

PROFESSOR–STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS AND THE PERCEIVED INFLUENCE ON
MOTIVATION TO PERSIST IN UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Tammy S. Hogan

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

Undergraduate students leaving their chosen field of study due to a lack of positive relationships between faculty and students is increasing at an alarming rate. The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to describe how undergraduate college students experience professor–student relationships and the influence of relationships on their motivation to persist in higher education. There is a significant amount of research examining the influence of relationships in the K–12 setting; however, research is lacking regarding the perceptions of college students and motivation to persist based on academic and social integration at the collegiate level. The theory guiding this study was Tinto’s integration theory which explains the academic and social integration of college students. Integration leads to a greater level of commitment to an institution and persistence to graduate. A qualitative research design with 10 purposefully selected participants from each level of undergraduate students, and a focus particularly on seniors and recent graduates, were chosen to unfold this phenomenon. The central research question of this study asked, “What are the lived experiences of undergraduate college students pertaining to student–faculty relationships and the perceived influence on motivation to persist?” Findings from the study demonstrated that professors who are caring, approachable, and passionate have a positive influence on each student’s motivation to persist. Professors who exhibit these characteristics and focus on the individuality of each student enable them to become academically and socially integrated into the college setting. Also, class size, personality, and the type of learner relating to motivation have a substantial impact on student integration.

Keywords: professor–student relationships, attrition, Tinto’s integration theory, college undergraduates, hermeneutic phenomenology, motivation, persistence

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this manuscript to my parents, Larry and Jody Ritchey. They have always been my biggest supporters and strongest spiritual examples. I appreciate the rich Christian heritage they have built for our family. Through their living testimony of God's unfailing, unwavering, and relentless love, they have instilled in me a desire to persevere and never lose sight of God's calling. I'm everything I am because they loved me.

Acknowledgments

I would first like to thank my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, for helping me to complete this degree. My life verse and mantra has always been, “I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength” (Phil. 4:13). God has been my source of strength throughout this entire journey. My personal faith, and the prayers of my family and friends, sustained me throughout this process. Secondly, I would like to thank my husband, Allen Hogan, for his endless support, encouragement, and prayers. He picked up the slack on the home front and encouraged me to keep going when I felt like I couldn’t. Thank you to Josh, Noah, Emily, Hannah, Summer, Caleb, and Levi, my seven treasures, who were also a tremendous support—their steadfast confidence would never let me give up. A special thank you to my first-born, Josh, my “go-to-guy” for tech support. You helped me many, many times and I could have never done this without you. My parents, who have always been my biggest fans, provided persistent prayers, and never lost faith in me, even when I had a hard time believing in myself. To all of my other family members (Grandma, and her direct line to heaven) and friends (you know who you are), who provided so much support through prayers, words of encouragement, and countless affirmations that carried me through to the end. A special thank you to Snickers who laid at my feet many nights and kept me company into the early morning as I would research and write. I greatly appreciate all of my cheerleaders and my incredible support system. Without all of you, I would not be at the finish line today. Thank you to my dissertation chair, Lucinda Spaulding, who is the epitome of what my dissertation is about; the positive relationship established with her inspired me and gave me motivation to persist. Thank you to my committee member, Kathleen Mott, who encouraged me always and prayed continually. My journey started many years ago in a high school AP English class (Thank you, Mrs. Cassie Ney), with a quote she often referred to, “Dream BIG; your future

depends on the size of your thoughts.” With those big dreams and a heart for God, a desire grew to pursue this degree and fulfill what God has called me to do. I know there are students out there who need a positive influence in their life, and I cannot wait for God to use me. I pray that through this degree, a door will open to serve in a position of leadership and influence.

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List of Abbreviations

Caring, Approachable, Passionate (CAP)

Central Research Question (CRQ)

Central Theme (CT)

Integrated Demographic Questionnaire (IDQ)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Liberty University (LU)

Professor–Student Relationship (PSR)

Professor–Student Interpersonal Relationship (PSIR)

Research Question (RQ)

Self-determination theory (SDT)

Teacher–Student Relationship (TSR)

Teacher–Student Interpersonal Relationship (TSIR)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Persistence to completion of a college degree is a problem in the United States. Roughly 60% of students who start at a four-year undergraduate university fail to persist to graduation (Ishitani, 2016). Research suggests that a positive relationship between a professor and a student can encourage student persistence and create an environment that will enable a student to reach their fullest potential (Villares & Brigman, 2019). Thus, the purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study explores the reasons for college student persistence by examining student perceptions of professor–student relationships (PSRs) and the influence these relationships have on motivation to persist in higher education. Essential factors promoting persistence include integration, both academically and socially, to the institution (Tinto, 1993).

Chapter One provides the foundation for the impetus for this study examining the perceptions of college students regarding relationships with professors. The significance of the study is introduced, and the researcher’s role is also defined. The chapter concludes with definitions that are critical to understanding the nature of the study, and finally, a summary providing a review of the key components of Chapter One.

Background

Student attrition is problematic in undergraduate students at universities in the United States. Approximately 60% of college undergraduate students do not persist to completion because of the lack of support of necessary programs at the university level (Ishitani, 2016). Universities need to see persistence through the eyes of the students they serve, hear their voice, and provide the support needed for students to persist and complete their program of study (Tinto, 2017). Pertaining to first-year students, seeing through the eyes of the students is

especially necessary, because if they fail to become socially and academically integrated, they may fail to persist (Arends & Petersen, 2018; Ishitani, 2016). Research indicates that in a K–12 setting, the teacher is the most influential catalyst in the classroom to help students achieve, become motivated, and persist to graduation (Myers, 2012). Therefore, this research examined the perceptions of undergraduate college students regarding relationships and how the relationships influenced their motivation to persist. Students who feel a sense of belonging and acceptance by their teachers can thrive in an academic setting that promotes positive relationships (Cooper & Miness, 2014; Hanna, 2014; Tinto, 2017). Professors can be instrumental in helping students discover their sense of purpose (Sharma & Yukhymenko-Lescroart, 2018).

It is my hope, as the researcher, that this study contributes to the lack of information on perceived faculty–student relationships at the collegiate level. Educators can utilize the findings to determine the significance of positive PSRs in fostering student motivation to persist. Research indicates that professors are an essential factor in fostering student success at the university (Bowman et al., 2019). Professors should develop personal, positive relationships with each student and be trained to show high expectations and understand the culture of each student (A. Martin & Collie, 2019). One of the most significant psychological concepts in education is motivation (A. Martin & Collie, 2016). Consequently, methodologies in fostering motivation may be related to the building of strong, positive relationships between the student and the professor. While there is an abundance of literature promoting positive teacher–student relationships at the K–12 level (Hansen, 2018; Krane et al., 2017; Uitto et al., 2018), there is limited research giving voice to college undergraduate students and their perceptions about

professors who inspire them to be motivated to persist and achieve their personal and academic goals.

Historical

Change is inevitable, and change happens in the education system continuously. Implementing change can be difficult and anxiety-ridden; however, new, innovative forms of teaching and thinking are the norm in the educational arena (Chazal, 2017). Historically, one issue that has changed considerably in education pertains to society in general. Respect for authority has been chiseled away during the past several decades (Pace & Hemmings, 2007). Years ago, students had great respect for educational leaders. They did not want to disappoint or perform below their capability, so this mindset was sometimes translated as fear towards authority and unapproachability of teachers. Sometimes, however, this unhealthy fear of teachers stemmed from the corporal punishment habits of old-school educational settings (Gershoff, 2017). Psychologists have concluded that corporal punishment negatively affects the social, psychological, and educational development of students and contributes to the cycle of child abuse and violent attitudes and behaviors of youth (McCarthy, 2005). A conducive environment contributes significantly to learning exemplifies teachers and students in developing a positive bond, causing an increase in engagement and amplifying the sense of connectedness between them (Sabol & Pianta, 2012). Creating a positive school climate promotes connectedness through supportive and caring interactions between students and teachers (Hopson & Lee, 2011; Noddings, 2012). Ultimately, this research seeks to describe the need for professors to cultivate relationships with college students to develop an intrinsic motivation for learning as a result. In a fast-paced world of technology and instant gratification, professors have a significant undertaking competing with the entertainment industry. One approach to combat the problem of

students' lack of motivation can be through the building of positive relationships between educators and students by employing strategies to promote the academic and social engagement of the student. An increase in motivation may result in students having a desire to persist, along with a belief in themselves and self-efficacy to continue to accomplish their goals (van Rooij et al., 2017).

Social

Universities are social institutions and are essential to students in preparing for a successful life after graduation. Students learn academics throughout their school career, but of equal importance is the social aspect of their education. Students who develop successful relationships and become integrated into the social environment of the university will be more likely to stay engaged (Tinto, 2017). At the K–12 level, students who form positive relationships with teachers are more successful academically and socially (Kim & Seo, 2018; Knoell et al., 2015; Lihong et al., 2018). Positive relationships cultivated with teachers promote student success (Alderman & Green, 2011; Gehlbach et al., 2012; Sabol & Pianta, 2012). There is an abundance of literature which demonstrates the significance of the teacher–student relationship and the perceived influence on student motivation and motivation to persist at the K–12 level; however, research is limited at the collegiate level. In my research study, I explored the relationships between college students and professors and the perceived influence this link has regarding their academic motivation and sense of belonging to the social institution and motivation to persist (Tinto, 2017).

Theoretical

Theories present a set of propositions that link concepts together through a rational argument (Reeves & Hean, 2013). Through qualitative inquiry, theories can generate insightful,

helpful, and practical advancements for educators. The guiding theory for this study is Tinto's (1975) model of institutional departure, with revisions and updates from Tinto's (1993) student integration theory and Tinto's (2017) sense of belonging model. In Tinto's (1975) model of institutional departure, academic integration and social integration are the two leading influencers on a student's decision to depart from their education. While this decision can be multi-faceted based on varying personal and institutional factors, ultimately, research indicates that academic integration and social integration are critical factors in student persistence (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014).

Academic integration occurs when a student becomes immersed in the curriculum and the intellectual life of college (Tinto, 1993). Social integration occurs when students develop relationships and connections outside the classroom (Tinto, 1993). Tinto's (1975) model of institutional departure suggests that students who integrate socially are more likely to have a higher commitment to the college, and therefore, are more likely to persist to graduation. Tinto's (1993) student integration theory details the significance of academic and social integration intertwined with a student's persistence to complete a college degree. Tinto (1993) suggested that student persistence in higher education is dependent on how well a student integrates within the social and academic framework of the university (Zhal, 2015). However, researchers have pointed out some inconsistencies in a student's motivation to persist (Braxton et al., 1997). Students can be academically integrated but fail to integrate socially, and the contrary is also true. Therefore, a student can achieve high grades and a strong commitment to the academic curriculum, demonstrating academic integration, but fail to integrate socially, showing low levels of relational connections (Braxton et al., 1997). A student who feels a sense of belonging and

becomes socially integrated into the college setting is more likely to persist to graduation (Tinto, 2017).

Tinto's theories have become widely respected as fundamental models regarding student persistence. As Tinto's theories were revised and progressed, other features were added to incorporate motivational variables such as goal commitment (Tinto, 2017). Tinto concluded that a student's decision to drop out may result from a low goal commitment to an institution. Students who have low academic and social integration, but high goal commitment, may persist until they are forced to leave the institution due to inadequate academic performance (Schulte, 2015).

Situation to Self

Being an educator for over 25 years demonstrates my passion for this study. It is my sincere desire to help others achieve and motivate them to reach their fullest potential. On a personal level, I have seven children of my own, ranging in age from 7 to 21. I have experienced every age throughout a student's academic career in both my personal and professional life. I have witnessed the challenges and successes that each stage brings throughout my educational journey. The process of examining what enables students to learn best is something I thoroughly enjoy. I taught several courses in the Education Department at Kings College (pseudonym), one of which was Educational Psychology. One of the fundamental concepts of Educational Psychology explores how students learn and factors that contribute to intrinsic motivation within students. This subject is fascinating to me and is one I want to continue pursuing in research. I have personally encountered the result of positive relationships with teachers and professors that have advanced me to where I am today in my educational career. I have a genuine love for students, my family, and my relationship with God. My Christian worldview influences every

aspect of life. I hope that this study will enlighten educators regarding the importance of relationships with their students so that students will learn, succeed, and persist in their educational careers.

As a qualitative human instrument, I bring many philosophical assumptions to the study that must be disclosed, given my interpretive role in hermeneutic phenomenology (van Manen, 2017). Ontology has its premise based on how things exist and the purpose of existence (Dinsmore, 2017). Like Heidegger, my ontological assumption is that a lived experience is an interpretive process situated in an individual's lifeworld (Neubauer et al., 2019). Throughout my study, this assumption is underlying and implied. I was aware that each participant has their viewpoint and opinion regarding relationships, motivation, and persistence. Therefore, I utilized the information from individual participants to view the phenomenon as a collective whole. Since this assumption is intertwined with epistemology, I also bring an epistemological assumption to my research. I know what I claim to know through personal experiences that I bring to the study. As an observer, my part of the world is not bias-free, and the understanding of the phenomenon is by interpretive means (Neubauer et al., 2019). My assumptions, beliefs, biases, and personal experiences will be incorporated to enrich my research as part of the experience of understanding. To determine the perceptions of the participants, I developed knowledge through the relationships I formed as I conducted personal interviews to explore others' perceptions and views (Creswell, 2013). My social constructivist view of knowledge is relative based on the impressions of the participants, combined with my own experiences, which incubate my epistemological assumptions. I conducted my research based on these assumptions. By asking the right questions in my interviews and collecting written data through questionnaires and essays, a perspective was developed that contains a reliable analysis of a subjective reality.

Although there can be apprehension in using a phenomenological research design in terms of subjectivity, scholars need to learn from the experiences of others to glean new insights about a phenomenon (Neubauer et al., 2019). In addition, meshing the personal experiences of others with my own experiences enables me to fully immerse myself in the research to view through an already constructed lens. Lastly, my axiological assumptions are linked to my perceptions of the relationships developed with each participant. Since my values and biases are intrinsically prevalent, I must be mindful of this to establish an empirical interpretation of my research findings. I value relationships and desire to have a positive influence on my students, and I have experienced firsthand the outcome that transpires with this type of mindset.

To fully understand the phenomenon that exists between positive PSRs and the motivation to persist, I looked carefully for complexity in the multiple views of the participants (Creswell, 2013). This social constructivist research paradigm aided in the understanding of the truths experienced by the participants in the study. Social constructivism explains reality through the thoughts of humans, and this research described the reality of the influence that PSRs have on student motivation to persist.

Problem Statement

Over 60% of first-year college students in the United States fail to return to college the following year (Ishitani, 2016). A teacher is the most influential person in the classroom who can promote student success, motivation, and retention in the academic setting (Keller, 2018; V. Myers, 2012). Therefore, this study explored the influence of professors who cultivated relationships with college undergraduate students to assist them in becoming the best version of themselves, thus promoting a desire to persist in their education. The dynamics of the relationship between a teacher and student present an essential component of the interpersonal

landscape (A. Martin & Collie, 2016). Since this is the case in the K–12 setting, it is important to understand what college students value and interpret as essential in relationships with professors to potentially increase motivation and combat the problem of student attrition. Disengagement in the K–12 academic setting can be a result of a negative relationship between students and teachers and can cause lower motivation and academic performance (Dennie et al., 2019; Tinto, 1975). Upwards of 40% of students are disengaged in the classroom due to a lack of motivation (J. Myers, 2012). By examining the root cause of disengagement through investigating student perceptions, this problem can be countered, thus creating a healthy learning environment and a greater likelihood that academic achievement and motivation will improve (Cooper & Miness, 2014; Knoell et al., 2015; Skipper & Douglas, 2015). Furthermore, it is more likely that a student will be motivated to persist to completion of their final goal of conferring their degree in a welcoming classroom environment. It is necessary for professors to develop personal, positive relationships with every student, and to be supported by the institution and administration so that they can demonstrate high expectations for each student. One of the most significant psychological concepts in education is motivation (Opdenakker et al., 2012). Consequently, methodologies in developing motivation are directly related to the building of a strong and positive relationship between the teacher and the student (A. Martin & Collie, 2016).

The problem is that over 60% of college students fail to persist in the completion of a college degree (Ishitani, 2016). The dynamics of the PSR is a key component in student retention. There is limited research at the collegiate level giving voice to undergraduate student perceptions regarding relationships with professors and how the relationship influences motivation to persist to completion of a college degree.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to describe how undergraduate college students experience PSRs and the influence of these relationships on their motivation to persist in higher education. Participants were purposefully selected from a private university in the northeastern United States. Participants consisted of 10 college students, with more of a focus on upperclassmen who have already experienced this phenomenon to the fullest. To reach maximum variation of sampling, participants were also selected through snowball sampling utilizing social media platforms. The research explored a students' academic and social integration based on the nature of the professor–student interactions and the influence of the PSR on motivation and persistence. The theory guiding this study was Tinto's (1993) student integration theory, which posits that if a student is integrated both socially and academically, then the student will be more likely to be motivated to persist to graduation. The goal of this study was designed to explore the impact of student–faculty relationships on student motivation to persist.

Significance of the Study

The goal of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to provide practical, empirical, and theoretical relevance to educators in the undergraduate setting. From this study, educators will gain a better understanding of the necessity of cultivating meaningful relationships with each student to inspire integration, both academically and socially, for students to persist in their field of study (Tinto, 1993, 2017). The significance of this study was to enhance the understanding and perceptions of relationship quality in the classroom and to promote an increase in the prospect of student academic motivation and persistence.

Practical Significance

From a practical standpoint, this research study was projected to provide educators with a deeper understanding of the influence that relationship has on student motivation to persist. A teacher is the most influential person in the classroom and can provide an environment to support students in a positive way to increase learning potential (J. Myers, 2012). Motivational factors that inspire students to achieve academically and persist in higher education were examined. Professors who take the time to develop an interest in their students' lives, both academically and personally, inspire them to continue in their educational journey and develop an intrinsic motivation to persist. Professors who inspire also motivate college students to become the best version of themselves, promote endurance to accomplish their goals, and encourage a belief in themselves and their abilities. Creating an intrinsic self-efficacy in students propelled through the development of positive PSRs results in a higher rate of student attrition. Therefore, this study is essential in a practical sense, because by understanding the perceptions of college students regarding the PSR, students are more motivated to persist. Enlightening information on the importance of fostering positive PSRs is vital to program administrators and faculty members to potentially increase the momentum of students persisting in higher education. Moreover, educators in higher administration should be aware of the importance of positive relationships as it pertains to student retention. When higher administration is making hiring decisions, a protocol must be followed to hire the best possible candidates who will utilize strategic tactics to cultivate positive PSRs to ensure a higher rate of student retention and motivation to persist at the collegiate level.

Empirical Significance

Empirically, this study fills a gap in the literature pertaining to undergraduate student perceptions of PSRs and the perceived influence on student motivation to persist at the collegiate level. Special attention was given to junior and senior college students because they have the unique opportunity to reflect on relationships throughout their educational journey, and the role that professors played during their college career. The existing literature was enhanced by finding answers to the central research question, “What are the lived experiences of college undergraduate students pertaining to student–faculty relationships and the perceived influence on motivation to persist?” and the sub-questions presented in the study.

Theoretical Significance

Lastly, from a theoretical standpoint, this study expands Tinto’s (1975, 1993, 2017) theories by adding to the understanding through the connection of the theories with the current research. Tinto (2017) found that a student’s sense of academic and social belonging impacts retention and graduation, and this sense of belonging is increased or decreased through interactions of the academic and social environments of the university. Therefore, a professor’s influence in the university makes a profound difference in terms of motivation and student persistence (Tinto, 2017). Professors who are personally vested and show dedication and devotion to helping their students achieve success have a positive influence that inspires students to persevere in their studies. The encouragement that a professor provides gives students a sense of belonging and facilitates them in reaching their fullest potential for academic success (Tinto, 2017).

In summary, this study has practical, empirical, and theoretical significance regarding relationships between professors and students, which improves the likelihood of college

undergraduate students' integration into their educational institutions. The significance of this study is important because if the problem pertaining to the attrition rate of students is not addressed, and positive relationships between professors and students are not cultivated, then students will be at risk for an early departure from their educational institution (Ishitani, 2016). Besides, relationships will not be cultivated to the fullest potential if educators do not fully understand the perceptions of students and what they consider as important aspects of the PSR. Although often neglected in higher education, student perceptions of relationships are important constructs and should be considered relevant because of the effect on student progress and success.

Research Questions

The research in this study will focus on PSRs and the perceived influence on student motivation to persist. Therefore, the targeted research questions serve as a guide to induce data from participants who have experienced this phenomenon. The central research question reiterates the purpose of the study and is followed by three sub-questions that extrapolate more detailed information regarding the central question (Creswell, 2013).

Central Research Question

What are the lived experiences of undergraduate college students pertaining to the interpretation of faculty–student relationships on motivation to persist?

Research has shown that the teacher–student interpersonal relationship (TSIR) is an essential factor concerning student motivation (Maulana et al., 2014). The objective of this central research question is to explore the phenomenon that occurs between a meaningful PSR and the perceived influence that can inspire the student to be motivated to persist in the completion of a college degree. Data were gathered through questionnaires, in-depth interviews,

and written essays with selected participants from an undergraduate university located in Pennsylvania, as well as students from online sources who attend various universities. To establish a variance in research participants, student perceptions from all levels of undergraduate studies were examined. Of the 10 undergraduate participants, a more specific concentration was based on the four upperclassmen, because of the opportunity they have experienced to develop meaningful relationships with their professors throughout their college education. Insight regarding these perceptions varied from freshmen to seniors, with different obstacles that are faced depending on grade level. For example, first-year students may depart from their original institution due to several variables such as leaving home for the first time, difficulty acclimating from high school to college life, and lack of social and academic integration at the university (Tinto, 1993). Upperclassmen may or may not demonstrate a tenacity to persist based on integration in the university.

Sub-Question One

How does the quality of faculty–student relations influence motivation to persist in college undergraduate students?

Relationships cultivated between teachers and students, whether positive or negative, have a perceived influence on student academic motivation (Alderman & Green, 2011; Sabol & Pianta, 2012). Sub-Question One identified factors that promote a student’s motivation to persist based on the relationship between professors and students. Research shows that students who have supportive relationships with professors will be better able to cope with the demands of college life (Sidelinger et al., 2016). Framed by Tinto’s (1993) integration theory, students who have positive connections with professors were more likely to be academically and socially integrated and continue with their education. The importance of this research is for educators to

determine what perceived factors, as indicated by undergraduate college students, promote student motivation to persist in the completion of a college degree.

Sub-Question Two

How do faculty–student relationships influence student academic motivation and goals?

Student–faculty interactions are components of both academic and social integration, a key concept in Tinto’s (1993) integration theory. Students who persist are more likely to achieve their goals. Persistence is not an inherited trait, but rather something that is learned over time, and as a result of different circumstances (Tinto, 2017). Professors can support students by believing in them and providing encouragement and support when necessary. In addition, professors who inspire students will be at an advantage to impart wisdom, which will help students become academically integrated into the intellectual component of their education (Tinto, 1993).

Sub-Question Three

How do faculty–student relations play an instrumental role in the social integration of undergraduate college students?

Many variables can foster positive relationships with students. Professors who nurture positive relationships with students create an environment advantageous to learning, and the emergence of a positive PSR is a catalyst for fostering a sense of belonging. If a student feels like a valuable member of the college community, then a sense of belonging may be established (Tinto, 2017). Students who become engaged and feel valued by their professors develop a sense of belonging (Tinto, 2017).

Definitions

The following definitions introduce vital concepts that are developed throughout this research study. The elements included in these definitions are relevant to the research questions and critical constructs of Tinto's (1993) integration theory.

1. *Academic Integration*—Students become assimilated into the intellectual component of college life (Sidelinger et al., 2016).
2. *Character-Building*—In education, it is the explicit delivery of mediated learning experiences designed to support the development of social competence and a cooperative disposition (White & Warfa, 2011).
3. *Characteristics*—Certain qualities a professor has that enabled students to achieve success (Walker, 2008).
4. *Effective*—Professors who were most successful in helping students achieve (Walker, 2008).
5. *Fixed Mindset*—A fixed mindset is the belief that intelligence is in a fixed state and cannot be expanded or developed (Claro et al., 2016).
6. *Goals*—A student's goals, pertaining to self-efficacy and student persistence, can have a significant bearing on institutional commitments (Tinto, 2017).
7. *Grit*—Success is really driven by a special blend of passion and long-term perseverance, not necessarily “genius” (Duckworth, 2016).
8. *Growth Mindset*—The belief that intelligence is not fixed and can be developed (Claro et al., 2016).

9. *Immediacy*—An interpersonal communication skill that promotes readiness and is an essential factor in facilitating an effective learning experience between professors and students (Beckowski & Gebauer, 2018).
10. *Intrinsic Motivation*—Students who are intrinsically motivated exhibit behaviors for learning that come from within (Deci & Ryan, 2012). Tinto (1975) theorized that a student who socially integrates into the classroom and outside the classroom would be more likely to be *motivated* to persist in their academic studies and persevere to graduation.
11. *Extrinsic Motivation*—Students who are extrinsically motivated exhibit specific behaviors to receive external rewards (Deci & Ryan, 2012).
12. *Negative Teacher–Student Relationships*—The extent to which a student is negatively connected to his teachers can predict a student’s lack of school engagement (operationalized by academic participation, enjoyment, and aspirations; A. Martin & Collie, 2019).
13. *Persistence*—Student–faculty interactions in the classroom influence the persistence of a student (Dwyer, 2017). Also, the degree to which a student is academically and socially integrated can influence their motivation to persist to the completion of a college degree (Tinto, 2017).
14. *Positive Teacher–Student Relationships*—Strong, supportive, and encouraging teacher–student relationships are considered a foundational aspect of a positive school experience (Cook et al., 2018).
15. *Respect*—A feeling of deep admiration for someone or something elicited by their abilities, qualities, or achievements (Celkan et al., 2015).

16. *Self-Efficacy*—Self-efficacy influences how an individual will approach accomplishing goals, tasks, and challenges (Tinto, 2017), and also demonstrates their belief in their ability to succeed at a task or in a specific situation (Bandura, 1977).
17. *Sense of Belonging*—Students can develop a sense of belonging at a university by becoming a member of the community of students, academics, and staff who value their inclusive membership. A student's sense of belonging is a key factor pertaining to student persistence (Tinto, 2017).
18. *Social Integration*—College students feel a sense of connection and create relationships inside and outside the classroom (Sidelinger et al., 2016; Tinto, 2017).
19. *Teacher–Student Relationship (TSR)*—TSRs affect student achievement and motivation based on psychological needs and influences engagement and achievement (Dennie et al., 2019).
20. *Theories*—Theories present a set of propositions that link concepts together through a rational argument (Reeves & Hean, 2013).

Summary

Chapter One introduces the research study and provides a foundation including the purpose, problem, and research questions. The problem studied is the high attrition rates of over 60% found in undergraduate students in universities across the United States (Ishitani, 2016). If positive PSRs and welcoming classroom environments are cultivated, an aspect of social and academic integration in Tinto's (1993) model, students may be more likely to be motivated to persist at the collegiate level (Dwyer, 2017; Tinto, 2017). The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to describe how undergraduate college students experience PSRs and the influence of these relationships on their motivation to persist in higher education.

Chapter One also includes the practical, empirical, and theoretical significance relevant to the study and concluded with a definition of terms that are critical to the understanding of the study.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Teacher–student relationships influence student motivation and persistence, as discussed in this literature review. The data are supportive for educators as they shed light on the perceived importance of cultivating positive teacher–student relationships to promote motivation and combat student attrition. While there is considerable research concerning positive teacher–student relationships at the K–12 level (Bernstein-Yamashiro & Noam, 2013; Claessens et al., 2016; Marzano, 2011), the literature is sparsely limited when examining positive professor–student relationships (PSRs) and the influence on motivation to persist at the collegiate level. Throughout this literature review, “teacher” and “professor” will be used when making inferences to the grade level found in the current literature. The word “teacher” designates research pertaining to K–12, and the word “professor” indicates higher education. However, the word “educator” indicates research to the K–12 level as well as higher education. The research illuminates the abundance of literature regarding K–12; however, there is a scarceness of research on this topic concerning higher education which can be identified by the lack of literature citations.

Each student needs to be viewed as an individual with unique and distinct characteristics that motivate (Maslow, 2013). At the heart of every great educator should be the desire to help a student succeed to their fullest potential. The framing theory for this study is Tinto’s (1993) student integration theory. Tinto’s (1993) theory posited that through well-acclimated academic and social integration, a student will persist to graduation.

