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Perceptions of Commuter Students and Faculty:

A Mixed Methods Study on Commuter

Student Retention

by

Julie A. Wengert

September 2018

A Dissertation submitted to the Education Faculty of Lindenwood University in

partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

School of Education

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A Mixed Methods Study on Commuter

Student Retention

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Julie A. Wengert

This Dissertation has been approved as partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

Lindenwood University, School of Education

Rhonda T Bishop — Dr. Rhonda Bishop, Dissertation Chair — 9-25-18 — Date

Sherry DeVore — Dr. Sherry DeVore, Committee Member — 9-25-18 — Date

Wendy McGrane — Dr. Wendy McGrane, Committee Member — 9/25/18 — Date

Declaration of Originality

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree.

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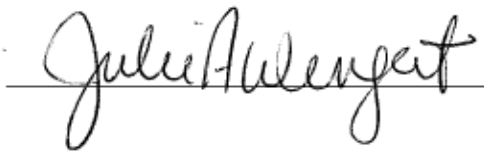
Signature:  Date: 9/25/18

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Abstract

College student success outcomes have become increasingly significant to many stakeholders as student attrition has proven costly for students, institutions of higher education, and the economy (Foss, Foss, Paynton, & Hahn, 2014; Jobe & Lenio, 2014). Historically, a positive relationship between college students who live on-campus and retention has been found (Astin, 1993; Bronkema & Bowman, 2017; Chickering, 1974; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Schudde, 2011; Soria & Taylor Jr., 2016; Walsh & Robinson Kurpius, 2016). However, commuter students now make up most of the current college student population (Skomsvold, 2014). The purpose of this mixed methods study was to advance the understanding of the commuter student phenomenon within the context of the institution. Quantitative data included first- to second-year retention rates and six-year graduation rates for the three most recent cohorts of commuter and residential students at one Midwest university. The first- to second-year retention rate was 63.21% for commuters and 66.07% for residential students; the six-year graduation rate was 35.07% for commuters and 33.68% for residential students. There were not statistically significant differences in the first- to second-year retention rates or six-year graduation rates of commuter and residential students. Qualitative data were gathered using student focus groups and faculty interviews, including 16 and nine participants respectively. Responses were reviewed through the lens of Strange and Banning's (2015) campus ecology model, and four themes emerged: getting from here to there, the double-edged sword of convenience, independence, and it is who we are. Based on the findings, higher education leaders should continue to observe and assess student groups within the context of their own unique institutions.

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Chapter One: Introduction

For decades, writers of the big screen have portrayed college life through the lens of residential campuses and students (Yakaboski & Donahoo, 2015). From *Animal House* to *Pitch Perfect*, storylines in Hollywood have been scripted to follow lives of students who live in residence halls and actively engage in social aspects of the university such as Greek life and musical performance clubs (Reitman & Simmons, 1978; Sie, 2017; Yakaboski & Donahoo, 2015). Residential life provides an on-campus living and learning arrangement, allowing many opportunities in which students may not only thrive within the academe but also foster relationships with other students living in the same vicinity (Johnson, Flynn, & Monroe, 2016). Although residential campuses in the United States still exist, the living situation for the majority of today's collegiate student population is not one accurately depicted in the movies (Skomsvold, 2014).

Decisions to live on-campus or off-campus can be influenced by many factors (Schudde, 2011). For example, college-owned housing shortages could make it impossible for first-year students to live on-campus (Schudde, 2011). Poynton, Lapan, and Marcotte (2015) explained the sharp rise in the cost of college tuition and room and board over the last 20 years has persuaded more students to live at home to save money. According to Skomsvold (2014), only 13.2% percent of today's collegiate population is made up of students who live on-campus (p. 93). College students who do not live on-campus, nor in housing owned by the institution are known as commuter students (Gianoutsos & Rosser, 2014; Jacoby, 1989).

Scholars, both past and present, have found supporting evidence demonstrating a positive connection between on-campus living and student success (Astin, 1975, 1985,

1993; Blimling, 1993; Bronkema & Bowman, 2017; Chickering, 1974; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Soria & Taylor Jr., 2016; Sriram et al., 2017; Walsh & Robinson Kurpius, 2016; Wolfe, 1993). These findings, paired with research about commuters, imply there are barriers to student success for those who live off-campus (Astin, 1975, 1985, 1993; Chickering, 1974). Darling (2015) explained the commuter student population is a heterogeneous group; however, they do share some unique commonalities.

