

Self-Efficacy, Motivation, and Persistence Factors at Higher Learning Institutions

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ABSTRACT

This study explored what factors impact persistence levels among students at different types of higher learning institutions. A survey was distributed to students at public residential, public commuter, private, online-only, and community institutions to determine their self-efficacy levels and feelings about the following factors including: academic advising, social connectedness, involvement and engagement, faculty and staff approachability, business procedures, learning experiences, and student support services and their relation to persistence. Phone interviews were used to determine what matters most to students at their current university. Results found type of institution does not affect persistence. The most important things keeping students at any of their universities are learning experiences, faculty and staff approachability, and involvement and engagement. Institution type does not affect levels of self-efficacy, and there is a correlation between age and levels of self-efficacy. These findings indicate institutions should focus a lot on students' learning experiences, having faculty and staff who are friendly and welcoming, and ensuring there are involvement and engagement opportunities for all types of students.

Keywords Persistence; self-efficacy; motivation; higher learning institution; university; college; retention; student

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Thesis

First-time, full-time students who enrolled at four-year degree-granting institutions in fall 2015 had an 81% persistence rate (Undergraduate Retention..., 2018). Yet, recent estimates from the National Center for Education Statistics suggest some 60% of students who sought bachelor's degrees at four-year institutions in fall 2010 completed the four-year degree within six years in spring 2016. The female to male six-year graduation rate ratio based on percentages of either gender is 63:57, meaning graduation rates were higher for females (2018).

Persistence is measured by the percentage of "first-time, full-time undergraduate students who complete their program at the same institution within a specified period of time" (2018). Persistence varies based upon how selective the higher learning institution is, however research shows levels of persistence continue to decline. For example, non-selective institutions have a retention rate of only 62%, and institutions with only 25% acceptance rates retain 100% of students (2018). These numbers suggest an ongoing problem for administrators in higher education institutions. Although we are aware of the numbers, retention experts still struggle with solutions for improving persistence rates. Persistence and retention are used interchangeably, as they both refer to student's staying at a higher learning institution.

Introduction

Affect theory and self-efficacy theory help determine why students persist at different types of higher learning institutions. The affect theory says people are motivated by their emotional states, or their moods (What is..., 2018). Self-efficacy theory is a person's belief that he or she can succeed, or accomplish certain tasks, while involved in

that situation or task (Bandura, 1991). Persistence is the dependent variable being studied, and institution type and factors leading to persistence are the independent variables. Persistence is defined as students who continue at their same school the next year (FAFSA, n.d.). Institution type is simply the type of higher learning institution students attend: public commuter, public residential, private, community, or online-only. Persistence factors include: academic advising, social connectedness, involvement and engagement, faculty and staff approachability, business procedures, learning experiences, and student support services. In order to determine how self-efficacy, motivations, and persistence factors lead to persistence at higher learning institutions, data was collected using an online survey created with Survey Monkey and follow up phone interviews. I wanted to know if students with higher levels of self-efficacy attended a certain type of institution. It was my expectation that students at certain institution types (mainly the more selective, private institutions) would receive higher levels of advising, mentoring, and other services, therefore leading to increased levels of persistence. If the levels of advising and personal attention at a smaller institution, I assumed these students would have lower levels of self-efficacy, since they had more contact with individuals at the institutional level. The purpose of this study was to help determine how and why students persist at different types of universities. Results concluded institution type does affect persistence, as the more connected a student is, the better his/her experience is. The most important persistence factors are learning experiences, faculty and staff approachability, and involvement and engagement. These do not vary based on institution type. Institution type does not affect self-efficacy, and finally, there is a correlation between age and self-efficacy.

Theories

The questions which persistence factors matter most for specific institution types and whether or not institution type affects persistence remain unanswered. Researchers try to use the following theories to find answers to those questions.

Affect Theory. Affect theory describes students' motivations for staying at a specific higher learning institution. Originated by Silvan S. Tomkins, affect theory states, humans are mostly motivated by their moods, or affective states (What is..., 2018). Affect theory explains how individuals experience emotion and how a physical response is triggered by the individual experiencing the emotion. For example, a student may be very happy at a higher learning institution, therefore causing him or her to want to stay at that institution, rather than transfer elsewhere.

Tomkins names three types of affect, or emotion: positive, neutral, and negative. Examples of positive emotions include "joy, interest, and excitement". Surprise is the only neutral emotion, and negative emotions include, but are not limited to, "anger, terror, and disgust" (2018, para. 3). One of the key components of affect theory is to show how these affects are the brain's involuntary response to external stimuli. Affect theory's goal is to "stop these automatic responses by listening to the messages the brain is sending through affects" (2018, para. 5). Once these affects are fully understood, it allows for changes in mental health state. Affect theory also says students can attain mental health by "maximizing positive affects, and minimizing negative affects" (2018, para. 3).

Highmore (2013) explains how emotion is a rational component to study related to communication and culture. His study explains how people's moods change based on the where they are and how they perceive their whereabouts (2013). Everyone has a

mood, or feeling, about something whether it be more or less intense. People's emotions often help them figure out what it is they want to do. For example, if someone did not want to deal with an individual on campus, this may result in the student having negative feelings about the entire institution. Based on this research and the research of Tomkins, it is evident that mood does affect retention rates at higher learning institutions.

Students hope for, and expect, certain things at their higher learning institution, and these feelings directly affect their attitude about said institution (Bank, Biddle, and Slavings, 1992). For example, many students expect their academic advisor to know which classes they should take to graduate on time. If their advisor does not know, this could negatively impact the student, hence negatively affecting his or her mood. An example of a positive effect on the student's mood could be the campus recreation center offering sports and events for all skill levels, rather than just really good athletes. The recreation centers on campus often provide intramurals and club sports for less competitive atmospheres than varsity athletic teams.

Self-Efficacy Theory. A student's persistence levels while attending any type of higher learning institution can be affected by their work, family, and finances (Reed, 2016 & Hirschy et al., 2011). However, Reed (2016) found that student's self-efficacy levels matter, too. Self-efficacy theory is a motivational, task specific, theory that focuses on an individual's idea of his or her ability to act in a particular way to ensure certain outcomes (Bean & Eaton, 2001—2002; Graham & Weiner, 1996). In other words, self-efficacy is an individual's belief that he or she can succeed in a specific situation, or accomplish a certain task (Bandura, 1991). These individuals figure out how effective (or ineffective) they are at coping with specific tasks or situations based on observations and

past experiences (Bean & Eaton, 2001—2002). According to Orth, Erol, and Luciano (2018), self-efficacy strongly increases in people between the ages of 15—30. This is the age range of many individuals at higher learning institutions.

There are three popular ways to measure self-efficacy (Ackerman, 2018). The first, and most popular, is known as a general/generalized self-efficacy scale (GSE). It was developed by Schwarzer and Jerusalem, and it has been in use since 1995 (2018). The second, New General Self-Efficacy Scale (NGSE), was developed by Chen, Gully, and Eden in 2001. The third popular measure of self-efficacy is the Self-Efficacy Questionnaire. This was developed by a Research Collaboration that works to improve education and professional development in 2015 (Ackerman, 2018). Reed (2016) used qualitative research to “uncover trends and themes regarding student self-efficacy, perseverance, and student satisfaction that leads to increased retention or lack thereof” (p. 53-54). As people, we all have self-motivating factors that help us pay attention to our behaviors (Bandura, 1991). This is our self-efficacy, which helps us succeed. Bandura (1991) also notes, students who set goals for themselves are more likely to succeed even if they lack support.

