five

years. The researcher made every effort to ensure confidentiality and anonymity; however, this was not guaranteed to study participants. The low numbers of participants in the qualitative portion of the study and the purposeful sampling technique used might allow for determining participant identity.

### **Validity**

Various techniques were utilized to increase the validity of this study and included: triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checking. Triangulation of ideas occurred through peer editing and referencing existing literature through a literature review. This allowed the researcher to obtain feedback from peers to validate appropriate analysis of ideas, concepts, and themes. Letters written to future students, which are recommended of all students at the conclusion of the SSC were also reviewed for the 2012-2013 academic year. Content in those letters were reviewed with academic leaders at the institution being studied and concluded that the data found in this study was consistent with the letters and their knowledge in the subject matter. Peer debriefing occurred through conversations with the Dean and Vice President at the research site, allowing the researcher to obtain feedback on the validity of analysis of data. Member checking was used in order to assess the accuracy with which the researcher has represented a participant's subjectivity. The researcher restated and summarized information and then questioned the participant to determine accuracy.

### **Limitations of Research Design**

There are a few limitations to this study. The primary external validity issue is generalizability. First, due to the purposeful sampling technique and the limited scope of the research study, findings cannot be generalized to other community colleges or other

populations of students. Internal validity issues resulting from the inability to control for confounding variables are also present in this study. Second, a confounding variable is student interest in the SSC and students giving honest answers on the CCSSE survey are another confounding variable that cannot be controlled. The researcher is unable to identify and control for the level of interest and effort a student applies in the SSC. Third, professor instruction variability is also a limitation. While all professors received the same curriculum, the teaching style and methods will vary depending on the instructor.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to measure the relationship between participating in the SSC on persistence, retention, academic achievement and engagement. This chapter provided an overview of the research problem, operationalization of theoretical constructs, research purpose, questions, hypotheses, research design, population and sampling selection, instrumentation to be used, data collection procedures, data analysis, privacy and ethical considerations, and the research design limitations of the study. For the study, a sequential mixed-methods design (quant→ QUAL) was used to analyze the relationship between participation in the SSC on student persistence, retention, academic achievement, and engagement. Persistence, retention and academic achievement were analyzed using a Chi-Square Test of Independence. CCSSE survey results were analyzed using frequencies and percentages and the interview responses will be analyzed using inductive thematic coding.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **RESULTS**

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship of participation in the Student Success Course (SSC) on persistence, retention, academic achievement, and student engagement of community college students. This chapter provides the detailed results of the data analysis of both the quantitative and qualitative data obtained for the study. The results of the data analysis for each of the six research questions are provided below. The chapter will conclude with a summary of the qualitative and quantitative findings.

#### **Quantitative Results**

For this mixed methods study, research question one and two were addressed using quantitative analysis. Data were obtained from a total of 432 participants: 197 participated in the SSC and 235 did not participate in the SSC.

##### **Research Question 1**

To answer research question one, *Is there relationship between participation in the Student Success Course and persistence?*, a Chi-Square Test of Independence was conducted to determine whether a relationship existed between SSC participation and persistence to the next semester (spring). Persistence was measured using data revealing whether the student was enrolled in the following semester (spring) or not. Student Success Course participation was based on whether the student had at some previous point taken the SSC course. No expected cell counts within the cross-tabulations were

less than five and the minimum expected count was 75.5, meeting test assumptions in both cases. The results of the Chi-Square Test of Independence suggested that a statistically significant relationship existed between whether a student had taken the SSC course and continued enrollment to the Spring semester,  $\chi^2(1, N = 432) = 7.765, p = .005$ . Ninety-nine percent of students who participated in the SSC persisted to the following semester, opposed to 94.9% who did not participate in the SSC (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1

*Cross-tabulation Results of SSC Participation and Persistence*

		Persistence Enrolled in Next Semester (Spring)	
		No	Yes
SSC Participation	No	5.1 % (n = 12)	94.9% (n = 223)
	Yes	1.0 % (n = 1 )	99.0% (n = 196)

**Research Question 2**

To answer research question two, *Is there a relationship between participation in the Student Success Course and retention?*, a Chi-Square Test of Independence was conducted to determine whether a relationship existed between SSC participation and retention to the next year (fall). Retention was measured using data revealing whether the student was enrolled in the following fall semester or not. Student Success Course participation was based on whether the student had at some previous point taken the SSC course. No expected cell counts within the cross-tabulations were less than five and the minimum expected count was 75.5, meeting test assumptions in both cases. The results of the Chi-Square Test of Independence suggested that a statistically significant

relationship existed between whether a student had taken the SSC course and continued enrollment to the following Fall semester,  $\chi^2(1, N = 432) = 6.360, p = .012$ . Sixty-eight percent of students who participated in the SSC were retained to the following fall as opposed to 56.2% of students retained who were not SSC participants (see Table 4.2).

**Table 4.2**

***Cross-tabulation Results of SSC Participation and Persistence***

		Retention Enrolled in Next Year (Fall)	
		No	Yes
SSC Participation	No	43.8 % (n = 189 )	56.2% (n = 243)
	Yes	32.0 % (n = 138)	68.0% (n =294)

**Research Question 3**

To answer research question three, *Is there a relationship between participation in the Student Success Course and academic achievement?*, a Chi-Square Test of Independence was conducted to determine whether a relationship existed between SSC participation and English and mathematics grades. No expected cell counts within the cross-tabulations were less than five and the minimum expected count was 75.5, meeting test assumptions in both cases. A statistically significant relationship was found to exist between the SSC participation and English grades,  $\chi^2(7, N = 432) = 30.337, p < .001$ . Students who participated in the SSC (77.3%) earned an A, B, or C grade in English as opposed to 63.4% of students earning an A, B, or C grade who did not participate in the

SSC. The grades of A, B, and C were used as earning those grades allows these gatekeeper courses to transfer to a four- yyear college or university (see Table 4.3).

Table 4.3

*Cross-tabulation Results of SSC Participation and English Grades*

English Grade	SSC Participation	
	No	Yes
A	58	64
B	50	59
C	34	30
Total	142	153

Similarly, a statistically significant relationship was found to exist between the SSC participation and mathematics grades,  $\chi^2(6, N = 432) = 28.29, p < .001$ . Students participating in the SSC earned a grade of A, B, or C (66.7%) as opposed to 29.9% students earning an A, B, or C who did not participate in the SSC (see Table 4.4).

Table 4.4

*Cross-tabulation Results of SSC Participation and Mathematics Grades*

Math Grade	SSC Participation	
	No	Yes
A	14	35
B	21	53
C	32	44
Total	67	132

### Research Question 4

To answer research question four, *Does participation in the Student Success Course influence student engagement?*, frequencies and percentages were reported on the responses to the CCSSE survey items reflecting student perceptions of engagement (Items 4 and 9) for those that had participated in the SSC and those that had not. Tables 4.5 and 4.6 display a comparison of the responses for both groups. Overall, for the majority of the survey items (72.7%) those that had participated in the SSC reported greater student engagement than those that had not.

Table 4.5

#### *Responses to CCSSE Item 4*

Survey Item		Never (%)	Sometimes (%)	Often (%)	Very Often (%)
Item 4- In your experience at this college during the current school year, about how often have you done each of the following?					
a. Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions	Participants	2.0	26.4	33.5	38.1
		(n = 4)	(n = 52)	(n = 66)	(n = 75)
	Non-participants	.86	37.8	32.6	28.8
		(n = 2)	(n = 88)	(n = 76)	(n = 67)
b. Made a class presentation	Participants	12.7	43.7	27.9	15.7
		(n = 25)	(n = 86)	(n = 55)	(n = 31)
	Non-participants	29.8	36.2	22.6	11.5
		(n = 70)	(n = 85)	(n = 53)	(n = 27)
f. Worked with other students on projects during class	Participants	7.1	34.5	36.0	22.3
		(n = 14)	(n = 68)	(n = 71)	(n = 44)
	Non-participants	14.0	40.4	34.5	11.1
		(n = 33)	(n = 95)	(n = 81)	(n = 26)



Survey Item		Never (%)	Sometimes (%)	Often (%)	Very Often (%)
g. Worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments	Participants	33.0 (n = 65)	37.6 (n = 74)	21.3 (n = 42)	8.1 (n = 16)
	Non-participants	34.9 (n = 82)	33.2 (n = 78)	21.3 (n = 50)	10.6 (n = 25)
l. Discussed grades or assignments with an instructor	Participants	4.6 (n = 9)	39.0 (n = 77)	32.5 (n = 64)	23.9 (n = 47)
	Non-participants	8.1 (n = 19)	45.1 (n = 106)	28.9 (n = 68)	17.9 (n = 42)
m. Talked about career plans with an instructor or advisor	Participants	13.2 (n = 26)	46.2 (n = 91)	26.9 (n = 53)	13.7 (n = 27)
	Non-participants	28.1 (n = 66)	46.8 (n = 110)	11.9 (n = 28)	13.2 (n = 31)
n. Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with instructors outside of class	Participants	41.1 (n = 81)	38.6 (n = 76)	14.2 (n = 28)	6.1 (n = 12)
	Non-participants	43.0 (n = 101)	39.2 (n = 92)	11.9 (n = 28)	6.0 (n = 14)
q. Worked with instructors on activities other than coursework	Participants	64.5 (n = 127)	26.4 (n = 52)	5.1 (n = 10)	4.1 (n = 8)
	Non-participants	67.7 (n = 159)	21.3 (n = 50)	8.1 (n = 19)	3.0 (n = 7)

Table 4.6

*Responses to CCSSE Item 9*

Survey Item		Very Little (%)	Some (%)	Quite a Bit (%)	Very much (%)	Total n
<b>Item 9 – How much does this college emphasize each of the follow?</b>						
<b>b. Providing the support you need to help you succeed at this college</b>	<b>Participants</b>	6.1 (n = 12)	13.2 (n = 26)	40.6 (n = 80)	40.1 (n = 79)	197
	<b>Non-participants</b>	9.4 (n = 22)	22.6 (n = 53)	41.7 (n = 98)	23.4 (n = 62)	235
<b>d. Helping you cope with your non-academic responsibilities (work, family, etc.)</b>	<b>Participants</b>	34.2 (n = 66)	33.7 (n = 65)	17.6 (n = 34)	14.5 (n = 28)	193
	<b>Non-participants</b>	41.6 (n = 94)	31.4 (n = 71)	18.6 (n = 42)	8.4 (n = 19)	226
<b>e. Providing the support you need to thrive socially</b>	<b>Participants</b>	18.4 (n = 35)	35.3 (n = 67)	29.0 (n = 55)	17.4 (n = 33)	190
	<b>Non-participants</b>	25.3 (n = 57)	36.0 (n = 81)	29.3 (n = 66)	9.3 (n = 21)	225

**Quantitative Conclusions**

For the first research question, a significant relationship was found between SSC course participation and persistence (continued enrollment to the following spring semester). For the second research question, a significant relationship was found between SSC course participation and retention (continued enrollment in the following fall semester). For the third research question, a significant relationship was revealed between SCC course participation and English and mathematics scores. These results suggest significant influence of SCC course participation on student persistence/retention as well as academic achievement specific to English and mathematics.