Two main components comprise this literature review: an explanation of the study’s theoretical framework and a review of the existing literature. By studying current literature, a gap

can be determined to further explore the relevance of this topic (A. Martin & Collie, 2016, 2019; Rudasill, 2011; Scherzinger & Wettstein, 2019). The existing literature will be synthesized, and the gap in the literature will be highlighted with a narrative description of the review. From this review, limitations will be revealed regarding the lack of research surrounding higher education concerning the influence of PSRs and the impact on a student's motivation to persist.

Chapter Two concludes with a summary of the importance of PSRs because of the parallel influence that it may have on college students' motivation to persist and their decision to complete their college education. There is a need for this study because of the limited research concerning college undergraduate students and their perceptions as to what inspires them to be motivated to persist in continuing in their studies to completion of a degree.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework has distinct significance in the literature review because it steers the research development and provides a lens through which to view the focus of the research (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014). The theory is articulated to understand the central phenomenon and to extend the knowledge already constructed, to provide a backbone to the content presented, and to explain a new idea concerning the framework. Research cannot stand without a strong theoretical structure to build upon. The backbone of this literature review is Tinto's (1993) student integration theory.

Tinto's Integration Theory

A prominent theorist pertaining to a student's motivation to persist in higher education is Vincent Tinto. Tinto's (1993) student integration theory primarily focused on college undergraduate students and explained that a student's desire to persist at a university was based on the extent of academic and social integration to the institution.

Tinto's theory has origins in Durkheim's theory of suicide. Emile Durkheim was a sociologist who developed theories surrounding social structure and related suicide to a social fact that occurred as a result of someone's circumstance (Godor, 2017). The works of Tinto (1993) parallel Durkheim as he compares a societal "drop-out" of a social system to a college drop-out of a university. A college drop-out lacks academic and social integration just as the societal drop-out does not integrate into the societal community (Godor, 2017). Durkheim also stated that if a "drop-out" occurs in academic communities, it is fatalistic and occurs from "excessive regulation of persons with futures pitilessly blocked and violently choked by oppressive discipline" (Godor, 2017, p. 239). Durkheim's academic fatalism is closely tied to Tinto's (1975) model of student departure which demonstrates that students who feel over-regulated due to varying factors, such as requirements stemming from academic degrees through the passing of specific examinations, can cause a lack of academic integration, thus leading to student departure from the university (Godor, 2017).

Tinto's (1993) model proposes that students enter the educational arena with an array of preexisting assumptions based on family upbringing, personal characteristics and traits, and pre-college educational experiences. These factors contribute to students persisting in their educational commitments or their decision to withdraw from college (Dwyer, 2017). Students with persistence will continue in the pursuit of obtaining a college degree regardless of the challenges that may arise (Tinto, 2017).

The central argument of Tinto's (1993) theoretical model is the notion of integration. Tinto (1993) theorized that a student who is intertwined and socially integrates into the classroom and outside the classroom will be more likely to persist in their academic studies and persevere to graduation. He recognized that college students integrate academically and socially

through formal and informal actions. A student's level of integration can be dependent on the initial acclimation to college life, both academically and socially (Tinto, 1975). Other factors can also influence persistence, including classroom experiences and financial resources (Tinto, 1993). Acclimation to the collegiate setting through immersion in peer-group interactions, extracurricular activities, and communication with faculty and staff is an indicator of social integration (Tinto, 1993). Tinto's (1993) research found that a student's social connections made them much more likely to persist in their education as compared to students that were socially isolated. However, a student's motivation to socially integrate is not the same as academic motivation to pursue cognitive learning (Littlepage & Hepworth, 2016).

Academic integration can be measured by a student's academic performance and intellectual development (Tinto, 1993). Both academic and social integration are two separate entities but are intertwined concerning persistence. Universities have adopted warning systems that identify struggling students and provide support embedded within the curriculum (Tinto, 2017). Students who are not integrated have a higher chance of dropping out due to academic dismissal or transferring to an alternate institution (Tinto, 1975). Students who are socially integrated have a lesser chance of dropping out because of their involvement with supportive groups and friendships (Tinto, 1975).

According to Tinto's (1993) student integration model, students attain academic integration when they are assimilated into the academic and intellectual life of the college setting. Likewise, students obtain social integration when they create connections at their university. Tinto's model is held in high esteem and is a respected model regarding student persistence.

A professor can help to facilitate both social and academic integration by creating an enriching, welcoming, and safe classroom environment. Cultivating this type of atmosphere can be accomplished through the development of positive relationships with each student. Researchers have sought to understand the mechanisms by which interpersonal relationships can influence student academic engagement (Christenson et al., 2012; Ellerbrock et al., 2014; Lerdpornkulrat et al., 2018; A. Martin & Dowson, 2009; Roorda et al., 2011). When professors connect with students through supportive and caring interactions, it can lead to positive outcomes in the students' school career and social integration, which encourages persistence to completion of studies (Steinberg & McCray, 2012). Students who connect with professors in the learning context are more likely to engage and be motivated to work to achieve their fullest potential (Roorda et al., 2011). Tinto (1993) suggests that student success comes from student behavior without influence on psychological elements. Campus environment can also have a positive influence on the sense of belonging, motivation, and persistence. The need for a sense of belonging and to feel valued by others can provide a sense of motivation, well-being, and positive outcomes in student achievement and persistence (Tinto, 2017).

Related Theories

Bean's (1980) model of student departure is an additional theory related to this study. Bean's (1980) theory suggests that persistence is based on behavioral intention, and the intentions are shaped by beliefs and attitudes (Willging & Johnson, 2019). Students can fail to persist in their education due to a wide variety of factors. Some of these factors include finding it difficult to make friends, dissatisfaction with the quality of teaching, feeling of inadequacy in course offerings or being in the wrong field of study, or finding it difficult to become accustomed to college life. Bean and Metzner's (1985) updated theory shows the correlation

between an employee leaving the workforce as parallel to a student leaving an institution. Bean's (1980) theory, combined with Tinto's (1993) theory, gives a more comprehensive outlook on the importance of integration and reasons for a student's persistence in education.

Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs theory, specifically the top tier of self-actualization, is another related theory of this study. Self-actualization occurs in students when all basic needs are met on Maslow's hierarchy, which can drive a student to pursue goals and accomplish dreams when nurtured and cultivated. If students feel valued and appreciated, they may feel more likely to be motivated to persist under the guidance of a loving and inspiring professor. In a supportive classroom environment, positive behaviors are exhibited, and student success and motivation are increased (Trout, 2012). The intrinsic motivation that develops within a student as a result of professor–student interactions and classroom environment is more likely to ensue if it is a positive experience.

Professors can have a profound influence on student retention and integration, both academically and socially (Tinto, 1993). Professors who are personally vested in their students inspire them to be both academically and socially integrated and encourage them to accomplish coursework and achieve good academic standing. Professors who give encouraging feedback to students can propel a student to complete their studies (Dewberry & Jackson, 2018). Academic integration is very beneficial in promoting student retention and enhances a positive PSR. In examining student success, researchers have identified social integration as a perceived dedication of the university to student success and academic preparedness as a forecaster of educational achievement (Hepworth et al., 2018). A multitude of teaching endeavors can promote student motivation and persistence. Some efforts might include an environment conducive to learning, providing necessary support to build positive PSRs, a safe and welcoming

college climate for all students, and intentional interaction between students and faculty (Trolan et al., 2016).

Students who are socially integrated will participate in college activities and will contribute to classroom discussions and interactions. Tinto (1993) posited that the degree to which a student is socially and academically integrated is the degree to which he or she will persist in college to completion. Students who have the perception of feeling cared for and invested in will become more socially integrated, which will increase the likeliness that the student will remain enrolled at the university (Hepworth et al., 2018; Tinto, 1993). PSRs can be a critical aspect of integration, whether it be social and creating connections or academic and supporting the intellectual life of the college. Both may aid students with their educational outlook and persistence.

Related Literature

The importance of PSRs and the relation to student motivation to persist was examined in this qualitative phenomenological approach through a practical, empirical, and theoretical lens. From a practical standpoint, this research study was intended to provide college professors with a deeper understanding of the substantial influence that a relationship can have on student motivation, how the professor can structure a classroom environment to support students in a positive way to increase learning potential, and how motivation promotes a desire to be persistent in fulfilling all degree requirements (Tinto, 2017). Empirical literature was extended by synthesizing current literature and incorporating newfound research to determine how a positive relationship influences persistence, and how the PSR influences affect student motivation to persist. Existing research confirms the association between perceived teacher–

student relationships and academic performance and motivation in the K–12 setting (Lihong et al., 2018; McHugh et al., 2013).

Lastly, from a theoretical standpoint, this study expanded the underpinnings of Tinto's (1975, 1993, 2017) theories. When studying Tinto's (1993) student integration theory, it can be noted that the academic and social integration of students is a determinant in their persistence to continue in their college education. The themes identified throughout this model include determination, motivation, and self-resilience (Pather & Chetty, 2016). These qualities lead to greater integration of the student and contribute to a higher sense of persistence at the university level. Tinto's (1993) model suggests that first-year college students need to be integrated into both the academic and social domains in college to ensure persistence to completion. Depending on a student's pre-entry college experiences, their motivation to persist may be a determinant of student success at the college level or drop-out based on repeated failures (Tinto, 1993). Pre-entry factors may include many facets, such as family background, skills and abilities, prior schooling, socioeconomic status, and cultural influences (Pather & Chetty, 2016). Another factor contributing to retention in students and social and academic integration into college life is based on the social and academic experiences the institution provides (Tinto, 2017).

Gap in the Literature

Research is abundant regarding the importance of influential teachers at the K–12 level who demonstrate the ability to impact a student's life positively and promote goals through well-planned content and objectives (Keller, 2018; A. Martin & Collie, 2016). However, there is limited research regarding student perceptions of positive PSRs relating to motivation to persist at the collegiate level. When students are personally connected with teachers in the academic context, instruction and successful assessment are more likely to engage (Brinkworth et al.,

2018). Students will be motivated to work harder and reach their fullest potential when they have teachers who demonstrate an interest in their success and well-being (Bernstein-Yamashiro & Noam, 2013). Qualitative hermeneutic research will further the literature by giving college students a voice to express meaningful interactions with faculty, describing how these interactions influence their motivation to persist. While *teacher* attrition can be common at the K–12 level, *student* attrition is common at the undergraduate level (Bean, 1980; Chang, 2009; Shen et al., 2015). This flipped dilemma has considerable importance in the educational arena, and this specific research study focuses on the student attrition component in the postsecondary setting. Research demonstrates higher stress in K–12 teachers, as compared to postsecondary education, which reveals higher stress in college students (Evans et al., 2019; Košir et al., 2015). Enriching relationships between students and professors can promote academic success and integration of students (Ahmad et al., 2017; Dwyer, 2017). Competent professors engage their students, promote social interaction, and help them achieve academic success while maintaining a more orderly, less disruptive classroom environment. One size does not fit all when it comes to teaching and motivating students. Professors who understand this concept realize there is not one enigmatic theory or method that will work with all students because each student has unique needs and talents that they bring to the learning experience (Spitznagel, 2018). Therefore, professors must tap into the individuality of each student to develop an effective plan to engage students and increase academic motivation (Ahmad et al., 2017). This study is best suited to a qualitative, hermeneutic phenomenological design because professor–student interactions and relationships, a component of social integration and its relationship to persistence, is under-researched (Demaris & Kritsonis, 2008; Tinto, 2000).

The Necessity of Positive Teacher–Student Relationships (TSRs)

Research indicates that the teacher is the most significant factor in facilitating motivation in students (J. Myers, 2012). The influences of the PSR on a student could potentially result in a college student's decision to persist to completion of their degree. Five components have a positive influence on PSRs, including quality of faculty contact, frequency of faculty contact, research with faculty, personal discussions with faculty, and out-of-class interactions with faculty (Trolan et al., 2016). College faculty should make the most of every opportunity to develop relationships and connect with students because it can influence many aspects of the college experience. Professors can be the mechanism in creating a positive learning environment and a key to increasing motivation and persistence. Administrators of universities need to promote professional autonomy for professors by providing opportunities for continued engagement in upgrading their knowledge and skills. Specified training can offer practical strategies to promote positive PSRs, which can lead to student retention at the university. Training should be provided to professors to further develop these characteristics, which can have a positive influence on all students.

According to van der Heijden et al. (2015), effective educators possess the following characteristics:

1. Eager to learn: They strive to develop themselves further professionally.
2. Reflective: They think deeply and carefully about the quality of their instruction.
3. Guidance givers: They support and direct student development.
4. Accessible: They are approachable and friendly.
5. Positive: They have high expectations and are highly motivated.
6. Committed: They are loyal to their school, students, and enthusiastic about making a

difference.

7. Trusting: They are warm, caring, and demonstrate empathy.

8. Self-assured: They are confident and know they can make a difference.

Professors are change agents and influencers. All of these characteristics are necessary to be an effective educator (van der Heijden et al., 2015).

In addition to these attributes, educators must also be sensitive to a student's culture. Developing cultural awareness within the classroom and being sensitive to student needs is another method of promoting positive TSRs. One interesting finding in a cross-sectional study was the influence of teacher–student interpersonal relationships (TSIR) in Western countries versus a teacher of Indonesian students (Maulana et al., 2014). The influence of respect exhibited differently across cultures because the “collectivist” by nature Indonesians viewed TSIRs as a valuable commodity as compared to the “individualistic” culture of Western countries (Maulana et al., 2014). Western cultures promote the needs of the individual over the needs of the group. The United States has one of the most individualistic cultures in the world. Americans prioritize their freedom and independence over the needs of the group; therefore, respect and group cohesion are not as highly valued as in a collectivist culture (Roberts et al., 2017).

Studies have demonstrated high-quality TSIRs result in a productive classroom environment, while a poor quality TSIR will decrease motivation (Maulana et al., 2014). The diversity of students in today's classroom makes it even more challenging for professors to accommodate contrasting academic needs (Keller, 2018). Therefore, it is necessary for professors to develop personal, positive relationships with each student and to show high expectations, be supportive, and understand the culture of each student (Keller, 2018). The

campus environment should be inviting, safe, inclusive, and supportive of all students (Cramer & Bennett, 2015; A. Martin & Collie, 2019).

Cultivating Positive Professor–Student Relationships (PSRs)

Cultivating relationships and creating a deep, emotional bond is critical in achieving a positive rapport with students to promote student success. Bowlby's (1958) attachment theory provides valuable insight on relationships and outcomes of achievement in the classroom (Keller, 2018). Professors who exhibit kindness by endorsing positive relationships have an optimistic influence on an undergraduate student's well-being. The purpose of the research in this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the perspectives of students of their relationships with professors and how that motivates them to persist in the completion of a degree. Researchers have investigated Bowlby's (1958) attachment theory and have found that genuine kindness exhibited by teachers in the classroom had a measurable influence on student success (Keller, 2018; Krane et al., 2017).

Respect

Respect can be defined as a feeling of deep admiration for someone or something elicited by their abilities, qualities, or achievements (Celkan et al., 2015). Expectations of respect can be viewed very differently when looking at a student's perspective versus a professor's perspective. At the collegiate level, student expectancies that contribute to respect are different from professors; however, respect is cultivated through achieving these differing expectancies. Professors who instill positive characteristics in students may be trying to earn respect. However, a student might see respect as more concrete and may expect validation from his professors (Celkan et al., 2015; Thompson, 2018). In a quantitative research study investigating the effects of TSRs on academic achievement, as high as 90% ($n = 402$) of students at the collegiate level

rated respect as one of the most essential characteristics displayed by competent instructors (Rebrean, 2017). Research shows that respect is a crucial indicator of student motivation and retention (Celkan et al., 2015; Thompson, 2018). Specific variables that lead to respect can include positive professor–student interactions and well-designed instruction (Sass et al., 2018).

Another important aspect of respect is listening. There is a high premium on mutual respect between students and teachers through the attention received by listening (Thompson, 2018). Listening to students and being prepared to share well-designed and organized content is something students appreciate and can facilitate mutual respect.

Interestingly, one factor that also increases respect in students for their professors is reliability (Celkan et al., 2015). Professors who come to class well-prepared with instruction and do their job with excellent care is a factor that scores highly with college students. Simplicity in things such as professors adhering to office hours also cultivates respect in students and make students feel that their time is valuable and considered (Brookfield, 2015). Also, these factors contribute to student retention at the institution (Crisp et al., 2015). Respect is a considerable factor of positive PSRs and must be mutually reciprocated between professors and students. A student demonstrates respect for professors based on admiration found in the professor's abilities, achievements, and qualities exemplified. Students realize that professors are an excellent resource to achieve success and make advancements in their college experience. Likewise, a professor shows respect to a student by promoting kindness and admiring the student's achievements (Keller, 2018; Krane et al., 2017). All of these things cultivate genuine mutual respect. Professors who demonstrate respect through classroom opportunities and model the reciprocity of respect have students that respond accordingly and exhibit respect in return (Giesinger, 2012; Liang et al., 2019). In the existing literature, high-quality relationships have

been described as warm and open with a structured environment that contains clear expectations and an underlying theme of empathy and mutual respect (Spilt et al., 2011; Wubbels et al., 2015). A mutually respectful relationship can have a direct bearing on a student's persistence, experiences, and learning (Komarraju et al., 2010).

Trust

Mutual trust has a direct impact on school well-being (Hongwidjojo et al., 2018). The higher the trust, the higher the school's well-being. The concept of trust in any relationship percolates over into all aspects of life. When students have trust for teachers, they learn to trust authority, thus contributing to society in an overall positive manner. Many professors set out to accomplish the lofty goal of positively inspiring their students to achieve great things. Inspiration comes through the encouragement of individuals who are respected and trusted (Hongwidjojo et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2019). Trust is a relational underpinning of education that has significant importance in cultivating positive TSRs (Frelin, 2015). Trust also has an overall positive influence on student self-efficacy (Lee et al., 2019). Integrating trust into the PSR has roots in both Maslow's (1954) and Tinto's (1993) theories.

Maslow's (1954) theory emphasizes a person's need for both trust and respect, and Tinto's (1993) theory emphasizes student academic and social integration which can be cultivated through a trusting relationship (Adams et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2019). Trust is constructed through the comparison of what is expected of professors and what is observed of professors (Lee et al., 2019). Therefore, if a student observes a professor doing what is expected of them, a greater trust connection is established. Exemplary educators take this a step further and do even more than what is expected of them. When students observe this type of behavior, their trust is even greater.

Character Building

One way to develop positive classroom interaction and engagement is through character-building activities (Silanoi, 2012). Character building is somewhat overlooked and neglected in the collegiate setting, yet it is vital in promoting the well-being of students. Character-building education is the explicit delivery of mediated learning experiences designed to support the development of social competence and a cooperative disposition (White & Warfa, 2011). Student emotions should be taken seriously because research strongly suggests there is a link between a student's emotional stability and achievement (Weber et al., 2016). Therefore, student feelings are vital factors because of the link to the teaching and learning process. Building character can help build positive school rapport between the professor and students. Since character strengths are variable based on a student's background and environment, it can be concluded that for positive changes to be made regarding institutional climate, training of character-building activities needs to be implemented (Silanoi, 2012). Research suggests a positive connection between a student's character strengths and motivation concerning school achievement level (Weber et al., 2016).

Hope and gratitude are two variables related to student character building that have meaningful connections with persistence to graduation (White & Warfa, 2011). Hope is a construct that refers to the self-efficacy of a student and their ability to accomplish goals, whereas gratitude is the feeling that one obtains when the goals are achieved (White & Warfa, 2011). Developing these intrinsic character qualities is essential concerning college persistence; therefore, an emphasis on character building should be incorporated into the classroom setting. Character-building virtues are core characteristics that evolve to moral excellence as a person adapts and copes with various life events (Gustems-Carnicer & Calderón, 2016). Six core virtues

that are related to academic settings include wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence. These virtues have considerable influence on a student's coping strategies in the institutional setting (Gustems-Carnicer & Calderón, 2016; Linley et al. 2007). Research suggests that focusing on character strengths and incorporating virtues into the teaching curriculum will help students with coping strategies, strengthen a commitment to their studies, and boost motivation and academic achievement (Gustems-Carnicer & Calderón, 2016; White & Warfa, 2011).

Student Age, Gender, and Race

Research examining relationships between teachers and students indicates that both positive and negative associations have an astounding effect on student motivation and achievement (Roorda et al., 2011). Interestingly, the age and gender of a student can also have a relational influence on motivation and success (Kittrell & Moore, 2013). Research indicates that educators should pay more attention to males when focusing on the facets of gender and race (Lei et al., 2018). The reasoning for this is that male students can sometimes require more direction than females when completing assignments. Also, culture and gender can affect the TSR (Lei et al., 2018).

Another interesting facet regarding PSRs investigated the differences between male and female professors in a coeducational classroom. Students are more apt to participate when the professor is a female (Brooks & Young, 2016). However, regardless of age, race, or gender, there is a significant increase in student engagement based on the established relationship with the professor (Kittrell & Moore, 2013; Koomen et al., 2012; Tatum et al., 2013). Students are more apt to contribute to classroom discussions and participate when they are in classrooms

where they feel comfortable and uninhibited. When there is an increase in positivity between the professor and student, more classroom engagement is prevalent (A. Martin & Collie, 2019).

Educator Experience

An educator's years of experience influence a sense of confidence and ability to establish and maintain positive TSRs. Job satisfaction, sense of well-being, and stress levels can correspond with years of experience (Claessens et al., 2016). In a study investigating teacher self-efficacy and its effects on classroom processes, it was discovered that the relationship between educator efficacy and student academic achievement was more substantial when instructional strategies were utilized and not the variable of classroom management (Zee & Koomen, 2016). Forty years of research comprised this study, proving that teachers who are confident in their teaching methods are more likely to possess the ability to motivate their students. In a study investigating students' personal best goals, and academic engagement, it was discovered that experienced teachers were still teaching for a variety of reasons. Their longevity in the field was based on personal and spiritual purposes (Collie et al., 2016). Some said they loved teaching and believed it was their calling, while others placed value on helping to mold students to reach their fullest potential (Bennett et al., 2013; A. Martin & Collie, 2016; Maslow, 2013). Whatever the reason for longevity, the students are the beneficiaries of the educator's passion for helping others and investing in their lives. In the K–12 setting, positive relationships between the teacher and student are the heart of teaching and learning in the classroom.

Campus Climate

Campus climate plays a substantial part in creating a positive link and has been described as the lived embodiment of school organization and the relationships within the school system that are institutionally supported (Krane et al., 2017; Masko, 2018). In addition, the campus

climate is based on the pattern of student experiences that reflect norms, values, interpersonal relationships, and the teaching and learning practices (Thapa et al., 2013). Students develop the same persistence mindset as their professors when a positive relationship is nurtured because they want to emulate them. Positive attitudes toward learning and education can be cultivated within the institution by the professors of each class. Eventually, the positive climate can spread throughout the institution and become the overall feel of the campus. Adoption of this attitude throughout the campus becomes the perceived influence related to the expectations of others, which can lead to an attitude of student persistence (Roland et al., 2018).

Classroom Management

Students are an excellent source of information concerning classroom processes; therefore, the reliability of student perceptions regarding classroom management is more accurate than a teacher's perception since students have more of an opportunity to be an external observer (Banks, 2014; Montuoro & Lewis, 2015). Students in a classroom with a positive learning atmosphere have a more beneficial domain for motivation and learning (Ahmad et al., 2017). Educators who maintain a classroom environment through excellent classroom management skills and who promote regular attendance make the environment advantageous to learning. Students will likely be challenged and academically motivated to succeed and persist in their education in this type of environment (Al-Shammari, 2016). Quality instruction includes effort, planning, and time and is linked to a positive learning environment, which is a crucial factor in educational success (Al-Shammari, 2016; Darling-Hammond, 2014; Irlbeck & Pexton, 2017). The classroom environment is one factor that contributes positively towards learning, engaging, and academic performance (Alderman & Green, 2011; Lihong et al., 2018).

At the collegiate level, classroom management is delineated differently than the K–12 classroom. Classroom management in higher education entails the professor guiding students using variable teaching methods to obtain specific objectives and goals (Ahmad et al., 2017). In addition to goal setting and objectives being fulfilled, an essential component of classroom management involves maintaining a positive environment that can be accomplished through the implementation of course content through a confident and optimistic attitude (Seligman et al., 2009). A college classroom that promotes successful classroom management will contain students that will be more likely to regulate cognition, motivation, behavior, and context and will, therefore, be able to achieve their goals and experience higher levels of academic success (Zusho, 2017). Students who reach their goals and objectives throughout their college career feel accomplished and are more inclined to persist in their college education until completion.

Maslow's Five Essential Needs

Dr. Abraham Maslow is an expert in his field of human behavior and motivation. He posited that at the highest level of the hierarchy is self-actualization and the freedom to effectuate one's ideas, try things out, make decisions, and make mistakes (Maslow, 1998). While Maslow's (1954) theory is not the selected theoretical framework for this research, it is still important to consider because of its relevance to PSRs. When a positive relationship is established with a professor, the student will be in an environment that lends itself to engaging the student to reach his fullest potential (Hogan, 2019).

The primary construct of Maslow's hierarchy is based upon the five essential needs of every individual (Maslow, 1954). The pyramid structure is significant regarding positive PSRs and the student's intrinsic motivation leading to persistence. The hierarchy builds from the lowest to the highest category in a pyramid form (Lester, 2013).

At the base are the most fundamental human physiological requirements, such as air, food, and water. Research supports that physiological needs must be met prior to students succeeding academically in the classroom (Maslow, 1988; Lester, 2013). The level of engagement in students, which can lead to persistence directly, equates to a student's perception of the fulfillment of needs by the institution (Lerdpornkulrat et al., 2018). When cultivating a positive PSR in the classroom, a student's basic needs must be met before advancing to the next level. Providing a snack if class meeting time is mid-morning or mid-afternoon can fulfill a basic need and contribute to more actively engaged students. If the fundamental needs are met, the student will be able to focus better, have higher motivation, and have better psychological health (Maslow, 1954). The second level includes safety needs such as personal security, employment, health, and property (Lester, 2013). Creating a warm and welcoming environment will enable students to feel safe so that the focus can be on learning. The third tier of Maslow's hierarchy encompasses a human's need for love and belonging. The need for friendship, family, and a sense of connection is contained at this level. A sense of relatedness will be reinforced by an environment that supports interaction between students (Zepke, 2017). Students who feel a sense of belonging in college will most likely persist because it leads to social integration and provides a social connection with others, which promotes persistence (Tinto, 2017). As in Tinto's (1993) theory, the third tier encapsulates the essence of social integration. The next tier reinforces esteem and includes the need for respect, recognition, and strength. Positive PSRs are the by-products that this tier can exhibit in the form of mutual respect and encouragement, which can be reciprocated on both ends of the spectrum (Liang et al., 2019).

Lastly, at the pinnacle of the hierarchy is self-actualization, which is the desire to become the best that one can be (Maslow, 1954). When a student's needs are met in the classroom, and

they feel a definite sense of connection to their teacher, they will be able to advance to the highest level/goal of the pinnacle which is self-actualization. If students attain this level, then they will be more likely to demonstrate an intrinsic motivation, which can result in social and academic integration to continue in their education until their degree is conferred. When the first four levels of the hierarchy are fulfilled, the student will be free to reach the point of self-actualization, which can lead to a drive to pursue goals if nurtured and cultivated (Taormina & Gao, 2013). There is limited research pertaining to factors that influence students at the collegiate level that result in intrinsic motivation and desire to persist; however, an educator can play a significant role in the advancement of tiers on Maslow's hierarchy. Cultivating positive relationships is a necessity for students to reach the highest level of self-actualization (Dennie et al., 2019; Merrow, 2011). When students reach this point in the hierarchy, they will likely persist in the completion of their goals (Maslow, 1954).