Self-efficacy theory has been widely used when studying students in higher learning institutions. Students with high levels of self-efficacy are known to willingly take on difficult tasks, put forth a greater effort, express high levels of persistence when obstacles appear, have low levels of anxiety, demonstrate a flexible nature in regards to learning strategies, accurately self-evaluate themselves, and self-regulate well (Mills, Pajares, & Herron, 2007, p. 417—418). This particular study was used to determine self-efficacy of students in an intermediate college-level French class. Mills, Pajares, and

Herron (2007) administered a self-belief survey to students studying French classes at three universities. Results showed gender differences in regards to self-efficacy levels between women and men. Women reported higher levels of self-efficacy for self-regulation (2007). Researchers found a students' level of self-efficacy to be the most significant predictor of French language achievement in students (2007). This same method could be used to determine if students' self-efficacy levels keep them motivated to continue at specific types of higher learning institutions.

Bean and Eaton (2001—2002) conducted self-efficacy research on service learning, learning communities/freshman interest groups, freshman orientation seminars, mentoring programs, and the effects of each on student's levels of self-efficacy. They were trying to determine which factors contributed most to student's persistence. Bean and Eaton (2001—2002) mention how “participation in higher education is voluntary and based on individual decisions to remain or to leave college” and how institutional policies and programming affect retention rates (p. 73). Obviously, students at institutions need to believe they are doing well academically and believe they are in control of their own destiny (2001—2002). Bean and Eaton (2001—2002) found that higher learning institutions should work to create programs that will increase students' levels of self-efficacy. With increased levels of self-efficacy, students develop positive feelings and attitudes toward their choice of higher learning institution. These positive attitudes will make students feel they fit in, help them get good grades, and make them want to graduate from the institution they initially chose (2001—2002).

Review of Literature

Student Belonging. Students' sense of belonging is their "psychological sense of identification and affiliation with the campus community" (Hausmann et al., 2009, p. 650). As students get used to being on campus, they establish a connection, or sense of belonging, with their higher learning institution. It is difficult to determine the exact reason(s) students stay at a specific higher learning institution. In sum, researchers have mixed feelings about why students persist. Astin believes student engagement is a strong predictor of retention at an institution. Astin (1993) paved the way for modern student engagement research. Engagement continues to be studied in his way today. Astin grouped student outcomes into seven categories: political identification of the student; personality, self-concept, and psychological well-being; attitudes, values, beliefs, and life goals; patterns of behavior; academic and cognitive development; career development; and satisfaction with various aspects of college (Astin, 1993). These seven categories of student outcomes contribute to students staying at their specific college or university. Astin (1993) notes: "(1)being in a particular institution type does not limit effectiveness of education, and what really matters is the environment created by faculty and staff; (2)the kinds of colleges and experiences that favorably affect standardized test performance are different from those that enhance retention; and (3)the most important environmental influence on student development is the peer group" (p. 75). This study was designed to explore reasons students thrive or fail to persist at different types of higher learning institutions.

Previous literature revealed a motivational typology for why students stay in college. In the longitudinal study conducted by Bank, Biddle, and Slavings (1992), college freshmen were asked to list their hopes for their first year at a higher learning

institution. These hopes were then sorted into five categories: social hopes, academic hopes, personal hopes, positional hopes, and financial hopes. A correlation analysis revealed expectancy for positional hopes was most significantly correlated with persistence behaviors (1992). Bank, Biddle, and Slavings (1992) found “Average expectancy is strongly correlated with self-labels ($r = .192$; $p < .001$) and attributed norms ($r = .142$; $p < .001$) than with own norms ($r = .072$; $p < .05$) and persistence ($r = .080$; $p < .05$)” (p. 328). Significant correlations also appeared for self-labels, attributed normals, own norms, and persistence. Almost all the participants were positive about their hopes being realized during their time in a higher learning institution. If the student’s hopes are fulfilled, he/she is more likely to persist.

Persistence. Persistence, sometimes known as retention, is the “percentage of a school’s first-time, first-year undergraduate students who continue at that school the next year” (FAFSA, n.d., para. 2). Sometimes definitions of persistence are institutionally based, however, this is the most common definition. At some institutions, a student’s persistence may be one semester, multiple semesters, or until the student’s graduation date. Bean (2005) developed a flow model for persistence, “prematriculation behavior and attitudes student interaction with the institution and external environment after enrollment attitudes about school experiences intention to leave departure from college” (p. 218).

Persistence studies conducted from an individual perspective identify how demographic characteristics, experiences at a higher learning institution, the students’ behavior, and the students’ attitudes come together to affect whether the student remains at the same institution (Bean, 2005). Students enter into their choice of higher learning

institution with personality traits that have been shaped by their life experiences, individual abilities, and assessments of themselves (Bean & Eaton, 2001—2002). Next, students interact with individuals at the university: students, faculty, staff, and individuals in offices like financial aid and parking services. These interactions pave the way to student's level of content with the institution. If the conversations go well and the student feels good about them, he or she is more likely to feel connected to the university (2001—2002). Bean and Eaton (2001—2002) say students who feel positively about their institution, are more likely to be successful, persistent graduates of that institution.

Persistence poses a problem for many institutions. Boatman and Long (2016) attribute low persistence rates to student challenges that seem difficult to overcome. Examples of potential challenges one may face at a higher learning institution include coming from a low-income household or area, not being prepared for collegiate level learning, and not receiving enough information about colleges. Not receiving adequate information can lead students to “attend institutions which are not the right fit or do not have necessary supports” for the student (Bean & Long, 2016, p. 654).

Challenges are likely to occur when one enters a higher learning institution, but it is all about how individuals work to overcome these challenges. Much like Tinto's 1975 model noted by Draper (2005), previous research supports student satisfaction and endurance levels as factors critical to persistence (Roberts & Styron, 2005). Similar to factors identified by Bean and Eaton (2001—2002) including mentor programs, learning communities, freshman interest groups, and freshman orientation, Roberts and Styron (2005) identified factors by name: academic advising, social connectedness, involvement

and engagement, faculty and staff approachability, business procedures, learning experiences, and student support services.

Roberts and Styron (2010) define “four different types of persistence: institutional, system, academic discipline, and by course” (p. 2). Institutional retention is the most commonly used method to track the percentage of students who return to the same higher learning institution every year (2010). It is also the form of retention that will be used to carry out this project. System retention tracks students within the system of higher education, no matter which higher learning institution they are attending (2010). Academic discipline retention measures students who stay within the same major; therefore if a student changes his/her major, it means he/ she has not been retained (2010). Finally, course retention simply refers to students staying in specific courses, or classes, offered by their higher learning institution.

Roberts and Styron (2010) also point out seven factors that contribute to persistence. These factors are academic advising, social connectedness, involvement and engagement, faculty and staff approachability, business procedures, learning experiences, and student support services. Each of these persistence factors contributes to persistence and is described in the following section.

Persistence Factors

Academic Advising. Roberts and Styron (2010) found academic advising to be the most influential aspect of student engagement and interaction with a higher learning institution. Academic advising is the process by which a student interacts with a faculty or staff member (2010) to help the student make decisions and figure out what actions he or she needs to take to reach established educational or career goals. DeLaRosby (2017)

found that a student who is satisfied with his or her academic advising experience is highly correlated with levels of persistence at a higher learning institution.