For the fourth research question, the results indicated a significant correlation between SCC course participation and student engagement. Upon comparing the frequencies and percentages of SCC participant and nonparticipant groups, the SCC participant group mean engagement score was higher than the nonparticipant group, and the difference was found to be statistically significant in the areas of asking questions in class/contributing to class discussion; making class presentations; working with other students on projects during class; and talking about career plans with an instructor or advisor. Student Success Course participants also felt the institution provided the support needed to be successful at the college being studied. Conversely, the results indicated that participation in the SSC did not have a statistically significant relationship to working with instructors or classmates outside of the classroom or discussing class related materials with instructors. Results also indicate that SSC participants do not feel the institution being studied helped them cope with non-academic issues or provided the support needed to thrive socially.

### **Qualitative Results**

#### **Research Questions 5 and 6**

To address the fifth and sixth research questions, *How has the SSC influenced student decisions to remain in college?*, and, *How has the SSC promoted student engagement?*, a qualitative analysis was conducted of the data obtained from interviews with a purposeful sample of twelve students who had previously participated in the SSC course. As the results garnered similar categories and themes for student perspectives on both retention at the institution and engagement, research questions five and six are combined in this section. Related themes from the analysis are discussed. Quotes from

the interviews provide insight into the unique experiences of the interview participants and how these experiences and perceptions answer the research questions.

In accordance with Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) and Lichtman (2013), who describe the necessary steps in qualitative analysis of data, after student interviews were conducted, data from the interviews were coded and clustered into thematic categories, within which key themes were revealed. The thematic categories related to the fifth and sixth research questions include: (a) perceptions of self and course; (b) course content, including experiences in the class and skills learned; and (c) importance of the instructor in the course. The key themes explore the positive self-perceptions of the student participants, which seem to align with the experiences of SSC supporting the perception of a positive impact of SSC participation on becoming more engaged at the institution and the decision to remain enrolled. Each thematic category developed from the analysis of the interview data is presented using key common themes revealed. Verbatim excerpts from the interviews support in-depth understanding of the experiences and perceptions of the participants in the SSC. The key themes revealed include student self-perceptions, course content, and instructor influence and will be discussed in the remainder of this chapter.

### **Participant Self Perception**

The theme of student self-perception is further delineated into two categories: (a) participant's perception of self as a student and, (b) the perception of the SSC, both prior to beginning the course and after it concluded. The theme of self-perceptions encompasses the participant's perception of self with regard to motivation to reach academic goals, level of engagement with the institution, and perception of self as a

student. Participant perception of the course includes thoughts and expectations prior to beginning the SSC as well as any changing perceptions throughout or after the course.

**Perception of self.** For participants who have completed the SSC, their self-description is telling of their perception of themselves academically and their ability to persist despite potential challenges. Participants described their reasons for staying in school (persistence and retention) as primarily self-motivating and related to their self-efficacy as students. Table 4.7 provides the participant responses and associated frequencies, which indicate the number of participants providing that response.

Table 4.7

*Student Self-Perception*

Response	Frequency
Committed, dedicated, or hardworking	5
Engaged	4
Mid-range or average student	4
Different than in high school	3
Focused	2
Language difficulties	2
Knowledgeable or intelligent	2
Good student	2
Enjoys learning	2
Self-motivated or responsible	2
Can procrastinate, but able to refocus and complete	2
Shy	1
Overachiever	1
Attention difficulties	1

When beginning the course, nine participants indicated they were self-motivated and were above average students who were engaged and enjoyed learning. Participant 3, speaking of the self-motivation necessary to stay in school, reflected “Basically myself...That’s what made me keep going to school, myself. It’s just me, so I have to have that drive within myself to go to school.” Five of the participants described themselves as committed, dedicated, or hardworking. These characteristics were thought to support success in terms of achievement. The following examples provide insight into the perceptions of the students when describing themselves. Participant 2 offered the following awareness about themselves as a student: “I always try to...to do my best to get the most I can from the class. And, I [am] hardworking as a student.” Similarly, participants 7 also felt positively about their effort toward being successful in school: “I would say I am a hard worker. I try as much as I can” (Participant 7).

Many students saw themselves as dedicated to reaching their academic goals, as shown by one participant’s description:

I would describe myself as a student who is very dedicated to what he is trying to accomplish. I have had moments where I tend to fall off a little bit at times but then once I realize how much I’m falling off, I tend to get myself back on track pretty quickly with the help of my instructors & anybody else who might be able to assist me in trying to be successful.  
(Participant 8)

Another participant indicated that they were involved on campus, and indicated their involvement assisted them in being more engaged on campus:

I think that I’m more involved than other students...Since I have two jobs here on campus....basically two jobs on campus, as an Ambassador and in the Student Help Center, I think I would know a lot more than other students on the. you know, whole registration side, you know, or who to take, what to take or what to do I guess in school. You know I’m way more involved than a lot of the other students. (Participant 3)

Other key common responses in describing themselves as related to support through the SSC course included being different than in high school, being more focused, enjoying learning, being self-motivated and responsible. For example, Participant 11 describes personal responsibility and self-motivation: "I'm really responsible: I like to get my studies done on time. I write things down so that I know when things are due.....so I'm not behind and doing everything last minute." Seven participants found it was a good transition course into college, noting the differences between college and high school level courses. One participant noted that:

I think it's pretty good for students coming out of high school, transitioning into college because it shows you what the rest of your classes are going to be like and it's not too much during the first semester.....A lot of students will take harder classes, thinking they can do it in the first semester and not understand how much work that goes into college classes. (Participant 3)

Another participant reflected how the SSC prepared them for future classes and should be taken seriously:

It....it [SSC] gets you ready for like your core classes. This class really like, teaches you, you know? It really gets you ready, but a lot of people take it for granted. They shouldn't.....it's a great class and really prepares you. (Participant 7)

**Perception of course.** While participants mostly had positive views of themselves as students, their view of the SSC prior to beginning was also important. A common finding among respondents was lack of knowledge about why they were enrolled in the SSC. Nine respondents stated they did not know why they were enrolled or didn't feel they should have been enrolled in this course. Four were unaware of the purpose of the course or didn't have clear expectations before beginning the course, many relying on friends who had previously taken the course when formulating their

expectations. Ten students felt, going into the course, that it was a “blow-off” class, (described as an “easy-A” course) that would help improve their grade point average (GPA). Two students felt they were too advanced for the course and thought they were more academically prepared than others taking the course. For example, one participant describes their feelings when they enrolled in the course:

Well, the first thing I thought was why would I need this class, it is really not for me....So, I didn't think it was for me, and I thought this was for somebody else and it's not into my degree that I'm going into.  
(Participant 1)

Participant 9 had a similar recollection: “I didn't feel like I needed it: I thought it was just one of those classes, you know that the college was just trying to make money off.” Similarly, participant 3 didn't recognize value in the course: “I thought the course was just going to be a little blow off kind of class, I guess you could say. Something you just have to take to get by, to go on towards the next semester.” One participant indicated they should not have been enrolled in the SSC: “I thought I shouldn't be here, like I should already be advanced to a higher level....so, I expected it to be easy and everything, you know, an easy “A” (Participant 4). Finally, participant 5 added concerns regarding transferability of the course: “I didn't really want to take it, 'cause when I transfer, it won't be on my transcript” (Participant 5).

After the course had ended, however, the perceptions of the course had also changed. Students indicated that the course had significantly helped them (6 participants), motivated them to keep going in school and give their best (2 participants) and inspired them in regard to their academic future and future in life (4 participants). Examples of the changing thoughts about the course are identified by the participants. For example, one participant indicated their behavior as a student changed:



I learned to approach my classes in a more dedicated manner. Like now, I'm showing up to class every day and I don't hardly ever miss a class.....I'm always asking instructors for help, whereas in the past, I didn't feel too comfortable doing that. (Participant 8)

Another participant added their thoughts regarding the value of the course after taking it:

Yeah, my mind changed a lot about the class after it started. It changed in the way I guess in how the class developed and how the teacher taught the class and motivated me and got me to thinking about why are you doing this, why are you going to college. It made me want to succeed. (Participant 1)

One participant found other students experiencing similar struggles as themselves and assisted them with overcoming challenges:

I figured out that more students were having a struggles with the classes like me. I didn't know that other people had the same stuff as me going on. I would say that I didn't know that this class would help me to overcome those challenges I had. (Participant 2)

Finally, participant 5, found their perception of the course changed early in the semester:

When I did get into the class, I did like it because it had a lot of motivational stuff. We watched a video and [it] made me cry because if he (a student with a disability in the video) could do it, then I can do anything I put my mind to. (Participant 5)

Participant's perception of themselves and the course resulted in inspiration to meet academic and personal goals (6 participants), while having an enjoyable experience (5 participants) and an effective tool in transitioning from high school to college (4 participants).

Examples of participants meeting both academic and personal goals due to the course were also plentiful. Participant 8 believes this is the most important class for reaching personal and academic goals:

They always say math is the most important class you ever take, but, I think this [SSC] is actually the most important class you'll ever take. This [SSC] will give you the confidence to that you will need to have to pass a

course like math or science.....and also to meet personal goals, like me. I now work full time. That was a personal goal of mine and I would not be where I am now if it hadn't been for that class. (Participant 8)

Participant 11 added, "It [SSC] just helps. It would just help you in the long run.....future wise, school wise, goal wise...I think in all aspects, it just helps you."

Participant 6 indicated that learning to prioritize was important: "I learned how to put priority in my life. She (the instructor) say, if you put your priority first then you have time to fill in the gaps with your other stuff." Another participant indicated the SSC supported them to be more interactive in other classes and attributed that to the group work required in the SSC:

You start off.....in groups of 5....You interact and work on projects and stuff. You all do it all together. It was fun. It'll [the class] make you a better person and more interactive in your other classes and help you improve. (Participant 10)

Participant 9 offered suggestions to future students taking the course:

Go in with an open mind. So many people go in with a close mind....like me. [Thinking] I'm not going to need this class so the first week or so, you're dreading it and you're really making it hard on yourself. But, if you go in with an open mind and feel like I might could get something out of this class, you really will. (Participant 9)

## **Course Content**

The next theme is course content. While course content is typically thought of as the curriculum, in the experiences of the participants of the SSC, it was more involved and hence has been categorized into two different sub-categories. Those include (a) experiences, and (b) skills learned in the SSC.