The Hindrances of Negative TSRs

Unfortunately, there is a flipside that must be examined when studying relationships between professors and students. Negative relationships can have an adverse effect on student learning and motivation (A. Martin & Collie, 2019). Brinkworth et al. (2018) conducted a quantitative research study ($N = 595$) with a new approach to evaluate and measure TSRs describing the overall positive and negative aspects of TSRs through teacher and student perspectives. The research presented a critical element that is sometimes overlooked when studying the influences of TSRs. They found that learning how to improve these relationships, especially negative ones, can significantly improve student motivation and the overall outcome of school achievement (Brinkworth et al., 2018). Enhancing the properties of positive TSRs seems to outweigh the limiting features of negative TSRs (J. Martin, 2017). If the health of this

relationship is affected negatively, the potential to impact a tremendous array of educational outcomes, including student academic achievement, motivation, and behavior, is at stake (Brinkworth et al., 2018). Studies suggest that many college students are dissatisfied with the communication quality of professors (Beckowski & Gebauer, 2018). Some college students express this dissatisfaction as a result of their professors not valuing their opinion, not being readily available when necessary, or displaying ineffective communication (Beckowski & Gebauer, 2018). Perceived negativity translates to negative emotions of frustration and anger and often results in a lack of motivation. To avoid potential failure of students, teachers should avoid personal criticism at all costs, as this could have a negative influence on a student's education (Krane et al., 2017; Skipper & Douglas, 2015). A problematic relationship between a teacher and student is detrimental to student motivation, as well as academic and social integration and development (V. Myers, 2012; Opdenakker et al., 2012).

Other educational risks associated with negative PSRs include high rates of dropouts, low self-efficacy, and low self-confidence (Rebrean, 2017). Classrooms that exhibit negative overtones may have a detrimental effect on students and their decision to persist in their education. In a negative classroom environment, students will find it difficult to integrate both academically and socially (Tinto, 1993, 2017). The key to integrating is to build a strong sense of social and intellectual community on campus (Tinto, 1993). In the classroom, the teacher can foster this type of integration by encouraging students to pursue or maintain an activity relevant to learning to promote positivity and motivation (Walters et al., 2017).

Professors Failing Students

Positive relationships are especially crucial for students with a negative outlook on their education (Rudasill, 2011). The majority of first-year students begin college with a positive

outlook; however, a lack of social and academic integration can quickly alter their mindset (Martini et al., 2019). Professors who do not invest in their students and strive to bring out the best in them are doing them a disservice that can permeate into other areas of life. An adverse classroom scenario will contribute to the creation of a negative self-image that will further inhibit learning (Raider-Roth, 2011). For students to develop a connection with their professor, they must know that they have confidence in them and that they are setting realistic, high expectations for them to achieve (Keller, 2018; A. Martin & Collie, 2019). Professors need to help their students excel and be personally connected, benefitting them in terms of academic success. Although the demands of a full-time university professor are physically draining, the work overload and conflict of student demands must be overcome as not to fail the students. Educators receive intrinsic rewards from developing close relationships with students and experience a negative connotation when relationships are distant or conflictual (Spilt et al., 2011).

Mistrust

Many students have learned to have skepticism towards professors. Unfortunately, this situation may stem from unfulfilled promises, lack of sincerity, undermining potential, inconsistency, being unprepared, and unloving or sarcastic remarks (Thompson, 2018). These underpinnings can cause a wedge to be built between the professor and student and will become detrimental to the learning process. Since undergraduate students come to college with preexisting assumptions based on family upbringing, personal characteristics and traits, and personal and academic pre-college experiences, a student's formulation of trust or mistrust may already be established before even setting foot on campus (Dwyer, 2017). These assumptions can present tricky obstacles to overcome and can contribute to a negative association, even in a new educational setting. Through a caring and diligent professor, the preexisting assumptions that

have been built over the years can be broken down, and a new foundation can be rebuilt on trust and respect (Celkan et al., 2015; Frelin, 2015; Lee et al., 2019). If a student's perceptions of a professor are positively developed through consistency, students will be more likely to integrate socially and academically (Tinto, 2017). These interpersonal dynamics can influence later relationships beyond the college setting, extending into a student's professional career and personal life; therefore, it is vital that positive, trusting relationships are established through clear expectations and consistency (Young et al., 2016). Professors who do not express vested interest in students or are not consistent with expectations cause mistrust and skepticism to develop. Students who experience negativity from a professor may develop a lack of motivation to pursue goals, which could lead to student attrition (Brinkworth et al., 2018; J. Martin, 2017). For these reasons, professors must establish trust as a prerequisite for teaching. Students who have a lack of trust will keep a barrier between themselves and their professors to avoid disappointing situations. To destroy this barrier, professors must build or reestablish trust until the student no longer feels vulnerable by creating a safe and convivial environment (Raider-Roth, 2011).

Traditional versus Online Learning in Cultivating PSRs

Relationships, both positive and negative, are cultivated in both traditional brick-and-mortar schools as well as the online environment. Although more challenging in an online environment, positive relationship building can be accomplished through diligent planning and efficient communication. Online education is no longer an anomaly in higher education in the United States. Approximately 25% of all students in higher education have taken at least one online course, and this number continues to grow rapidly (S. James et al., 2016). Online educational environments are a growing trend in institutions of higher learning; therefore,

professors must use creativity in delivering instruction that will positively influence students to persist in their education.

A significant component of positive interaction between professors and students in an online environment is immediacy (Beckowski & Gebauer, 2018). A professor's interpersonal communication skills in developing immediacy is an essential factor in facilitating compelling learning experiences in distance education and the traditional setting (Beckowski & Gebauer, 2018). In either scenario, whether traditional or online, the instructor has the opportunity to have a positive influence on the lives of students. Relationships not only influence academic integration in students, such as a student's grades, but positive exchanges can also have a significant influence on a student's worldview and engagement (Beckowski & Gebauer, 2018).

Professor attitudes create an atmosphere that encourages student engagement. In an atmosphere that influences educational outcomes, research shows the quality of the engagement, rather than quantity, is a key factor (Beckowski & Gebauer, 2018). Kindness exhibited by professors can unlock student academic potential and create a positive mood and energizing disposition in the classroom (Krane et al., 2017). Positive PSRs are an effective way to optimize these influential connections, and professors who prioritize developing rapport with students establish a pivotal connection to moving forward in academic coursework (Beckowski & Gebauer, 2018). The findings of a study involving the importance of faculty residential homes in student residential communities highlighted the importance of the faculty–student conversations as a vulnerable space to share “relationships, family, spirituality, and meaning-making” (Sriram & McLevain, 2016, p. 607). Professors who invest in opportunities to connect and develop relationships with students will share in their success. Dialogue regarding life interactions will promote an interpersonal connection and provide a foundation for academic productivity (Sriram

& McLevain, 2016). Students who perceive faculty members to be genuinely interested in them as an individual and in their abilities are more likely to show satisfaction with their educational experience (Giesinger, 2012). Professors who genuinely care and take the time to invest in their students can inspire, build confidence, and motivate them to persist in their education.

Motivation

Research reveals a strong link between positive PSRs and student academic motivation (Opdenakker et al., 2012; Seligman et al., 2009). One of the most significant psychological concepts in education is motivation (A. Martin & Collie, 2019). Consequently, methodologies in fostering motivation are directly related to the building of a strong and positive relationship between the professor and teacher. In a quantitative research study ($N = 165$) conducted by Yilmaz et al. (2017), it was determined that the most important variables influencing student motivation pertained to the teacher and the teaching techniques, a student-centered environment conducive to learning, freely given positive teacher feedback, and the use of contemporary teaching materials. The use of technological teaching materials for today's millennial students is a positive influencer that encourages motivation. Any technology introduced in the educational arena has a novelty effect. Especially today, when teachers are competing with prodigious technology, they need to realize that a synthetic electronic device cannot replace them. An electronic device is incapable of developing a positive relationship, and a teacher has the human aspect that electronics cannot replicate. They can, however, utilize technology to foster student motivation. By gaining a better understanding of the nature of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and the ability to gauge students' motivation while interacting with mobile technology, teachers can create an environment that supports the design of effective educational programs (Ciampa, 2014; Deci & Ryan, 2012).

The self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2012) is a theory that addresses motivation. The theory suggests that people have three psychological needs including competence (to seek control of an outcome), relatedness (to connect and care for others), and autonomy (to be in harmony with one's integrated self; Ryan & Deci, 2012). Professors who facilitate active and reciprocal learning are more likely to have a classroom of motivated students (Walters et al., 2017). How course content is delivered can be an asset to motivation and is also a factor in student motivation and achievement. Student engagement will most likely occur more frequently when students feel an overall satisfaction towards their class, and they feel that the content is meaningful (Farr-Warnton et al., 2018). It is also essential to consider the delivery method of course material and the influence on student satisfaction and engagement. Positive PSRs are important determinants of healthy classroom environments and can be indicative of a productive classroom environment (Opdenakker et al., 2012). Productive classroom environments yield students with intrinsic academic motivation. Interactions that occur in and out of the classroom between students and professors promote academic motivation and integration (Komarraju et al., 2010; Trolan et al., 2016).

Student success in school is directly parallel to the extent of motivation cultivated by professors through interactions with students (Opdenakker et al., 2012). Several types of professor exchanges include career guidance, campus interaction, approachability, respectful interactions, a caring attitude, and connectedness. All of these exchanges have been shown to influence student motivation positively (Trolan et al., 2016). These connections enhance student academic motivation and increase the probability that students will continue in their college career to pursue graduation.

Lack of Motivation

Upwards of 40% of high school students are disengaged in the classroom due to lack of motivation; however, there is evidence that the TSR influences student motivation to achieve at a higher level (A. Martin & Collie, 2016; J. Myers, 2012). There is limited research regarding lack of motivation in higher education based on PSRs; however, positive PSRs could have a significant impact on combating this grim statistic. Therefore, it is necessary for professors to develop personal, positive relationships with each student and to be supported to establish high expectations (Masko, 2018). Lack of engagement can result in lower motivation and contribute to mediocre academic performance. Social media can cause a lack of motivation in today's college student. Students have become less motivated during class discussions and engage in social media for fear that they might miss out on happenings in their social environments. Social media engagement in the classroom can be a factor that can cause disengagement and lack of achievement.

Another issue leading to disengagement is the inappropriate use of cell phones. Students may feel the need to engage in cell phone usage during class to satisfy their psychological needs or sense of connectedness and belonging (Lee et al., 2019; Maslow, 1954; Wang et al., 2015). A student might have a distorted sense of interaction about media usage, which can cause an unhealthy addiction leading to stress, disengagement, and depression (Wang et al., 2015). Social media can also trigger depression due to the mindset that friends have a better life, which then leads to a lack of motivation (Kross et al., 2011).

Millennials have a technological mindset and are highly skilled at multi-tasking; however, there are drawbacks to this acquired skill. Full attention cannot be given in the process of multitasking. Not being present results in distracted disengagement that can sometimes

become addictive. In an attempt to destress, some college students share prime study time with technology, and as a result, their studies are disrupted. Factors that lead to a lack of motivation are something that needs to be addressed in the university setting so that students can receive timely support if they face issues with academic or social integration (Tinto, 2017). If the problems of lack of motivation are countered, there is a greater likelihood that academic achievement will improve, and students will persist in their education (Dennie et al., 2019; Henry et al., 2012).

Persistence in Undergraduate College Students

The dropout rates of undergraduate college students have become an alarming statistic, with only 57% of college students completing their four-year degree within six years (Flynn, 2014). Statistics of students not persisting to graduation emphasizes the importance of cultivating a positive PSR as a means of retaining students at the college level. Students who feel a connection to their professors will be more socially and academically integrated per Tinto's (1993) theory and will have a sense of belonging and connectedness per Maslow's (1954) theory. Students prematurely leaving higher education is a global issue, and researchers identify several reasons for this occurrence.

First, students feel inadequate, which leads to a lack of engagement or integration followed by attrition. Secondly, institutions are not adequately prepared to confront student attrition (Farr-Wharton et al., 2018). Disengagement in the classroom due to disinterest in course content is another primary reason for students leaving an institution prematurely (Lerdpornkulrat et al., 2018). It is the responsibility of the university, and more specifically, each professor, to provide a classroom atmosphere that engages with a high level of expectation (Keller, 2018).

Another factor associated with student attrition is a student experiencing success in one course but not in another (Hepworth et al., 2018). Lack of academic integration and not passing a class can be a factor in a student not persisting in the completion of their degree (Tinto, 2017). Other indicators that affect premature attrition rates include a student's level of educational preparedness, the mode of study (residential versus online students), the year of their university study (first-year students have a higher attrition rate due to outside influencing variables), and the extent to which they participate in outside activities, such as work or sports (Dwyer, 2017). Furthermore, economic status, educational preparedness, gender, study mode (distance learning versus traditional), work hours, and year of college can also contribute to student attrition (Farr-Wharton et al., 2018).

Academic preparedness is critical to academic success, and both are important to student retention in postsecondary institutions (Hepworth et al., 2018). Professors can reduce attrition by controlling what is in their power regarding content dispersion, professor–student interactions, and classroom climate. Engaging students in the classroom and providing ways to connect and academically integrate can strengthen the likelihood that students will persist in their education (Tinto, 2017). Likewise, students who participate in various college activities such as work or sports will socially integrate and feel a sense of belonging at the university (Henning, 2014). The professor cannot control outside factors related to work and sports; however, all efforts can be made to promote positive interactions in and out of the classroom by being supportive of academic and non-academic responsibilities. In some cases, a positive PSR can promote the retention of a student at the institution even if academic performance is deficient. The value of learning and course satisfaction can be high even when the grades are mediocre, and this leads to student retention based on the TSR (Farr-Wharton et al., 2018).

College Freshmen and Student Attrition

Many different factors can be contributors to first-year students leaving their college institution at the end of their freshmen year. Tinto's (1993) integration theory states that academic integration is related to institutional commitment for first-year students (Browning et al., 2018). Students who feel inadequately prepared or overwhelmed in coursework find difficulty integrating academically. Another promoting factor in the premature departure of the university is the lack of social integration. Research shows that a lack of social integration as compared to a lack of academic integration has a more robust effect on voluntary attrition in females, while the reverse is true in males (Terenzini & Pascarella, 1998). Research findings also show that self-efficacy and perceptions of mentorship were two of the most essential factors in persisting beyond the first year of college, further substantiating the importance of fostering positive PSRs to retain students beyond the first year of college (Baier et al., 2016; Brady-Amoon & Fuertes, 2011).

Noncognitive factors, such as the student's mindset, are important to consider regarding motivation to persist (Farruggia et al., 2018). Grit, the combination of passion and perseverance, is an important mindset that a student should possess in striving toward the prospect of graduation and completion of goals (Duckworth, 2016). Students who are intrinsically motivated to persist and actively cultivate a sense of belonging and self-efficacy correspond with first through second year retention rates (Baier et al., 2016; Brady-Amoon & Fuertes, 2011). Academic self-efficacy, or confidence in performing academic tasks, is relevant to consider regarding the persistence mindset (Torres & Solberg, 2001; Zajacova et al., 2005). A student has a much higher chance of persisting with an academic mindset of growth rather than a fixed mindset. A fixed mindset is one in which students stay stagnant in their thinking, and the belief is

that no further development of intelligence can take place. However, a growth mindset allows for an extension of knowledge that has already been attained, and students can further their mindset based on development (Claro et al., 2016; Haimovitz & Dweck, 2017; Murphy & Dweck, 2016).

The degree to which a college student integrates socially is parallel to the degree of continuation at the university. If a student's perception is one in which he feels that the university is committed to his success, a higher level of social integration will occur, thus, the likelihood of persistence (Littlepage & Hepworth, 2016). In many cases, professors can cultivate a relationship with students and be able to provide guidance by drawing upon their own life experiences (Beckowski & Gebauer, 2018). Dialogue regarding life interactions will promote an interpersonal connection and will provide a foundation for academic and social productivity (Sriram & McLevain, 2016). Professors who invest in opportunities to connect and develop relationships will reap the benefit of student success. As a result of this positive relationship, students may be more prone to have the tenacity to continue in their education. The sooner relationships develop and social integration takes place, the better the opportunities will be for intervention and integration into the new environment of the university (Arends & Petersen, 2018). Perceived professor support can intervene between the relationship of a student's perceptions of institutional readiness and a sense of well-being as a first-year student (Souza et al., 2019).

First-generation college students need to be acclimated to the college environment as quickly as possible to retain them beyond their freshmen year and encourage persistence (Littlepage & Hepworth, 2016). When students come to a university without family and home life support, they must overcome many obstacles based on their upbringing. However, even students who do not have family support can overcome and become acclimated to the social

integration of college through the culture of the school, the professors, and the administrators (Arends & Petersen, 2018; Baier et al., 2016; Pather & Chetty, 2016). The university can fulfill this area of need by providing a welcome week each year for incoming freshmen and having activities that encourage social integration. By creating a sense of community and establishing social integration from the commencement of their freshmen year, it is more likely that they will persist in their education and become an integral part of the college community (Pather & Chetty, 2016).

Outside factors can contribute to a lack of persistence beyond the first year of college. First-year students who are homesick and poorly adjusted to college present another major challenge. For some students, it may be the first significant length of time away from home, and acclimating to a new environment and lifestyle can be overwhelming. Adaptation to a new lifestyle and making new connections with classmates, roommates, and professors may feel daunting to first-year students (Arends & Petersen, 2018; Baier et al., 2016). The separation experience can also cause psychological symptoms that can contribute negatively and have social and intellectual consequences (Scopelliti & Tiberio, 2010; Thurber & Walton, 2012). College administrators, professors, academic advisors, and mental health counselors are all resources that can help first-year students combat feelings of homesickness by providing coping strategies (Bowman et al., 2019; Credé & Niehorster, 2012).

Life-Changing Teachers

Teachers who create positive memories for students have a life-long influence on their success and well-being. When researching positive qualities exhibited by teachers who are admired and appreciated, there is an underlying thread woven throughout the literature about these unique characteristics. The four most prominent themes surfacing from the research

regarding life-changing teachers include respect, guidance/wisdom, and inspiration (Uitto et al., 2018).

The first prominent theme in life-changing teachers is respect. A teacher can show respect to a student by promoting kindness, admiring the student's achievements, and cultivating genuine and joint respect (Keller, 2018; Krane et al., 2017). Life-changing teachers are deeply respected within the classroom and have established credibility consistently.

Second, teachers who direct students to find the right path based on student interest and strengths are long remembered for taking the time to guide them in their educational journey. Also, teachers who provide wise instruction, both academically and in real-life practicality, are competent professionals who enhance student growth and achievement (Ludwikowska, 2019). A teacher should be a lifelong learner that leads by example. Personal characteristics, such as a lifelong learner, will speak volumes regarding the importance of learning by doing. Teachers who continue a journey to greater competency through autonomous learning will indirectly impart valuable instruction by example.

Third, love and understanding are prominent themes in life-changing teachers throughout the literature. Teachers who provide these altering characteristics can change lives. Lastly, teachers who give life-changing advice or inspire students to strive to reach their aspirations and goals will be remembered for a lifetime. These findings emphasize the significance of considering student emotions seriously to promote a more positive school climate, which will result in higher academic achievement, motivation, and persistence.

Summary

The majority of the findings in this literature review pertain to K–12 educators. There is very little voice given to college students and their perceptions of how PSRs influence

motivation to persist in their studies. Professors have an extraordinary opportunity to establish a positive influence by creating an environment conducive to learning. As a result of the advantageous professor–student exchange, there is an increase in student academic motivation and student retention at the collegiate level. Research shows at the K–12 level, students who connect positively with their teachers are more academically engaged and self-motivated (Brinkworth et al., 2018). Relationships are the core of the learning environment, and improving these relationships will assist in developing student success and persistence. A positive campus climate at a university will be promoted; as a result, leading to the possibility of student retention (J. Martin, 2017). At the K–12 level, there is research suggesting that positive relationships influence student academic outcomes, and a student who is satisfied and comfortable will take risks and be more engaged and productive in the learning process (Uitto et al., 2018). When college students are more personally connected with their professors and the teaching and the learning context, they may be more likely to take risks and achieve to their highest potential. The power of positive relationships can be found in the research about educators who became mentors and role models and positively influenced student academic success, motivation, and persistence (Hansen, 2018). Educational achievement in students can be acute (such as a grade or final transcript for a semester), or continuous (such as student persistence), triggering increased motivation (Hepworth et al., 2018). Tinto’s (1993) integration model is the framework of this research pertaining to the influence on student persistence at the university level.

In summary, the literature is abundant in describing positive TSRs at the K–12 level; however, there is limited research giving college students a voice as to how the PSR influences their motivation to persist. The findings of this literature review emphasize the necessity of

research about undergraduate college student perceptions regarding relationships with faculty that inspire, encourage, and motivate students to persist in their education.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

Chapter Three specifies the methods for conducting this hermeneutic phenomenological study. The relationships between professors and students in higher education were examined to gain an understanding of the perceived influence the relationship has on motivation to persist. Chapter Three unfolds the hermeneutic phenomenological research design and reiterates the research questions. It also explains the targeted settings, discusses participant selection methods, and reviews procedures used to conduct the study. Data collection methods, including an integrated demographic questionnaire (Appendix D), in-depth interviews (Appendix E), and written essays (Appendix G), are examined. Also, the instruments utilized to collect the data are explained. The researcher's role is also specified. Lastly, data analysis, methods for establishing trustworthiness, reliability, and ethical authenticity are considered.

Design

A qualitative, hermeneutic phenomenological study was chosen because this approach allows researchers to gain a “deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences and explores how humans make sense of and transform experience into consciousness, both individually and as shared meaning” (Patton, 2015, p. 125). Qualitative research is designed to give a voice to college students who have experienced the phenomenon of professor–student relationships (PSRs) and how the relationship influences their motivation to persist to complete their college education. The goal of this research study was to hear the voice of undergraduate students and transcribe valuable information for professors to support students in developing motivation to achieve greater success and ultimately develop an intrinsic desire in college students to persist in their educational journey. The interviews with each participant were

to understand the human experience of relationships between professors and undergraduate students and how these relationships have an influence on student academic motivation to persist.

By utilizing a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, the focus was on the commonality of college students and the interpretation of their lived experiences regarding PSRs and how that phenomenon influenced their motivation to persist (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For this study, relationships built between students and faculty were examined, and motivation was interpreted based on the influence the professor has on a student to persist to completion of a college degree. Faculty who are encouraging, supportive, reassuring, knowledgeable, enthusiastic, and cheerful have a positive influence on students' motivation to continue in their studies. They also have a beneficial influence that shows approval and acceptance. A study conducted on student–faculty contact outside the classroom revealed that faculty who were consistently named “Most Outstanding” or “Most Impactful” showed a more significant impact on student academic growth when they made it a priority to invest in students both in and out of the classroom (Cuseo, 2018).

A student's relationship with their professor influences motivation (Yu et al., 2018). Furthermore, by gaining an understanding of a college student's relational experiences through integrated questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and written essays, a more vibrant picture was presented of how students experience and make sense of the relationship between professors and students and the influence on motivation to persist.

Hermeneutic phenomenology was chosen for this study because this research design is useful when conveying an understanding of a phenomenon by interpreting the meanings of the experiences of people (Laverty, 2003). The goal of phenomenology is to describe the meaning of

the experience, both in terms of what was experienced and how it was experienced (Neubauer et al., 2019). Phenomenological research design has specific characteristics to reveal the essence and meanings of human experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Hermeneutics is a branch of philosophy that focuses on the interpretation of text. This phenomenological study is hermeneutical because it “reflects on the experience and aims for discursive language and utilizes sensitive interpretive devices that make phenomenological analysis, explication, and description possible and intelligible” (van Manen, 2014, p. 26). Phenomenology is the study of lived experience in the lifeworld (Hultgren, 1944; van Manen, 1977). Therefore, hermeneutic phenomenology is a fitting approach for this study because the biases of the researcher must be made explicit concerning the actual lived experience. Since I am bringing personal experiences and biases to enrich my research as part of the understanding, I chose a hermeneutic research design. I am passionate about the topic of positive PSRs and the perceived influence on motivation to persist and I have preexisting biases related to this study. However, I utilized my personal experiences as a lens through which to reconstruct data gathered from selected research participants. Therefore, since my personal experiences are relevant to this topic, hermeneutic phenomenology was my research design of choice.

Research Questions

The central research question was the focal point of this study, and the three sub-questions further investigated this phenomenon in more detail. After an analysis of the three pieces of data collection, answers began to formulate to the research questions. The central research question portrayed the “essence of the phenomenon,” with the sub-questions providing supporting evidence to the phenomenon. The following research questions guided this

hermeneutic phenomenological study. The questions contain key variables that show the relationship between the why and what statements of the study (Newman & Covrig, 2013).

Central Question: What are the lived experiences of undergraduate college students pertaining to the interpretation of student–faculty relationships on motivation to persist?

Sub-Question One: How does the quality of faculty–student relations influence motivation to persist in college undergraduate students?

Sub-Question Two: How do faculty–student relationships influence student academic motivation and goals?

Sub-Question Three: How do faculty–student relations play an instrumental role in the social integration of undergraduate college students?

Setting

The setting for this phenomenological study was Kings College (pseudonym), a four-year private, liberal arts college. Also, participants were chosen from various universities in the United States, as well as globally, through snowball sampling on social media. Pseudonyms were used to respect the privacy of the participants and the research sites in the study.

Kings College is located in south central Pennsylvania in a suburbia setting and encompasses a campus size of 473 acres in the northeast region of the United States. The college offers both graduate and undergraduate degrees in a traditional and online format. Undergraduate programs are residential only; however, there are both traditional and online offerings for graduate students. The undergraduate program is comprised of 1,202 males and 1,563 females. The attrition rate for this study for first-year students is somewhat more depressed at the research site (46.2%). The college was founded in 1910 and is a non-denominational Christian affiliated college that embraces the Anabaptist, Pietist, and Wesleyan traditions of the Christian church.

The professors employed at Kings College must submit a Statement of Faith as part of the interview screening process. The Department of Education at Kings College offers several certifications within the realm of education, including a teaching certification in grades PreK–4 as well as K–8 in Special Education. Many education concentrations can also be obtained in English, math, science, and social studies. Students may also pursue secondary certification. The reason for choosing this institution was because of the uniqueness of the setting and student diversity. In addition to U.S. students from a variety of racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds, Kings College also welcomes students from nearly 32 different countries. Most students who attend Kings College are followers of Christ; however, students come from a wide variety of backgrounds in denomination due to the non-denominational affiliation. Another factor as to why this school was chosen is the convenience of proximity to where I live and was previously employed. Research from this study will benefit the college because it will provide practical implications of how positive PSRs influence motivation, which results in student persistence. At Kings College, the president presides over all campus employees, and the chain of command trickles down to the vice president and president’s cabinet, provost, dean, department chairs, and then individual faculty members comprised of full-time, assistant, and adjunct professors.

In addition to students at Kings College, undergraduate students were selected through the process of convenience sampling through personal networks and social media from other institutions to gain a broader perspective. By using social media, I was able to obtain students from universities that were not just local. This ensured that the study would not be limited to one university.

Participants

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (see Appendix A) was obtained before research and data collection began (Creswell, 2013). Liberty University IRB approval was granted on July 27, 2020. Ten undergraduate students were selected from Kings College and social media through purposeful and snowball sampling. The participants included one sophomore, three juniors, one senior, and five recent graduates as of May 2019 and May 2020. The settings included five participants from Pennsylvania, two from Florida, one from Ohio, one from Virginia, and one from Greece. Participants were similar because they experienced the same phenomenon; however, to capture a variant of the phenomenon based on interpretation of relationship building, participants were purposefully chosen from various levels of undergraduate students. A purposeful selection from the potential volunteer participants ($N = 24$) was made based upon a student's major, year in college, and the college location to gain a more diverse snapshot of the chosen population. A more focused approach was placed on recent graduates because they had the opportunity to develop meaningful relationships with faculty throughout their college experience. It was important to examine the dynamics of faculty–student relationships at both the underclassmen and upperclassmen level of students to develop interpretive results for this hermeneutic phenomenological study. For example, underclassmen may have had a different set of dynamics based on entrance to the postsecondary arena and life-changing events such as beginning college for the first time and leaving home. Research indicates that there is a higher rate of student attrition during the freshman year due to the adjustment process of social and academic integration and to the adaption to college life (Clark, 2005; Tinto, 1993, 2017; Wright et al., 2013). Freshmen and sophomore students are more assimilated to the culture of college life by the conclusion of the first half of the college

experience. Students have the opportunity to build relationships with faculty throughout their collegiate journey, and deeper relationships are developed, especially with professors who are mentors in a student's major field of study.

Participants were selected through purposeful sampling. This technique involves identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals who are especially knowledgeable or experienced with the phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Selected participants were chosen based on a demographic integrated questionnaire requesting interest in participating in the study, and the participants were chosen based on characteristics to fulfill the objectives of the study (see Appendix D). Students were chosen from the Human Development and Family Science department as well as students from the Education department at Kings College. These designated students were chosen to gain a purposefully informed understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Palinkas et al., 2015).