Recent research indicates academic advisors are considered “cultural navigators” (Strayhorn, 2014). Strayhorn (2014) says advisors should hold students to high standards and have high, yet attainable, expectations of each of them. Advisors should make students aware of service learning opportunities, as these experiences positively impact students as well (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). To give students the absolute best advising experience possible, advisors should get to know their students. Advisors should learn things like students’ names, where students’ families are from, what qualities and attributes students bring to the university, and strengths and weaknesses of the student (Strayhorn, 2014). Advising is difficult work, yet it is definitely worth the effort, even with little time, since it has so much impact on students.

Social Connectedness. Student’s social lives are a very important factor in relation to retention. Previous research suggests social involvement and extracurricular involvement heighten students’ perceptions and positive feelings about their higher learning institution (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Students form bonds with other students when their institution provides experiences of learning and development to help students fit in with others at the institution (Bean, 2005, p. 227).

University belonging and quality of friendship are strongly correlated in a study by Pittman and Richmond (2008). Their study supports “previous cross-sectional research (Freeman et al., 2007; Pittman & Richmond, 2007) indicating that a sense of university belonging, like the sense of school belonging at younger ages, is linked to students’ positive self-perceptions of social acceptance and scholastic competence” (p.

354). Weak attachments that focus on “destructive or avoidant behavior” are bad for retention rates (Bean, 2005, p. 227). Draper (2005) notes it does not seem to matter if students are in the “dominant social crowd”; as long as they find a crowd to be friends with and individuals with whom they can spend their time talking and interacting.

Freshman orientation seminars are one way to help students become more socially connected to their higher learning institution before they even begin classes. Bean and Eaton (2001—2002) define freshman orientation seminars as extensions of the traditional orientation programs that assist with social integration and students’ persistence. These orientation programs help first-year students with cultivating a sense of community at their institution, becoming involved, and meeting more people (2001—2002).

Involvement and Engagement. Student engagement has been researched since the 1930s, starting with an educational psychologist, Ralph Tyler. Engage is defined as “to occupy the attention of”, with engagement meaning “the condition or act of being so occupied” (Axelson & Flick, 2011, p. 40). Students who belong to a group or organization are more likely to feel a stronger sense of connection to their higher learning institution (Shaulskiy, 2016). Belonging to student organizations was helpful to students’ psychological well-being (2016). Student engagement is known as involvement/membership in student organizations. Engagement has led to higher retention rates for university students (Astin, 1993). There are three types of engagement: behavioral, emotional, and cognitive (Axelson & Flick, 2011). With the notion that engagement should be evaluated in a more refined, practical way in mind, Astin (1993) developed a way to research student engagement. He mentions how every aspect of a student’s development, whether it be cognitive, affective, psychological, or behavioral, is

affected by their peers' characteristics in some way, shape, or form. Student engagement and involvement with academics and faculty members have all led to higher retention rates for university students (Axelson & Flick, 2011).

Mentoring programs are another form of student engagement. These programs are used during a student's first year at an institution to aid with engagement and involvement. A mentor's purpose is to provide incoming students with "support, information, and referrals to university services" (Bean & Eaton, 2001—2002). The mentor assists first-year students with their transition from high school to a higher learning institution and helps them adapt to new academic and social situations. Mentors work with students on their personal development (2001—2002).

Faculty and Staff Approachability. Researchers agree faculty and staff relationships with students are crucial to student retention (Astin, 1993; Pascarella, 1983). Zhou and Cole (2016) found interactions with faculty members had the highest impact on overall satisfaction for both American and international students. Faculty members appear approachable to students when they are available inside and outside of the classroom (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2005). Faculty members can be approachable when they are off campus as well by providing cell phone numbers and e-mail addresses for students to get ahold of them any time, or by coming in for special appointments in their office that may be outside of their scheduled office hours (Kuh et al., 2005). Kuh et al. (2005) also mentions the importance of faculty members gaining insight about their classes from students before the next semester begins. They found it was important for students to mention things they liked and disliked about courses, so these could be amended for the next group of students (2005). Pascarella and Terenzini

(2005) mention, the more contact a student has with a faculty member, the better chance he/she has in persisting until graduation” (Roberts & Styron, 2010, p. 4).

Business Procedures. Bean (2005) defines business procedures as places at the higher learning institution where students speak with university representatives or utilize available services. Examples of services that would be considered part of the institution’s business offices are: financial aid; residence life; parking services; student conduct; athletic events; and more (Roberts & Styron, 2010). For example, Boatman and Long (2016) present evidence showing the important role financial aid plays in helping students enroll in a higher learning institution, persist there, and graduate. They also mention not much research has been done on where the money is coming from, yet many students respond positively to financial aid when deciding where to attend college (2016). Sometimes, students do not feel satisfied with what happens in business offices or with individuals in these offices. For example, if students do not provide appropriate forms and/or money in exchange for the services they are requesting, they may “become discouraged and perceive bureaucracy as more important to college staff than student service” (Roberts & Styron, 2010, p. 4-5). These negative feelings can lead to students leaving the institution they wanted so badly to be a part of.

Learning Experiences. Higher learning institutions should provide meaningful and enriching learning experiences for their students both inside and outside of class (Roberts & Styron, 2010). Classes often help students decide which major they want to choose, leading to a career after college (2010). There is evidence suggesting smaller class sizes are beneficial to students. Acevedo (2018) mentions smaller classes allow more time with professors, have better structure, allow for quicker feedback on

assignments, make you more accountable, and show greater levels of student performance. This is not to say students who prefer larger classes are less successful or have less of a connection to their university.

Aside from the importance of student's day-to-day classes, experiential/service learning is another meaningful learning experience. Jacoby (1996, p. 5) defines experiential/service learning as an education form allowing students to participate in activities that address human and community needs that provide opportunities designed to promote student development and learning. Experiential/service-learning opportunities at higher learning institutions may include but are not limited to: internships; study abroad trips; and cooperative education programs (co-ops) (Franek, 2018).

Experiential/service learning allows students to find out what they love, take risks, and learn how to talk about their skills (2018). Research has proven students who participate in experiential/service-learning programs gain knowledge both academically and cognitively through applying theory to practice and examining theories in new situations (Bean & Eaton, 2001—2002). They found that through service learning, students develop a purpose, make social gains, and their feelings of isolation are significantly reduced (Greenberg, 1997). Students who are provided with meaningful and enriching learning experiences know how to apply knowledge from their classes to real life experiences and are engaged and satisfied at the higher learning institution which they attend (Roberts & Styron, 2010; Levin & Cureton, 1998).

Transitioning to a higher learning institution is often difficult, sometimes causing students to leave. Learning communities/freshman interest groups are examples of learning experiences that help with student persistence (Bean & Eaton, 2001—2002).

First-year experience courses are a type of freshman interest group. These courses have a positive overall impact on student retention rates (Newman, 2016). Koch (2007) surveyed higher learning institution, revealing 85% offered FYE courses. Over half of these universities required students to complete this course. Newman (2016) found the first-year experience course to be significant for student retention $X^2(1, N = 1402) = 6.47, p = .004$, Cramer's $V = .06$.

Both learning communities and freshman interest groups allow students to interact with other students, faculty, and staff members (Bean & Eaton, 2001—2002). These courses provide great opportunities for students to build connections and feel more comfortable in their new learning environment.