**Experiences.** Two thematic categories developed from the interview data were used to formulate the theme of course content, experiences had and skills learned in the SSC. The first category identified was experiences participants had in the course.

Experiences were further delineated into sub categories consisting of: (a) group projects; (b) effective use of technology and videos; (c) impactful relationship building; and (d) improved public speaking skills. Participants indicated that the experiences they had in the course led to improved learning, increased engagement in the college, with other students, faculty and staff, and improved social and public speaking skills.

Experiences described by participants that were especially beneficial were group projects (8 participants), effective use of videos and other technology (8 participants), impactful relationship building with other students (5 participants), and improved public speaking (3 participants). Participant interview data provided an array of experiences in the SSC course, nearly all of which were positive, supporting student engagement. Table 4.8 shows both the commonality and the diversity of the responses.

Table 4.8

*Experiences in SSC*

Response	Frequency
1. Group projects	8
2. Use of videos	8
3. Increased confidence	5
4. Improved social skills and awareness	5
5. Not much work; easy assignments	4
6. Impactful relationship with another student	4
7. Improved public speaking	3
8. Enjoyable experience	3
9. Use of journals	2
10. Helpful transition from high school	2
11. Active student involvement	2
12. Comfortable environment and teacher	2
13. Excellent and impactful instructor	2
14. Involvement outside of class	2
15. Lots of work	1
16. Cooperative quizzes	1
17. Inspired toward career direction	1

**Group projects.** Participants provided insights into the importance of group projects in the SSC. Participant 1 discussed the nature of group work in the SSC: “We had to do a lot of group activities and work together. Getting into groups, talking to each other and learning to communicate with each other...you know by talking and stuff.”

These kinds of activities served to make the SSC more enjoyable and supported student engagement in the class. An outcome of these group activities was confidence, as explained by one participant:

We played, we had a lot of fun activities in there and, that really helped to raise my confidence. And without the class, I wouldn't have the

confidence that I have and I wouldn't have accomplished what I have and I probably wouldn't be doing what I am doing now and I wouldn't know what I want to do for a living because I wouldn't have the confidence to do it and I'd probably still be stuck holding on to the things I struggled with. (Participant 8)

All of these experiences in class, enjoyment, and bonding with peers and teachers served to support increased engagement in the learning environment. Other group work occurred frequently in the class according to another participant who stated:

When we did our scavenger hunt....we had to walk around together and then like some of the quizzes, we did together as a group. We all took parts of the work and we just came up with the answers together. And I guess helping, having someone to help confirm your answer, if you don't have the right one, you can talk to everybody and that always helps to get the right one [answer]. (Participant 10)

Another participant mentioned the usefulness of working in groups to help alleviate fears associated with college:

This class is to...is to work together. Yeah, to share with other students because the teacher makes small groups and work together and has to make presentations and this makes more communication between students...If we have fears, we like talk to other students and by making small groups, you more comfortable to share experience and to talk to them. Yeah...that was really helpful. (Participant 6)

As the above comments indicate, the use of group work in the SSC facilitated overcoming fears associated with going to college while also building confidence in building relationships which will be discussed further in this section.

***Effective use of technology.*** The second sub-category mentioned by interview participants was the effective use of technology and videos in the SSC. Participants discussed the importance of educational support tools in the course to emphasize the material they learned. Several participants mentioned a specific video they found inspirational. Participant 6 revealed the positive effects of the videos and personal

examples used by the instructor: “The examples she presents [and] the videotapes inspire students if people with disability can do it, we can do it” (Participant 6). Another participant describes the video they found inspirational:

When I was first in there, she showed us the video of a guy who was...he couldn't walk. He couldn't use his hands, so he was, he was sitting on a chair and for him it was always a struggle to get up in the morning and dress up. Which was a thing I didn't have to face. He finished college even though he was in that condition and that was one of the things that I, was telling me...hey, I have everything he wish. I have everything he want....why shouldn't I? That was a really good example for us. (Participant 2)

Participant 5 mentioned videos and in-class technology as important tools in reaching goals and staying in college:

The videos helped a lot and so did the interactive stuff...you know like voting and stuff using our phones. The book, technology and videos and stuff he used....that really does the job. I mean there were times I thought about dropping out of school and you, know, now I would never do that, but, you know the stuff he used in the classes really did the job in keeping me here. (Participant 5)

Another participant seemed surprised at being able to learn and have fun at the same time when describing the effectiveness of videos and technology in the SSC: “The videos and games and stuff that she did have...it was fun, so even though you were learning....you enjoyed doing it because you had fun doing it” (Participant 9). As seen by eight participants' comments, the use of technology and videos in the SSC assisted in the learning of concepts taught in the course.

***Impactful relationship building.*** Nine participants found the SSC facilitated building essential relationships with students, faculty, and staff. One participant mentioned their experiences that reflect the importance of relationship building:

I got to interact with a lot of people. I got to meet a lot of new people. And then after that...like a semester later or a year later, I would still be like kept in touch and stuff. We kept in contact when we'd see each other and stuff. ... We watched Freedom Riders and then had to interact. Kinda' like role play with the group that we sat with and we all had characters and I remember it was certain things that I forgot what it was, but, it was like certain moods that we had to learn about and we kinda' just acted it out and everyone, they were watching and they had to pick out the ones that we had already played out. And that was for a grade so we had to ....You know, it was easy, but, it was a fun grade too. (Participant 11)

These experiences also made a more comfortable learning environment in which the teachers supported students' social development and improved abilities to interact effectively with others, developing people skills, as participant 8 describes: "She [instructor] always made it fun. She was very encouraging and she made it fun for everybody. She always found ways to connect with everybody and for everybody to connect to everybody else." One participant described their experiences in the SSC as essential in becoming involved on campus and becoming more confident interacting with fellow students, faculty and staff on campus:

My experience....this class is to, is to work together. Yeah, to share with other students because the teacher makes small groups to work together and has to make presentations and uh, she makes like more students, more communications between students ... Yeah, yeah because we was like fears, if we have fears, we like talk to other students and by making small groups, you more comfortable to share experience and to talk to them. Yeah....that was helpful..... Yeah, I guess it did go to other classes...yeah...it sure did. (Participant 6)

Participants indicated that the SSC facilitated engagement with other students, faculty and staff; noticing it was important in developing relationships on campus:

Getting to know more people and interact with them. I mean the way we had to get to know people, it got me to know more of the teachers and staff and more faculty and get into the DALO club. It helped me a lot....yeah.....getting to know more people was really good. (Participant 1)

Another example of a participant developing relationships with other students, resulting in a comfortable environment is below:

We learned to talk to each other...you know, share and stuff. Some [classmates] were telling their stories and crying and stuff like that. And then by the end of the semester, everyone felt really comfortable with each other...yeah....and, you know easier to talk to other students and teachers and stuff. (Participant 4)

Many examples of participants developing relationships were provided (10 participants). Participants emphasized the importance of building relationships and were evident when describing their experiences in the SSC. These relationships facilitated engagement with other students, faculty and staff on campus.

*Improved public speaking.* The final sub-category of student experiences examine the practice of public speaking in the SSC. While many participants (5 participants) indicated they initially were fearful of public speaking, through regular exposure to speaking in front of the class, they became more comfortable with the process. Participant 1 describes their experience: "She actually made us speak in front of other people and that was hard but by the end it got kinda' easier, you know?" Similarly, another participant had similar experiences with developing their public speaking abilities in the SSC. "She made us talk in front of everybody....you know like a speech thing. I hated it, but then got used to it. It's all...it's all getting me ready for my university. You know experience in the future" (Participant 4). One participant described an assignment that was especially meaningful to them:

We had to do a skit of Freedom Riders. We had to pick a character and go in front of the class and talk about them. But, we had to make up our own, like person. I had to talk about someone showing up late for an interview. It was cool. I really remember that. (Participant 7)



Four participants feared public speaking, yet became more comfortable over time:

“We had a lot of activities where we had to interact and like stand in front of the class. It was nerve wracking, but it actually helped me be more okay with doing stuff like that”

(Participant 11). Another individual describes how their group projects assisted with speaking in front of the class:

I was able to open up and talk to the class, because with our projects each person had to go up there and talk individually. It helped me open up to speak in front of a lot of people. Before, I would say, I’ll do all the work, you do all the talking. I was always that person before so the class helped me open up a lot about talking in front of other people. (Participant 12)

Even those participants that felt they had good public speaking skills saw the benefit and improvement of those skills as described by participant 9: “I always thought I was a good public speaker. I had to do a lot of presenting in this class. It helped me fine tune my skills. I learned you can always improve.” Public speaking assisted the participants in building relationships and opening up to experiences previously feared or avoided. Many described these experiences as beneficial in their development as a college student and overall engagement with others and the institution.

**Skills learned in SSC.** The final thematic category in this section was developed from participant responses indicating the skills learned in the SSC course. The responses from participants can be categorized into: (a) social skills and (b) study skills when referring to the perceived skills learned in the SSC. The most commonly noted skills learned included: social skills; developing support systems; increasing peer engagement; improving time management and prioritization; improving communication, both in general and specifically with instructors; increased personal responsibility; public speaking and presenting; positivity and motivation; and increased confidence. Looking at

the key components of skills learned, the type of skills learned support student engagement by supporting social skills, communication, positivity and motivation, responsibility, increased confidence, organization and time management. Table 4.9 provides an overview of the most common responses and the diversity of the responses. Frequency indicates the number of participants providing this response.