A review of recent research revealed concerns for commuter students revolve around concepts of transportation, time, sense of belonging, family, work, and finances (Brown, 2015; Burlison, 2015; Nelson, Misra, Sype, & Mackie, 2016; Newbold, 2015; Newbold, Mehta, & Forbus, 2011). These concerns, in addition to recent trends in higher education, combine to ripen the quest for additional research on student success as it relates to this growing student population (Skomsvold, 2014). For example, Brown (2015) suggested higher education could be held under higher scrutiny since freshman persistence rates and four-year graduation rates over the last 30 years have remained rather steady. In addition, federal government officials' desire to hold institutions of higher education more accountable for the attainment of degrees and certificates creates the demand for both knowledge and strategies to enhance student persistence and completion (Nailos & Borden 2014).

In Chapter One, an introduction and information about the background of the study on characteristics, self-identified needs, and on-campus engagement of commuter students are included. The conceptual framework used in this study is described and serves as the foundation upon which the statement of the problem was established. The purpose of the study is explained, followed by specific research questions which guided

the study. Provided at the conclusion of Chapter One is information about the significance of the study, key terms and definitions, limitations and assumptions, and a summary.

Background of the Study

Prior to the 20th century, students started college after eighth grade and faculty served in the role of a parent figure, or *in locus parentis* (Brubacher & Rudy, 2017; Rudolph, 1990). According to Rudolf (1990), "The college was a large family; sleeping, eating, studying, and worshipping together" (p. 88). Personal involvement in students' lives was normal for faculty and presidents in the higher education setting of the 17th century (Gillett-Karam, 2016). Gillett-Karam (2016) described how the dawn of research institutions, during the 19th century, is what both solidified the advent of student affairs and removed the responsibility of the role of parent-figure from faculty. As time has passed, students have been expected to take on more responsibility regarding both their academic and social interactions (Johnson et al., 2016). Caring for the needs of today's students has become the work of student affairs professionals (Gillett-Karam, 2016).

Student affairs professionals serve universities in a variety of roles, including jobs in student life, career services, student activities, and residence life (NASPA, 2017). Residence life professionals are often the closest individuals associated with serving in a parent role on a college campus and feel it is their responsibility to help residential students acclimate to the college community (Johnson et al., 2016). Tinto (2017) explained integrating into the college community, or finding a sense of belonging, is linked to facilitating student persistence.

Sense of belonging is one of many concepts, studied over the years, relative to student retention (Tinto, 1993). However, during the first 330 years of higher education's existence in the United States, there was not much consideration given to retention (Berger, Blanco, Ramirez, & Lyon, 2012). During the 19th and early 20th centuries, the number of students attending college increased, directly affording institutions the opportunity to become more selective in admissions and indirectly increasing the importance of college life, or student experience (Berger et al., 2012). Student mortality, or attrition, was studied for the first time in the 1930s, followed by philosophical studies on student dropout in the 1950s and 1960s (Berger et al., 2012).

By the 1970s, after the first predictions for lower college enrollment rates had occurred, retention became a popular research topic, and conceptual frameworks and theories began to emerge (Berger et al., 2012). First, Spady (1971), who completed one of the first recognized retention studies, created a model related to student dropout. In his study, Spady (1971) concluded academic performance is the primary influence on student attrition. Next, Tinto (1975) built upon Spady's concept of student dropout and established his own model of student integration, which attempted to account for and explain all aspects of student attrition. Also, during the mid-1970s, Astin (1985) authored several articles and books about the college environment, which led to the eventual development of his own theory about student involvement in higher education. These theories, established in the 1970s, have served as a foundation upon which retention research has developed over the last fifty years (Berger et al., 2012).

Studying the relationship between student background characteristics, such as distance from campus, and retention is what sparked initial studies about residential and

commuter students (Berger et al., 2012). Brown (2015) explained the positive relationship between residential living and student persistence has been found through various empirical studies over the years. For example, Chickering (1974) found students who live on-campus are more engaged than students who commute. Astin (1993) and Blimling (1993) explained the benefits of on-campus living communities and their ability to influence peer relationships, which can lead to greater chances of social involvement. Wolfe (1993) examined intervention strategies for first-year students and how those strategies were related to the persistence of both commuter and residential students. In another study supporting the positive relationship between on-campus living and persistence, Pike and Kuh (2005) concluded living on-campus was positively related to higher levels of both academic and social engagement.