Student Support Services. Higher learning institutions are always looking for ways to help new students adjust to their campus (Grayson, 2003). Student support services make adjustment for many students much simpler. Academic support services including tutoring centers for math, writing, and study skills are beneficial to students (Roberts & Styron, 2010). Another notable academic support service is the Disability Services Office. This office can help students find suitable accommodations in the classroom, with a focus on abilities rather than disabilities (YSU Disability Services, 2019). Counseling services are another support service a lot of students find necessary and helpful. Individualized counseling can, and should, be provided for

personal, career, and academic information, activities, and instruction designed to acquaint students with career options; exposure to cultural events and academic programs not usually available; mentoring programs, securing temporary housing during breaks for

students who are homeless youths and students who are in foster care or are aging out of the foster care system (U.S. Dept. of Ed., 2018, para. 2).

Higher learning institutions with strong student support services in place are more likely to retain their students (Roberts & Styron, 2010).

Types of Institutions

A study conducted by Pascarella et al. tests the theoretical model of withdrawal in a non-residential collegiate setting developed by Tinto (1975). The longitudinal study allowed for three data collections throughout the 1979—1980 and the 1980—1981 school years. Participants completed the American Council on Education (ACE) so researchers could understand their expectations for college and some background information. Results yield that background characteristics are important, and there is not a lot of support for the person-environment fit parts of Tinto’s model. The authors developed a new model to explain persistence/withdrawal decisions in commuter institutions. This model needs more testing, however, authors believe with more involvement from faculty, an emphasis on more creative programming, and awareness of the interests of students who are recruited and enrolled, some predominantly commuter universities may be able to “provide richer and more varied opportunities for satisfying social interaction and involvement than others” (p. 99).

Bank, Biddle, and Slavings (1992) conducted a longitudinal study to define four types of college freshman expectations: expectancies, self-labels, attributed norms, and own norms. Participants listed their hopes, and these were sorted into five categories: social hopes, academic hopes, personal hopes, positional hopes, and financial hopes. Social hopes made up one-third of the 4,846 hopes listed, with finding friends being the

most popular hope. Almost all respondents were positive about their hopes being realized during their time in college. They found students' hopes do not have much to do with the college experience. Many of their hopes were both social and personal, and therefore could be fulfilled without a college setting. Notably, there were weak relationships between students' expectancies and their academic persistence (p. 330). A lot of the academic hopes could be satisfied at any college or university, as they were not specific to the university which they chose to attend.

There are five types of higher learning institutions being studied to determine if persistence varies based on institution type: a public commuter institution, a public residential institution, a private institution, a community college, and an online only institution. These types were chosen due to the researcher's access to them. The higher learning institution types were defined by the researcher, using definitions from previous research. The five types of higher learning institutions studied are described in more detail below.

Public Commuter Institution. A public commuter institution is a state institution in which students primarily live off campus and commute to class, rather than walk from their residence hall on campus. (Burrell, 2018). Commuter institutions tend to focus more on "training and teaching rather than a traditional college campus life that includes football games, dorms, and Greek houses" (2018, para. 2). Most students at a commuter institution will leave campus right after class, and the campus is very quiet on weekends. Often, evenings on campus are quiet as well (2018).

Public Residential Institution. Public Affairs Residential College (2018) defines a public residential institution as a state institution with a "cohesive, energetic community

that seeks to broaden the learning experience beyond the traditional classroom, laboratory, or studio settings” (para. 1). Residential institutions often have a lot of places on campus for students to live (Burrell, 2018). The campus hosts many activities that are both cultural and intellectual in nature (Public Affairs...,2018). Goals of a residential institution are: housing a variety of extracurricular activities for students to learn beyond the classroom; including communities where students are supported and get the feeling of a small campus atmosphere at a big university; and creating better relationships between students and teachers in a more informal environment (2018).

Private Institution. Lauryn (2017) defines private institutions as an independent, privately-funded school that “sets its own policies and goals” (para. 1). Sometimes, private institutions are associated with a particular religion or gender, but not always. Private institutions are open to all types of people, but the courses and student activities may be more geared toward the particular population of students they are established to serve (2017). Private institutions are tend to offer a more limited choice of majors. These institutions are expensive, but they do tend to offer plenty of financial aid.

Community College. A community college is a two-year, postsecondary education institution that is affordable. (Homeland Security, 2012). Community colleges tend to have smaller class sizes, individualized attention, and a supportive atmosphere for those who need it (2012). They are known for: providing a “pathway to a four-year degree, affordability, relevance, and partnerships with industry” (2012, para. 5).

Online-Only Institution. An online-only institution is an institution where everything, including classes and communication, is done completely online. There is no physical campus where students attend classes, and if there is access to a campus, it is

extremely limited (Friedman, 2017). Important things to note about online only institutions are: accreditation, they cater mostly to those who work, it does not mean an institution is lower quality just because they are online only, faculty and student services may be available, many are for-profit, there may be clinical requirements in some classes, and the programs are not a good fit for everyone (2017). Success at an online-only institution relies heavily on the student's time management skills and discipline to complete material without being in a classroom. Online-only institutions are excellent solutions for those who have a difficult time commuting and for people who learn better working by themselves (University of Phoenix, 2018). An example of an online-only institution being studied is Full Sail University.

Research Questions

RQ1: How does institution type (public commuter, public residential, private, community college, online-only) affect student perceptions of persistence?

RQ2a: Which student success factors students are most important for persistence overall?

RQ2b: Which student success factors matter most for persistence based on institution type?

RQ3: How is self-efficacy among college students related to institution type?

RQ4: How is self-efficacy among college students related to age?

Methodology

Sample. Participants were a convenience sample of students (N = 283) from public commuter (49.47%), public residential (39.58%), private (5.3%), community

(2.83%), and online-only (2.83%) higher learning institutions. A convenience sample is a “non-probability sampling method that relies on data collection from population members who are conveniently available to participate in a study” (Saunders, et al., 2012, para. 1). This decision was made because the study was focused on persistence rates and variables associated with persistence in certain types of higher learning institutions. The participants were identified through mutual contacts and email solicitation. This sampling method allowed for a larger number of students to be reached in a shorter period of time.

Not all participants completed the survey entirely, therefore sample size ranges from (N = 296-257). Responses came from mostly females with 191 females (74.32%), 63 males (24.51%), 2 other (0.78%), and 1 (0.39%) prefer not to say completing the survey. 39 participants skipped this question. Most participants indicated being Caucasian, or white (74.71%), followed by African American (12.84%), Hispanic or Latino (3.89%), other (3.50%), Asian/Pacific Islander (3.11%), prefer not to say (1.17%), and Native American or American Indian (0.78%). The most common age of participants was 18-24 (84.82%), followed by 25-34 (8.56%), 45-54 (3.11%), 33-44 (2.72%), and 55 or above (0.78%). Participants included individuals who have spent less than 1 year (15.56%), 1 year (5.06%), 2 years (24.9%), 3 years (23.35%), 4 years (18.68%), 5 years (7.39%), and students who have spent more than 5 years (5.06%) at their current institution. Employment among participants was varied with most being employed part-time - less than 40 hours a week (60.31%), followed by those who are just students (19.46%), employed full-time - 40+ hours a week (13.23%), unemployed (4.28%), self-employed (1.17%), retired (0.78%), and unable to work (0.78%).