I also utilized convenience sampling to obtain a wider spectrum of interpretation. Social media outlets were employed to invite participants to engage in the study because of the opportunistic availability regarding time, access, location, and willingness. I incorporated snowball sampling to gather information from unknown contacts upon recommendations of friends, relatives, and colleagues. By expanding participant selection from various institutions using these samplings, I lessened the limitations of the study.

Purposeful sampling, along with maximum variation sampling, was utilized to ensure diversity in participant selection. By incorporating purposefully selected participants, I can reliably certify that I selected students who had experienced the phenomenon being studied.

By incorporating other sampling methods, I confirmed that I am not limiting the study and have a sample of participants who are representative of all extremes to gain an understanding

of how different groups of people view a specific anomaly. Therefore, by combining convenience and snowball sampling into the study, diversifying results were achieved by engaging participants from various universities. All students were assigned a pseudonym to protect the disclosure of their identities.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Year in School	Major or Degree	Ethnicity	Gender	Institution
Vivian	Junior	Human Development and Family Science	White	Female	Private, faith-based (PA)
Belle	Sophomore	Early Childhood	White	Female	Private, faith-based (PA)
Riley	Junior	English Education	White	Female	Private, faith-based (PA)
Rhema	Graduate May 2019	History	White	Female	Private (PA)
Eva	Graduate May 2020	Social Work	White	Female	Private, faith-based (PA)
Liv	Graduate May 2020	Social Work	White	Female	Private (FL)
Wyatt	Senior	Sports Management	White	Male	Private, faith-based (OH)
Dylan	Graduate May 2020	Business Administration	White	Male	Private (VA)
Megan	Graduate May 2019	Elementary Education	White	Female	Private, faith-based (FL)
Sara	Junior	Theology	White	Female	Bible College, Greece

Procedures

After receiving approval from the IRB (see Appendix A), permission was requested of the Dean of Education, Business and Social Sciences at Kings College (see Appendix B) to begin research at the chosen site. Once permission was granted, I elicited several professors in the Education and Human Development and Family Science departments through email for their assistance in the recruitment of students for this study. Upon selecting students to participate, the consent forms from legal adult students were gathered (Appendix C). Next, Integrated Demographic Questionnaires (Appendix D) were collected from potential research participants. After receiving the questionnaires, participants were purposefully chosen based on responses given in questionnaires and willingness to participate in the study. Each participant was asked to participate in a recorded interview lasting approximately one hour to obtain in-depth data regarding the phenomenon of professor–student interaction. To ensure the interview questions (Appendix E) were succinct, I collaborated with several colleagues to receive feedback or suggestions for improvement. I also piloted the interview with a small sample outside of my study to ensure correct wording and clarity. Once the interview questions were revised and edited, I proceeded with the interview process. Within three to five days of the interview, participants were asked to submit a written essay (see Appendix G) concerning their perceptions of how their relationships with professors influenced their motivation to persist. The essay was discussed at the end of the interview, and specific directions were given for submission. The essence of timing is a vital research benefit to keep the interview process fresh in the participants' minds as they contemplate written material (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

After the data collection of the integrated demographic questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and written essays, an analysis of transcripts was conducted to develop patterns using

coding methods to classify the common themes extracted from the pre-recorded interviews (Saldaña, 2016). The discovered emergent themes were then used to describe the study phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). I used the themes to compare accumulated information to discover what the interpretations of college students were concerning their relationships with professors, and how their relationships contributed to motivation to persist. The goal was to discover a common denominator that exists in successful relationships to promote academic motivation to persist. Following the data collection and analysis, I presented my findings through a newly reconstructed lens based on participant input to contribute to the existing literature. I filled a gap in the literature by researching factors that contribute to student motivation based on relationships with professors and the influence of the relationship on student persistence at the collegiate level.

The Researcher's Role

Since this is a qualitative study, I was the human instrument who synthesized the collected information. Following data collection, I analyzed the transcripts and reflected on the emerging themes from the participants. The rationale for this hermeneutic phenomenological research design was to include my personal experiences and biases, which enriched the research as part of the experience of understanding. The intertwining of the new data based on a review of the literature and transcribed materials interpreted through my own experiences and preconceived notions of the phenomenon created a new knowledge base. Following the collection of data, information was analyzed and represented in a useful manner, and then disseminated in a way that will help others (Creswell & Poth, 2018). During the data collection process, my role as the researcher was to reflect on essential themes of participant experience with the phenomenon, while simultaneously reflecting on my own experiences.

My relationship with Kings College was as a former adjunct professor. To eliminate the prospect of coercion, I do not have any supervisory role over any of the participants in this study. I am passionate about this study because I enjoy the psychological processes of what influences student learning. I taught several courses in the Education Department at Kings College, one of which was Educational Psychology. Therefore, how students learn and are motivated to succeed, has always fascinated me and become an area of interest in my professional career and research.

I have been an educator for almost 30 years. I have a vested interest in this study because it is my sincere desire to help others achieve and motivate them to reach their fullest potential. I have faced challenges and rewarding experiences throughout my career as an educator. As a result of my relationships with teachers and professors, I have been motivated to where I am today on my educational journey. I hope that this study will support professors in examining the vital process of developing beneficial relationships so students can develop an intrinsic desire to learn and persist in their education. As a result of this study, the research will benefit both myself and Kings College, in future endeavors. It is my desire, that as a result of this degree, I will be able to secure a full-time job as a professor at Kings College. I will then be able to put my research into practice.

Data Collection

Data collection for this hermeneutic phenomenological study includes integrated demographic questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and written essays from participants. These methods gave me the opportunity to gain the trust of the participants through a rumination involving the PSRs pertaining to motivation to persist. I collected data in the following order: an integrated demographic questionnaire, an in-depth interview, and a focused written essay. The logic behind this data collection method was sequential based on each method being built upon

from the last. Lastly, I followed up with a written essay collected from students outlining characteristics they feel are essential for an ideal professor. A piece of writing articulating their thoughts gave the opportunity to mention any important aspects that were not addressed during the interview. After these steps were finalized, a full analysis of the collected data was performed.

Integrated Demographic Questionnaire (IDQ)

Demographics are important in research to obtain a representative sample of the target population for the transferability of findings. The IDQ (Appendix D) contained questions that provided insight regarding PSRs as well as the demographics of the participant. The demographic portion of the questionnaire is necessary for purposeful sampling. Other sampling techniques can also be utilized through questionnaires such as snowball and convenience sampling, and all three sampling techniques were employed in this study to obtain a diverse pool of research participants. The qualitative questionnaire was used to obtain answers to questions that provided personal detail as well as gathering data regarding attitudes, opinions, and beliefs (Artino et al., 2014). The questions were administered using a 5- point Likert scale in which the respondent had a limited number of choices from which to choose an answer that most adequately described their feelings (Vonglao, 2017). There was also an open-ended query at the end of the questionnaire for the respondent to provide any additional comments that may not have been sufficiently interpreted from the closed-ended questions. The questionnaire can be found in Appendix D and email distribution with the aid of the professor from the chosen targeted classes at Kings College, as well as snowball sampling from social media, was implemented to disperse the questionnaires. Table 2 outlines the results obtained from the demographic questionnaires. This gave an overview of the perceptions of participants before

interviewing and also aided in the purposeful selection of participants based on backgrounds and demographics.

Interviews

For my research, I interviewed undergraduate students at Kings College. Also, I utilized social media to choose students through snowball sampling. Due to the current global pandemic, all interviews took place through ZOOM, rather than face-to-face interviews.

The college undergraduate participants in the study were asked to answer the following open-ended questions:

1. In as much detail as possible, please describe your educational experience to this point, including demographics, academics, extra-curricular activities, etc.
2. How has your family influenced your educational journey?
3. Please tell me a highlight(s) of an academic experience throughout your school career, and if anyone influenced that highlighted experience.
4. Please describe an experience in your educational journey when you felt motivated to succeed.
5. If you have/had a favorite professor, please explain why he/she had such a positive influence on your life.
6. Have you ever had a professor who you felt was personally invested in you, and if so, how did that relationship evolve to make you feel that way?
7. What are three qualities that you appreciate about a professor, and why?
8. Please describe a scenario when a professor has said something (positive or negative) that has stuck with you and influenced your life, and decisions you made following were a result of their comment.

9. What do you think is the most essential characteristic in defining an excellent professor, and why?
10. Please describe how you typically feel when you approach your professor with a question or concern (confident, inhibited, etc.).
11. How do you feel about your quality, frequency, and availability of faculty contact, meaning the opportunities to connect with professors and strengthen your relationship with them (in and out of the classroom)?
12. Please describe, in light of the world pandemic due to COVID-19, the challenges presented in the shift of traditional to online instruction, and any obstacles you were confronted with regarding professor relationships during this shift?
13. Please describe any experiences related to race or gender you may have encountered throughout your educational career, especially in terms of relationship with faculty.
14. How important is your education to you, and how important is it that you succeed in your educational career?
15. What do you wish you could change about your education pertaining to your professors or academics in general?
16. How have your professors influenced or inspired you to continue your educational journey?
17. How have your professors demonstrated an interest in you as a person, and do they show delight and encouragement in your successes?
18. Please explain your motivation in attending college and if any of the professors at Kings College helped you to achieve and feel more motivated in and out of the classroom? Expound on your rationale for this question.

19. In the past, I remember having professors who I wasn't quite sure "how to read."

They weren't making any effort to develop a relationship with me, so I had to reach out to them. Is there anything that you do to foster a relationship with a professor who might not make the effort himself?

20. I had to conduct interviews a few years ago for potential professor candidates, and one question I asked was, "What qualities or attributes does an effective professor possess?" If you were interviewing candidates, what answers would you hope to hear from the potential professor?

21. Please describe a situation during your educational career that a teacher/professor made you feel positive and confident about yourself.

22. Please explain, in as much detail as possible, how you feel professor relationships may have influenced your educational journey?

23. Thank you for the time you dedicated to this research study. Please elaborate on any final thoughts.

The questions for the structured, in-depth interviews were designed to elicit responses that required elaboration rather than "yes" or "no" answers (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Each of the questions involved in the interview process has substantial significance. They were created to provoke in-depth responses concerning perceptions of relationships, qualities, or attributes that were found in effective professors, motivation, and persistence. These questions were constructed to discover the perceived influence of relationships and the effect on student motivation to persist.

The questions pulled apart aspects contained within the central and sub-research questions of the study. Questions 1, 2, 3, and 4 were designed to capture a replica of participant

background concerning educational experiences. These questions were important to illuminate participant upbringing and attitudes towards professors and education. The purpose of these questions was to establish a trusting atmosphere and develop rapport between the researcher and participant (Patton, 2015). Question 3 explored the familial aspect of education and the influence that the family has on the student. Research shows a secure connection between family involvement and academic achievement (Gustafsson & Yang Hansen, 2018). Question 4 was an endeavor to discover intrinsic motivation within students. Relationships established between the professor and student represent a significant component of the interpersonal background, and when students are personally connected with their professor, motivation and persistence are more likely to ensue (A. Martin & Collie, 2016).

Questions 5, 6, 7, and 8 focused on the premise of positive PSRs. The research concluded that positive relationships with adults are the single most important ingredient in promoting positive youth development (Brinkworth et al., 2018). Question 6 investigates qualities that favorite professors possess. Positive PSRs are influential relationships that shape student academic success, motivation, and persistence (Hansen, 2018). Question 7 was intended to pull out any characteristics that students feel make professors remarkable. Students are acutely aware of professors who invest in them and are sincerely interested in their success (Bacon & Stewart, 2019). Question 8 can be positive or negative depending on the interpretation of the student, and it is an important question to be asked when examining the potentially detrimental effects of a negative teacher–student relationship. If a student encounters a negative school experience, he has a higher potential to be disengaged and unmotivated. Research indicates that more than 40% of students experience the phenomenon of a lack of motivation and persistence due to a negative teacher–student relationship (J. Myers, 2012).

Question 9 was very similar to Questions 3 and 6 but was done with purposeful intent to establish credibility. One method of establishing credibility in research is through repetitive consistency. Consistency can be evoked by reiteration in different terms of what is most important to the student in a relationship with a professor and gives a complete understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Question 10 revealed pre-conceived attitudes regarding professor approachability, which can have a positive or negative influence on learning and motivation (Brooks & Young, 2016).

Question 11 pertained to the quality and quantity of interactions between students and professors. The question was directly related to teacher immediacy and presence and the research sub-questions. This question also focused on factors that promote student motivation to persist based on positive relationships between professors and students (Alderman & Green, 2011; Sabol & Pianta, 2012).

Question 12 relates to the current world pandemic. In light of COVID-19, a shift in education was made to online instruction. This question investigated the “new normal” and how the dynamics of the PSR had to change to accommodate non-traditional learning.

Question 13 was designed to obtain information on another current issue about society today. Race and gender are influences that have an impact on relationship building between professors and students.

Question 14 was a measure of student perceptions on an educational barometer. It reflects their mindset towards the university and the value they place upon their education. The relationship between student ratings and learning has been addressed in studies that measure student achievement (Benton et al., 2013).

Questions 15 and 16 provided insight for improvement to bring about a more positive relationship and higher motivation in students. It elicited information on motivation tactics. An educator is the most influential person in the classroom and can provide an environment to support students in a positive way to increase learning potential (J. Myers, 2012).

Question 17 was a summarization of the research questions about positive PSRs and the influence the relationship has on student academic motivation. The impact of the PSR is the facilitator to nurturing student resilience and academic achievement (Hansen, 2018).

Question 18 pertained to the theoretical framework of this study and how well the student socially integrated through a relationship with their professor, which may influence the student's desire to persist in their education (Tinto, 1993).

Questions 19, 20, and 21 explored the intrinsic manifestation of the influence a positive PSR had on student motivation. Students recognize professors who care about them, and to please their professors, they are more likely to push towards academic success (Giesinger, 2012). Questions 22 and 23 are recap questions to capture any loose threads that the participant would like to clarify.

Written Essay

Using a qualitative approach, I analyzed written essays as to what students believed about their experiences concerning their relationship with professors and how that relationship motivated them to persist in their education (see Appendix G). The written essay was a critical piece of data that the participant completed within three days of the interview and submitted as an attached word document. I briefly discussed this essay with them at the end of the interview and gave them more detailed instructions through email at the conclusion of the interview.

The instructions were as follows:

Think about a professor who has made a substantial impact on your life. Consider academic influences of achievement as well as personal experiences that have enhanced your relationship. Give specific reasoning and examples as to how the relationship has motivated you and encouraged you to continue in your educational endeavors. Two terms to contemplate when writing your essay include effective (professors who were most successful in helping you learn), and characteristics (qualities a professor has that helps promote you to achieve success). In 500–1000 words, please write qualities you feel define an ideal professor and give a detailed explanation as to why you think they are ideal. Submit this document as a Word document attachment to the following email: thogan2@liberty.edu within three days. Thank you for your time and contribution to this important research project.

Data Analysis

The data analysis for this research study utilized van Manen's (1977) hermeneutic phenomenological design. Interpretive phenomenology studies a phenomenon and how it manifests and appears in the lifeworld (Lavery, 2003). The lifeworld is the world as it is lived and as it is experienced (van Manen, 2007). A hermeneutic or interpretive approach to phenomenological research involves a construct or an interpretive description of some aspect of the lifeworld (Heidegger et al., 1994). In this research study, the interpretation was the analysis of the PSR and the perceived influence on student academic motivation and persistence.

Max van Manen suggested six research behaviors to develop this type of hermeneutic phenomenological research (Vagle, 2018; van Manen, 2017):

1. Commit deeply to a phenomenon and choose something of interest.
2. Investigate the activity as it is being lived. The phenomenon involves real-life experiences and not conceptual ideas.

3. Reflect on the essential themes of the phenomenon.
4. Describe the phenomenon through writing the analysis of language.
5. Allow the phenomenon to teach something and learn from the phenomenon.
6. Think in terms of the part(s) to the whole when analyzing phenomenological research.

The research being conducted in this study identifies with all six of the research suggestions constructed by van Manen (1977). As the researcher, I began by committing to a phenomenon that I am passionate about and that I am interested in exploring in future research. During the data collection procedures of the study, I investigated the real-life experiences of participants in the study through an integrated demographic questionnaire, in-depth interviews, and written essays. I analyzed the transcripts using language and coding for themes. I allowed the phenomenon to teach me so that new concepts could be developed as a result of the research. I observed the study as parts of lived experiences, and on the commonality of individual students and their lived experiences as it contributes to the whole, creating the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

After coding and the development of themes, an analysis was completed of each questionnaire, recorded interview, and written essay. Coding is a term to describe how data are interpreted or analyzed through the eye of the researcher (Saldaña, 2016). As information was coded, emergent themes developed. Coding can be done in multiple ways and is very subjective. I chose to manually code each piece of data following the transcription of interviews and written essays through the use of multi-colored sticky notes and labels. Also, I used Microsoft Word to code my transcripts. I downloaded a Word Macro program and extracted code from my document using macros which enabled me to put the new document into an Excel spreadsheet. From there, I was able to filter the code based on the number of times it appeared to develop the

category or theme. Keeping in mind the hermeneutic circle, I continually moved between smaller and larger units of meaning to determine a holistic meaning of the phenomenon (Lengyel, 2018). While coding, I constantly referred back to my research questions to ensure the coding was answering the original questions (Thomas, 2006). Information was synthesized to find patterns to develop the research further and to discover answers to the research questions. I was the main instrument of data collection, and all information was kept organized through my own methods of notetaking.

Research findings were accurately reported, and information was kept secure and confidential. After coding, I reviewed and revised to identify emergent themes. The information collected from the interviews was triangulated and analyzed. The triangulation method used in this research study incorporated three data collection methods, including questionnaires, interviews, and written essays. By utilizing multiple methods of data collection in a study, the quality of the research increases, and the value of the data rises in reliability (Rhineberger et al., 2005). The transcribed interviews were given to each participant to complete member checks for accuracy (see a sample transcript in Appendix F).

As the questionnaires, interviews, and written essays were analyzed, I synthesized my personal experiences to enrich the result-findings and find connections that existed. I integrated all gathered information from the data collection process and created an analysis to interpret how the parts contributed to the evolving and the understanding of the whole (van Manen, 1977). At this point in the research, I objectively pieced in my personal experiences to complete the circle of hermeneutic phenomenology.

Trustworthiness

For a study to be considered trustworthy, data analysis must be precise, consistent, and systematizing, as to disclose the methods of analysis with enough detail to determine credibility (Nowell et al., 2017). Multiple steps were taken to increase credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Patton, 2015).

Credibility

Credibility is the first criterion that must be established. Credibility is what links the research study's findings with the reality to demonstrate the truth of the study findings (Noble & Smith, 2015). Triangulation and member checking are two strategies that were utilized to establish credibility. Triangulation involves using multiple methods in a triangular approach, which included questionnaires, interviews, and written essays to gain a complete understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Also, I incorporated memo coding in my data analysis. High-quality memo writing increases the credibility of the study and proves thoroughness, transparency, and honesty. Another way to establish credibility in the study is through member checking. Participants were given the opportunity to review the transcribed data analysis for accuracy of the findings. To maintain truthfulness, the study was authenticated and cross-examined. In this specific research, it was done through the students participating at each level of undergraduate studies. Through member checking by the participants, the research becomes more credible, and any misrepresentation of information can be rejected or modified (Candela, 2019).

Transferability

Transferability, akin to generalizability in a quantitative study, is the process of confirming external validity and evidence that the study's findings could be applicable to other

contexts, situations, times, and populations (Morse, 2015). Transferability was increased through the use of convenience sampling and snowball sampling to reach maximum variation in the sample. Participants from more than one university were involved in data collection through demographic questionnaires; therefore, this study had increased transferability. Intentional purposeful sampling (hand-picked participants based on demographics including gender, ethnicity, age, and major) increased the diversity of the study sample. If this study would be transferred to other demographics throughout the world, it would be interesting to see if the underlying themes remain the same, regardless of the population, culture, and geographical area.

Dependability

Dependability is the stability of data over time and conditions (Funder et al., 2014). For this study, dependability was established through mixed samplings of demographic questionnaires, followed by in-depth interviews and the collection of written essays. I incorporated a reflective journal in my research to assist reflexivity. I feel this is especially important in hermeneutic phenomenology research to keep my personal biases transparent when mixed with the collected data.

Being able to replicate a study in a different location is also a characteristic that defines dependability. I took steps to increase the dependability of this study so it could be easily replicated. By keeping organized records of all stages of the research, and a written record of my decisions, and the rationale behind those choices, a full audit trail is available to increase the dependability of the study (Baillie, 2015). Dependability is increased in this study because of the capability to replicate in any location given the methodological detail provided. Also, this study included the aspect of consistency, in accordance with hermeneutic phenomenological research design, because it is grounded in empirical and theoretical research (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Confirmability

Confirmability is used to verify the findings that are shaped by the participants and not the individual researcher. An audit trail was used in this research study to authorize confirmability (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Confirmability was addressed by concentrating on the style and tone of the participants and remaining neutral throughout the interview process to avoid biases. To maintain transparency of the process, organized research including transcribed notes, reflective journaling, research materials, and findings of the data was supported accurately to ensure an audit trail that is dependable and confirmable (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). In addition, to ensure confirmability, member checking was completed with transcribed interviews. Transparency of all research materials with participants and the IRB provides an accurate audit trail to promote confirmability.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were respected throughout this research study. Before beginning any collection of data, IRB approval was acquired. The IRB, also known as the human subject review board, is set in place to ensure the rights of participants in the study (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014). The IRB follows strict ethical principles and protects the rights of participants involved in research activity. Full written consent was gathered from each willing research participant before beginning research. Sensitivity to participant feelings was safeguarded to ensure the participants felt comfortable in answering questions. To avoid personal bias during the interview process, questions or comments that are leading, or eliciting, were excluded. The participant was given the right to withdraw at any time and for any reason. Researchers have an ethical responsibility to ensure trust, confidentiality, anonymity, and privacy (N. James & Busher, 2007). Anonymity, both online and written, was secured as not to violate

the confidentiality of the research participants who chose to complete the questionnaire, but not participate in the next phase of research (interviews and written essay). Those who volunteered to participate in the interview and write an essay were provided pseudonyms to protect confidentiality. Sites were also given pseudonyms to further increase confidentiality.

Participants were made aware of the ethical efforts to protect their privacy. Careful transcribing was done to substantiate no misinterpreted or exaggerated information. Upon transcribing interviews, participants had the opportunity to complete member checking for accuracy. I put aside biases when conducting the study, until suitable for application and integration, to avoid preconceived notions. Information collected from questionnaires, interviews, and written essays were used only for the sole purpose of the research project, and the participants of the study were adequately informed as to the intent of the data collection. As the researcher, I was ethical in terms of citing other individuals' work to give proper credit and to prevent plagiarism. The research I conducted was my authentic synthesis of collected data built on preexisting literature integrated with my research findings. To ensure security of paper and electronic documents, all documents will remain in a locked filing cabinet for three years, per federal regulations of IRB protocol. All electronic documents are password protected. At the conclusion of three years, all paper documents will be shredded, and electronic documents will be deleted.

Summary

Chapter Three included a description of the hermeneutic phenomenological design of the study that offered insight into the lived experiences of undergraduate students, and how their perceptions of relationships with professors influenced motivation and student persistence. Chapter Three also discussed the importance of the PSR as a determinant to achieve at a higher

level. The structure and procedure of the research study were also illuminated. The research questions, setting, selection of participants, step-by-step data collection procedures, and the researcher's role were also examined. In addition, methods of establishing trustworthiness were discussed, including credibility, dependability, and transferability. Lastly, ethical considerations were disclosed.

Professors have an incredible opportunity to have a positive influence on students by creating an environment conducive to learning. By establishing this type of culture within the classroom, an increase in student motivation to persist may result. Due to the problem of attrition, with over 60% of first-year college students not persisting in their education (Ishitani, 2016), positive relationships between professors and students are critical to combat the low retention rate.

Relationships between professors and students are the core of the university learning environment, and enhancing these relationships helps to improve student success. Retention of students can be established throughout their college experience if a meaningful PSR is established from the commencement of the collegiate journey. The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to describe how college students experience PSRs and the impact of these relationships on their motivation to persist in higher education.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to describe how undergraduate college students experience professor–student relationships (PSRs) and the influence of these relationships on motivation to persist in higher education. The central research question for this study asked, “What are the lived experiences of undergraduate college students pertaining to student–faculty relationships and the perceived influence on motivation to persist?” Tinto’s (1993) student integration theory provided the conceptual framework for this research. Chapter Four illuminates the participant perceptions of the research questions. Findings from demographic questionnaires, interviews and written essays are examined, and the participants are given a descriptive voice to illustrate the phenomenon being studied. A synopsis of each of the research participants and their described perceptions based on demographic questionnaires, interview recordings, and written essays are presented in the results section which also includes theme development and answers to research questions. Also, a general overview of the experiences and an analysis of the triangulation of data are analyzed. Lastly, themes are presented from the research findings and a concluding summary.

Participants

Following IRB approval (see Appendix A), the participants in this study were contacted and selected from four-year accredited institutions from the United States and globally. To obtain a diverse selection, snowball sampling through social media was utilized, as well as purposeful sampling through Listserv obtained from several professors at the chosen research site. A mixed participation pool was easily secured through these two avenues. In this section, a portrait of each of the 10 participants, including the uniqueness considering their educational backgrounds,

experiences and perceptions, and opinions regarding the influence of PSRs on motivation to persist to graduation is discussed.

Vivian

Vivian is a third-year college student attending a university in the northeast region of the United States. She is currently studying Human Development and Family Science and is also completing a concentration in psychology with a minor in statistics. She attends school on-campus and is heavily involved in campus-wide activities. She is also the president of the junior class. She comes from a large family and has attended public school her entire life. She is very optimistic about school and enjoys learning and being around others. She is the oldest of five siblings, and a first-generation college student from both sides of her family. During the interview, she recalled several highlights throughout her educational journey and noted that she is a “self-starter and has an intrinsic love of learning.” One positive experience she recalled from college was presenting a research project with her professor at a large conference. She stated that the process helped her to realize that she is “interested more in the research side of helping people versus the clinical side.” She worked collaboratively with her professor and developed a strong bond and claimed that he was instrumental in helping her define her career path.

Belle

Belle is also attending a university in the northeast region of the United States and is beginning her second year of college. Her major is Early Childhood Education. Even though she is just beginning her sophomore year, she is almost halfway finished with her degree since she was dual-enrolled her senior year of high school and earned almost an entire semester of credits. Her parents have always been very involved and influential concerning her education; her mother is a teacher, and her father is a doctor. She said her parents have always highly valued

education and she has learned a strong work ethic from them. She also plays on the women's soccer team at her university and is a very involved on-campus student. She mentioned during the interview that sports are a huge part of college life, and she sometimes finds it difficult to get her academics completed with the heavy time commitment that is required when playing sports at the collegiate level. However, one of the things that keeps her motivated is the content of her classes. She has almost completed all of her general education requirements and is beginning to delve into courses within the realm of her major course of study. She stated, "The courses I have enrolled in play a huge role in my motivation. I am motivated to learn about the information to retain it, rather than just studying the content to regurgitate it for answers on a test." Belle is a hard-worker and a high-achiever and has maintained a 4.0 GPA thus far.

Riley

Riley is a junior at a college in the midwest portion of the United States. She had a diversified, intercultural educational career and attended public school, private school, and was also homeschooled. Riley was born in Turkey and moved to central Asia. She began her education in a village in Asia where there was no access to an English-speaking school. She is currently attending a small, public college about an hour from her home. She is an English Education major and is a very polished, effective communicator. Her interview and essay, alike, provided valuable insight into the study. She has been fortunate to have the support of her close-knit family throughout her educational career. Both of her parents are teachers in a public-school setting. Riley has developed resilience through all of the transitions in her life. She attributes her effective communication to the various cultures she has been exposed to throughout her life. One of the comments that struck me during her interview was in referencing one of her favorite professors: "I don't necessarily remember much of the content, even though he was an excellent

teacher and communicator, but what I do remember are the great activities he created to teach the content, and how his class made me feel.”