After decades of research about the benefits of living on-campus, the commuter student population became a focal point (Gianoutsos & Rosser, 2014). One reason commuter students have become the subject of recent research is they make up the majority of the college student population (Gianoutsos & Rosser, 2014; Skomsvold, 2014). According to Skomsvold (2014), 86.8% of all college undergraduates lived off-campus, and 77.4% of undergraduates attending a public four-year university lived off-campus (p. 93). Berger et al. (2012) and Strange (2000) explained the increase in diversity of the student population has fueled retention studies not only of specific student groups but also within individual institutional contexts.

During the last five years, commuter student research has been focused on specific, shared characteristics of commuter students such as race and financial aid status (Gianoutsos & Rosser, 2014; Ishitani & Reid, 2015; Newbold, 2015). Additionally, over

the last five years, researchers have quantified information about commuter students within the context of institution-specific studies covering key concerns these students face such as work, family, and student engagement rates (Alfano & Eduljee, 2013; Darling, 2015; Maksy & Wagman, 2016; Martin & Kilgo, 2015). Dugan, Garland, Jacoby, and Gasiorski (2008) and Jacoby (1989) argued institutional personnel should study their own unique commuter student population, as opposed to using national data or other institutions' data, to guide decisions about commuter-specific policies and procedures. Although some commuter student research has emerged over the last decade, there is still much to be learned about this vast student population (Jacoby, 2015). Higher education constituents can use information gleaned through research to better understand commuter student needs, set appropriate institutional policies, increase learning and engagement, and develop strategies to assist with persistence and graduation (Jacoby, 2015).

Conceptual Framework

This study was primarily guided by Strange and Banning's (2015) campus ecology model. Steeped in social ecology theory, Strange and Banning's (2015) model has four parts to explain the effects a campus environment has on its students. The ecological perspective as it relates to a college campus "incorporates the influence of environments on students and students on environments" (Banning, 1978, p. 5). Implied in the ecological perspective is the idea institutions of higher education are responsible for creating a campus environment which serves an educational purpose (Strange & Banning, 2015).

The physical environment is the first part of Strange and Banning's (2015) campus ecology model. Physical environment, made up of both synthetic and natural features, affects human engagement (Jacoby, 2015). Strange (1999) posited the combination of synthetic features, such as space or distance, with natural features, such as climate or location, has the power to affect students' levels of happiness within a specific space. The campus physical environment and its components help serve the functional needs of its constituents and can either promote or hinder learning (Strange & Banning, 2015). Strange and Banning (2015) also explained how physical components of campus send both verbal and nonverbal messages. For example, a classroom with moveable seating, as opposed to fixed seating structures, may nonverbally facilitate group work (Strange, 2000).

The second part of Strange and Banning's (2015) campus ecology model is called aggregate environments. All individuals and collective characteristics of individuals who occupy the space make up the aggregate environment (Jacoby, 2015; Strange and Banning, 2015). Psychological and demographic characteristics of people within an environment can predict an environment's dominant features (Strange & Banning, 2015). Holland (1973) explained human aggregates are either highly differentiated or undifferentiated. Highly differentiated aggregates are described as homogenous and are composed of similar-type people; undifferentiated aggregates are described as heterogeneous and are composed of different types of people (Holland, 1973). Strange (1999) explained:

> The dynamics of human aggregates attract, satisfy, and retain individuals who are most similar in type to the dominant characteristics of those individuals

> comprising the aggregate and individuals who are dissimilar to the dominant type are more likely to be repelled by, dissatisfied with, and rejected by a particular aggregate. (p. 581)

As a result of these dynamics, the dominant type is reinforced and rewarded over time (Strange, 1999).

Organizational environments make up the third part of Strange and Banning's (2015) campus ecology model. Jacoby (2015) described the organizational environment as that which "reflects the purposes, goals, and priorities that enhance or inhibit positive interactions" (p. 9). Individuals' behaviors within an environment create organizational infrastructures, which are influenced by decisions, such as the way in which resources are allocated or what the institution's goals are (Strange & Banning, 2015). The organization of an educational system can be either dynamic or static (Strange, 1999). A dynamic organization is less formal and decentralized, while a static organization is more formal and centralized (Strange, 1999).