The five types of higher learning institutions selected were based on convenience sampling. This decision was made because all of the higher learning institutions chosen were easily accessible by the researcher. Primary contacts at each institution were established before beginning the study, paving the way for research to be conducted. There were a variety of institutions represented that made up the 5 categories, public commuter (n = 140), public residential (n = 112), private (n = 15), community (n = 8), online-only (n = 8).

Procedure. The self-administered, quantitative online survey was created with Survey Monkey, and an online link to the instrument was distributed by email to faculty members from predetermined higher learning institutions (Stephenson & Yerger, 2015). Faculty members were encouraged to share the link with their students. The link was also distributed via Facebook. This survey was used to measure student's self-efficacy and persistence factors that kept them motivated (N = 296—257). The sample size ranges because not all participants completed the demographics measure. As student respondents completed the survey, Survey Monkey automatically tallied their responses, and the final data was exported into a spreadsheet for further analysis in SPSS. An online survey is important for this kind of research because it is an important tool used to gather information in a quick manner. The questionnaire was designed to keep participants as engaged as possible, placing demographic questions at the end, in case participants chose to exit the survey before finishing. This way, the more important questions were answered, leaving demographics as a less important piece to the research.

If participants got randomly selected for the second phase of the research project, they participated in a phone interview. The phone interview was comprised of 5 questions

for participants to answer (see appendix E). A phone interview is important for this kind of research because qualitative data allows for a deeper, more profound understanding about self-efficacy, motivations, and persistence at higher learning institutions. Phone interviews also allow participants to express their thoughts and feelings about their institution.

Instrumentation. The study began by having participants sign a consent form to participate in this research project (see appendix C). After completing the IRB consent form online on Survey Monkey with an electronic signature, participants will then be taken directly to the online survey (see appendix D). A 5-point Likert Scale was used to measure self-efficacy levels of students at varying types of universities. The Likert response options ranged from ‘Strongly Agree’ (5) to ‘Strongly Disagree’ (1), with a neutral point in the middle, ‘Neither Agree nor Disagree’ (3) (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995). Multiple choice measures were used to determine type of higher learning institution and demographic characteristics (age, gender, ethnicity, years he/she has attended their current institution, employment status). A yes/no measure was used to determine if the type of institution affected both the student’s decision to attend the institution and stay at the institution. A rank measure was used to determine which factors matter most for student persistence, ‘Most Important’ (1) through ‘Least Important’ (7). Finally, a fill-in was used for any students who wished to participate in a follow up interview.

In order to qualify for the follow up interview, students needed to provide their email and current phone number on an additional page that was added to the survey. This was separate from the main survey, asking any participants who were willing to

participate in a follow up interview to please provide their email address and phone number. At this point, it was clear the individual being interviewed was willing to participate and was clearly identified by his/her phone number and email. These participant's identity will be kept confidential by the investigator.

Phase two of the research project included 14 participants being randomly selected from all who took the survey and completed the additional page, stating his/her willingness to participate in a brief phone interview (see appendix E). Again, the participants were informed that his/her identity would be kept confidential. After re-explaining the previously signed consent form and informing participants their identity would remain confidential, participants were then asked for their consent to record. Recordings were done on the Simple Recorder app. The recordings are kept confidential on the researcher's personal laptop computer. The computer is privately owned and password protected, therefore it is not at all accessible to the public.

Institution type and persistence. Multiple choice questions were used to gain insight about research participant's choice of university. These questions were also used to determine whether this type of university had anything to do with them choosing to attend their stated type of university and if the type has any affect on them staying at the university.

Success factors by institution type. A rank measure was used to determine what student's perceived as factors most important to their success. These factors included academic advising, social connectedness, involvement and engagement, faculty and staff approachability, business procedures, learning experiences, and student support services. This rank measure was generated from many different researcher's ideas of what

contributes most to persistence at higher learning institutions. Each researcher has a different idea about persistence and the factor that contributes most. Roberts and Styron (2010) and DeLaRosby (2017) found academic advising to be highly correlated with student persistence. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), Bean (2005), and Pittman and Richmond (2007) found belonging and friendship to be correlated with retention, and Bean and Eaton (2001—2002) found orientation, a form of belonging to be correlated with persistence. Shaulskiy (2016), Astin (1993), and Bean and Eaton (2001) determined that involvement and engagement, including mentoring programs contribute to higher persistence rates at higher learning institutions. Faculty and staff approachability is crucial to persistence according to Astin (1993), Pascarella (1983), and Zhou and Cole (2016). They also note faculty and staff approachability generally has the highest impact on overall student satisfaction. Business procedures seem to not be as important in general, yet financial aid and amount of assistance proves important according to Boatman and Long (2016). Learning experiences prove important because they help students discover what they enjoy and find their purpose (Franek, 2018; Greenberg, 1997). Newman (2016) also mentions how first-year experience courses contribute to persistence levels. Higher learning institutions are more likely to retain their students when student support services are in place (Roberts & Styron, 2018).

Success factors that matter most for persistence. Phone interviews were conducted to touch on what matters most to students to keep them persisting at their current university. Questions were created by the researcher to gather qualitative data and understand why students persist at their stated type of university and the reasons they continue to persist.

Self-efficacy in relation to persistence. Self-efficacy was measured using a 5-point Likert scale. This scale was adapted from Schwarzer and Jerusalem's Generalized Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE) (Ackerman, 2018). However, instead of keeping answer options 1 (Not true at all) through 4 (exactly true), options were changed to a 5-point Likert scale as previously mentioned. The scale inquired about student's levels of self-efficacy during their time spent at their higher learning institution. The self-efficacy scale used had good reliability ($\alpha = .87$, $M = 40.15$, $SD = 5.32$).

Results

Analysis. Persistence is an outcome of interest in this research project. This concept guided the analysis, as examples of why students choose to stay at their current higher learning institution were noted. Also determined was whether students believed anything is missing from their institution and that, if offered, would make students persist. The purpose of this study was to determine what motivates students to persist at their higher learning institutions. Five research questions were used to guide the study. A multi-methodological approach was used to answer these questions, meaning both qualitative and quantitative data was used when determining answers to the research questions. The quantitative data was used to determine demographic information, self-efficacy levels, institution type, and success (persistence) factors. It was analyzed using SPSS. The qualitative research focused on what leads students to persist at their particular higher learning institution and what they believe would make either themselves, or other students stay, at this particular higher learning institution. Qualitative data was analyzed by transcribing the 14 interviews. After transcription, an open analytic method was used.

The unit of analysis was approximately every minute of speaking time during the phone interview found in appendix E.

Research Question 1. Research question 1 asked if the type of institution affected students' perceptions of persistence. A regression analysis was used to determine predictive relationships between independent variables (institution type, persistence factors) and dependent variable (student persistence). It was also used to determine which factors students at higher learning institutions say are most important for their self-efficacy, motivation, and persistence.

The data was analyzed using a regression analysis to estimate how the institution type affects perceptions of persistence, which factors are most important to students at particular higher learning institutions, which factors matter most for persistence, and how self-efficacy is related to persistence. Regression analyses helped identify possible causal relationships between the factors type of institution and perception of persistence. A simple linear regression was calculated to predict the type of institution based on students' perceptions of persistence. A slightly significant regression equation was found ($F(1, 281) = 6.37, p = .05$), with an R^2 of .022. Participants' institution type clearly indicates their willingness to persist at their institution.