Rhema

Rhema is a graduate of a private university located in central Pennsylvania. She was awarded a degree in History and is currently an employed alumna by her university. She maintained a 3.85 GPA throughout college and graduated magna cum laude. She attended public school all of her life, until attending a private university. Rhema considers herself an introvert and was not involved in any extracurricular activities while in high school or at college. She has many family members who are alumni of the same college including her parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and several cousins, so her motive for attending that particular school was through association. She explained, “My family strongly influenced me to attend there, and growing up I was on campus many times, so that’s what college was to me.” During her time in college, she had professors who became very close because of the small, close-knit school community. She stated that “everyone there seemed like an extended family.” When describing an essential characteristic of an excellent professor she said “passion” is a must. “If a professor has a passion for what they do and what they teach, it will spill over into all other areas of life.”

Eva

Eva is a newly graduated student from a private university in the northeast. Her degree is in social work, and she is currently employed full-time. While Eva was at college, she was heavily involved in the school’s social work department as the prayer chaplain and was on the leadership team as part of the mentor program. Eva had many positive experiences with professors from her college. She referred to her professors with the following accolades:

I truly don't know if I would have stuck with the social work department because I was so unsure if I had the skills necessary and if I was capable. I think if it weren't for them (my professors) being such a positive influence and encouragement, prompting growth and understanding, and having an outlet to go to comfortably and talk to about some of my struggles, I probably would not have graduated or be where I am today.

Liv

Liv graduated with a bachelor's degree in social work from a private college in northern Pennsylvania. Before attending college, she attended public school for her elementary and secondary education. While at college she maintained two part-time jobs; one was in the social work department as an administrator and the other was a student trainer. Also, during her time at college, she studied abroad for one semester doing social work in Lithuania. Liv's parents were highly influential in her pursuing a college degree, and both of her parents have bachelor's and master's degrees. One of the highlights of Liv's education was a macro presentation for a local food bank. After her presentation, one of her professors came up to her and had tears in his eyes and said, "I am so, so proud of you!" Hearing those words from one of her favorite professors was a highlight of her academic experience. While at college, another very influential professor who had a profound influence on Liv's life was a professor who always had an ear to listen, and Liv commented that it was an "unspoken fact that you could go into her office with a concern, and she would always have a box of tissues ready, along with some chocolate, and would clear her schedule to be available to listen."

Wyatt

Wyatt is a senior in college at a private, church-affiliated school in mid-state Ohio. He attends school on-campus and is majoring in Sports Management. He is a triplet and his two

sisters also attend the same school. Wyatt grew up attending a private Christian school where his mom was a teacher. He is thankful to attend a university where professors and students alike have similar beliefs. His motivation in attending college revolved around finding a Christian school close to home that would accommodate his special needs sister, so he could attend with her. He is very close to his sisters, and his parents and they have all had an impact on him in deciding the best college for him to attend. One highlight of attending a small Christian university is the close-knit community on campus. Wyatt stated, "Going to a small Christian school has its advantages and disadvantages. One of the benefits being that you can grow your relationship with professors and classmates because of the small class size."

Dylan

Dylan attended a large university in western Virginia. His degree is in Business Administration. During his first two years, he attended a small, private university as a commuter student. Following his transfer to a large university, his final two years were completed online. His interview was enlightening in the fact that his perception of his undergraduate studies differed from the other interviewees. While some of his experiences were positive, some underlying negative tones could be heard throughout his interview. He commented,

I did find it difficult to make those connections in a lot of my classes because I didn't have opportunities to meet with professors or see them outside of class because I commuted to school and worked full-time. Same with my classmates. So that part of college was disappointing because I felt like I was missing out on the "college experience."

Megan

Megan attended a medium-sized university in southeast Florida. She is a recent graduate, as of last May, and is currently working in a Christian school as a fourth-grade teacher. Her undergraduate degree was in Elementary Education and she is currently starting classes for her master's degree. While attending college, she lived off-campus with other students attending the same college. Megan has a very outgoing personality, and has always done well in school and maintained a high GPA. She said that the professors at her school "stressed the importance of building rapport with their students." She also commented, "Having professors who showed a vested interest in student success made me want to do my best work." However, Megan said that even in classes with professors who did not show a high level of rapport, she was still motivated to do her best and succeed because she loves to learn and is an intrinsically driven individual.

Sara

Sara is studying abroad attending all four years at an accredited Bible college in Greece. Her motivation in attending the international school stemmed from her family who lives overseas in that area. She is unique in the fact that her education, since the beginning, was very diversified. She alternated throughout her elementary and secondary education between public school, private school, and being homeschooled. Her longest period of time at any one particular school was three years. Sara can speak two languages fluently and is semi-adept in a third. She has learned extreme resiliency due to many changes and challenges in her personal life and schooling. Sara's university has been a godsend in her life. She said she finally feels like she has found "where I belong" and commented that her professors have "positively impacted my life in many ways other than just academically." Coming from a family with two teachers as parents, both with master's degrees, Sara was taught from a very young age the value and the importance

of education. When she began attending her college, she had no intention of staying all four years. Her original intent was to obtain a “certificate of completion” which is awarded after the first year. However, when she realized the college was helping her to thrive in so many different areas of her life, she decided to complete all four years and is currently a second-semester junior. She is very grateful for the opportunity to be enrolled at her university; her closing statement of her interview was, “College is a game-changer for me. I don’t think I would be where I am today if the professors weren’t so proactive in the relationship building.”

Results

In this section, the process of triangulating data through the utilization of demographic questionnaires, transcribed interviews, and written essays to formulate themes is discussed. The purpose of the triangulation of data is to answer the research questions guiding this study. The study was initiated through the distribution of integrated demographic questionnaires (IDQ). The IDQ also served as a valuable piece of data as further confirmation of answers and perceptions discovered during the interview process and essay writing. Next, one-on-one interviews were conducted. Despite the pandemic and the inability to meet in-person, having the opportunity to use ZOOM and “see” participants made it easier to make connections. After each interview, participants were instructed to complete a written essay. Directions regarding the essay were given verbally at the end of the interview and sent through email. The essay increased the credibility of the study by reiterating what was said in the interview and giving participants the opportunity to add new thoughts and clarify omissions. The results of this study demonstrated that PSRs have a substantial influence on a student’s motivation to persist in their education to the completion of a college degree. Participants reiterated the same verbiage throughout the

integrated demographic questionnaires, interviews, and essay writing, giving the research study validity.

Theme Development

Transcribed interviews and essays were coded manually using printed documents with color-coded labels and then transferred to a digital format utilizing Microsoft Word macros to narrow down into categories and themes. Also, data were triangulated by processing the information obtained from the IDQs to obtain a diversified participant pool. The questionnaires were examined to understand the multiplicity of research participants. Brief perceptions could be gathered from the questionnaire as well as background educational demographics of each individual before the interview process began. Below is a table of the questionnaire results.

Table 2

IDQ Results

Integrated Questions	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. Throughout my educational journey, I have had many positive experiences.	0%	0%	10%	10%	80%
2. I enjoy academics and consider myself a life-long learner.	0%	0%	10%	60%	30%
3. I can recall negative experiences that have occurred throughout my educational journey.	0%	0%	20%	50%	30%
4. I usually have a difficult time adapting to change and new situations.	0%	60%	40%	0%	0%
5. I put a lot of effort into classwork and homework assignments.	0%	0%	10%	50%	40%
6. I am most happy when I am with a group of friends.	0%	0%	30%	40%	30%
7. I prefer to learn new concepts and ideas rather than group settings or projects.	0%	30%	30%	20%	20%

8. I enjoy getting to know my professors on a personal level.	0%	0%	10%	60%	30%
9. Developing positive relationships with professors makes me more motivated to excel.	0%	10%	10%	40%	40%
10. I have experienced one or more phenomenal professors that have positively impacted my life and have inspired me to pursue my goals.	0%	10%	0%	20%	70%
11. I value my education and place a high priority on learning.	0%	0%	10%	30%	60%
12. I consider it a privilege to attend an institution of higher learning.	0%	10%	0%	10%	80%
13. Faculty approachability is important to me.	0%	0%	10%	50%	40%
14. Knowing that my professor wants me to succeed makes a difference in my educational career and personal life.	0%	0%	30%	20%	50%
15. From my college experience, I feel that I am the catalyst in reaching out to professors in getting to know them and establishing relationships.	0%	50%	20%	30%	0%

From the questionnaires, a sampling of participants was chosen based on the year in college, major, ethnicity and gender, and answers to questions based on a five-point Likert scale (see table above and Appendix D). The questionnaires helped obtain information to use as a foundational piece of data in which to select participants for one-on-one interviews. A significant underlying perception discovered from the IDQ was concerning the importance of attending an institution of higher learning. Interestingly, the participant who scored this question lowest did a majority of his studies online. Likewise, in the interview, the lack of immediacy that participants felt was clarified because of being an online student due to the pandemic.

By extracting the code using the macros, I was able to produce a table to give a visual representation of developing categories which further emerged into themes. I then transferred

this information to an Excel spreadsheet which enabled me to filter specific codes and categories, making saturation apparent. By using the conceptual framework outlined in the literature review, I was able to compare and contrast my research findings to the conceptual framework to narrow the code into more defined categories that produced patterns to develop into themes. In addition, by using my research questions as a guide to steer this study, I was able to develop categories of meaning (see Appendix I). Statements portrayed in the IDQs, interviews, and essays were organized into categories and then reduced into overarching themes. The Central Theme (CT) is, “Professor influence on student motivation to persist.” Three sub-themes also emerged: (1) Professor influence on intrinsic and extrinsic learners; (2) Caring, Approachable, and Passionate (CAP) professors and student goal attainment; and (3) Professor–Student Relationships (PSRs) and student integration.

Themes and Research Questions Responses

Central Theme (CT)

Professors can have a profound influence on student motivation to persist. The central theme of this research is concerning the influence professors can have in motivating students and helping them become integrated into college life. The degree to which a student becomes academically and socially integrated is parallel to their desire to persist in their education. The central theme developed through the exploration of the central research question, “What are the lived experiences of undergraduate college students pertaining to student–faculty relationships and the perceived influence on motivation to persist?”

The lived experiences of undergraduate college students presented similarities and differences; however, when concerning PSRs, the underlying influences on motivation to persist were repeated throughout the research study. Several categories that emerged during coding

which influenced motivation, persistence, and relationship quality included a student's chosen major versus general education classes, the size of the school/class-size, the personality of the student (introvert/extrovert), teaching pedagogies, family influences, the value a student places on education, demographics, traditional versus online students, the extent to which professors are invested in their students, opportunities for faculty contact, and the approachability of the professor.

Students expressed that professors in their major course of study were typically more passionate about the content, which in turn, had an impact on the students. Also, classes in a student's major made it easier to connect on a more personal level due to smaller class sizes, repetition of professors for various classes, and more in-depth content. According to Rhema, when referencing her classes, she said,

I felt motivated to succeed in my history classes since that was my major. I enjoyed those classes the most, and I wanted to learn and retain the information, not just spit it back out for a test. So especially, the classes in my major were the most interesting and motivated me to succeed.

According to Megan, there were more opportunities to take an active role in learning in smaller classrooms over the passive lecture-style found on many large college campuses. Good teaching pedagogies and activities were also demonstrated in smaller class sizes. She recalled a time when she had to teach a lesson/unit to her classmates in one of her education classes that made the content come to life. She was learning about the development of teaching across the curriculum thematically. She explained,

I decided to do a baseball theme. I wore an entire baseball uniform, cap, pants, jersey, and brought a bat and ball. I taught cross-curricular with the baseball theme and

incorporated a story, math relating to baseball innings, the history of Babe Ruth, etc. It was nice that every student had the opportunity to present their thematic unit, and I really enjoyed the creativity of my classmates.

If Megan had been at a large university with class sizes upwards of twenty-plus students, the active role in learning would most likely not have been possible. The size of the school influences relationship development. Deducting from the answers given by participants in this study, it can be inferred that the bigger the school and class size, the harder it would be to connect, and the less of a chance to build relationships. In smaller classes, there is more of a chance for one-on-one contact. As stated by Eva,

I didn't really have the chance to get to know my professors very well in my gen-ed classes. The classes were bigger and there wasn't a chance to meet one-on-one. Like my professors that were in the social work department, we would meet for lunch or during office hours. And if my professors in my gen-ed classes didn't initiate the relationship, I didn't have the time to go out of my way to foster that.

Another interesting facet in PSRs pertained to the personality of the student. This unexpected category emerged, and it became apparent that more introverted students did not experience as close of a connection to professors as their more extroverted counterparts. When discussing professors who do not foster relationships, more introverted students would probably not make the effort to reach out to establish a relationship. Fortunately, in Eva's case, since she is an introverted student and prefers being left alone, it did not bother her that one of her professors in her major course of study did not try to cultivate a relationship with the class on a deeper level. Eva said, "It didn't bother me much that the professor didn't reach out. I am an intrinsic

learner as well as an introvert, so I prefer communicating through email anyway, and prefer to solve things on my own.”

Family influence also played an important role in cultivating relationships with professors. Students who had parents who placed a high value on education tended to seek out opportunities to succeed and advance in their studies. Interestingly, many of the participants in this study came from a family with at least one parent who is an educator. Two participants had both parents in the educational field. When asked about family influence concerning college and motivation, Dylan answered,

My mom was an elementary school teacher. She always said that school is very important and instilled the love of learning in me at a very young age. She helped me with my homework and school projects and said to be thankful for the opportunity to go to school. Both my immediate and extended family attended college, so growing up it was like the “unspoken requirement.”

The value the student places on their education, in addition to family influence, can be a key factor in their motivation to persist. According to Eva, the value she placed on her education changed her perspective after studying abroad. She said,

The value I place on my education has definitely changed since studying abroad. I just face life differently now. My education is even more important to me now, and I am thankful for the privilege I have of getting a degree and going to school.

Sara has strong ties to education with both of her parents being teachers, and her family influence has a huge impact on the value she places on her education. During her interview, she commented,

With both of my parents being teachers, college was a requirement. It was something I grew up with and knew that it was a must. My parents always talked about how important education is and how I should be grateful to have the opportunity to get a college education.

Wyatt also said his family influenced his education. His mom was a teacher and always set schoolwork as a priority in his household. Also, his extended family would always ask about what college he was going to attend and always showed an interest in his education since many of his family members also had college degrees.

My immediate and extended family has always shown an interest in education and placed a high priority on obtaining a college education. My parents, especially my mom, have always promoted getting good grades and helped me with my homework, and encouraged me to do well in school and to always give my best. Also, my extended family was a huge impact and I had aunts, uncles, and cousins who went to the same college that I went to.

According to Megan, her family was supportive but also became the deciding factor of where she would attend college for financial reasons. She could not financially afford college without the help of her parents who set the criteria in place when she began to search for an institution to attend. Due to her parent's stipulations, her choices became limited; however, she commented that it was in her best interest:

My family has always been very encouraging and supportive of my education, but my parents told me when I started to look at different colleges to attend, that they would not help me financially if I decided to go to a secular university. They limited my choices, but I was leaning towards a private school anyway. I went to a very small, private

Christian school in elementary, middle, and high school, so I don't think I would have been very comfortable at a large state school.

Other students in the study were offspring of alumni and had additional family members who attended the same college, so they attended college with full support. Rhema commented,

My family is one of the main reasons I chose to go to [Kings College]. I had a bunch of family members who went there as well, starting with my grandfather. So many alumni from my family including grandparents, parents, older siblings, aunts, uncles, and cousins. So that was just the "expected" thing to do once I graduated from high school. It's always been a part of my life by association.

Demographics concerning the size of the school also influence the development of PSRs. Sara felt very comfortable at her college and in the relationships that she had established with faculty. She said,

If I were at any other school, I think I would feel very subconscious when approaching a professor with a question or concern. I think I would be hesitant to ask anything at all. However, at my college, I feel confident in asking any question because the professors have built an environment that is conducive to learning, and they have really taken the opportunity to get to know students on an individual basis.

Another interesting aspect regarding PSRs, which has become more prevalent in the past six months is traditional schooling versus online learning. Due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, a shift to online instruction has taken place across the globe. Some of the biggest complaints which surfaced in the shift to online instruction were the lack of face-to-face interactions as well as delays in feedback and communication. Liv recalled the shift to online instruction and said,

It is definitely more difficult to have classes online. Since it isn't live like in a traditional classroom setting, you just have to watch videos or read the content, and it loses the human interaction and the ability to connect with professors. It is also harder to edit papers and assignments since there is no immediate feedback like in a traditional setting.

Losing the personal touch of immediate responses and feedback can cause a delay in communication and inhibit relationship building. One student stressed how important timely, positive feedback and notes of encouragement were to keep him motivated. Dylan said,

By writing notes on exams and providing words of affirmation, such as "excellent work," or complimenting by saying "I appreciate all the time and effort you put into that assignment and you're doing a great job." All of these words kept me motivated and encouraged.

Without immediate feedback and face-to-face instruction, motivation and persistence are difficult to maintain.

Theme One

The type and personality of the learner will determine the extent to which a professor's influence motivates. The first theme answered Sub-Question One which asked, "How does the quality of faculty–student relations influence motivation to persist in undergraduate college students?" The research showed evidence that students were motivated based on internal and external factors, and the quality of interaction with professors had an impact on motivation based on student personality and type of learner.

Faculty–student relations can be a factor in motivation in college undergraduate students. When a student feels comfortable in a classroom setting that is enhanced by trust and mutual respect, they are more apt to show vulnerability, and therefore, less inhibited to participate in

class discussions. Also, when professors take the time to show a personal interest in students and who they are as an individual, they become more motivated to persist. As Belle stated when speaking about impactful professors, “The most memorable professors were the ones in which I developed a personal connection.”

The development of faculty–student relations also depends on the type of learner and personality. An unexpected code that arose during this process was “intrinsic motivation.” Students who are intrinsically motivated and have a love of learning and a desire to learn will typically be successful and stay motivated regardless of professor interaction and relationship. However, it was found that if a positive relationship between the professor and student was cultivated, even in an intrinsic learner, learning would be enhanced, and the process would be more fluent. According to Vivian,

I am a self-starter and do not require much coaxing to be motivated. But I will say, that when I have a professor who makes me feel like more than just a number, like someone they want to see succeed in their class and get a good grade, it makes me want to put forth more effort and try my best to be successful.

Professors who do not reach out to their students can sometimes have a negative effect on students and they display subpar results as compared to a professor who has a more vested interest in the class. It was also found that students do not gain as much insight and knowledge from the class when the professors make no effort to connect with them on a personal level. Wyatt recalled a large general education history class where there was a discrepancy with the syllabus. When he confronted his professor, he answered him in a belittling way and gave him no desire to succeed in that class. He made no further attempts to connect with him throughout the remainder of the semester. Wyatt stated,

I feel like it's much easier to connect with professors in my major on a more personal basis. I remember a history gen-ed class that I had to take to get my history credits, and there was a conflict with the due date of the assignment on Moodle versus the syllabus. When I asked the professor about it, he said, "You should have already submitted that assignment." I tried to explain the discrepancy in the dates, and he wouldn't budge. Even though it said something different on the syllabus, he gave me a zero. I didn't get much out of that class from that day forward because I really didn't feel like trying.

Theme Two

Relationships with Caring, Approachable, and Passionate (CAP) faculty can provide the support and encouragement necessary for students to stay motivated and attain goals. Theme two answered Sub-Question Two: "How do faculty–student relationships influence student academic motivation and goals?" During the interview process, participant perceptions became evident and themes began to develop (see Appendix I). Words such as Caring, Approachable, and Passionate (CAP) were found to be qualities that effective professors possessed. CAP professors had a profound influence on student lives and gave them the motivation to persist to attain their goals.

What Does a Caring Professor Look Like? *Caring* was an underlying thread that was woven throughout the research findings. Professors who truly invested in their students and displayed a caring demeanor, in and out of the classroom, were professors who had a great influence on their students. If professors took the time to meet with students personally, whether that be after class or at lunch, it showed how much they cared and were vested in the emotional well-being and success of the student.

Caring professors, as described by Belle, referred to professors who “cared enough to connect on a personal level.” She continued, “I’ve had professors who have made a profound impact on my life because they deeply cared and proved I was much more than my academic success.” Sara was also in agreement regarding caring professors. She said, “The little gestures such as remembering names, mixing up teaching approaches, and providing the occasional surprise, such as a snack or treat, shows that the professor cares, and it really makes a huge difference.”

Professors are in a unique position with the opportunity to have a profound impact on the students they teach. Effective professors are not only competent about the content matter, but they are also capable of serving as a mentor to students at a critical time in their life when guidance is sometimes sought. Sara was going through a difficult time during her first year of college. She said, “It is commendable when professors care more about the wellbeing and success of their students rather than the importance of meeting a deadline.” She further explained,

Professors who want to see you succeed and make modifications for that to happen show that they truly care. During my first semester, I was having a lot of family issues and I confided in one of my professors as to why I did not complete an assignment on time. She was willing to work with me and gave me an extension because of what I was dealing with at home. This really meant a lot to me and I know that she truly cared about me as a student.

What Does an Approachable Professor Look Like? The *approachability* of the professor is another category that emerged during the data analysis process. If a professor is approachable, more learning will take place because students will not feel inhibited when asking questions or

clarification of content. Several students mentioned during the interview that it “depends on the professor” as to how the student feels about professor approachability. Students with repeat professors would be more apt to approach the professor with confidence since the relationship was already established. Students without inhibitions when approaching professors due to an established relationship were able to gain deeper understandings and find solutions to their questions and challenges. Also, class size plays a factor in approachability, with smaller classes providing more opportunities for interaction between professors and students. Smaller universities, hence smaller class sizes, promoted the approachability of professors. The frequency and availability of contact had a substantial impact on the relationship building between professors and students.

Approachable professors have a substantial influence on a student’s motivation to persist. If a professor is approachable, then students can bring concerns and questions without reserve. All the participants in this study attended a private school, which may have had an impact on the approachability of professors due to smaller class sizes. Rhema sang the praises of her professors and commented that “if I ever had a question or concern, I was able to go to my professors with the confidence that they would take the time to listen and discuss it with me.”

What Does A Passionate Professor Look Like? Another underlying thread was *passion*. The students who commented on a professor’s passion said that it was much easier to engage in the class and build a relationship if the professors were passionate about their job and the content they were teaching. It made it easier to retain the knowledge if they invested in their students and the “whole picture” of teaching. To them, it was not enough to teach the content alone. The passionate professors wanted to learn about their students and connect on a personal level, as well as teach course content.

Teaching with passion and enthusiasm will contribute to positive relationships between professors and students. Being knowledgeable of the course content is insufficient; an effective professor must know how to teach the content in a meaningful way through incorporating various teaching methods. As stated by Vivian,

I've had professors who were hard to follow. They were amazing as people, but terrible at teaching and articulating concepts. They had all the book knowledge and were competent in their field but conveying that knowledge through teaching was a different story.

Passion in teaching is vital in keeping motivation alive in students. As described by Vivian, "If a professor has a passion for the content that they teach, it is contagious, and students become engaged and they stay motivated."

Riley wrote about professors who had a substantial impact on her life. She discussed the importance of a professor who is passionate and how that characteristic engages students and helps them be more successful in the classroom. Having this type of ideal professor helps students attain their goals:

If I have a professor who is personally vested in me and shows an interest in who I am, the work I do, and a genuine concern for me as a whole person, then it motivates me to do well. Passion is contagious. Professors who are passionate about what they teach, make a fire around them for others to catch.

Riley also shared during her interview that professors who have clear expectations are pivotal in her success in attaining goals: "Clear instructions and communication are essential, assuming the professor has already assessed what the students need, and what they already know." Based on

those assumptions, the ability to articulate what is expected is essential for successful learning to occur and for goals to be attained.

Wyatt appreciates when professors are fluent. He commented,

I really appreciate professors who have clear expectations and don't alter the syllabus without making sure the students are well informed. Communication is so important, especially now with online learning due to COVID-19. I don't like unexpected "surprises" that could result negatively on my grade. Professors who communicate clearly about what is expected, even if it is online through emails instead of face-to-face, are appreciated.

Professors who invest in their students will foster engagement and motivation in and out of the classroom. Students who develop a personal connection with professors stay motivated and are encouraged directly and indirectly to attain goals. As expressed by Rhema,

When a professor voices care and concern for their students, and genuinely expresses how much they want them to achieve their goals, and how much they want their students to succeed, I believe the student will want to succeed more and do their best to put in their most exemplary work for their assignments.

A direct influence may stem from positive feedback and encouragement given by the professor. An indirect influence might be the positive feedback received over time which caused the student to develop an inner voice of confidence and persistence based on professor comments and attitudes. Dylan responded well to professors who gave words of affirmation and made the effort to give positive compliments. He said, "When I would get handwritten notes on exams saying that I did excellent work or even positive verbal communication and encouragement from

professors after class, it made me start to believe in myself and my abilities.” When Belle wrote about her most influential professor, she said,

The professors who have had the most profound impact on my life were the ones that cared about me personally and proved I was much more than my academic successes.

This encouraged me to pursue a degree of higher learning.

Throughout the research, it became evident that professors who are caring, approachable, and passionate provide support and encouragement for students to stay motivated. CAP professors make a difference, and these attributes are three of the most influential in providing the support necessary to help students maintain motivation to achieve goals. The results of this study proved that professors must wear many CAPs to be an ideal professor.

Theme Three

Faculty–student relations can help students acclimate to college life and integrate into the college setting. According to Tinto’s (1993) student integration theory, students who become integrated academically and socially into the college setting persist to completion of a college degree, and professors can have an influential impact on their integration. Theme Three provides the answer to Sub-Question Three, “How do faculty–student relations play an instrumental role in the social integration of undergraduate college students?”

Students can profit from the mentoring provided by professors. Professors can bestow knowledge upon students that they need for their course of study. They are an excellent resource to help guide and steer students in the right direction and to make the right choices along their career path. A professor–student mentorship can also help students integrate into the college setting. Eva experienced a positive professor–student mentorship when studying abroad in Uganda:

Professors who were mentors to me and provided a support system helped with the transition into college. When I studied abroad in Uganda, my professor fostered our relationship by showing her support, and she would FaceTime me every week to see how I was doing. Also, I was really struggling during my junior year and my professors encouraged me and told me to keep pursuing my major. This encouragement motivated me to continue in social work.

Riley had a similar experience with a mentor professor who helped her to shift her view. She was struggling with a class, but her professor provided the encouragement, mentorship, and support necessary to keep her motivated by providing real-life examples and remaining vulnerable so she could learn from her professor's mistakes:

I was really struggling with a math class, to the point of almost dropping the class. I got one of the first bad grades of my life and my professor could tell I was visibly distraught. She pulled me aside after class and said something profound that I have never forgotten. I wish I could remember the exact wording, but she was talking about making mistakes and having occasional failures that show us we are still human. She explained that those small failures can sometimes be a really good thing that can actually help you grow.

The importance of professors providing career mentorship cannot be undermined. Eva was confused at one point in her collegiate journey as to whether or not she was in the correct major. She was feeling overwhelmed and was struggling, but her professor provided encouragement and motivation for her to press on and continue with her major. The inspiration he provided helped her integrate more deeply into her program and kept her focused on her goal. She recalled her professor saying, "You have what it takes to do social work. You have the talent

and the passion, and you are equipped to do this. You have the skills to run small groups. Don't give up!"

Vivian also experienced the benefit of professor mentorship when she worked with one of her professors to do research. Her professor was able to mentor her and provide her with valuable feedback and an extraordinary learning experience. As a result of this mentorship, Vivian also found it easier to integrate academically and socially. Through this investment, Vivian gained important insight which guided her on a slightly different career path. She said,

I had the opportunity to present a "poster proposal" for a large conference. I did a research intern with my professor on pedagogical research involving family science. The conference confirmed in me how much I am interested in the research side of helping people versus the clinical side. Both are extremely important, but my personality leans more towards the research side.

Good teaching pedagogies, class discussions, and opportunities to connect with professors and other students in the classroom setting also support students in becoming integrated into the college environment. Professors who use alternate teaching methods, besides strictly lecture, can engage students on a level that provides a deeper connection to everyone in the classroom. Megan had an experience in one of her classes for her major that impacted her so much that she emulates similar teaching methods in her first classroom.

Instead of lecturing from a PowerPoint and taking notes, my professor simulated a book study. Before class, we would read a few chapters of the book. Then during class, the professor did a walkthrough of what a book study should look like for future students in my classroom. This experience gave me a first-hand understanding about what a book club should look like.

Faculty who find alternative methods of teaching and incorporate activities such as the book club gives students an advantage by providing a hands-on approach to learning. Most students engaged in this type of learning could recall the experience and retained the knowledge long-term. Professors who employ good teaching pedagogies help students to become integrated. By incorporating excellent questioning techniques, critical thinking skills will be inspired by valuing student opinions and perspectives. Professors and students who collaborate with a common goal will experience integration as the end result. This connection can be cultivated by valuing, respecting, and listening to students. Belle mentioned that professors who show an interest in student opinions and perspectives help to inspire critical thinking and a love of learning.