Table 4.9

*Skills Learned in SSC*

Response	Frequency
1. Social skills, support systems, and peer engagement	9
2. Time management and prioritization	8
3. Communication in general and with instructors	6
4. Responsibility	6
5. Public speaking; presenting	5
6. Positivity and motivation	5
7. Increased confidence	5
8. Note-taking	4
9. Professionalism	2
10. Academic engagement	2
11. Organization	1
12. Honed existing skills	1
13. Leadership skills	1

***Social skills.*** Similar to previous mention of the benefit of increased social skills, increased support systems, and peer engagement, one participant described how these skills served to support academic achievement. This participant described how social engagement can lead to academic engagement:

[I got] comfortable with my classmates, so I thought it was, you know, good... I mean he always told us that we had to find someone in the class, to be a study group, and really just make those connections and surround yourself with those that want to succeed in the class and you will succeed. I learned to do that in all my classes. ... You know, you have to be engaged in class with other students and you know stick by their side, you know and kind of work together. You want to be involved in the class and with your professor and other students. (Participant 3)

Another skill reported by participants in SSC was communication, both in general and more specifically with faculty. This high level of communication with peers, staff and faculty allows for enhanced learning and increased engagement. For example:

It also helped me learn to talk to instructors about different things. My instructor for this class would ask me about things going on in my different class and when I would say things, she would tell me to talk to my instructor and tell me to talk to them and helped me not be afraid to talk to them. She'd say as long as you talk to them, they will help you. If you don't talk to them, they don't know what is going on with you. ... I talk to my instructors a lot now. (Participant 1)

Similarly, another participant discussed learning how to ask appropriate questions in class:

I guess just kinda asking questions and being able to feel comfortable with the professor and I really do think it depends on the professor a lot, especially with this type of class. You want to be involved in the class and with your professor and other students. You know there's not a stupid question....that is what he always told us. You know, there is not a stupid question, so if you don't know something, just blurt it out and we'll figure it out together. (Participant 3)

Social skills were viewed by 8 participants as critical to enhance their ability to ask appropriate questions, feel comfortable in the college learning and social environment and to discuss issues with faculty members:

***Study skills.*** Study skills learned in the SSC differ from the social skills learned.

Study skills were seen by participants to be helpful in their transition to college and in becoming a successful student in college. This study revealed the following as important

study skills: (a) time management (b) note taking and (c) decision making. One important study skill mentioned by participants is time management and a sense of responsibility. Both of which are critical to engagement, as the scheduling of one's time can become difficult with greater amounts of engagement. These study habits are necessary for student academic achievement and retention. Time management was frequently mentioned as an important study skill:

I remember having like a sheet a teacher gave us for a week...she gave us a sheet and we had to write down everything we did. We had to write down when we did everything. We had to make the time for everything...studying, watching TV, time for going out, cleaning, and anything like that. I think that was a big thing I got out of it was time management. (Participant 1)

One participant felt time management was useful and necessary to successfully maneuver classwork, despite not always following this sound advice:

But it really taught you how to manage your time, and to set like a agenda for you to do long term goals and plan everything out so that way you can always keep yourself constantly on schedule, never get behind. I haven't quite learned them yet but I know the main skill is to always manage your time, not to put your homework on the back burner to go party or attend other things. Always make sure your homework is done first before anything you do. Study habits, managing my time to actually do my work. I still put other stuff first before homework sometimes. I even give myself a certain amount of days, like, ok, you have three days to do it and I'll still do it at the last minute. (Participant 12)

Taking notes was another skill learned in the SSC that many students previously struggled. One participant indicated that learning to take notes appropriately was beneficial:

She'd [professor] tell us what to write down or something like that. Or what she said or something. She'd like practice with us what was important to write down and what wasn't. She would like make a label, like different colors or something to show us what was important and what wasn't. It was pretty cool. (Participant 4)

Another participant felt that the SSC assisted them in learning how to take better notes in class: “I learned how to take better notes, I think. My notes were more organized after that and I didn’t need to write everything down. I would just like pinpoint certain things that I needed and that was really good” (Participant 11).

Finally, decision making skills were also mentioned as an important study skill learned in the SSC:

She [instructor] helped us look at all the options before we made decisions. I liked that and she also gave us the opportunity if we wanted her to read our journals and help us make decisions we discussed in our journals. Decision making for classes is really hard, but, she taught us a really easy way to make good decisions. (Participant 1)

One participant discussed decision making skills as they relate to procrastination:

I learned a lot about procrastination and that is something, that I, have dealt with in the past, so, you know it, it helped me, you know to prepare myself better and make better choices and like decision and stuff, you know?.....Now I don’t procrastinate.....I don’t procrastinate as much. (Participant 5)

As noted in previous sections, other skills and characteristics such as increased confidence, presenting, motivation, and engagement were skills and/or characteristics participants believed they gained through their experiences in the SSC. From the perspective of the participants in this study, these skills were deemed to contribute to the development of a sense of community, sense of belonging, and engagement on campus, both inside and outside the classroom to support academic achievement and retention among the participants.

**Instructor influence.** The final thematic category developed from the interview data related to the perceptions of the SSC course was the influence of instructors on the participants. The impact of instructors was noted in the previous thematic category as a

factor perceived to affect students' decision to remain enrolled. Key common responses related to the impact of the SSC instructors highlight perceptions of instructors who were helpful, kind, friendly, and understanding, and who showed a personal interest in the students and offered good advice to students to support their achievement. One participant describes instructor qualities they found helpful in the SSC:

The instructor, I would describe her as being very friendly and helpful and she takes it personal to help you and to help every student in the way they need it. ... She would always tell me it was my decision what I was going to do and she helped me look at all my options before I made a decision. I liked that. (Participant 1)

As described by the participants, these instructors also seemed to contribute to student engagement and achievement through providing interactive instruction that was perceived as entertaining by participants, using real life examples, explaining the content well to students, communicating on level with the students, and supporting and motivating the students:

The videos and the real life situations, the real life situations actually helped a lot more than the videos. He told us he worked in a prison and he taught Psychology there and he was saying how the people in there wished they could go back and actually do the work instead of doing the bad things that they got into jail for. ... He helped me, I was able to open up and talk to the class, because with our projects each person had to go up there and talk individually. As a group but we had a certain part to speak about and it helped me open up to speak in front of a lot of people. Before I would say, I'll do all the work, you all do all the talking. I was always that person before so the class helped me open up a lot. (Participant 12)

Participant 6 agreed, highlighting the importance of the instructor of the SSC class as the most important contributing factor to continued enrollment:

But, the most important thing was the teacher. She placed a good, a good, I don't know how to say. She was important for me because I was, uh, she play a good thing for me, yeah, yeah. I found her, if she was angry or she doesn't want to help a students, I really would drop the class, but, she, she, she was good teacher. I told her about my situation with my English and

that I have some problems working, understanding so she told me that I can stay after class and talk to her and she always, at the end of the class was waiting for me, so she, she, she make me more comfortable and, uh, more familiar with the class so that she was a good teacher. (Participant 6)

Participant 2 described their instructor's ability to separate personal issues from the classroom. They indicated this resulted in a professional environment that was conducive to learning:

She was always in a good mood and so, sometimes she had struggles, in her home, but, she left them in her home and she didn't bring them to class and I think she was really nice. I even have to tell my friends when they have to take Psychology, I tell them to take her. Because she is really good. (Participant 2)

Another participant indicated the importance of the instructor being fair:

I remember her telling us, like, for us to open up to her. Like she has to open up to us first and she'd always say, like to get respect, you always have to give it first...so I'll never disrespect y'all...if you just disrespect me that's okay, but, but, she always knew. She was fair. Very fair. Yeah....she was very fair. (Participant 7)

The ability of the instructors to bond with the class was noted by 10 participants as important. One participant indicated the importance of the instructor bonding with the entire class, not just select students:

She was real nice and bonded with the class there not all just there to have fun and stuff, even though we did, we all learned a lot from the teacher....she bonded with all of us, not just me and that made us all learn a lot from her. She'd go out of her way to ask if we'd done our work and like send emails and stuff. (Participant 4)

Pushing students to succeed and creating a welcoming, fun learning environment was another characteristic of the instructor participant 9 indicated was helpful:

She was always there to give good advice or keep pushing, just [telling us] to think of the end result. She made is easier versus some instructor seem like they make it so hard, she made it easy to want to come to class by enjoying learning. It was fun to learn in her class. (Participant 9)

Finally, the instructors were also commonly noted to provide an example of positive attitude, work ethic, and respectful demeanor in the learning environment. According to the participants interviewed, the instructors for the SSC modeled the attributes they were trying to impart on their students. They demonstrated the skills and behaviors they were teaching, which, according to participants, left a deep and lasting impact.

Table 4.10 illustrates the full variety of responses of participants as they described their instructors and the influence these instructors had on their achievement and continued enrollment. Frequency indicates the number of participants providing this response.



Table 4.10

*Description of Instructors and Instructor Influence*

Response	Frequency
1. Helpful; good advice	9
2. Friendly; kind	7
3. Personal interest in students	7
4. Understanding	7
5. Entertaining; funny	6
6. Used good real life examples	5
7. Good at communicating on level with or relating to students	5
8. Motivational	4
9. Easy to understand; explains things well	4
10. Hardworking	3
11. Good attitude	3
12. Very good instructor	3
13. Fair and respectful; equal attention	3
14. Supportive	3
15. Energetic	2
16. Strict with high expectations	1
17. Creative	1

**Qualitative Conclusion**

Grouping the large amount of qualitative data into overarching themes that represent the experiences and perceptions of the group of qualitative participants as a whole, revealed three key themes. Theme 1: When first enrolled in the SSC, participants were not familiar with what the course entailed, nor did they understand why they were taking the course. However, as time passed in the course the perceived benefits of SSC

became clear and aligned with the perceived factors influencing students' decision to remain in college, which were motivation to attain goals, familiar and comfortable environment, significant advisor or instructor relationships, and a sense of community. The participants identified as self-motivated to continue their education and intrinsically focused on goals that led to their continuation in school. The SSC was described as providing an active and enjoyable learning experience that supported peer social interactions, instructor-student interactions, and support that served to increase the participants' perceived level of engagement.

Theme 2: Course content was the second theme and encompassed both experiences students had and skills they learned in the course. The experience sub-category was further delineated into four areas which included group projects; effective use of technology; impactful relationship building; and improved public speaking skills. SSC students recommend the course to other students, reporting the perceptions that it prepares students for other coursework and life situations, motivates students to achieve, and teaches prioritization, responsibility, and organization. The SSC was also described as instilling a sense of dedication to college. Participants further indicated the SSC supports social development, and personal growth in specific skill sets including social skills, study skills, communication, time management, as well as develops characteristics of responsibility and self-confidence. Experiences that were noted by participants included use of technology, such as videos and movies, building impactful relationships, improved public speaking skills, and group work that facilitated the development of interpersonal relationships. As such, the SSC supported both retention and engagement.