Qualitative data was also analyzed. Interestingly, both students from community colleges (participant 2 and participant 7) mentioned the thing they enjoy most about their university is the "affordability." Students from the private, public residential, and public commuter institutions were much more inclined to talk about connections they have made, the faculty and staff, and the extracurricular activities they are involved in. The online-only students seemed to enjoy that they only had class online and could "live their

lives outside of school more simply, since school could be done at their convenience.” It appears that those from private, public residential, and public commuter institutions have more “meaningful connections” to their universities, therefore causing them to be more inclined to persist. They also mentioned having “easy access” to other students and faculty should they need help with anything. These results indicate different higher learning institution types work for different students.

Research Question 2a. Research question 2a asked which success (persistence) factors students perceived as most important for their persistence. Descriptive statistics revealed that respondents in this sample ranked learning experiences, faculty and staff approachability, and involvement and engagement as the most important factors for persisting at their institution.

According to interview participant 1, a male student at a private institution learning experiences are made easier with a close group of friends. He says “it [having close friends] really helps you get through the tough classes and studying for exams”. Participant 7, a male community college student says down curriculum that is “down to earth and relates to daily life” is important to him.

Learning experiences are impacted by a multitude of different things, including Disability Services Offices. Participant 6, an online-only student said if it weren’t for her accommodations, she may not be doing as well in her courses. Private school female participant 8 believes her curriculum is “a bit harder than a public school or public university.” This, however, does not shy her away from completing her Biology degree at a private university.

Faculty and staff approachability, according to participant 5, a student at a public

residential university, makes students like herself not want to transfer. She describes their approachability as “helpful” and “really friendly” and the reason she is “staying and finishing out” at her institution. Participant 3, a female at a public residential institution shared how a professional mentor relationship with a faculty member “helped solidify her and her education trajectory in general.” Participant 9, a male student at a private institution describes the importance of approachability: “Everyone here is super friendly and it’s a smaller campus so the class sizes are smaller and you get a little bit more one-on-one time with your professor than you would at a bigger university.” He says this is helpful when individuals are struggling in classes because there are a lot of people willing to help and provide a lot of “positive reinforcement to help you move in the right direction.” Participant 11, a female at an online-only institution describes how important it is to get to know professors. She says “I have had some very critical professors. They’ve made me better and a lot of my online university is learning about collaboration and differentiation in the classroom and my professors, despite it being online, help me apply strategies in my own classroom when I’ve asked them for assistance.”

According to participant 10, a female public commuter student, involvement and engagement encompass “a lot of extracurricular things and clubs and stuff like that”. She mentions “loving all of that” but not being a part of any clubs this year. She mentioned how her own involvement and engagement made her passionate about her university, with a noticeable excitement in her voice. Participant 5, a female public residential student, noted how her school “has a lot to offer”, but she “just doesn’t involve” herself. She thinks not being involved makes her feel negatively about her institution.

Research question 2b. Research question 2b asked which student success (persistence) factors mattered most for persistence based on institution type. Respondents in this sample suggested learning experiences, faculty and staff approachability, and involvement and engagement as most important to somewhat important for their persistence. Therefore, institution type did not change these factors. Overall, the participants interviewed were content at their current higher learning institution and had no intentions of leaving, even if they had experienced something negative during their time there.

Faculty and staff approachability was a common, important trend in many phone interviews. Participant 3, a female student at a public residential institution mentioned how faculty members at her institution are “very accessible, super smart, and very supportive.” She also mentions a mentoring relationship with a faculty member, saying meetings with this person “cleared things up” and “really helped with goals and things like that.” This student mentioned how this relationship came during the first year of her PhD program, when it was needed the most. The student explained the importance of an approachable faculty and staff at her university, explaining this specific faculty member’s relationship with her is positive and helped her persist at her institution when she was thinking about giving up. Participant 5, also a female student at a public residential institution mentioned the importance of the faculty and staff at her university. She says the staff is “really helpful and really friendly.” She was considering transferring to an institution closer to home, however her relationship with a woman in the University President’s office made her “want to stay [at her current institution] and finish out.” Participant 6, a female online-only student says her faculty members’ understanding has

been important to her success at an online-only institution. She mentions working with the Disability Services Office and having a wonderful experience all around at her institution: “I have not had one instructor deny my accommodation. One time, it was -60 where I live and the person I was supposed to interview for a class project canceled. My professor bumped back the project deadline with no problem.”

Faculty and staff approachability was the most common theme during phone interviews, but learning experiences were also mentioned. Participant 9, a female at a private institution mentioned how her learning experiences were potentially affected. She tells a story of a male professor she has had for multiple courses (and continues to have). He was teaching a philosophy class and used a derogatory word during one of his lectures. A student in the class was offended by his use of “the n-word” and the story got around campus: “He [the professor] was put on a leave of absence and you can definitely tell his work ethic and the way he teaches is totally different now [that he came back to the institution after his leave of absence]. He [the professor] doesn’t seem to care as much about his classes.” A professor not caring about the success of his students, or simply giving them passing grades because he/she does not want to be there, has an impact on the learning experiences of students. Students enroll in college courses to be challenged and learn different perspectives, not simply to get by.

While faculty and staff approachability along with learning experiences came up in phone conversations, involvement and engagement came up as well. Participant 10, a female student at a public commuter institution said, her school is “a sports’ school, but people do a lot of extracurricular things and clubs and stuff like that, so it makes it really diverse for anyone!” She mentioned how the people she met, through

being involved at her institution, helped her want to continue her education and even recommend her institution to others. “I’d continue my education even after I graduated like with a Masters’ program or anything else! I tell everybody, I’m like, just apply. Go visit, I think you’ll like it.”

To test this question further, a MANOVA test was run to determine mean differences between several dependent variables. The results showed the differences in mean scores and standard deviations between each persistence factor at each type of higher learning institution. It showed that while some things scored well based on the mean, others were more consistent due to the standard deviation. Presented are the most important persistence factors by institution type:

Public Commuter Institution

Factor	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Academic Advising	3.66	1.93
Social Connectedness	4.03	1.91
Involvement & Engagement	3.92	1.80
Faculty & Staff Approachability	3.52	1.79
Business Procedures	5.08	2.12
Learning Experiences	3.39	2.16
Student Support Services	4.41	1.78

Public Residential Institution

Factor	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Academic Advising	3.91	1.83

Social Connectedness	3.86	1.96
Involvement & Engagement	3.61	1.66
Faculty & Staff Approachability	3.94	1.62
Business Procedures	5.37	2.13
Learning Experiences	3.00	2.01
Student Support Services	4.31	1.98

Private Institution

Factor	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Academic Advising	4.00	1.76
Social Connectedness	4.83	2.25
Involvement & Engagement	3.67	1.72
Faculty & Staff Approachability	3.25	1.60
Business Procedures	5.50	1.83
Learning Experiences	2.50	1.93
Student Support Services	4.25	1.81

Community College

Factor	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Academic Advising	4.75	1.39
Social Connectedness	5.63	1.19
Involvement & Engagement	5.25	1.67
Faculty & Staff Approachability	2.63	1.41
Business Procedures	3.63	2.00
Learning Experiences	1.75	.71

Student Support Services	4.38	2.39
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Online-Only Institution

Factor	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Academic Advising	3.43	.79
Social Connectedness	4.00	2.65
Involvement & Engagement	4.57	1.90
Faculty & Staff Approachability	3.86	2.41
Business Procedures	4.14	2.48
Learning Experiences	4.14	2.61
Student Support Services	3.86	1.35

Totals

Factor	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Academic Advising	3.80	1.85
Social Connectedness	4.04	1.97
Involvement & Engagement	3.84	1.76
Faculty & Staff Approachability	3.66	1.73
Business Procedures	5.15	2.13
Learning Experiences	3.16	2.10
Student Support Services	4.35	1.86

Research Question 3. The third research question asked if self-efficacy is related to institution type. There was no significant correlation between self-efficacy and institution type ($r = -.018$, $n = 283$, $p = .384$, one tailed). In other words, institution type does not determine or affect self-efficacy levels. Previous research suggests self-efficacy

is related to persistence and that problems with persistence occur at non-selective universities (Undergraduate Retention..., 2018). Interestingly, most participants in this study, according to results, were from more non-selective institution types.