I had to take a class in philosophy and bioethics and both professors talked about some difficult topics, but they asked for our opinions rather than just lecturing. Because of their willingness to listen, I gained a lot from those classes that have stuck with me and challenged me to form my own opinions on tough topics.

Additional codes which emerged from the interviews and essay writings regarding characteristics of effective professors included the following: respectful, encourager, mentor, articulate, good listener, understanding, relational, loving, knowledgeable, wise, vulnerable, flexible, clear expectations, relevant feedback, organized, servant-hearted, resilient, patient, available, positive, friendly, engaging, upbeat personality, make personal connections, and has a genuine interest in student success.

Encouraging was a repeated word found in the research data. Liv stated that “professors who are encouraging help me to exude confidence and enable me to believe in myself and my abilities.” *Competent, articulate communicator* and *clear expectations* were also codes that

emerged from the research data and fell into the category of essential characteristics of motivation. A competent professor is a key factor in developing positive PSRs. According to Rhema, competent professors use “good teaching pedagogies to keep students motivated. Even if you don’t remember all the content from courses, you remember the activities used to teach the content.”

As described by several of the other participants in the study, professors who are motivating give *clear and timely feedback*. The importance of positive feedback and constructive criticism cannot be undermined. It is an essential feature in keeping students motivated. Dylan commented, “I appreciate professors who put time into my work and leave feedback and relevant comments.” One important comment made in an essay by Riley was as follows:

When students know exactly what is expected of them, why it is important, and what support systems are in place to help them succeed, they can put all of their time and energy into the meat of the work itself instead of floundering in the wording of instructions.

Summary

Research findings and analyses were presented in Chapter Four. The exploration of the vital PSR and the influence on motivation to persist became prevalent in the findings as the chapter unfolded. Each piece of data was triangulated, and themes were developed based on the research questions. Discoveries related to the influence of PSRs evolved. Many codes emerged regarding positive professor attributes, some of which included: *Caring*, *Approachable*, and *Passionate (CAP)*. Another noteworthy finding was the impact of class size. Students felt more motivated to succeed in smaller class sizes where professors had the opportunity to take a more personal interest in each student. Getting to know the students on a personal level and building

one-on-one relationships generally took place in classes related to the student's major course of study, where the class sizes were smaller. The answer to the central research question reveals the essence of the phenomenon which can be summated in that when students feel socially and academically integrated into the college setting, they develop a deeper connection with professors and persist in their course of study. These findings further validate the theoretical framework guiding the study. Integration is critical for students to accomplish their goals, and the establishment of a positive relationship with faculty can motivate a student to persist to graduation. The answer to Sub-Question One reveals evidence that students are motivated based on internal and external factors, and the quality of interaction with professors had an impact on motivation based on student personality and type of learner. Sub-Question Two was answered through research findings regarding caring, approachable, and passionate professors. CAP professors had a profound influence on student lives and gave them the motivation to persist to attain their goals. The third sub-question tied back to the theoretical framework regarding Tinto's student integration theory. A professor-student mentorship can help students integrate into the college setting.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

Professor–student relationships (PSRs) are an integral component of motivation in college students. Without the establishment of this vital relationship, students may not reach their fullest potential, or worse—fail to persist to completion of a college degree. Key elements necessary in the relationship are presented in this chapter, as well as a discussion of the importance of these relationships during a student’s collegiate journey. The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to give a voice to college undergraduate students and to describe how they experience PSRs and the influence on their motivation to persist in higher education.

Chapter Five provides an analysis and discussion of my research findings based on the participants’ perceptions, and brings a conclusion to the central research question, “What are the lived experiences of undergraduate college students pertaining to faculty–student relationships on motivation to persist?” The three sub-questions shed further light on this phenomenon. Findings are discussed in light of Tinto’s (1993) student integration theory, the relationship to the current empirical literature from Chapter Two, and the research findings defined in Chapter Four. Implications of the study are also presented, including delimitations and limitations. Finally, recommendations for future research are suggested.

Summary of Findings

A central research question and three sub-questions guided this research study. The next section expounds on the research findings concerning these questions, the existing literature, and the theoretical framework. These guiding questions obtained a perspective of PSRs and their relevancy on student motivation and persistence.

Central Research Question

What are the lived experiences of undergraduate college students concerning student–faculty relationships and the perceived influence on motivation to persist?

After analyzing the research findings from the questionnaires, interviews, and essays, I concluded that some students are greatly affected by a positive relationship with their professors. Likewise, a negative relationship can have a detrimental effect, possibly to the point of attrition. Some introverted students who are intrinsic learners may be affected by the PSR, and will still succeed. This realization became evident after several students repeatedly commented on the necessity of positive relationships, and how it greatly influenced their motivation to persist in their studies and pursue their goals. The answer to the central research question reveals the essence of the phenomenon which can be summated in that when students feel socially and academically integrated into the college setting, they develop a deeper connection with professors and persist in their course of study.

Sub-Question One

How does the quality of faculty–student relations influence motivation to persist in college undergraduate students?

Many students expressed a positive perception of their lived experiences regarding PSRs concerning motivation. However, some students in this study seemed indifferent to faculty–student relations and the influence on motivation to persist. The type of learner and personality can affect relationships between professors and students. It was recognized that students who were intrinsic/self-starters do not necessarily obtain their motivation from professors, but rather, from within. On the contrary, students who were more extroverted by nature were more inclined

to care deeply about their relationship with professors and thrived on positive feedback, connections, and interaction.

Another factor to consider is the students' major course of study. In a field such as social work, the quality of relationships must be congenial or the social worker will not progress with clients. Therefore, a student's major can also provide a direct influence on the quality of the relationship.

Sub-Question Two

How do faculty–student relationships influence student academic motivation and goals?

According to my research, the professors who were truly interested in their students and did not view them as a “number” had the greatest impact and inspired students to do their best and achieve their goals. Many of these students commented on the similar attributes of these professors by the demonstration of being caring, approachable, and passionate. Students portrayed their experiences, and each one had a different story to tell, yet underlying threads were woven throughout. It became evident that each student desires a mentorship-like relationship with professors who possess distinct qualities who can help them succeed. Some underlying characteristics found in positive PSRs included the following characteristics: Caring, Approachable, and Passionate (CAP).

On the same note, the students who attended smaller universities seemed to have closer relationships with their professors because of smaller class sizes. The smaller universities played a huge role in the development of positive PSRs. This does not mean that it is not feasible to cultivate positive relationships on larger campuses; in that case, it requires more effort and creativity. However, smaller class sizes enabled students to meet with professors after class, on campus for lunch, and other opportunities outside the classroom setting. Students felt more

motivated in smaller classes where professors took a personal interest in each student. Positive PSRs, when cultivated, stirred a sense of determination for students to be motivated in their studies and achieve their goals successfully.

Another important finding in this study was the comments made on the importance of feedback. One alternative in which professors can help students achieve their goals is through reinforcing positive interactions through feedback. This is an important aspect in the development of a meaningful, positive relationship. Clear, substantial feedback, given routinely, is beneficial in advancing students by generating motivation to meet their goals. The use of constructive criticism and positive reinforcement enables students to improve and grow to reach their fullest potential.

Sub-Question Three

How do faculty–student relations play an instrumental role in the social integration of undergraduate college students?

Faculty–student relations are an important component in the social integration of college students. Professors who exhibit teaching pedagogies that include Socratic style discussion and incorporate other creative teaching techniques, create a classroom environment that is conducive to learning and promote social integration of students. One student mentioned that when a professor shows vulnerability by teaching with life examples and experiences, then students are more apt to connect with the professor on a more personal level due to the relatedness. Another important aspect of social integration employed by professors is the use of a “no-judgment zone” where students are comfortable enough to participate in classroom discussions and activities based on the safe environment created by the professor. The manner in which professors conduct their classroom environment will lend itself to students being more assimilated to the college

setting, and more likely to engage in communication with the professor and other students, in and out of the classroom.

Discussion

Student perceptions regarding what they value in a PSR, as well as experiences pertaining to what gives them the motivation to persist, were revealed throughout the questionnaires, interviews, and essays. This hermeneutic phenomenological study portrays participants who shared lived experiences concerning the phenomenon of the vital PSR in relation to their motivation to persist. This section provides a discussion of the research findings through the lens of the theoretical framework, as well as an analysis of research as tied to the empirical literature from Chapter Two.

Theoretical Discussion

Tinto's (1993) student integration theory is the theoretical framework informing this study. Tinto's theory suggests that a student's desire to persist at a university is based on the extent of academic and social integration to the institution. The theoretical framework of student integration was supported by the study findings as a positive relationship established between students and faculty can have an impact on student integration, influencing their motivation to persist in the collegiate setting. In Tinto's (1993) model, it is indicated that students arrive at college with preexisting assumptions based on family upbringing, personal characteristics and traits, and educational experiences prior to college. While these preexisting conditions cannot be altered, a professor can build upon background circumstances and meet students where they are to provide a classroom environment that promotes success. Preexisting assumptions were analyzed in this research study through questionnaires, interviews, and written essays.

As the existing literature states, preexisting assumptions contribute to students persisting in their educational commitments or their decision to withdraw from college (Dwyer, 2017). Family influence is a preexisting component that contributes to a student's persistence and integration to college. The participants in this study described their family's influence in many ways. Some were first-generation college students who had family support but were the first to trudge through uncharted territory. While those students were backed by their families financially, the family could not empathize with their assimilation to college life. According to literature, first-generation college students need to be acclimated to the college environment as quickly as possible to retain them beyond their freshmen year and encourage persistence (Littlepage & Hepworth, 2016). To prevent attrition during their first year, professors need to implement creative teaching techniques to keep students engaged to become socially and academically integrated as they adjust to college life. A student's level of integration can be dependent on the initial acclimation to college life, both academically and socially (Tinto, 1975). The participants in this research study repeatedly commented that professors who made an effort to connect with them at the onset of the semester gave them the motivation they needed to succeed, as a sense of belonging was cultivated based on those interactions.

Other students in this study had relatives who were alumni of their institution and attended college with full support. Students who attended a university with an already established familiarity based on preexisting experiences had an easier time becoming acclimated. Their families offered first-hand support and guidance as they navigated their way through the already familiar college experience. The participants in this study said they highly valued their education and reiterated that their families placed a high value on education and encouraged them in their journeys. In this case, familial backing was a reinforcement in the integration of the

university. Tinto's (1993) integration theory suggests that important relationships are critical for successful integration to a student's college career. Students who become a part of the college climate are more likely to persevere. According to the theory, pre-entry attributes are in place before a student attends college. Family background, including education levels, family expectations, and social status all directly affect a student's initial commitment to an institution (Chrysikos et al., 2017). Therefore, family influence has a direct bearing on student integration prior to a student beginning his or her school career. These preexisting influences are crucial and a contributing factor relevant to the readiness of the student to acclimate to college and become integrated. The need for a sense of belonging and to feel valued by others can provide a sense of motivation, well-being, and positive outcomes in student achievement and persistence (Tinto, 2017). According to the participants in this study, family influence in some instances was the deciding factor on what institution to attend.

Students begin their collegiate journey with preexisting assumptions built upon previous educational experiences. These experiences were examined in the demographic questionnaire and at the start of the interview. Based on the research findings, students who were integrated into various academic and social experiences before college tended to integrate more effortlessly during their collegiate experience. After examining the demographic questionnaires and then analyzing the interview transcripts, it became evident which students were heavily involved in school activities before committing to college. These students, according to their interview responses, integrated seamlessly into the college setting because they were already integrated into their educational experience. Typically, this was a result of their extroverted personality, which aided in the relationship-building with professors and classmates.

The research gathered from this study further accentuates the relevancy of Tinto's (1993) theory of student integration. Professors who give guidance and help with more than strictly academics, such as mentoring and giving advice, clarifying student questions concerning their major, or advising with scheduling issues, support a student in helping them integrate both academically and socially.

An unexpected theme surfaced during the research study. Students who were intrinsically motivated to persist would do so with or without the prompting of a professor's influence. In some cases, the extent to which the student integrated due to an introverted personality was limited. However, if the students were intrinsic learners and had a desire to succeed, they would rise above the circumstances and persist based on their own merit. Tinto's (1993) student integration theory diverges from the research findings of this study in that intrinsic learners will succeed regardless of the extent of integration in the collegiate setting. Students at the K–12 level, as exposed by current literature, are motivated to work harder and reach their fullest potential when they have teachers that demonstrate an interest in their success and well-being (Bernstein-Yamashiro & Noam, 2013). Based on the findings of this study, motivation in this sense is also found at the collegiate level, but not to the same extent as K–12 findings. Current literature states that student–teacher relationships have more of a determinant on motivation at the K–12 level. The teacher is the most significant factor in facilitating motivation in students in Grades K–12 (V. Myers, 2012). If students are intrinsically motivated, having a professor who cultivates relationships with students will make it easier for the students to be successful; however, their success ultimately comes from within. Therefore, professors can make the experience easier and offer valuable guidance and direction if the student is willing to accept and be a part of the relationship.

The central argument of Tinto's (1993) notion of integration is that a student who is integrated both academically and socially will be more likely to persist in their studies to graduation. Students integrate into the college setting through formal and informal actions. A professor's concern should be cultivating positive relationships with students both formally, in the classroom setting, and informally, outside the classroom. The findings of this research study reiterated many times the importance of professors making connections outside the four walls of the classroom, as well as during the classroom setting. By doing so, students will be more likely to integrate socially and academically.

This study addresses a gap in the sparse research concerning PSRs and the influence on motivation to persist by giving college students a voice to validate the importance of PSRs and integration. Based on Tinto's (1993) theory, students may fail to integrate academically and socially into the college setting without the establishment of a PSR. Students who are intrinsically motivated may persist in their studies to graduation; however, some students may fail to complete their collegiate journey if they do not have CAP professors who promote integration through effective and influential characteristics. Sara, an extrinsic learner, commented, "This school was a game-changer for me. If the professors weren't as active in the relationship, then I probably would not still be here today." A professor can have a substantial impact on a student's integration and desire to persist in their collegiate journey.

Empirical Discussion

Existing research confirms the association between teacher-student relationships and motivation at the K-12 level (Lihong et al., 2018). However, there was limited research given to college students concerning their perceptions about professors who inspire them to be motivated to persist to graduation. This study confirms previous research regarding the importance of

positive teacher–student relationships for students at the K–12 level and extends to include college students. Professors can have a profound impact on a student’s collegiate journey. The existing research shows that genuine kindness exhibited by teachers in the classroom had a measurable influence on student success (Keller, 2018; Krane et al., 2017). In this study, it was repeated until saturation that professors who are caring, approachable, and passionate (CAP) inspire students to be motivated to succeed and attain their goals. Research is abundant regarding the importance of influential teachers at the K–12 level who demonstrate the ability to impact a student’s life positively and promote goals through well-planned content and objectives (Keller, 2018; A. Martin & Collie, 2016). Likewise, according to my research findings, college professors who are organized and creative in teaching methods can have a positive impact on student success and inspire students to accomplish their goals.

One characteristic that makes professors inspirational is respect. In the literature, respect is defined as a feeling of deep admiration for someone or something elicited by their abilities, qualities, or achievements (Celkan et al., 2015). This two-way street is critical in establishing relationships that nurture motivation and persistence. A professor who values the insight and opinions of students will have students who reciprocate the same. Respect is vital in any relationship and is dynamic in a PSR with a direct influence on student motivation to persist. The research findings of this study revealed that professors who have cultivated mutual respect are professors who influence a student’s educational journey and fulfillment. This essential characteristic, if nurtured, allows professors to make an exponential impact. One method in developing mutual respect with students is through various teaching methods that make the content engaging. The literature states that specific variables that lead to respect can include positive professor–student interactions and well-designed instruction (Sass et al., 2018). This

study validated the literature further because students confirmed that professors who are prepared, well-organized, knowledgeable, and passionate about teaching will gain a student's respect. Further substantiating a professor's role in gaining the respect of students is to have clear and precise objectives. College students need to know what is expected of them and have directives that are succinct. According to the literature, another important aspect of respect is listening. Mutual respect can flourish when the teacher–student relationship is developed through the attention received by listening (Thompson, 2018). In my research, a student said that he feels “mutual respect when a professor values their opinions, listens to their perspective and provides timely feedback.”

The importance of PSRs cannot be undermined. It can be a catalyst for a student to persist in their education, or the demise of a student to fail to persist. Current research examining relationships between teachers and students indicates that both positive and negative associations affect motivation and achievement (Roorda et al., 2011). From this study, college students expressed a decline in motivation or lack of desire to do well in a course if the professor was not understanding of their situation. One student discussed a conflict in the syllabus due date, but his professor would not investigate the issue. The student lost the motivation to excel in that class due to the lack of support shown by the professor. However, another student had a personal situation that she was dealing with and her professor offered her an extension. She became fully motivated to succeed in her class based on the positive interaction. The findings of this study demonstrated the support of evidence that student situations should be considered on an individual basis. According to existing literature, student motivation and engagement increases when there is a positive relationship established with the teacher or professor (Kittrell & Moore,

2013). Student emotions should be taken seriously because research strongly suggests there is a link between a student's emotional stability and achievement (Weber et al., 2016).

Student motivation can also be linked to the experience level of the teacher. When evaluating a teacher and his or her longevity, it can be noted from over 40 years of research that teachers who are confident in their teaching methods will produce competent, motivated students (Zee & Koomen, 2016). This was indicated in the findings from this study when several students reiterated that teachers who had established good teaching pedagogies made them feel more engaged in classroom discussions and inspired motivation to succeed. Quality instruction includes effort, planning, and time and is linked to a positive learning environment, which is a crucial factor in educational success (Al-Shammari, 2016; Darling-Hammond, 2014; Irlbeck & Pexton, 2017). As a result of my research, it was emphasized that there is a necessity in being organized and precise with what is expected of students throughout the course term to create quality instruction. By doing so, students are equipped and have the tools necessary to be successful and to accomplish their goals. There is no exception for quality instruction which is critical for successful learning at all grade levels.

A positive school climate, according to the empirical literature, also promotes connectedness through supportive and caring interactions between students and teachers (Hopson & Lee, 2011). The same is true at the collegiate level and interconnectedness between professors and students enables a student to progress academically towards the completion of goals. Participants from this study expressed appreciation for professors who create a welcoming environment that is conducive to learning. This type of environment makes integration more successful. When students feel a connection to their professors and develop a sense of relatedness, they integrate into the college setting more readily. According to the literature, a

sense of relatedness will be reinforced in an environment that supports interaction between students (Zepke, 2017).

The existing literature also discusses classroom management as an important component in maintaining a positive classroom environment. Classroom management in higher education entails the professor guiding students using variable teaching methods to obtain specific objectives and goals (Ahmad et al., 2017). One of the primary findings of my study was concerning a professor's passion for teaching. When professors are passionate about what they are teaching, and about teaching in general, good classroom management is a by-product. By obtaining successful classroom management, students will be able to achieve their goals and higher levels of academic success (Zusho, 2017). This will help to secure a student's persistence to complete their college education. Students are more apt to contribute to classroom discussions and participate when they are in classrooms where they feel comfortable and uninhibited. When there is an increase in positivity between the professor and student, classroom engagement is prevalent (A. Martin & Collie, 2019).

The empirical literature also focused on professors who failed their students because of a lack of confidence in them, not making connections, or being ambiguous. Negative relationships can have an adverse effect on student learning and motivation of students at the K–12 level (A. Martin & Collie, 2019). My research echoed the importance of having connections and celebrating successes. One student stressed how important positive feedback and notes of encouragement were to keep him motivated. Feedback given on a timely basis is crucial in developing student academic integration. Small gestures such as timely feedback and positive words of encouragement can go a long way. By incorporating these methods and listening to the voice of college students, a successful outcome can be achieved.

Learning how to improve negative encounters can affect the overall outcome of student achievement (Brinkworth et al., 2018). Avoiding potentially negative situations by being proactive in planning can make all the difference. Many educators were forcefully thrown into an online teaching platform because of COVID-19. Due to the current pandemic, online instruction has become more of the norm than the exception. While it is more difficult to make personal connections in distant education learning environments, it is not impossible. Traditional versus online learning was another issue concerning PSRs that were examined in the empirical literature and this research study. Approximately 25% of students have taken at least one online course, and this number continues to grow rapidly (S. James et al., 2016). Students who feel their teachers are interested in them as an individual are more likely to show satisfaction with their school experience (Giesinger, 2012). When dealing with online instruction, this presents more challenges, but teachers can still show an interest in students through face-to-face ZOOM meetings, pre-recorded videos, and an increase in email messaging.

Professor immediacy is essential in developing positive PSRs. Immediacy is an interpersonal communication skill that promotes readiness, beneficial communication, and reduces the perceived distance between the teacher and students. It is an essential factor in facilitating an effective learning experience between professors and students (Beckowski & Gebauer, 2018). Professors who make a conscious effort to be present, despite distance education or traditional learning, can aid students in becoming integrated as described in the theoretical framework guiding this study. While establishing immediacy is more challenging in an online environment, it can still be accomplished through the use of well-crafted instructional videos which can add a personal touch to an otherwise impersonal environment (Ramlatchan & Watson, 2020). Students also suggested that professors who made themselves accessible virtually through

added contact information such as text and voice calling helped the students to feel a connection, regardless of the virtual barrier.

Whether online or traditional, cultivating motivation requires intentional, well-thought-out interactions and feedback. These exchanges have been found to influence student motivation positively (Trolan et al., 2016). These interchanges are true regarding K–12 or for students at the collegiate level. Motivation, and the direct influence on the PSR, is a key concept reviewed in this study. The motivation of students can be displayed in many different forms. Findings from this study revealed different approaches. One approach is to take a personal interest in each student by letting them know they are valued. Also, showing respect and compassion, being knowledgeable and well-organized, as well as prepared, are all characteristics that college students appreciate. Being approachable as a mentor and educator is another element that increases motivation in students. The exchanges that affect motivation positively such as approachability, campus interaction, and a caring attitude, were traits that were prevalent in this study as well as the current empirical literature (Trolan et al., 2016). Also, teachers who are accessible, approachable, and friendly possess the characteristics that increase student motivation (van der Heijden et al., 2015). Current literature suggests that students will be more motivated and engaged when the content is relevant (Farr-Wharton et al., 2018). In this study, professors who made course content relevant had students who retained the knowledge much longer than short-term memorization for an exam.

A detrimental effect on a student's motivation can be brought about by a professor's lack of involvement or lack of personal investing. A student deficient in motivation, coupled with an uninspiring professor, equals a dangerous permutation. It is difficult to engage and thrive in an unmotivating atmosphere. Upwards of 40% of students are disengaged in the classroom due to

lack of motivation; however, there is evidence that the teacher–student relationship influences student motivation to achieve at a higher level (A. Martin & Collie, 2016; J. Myers, 2012). Similarly, a lack of engagement can result in lower motivation and contribute to mediocre academic performance and integration at the collegiate level as well. If a student does not become assimilated academically, then disinterest in the course content is a primary reason for students leaving the institution prematurely (Lerdpornkulrat et al., 2018). Student success is parallel to motivation which can be cultivated by dynamic teachers (Opdenakker et al., 2012). A professor can mentor students through this type of situation. A few of the students interviewed for this study mentioned that because their professor guided them and gave them advice concerning their major course of study, they did not drop out. Professors need to take advantage of opportunities to help students get on the right path to the successful completion of their collegiate journey, and ultimately, a great start to their future career. Other factors that can contribute to student attrition include a student’s level of academic preparedness, the mode of study (residential versus online students), the year of their university study (first-year students have a higher attrition rate due to outside influencing variables), and the extent to which they participate in outside activities, such as work or sports (Dwyer, 2017). My research findings demonstrated that students who are integrated academically and socially, being inspired by excellent, influential professors, can thrive as they finish their education. Professors who help their students develop an important mindset to persevere with passion and persistence are instrumental in helping students achieve their goals (Duckworth, 2016). After analyzing information from the demographic questionnaires, as well as several of the key questions concerning this topic in the interview process, one thing became evident. Putting aside background information that cannot be altered, it was found that students require specific

attributes from professors to be successful. From my research, I learned that a professor must wear different types of CAPs, which is an easy acronym to remember explaining the key qualities effective professors possess. If a professor is Caring, Approachable, and Passionate (CAP), then a student will be much more likely to exhibit motivation and persist in their studies. Engaging students in the classroom and providing ways to connect and academically integrate can strengthen the likelihood that a student will persist in his or her education.

Another key concept in the existing literature concerned academic self-efficacy, and this is related to the new research findings in this study as well. An unexpected category emerged from the research. It was found that self-motivated students tend to succeed regardless of professor influence. Consequently, if a professor is not inspiring or motivating, but a student is self-motivated and an intrinsic learner, then the student will most likely still succeed. According to current literature, self-efficacy, or confidence in performing academic tasks, is relevant to consider regarding the persistence mindset (Zajacova et al., 2005). In this regard, students would not necessarily be more motivated and persistent even if they had a professor who exuded the qualities of being caring, approachable, and passionate. Professors who exhibit the CAP qualities will make it easier to be motivated extrinsically; however, intrinsically motivated students will most likely succeed regardless of external factors.

The degree to which the student is motivated, whether intrinsically or extrinsically, can be altered by the professor and the climate of the classroom. A teacher at the K–12 level might have more of an impact externally; however, professors still have a profound influence because regardless of college students being self-sufficient learners, they can still be motivated by well-cultivated relationships with their professors. According to literature, students who are intrinsically motivated to persist, and actively cultivate a sense of belonging and self-efficacy,

correspond with first through second year retention rates (Baier et al., 2016; Brady-Amoon & Fuertes, 2011). As a result of this positive relationship, students may be more prone to have the tenacity to continue in their education. A professor has the potential to be a life-changing instrument in a student's life. Research demonstrates that an effective teacher consistently promotes kindness, admires student achievements, and cultivates genuine and mutual respect (Keller, 2018; Krane et al., 2017). A professor who demonstrates these qualities, regardless of a student's personality being introverted or extroverted, will help a student develop determination and continue to completion of a college degree.

Life-changing teachers in grades K–12 have certain attributes that surfaced in the empirical literature. The characteristics these teachers possessed included respect, guidance/wisdom, and inspiration (Uitto et al., 2018). Love and understanding were also notably discussed. The prominent characteristics identified in my research concerning effective professors at the collegiate level were caring, approachable, and passionate. A caring professor also shows love and understanding, so the necessity of these characteristics carries through to the college level just as it is necessitated in students at the K–12 level. Life-changing teachers are deeply respected within the classroom and have established credibility consistently. Professors have an opportunity to be a life-changer by establishing a positive classroom climate conducive to learning that will promote the academic and social integration of students. Findings in the empirical literature about the relational qualities between K–12 teachers and students mirrored the findings from this study and extended the research to include undergraduate college students. The characteristics and attributes necessary to foster motivation and persistence are parallel no matter what the grade level.

Implications

From a practical standpoint, this research study was intended to provide college professors with a deeper understanding of the substantial influence that a PSR can have on student motivation. For this reason, the findings of this study have practical implications for institutions of higher education, specifically to professors and students, as well as the university. All have vested interest in the well-being of the higher educational institution for varying reasons. The professor can structure a classroom environment to support students in a positive way to increase learning potential. This will in turn promote a desire in undergraduate college students to be persistent in fulfilling all degree requirements (Tinto, 2017). The university will benefit from having top-notch professors who will help students integrate and result in higher retention rates. By uncovering the results of this study, professors can be made aware of what contributes to a positive PSR, so the best possible outcome for each student will be achieved. The results of this research, if put into practice, will also benefit the institution in its entirety.

Implications for Faculty

The results of this study were consistent with previous research indicating that positive teacher–student relationships are necessary and have an influence on student motivation. As a result of this study, it can be concluded that the necessity of positive relationships, as it affects student motivation, extends to the collegiate level. More students will persist to graduation if they are taught by caring, approachable, and passionate (CAP) professors. Professors can create environments conducive to learning. Research suggests that positive relationships influence educational outcomes. A student who is comfortable and engaged will take more risks and be productive in the learning environment (Uitto et al., 2018). To offer support for academic integration, professors can create an environment that is enriching, welcoming, and safe. They

can also arrange study sessions with students and provide feedback on assignments and exams, and by other means of communication such as emails. By offering simple gestures, professors can also connect informally with students outside the classroom to support the social integration of students. These gestures can include a personal greeting by name on-campus in passing, at lunch, or arranging a meeting during office hours. Professors can also help students integrate socially by attending sporting events that the student is involved in as well as other extracurricular activities. All of these things are indicators of the social integration of students which makes students more likely to persist in their education (Tinto, 1993). Professors have the unique opportunity to foster relationships and create positive experiences to help students assimilate into the academic and social life of the college setting by creating connections both in and out of the classroom. Engaging students and providing ways to connect will help a student academically integrate and persist (Tinto, 2017). By investing in each student and showing a genuine interest, the PSR will flourish.