**Theme 3: The significant impact of SSC instructors was considered a driving force behind the perceived effectiveness of the SSC. The instructors were recognized for building a comfortable, familiar, and welcoming environment that supported social interactions, engagement in the learning community, and the development of the necessary skills to be successful in college. This was done through both effective teaching tools and embodying the skills they were teaching. The perceived benefits of the SSC, as described in the previous themes, aligned with the perceived factors influencing students' decision to remain in college, which were motivation to attain goals, familiar and comfortable environment, significant instructor or staff relationships, and a sense of community. Comparing these factors to those of the first three themes, the conclusion of the qualitative analysis is that the SSC is perceived by the students who took the course to support student persistence and retention and student engagement on campus.**

### **Summary of Findings**

**This mixed method study incorporated quantitative data collected from a sample students, comparing student responses between those who had taken the SSC course, and those students who did not take the SSC course. For the first and second research questions, a significant relationship was found between SSC course participation and persistence (continued enrollment in the following semester) and retention (continued enrollment to the following year [fall]). A significant relationship was also revealed between SCC and academic achievement in college level English and Math scores. These results suggest significant influence of SCC course participation on student**

persistence and retention as well as academic achievement specific to Mathematics and English.

For the fourth research question, the results indicated a significant correlation between SCC course participation and student engagement. Upon comparing the engagement responses of SCC participant and nonparticipant groups, the SCC participant group mean engagement score was higher than the nonparticipant group, and the difference was found to statistically significant ( $p = .004$ ).

In addressing the fifth and sixth research questions, the factors described as key to the decision to remain in college matched with the perceived benefits of SSC participation. The participant perceptions of the course evolved during and after completion of the SSC. Participants also indicated the course content was important in their decision to stay enrolled at the college. Course content was further delineated into experiences and skills. Experiences included group projects; effective use of technology; impactful relationship building; and improved public speaking skills. Skills learned from the course included both social and study skills, which influenced persistence, retention and student engagement. Finally, the instructor was also noted by participants as an important factor in their decision to stay enrolled and be engaged at the institution. They indicated that both characteristics of the instructor and teaching styles were valuable to them.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **SUMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMNEDATIONS**

**The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship of participation in the Student Success Course (SSC) on persistence, retention, academic achievement, and student engagement of community college students. This chapter presents conclusions from this mixed methods study including a summary of key research findings. Also included are implications for practice and recommendations for future research. This section closes with the limitations of the study and conclusions.**

#### **Summary of Findings**

**This mixed method study incorporated quantitative data collected from a sample of students, comparing student responses between those who had taken the SSC and those students who did not take the SSC. For the first research question, a significant relationship was found between SSC participation and persistence (continued enrollment in the following semester). The second research question demonstrated a significant relationship between SSC participation and retention (continued enrollment to the following year [fall]). The third research question also revealed a significant relationship between SSC participation and English and mathematics scores. These results suggest significant influence of SSC participation on student persistence and retention as well as academic achicvement specific to English and Mathematics. Findings for the fourth research question revealed a significant correlation between SSC participation and student engagement.**

In addressing the fifth and sixth research questions, the factors described as key to the decision to remain in college matched with the perceived benefits of SSC participation. Perceptions of self and the course were one thematic category. The participant perceptions of the course evolved during and after completion of the SSC. Participants also indicated the course content was important in their decision to stay enrolled at the college. Course content was further delineated into experiences and skills. Experiences included group projects; effective use of technology; impactful relationship building; and improved public speaking skills. Skills learned from the course included both social and study skills, which influenced persistence, retention and student engagement. Finally, the instructor was also noted by participants as an important factor in their decision to stay enrolled and be engaged at the institution. They indicated that both characteristics of the instructor and teaching styles were valuable to them.

### **Research Question 1**

To answer research question one, *Does participation in a Student Success Course influence persistence?*, a Chi-Square Test of Independence was conducted to demonstrate the relationship between SSC participation and retention to the following spring semester. A statistically significant relationship was found between participation in the SSC and persistence. The relationship found with participating in the SSC in this study agreed with Fowler and Boylan (2010), and Zeidenberg, Jenkins, and Calcagno (2007) who determined that students who enrolled in SSC's were more likely to persist and earn a degree as compared to their peers who did not take the SSC. Fowler and Boylen (2010) looked at success rates in developmental education courses, GPA's and persistence and retention. This study did not exclude students in credit courses. While this course was

paired with a developmental mathematics course, it is also coupled with certain degree programs; therefore, not exclusive to developmental education students.

Important to note is that these studies, similar to this one, were all conducted in community college settings. Conversely, those who found no significant difference in persistence of students who participate in a SSC versus those that did not were conducted in university settings (Baldwin et al., 2011; Clark & Cundiff, 2011; Engberg & Mayhew, 2007). Furthermore, Clark and Cundiff (2011) ran a battery of tests to assess a variety of traits thought to be related to academic achievement and retention in an introduction to Psychology course, as opposed to this study that reviewed the entire population of students taking both the SSC and completing the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE). The qualitative data of this study also reinforced that the SSC supported persistence, similar to Barbatis' (2010) study which indicated that students who are engaged on campus and interact with faculty and other students are more likely to persist in a community college setting.

Given the interview participant perceptions, the close relationship they developed with SSC faculty members was a significant contributing factor in their decision to stay enrolled at the institution being studied. For example, one participant described the SSC instructor as an essential factor with regard to staying enrolled to the next semester and the following year (persistence and retention):

Without the on-going support of Ms. H, I don't think I would have made it. She is the greatest, and she still to this day is supportive of me and continues to ask me how I am doing in all my classes. She keeps up with me and cheers me on. (Participant 8).

Learning skills and strategies that lead to personal success and demonstrating knowledge of personal responsibility while mastering self-management are essential to persistence and retention and are explicit learner outcomes of the SSC.

### **Research Question 2**

To answer research question two, *Does participation in a Student Success Course influence retention?*, a Chi-Square Test of Independence was conducted to demonstrate the relationship between SSC participation and retention to the next fall semester. A statistically significant relationship was found between participation in the SSC and retention. The relationship between participating in the SSC and retention revealed in this study agreed with Fowler and Boylan (2010), Jacobs and Archie (2008), and Zeidenberg et al. (2007) who all found that students who enrolled in SSC's were more likely to be retained and earn a degree as compared to their peers who did not take the SSC.

Purdie and Rosser's (2011) findings did not agree with this study, indicating that participating in the SSC did not increase the likelihood that students would be retained to the following year as compared to non-SSC participants. They did acknowledge that this was not consistent with other research and posited it may relate to low interaction between students and faculty who taught this course. Similarly, Clark and Cundiff (2011) also found no significant impact of SSC participation on retention. Clark and Cundiff (2011) also studied only students enrolled in an intro to Psychology course, juxtaposed to this study that reviewed all students enrolled in the SSC that also took the CCSSE survey. Important to note, Purdie and Rosser's (2011) and Clark and Cundiff's (2011) studies were also conducted at universities and similar to the findings in persistence, studies conducted at four-year universities more often found an insignificant



relationship between participating in the SSC and persistence and retention than did studies conducted at community colleges, which may be due to the selective participant sample in these studies.

Persistence and retention are closely coupled in this study, as many of the skills and strategies students learn through the SSC promulgate both increased persistence and retention. As mentioned earlier, the development of strategies and skills that lead to personal success and personal responsibility are also essential for students staying enrolled to the following fall semester (retention). Furthermore, mastering self-management skills and developing interdependence are equally important in facilitating a student's decision to stay enrolled at the institution. Students in the SSC learned to transfer the skills gained in the SSC to other courses and used those skills and strategies in managing their everyday lives. One participant describes this: "...with my newfound confidence, I discovered that I had a better ability to deal with people, which I found very useful in my job and in my other classes" (Participant 8). Participants learned important life skills that assisted them in successfully maneuvering the often difficult terrain of higher education, resulting in participants staying enrolled in an effort to successfully complete their academic goals.

It is important to note that studies conducted at community colleges were far less prevalent than those conducted at universities and none included both quantitative and qualitative data in the analysis. This lack of empirical evidence is likely due to the rapid adoption of the SSC into the community college based on the 4-year college model in attempts to respond to the increase in state and federal accountability. This study was also unique in adding to the existing literature because of the mixed methods design,

which added the perceptions of the SSC participants to discern why the SSC was effective in their decision to stay enrolled.

### **Research Question 3**

To answer research question three, *Does participation in a Student Success Course influence academic achievement?*, a Chi-Square Test of Independence was conducted to demonstrate the relationship between SSC participation and academic achievement. A statistically significant relationship was found between participation in the SSC and academic achievement. The results of this study, which identified a relationship between participation in the SSC and academic achievement were consistent with Zeidenberg et al. (2007) who found that students who participated in a SSC were more likely than their peers to earn a credential in a gatekeeper course. This study supports that research, concluding that a positive relationship between SSC class participation and achievement in the gatekeeper Mathematics (MATH 1314) and English (ENGL 1301) courses exist. The discoveries in this study supported the findings of Zeidenberg et al. (2007), who found that participation in the SSC positively correlated with increased grades. Zeidenberg et al. (2007) also found that cumulative GPA's improved as a result of participation in the SSC; however, this study focused on academic achievement in gatekeeper courses, rather than GPA's.

Pike et.al., (2010), Purdie and Rosser (2011), Clark and Cundiff (2011), and Malik (2011) found that there was no statistically significant difference between SSC participants and non-SSC participants cumulative GPA's. However, Purdie and Rosser (2011) included only first year students with one developmental need, as opposed to this study that included all students enrolled in the SSC that also took the CCSSE survey.

While this course was coupled with developmental mathematics course, it is also required of students in certain programs of study and students can self-select into the SSC.

Furthermore, Malik's (2011) sample included only first time, full time students enrolled in business and hospitality courses, which is a selective sample, as opposed to the broader sample included in this study.

This study focused on academic achievement in gatekeeper courses, as opposed to other studies cited that reviewed cumulative GPA's (Clark & Cundiff, 2011; Malik, 2011; Pike & Hanson, 2010; & Zeidenberg, et.al., 2007). Fowler and Boylan (2010) conducted a study similar to this research and found comparable results, noting that students who participated in the SSC were more likely than non-SSC participants to successfully complete English Composition I and an introductory Algebra course. The necessity of successfully completing gatekeeper courses is an indicator to successful completion of a degree (Fowler & Boylan, 2010). Mastering effective self-management, personal responsibility, and study skills while also developing improved self-confidence in the academic world would unquestionably result in improved academic achievement in gatekeeper courses. Furthermore, the qualitative data from this study informed the body of literature, demonstrating that learning how to develop effective relationships with faculty and other students (interdependence) is essential in maneuvering through these first college level courses, as is gaining confidence in the ability to work in groups and speak publicly. These were all skills interview participants indicated were essential not only in their decision to stay enrolled at the college, but also to earn academic credit.