Research Question 4. The fourth research question asked if self-efficacy is related to age. Orth, Erol, and Luciano (2018) found that people’s self-efficacy strongly increases between the ages of 15—30. To test Orth, Erol, and Luciano’s findings, a Pearson one-tailed correlation was computed between age and self-efficacy. Results yielded there is a positive correlation between age and self-efficacy ($r = .101$, $n = 257$, $p = .05$, one-tailed). Notably, descriptive statistics from this study revealed 84.82% of survey participants were between the ages 18 and 24, and 8.56 were between ages 25 and 34. Therefore, findings from this study are consistent with previous research (Orth, Erol, & Luciano, 2018).

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	N
Self-Efficacy Score	36.47	4.83	260
Age	1.26	.73	257

Discussion

Takeaway. Research shows student’s self-efficacy levels peak between the ages of 15—30 (Orth, Erol, & Luciano, 2018). It does not matter which type of institution a student attends, he/she will have the same levels of self-efficacy and persistence. At any type of institution, the overall most important persistence factors include learning experiences, faculty and staff approachability, and involvement and engagement, with learning experiences proving to be the most important. During phone interviews, the conversational aspect and ability for the researcher to answer any

questions participants had made this research method appear more useful. Students really feel institutional staff members are important to their successes. Some mentioned advisors as being important, others mentioned instructors, and one even mentioned an employee in the Office of the President as a contributing factor to her success and persistence. People really can make the difference in the lives of students, including other students at the university. Everyone longs for acceptance, and sometimes having one person to talk to makes all the difference.

Previous research shows more women persist and graduate than men (Undergraduate Retention..., 2018). Interestingly, most participants who took the survey identified as female (74.32%). This could be partly due to more women being enrolled at higher learning institutions, more women persisting to graduation, or just more women deciding to take the survey.

Limitations. Persistence is commonly researched in the realm of higher education but not quite in this fashion. This research seemed that it would benefit from both qualitative and quantitative data. Finding participants to take the survey was not difficult, however, it was difficult to find willing phone interview participants from each type of higher learning institution. The sample size was between (N = 296) and (N = 257), with only (n = 101) volunteers for the potential phone interview. The participants were randomly selected, and due to time constraints (n = 14) was the sample size for phone interviews. These interviews included, however, (n = 6) males and (n = 8) females, with a diverse sampling in higher learning institution type as well (n = 3) private, (n = 2) community, (n = 3) online, (n = 3) public residential, and (n = 3) public commuter.

It was also a bit difficult to determine what students were marking, as they could have lied about their reasons for persistence. A key consideration is that there could be commuters at public residential institutions or residential students at public commuter institutions. It would have been beneficial to define these institutions more tightly, using a more standardized approach like the Carnegie Classification System, rather than definitions from previous researchers.

There was a weak number of students from private, community, and online-only learning institutions. This led to weak statistical evidence. It may have been beneficial to run a t-test between only public-commuter and public-residential institutions. This was not the plan for the study, however, therefore resulting in weak statistical evidence.

Future research. Future researchers should try this study with a larger group of students taking the survey; more phone interview participants; pulling more students from private, community, and online-only institutions; finding more nontraditional students; and gathering results from a more even gender distribution. A larger group of students would allow the researcher to gather more opinions from a more diverse sample across different institutions and areas. More phone interview participants would have allowed for more qualitative data that could provide a deeper insight into student's minds. Pulling more students from private, community, and online-only institutions would have given a deeper knowledge and understanding of supposedly less common higher learning institution choices. More nontraditional students, rather than those in the 18—24 age range could have provided unique perspectives about their campus. They may also provide varying results relating to self-efficacy. The sample consisted of ($n = 218$) participants ranging from age 18—24 out of ($N = 257$) who answered the age question.

While these are considered traditionally aged students, it would have been interesting to target the nontraditional population also. It would have been great to gather information from a more varied gender distribution. The sample consisted of (n = 191) female participants out of (N= 257). Unfortunately, there was no way to encourage more male participants or those who identify as something other than male or female. It would have been interesting to gather more unique perspectives from these genders as well.

Future researchers should also consider asking more questions related to self-efficacy during the phone interview (Reed, 2016). Gathering more insight about student's thoughts and feelings about themselves at their higher learning institution and why he/she feels the way he/she feels would have been helpful.

Finally, it would have been interesting to gather information from students who did not persist. The participants in this study have all persisted at their current institution, or they plan to persist. Finding a way to gather information from students who may have transferred institutions, or dropped out, would be a very interesting addition to this research. It would be neat to find out why they left and which factors impacted their decision to leave their institution.

Concluding thoughts. Participants indicated the type of institution they attend does influence their decision to persist. Some stay because their institution is affordable, others stay due to convenience, and most stay because they have made meaningful connections at their institution. Different types of institutions work for different types of students. This research proves that all types of higher learning institutions are important.

The top three persistence factors are learning experiences, faculty and staff approachability, and involvement and engagement. These factors did not vary based on

institution type. Therefore, all higher learning institutions should consider conducting research to find out what learning experiences students are looking for while at their particular institution. Instructors and people students interact with really make a difference for persistence at any type of higher learning institution. Institutions should hire people who are committed to creating a community at their institution. The institution should also ensure there are plenty of involvement and engagement opportunities for all types of students that cater to their interests.

Self-efficacy was proven to not be related to institution type. This is contrary to previous research done in 2018 (Undergraduate Retention..., 2018). While this could be partially due to a small sample size, it is still worth noting. There was a positive correlation between age and self-efficacy. This is likely due to most participant's ages being between 15 and 30, the ages where self-efficacy levels peak (Orth, Erol, & Luciano, 2018). Higher learning institutions have access to students with high levels of self-efficacy. These institutions should challenge students and motivate them to become better, more hardworking people.

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Appendix A. IRB Approval



One University Plaza, Youngstown, Ohio 44555
Office of Research
330.941.2377

February 28, 2018

Dr. Adam Earnhardt, Principal Investigator
Ms. Laura Roch, Co-investigator
Department of Communication
UNIVERSITY

RE: HSRC PROTOCOL NUMBER: 126-2019
TITLE: Self-efficacy, Motivation, and Persistence Factors at Higher Learning
Institutions

Dear Dr. Earnhardt and Ms. Roch:

The Institutional Review Board has reviewed the abovementioned protocol and determined that it meets the criteria of DHHS 45 CFR 46.104(d)(2) and therefore it is exempt from full committee review.

Any changes in your research activity should be promptly reported to the Institutional Review Board and may not be initiated without IRB approval except where necessary to eliminate hazard to human subjects. Any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects should also be promptly reported to the IRB.