Another concrete way to nurture positive relationships with students is through good teaching pedagogies. Students will naturally care about what the professors know once they know how much the professors care. Professors need to set high goals and expectations for students to help them achieve (Keller, 2018; A. Martin & Collie, 2019). Also, professors who develop mutual respect by listening and valuing the opinions of students and incorporating their perceptions into the content being taught will inspire meaningful learning. It was evident through the comments made by participants during interviews and written essays that students recognized professors who did more than teach course content. The professors who made a difference cared enough to learn about each student and discovered what motivated them to learn. A great educator can transfer knowledge clearly and articulately. Lecturing is an excellent platform for

auditory learners, but visual and kinesthetic learners need variations such as PowerPoint presentations and group projects. However, all types of learners benefit from clear expectations. This is another important aspect concerning PSRs involving clearly communicated expectations.

Seeking to understand what students are trying to convey, and developing a sensitive listening ear, personifies a caring professor. Sometimes this requires an adjustment in office hours to accommodate student schedules. Instead of having set office hours every day from 3–5 p.m., maybe a morning time slot would be more compliant with the schedules of some students. Having accessible office hours will not go unnoticed and will speak volumes to students in showing the sincerity and depth of how much a professor truly cares. These are all implications professors must consider if striving to develop positive relationships with students.

The development of relationships with students who are introverted by nature can be another implication for faculty. By cultivating a welcoming classroom environment, students will be more apt to come out of their shell and lose inhibitions. To promote further, professors should be mindful of putting students in uncomfortable situations. For example, when assigning group projects, various apps can be used such as TeamShake or Class Dojo to pick random groups. This way, an introverted student is not put in an awkward situation of having to pick team members for a group project. Getting to know students on a first-name basis and being attentive to details are other things that foster positive relationships.

Another implication concerning faculty at research institutions is the obligation to produce publications for tenure or promotion. If this is a fundamental requirement of the institution, it needs to be revisited pertaining to the time restraints of cultivating positive PSRs. If such requirements result in the scarce amount of time to build relationships and provide student mentorship, then universities need to revamp the tenure criteria to include an element that

promotes student mentorship. Boyer's model of scholarship endorses four types of scholarship for promotions or staff appraisal including (1) basic research or extension of knowledge, (2) scholarship of integration across disciplines, (3) scholarship of engagement or evaluation by peers, and (4) the scholarship of teaching and learning (Boyer, 1996; Renwick et al., 2020). When examining the four principles of Boyer's model of scholarship, the idea of adding the element of promoting student mentorship falls under principle three. As an alternative of an evaluation by peers, professors could be evaluated utilizing IDEA student rating of instruction survey forms completed by their students, or some other type of evaluative student rating instrument (Medina et al., 2019). An IDEA survey form is a useful, evaluative tool used in higher education to provide constructive feedback to professors based on student ratings of instruction. It is aimed to improve the quality of instruction by students giving feedback based on their direct course experiences. This tool can be useful in providing faculty with pertinent information to guide and strengthen the delivery of instruction. Utilizing evaluative tools such as the IDEA student rating of instruction would enable professors to acquire more time to focus on the mentorship aspect of their job as well as complete additional requirements necessary to obtain tenure or promotion.

Implications for Students

It is primarily the professor's responsibility to foster a relationship with students; however, when the professor falls short of accomplishing a key prerequisite to enhancing a positive classroom environment, there are some steps students can take to ensure the desired outcome. Students should have an open mind and be willing to foster relationships with their professors by having a positive attitude, adhering to assignment deadlines, participating in class discussions, and asking questions for clarification of content. Good professors breed good

students; however, the aforementioned characteristics are practical suggestions for students to advance positive relationships cultivated with faculty.

High school seniors should be made aware of universities that hire professors with the characteristics discussed in this research study. When deciding the best institution to attend, this piece of information is critical and could have an impact on student success and persistence. Several websites offer information regarding professor performance at universities such as “Rate My Professor,” “Uloop,” “Rate Your Lecturer,” and “Koofers” to help students make an informed decision about their college of choice. This is also a critical aspect considering the academic and social integration of each student. If the findings of my research were implemented, eventually institutions of higher learning would be revamped, and the professors who are employed “only to make a paycheck” would be eliminated.

Students can profit from career mentoring provided by professors. Professors can bestow knowledge upon students that they need for their course of study. They are an excellent resource to help guide and steer students in the right direction and to make the right choices along their career path. When students are in a classroom with like-minded classmates, with professors who guide and direct their course of study through mentoring, advising, and supporting, they tend to be successful and attain their goals. The flip side of this can take place if students have professors who exhibit negativity or lack of personal interest in students. According to current literature, students who experience negativity from a professor may develop a lack of motivation to pursue goals, which could lead to student attrition (Brinkworth et al., 2018; J. Martin, 2017).

Positive relationships with faculty is critical for students in terms of recommendations for future job prospects. A professor can be the bridge for students between a college education and real-life employment. Connections held by professors could provide the missing link that

students need upon graduation to venture into full-time employment. Students can benefit from letters of recommendation provided by professors for future job opportunities.

Implications for Higher Education Leadership

Positive PSRs are an important facet that has a bearing on the educational institution and affects the overall school climate. If it becomes understood that there is a high standard on the importance of PSRs, then universities will have an increase in school enrollment as well as a comprehensive satisfaction of the college experience. The Human Resource department of universities should highly consider examining this research so the best possible candidates can be hired that will promote positive PSRs. When examining the results of this study concerning the most important attributes found in influential professors, the results proved that professors must wear many CAPs to be an ideal professor. When hiring a candidate in higher education, the interviewers should formulate questions to draw out indicators of the following attributes: caring, approachable, passionate, respectful, encourager, mentor, excellent communicator, articulate, good listener, understanding, relational, loving, knowledgeable, wise, vulnerable, adaptable, flexible, clear in expectations, organized, servant-hearted determined, resilient, patient, available, sincere, well-spoken, friendly, engaging, and has a genuine interest in student success.

Implications for higher educational institutions surround the importance of positive PSRs which include hiring candidates with the abovementioned attributes. It is also important to examine faculty course load to ensure professors are not too encumbered and have time and availability to meet with students to mentor on an individual basis. Administrators who are proactive in course load scheduling will take the initiative of meeting student needs through the prospect of allotted time for mentorship relationships.

Delimitations and Limitations of the Study

Qualitative research by nature has inherent limitations because of the subjective component of research. As the researcher, I am the main tool for the research analysis, so I was careful to withhold personal biases as outlined in Chapter Three. Due to the subjective nature of the research, I was careful to promote accurate findings through careful transcribing, detailed coding, peer review, member checking, and reflective notes throughout the data collection and analysis process.

For this study, several delimitations were set in place. As the study evolved, an increased focus was placed on recent graduates within one year since students who freshly graduated had a fuller perspective of PSRs and the influence on motivation to persist. Underclassmen did not have as rich of a perspective because they were just beginning their collegiate journey and were not necessarily enrolled in courses specific to their course of study. After analyzing research data of the first few participants, it became evident that the students who were already upperclassmen or recently graduated had a deeper, thicker perspective on the importance of PSRs and how it directly influenced their motivation and success. Therefore, after making this realization, the rest of the participant pool came from recently graduated students through purposeful sampling.

Delimitations were also made regarding the type of study, and a phenomenological study was chosen because the essence of the study involved the lived experiences of college students and their perceptions on how PSRs influenced their motivation to persist. Since the purpose of a phenomenological study is to make sense and understand the meaning of people's lived experiences, this was best suited for this type of research.

Limitations of this study revolve around the type of school being studied. It was not until the conclusion of the study that it became evident that every participant was from a private

university. The selection process from the main research site, as well as participants obtained through snowball sampling, all attended small, private universities. After deciding to select seniors or newly graduated students, the remaining selection pool only included these criteria from private universities. This may skew the results somewhat in the areas of “approachability” as well as “frequency of contact” due to class sizes found in smaller universities. The selection criteria set forth at the beginning of the study did not designate whether or not the university had to be private or secular. The criterion was that the participants had to be an undergraduate student at a four-year accredited university or a recent graduate within one year.

In addition to the size and nature of the school, only two of the participants in this study were White males. Even though snowball sampling utilizing social media was employed, this was the end result. By creating participant selection criteria to be more diverse with gender and ethnicity, a different perspective on PSRs and the influence on motivation to persist may be discovered.

Recommendations for Future Research

As suggested in the limitations of the study, this research could have different results if the participant criteria were based on a selection from large, secular universities rather than smaller, private universities. A future research study could involve the importance of smaller class sizes in terms of relationship-building between professors and students. On the same note as smaller class sizes, a study could be conducted involving the necessity of general education classes due to the difficulty of connection building between professors and students as in comparison to connections made in classes involving the student’s major course of study. Also, a future study on college dropouts would be interesting to see if the PSR had an influence on a lack of motivation to persist.

The studies listed above would be best suited to a phenomenological study to examine the experiences that occur when studying undergraduate college students in light of PSRs. The study would still be focused on the participant's experiences, but the research site would be changed. The second study would also be best suited as a phenomenological study because it is examining the lived experiences of college students concerning class size and PSRs. However, the research on the importance of class size could also be examined using a qualitative case study approach, comparing students at larger universities and larger class sizes to smaller universities with smaller class sizes. The necessity of general education courses could be best researched using a quantitative approach due to the broad scope involving many participants. An interesting study for future research could also involve examining PSRs and the influence on motivation in traditional versus online learning. Due to the current pandemic, universities have shifted to an online learning platform, so this research would be contemporary and relevant to what students are facing currently. Another recommendation for future research could investigate how intrinsic learners are affected by PSRs, and if the relationship is as much of a necessity considering personality and learning style. Lastly, future research could investigate faculty perspectives on overloading in teaching and service causing a lack of deep mentor relationships with students due to time constraints. This is an issue needing to be addressed by higher education administrators.

Summary

Professors have the opportunity to be atmosphere changers. The dynamics of the classroom environment are in the hands of the professors and it is up to them what they do with it. Professors who are caring, approachable, and passionate (CAP), as well as those who employ good teaching pedagogies, are the ones who make a lasting impact. The age-old adage, "Students

don't care how much you know until they know how much you care," stretches across all grade levels and pertains to kindergarten students as well as college graduates. To truly make a difference, professors must have a mix of the qualities discussed in this research and have the heart to make a difference in the lives of their students.

Being cognizant of individual student needs will make all the difference. There is a story entitled "The Star Thrower," written by Loren Eiseley, about a little boy and a starfish that illustrates how a monumental task can be broken down to make a difference in a single starfish. This story parallels the difference that professors can make by building positive relationships with students.

Once upon a time, an old man was walking along a beach after a big storm. In the distance, he sees a young boy moving towards him, bending over every few steps to pick something up and toss it into the sea. As the boy comes closer, the old man sees that he is carefully picking up each starfish and throwing it back into the water. The turbulent waves of the storm left hundreds of starfish washed up on the sand. The man goes up to the boy and asks, "What are you doing?" The boy said, "I'm putting these starfish back in the sea. Without water, they will die." "But there's hundreds and hundreds of starfish on the beach. How can you make any difference?" The boy bends down, picks up another starfish, and tosses it into the sea. Then he said, "It made a difference to that one." (Van Heugten, 2011, p. 128)

Professors have hundreds and hundreds of students over a period of time, and each student should be viewed as a unique individual with offerings that no one else can bring to the world. Professors who recognize the individuality of students and truly believe in the importance that their position entails will build relationships with students that will have a profound

influence. By incorporating the essential characteristics discussed in this research, professors can make a difference in the lives of each student and give them the desire and motivation to persist in their studies and other areas of life. One professor might not be able to change the entire world, but at least a small part of the world can be changed for someone. To that one student, just like that one starfish, eventually, it will make a world of difference. It is my hope, as the researcher, that the findings of this study will reveal the importance of PSRs, and that each professor who reads this research will strive to make a difference –*one student at a time*.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: IRB Approval

Date: 7-27-2020

IRB #: IRB-FY19-20-465

Title: PROFESSOR-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS AND THE PERCEIVED INFLUENCE ON MOTIVATION TO PERSIST IN UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Creation Date: 6-22-2020

End Date:

Status: **Approved**

Principal Investigator: Tammy Hogan

Review Board: Research Ethics Office

Sponsor:

Study History

Submission Type	Initial	Review Type	Limited	Decision	Exempt - Limited IRB
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Key Study Contacts

Member	Tammy Hogan	Role	Principal Investigator	Contact	thogan2@liberty.edu
Member	Tammy Hogan	Role	Primary Contact	Contact	thogan2@liberty.edu
Member	Lucinda Spaulding	Role	Co-Principal Investigator	Contact	lsspaulding@liberty.edu

Appendix B: Request to Conduct Research

Email Request for Participation of Research Site: Kings College and Department Chair

4/5/2020

My name is Tammy Hogan and I am a Ph.D. candidate at Liberty University. I am approaching the data collection phase of my dissertation and would like to ask for your permission to conduct research at Kings College. I was formally an Adjunct Instructor in the Education Department in 2016, and I also was the Admin at the Early Learning Center until its closing last May. My research topic is “Professor-Student Relationships and the Influence on Motivation to Persist in Undergraduate Students.”

Kings College is my first choice for research. I am seeking Liberty University IRB approval and Liberty will not grant IRB approval until my proposed research site has approved my research. If granted, I will need a letter stating approval on Kings College letterhead. Due to the current state of the world pandemic, I realize this may have to take place through online platforms, rather than face-to-face interviews and other data collection methods.

I look forward to hearing from you about the possibility of conducting my research with Kings College students in the Education and HDFS department. Please feel free to contact me via phone or email at your convenience if you have any questions or would like to discuss my research in more detail.

Warm Regards,

Tammy Hogan, M.Ed.
Ph.D. Candidate, Liberty University
thogan2@liberty.edu

Appendix C: Informed Consent Document

Consent

Title of the Project: Professor-Student Relationships and the Perceived Influence on Motivation to Persist in Undergraduate Students

Principal Investigator: Tammy Hogan, Ph.D. Candidate, Liberty University

Invitation to be part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be 18 years of age or older and be enrolled as an undergraduate college student at a four-year accredited university, or a recent college graduate within the last year. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take the time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to describe how undergraduate college students experience professor-student relationships, and the influence of these relationships on motivation to persist in higher education. This research study is projected to provide educators with a deeper understanding of the influence that relationship may have on student motivation to persist.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. Complete this consent form with signature and date and then fill out a demographic questionnaire. This should only take approximately 10-15 minutes of your time.
2. If chosen to participate as a result of the demographic questionnaire, I will schedule an interview that will take place online utilizing ZOOM. This interview will be recorded due to transcribing purposes and will take approximately 45 minutes. After the interview is transcribed, you will have the opportunity to read over the interview results to ensure accuracy.
3. The final task will be a written essay consisting of approximately 500-1000 words and will need to be submitted via email within three days of the interview.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study, however, your insight could help educators better understand the significance of professor-student relationships.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

- Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of the study, but pseudonyms will be assigned to protect the confidentiality of participants and the research site. Interviews will be conducted online in a private setting to ensure others do not overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted. To obtain security of paper documents, all documents will remain in a locked filing cabinet for three years, per federal regulations of IRB protocol. At the conclusion of three years, all paper documents will be shredded.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will be compensated for participating in this study. Chosen participants will receive a \$25 Amazon gift card in exchange for their valuable insight on this topic. Email addresses will be requested for compensation purposes; however, they will be pulled and separated from your responses to maintain your confidentiality.

What are the costs to you to be part of the study?

There will be no cost to participate in this research.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or Messiah. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Tammy Hogan. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [REDACTED] and/or thogan2@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Lucinda Spaulding, at lsspaulding@liberty.edu.

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy of the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record/video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

Appendix D: Integrated Demographic Questionnaire and Results

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Age: _____

Gender: _____

Ethnicity: _____

City & State of home address: _____

Family size: _____

What type of schooling did you have prior to college? 1. Private 2. Public 3. Homeschooled

Name of college: _____ Accredited 4-year? Yes or No

Year in college: _____

Major: _____

Current G.P.A.: _____

Current number of credit hours completed: _____

Do you live: On-campus / Off-campus with other students / Commute from home? (Circle one.)

Are you involved in any sports or other extra-curricular activities? _____

Approximately how many hours per week do you spend doing those activities? _____

Please circle your answer to the questions below based on a 5-point rating scale:

1=Strongly Disagree 2=Disagree 3=Neutral 4=Agree 5=Strongly Agree

Question 1. Throughout my educational journey, I have had many positive experiences.

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Neutral	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree
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Question 2. I enjoy academics and consider myself a life-long learner.

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Neutral	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree
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Question 3. I can recall negative experiences that have occurred throughout my educational journey.

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Neutral	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree
---------------------------	---------------	--------------	------------	---------------------

Question 4. I usually have a difficult time adapting to change and new situations.

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Neutral	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree
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Question 5. I put a lot of effort into classwork and homework assignments.

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Neutral	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree
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Question 6. I am most happy when I am with a group of friends.

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Neutral	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree
---------------------------	---------------	--------------	------------	---------------------

Question 7. I prefer to learn new concepts and ideas rather than group settings or projects.

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Neutral	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree
---------------------------	---------------	--------------	------------	---------------------

Question 8. I enjoy getting to know my professors on a personal level.

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Neutral	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree
---------------------------	---------------	--------------	------------	---------------------

Question 9. Developing positive relationships with professors makes me more motivated to excel.

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Neutral	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree
---------------------------	---------------	--------------	------------	---------------------

Question 10. I have experienced one or more phenomenal professors that have positively impacted my life and have inspired me to pursue my goals.

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Neutral	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree
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Question 11. I value my education and place a high priority on learning.

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Neutral	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree
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Question 12. I consider it a privilege to attend an institution of higher learning.

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Neutral	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree
---------------------------	---------------	--------------	------------	---------------------

Question 13. Faculty approachability is important to me.

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Neutral	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree
---------------------------	---------------	--------------	------------	---------------------

Question 14. Knowing that my professor wants me to succeed makes a difference in my educational career and personal life.

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Neutral	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree
---------------------------	---------------	--------------	------------	---------------------

Question 15. From my college experience, I feel that I am the catalyst in reaching out to professors in getting to know them and establishing relationships.

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Neutral	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree
---------------------------	---------------	--------------	------------	---------------------

Question 16. Is there anything you would like to elaborate on regarding professor-student relationships or your experiences in higher education?

Thank you for taking the time to fill out this questionnaire.

If you would be willing to participate in the next phase of this research study which involves an interview and written response, I would like to extend compensation in the form of a \$25 Amazon gift card in exchange for your valuable insight. If you are willing to continue in this study, please provide your email address below:

Thank you!

Questionnaire Results

Integrated Questions	1=Strongly Disagree	2=Disagree	3=Neutral	4=Agree	5=Strongly Agree
1. Throughout my educational journey, I have had many positive experiences.	0%	0%	10%	10%	80%
2. I enjoy academics and consider myself a life-long learner.	0%	0%	10%	60%	30%
3. I can recall negative experiences that have occurred throughout my educational journey.	0%	0%	20%	50%	30%
4. I usually have a difficult time adapting to change and new situations.	0%	60%	40%	0%	0%
5. I put a lot of effort into classwork and homework assignments.	0%	0%	10%	50%	40%
6. I am most happy when I am with a group of friends.	0%	0%	30%	40%	30%
7. I prefer to learn new concepts and ideas rather than group settings or projects.	0%	30%	30%	20%	20%
8. I enjoy getting to know my professors on a personal level.	0%	0%	10%	60%	30%
9. Developing positive relationships with professors makes me more motivated to excel.	0%	10%	10%	40%	40%
10. I have experienced one or more phenomenal professors that have positively impacted my life and have inspired me to pursue my goals.	0%	10%	0%	20%	70%
11. I value my education and place a high priority on learning.	0%	0%	10%	30%	60%
12. I consider it a privilege to attend an institution of higher learning.	0%	10%	0%	10%	80%
13. Faculty approachability is important to me.	0%	0%	10%	50%	40%
14. Knowing that my professor wants me to succeed makes a difference in my educational career and personal life.	0%	0%	30%	20%	50%
15. From my college experience, I feel that I am the catalyst in reaching out to professors in getting to know them and establishing relationships.	0%	50%	20%	30%	0%

Appendix E: Interview Questions

1. In as much detail as possible, please describe your educational experience to this point, including demographics, academics, extra-curricular activities, etc.
2. How has your family influenced your educational journey?
3. Please tell me a highlight(s) of an academic experience throughout your school career, and if anyone influenced that highlighted experience.
4. Please describe an experience in your educational journey when you felt motivated to succeed.
5. If you have/had a favorite professor, please explain why he/she had such a positive influence on your life.
6. Have you ever had a professor who you felt was personally invested in you, and if so, how did that relationship evolve to make you feel that way?
7. What are three qualities that you appreciate about a professor, and why?
8. Please describe a scenario when a professor has said something (positive or negative) that has stuck with you and influenced your life, and decisions you made following were a result of their comment.
9. What do you think is the most essential characteristic in defining an excellent professor, and why?
10. Please describe how you typically feel when you approach your professor with a question or concern (confident, inhibited, etc.).
11. How do you feel about your quality, frequency, and availability of faculty contact, meaning the opportunities to connect with professors and strengthen your relationship with them (in and out of the classroom)?

12. Please describe, in light of the world pandemic due to COVID-19, the challenges presented in the shift of traditional to online instruction, and any obstacles you were confronted with regarding professor relationships during this shift?
13. Please describe any experiences related to race or gender you may have encountered throughout your educational career, especially in terms of relationship with faculty.
14. How important is your education to you, and how important is it that you succeed in your educational career?
15. What do you wish you could change about your education pertaining to your professors or academics in general?
16. How have your professors influenced or inspired you to continue your educational journey?
17. How have your professors demonstrated an interest in you as a person, and do they show delight and encouragement in your successes?
18. Please explain your motivation in attending college and if any of the professors at Kings College helped you to achieve and feel more motivated in and out of the classroom? Expound on your rationale for this question.
19. In the past, I remember having professors who I wasn't quite sure "how to read." They weren't making any effort to develop a relationship with me, so I had to reach out to them. Is there anything that you do to foster a relationship with a professor who might not make the effort himself?
20. I had to conduct interviews a few years ago for potential professor candidates, and one question I asked was, "What qualities or attributes does an effective professor

possess?” If you were interviewing candidates, what answers would you hope to hear from the potential professor?

21. Please describe a situation during your educational career that a teacher/professor made you feel positive and confident about yourself.
22. Please explain, in as much detail as possible, how you feel professor relationships may have influenced your educational journey?
23. Thank you for the time you dedicated to this research study. Please elaborate on any final thoughts.

Appendix F: Sample Interview Transcript

INTERVIEW WITH VIVIAN—August 25, 2020

Tammy (T)--In as much detail as possible, please describe your educational experiences to this point, including demographics, academics, extracurricular activities, etc.

*Vivian (V)--*I attended a public elementary and middle school, public high school. In high school, I was involved with lot of academics and was on the honors track... Cause we had three different tracks. I was involved with STEM club with a book club that did reading competitions and that was the biggest things that took up those most involved in high school. Okay. I am attending [Kings College] currently. I am a junior and this is my second year of co-leading a special interest house. Which is an on-campus house, where each house has a different theme. My house theme is with the college honors program, university honors program and I'm also on the leadership team for a theology club at my college. My major is currently human development and family science with a minor in psychology and a minor in statistics.

T: Oh, wow. that's really, diversified.

V: Yeah, I'm all over the place in my interests. I actually am thinking about switching my major to bio psychology or regular psychology, really still in the process of figuring that out. It's hard. I actually changed my major in between my sophomore and junior year.

I'll also add that this is my second year of being a research intern. It's a little different than a work study, but it's this similar concept of I'm working with a professor on different scholarly research projects.

T: Wow. That sounds interesting. You said this is your second year for that?

V: Yeah.

T: Okay, great.

T: *Question two. How has your family influenced your educational journey?*

V: I would say, they've definitely been encouraging and supportive, but I think that it's mostly been my own self-motivation as far as trying to achieve in school because neither of my parents have a college degree. I've been a straight A student so far and I think that usually it was me putting more stress on myself to do well versus them, but they have definitely been encouraging and supportive as far as wanting me to get the most out of my education and definitely supporting my decision to want to go to college. Also with financial support as well. That has definitely been a huge blessing and help because I don't think I'd be at the college I am at because my college is pretty expensive.

T: You do have a very busy life. So are any of your other, or any of your siblings, at the college level yet?

V: No, but the next, the next oldest sibling is my brother and he's entering ninth.

T: Okay. did any of your grandparents or anybody go to college or are you first generation?

V: I would be a first-generation college student in my extended family. On my mom's side. I have one uncle that got an undergrad and a master's. I think he had a master's.

T: So it sounds like you are a self-motivated, self-starter type of person. It's great though that your family has influenced as far as like the encouragement, like you said, and financially. Okay, great.

T: *Number three, please tell me a highlight of an academic experience during your school career and if anyone influenced that experience.*

V: I had the opportunity to present a “poster proposal” for a large conference. It's called National Council on Family Relations and it's national, plus internationals. I did a research intern with my professor on pedagogical research involving family science. Not like in front of people, but it was one of the sessions where there's a huge room full of posters, and then anyone can walk around and stop and ask questions, that type of thing. but it was really neat to just have the experience of going to that conference and seeing that how much research goes into, like the social sciences and different family theories. The conference confirmed in me how much I am interested in the research side of helping people versus the clinical side. Both are extremely important, but my personality leans more towards the research side.

T: Wow. congratulations on that. Very exciting.

V: Yeah, thanks.

T: *Number four, please describe an experience in your educational journey when you felt motivated to succeed.*

V: The first thing that pops in my mind for this question is when I was in high school. so even though I've gotten like good grades in high school, I felt very insecure as far as like science courses. I just felt like very insecure in my abilities to do science courses, but I had my chem professor in 10th grade and he made the chem class so enjoyable. He was really encouraging, and I just formed a really good student teacher relationship with him. He encouraged me to join the STEM club and our high school even had a drone team.

So I even joined that. In one particular instance, he told me that he was proud of me for something that I had done. And even though my parents have said that all the time, it was really meaningful coming from him because like he knew what I had done versus my parents. They just said it all the time regardless.

It gave me confidence in myself and my abilities and not to be afraid to take a science class.

T: Great! Alright. Number five. If you have had a favorite professor, please explain why he or she had such a positive influence on your life.

V: Oh, I've had multiple favorite professors. One professor for instance, has really been impactful to me because he's been so willing to just have conversations with—I've debated a lot of different career paths and a lot of different decision making in that regards. And even with classes, it was different things. And I think almost every semester, so far I've just been able to talk to him about it and he's been super helpful and willing to listen and give good advice and just kinda give a good perspective on the situation. And so I think just the willingness and sincerity of caring about me not just as a student, but as a person. And so I think that willingness to have a one on one conversation willing to listen and like help.

T: Super! Ok, Number six. Have you had a professor who you felt was personally invested in you and if so, how did that relationship evolve to make you feel that way?

V: I would say perhaps, The professor that I doing a research intern with because, just that I've been able to, since she's working on, like different projects, for instance, like last year I was helping research articles for the next textbook edition and she did the writing.

And so it just was really neat that I was going through articles and finding them so that it would make her research easier because then she wouldn't have everything to look through, but just like the ones that I thought were good.

T: I'm sure she appreciates that—that's a lot of work.

V: Yes, I think just the fact that, I was able to see firsthand that I'm helping and the fact that she would give feedback.

T: That's pretty neat. Yeah, that's a two-way street, she's invested in you, but you're also investing in her, by helping her with the research.