#### **Research Question 4**

To answer research question four, *Does participation in the Student Success Course influence student engagement?*, frequencies (n) and percentage data of the responses to the CCSSE survey Items 4 (a, b, f, g, l, m, n, and q) and Item 9 (b, d, and e) reflected student perceptions of student engagement. Using a cross-tabulation to reveal the frequencies in the different groups, a significant relationship with participation in the SSC and several questions were revealed, including making a class presentation; working with other students on projects during class; working with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments; discussing grades or assignments with instructors; talking about career plans with an advisor or instructor; discussing ideas from readings with or classes with instructors outside of class; and working with instructors on outside activities other than coursework.

The results of this study are consistent with the study conducted by Barbatis (2010), and Jacobs and Archie (2008), revealing that students engaging on campus in different clubs and organizations and interacting with faculty members and other students both inside and outside of the classroom positively influenced both persistence and retention. Conversely, Malik (2011) found no significant impact of taking the SSC on academic and social engagement. However, Malik's (2011) sample included 99 students taking 10 week sessions, as opposed to this study that included 432 students, enrolled in 16- week courses. Similar to this study, Duggan and William (2011) found that student's perceived the SSC facilitated a successful transition into college by evaluating goals and motivating them for success. Participants in this study also indicated that building

important relationships was an important factor in their engagement both in and out of the classroom.

This study adds to the existing body of research by demonstrating that students who participate in the SSC perceive themselves to be more engaged on campus, both in and outside of the classroom, than students who do not participate in the SSC when comparing the participant group mean engagement score to non-participants. Only one question did not demonstrate that SSC participants engaged at higher levels than non-SSC participants. That question focused on asking questions in class or contributing to class discussions. This result may be attributed to students not fully comprehending the questions being asked on the CCSSE. The qualitative phase of this study indicated that participants identified group work and active learning in the classroom to be a primary factor in the student's decision to stay enrolled at the college, which is juxtaposed to the responses on the CCSSE tool. Therefore, the qualitative data discovered in this study uncovers the need for further exploration of the tool used to examine student engagement, specifically as it relates to participant understanding of questions being asked.

#### **Research Questions 5 and 6**

To answer research question five, *How has the Student Success Course influenced student decisions to remain in college?*, and research question six, *How has the Student Success Course promoted student engagement?*, interviews were conducted and revealed that participation in the SSC was perceived by the students to have a positive influence on both their decision to remain in college and their engagement at the college being studied. Consistent with the quantitative research results for questions 1, 2, 3, and 4, the

results of the qualitative data also support the SSC as having an influence on staying in college (persistence and retention) and student's engaging on campus.

Similar to the results section of this paper, research questions 5 and 6 are being combined, as in the process of analysis similar results emerged out of the interviews with participants when discussing both remaining in the college (persistence and retention) and engagement on campus both in and out of the classroom. Two important topics evolving out of the analysis of the qualitative data were the participant's skills obtained during the SSC and the importance of the instructor teaching the SSC. These topics inform the quantitative data, adding depth by delving into the student perspective of the SSC. Both of these will be deliberated and compared to existing literature.

**Skills obtained.** This category will discuss two important aspects of skills obtained in the SSC: (a) study skills and; (b) building relationships. All of these types of skills facilitate both persistence and retention and engagement on campus. While many skills were discussed by participants as facilitating their ability to be successful in school, this study revealed that it is not only learning the skills themselves, but how the participants internalized those skills and generalized their usage that truly influenced their decisions to stay in college and become more engaged on campus.

Research on mastering study skills has shown its importance for retention and academic achievement, similar to findings listed above, these schools were four year versus community colleges (Bai & Pan, 2009; Zeidenberg et al., 2007). The skills participants identified in this study as important included: learning to take appropriate notes; learning to manage time appropriately and balance school, work and life; and making good decisions related to being a successful student. While this study did not

reveal any new insights into the importance of study skills, it did emphasize that having these skills incorporated into the SSC are important. Despite other skills being discussed by participants, these are the primary skills that participants determined made a difference in them being successful as a student.

Much prior research has pointed to the necessity of building relationships with faculty and other students as an important component to persistence and retention or staying in college (Astin, 1999; Choate & Smith, 2003; Duggan & William, 2011; O’Gara, et.al., 2009). While this study supports that notion, and the theoretical framework of this study, participants in this study indicated that their ability to use those skills obtained in other courses strongly influenced their decision to stay in school. Additional findings of this study reflect the SSC itself as facilitating a warm, comfortable and inviting environment for participants, largely due to building important relationships. While other research has discussed the importance of students being comfortable and feeling welcomed in the college environment (CCSSE, 2005; Malik, 2011), this study reveals the SSC as a tool to create that warm and welcoming environment. No other research has focused on the SSC as a predominate basis for students feeling welcomed and comfortable on campus.

Important to note is the interpersonal skill development that occurs in the SSC through group projects and personally obtaining resource information across campus. The SSC’s focus on building confidence and strong interpersonal skills assists participants in being able to build necessary relationships on campus that will promote persistence, retention and engagement. While many studies discuss the necessity of building relationships with others on campus to promote student engagement (Barbatis,

2010; Greene et al., 2008; & Hoffman et al., 2003), this study reveals this course (SSC) focuses on learning how to build those relationships that are so necessary for students to stay enrolled in college and obtain resources available to problem solve through the difficulties experienced while a student. Through relationship building, increased engagement occurs, as seen by many participants in this study who, after participating in the SSC, became involved in various clubs and organizations and increased their ability to meet new people and talk to instructors.

**Importance of instructor.** One emerging idea found to be recurrent in this study was the importance of the instructor teaching the SSC. It became clear that participants were able to recognize specific skills gained and explained the instructor was very important to their engagement in both the campus and also on campus in general. Tinto (1993) has long discussed the importance of faculty and student interactions, indicating characteristics of effective instructors include the following: kind, virtuous, good and caring, empathetic; understanding and, responsive. Similarly, the participants in this study revealed the characteristics of faculty members teaching the SSC they found especially helpful in learning the material. Those include: helpful, kind, friendly, understanding, showing a personal interest in the student, and giving good advice to support student achievement. Clearly, these findings practically mirror those of Tinto's (1993). Other researchers found similar characteristics that students find to facilitate quality communication and relationship building (Christophel & Gorham, 1995; O'Keefe, 2013) Participants in this study cited having a relationship with and feeling cared for by the SSC instructor as a reason for staying in school. The feelings of feeling cared for and the instructor providing a comfortable and open learning environment is



consistent with prior research that indicates students feeling cared for by instructors is critical to student success (O'Keefe, 2013; Wirt, 2010).

Not only are the characteristics of the instructor important to participants, but equally so is the teaching methodology used by the instructors of the SSC. Participants in this study mentioned the differences between active and passive teaching styles. They discussed other instructors that utilize the lecture or PowerPoint only teaching method, while comparing the instructors in the SSC, who used videos, games, stories and other methods of making the course content clear and understandable. Participants mentioned personal stories to emphasize a point in the curriculum as effective. Downs et al. (1988) also found that the appropriate use of self-disclosure and humor are positive techniques instructors can use to improve engagement in the classroom and improve student performance. Downs et al. went on to add that when faculty use personal stories, humor and narratives that closely relate to the material being taught that students perceive they are learning more than with traditional lecture only teaching style. These active teaching techniques facilitate an environment conducive to learning and being actively engaged in the class.

The participants in this study revealed that being actively involved in the learning process, and instructors having a positive attitude in the classroom created an environment that positively affected their engagement and learning. This finding corroborates P. Umbach and M. Wawrzynski's (2005) study that revealed faculty that engage students in and out of the classroom have higher retention and academic achievement rates. This is critically important when determining who will teach the SSC.

As this strategy grows in popularity among community colleges, the importance of having instructors that are effective and possess the skills described above are essential.

### **Implications for Practice**

As stated in the significance of the problem section, the persistence, retention, and graduation rates in community colleges continue to be as low now as they were in the 1970's, when the numbers of students attending community colleges was much smaller than it is today. The SSC has become a popular strategy to combat these issues and the findings of this study support its effectiveness with regard to persistence, retention, and academic achievement. This study also supports the SSC's effectiveness in improving student engagement, which supports retention, persistence, and successful completion of an academic goal. Given the results of this study, increased persistence, retention, academic achievement, and engagement should occur by incorporating the SSC into the core curriculum and requiring all students to take this course in their first semester of enrollment. Currently, the course is only required for students in certain developmental courses and not required of the general student population. The SSC should be made mandatory for all incoming students within their first semester enrolled at the college. The interview participants in this study perceived that taking the SSC in the first semester offers the greatest benefits to students. The effectiveness of this course seems to outweigh any costs associated with increasing course offerings, as the costs of implementation of the SSC could be offset by the increased revenue generated by retained students.

The state of Texas has begun performance based funding for 10% of colleges' overall budgets, beginning in the fall semester 2014. Given this new funding model, it is

essential for community colleges to improve their course completion rates, as success points are now tied to completing the first college level course, completing 15 college hours, and completing 30 college hours. If this course were to be required of all incoming students, colleges would gain success point for each student completing the course while at the same time increasing the chance of earning additional points by retaining students who are receiving credits in gatekeeper course and eventually earning an academic credential.

Another important revelation in this study was the confusion experienced by students who had to take the SSC. Many were not aware of the purpose of the course, nor had expectations prior to attending the course. The college should make more of an effort to explain the purpose and benefits of the SSC to students. This could be accomplished by publicizing student comments about the SSC to assist new students understanding of the purpose of the course and potential impact when they enroll. Finally, SSC instructors should be well vetted, as this study emphasizes the importance of the instructor in the success of the course. SSC instructors should utilize interactive teaching methods, encouraging networking among enrolled students and other professors at the college. The consensus of the students participating in this study emphasized the importance of a strong instructor who is interactive and encourages active student participation in the course.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study contributed to the current body of research by examining the effects of participating in the SSC on persistence, retention, academic achievement, and engagement. This study was limited in its scope as it only included data from one

campus in the Texas gulf coast. A future study could expand this research to include all community colleges in Texas that offer the SSC. This will allow researchers to determine if the findings of this study are consistent throughout colleges and systems that have implemented the SSC across the state of Texas. Furthermore, additional research could explore other subjects for academic achievement. This study focused on the gatekeeper courses, English Composition I and College Algebra; however, future studies could expand the focus to include other courses and/or the GPA of participants versus non-participants.