The IRB would like to extend its best wishes to you in the conduct of this study.

Sincerely,


Dr. Gregg Dillon
Interim Associate Vice President for Research
Authorized Institutional Official

GD:cc

c: Dr. Adam Earnhardt, Chair
Department of Communication

Appendix B.

Generalized Self-Efficacy Scale

Scale adapted from Schwarzer and Jerusalem in 1995. Answers range from 1

(Strongly Agree) to 5 (Strongly Disagree) (Ackerman, 2018)

1. I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough.
2. If someone opposes me, I can find the means and ways to get what I want.
3. It is easy for me to stick to my aims and accomplish my goals.
4. I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events.
5. Thanks to my resourcefulness, I know how to handle unforeseen situations.
6. I can solve most problems if I invest the necessary effort.
7. I can remain calm when facing difficulties because I can rely on my coping abilities.
8. When I am confronted with a problem, I can usually find several solutions.
9. If I am in trouble, I can usually think of a solution.
10. I can usually handle whatever comes my way.

Appendix C.

IRB Consent form

Dear Student:

I am Laura Roch from Youngstown State University. I am conducting a study to investigate factors that lead to persistence (also called “retention”), at specific types of higher learning institutions. In this study, you will be asked to take a short survey. Following this survey, you may be selected, if you choose to provide your email and phone number, for a follow up phone interview. I will also ask you to provide demographic information such as your age, gender, ethnicity, how long you have attended your current institution, and your current employment status. The survey should take no more than 10 minutes to complete. If selected, following this short survey, you will be asked to complete a short phone interview which should take no more than 10 minutes.

You will not be at risk of harm because of this research.

There are no direct benefits to you from being in this study. However, data collected from this study will be used to better understand the factors that lead to persistence in higher learning institutions.

Your privacy is important. I will handle all information collected about you in a confidential manner. I will report the results of the project in a way that will not identify you. Information from this study will be presented as part of my thesis requirements in the M.A. program in professional communication. Additionally, I may present the results of the study at a future conference.

You do not have to participate in this study. Additionally, you can stop participating at any time.

If you have any questions about this research project, please contact Dr. Adam Earnhardt (330-941-3631) or at acearnhardt@ysu.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in a research project, you may contact the Office of Grants and Sponsored Programs at YSU (330-941-2377) or at YSUIRB@ysu.edu.

I understand the study described above and have been given a copy of this consent document. I am 18 years of age or older and I agree to participate.

Appendix D.

Survey Instrument

Consent Form:

Dear Student:

I am Laura Roch from Youngstown State University. I am conducting a study to investigate factors that lead to persistence (also called “retention”), at specific types of higher learning institutions. In this study, you will be asked to take a short survey. Following this survey, you may be selected, if you choose to provide your email and phone number, for a follow up phone interview. I will also ask you to provide demographic information such as your age, gender, ethnicity, how long you have attended your current institution, and your current employment status. The survey should take no more than 10 minutes to complete. If selected, following this short survey, you will be asked to complete a short phone interview which should take no more than 10 minutes.

You will not be at risk of harm because of this research.

There are no direct benefits to you from being in this study. However, data collected from this study will be used to better understand the factors that lead to persistence in higher learning institutions.

Your privacy is important. I will handle all information collected about you in a confidential manner. I will report the results of the project in a way that will not identify you. Information from this study will be presented as part of my thesis requirements in the M.A. program in professional communication. I may present the results of the study at a future conference. We will take the following steps to keep the information about you

confidential and to protect it from unauthorized disclosure, tampering, or damage: 1) all data will be kept on a password protected computer, 2) the only people who will have access to this data are the investigators for this study.

You do not have to participate in this study. Additionally, you can stop participating at any time.

If you have any questions about this research project, please contact Dr. Adam Earnhardt (330-941-3631) or at acearnhardt@ysu.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in a research project, you may contact the Office of Grants and Sponsored Programs at YSU (330-941-2377) or at YSUIRB@ysu.edu.

2. Which type of higher learning institution do you attend?
 - a. Public Commuter Institution
 - b. Public Residential Institution
 - c. Private Institutions
 - d. Community College
 - e. Online Only Institution
3. Did the type of institution impact your decision to attend this university?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
4. Does being at this type of institution influence your decision to stay here?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
5. Please rank from most important (1) to least important (7) what you believe to be the most important factors for staying at your current institution.

- _____ Academic Advising
- _____ Social Connectedness
- _____ Involvement and Engagement
- _____ Faculty and Staff Approachability
- _____ Business Procedures
- _____ Learning Experiences
- _____ Student Support Services

6. Generalized Self-Efficacy Scale developed by Schwarzer and Jerusalem in 1995 – Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements using the scale below. Answers range from 1 (Strongly Agree) to 5 (Strongly Disagree) (Ackerman, 2018)

- a. I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough.
- b. If someone opposes me, I can find the means and ways to get what I want.
- c. It is easy for me to stick to my aims and accomplish my goals.
- d. I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events.
- e. Thanks to me resourcefulness, I know how to handle unforeseen situations.
- f. I can solve most problems if I invest the necessary effort.
- g. I can remain calm when facing difficulties because I can rely on my coping abilities.
- h. When I am confronted with a problem, I can usually find several solutions.
- i. If I am in trouble, I can usually think of a solution.
- j. I can usually handle whatever comes my way.

Demographics

Jovancic, N. (2018, July 18). 8 Demographic Questions Every Quality Survey Needs to Contain. Retrieved from <https://blog.leadquizzes.com/8-types-of-demographic-questions/>

- 7. What is your age?
 - a. 18 - 24
 - b. 25-34
 - c. 35-44
 - d. 45-54
 - e. 55 or above

8. How do you identify?
 - a. Female
 - b. Male
 - c. Other
 - d. Prefer not to say

9. What is your ethnicity?
 - a. African American or Black
 - b. Asian/ Pacific Islander
 - c. Caucasian or White
 - d. Hispanic or Latino
 - e. Native American or American Indian
 - f. Other (please specify)

10. How many years have you attended your current institution?
 - a. Less than one year
 - b. 1 year
 - c. 2 years
 - d. 3 years
 - e. 4 years
 - f. 5 years
 - g. More than 5 years

11. What is your current employment status?
 - a. Employed full-time (40+ hours a week)
 - b. Employed part-time (less than 40 hours a week)
 - c. Unemployed
 - d. Retired
 - e. Student only
 - f. Self-employed
 - g. Unable to work

Separate page on Survey Monkey:

12. Please enter your email address and phone number below if you are willing to be contacted for a short, follow up survey.

Email Address: _____

Phone Number: _____

Appendix E.

Follow Up Phone Interview Instrument

My name is Laura Roch. I am a graduate student at Youngstown State University. You completed a survey that I sent out regarding persistence. I mentioned in the survey that I may contact you for a follow up interview if you had provided me with your email and phone number. I want to again remind you that all of the information you have provided me with is confidential. Do you have a few minutes to answer a couple follow up questions?

Thank you so much, do I have your consent to record this brief interview?

1. What type of university do you attend?
2. Do you enjoy being at this university?
. Why/ why not?
3. Are you involved in any activities or extracurricular groups at your university?
. Tell me more about these.
4. Tell me about an experience that has either positively or negatively impacted you at your current university.
. Has this experience made you want to continue your education here?
Why/ why not?
5. Is there one thing missing that your school could offer to make students want to stay there?