T: *Alright. Number seven. What are three qualities that you appreciate about a professor and why?*

V: I would say passionate because I think the best professors I've had are the ones that are passionate about what they're teaching, and they love it so much. If a professor has a passion for the content that they teach, it is contagious, and students become engaged and they stay motivated. And that in turn helps the class want to engage better. Then secondly, I'd say caring, because caring about students and not just there for just teaching because it was the job they found and just earning a paycheck, but actually wanting their students to succeed, which at the college level is sometimes can be difficult to find professors like that. But I found that at my small Christian college, that I've seen that a lot, as caring professors. So I said passionate, caring and the third quality would be knowledgeable. So I have had some professors where it seemed like they almost didn't know enough about the content to be teaching. So just having a professor that is able to know and articulate it and say that's important.

T: Thank you, three excellent answers.

T: *Number eight, please describe a scenario when a professor said something either positive or negative that has stuck with you and influenced your life and that the decisions you may following were a result of the professor's comment.*

V: Oh man, I've been trying to do like my first instinct, but I thought about this one for too long. That's funny because when you say what pops into your head right away, it's much easier than if you try to read into it too much. And then it becomes harder to think of something, but I'm trying to think of a scenario, but I can't remember exactly what. Oh, okay. I would say in one of my

classes, I had a professor, that made a great point. It was, I don't want to mess up what I'm trying to think of how he worded it cause he worded it really well. He said that you can't truly love someone unless you're willing to be hurt. Or it's risks one takes when talking about vulnerability in relationships and things like that. And I think that really stuck with me because before then I hadn't really thought about it in some respects, but just how he said it, like that realization of how vulnerable it is to form friendships and relationships, but yet how necessary it is for human beings to do that.

T: That's really good advice. All right.

T: Number nine. What do you think is the most essential characteristic in defining an excellent professor and why?

V: Yeah. I would say going back to the passionate characteristic that I had mentioned before, and for the same reasons.

T: Alright, number 10, please. Describe how you typically feel when you approach your professor with a question or a concern. Do you feel confident, inhibited?

V: How do I feel? I would say typically I feel confused because I have a question, but I think I feel confident in the sense that I am confident that my professor's going to answer and clarify.

And even if it's a question that he or she doesn't necessarily have the answer to, I have the confidence that they'll provide an answer that to get me to think deeper or to at least satisfy as to what the concern is, or even just confident that he or she will take it seriously and try to answer.

T: Okay. That's great. Number 11. How do you feel about your quality, frequency, and availability of faculty contact, meaning the opportunities to connect and strengthen your relationship with them? (Both in and out of the classroom)

V: I would say for the most part professors are willing to meet up. If you email them, then they're willing to make appointments. There's never like certainty that the professor will be available. So usually like anytime I do want to talk to them, it's more of a scheduled time.

Here recently though, like the past few semesters, I've had a lot of back-to-back courses, so I haven't been able to talk to professors after class but I would say still that I do get to know my professors by the end of each course that I take. My time is pretty limited for the professors that I'd like to talk to after class.

T: *Okay. Here's a very "current" question. So please describe in light of the world pandemic due to COVID-19 the challenges presented in the shift of traditional to online instruction and any obstacles you were confronted with regarding professor relationships during the shift.*

V: I would say right now, my college is trying to do in person as much as we can. Some of my classes are half in person, half online, but I think what's made it really challenging is as far as class discussions, some of my professors really like having like class discussions and that's going to be difficult with not being able to move around furniture and things and just, no, but the six feet social distancing. I think that kind of makes it a challenge. As far as like meeting with professors—professors are willing to do zoom office hours and willing to make appointments. I think one positive out of the situation is that it's a lot more convenient to do zoom calls with professors versus walking to their office and scheduling that type of thing. Last semester when everything went online, I just felt very distance from the professor even if we had a live stream with lectures. I really disliked it because of technology difficulties—it just would have been easier to have a recorded lecture where I could watch it anytime. And it's hard not having that face to face, immediate feedback.

T: Alright, great! ***Number 13. Please describe any experiences related to race or gender that you may have encountered throughout your educational career, especially in terms of relationship with faculty.***

V: As far as the gender, I would say that I've been able to interact with professors of either gender. So I don't think that has really been influential. As far as race, I've had professors of different races and I'm thinking of one professor who taught my intro to psych class. I forget what country he was from, but he had a very thick accent. So at first it was a little difficult to understand him, but he ended up being one of my favorite professors. He was so funny and so interactive and made us think deeply. I think it was really cool to not just have all professors that look like me, which actually have some professors that look different and have different backgrounds.

T: ***Number 14. How important is your education to you and how important is it that you succeed in your educational career?***

I would say it's really important to me because I have realized what a privilege education is, and thinking of other countries where they're just not allowed to, or don't have the same opportunities just to go to college to learn and to be challenged, to think critically and think deeper, to problem solve and look at things in new ways. So I definitely value the opportunity and just the joy of learning. I love learning new things and just sitting in class and hearing professors talk and having the privilege of learning from really smart people who want to share knowledge. I think it's so important because I think it can be used to help people by having an education to do better things. I think it's even like tying into a faith perspective. I think that God has called some of the professors to go into education so that they can impact a lot of large group of people. And then in

return, those people are being trained and educated to make positive influences in the world and it multiplies exponentially when you think of it like that.

T: You're definitely correct about that! You're doing a great job!

T: Number 15. What do you wish you could change about your education pertaining to your professors or academics in general?

V: I wish I could have my undergrad longer than four years so that I could have more room to try out different classes.

T: That's interesting. I think I had that same mindset when I was in doing my undergrad—there was so much that I was interested in and it was so hard just to narrow it down.

V: I'm a learner, so yeah, I definitely want to get a master's degree but I'm trying to decide if I want to take a couple of gap years to decide exactly what I want to do, because I want to make sure, I know what I want before going into a master's. Right now I am really interested in doing a master's in nutrition and dietetics. So if I did that, I think then I would take some science undergrad courses just to have those science pre-recs.

T: Yes, definitely. Alright. Number 16. How have your professors influenced or inspired you to continue in your educational journey?

V: The first thing that comes in my one mind is, my one professor, an adjunct professor who has been a mentor these past two years to me. I went through a lot of my freshman year. I actually lost a family member, which was really hard, but she's been encouraging and has tried to remind me that I should be proud of my resilience and has always pointed out how God keeps giving me strength to keep going. I think just her encouragement and reminder about God's strength that he gives has been influential when school feels overwhelming and life feels stressful to just keep going.

T: That's great. It's great to have professors like that who are also mentors and friends, that can relate to things going on in your life.

T: *Okay. Number 17, How have your professors demonstrated an interest in you as a person? And did they show delight and encouragement in your successes?*

V: I've had professors that would ask questions and were just really interested in knowing about my life, my story and about my family... like if I was an only child or have other siblings, or like where I'm from, like what are your hobbies? So just those basic things of wanting to know just what makes up your story and makes you, you!

T: Yeah, that's definitely important.

Are you still there? I think my screen is frozen.

Can you hear me?

Are you there?

Can you hear me?

V: Yes. Now I can. Okay. I think it froze for a minute.

T: Alright, let's get back to where we were. I think we are done with number 17, I think, yes.

T: *Ok. Number 18, Please explain your motivation in attending college and if any of the professors at your college helped you to achieve and feel more motivated in and out of the classroom.*

V: Motivation to attend college was just an interest in learning and a joy of learning and wanting to continue to be challenged and to learn new things. I am a self-starter and do not require much coaxing to be motivated. But I will say, that when I have a professor who makes me feel like more than just a number, like someone they want to see succeed in their class and get a good grade, it makes me want to put forth more effort and try my best to be successful. Also,

professors who just would challenge us as students and to think deeply about different questions and to consider what we were learning and how it could be applied to a lot of different areas...like whether it was applied to our faith or how we can help people. I would say that sense of just to think more deeply about different topics.

T: Okay. Thank you. You're doing a fabulous job.

T: Alright. Next question... *In the past, I remember having professors who I wasn't quite sure how to read. They weren't making any efforts to develop a relationship with me. So I had to reach out to them. Is there anything that you do to foster relationship with a professor that might not make the effort himself?*

V: So thinking to situations where there's so many students, that the professor really can't make a relationship with every student. I would say in those situations, maybe just asking to meet, to discuss something like perhaps I was being confused on a concept. I'd just go up to them and ask about it or ask if we can meet like schedule or if I can drop by during office hours to bring up the question. I'd say most of my professors have been pretty intentional though, like wanting to get to at least know our name and know our personality.

T: Okay. That's good.

T: *Number 20, I had to conduct interviews a few years ago for potential professor candidates. And one question I asked was what qualities or attributes does an effective professor possesses? If you were an interviewer, what answers would you hope to hear from the potential candidate?*

V: So I would say definitely organized and to be able to communicate well and articulate concepts. I've had professors who were hard to follow. They were amazing as people, but

terrible at teaching and articulating concepts. They had all the book knowledge and were competent in their field but conveying that knowledge through teaching was a different story. So probably just being able to explain things as well, I would say. Then also just a sincere passion for whatever subject they were teaching as well.

T: Perfect—that makes sense.

T: *Number 21, Have you ever struggled with something specific during your educational career and had a professor who helped you overcome this difficulty and achieve success?*

V: I think, yes. I think a couple of different times.

One instance in particular was when I was just feeling a disconnect with some of my courses and evaluating whether I should change majors. I just felt like I had a false perception, like I'm already in this major and it's too late to switch, but I would say discussing it over with the professor. She made me realize that it's never too late to try out different classes. That kind of just opened up the opportunity and helped me realize that even if I would change a career path later on, like for going for a master's, that it's ok to do that. Undergrad is sometimes viewed as being the "new high school." With a liberal arts education, it's easy nowadays to just completely change career paths, and even do a master's in something totally different. So I think, yeah, that reassurance just helped calm a lot of stress that I was dealing with.

T: Definitely. you're exactly right. And a lot of times, just having a degree, regardless of the field of study, some employers will give you the on the job training that you need, as long as you have the credentials behind your name. Because honestly, it shows that you are intelligent, it shows that you are able to successfully complete rigorous coursework and that you're a good student. So sometimes, your career path could end up being totally different than what you originally study.

T: Alright. Number 22. Please describe a situation during your educational career that a teacher or professor made you feel positive and confident about yourself.

V: The first thing that pops in my head was my first semester of my freshman year. We had a paper towards the end of the course. It was an interpersonal relationships course, and we had to synchronize different concepts from the course that we learned and integrate faith into it and describe how faith impacted interpersonal relationships. I really enjoyed writing the paper and going through all the class content. I thought it was just an average paper, but my professor, made a special note to go out of his way to personally tell me that he thought it was written really well. So that just made me really confident in that I felt like I CAN do college work and I CAN succeed here. Yeah. So just his willingness to personally make the extra effort of telling me that, just really helped boost my confidence.

T: That's great. Ok, last question...

Number 23, Please explain in as much detail as possible as to how you feel professor relationships may have influenced your educational journey.

V: Like for instance, professors who have become more of mentors and have helped even with personal issues, like dealing with loss and grief, or professors who have helped with core scheduling and then others who I have had the opportunity to help me see the big picture of things and see how these little concepts fit into a bigger picture of what we're learning or even how one class fits into the grand scheme of how this will be useful down the road. If I had to summarize it as being like inspirational and the fact of them wanting to share learning and wanting to see students learn and succeed so that they can in return be influential in the world. I'd say just that, like an encouragement that I've seen from them definitely.

T: So it sounds like your professors have helped you in variety of ways and that has helped make your educational journey more fulfilled.

V: I definitely think that. One way it has also been influential is that it's made college not just seem like a thing to check off so that I can get job X and make some money, but it's made my educational journey so far feel challenging to grow as a person and character and to have new perspectives and be able to communicate and interact better with others.

T: Yes, definitely. So it sounds like your education hasn't just influenced you in an academic way, but overall as a person in many different ways. Awesome. Okay. that brings us to the end. You did an amazing job. You're a great interviewee! Thank you so much. I appreciate that.

T: *Is there anything else that you would like to add or elaborate on any final thoughts?*

V: I guess the only thing I can think of is I think with some professors there's like the concern of having too big of classes to personally get to know students. But I think that they can still be extremely influential just by being able to challenge students in lecture, or even giving questions for students to really think about, deeply, and dwell on. I think even if a professor doesn't necessarily have a personal relationship, they can still get to know their students and be hugely impactful, just by conveying information and the ways they can challenge them.

T: Okay. I really appreciate that and I'm sure that your answers will help with this topic to all professors. So thank you very much.

The next step is the essay...if you remember on the consent, I'll send you an email that has the criteria for the essay. Basically, it is a 500–1,000 word essay on what makes an ideal professor. I will send you an email that contains a writing prompt. If you could get that back to me in three to five days, that would be great! I really appreciate you taking in the time to do this and it's been great getting to know you, [Vivian]. I hope you have a great semester!

V: You're welcome.

T: Ok, thank you again. I appreciate it. I'll send you a follow up email regarding the essay.

V: Alright, sounds good.

T: Thank you.

V: Thank you.

T: Bye.

V: Bye.

Appendix G: Written Essay Question Prompt

Think about a professor who has made a substantial impact on your life. Consider academic influences of achievement as well as personal experiences that have enhanced your relationship. Give specific reasoning as to how the relationship has motivated you and encouraged you to continue in your educational endeavors. Two terms to contemplate when writing your essay include effective (professors who were most successful in helping you learn), and characteristics (qualities a professor has that helps promote you to achieve success). In 500–1000 words, please write qualities you feel define an ideal professor and give your reasoning as to why you think they are ideal. Submit this document as a word document attachment to the following email: thogan2@liberty.edu within three days. Thank you for your time and contributions to this important research project.

Appendix H: Sample Essay Response

What Makes A Good Professor?

When I was younger, the picture I had in my mind of what a good teacher looked like closely resembled Mary Poppins. A good teacher was kind, gentle but firm in their corrections, was always more than thrilled to hear your stories of things that happened over the weekend, and would at least entertain the idea of making it to your sporting events that evening if they knew your team was playing for the championships. As a recent college graduate, I realize that while some of those aspects of what a good teacher looks like are still true, they many have taken the form of other things such as experience in their field, vulnerability with their students, and a listening year [sic] that goes far beyond the story about how your sister accidentally fell off the trampoline this past weekend.

As a student that graduated from a field that was dominated by self-reflection, empathy, and the constant strive toward competence in working and assisting in the healing process with others, it was crucial that the professors who taught the classes were able to be transparent and vulnerable with the students. If the professors could not tell students of the mistakes they made or experiences they had while in the field then students would not be able to learn from such mistakes and be able to take those valuable lessons and apply them to their own careers. Not only are the students able to learn from the professor's mistakes, but it also teaches the students how to speak about and process through those mistakes and experiences. Something I struggled with in my time as a student in the social work department, on a personal level, was asking for help for fear of being incompetent. By gently being called out for it by my professors and being able to share with them my fear of that vulnerability, they were able to share their stories of their own

failures with me which allowed me as a student to learn early on how to take a mistake and move on.

Going along with that, I believe it is common sense that a professor should have relevant opinions and experiences in the field in which they teach. Students need to be prepared to enter their field in the present times, not based off of old practices or that are outdated and not useful to the students upon graduation. In order to teach students and to give them the most relevant and successful education, professors need to have that drive and passion to stay current in the field so that information can continually be taught to the young professionals entering into the field.

Lastly, a listening ear goes a long way when you are a college student struggling to figure out just where you want to take your direction in life. I am beyond grateful for the amount of times I was able to be open and honest about how I was feeling to a professor because they created that space for me to feel comfortable and safe to express my concerns and struggles.

As the years passed since I graduated college, I realized that some of the memories I hold dear will fade. One thing I am certain of, though, is that I will never forget what my professors taught me both inside and outside of the classroom not only about the subject of the class, but of valuable lessons, too.

Appendix I: Data Analysis Tables

Central Theme (CT): Professor influence on student motivation to persist

Theme one (1): Type/Personality of learner

Intrinsic/Extrinsic learner

Theme two (2): Caring, Approachable, and Passionate Professors and Student Goal Attainment

Theme three (3): Professor-Student Relationships and Student Integration

Codes	Categories	Themes
Educational experiences	Public school Homeschooled Private school Faith-based school Online school International school	1
Extracurricular	Sports Academics Church-based Work study Leadership positions Cultural-based	3
Family Influence	Parents educational background Value placed on education Encouraging Christian education Parents were part of decision making process Backed financially only if attended a Christian university Never pushed to go to college Supportive/Encouraging Highly supported and encouraged to go to college Helped with schoolwork Work ethic—parents always stayed on top of schoolwork Location of school—close to home Alumni—family members by association Both parents college graduates Supportive First-generation college student Financial support	1

	Parents are teachers Extended family also supportive	
Highlights	High expectations Exciting content Academic Competitions Concrete methodologies TESOL course Career conference Poster proposal Pedagogical research Study abroad Going back to public school—missed social interaction College in general Gave a good presentation and asked to share with next class ESL class Social work department Taught summer lab class with professor Sports-related Internship/mentorship Review of lesson from professor built confidence Experiences with classmates and professors 4.0 GPA Academics/good grades	CT, 3
Motivation	Different teaching approaches (final exam) Unique group activity/projects Wanted a change in my life Breath of fresh air and a new beginning Loved professor so put forth the extra effort to succeed Professor recognized efforts Passionate about major courses—wanted to learn the information and retain Intrinsic—not professor influenced Family expectation Found niche Fine Arts Festival—found out about college from a church event Art of ancient storytelling Content comes alive –passionate teaching Wanted to be a teacher /career path Professors helped through a hard time Wanted to attend to get a better career	CT, 1, 2, 3

	<p>Gave positive feedback Professor said proud of me—never heard that before Intrinsic desire to do well in school Self-motivated Family requirement—expected Motivated to strive for good grades Wanted deep education—not surface level Mentor motivates me to be my best Personal desire to attend college Gives support Enjoyable Love of learning Correct major Small group assignments/projects Wanted a challenge Think more deeply about topics Professor intentional Encouraged STEM Words of affirmation</p>	
Favorite professor	<p>Element of surprise (barefoot in suit and tie) Soft voice but audible Talked really fast—covered lots of content Conversation Mentorship—made me strive to be a better person Not a number, but a relationship Huge influencer Positive Class discussions about content but also life in general Motivating Connects on an individual basis Amazing class content Awesome teacher Willing to listen Gave good advice Says “Hi” when see on campus Pleasant when walking into the classroom Got to know on a personal level Invited class to house for back to school social Affirmation Qualified Encouragement</p>	CT, 2, 3

	Helpful/encouraging	
Professor investment/ positive influence	<p>Vulnerability—admitting mistakes</p> <p>Failures show humanity</p> <p>Helped to solve problems</p> <p>Don't just care about the grade, but about me as a person</p> <p>Addressed the heart of the issue</p> <p>Deep connection with major professors</p> <p>Very supportive</p> <p>Built relationship and inspired me to someday be a professor</p> <p>The personal connection gives me motivation</p> <p>Gave excellent feedback on a project and used mine as an example for future classes</p> <p>Made me feel important and more than just a number</p> <p>Kept in touch after graduation—encouraged me to attend grad school</p> <p>Inspired to pursue a second degree</p> <p>Thankful for the small school environment</p> <p>Push through when felt like quitting</p> <p>Gave award in front of the class</p> <p>Professor influence was a game-changer and kept me at my university</p> <p>Inspired me to continue in my journey</p> <p>Aspire to emulate</p> <p>Knowing they were on the same journey before us</p> <p>Values and listens to student opinions</p> <p>Professor had more one-on-one time because of smaller major</p> <p>Worked on projects collaboratively with prof</p> <p>Daily check-ins during COVID-19</p> <p>Asked how life was going</p> <p>Asked if could help clarify assignments</p> <p>Spoke wisdom into my life</p> <p>Loved smaller class sizes</p> <p>Research intern</p> <p>Feedback</p> <p>Relational building</p> <p>Cultivated confidence</p> <p>Professors of major personally invested</p> <p>Professor did not influence much—intrinsic learner</p>	CT, 2, 3

	<p>Professor called and discussed the issue while on vacation</p> <p>Immediate feedback</p> <p>Professor showed interest—asked questions</p> <p>A genuine interest in my life/story</p> <p>Recognized my strengths and weaknesses</p>	
Three distinct qualities	<p>Caring</p> <p>Approachable</p> <p>Passionate</p> <p>Genuine</p> <p>Vulnerable</p> <p>Friendly</p> <p>Open-minded</p> <p>Personal connection</p> <p>Wants students to succeed</p> <p>Understanding</p> <p>Knowledgable</p> <p>Articulate</p> <p>Vulnerability</p> <p>Ability to form relationships</p> <p>Flexible</p> <p>Tactful</p> <p>Honesty/Integrity</p> <p>Gives outlets to ensure success</p> <p>Good communicator</p> <p>Ability to listen</p> <p>Approachable</p> <p>Respect</p> <p>Organized</p>	CT, 2
Influential Comment	<p>“Paper was written by non-Native English speaker”</p> <p>Words of affirmation</p> <p>I’m proud of you</p> <p>Don’t give up</p> <p>Nothing specific but gave test advice</p> <p>Never had a negative encounter</p> <p>Tough topics—professor valued student opinions and perspectives</p> <p>Faith integration into course</p> <p>Discussed emotional transformation from junior to senior year</p> <p>Made connection of major to ministry</p> <p>Not specific but overall positive outlook on life</p> <p>Stress breakers from daily musings</p>	1

	Told the class not many will stick with this major	
Essential Characteristics	Caring Approachable Passionate Clear expectations and instructions Knowledgeable and incorporates life experiences Adaptable Well-rounded Respectful Feedback Relational Willing to invest personal time Clear expectations and instructions Articulate Good communicator Willingness to connect/friendly	CT, 2
Approachability	Gave lots of contact info: phone (call or text), email, ZOOM, social media Caring Introverted Nervous—make sure covered all bases before asking questions More comfortable approaching 1-1 Be teachable Open-minded Professor from major less intimidating Would be self-conscious at a bigger school and class size Intimidated Intentionally connects Prof of major easier to approach Less intimidated upperclassmen Confused Confident Servant's heart Vulnerable Clarification Think deeper	CT, 2, 3
Availability	Great office hours Contact anytime Lots of opportunities to connect Always willing to talk and give good advice	CT, 3

	<p>Run into on campus Invited class to house for dinner Always readily available or will find a time that works Text—call if needed Really get to know in major course of study Not too many opportunities—commuter Coffee/lunch/dinner in cafeteria Talk after class (student time limit) Busy in sports—no time to connect outside the classroom Willing to schedule outside office hours if the schedule doesn't permit Email Appointments Schedule time—lots of opportunities</p>	
Traditional v. Online Shift	<p>Clear outline--syllabus Well-structured Easy if a clear outline Difficult to grasp content without in-class interaction More difficult to cultivate relationships on a screen Hard to adjust and complete work—definitely prefer traditional learning Lacking immediacy No in-person zoom calls Detailed instructions Personal email 2x/week ZOOM session—content then personal bonding time with classmates and professor Set deadlines Super organized Challenging Learning management system Missed face-to-face Lack of comradery Wait time was annoying Eventually adjusted but did not prefer Attendance issues Technological issues (ZOOM meetings) Not as convenient Lack of immediacy Insufficient feedback Lack of feedback</p>	CT, 1

	<p>Long wait time</p> <p>Impersonal—no face-to-face immediate response</p> <p>Translate teaching to technology</p>	
Race and gender	<p>Two professors from Ghana</p> <p>British professors</p> <p>Australian professor</p> <p>Melting pot university</p> <p>Residence—countries</p> <p>Ethnicity</p> <p>Cultural background/upbringing</p> <p>Professors from many different countries</p> <p>Mostly males in major (classmates) so professors have to form certain questions “politically correct”</p> <p>Professor of color—very valuable to promote diversity especially in the field of social work</p> <p>Mostly male professors in the major course of study (History)</p> <p>Mostly female professors in the major course of study (Early Childhood Education)</p> <p>Prefers male professor over female</p> <p>African professor with a thick accent</p> <p>Female professor 80 years old teaching technology class</p> <p>Most professors female</p> <p>Never had any issues</p> <p>African professor—very hard to understand accent although very intelligent</p> <p>Cultural disconnect</p> <p>Major course of study is female dominant</p> <p>Never experienced encounters related to race</p> <p>Cool to have diversity</p> <p>So hilarious—my favorite</p> <p>Makes class interesting—enjoy different backgrounds</p>	CT, 3
Value of education	<p>Very important</p> <p>Freeing</p> <p>Enable to do what want to do</p> <p>Talents refined</p> <p>Lifelong learner</p>	1

	<p>Learning and understanding of real-world knowledge more important than grades</p> <p>Found niche in major</p> <p>Privilege</p> <p>Broaden understanding of the world</p> <p>Changed since studying abroad</p> <p>Thinking about a graduate degree</p> <p>Bigger classes—harder to get to know</p> <p>USA blessed</p> <p>Love of learning</p> <p>Intelligent people –share knowledge</p> <p>Positive influence</p>	
Changes to education	<p>Eliminate general education classes—a repeat of high school</p> <p>Professors should be required to go through “extensive teacher training”</p> <p>Need to learn how to present (teach); not just “know it”</p> <p>Advising issues</p> <p>Professors who don’t accommodate learning styles</p> <p>Would like to get to know professors on a deeper level (not enrolled in major classes yet)</p> <p>Know how to communicate/relay book knowledge</p> <p>Cost—Too expensive!</p> <p>Hire better professors already experienced in the field of expertise</p> <p>Definitely did not like online learning due to COVID-19</p> <p>Longer undergraduate study more things</p> <p>Wish would have put forth more effort</p> <p>Take more seriously</p>	CT
Inspirational Professor/Mentor	<p>Prof inspired/influenced</p> <p>Set reasonable, attainable, achievable goals</p> <p>Realization from research intern</p> <p>Enjoy the class and not inhibited to ask questions</p> <p>Faculty-student research</p> <p>Life stressful—encourage to keep going</p> <p>Do what passionate about</p> <p>Seeks out ways to learn new things</p> <p>Amazing input</p> <p>Inspiring</p>	CT, 2

	Resilience Encourager	
Delight in successes (Encourager)	<p>Showed “real affirmation”—could see it in her eyes</p> <p>Told class how well succeeding</p> <p>Always seemed interested</p> <p>Transitioning from college to real-world</p> <p>Confidence</p> <p>Encouraged growth</p> <p>Wrote comments on papers</p> <p>Receive good feedback</p> <p>Macro presentation—professors and classmates gave positive support/feedback</p> <p>Encouraged by verbally telling the highest grade in the class</p> <p>Tried to convince to change major</p> <p>Words of affirmation (written and verbal)</p> <p>Took interest in personal life and well-being</p>	CT, 2, 3
Prof not reaching out	<p>Take action of what can control</p> <p>Do homework</p> <p>Participate in class discussions</p> <p>Write good essays</p> <p>Afraid of being shot down</p> <p>Exchange pleasantries when appropriate</p> <p>Try to initiate a conversation</p> <p>Formulate own opinions—not reaching out but ended up playing on a soccer league</p> <p>Send email</p> <p>Would not be willing to reach out on own to foster relationship because introverted</p> <p>Two-way street (will not go out of the way to initiate)</p> <p>Talk after class if time permits</p> <p>Would not take initiative to foster a relationship</p>	CT, 3
Interview candidate	<p>Passion</p> <p>Clear communication</p> <p>Engaging classroom</p> <p>Respect</p> <p>Welcoming environment</p> <p>Consistent</p> <p>Organized</p> <p>Great communicator</p> <p>Passion for content</p>	CT, 2, 3

	Approachable Resilient Build relationships and connect with students Investment Mentorship Listener Friendly Connected to students Knowledgeable about course content Ability to listen Serve students Not just there for a paycheck Show students respect Understanding	
Struggles	Professor taught how to break down research Felt proud of the results but it was challenging Not really—high achieving student Break into manageable parts—a life skill Disconnect Friend passed away in a plane accident— professor helped to arrange memorial Explained step by step procedures for difficult content Basics when first starting major Different major Big classes—less opportunity Helped me to grow Difficulty in class—professor gave an assignment to earn points to boost the grade Broke down content into manageable parts Genuinely cared and helped tutor with difficult content Made me do things out of comfort zone to grow –stretch my abilities	CT
Professor made me feel positive	Published research work and pointed out to the class Words of encouragement—makes me want to do better on the next exam Provided extension and understanding of life circumstances Posted work on social media Helped to see the “big picture” Confident Very complimentary about public speaking	CT, 1, 2,3

	Wrote positive comments on exam Excellent feedback Affirmation of excellent work through verbal communication Encouraged in my talents and abilities	
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