The fourth and final part of Strange and Banning's (2015) campus ecology model is referred to as socially constructed environments. The socially constructed environment is described as how people experience, interpret, and perceive their environment (Jacoby, 2015). To understand how individuals will behave in environments, it is vital to investigate the collective perceptions and experiences of individuals within that environment (Strange & Banning, 2015). It is hypothesized one can predict an individual's future response to a particular environment by investigating other individuals' past perceptions of that environment (Strange, 1999). For example, negative perceptions could prompt an individual to become dissatisfied and leave an environment,

but positive perceptions could promote satisfaction with an environment and prompt an individual to stay (Strange, 1999).

Educational environments influence students regardless of one's desire or understanding (Strange & Banning, 2015). The recognition and understanding of the dynamics of the four components of Strange and Banning's (2015) campus ecology model can be a stepping-stone to educational achievement. Jacoby (2015) posited the four parts of Strange and Banning's model influence "the ability of commuter students to transition and function successfully" (p. 9). Strange (1999) wrote, "When environmental expectations, ideals, and realities are congruent, satisfaction and persistence in the environment are much more likely" (p. 582). Intentionally designing environments to accommodate the needs of commuter students provides an opportunity to enhance their academic and social engagement on-campus (Jacoby, 2015).

Statement of the Problem

Nailos and Borden (2014) explained the recent shift in focus from educational access to accountability in higher education is evident through initiatives such as the Obama administration's college degree attainment goal for 2020, which, if accomplished, would rank the United States first in the world among its peers providing college degrees. Freshman persistence rates and four-year graduation rates have been relatively steady for the last three decades, causing concern about accountability in higher education (Brown, 2015). In fall 2015, about 40% of college students in the United States did not return for their sophomore year at the original institution in which they enrolled (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2017, p. 1). About 30% of American undergraduate students are earning a baccalaureate degree within four years, and only 58% are

graduating within a six-year timeframe (Brown, 2015, p. 405; Turner & Thompson, 2014, p. 94). Foss et al. (2014) proclaimed lost wages and taxes associated with college dropouts account for nearly $4.5 billion in the United States (p. 2).

College student retention is multifaceted, and many retention theories have been developed over the years to both explain and understand student attrition (Berger et al., 2012). Ishitani and Reid (2015) proclaimed these theories have prompted studies to solve the persistence issue as it relates to varying student populations, including commuter students. Commuter students in higher education are students who do not live on the college campus or in a college-owned residential housing facility (Gianoutsos & Rosser, 2014). Approximately 87% of two-year and four-year college students lived off-campus during the 2011-2012 academic year (Skomsvold, 2014, p. 93). Eighty-six percent of students attending a four-year public, non-doctorate granting institution in 2011-2012 commuted to college (Skomsvold, 2014, p. 93). The vast size of the commuter student population has been a driving force in the development of research and theory dedicated to this student group (Gianoutsos & Rosser, 2014).

Brown (2015) explained commuter students are thought to be disadvantaged compared to their residential counterparts because multiple studies conducted over the years have indicated living on-campus has a positive relationship with student retention. Because of the amount of time residential students spend on-campus, they are more likely to be exposed to and involved in campus life activities (Astin, 1985). Time and other outside obligations prevent commuter students from having as many opportunities to build relationships with other on-campus students (Martin & Kilgo, 2015). A lack of relationship building can lead to a lack of sense of belonging (Martin & Kilgo, 2015).

Ishitani and Reid (2015) found a significant positive relationship between a student's academic and social integration with the institution and their first-year retention rate. Researchers concluded increases in these types of engagement could help students overcome retention barriers (Ishitani & Reid, 2015). It is important to determine if there is a significant difference in the academic success of commuter and residential students at this individual institution in order to determine appropriate strategies for future commuter student success (Berger et al., 2012; Strange, 2000).

Unconsciously overlooking the needs of commuter students could cause institutional personnel to unintentionally ill-effect students' persistence and graduation rates (Darling, 2015). Quaye and Harper (2015) explained it is sensible to continue to investigate strategies developed for student populations, such as commuters, who have been found to have empirically researched findings relative to student engagement. A review of current literature by Burlison (2015) revealed a need for more qualitative studies on commuter students. Analyzing information reported through interviews, such as perceptions of both students and faculty regarding physical, aggregate, organizational and socially constructed environments can help to shed light on qualitative gaps in the research pertaining to the commuter student population (Burlison, 2015; Strange & Banning, 2015).