In addition, future studies could expand research on engagement scores of SSC participants versus non- SSC participants. While this study found engagement to be positively correlated with the SSC, additional studies that include various engagement scores in addition to the CCSSE would add more breadth and depth to these findings. An additional area for future study is student knowledge of the purpose of the SSC and whether that advanced knowledge affects student expectations from the course. A topic that needs additional exploration is the background of SSC instructors. All of the instructors in this study had counseling backgrounds. Future studies could identify if the positive impact of the SSC instructor is related to their professional background and area of study.

Future research could also focus on the race and/or ethnicity of students to determine if there is a difference between the success rates of students from diverse backgrounds, specifically minority males who are completing college at a much lower rate than the general population, according to Greene et al. (2008). Finally, additional research could focus on the differences between success rates of community college

students versus four-year university students using the same SSC curriculum to determine if there is a difference between the community college and university student success in the course.

### **Conclusions**

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of the SSC on persistence, retention, academic achievement, and engagement. The focus of this study was on reviewing archived data related to persistence, retention, and academic achievement to determine the effectiveness of participation in the SSC. Another focus of this study was to supplement the quantitative data found with seeking the perceptions of participants in the SSC about the course and its effect on persistence, retention, and engagement. From this, the college being studied will be able to make informed decisions about curriculum related to this course and requiring it for more students. This study identified that participation in a SSC positively impacted persistence, retention, academic achievement in gate keeper courses (Mathematics and English), and student engagement.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the literature revealed mixed results regarding the effectiveness of SSC's on retention, persistence, and academic achievement.

Interestingly, all of the studies that found no relationship between participating in a SSC and increased retention and academic achievement were conducted at four-year universities and not community colleges. The literature also revealed the course to be effective in assisting students in successfully adjusting to the college environment and improving engagement with their educational institutions. The literature also revealed students perceiving the SSC as beneficial in helping them navigate the community

college environment while providing them with resources to persist in reaching their academic goals.

In this study, archived data was reviewed for persistence, retention, academic achievement, and engagement as demonstrated on scores from the CCSSE. Qualitative data was gathered through interviews, coded and categorized, and revealed three major themes regarding the perceptions of participants from the SSC as they relate to persistence, retention, and engagement:

- Perceptions of self and course,
- The course content, including experiences and skills learned in the course, and
- The importance of the instructor in the course.

Findings from this study support the research regarding the impact of participation in the SSC on persistence, retention, academic achievement (in gatekeeper courses), and student engagement. Participants from the interviews indicated they felt the SSC was a positive experience for them and led to improved persistence, retention, and engagement.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENT REPORT (CCSSE)**

## APPENDIX A

# The Community College Student Report

Instructions: It is essential that you use a No. 2 pencil to complete this survey. Mark your answers as shown in the following example: ☒ Correct Mark ☐ ☐ ☐ Incorrect Marks

1. Did you begin college at this college or elsewhere? ☐ Started here ☐ Started elsewhere
2. Thinking about this current academic term, how would you characterize your enrollment at this college? ☐ Full-time ☐ Less than full-time
3. Have you taken this survey in another class this term? ☐ Yes ☐ No

4. In your experiences at this college during the current school year, about how often have you done each of the following?
- |  | Very often            | Often                 | Sometimes             | Never                 |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| a. Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| b. Made a class presentation   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| c. Prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| d. Worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| e. Came to class without completing readings or assignments  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| f. Worked with other students on projects during class   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| g. Worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| h. Tutored or taught other students (paid or voluntary)  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| i. Participated in a community-based project as a part of a regular course   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| j. Used the Internet or instant messaging to work on an assignment   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| k. Used e-mail to communicate with an instructor   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| l. Discussed grades or assignments with an instructor  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| m. Talked about career plans with an instructor or advisor   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| n. Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with instructors outside of class   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| o. Received prompt feedback (written or oral) from instructors on your performance   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| p. Worked harder than you thought you could to meet an instructor's standards or expectations  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| q. Worked with instructors on activities other than coursework   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| r. Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with others outside of class (students, family members, co-workers, etc.)                 | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| s. Had serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity other than your own  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| t. Had serious conversations with students who differ from you in terms of their religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| u. Skipped class   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

5. During the current school year, how much has your coursework at this college emphasized the following mental activities?
- |   | Very much             | Quite a bit           | Some                  | Very little           |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| a. Memorizing facts, ideas, or methods from your courses and readings so you can repeat them in pretty much the same form | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| b. Analyzing the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| c. Synthesizing and organizing ideas, information, or experiences in new ways   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| d. Making judgments about the value or soundness of information, arguments, or methods                                    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| e. Applying theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| f. Using information you have read or heard to perform a new skill  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

PLEASE DO NOT MARK IN THIS AREA



SERIAL #

6. During the current school year, about how much reading and writing have you done at this college?

- a. Number of assigned textbooks, manuals, books, or book-length packs of course readings  
 b. Number of books read on your own (not assigned) for personal enjoyment or academic enrichment  
 c. Number of written papers or reports of any length

None	1 to 4	5 to 10	11 to 20	More than 21
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

7. Mark the response that best represents the extent to which your examinations during the current school year have challenged you to do your best work at this college.

Extremely challenging    Ⓐ   Ⓑ   Ⓒ   Ⓓ   Ⓔ   Ⓕ   Extremely easy

8. Which of the following have you done, are you doing, or do you plan to do while attending this college?

- a. Internship, field experience, co-op experience, or clinical assignment  
 b. English as a second language course  
 c. Developmental/remedial reading course  
 d. Developmental/remedial writing course  
 e. Developmental/remedial math course  
 f. Study skills course  
 g. Honors course  
 h. College orientation program or course  
 i. Organized learning communities (linked courses/study groups led by faculty or counselors)

I have done	I plan to do	I have not done nor plan to do
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

9. How much does this college emphasize each of the following?

- a. Encouraging you to spend significant amounts of time studying  
 b. Providing the support you need to help you succeed at this college  
 c. Encouraging contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds  
 d. Helping you cope with your non-academic responsibilities (work, family, etc.)  
 e. Providing the support you need to thrive socially  
 f. Providing the financial support you need to afford your education  
 g. Using computers in academic work

Very much	Quite a bit	Some	Very little
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

10. About how many hours do you spend in a typical 7-day week doing each of the following?

	None	1 - 5	6 - 10	11 - 20	21 - 30	More than 30
a. Preparing for class (studying, reading, writing, rehearsing, doing homework, or other activities related to your program)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b. Working for pay	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c. Participating in college-sponsored activities (organizations, campus publications, student government, intercollegiate or intramural sports, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d. Providing care for dependents living with you (parents, children, spouse, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
e. Commuting to and from classes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

11. Mark the number that best represents the quality of your relationships with people at this college.

Your relationship with:

a. Other Students

Friendly, supportive, sense of belonging ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Unfriendly, unsupportive, sense of alienation

b. Instructors

Available, helpful, sympathetic ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Unavailable, unhelpful, unsympathetic

c. Administrative Personnel & Offices

Helpful, considerate, flexible ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Unhelpful, inconsiderate, rigid

12. How much has YOUR EXPERIENCE AT THIS COLLEGE contributed to your knowledge, skills, and personal development in the following areas?

	Very much	Quite a bit	Some	Very little
a. Acquiring a broad general education	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b. Acquiring job or work-related knowledge and skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c. Writing clearly and effectively	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d. Speaking clearly and effectively	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
e. Thinking critically and analytically	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
f. Solving numerical problems	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
g. Using computing and information technology	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
h. Working effectively with others	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
i. Learning effectively on your own	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
j. Understanding yourself	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
k. Understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
l. Developing a personal code of values and ethics	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
m. Contributing to the welfare of your community	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
n. Developing clearer career goals	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
o. Gaining information about career opportunities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

SERIAL #

PLEASE DO NOT MARK IN THIS AREA

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13. This section has three parts. Please answer all three sections, indicating (1) HOW OFTEN you use the following services, (2) HOW SATISFIED you are with the services, and (3) HOW IMPORTANT the services are to you AT THIS COLLEGE.

	(1) Frequency of Use				(2) Satisfaction				(3) Importance		
	Often	Sometimes	Rarely/ Never	Don't know/ N.A.	Very	Somewhat	Not at all	N.A.	Very	Somewhat	Not at all
a. Academic advising/planning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b. Career counseling	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c. Job placement assistance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d. Peer or other tutoring	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
e. Skill labs (writing, math, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
f. Child care	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
g. Financial aid advising	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
h. Computer lab	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
i. Student organizations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
j. Transfer credit assistance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
k. Services to students with disabilities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

14. How likely is it that the following issues would cause you to withdraw from class or from this college? (Please respond to each item)

- a. Working full-time  
b. Caring for dependents  
c. Academically unprepared  
d. Lack of finances  
e. Transfer to a 4-year college or university

Very likely	Likely	Somewhat likely	Not likely
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

15. How supportive are your friends of your attending this college?

<input type="radio"/> Extremely	<input type="radio"/> Somewhat
<input type="radio"/> Quite a bit	<input type="radio"/> Not very

16. How supportive is your immediate family of your attending this college?

<input type="radio"/> Extremely	<input type="radio"/> Somewhat
<input type="radio"/> Quite a bit	<input type="radio"/> Not very

17. Indicate which of the following are your reasons/goals for attending this college. (Please respond to each item)

- a. Complete a certificate program  
b. Obtain an associate degree  
c. Transfer to a 4-year college or university  
d. Obtain or update job-related skills  
e. Self-improvement/personal enjoyment  
f. Change careers

Primary goal	Secondary goal	Not a goal
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**PLEASE DO NOT MARK IN THIS AREA**

**SERIAL #**

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18. Indicate which of the following are SOURCES you use to pay your tuition at this college? (Please respond to each item)

	Major source	Minor source	Not a source
a. My own income/savings	0	0	0
b. Parent or spouse/significant other's income/savings	0	0	0
c. Employer contributions	0	0	0
d. Grants and scholarships	0	0	0
e. Student loans (bank, etc.)	0	0	0
f. Public assistance	0	0	0

19. Since high school, which of the following types of schools have you attended other than the one you are now attending? (Please mark all that apply)

☐ Proprietary (private) school or training program  
☐ Public vocational-technical school  
☐ Another community or technical college  
☐ 4-year college or university  
☐ None

20. When do you plan to take classes at this college again?

☐ I will accomplish my goal(s) during this term and will not be returning  
☐ I have no current plan to return  
☐ Within the next 12 months  
☐ Uncertain

21. At this college, in what range is your overall college grade average?

☐ A  
☐ A- to B+  
☐ B  
☐ B- to C-  
☐ C  
☐ C- or lower  
☐ Do not have a GPA at this school  
☐ Pass/fail classes only

22. When do you most frequently take classes at this college? (Mark one only)

☐ Day classes (morning or afternoon)  
☐ Evening classes  
☐ Weekend classes

23. How many **TOTAL** credit hours have you earned at this college, not counting the courses you are currently taking this term?