Purpose of the Study

Historically, through examining the relationship between both academic and social engagement and retention, researchers have found a positive relationship between retention rates and residential students (Astin, 1975, 1985, 1993; Blimling, 1993; Bronkema & Bowman, 2017; Chickering, 1974; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Schudde, 2011; Soria

& Taylor Jr., 2016; Sriram et al., 2017; Walsh & Robinson Kurpius, 2016; Wolfe, 1993). However, the landscape of higher education has changed over time (Berger et al., 2012). Because each institution has its own unique makeup, it is important to study student groups within their own institutional setting (Berger et al., 2012). In this study, retention and graduation rates of one Midwest institution's residential and commuter students were examined to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between the two student groups. A quantitative analysis of these two groups of students helped shed light on the phenomenon of commuting at this specific institution.

Strategies have been identified through quantitative research to help mitigate attrition rates, but commuter students have rarely been asked what keeps them engaged in their education (Burlison, 2015). By analyzing perceptions and identified needs of the commuter student population, administrators can make changes to policies, procedures, environment, and programming which have the potential to enhance student engagement as well as increase commuter student success (Darling, 2015). According to Tinto (2017):

> Another question that universities—and by extension all its members, academics, professional staff, and administration—should ask themselves is: What can they do to lead students to want and have the ability to persist and complete their programs of study within the university? To do so, universities have to see the issue of persistence through the eyes of their students, hear their voices, engage with their students as partners, learn from their experiences and understand how those experiences shape their responses to university policies. (p. 6)

For the qualitative part of the study, information was obtained regarding perceptions of both commuter students and faculty relative to supportive and unsupportive factors affecting commuter student retention in college.

The purpose of this study is to advance the understanding of one Midwest institution's commuter student population. Using quantitative and qualitative analyses can provide a more comprehensive outlook of how the commuter student phenomenon impacts the institution (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Doyle, Brady, & Byrne, 2016; Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2015). Information gleaned from this mixed methods study will help institutional personnel not only formulate appropriate policies and procedures but also enhance the educational environment to facilitate commuter student retention and completion. Creating a campus environment which fosters the educational success of its students is the responsibility of institutional personnel (Jacoby, 2015; Strange & Banning, 2015).

Research questions and hypotheses. The following research questions and hypotheses guided the study:

1. What significant difference exists, if any, between the first- to second-year retention rates of first-time freshmen-who lived on-campus and similar first-time freshmen-who commuted to campus at a public four-year Midwestern university?

   $H1_{0:}$ There is no significant difference between the first- to second-year retention rates of first-time freshmen-who lived on-campus and similar first-time freshmen who commuted to campus at a public four-year Midwestern university.

   $H1_{a:}$ There is a significant difference between the first- to second-year retention

rates of first-time freshmen-who lived on-campus and similar first-time freshmen who commuted to campus at a public four-year Midwestern university.

2. What significant difference exists, if any, between the six-year graduation rates of first-time freshmen-who lived on-campus and similar first-time freshmen who commuted to campus at a public four-year Midwestern university?

$H2_{0:}$ There is no significant difference between the six-year graduation rates of first-time freshmen-who lived on-campus and similar first-time freshmen-who commuted to campus at a public four-year Midwestern university.

$H2_{a:}$ There is a significant difference between the six-year graduation rates of first-time freshmen-who lived on-campus and similar first-time freshmen-who commuted to campus at a public four-year Midwestern university.

3. What factors, both institutional and personal, do commuter students at a public four-year Midwestern university perceive as supporting their efforts towards retention and degree completion?

4. What factors, both institutional and personal, do commuter students at a public four-year Midwestern university perceive as obstacles in their efforts towards retention and degree completion?

5. What factors, both institutional and personal, do faculty at a public four-year Midwestern university perceive as supporting commuter students' efforts towards retention and degree completion?

6. What factors, both institutional and personal, do faculty at a public four-year Midwestern university perceive as obstacles for commuter students' efforts towards retention and degree completion?

Significance of the Study

Some recent quantitative studies have focused on profiling today's commuter students (Gianoutsos & Rosser, 2014; Ishitani & Reid, 2015; Nelson et al., 2016; Newbold et al., 2011). Darling (2015) described the commuter student population as having common characteristics but also labeled commuter students as a heterogeneous group. Because of the immense size of the commuter student population and its growing diversity, additional research is needed to dissect the evolving characteristics of this group of students (Gianoutsos & Rosser, 2014). As the complexity of the commuter student profile grows, a better understanding of this student group is necessary to aid institutional personnel in meeting their needs (Newbold et al., 2011).