☐ None  
☐ 1-14 credits  
☐ 15-29 credits  
☐ 30-44 credits  
☐ 45-60 credits  
☐ Over 60 credits



24. At what other types of institutions are you taking classes this term? (Please mark all that apply)

- ☐ None
- ☐ High school
- ☐ Vocational/technical school
- ☐ Another community or technical college
- ☐ 4-year college/university
- ☐ Other

25. How many classes are you presently taking at OTHER institutions?

- ☐ None
- ☐ 1 class
- ☐ 2 classes
- ☐ 3 classes
- ☐ 4 classes or more

26. Would you recommend this college to a friend or family member?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

27. How would you evaluate your entire educational experience at this college?

- ☐ Excellent
- ☐ Good
- ☐ Fair
- ☐ Poor

28. Do you have children who live with you?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

29. Mark your age group.

- ☐ Under 18
- ☐ 18 to 19
- ☐ 20 to 21
- ☐ 22 to 24
- ☐ 25 to 29
- ☐ 30 to 39
- ☐ 40 to 49
- ☐ 50 to 64
- ☐ 65+

30. Your sex:

- ☐ Male ☐ Female

31. Are you married?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

32. Is English your native (first) language?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

33. Are you an international student or foreign national?

- ☐ Yes    ☐ No

34. What is your racial identification? (Mark only one)

- ☐ American Indian or other Native American  
☐ Asian, Asian American or Pacific Islander  
☐ Native Hawaiian  
☐ Black or African American, Non-Hispanic  
☐ White, Non-Hispanic  
☐ Hispanic, Latino, Spanish  
☐ Other

35. What is the highest academic credential you have earned?

- ☐ None  
☐ High school diploma or GED  
☐ Vocational/technical certificate  
☐ Associate degree  
☐ Bachelor's degree  
☐ Master's/doctoral/professional degree

36. What is the highest level of education obtained by your:

- a. Not a high school graduate  
b. High school diploma or GED  
c. Some college, did not complete degree  
d. Associate degree  
e. Bachelor's degree  
f. Master's degree/1st professional  
g. Doctorate degree  
h. Unknown

Father

Mother

0  
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37. Using the list provided, please fill in the bubbles that correspond to the code indicating your program or major. Using the first column, indicate the first number in the program code, using the second column, indicate the second number in the program code.

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**38. Please provide your student identification number by filling in the corresponding bubbles. For example, in the first column, indicate the first number or letter in your student ID number, and so forth. (OPTIONAL)**

**(Please begin here)**

[illegible]

Your responses will remain confidential and individual responses will not be reported.

**Thank you for sharing your views.**

**Additional Items (Please respond to these items if requested)**

1. 0	0	0	0	0
2. 0	0	0	0	0
3. 0	0	0	0	0
4. 0	0	0	0	0
5. 0	0	0	0	0
6. 0	0	0	0	0
7. 0	0	0	0	0
8. 0	0	0	0	0
9. 0	0	0	0	0
10. 0	0	0	0	0
11. 0	0	0	0	0
12. 0	0	0	0	0
13. 0	0	0	0	0
14. 0	0	0	0	0
15. 0	0	0	0	0
16. 0	0	0	0	0
17. 0	0	0	0	0
18. 0	0	0	0	0
19. 0	0	0	0	0
20. 0	0	0	0	0

**APPENDIX B**

**INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

## APPENDIX B

### **Informed Consent to Participate In Research**

You are being asked to participate in the research project described below. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate, or you may decide to stop your participation at any time. Should you refuse to participate in the study or should you withdraw your consent and stop participation in the study, your decision will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you may be otherwise entitled. You are being asked to read the information below carefully, and ask questions about anything you don't understand before deciding whether or not to participate.

**Title: Effectiveness of the Student Success Course on Persistence, Retention, Academic Achievement and Student Engagement.**

**Principal Investigator(s): Bettye Grigsby, Ph.D.**

**Student Investigator(s): Kris R. Kimbark**

**Faculty Sponsor: Bettye Grigsby, Ph.D.**

#### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this research is to determine the influence participation in the SSC has, if any, on persistence, retention, academic achievement and student engagement.

#### **PROCEDURES**

The research procedures are as follows: The procedures used for the interview process will be for the participant to meet with the researcher in a private meeting room. The researcher will audio tape the interviews and they will be transcribed for analysis. Approximately 10 questions will be asked with possible follow up questions for clarification.

#### **EXPECTED DURATION**

The total anticipated time commitment will be approximately 60-90 minutes.

#### **RISKS OF PARTICIPATION**

There are no anticipated risks associated with participation in this project.

#### **BENEFITS TO THE SUBJECT**

There is no direct benefit received from your participation in this study, but your participation will help the investigator(s) better understand the benefits of the SSC for students enrolled at this community college.

#### **CONFIDENTIALITY OF RECORDS**

Every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality of your study records. The data collected from the study will be used for educational and publication

purposes, however, you will not be identified by name. For federal audit purposes, the participant's documentation for this research project will be maintained and safeguarded by Kris Kimbark for a minimum of three years after completion of the study. After that time, the participant's documentation may be destroyed.

#### **FINANCIAL COMPENSATION**

There is no financial compensation to be offered for participation in the study.

#### **INVESTIGATOR'S RIGHT TO WITHDRAW PARTICIPANT**

The investigator has the right to withdraw you from this study at any time.

#### **CONTACT INFORMATION FOR QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS**

The investigator has offered to answer all your questions. If you have additional questions during the course of this study about the research or any related problem, you may contact the Faculty Sponsor, Bettye Grigsby, Ph.D., at phone number {281-283-3520} or by email at GrigsbyB@uhcl.edu.

If you have additional questions during the course of this study about the research or any related problem, you may contact the Student Researcher, Kris R. Kimbark at 409-933-8131 or by email at kkimbark@com.edu. The Faculty Sponsor Bettye Grigsby, Ph.D., may be contacted at phone number 281-283-3520 or by email at GrigsbyB@uhcl.edu.

**SIGNATURES:**

Your signature below acknowledges your voluntary participation in this research project. Such participation does not release the investigator(s), institution(s), sponsor(s) or granting agency(ies) from their professional and ethical responsibility to you.

In the event of physical injury resulting from this research, the University is not able to offer financial compensation nor absorb the costs of medical treatment. Medical expenses for the treatment of any injuries incurred during this project will need to be covered by the participant or the participant's insurance or health care program. No other forms of compensation are available. If you decide to participate in this study and you sign this form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights.

The purpose of this study, procedures to be followed, and explanation of risks or benefits have been explained to you. You have been allowed to ask questions and your questions have been answered to your satisfaction. You have been told who to contact if you have additional questions. You have read this consent form and voluntarily agree to participate as a subject in this study. You are free to withdraw your consent at any time by contacting the Principal Investigator or Student Researcher/Faculty Sponsor. You will be given a copy of the consent form you have signed.

Subject's printed name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Subject: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Using language that is understandable and appropriate, I have discussed this project and the items listed above with the subject.

Printed name and title: Kris Kimbark, Student Researcher

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON-CLEAR LAKE (UHCL)  
COMMITTEE FOR PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS HAS  
REVIEWED AND APPROVED THIS PROJECT. ANY**

**QUESTIONS REGARDING YOUR RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH  
SUBJECT MAY BE ADDRESSED TO THE UHCL COMMITTEE  
FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS (281-283-3015).  
ALL RESEARCH PROJECTS THAT ARE CARRIED OUT BY  
INVESTIGATORS AT UHCL ARE GOVERNED BY  
REQUIREMENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY AND THE FEDERAL  
GOVERNMENT. (FEDERALWIDE ASSURANCE #  
FWA00004068)**



**APPENDIX C**  
**INTERVEIW GUIDE**

## **APPENDIX C**

### **Interview Guide For students enrolled in SSC in 2012-2013**

- 1. How would you describe yourself as a student?**
- 2. When you first enrolled in this class, what were your thoughts?**
- 3. What contributed to your decision to continue at this college?**
- 4. How would you describe your experiences in the SSC course?**
- 5. Discuss skills you learned in this course.**
- 6. How would you describe your instructor for this class?**
- 7. Please share anything else you would like about your experience in this class.**

## **APPENDIX C**

### **Interview Guide For students enrolled in SSC in 2012-2013**

- 1. How would you describe yourself as a student?**
- 2. When you first enrolled in this class, what were your thoughts?**
- 3. What contributed to your decision to continue at this college?**
- 4. How would you describe your experiences in the SSC course?**
- 5. Discuss skills you learned in this course.**
- 6. How would you describe your instructor for this class?**
- 7. Please share anything else you would like about your experience in this class.**

# **RÉSUMÉ**

## **KRIS R. KIMBARK**

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### **EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

- 2015 University of Houston-Clear Lake, Houston, Texas**  
Ed. D in Educational Leadership, emphasis in Higher Education  
Anticipated completion in May of 2015
- 1990 Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan**  
Master of Arts in Rehabilitation Counseling
- 1988 Southeastern Oklahoma State University, Durant, Oklahoma**  
Bachelor of Arts in Sociology, Psychology and Communications

### **PROFESSIONAL CERTIFICATION**

Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) #00007598- December 1990 to present  
Certified Mediator  
Ruby Payne- A Framework for Understanding Poverty Training  
Skip Downing- On Course: Strategies for Creating Success in College and Life Training  
Elimination of Campus Sexual Violence Training  
Title IX Compliance Institution Training  
Title IX Investigator Training  
Mediation Training  
Competency based training in Cross Cultural Communication  
CCSSE High Impact Practices Institutes

### **PROFESSIONAL WORK EXPERIENCE**

- 2001-Current** Higher Education Administrator in Student Services  
**1991-2001** Health Care Administration -Brain Injury Rehabilitation

### **PROFESSIONAL PRESENTATIONS**

- Student Success Workshops
- Student Conduct Task Force/ Behavioral Intervention Team
- Classroom Management Techniques for faculty
- Local, State, Regional, National and International training conferences for Rehabilitation and Education professionals
- Financial Literacy conference for Trio/Higher Ed personnel
- Developing a Shared Vision using the SOAR method-- Junior/Community College Student Personnel Association of Texas(J/CCSPAT)