For most of the quantitative studies completed in the last five years, research is limited to a single institution's data (Alfano & Eduljee, 2013; Brown, 2015; Gianoutsos & Rosser, 2014; Maksy & Wagaman, 2016; Nelson et al., 2016; Newbold et al., 2011). However, completing research within a particular campus allows for a fuller understanding of how a specific group of students interacts with their environment (Strange, 2000). Furthermore, retention research of the past has paved the way for studying specific groups of students within different institutional contexts in the 21st century (Berger et al., 2012).

A few quantitative studies have attempted to measure persistence, retention, or academic success of commuter students by examining first-year students (Gianoutsos & Rosser, 2014; Ishitani & Reid, 2015; Nelson et al., 2016). The majority of existing empirical research compares residential students to commuter students (Dugan et al., 2008). In an effort to determine if significant differences exist at this unique institution,

the present study examined first- to second-year retention rates as well as six-year graduation rates of residential and commuter students (Berger et al., 2012; Strange, 2000).

Burlison (2015) concluded her literature review concerning nonacademic commitments of commuter students with a final thought indicating current literature regarding commuter student engagement is scarce. Citing only one qualitative study found for her review, Burlison (2015) described the need for more comprehensive information about commuter students for the purpose of helping them succeed. In a broader search for studies about commuter students within the last five years, only two other qualitative studies were found (Regalado & Smale, 2015; Weiss, 2014). The present study fills a gap in qualitative research as it provides both students and faculty a voice regarding perceived influences on commuter student retention.

Commuter students have unique needs and the inability to recognize those needs could produce unintentional barriers to student success (Darling, 2015). A mixed methods approach was developed to concentrate on potential differences in retention and graduation rates of commuter and residential students as well as lived experiences of the Midwest institution's commuter students and faculty. Students and faculty were provided an opportunity to self-identify and self-report information without the influence of pre-existing profiling labels, which opened up the potential for discovery of new, unexplored factors affecting retention. The present study is also unique because it captured perceptions from an untapped audience in this realm of research, the faculty. This study was created as an effort to better understand a four-year, public Midwestern campus

environment and its influence on commuter students as well as add to the existing literature.

Definition of Key Terms

For the purposes of this study, the following terms are defined:

Commuter school or institution. The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (2018) stated:

> Institutions with fewer than 25 percent of degree-seeking undergraduates living on campus or fewer than 50 percent enrolled full-time were classified as primarily nonresidential. It is important to note "nonresidential" can represent three distinct populations: those who live in neighborhoods close to campus (often in rental housing with other students), those who commute some distance to campus, and those who participate via distance education. (para. 5)

Commuter student. According to Jacoby (1989) commuter students are "…all students who do not live in institution-owned housing" (p. 5). In addition to not living in campus-owned housing, Gianoutsos and Rosser (2014) further clarified commuter students do not live on-campus.

Nontraditional student. The National Center for Education Statistics Data and Definitions (2018) indicated students over the age of 24 are typically indicative of being classified as nontraditional students.

Persistence. It is important to note, as Voight and Hundrieser (2008) explained, sometimes persistence and retention are used interchangeably. However, for purposes of this study, distinct from retention, the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center

(2017) defined persistence as "continued enrollment (or degree completion) at any institution" (p. 11).

Residential student. Martin and Kilgo (2015) described residential students as those who reside on-campus. Alfano and Eduljee (2013) also called students who live on-campus as residential students throughout their study.

Retention. Distinct from persistence, the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2017) defined retention as "continued enrollment (or degree completion) within the same higher education institution" (p. 11). Powell (2013) indicated "retention in higher education refers to the ability of an institution to keep students enrolled until graduation" (p. 3).

Student success. Berger et al. (2012) described student success as "the ability to persist to the completion of a degree at one or more colleges" (p. 32). More than just the ability to obtain a degree, student success encompasses both academic and social degrees of involvement at the institution (Astin, 1985).

Limitations and Assumptions

The following limitations were identified in this study:

Population and sample demographics. The population in this study was limited to commuter students and faculty at a single four-year, public university in the Midwest. Furthermore, qualitative samples were narrowed to members of this population who chose to participate in the study. In an effort to reduce a threat of internal validity, an effort was made to produce consistent subgroups for the quantitative subject sample (Fraenkel et al., 2015). Approximately 80% of currently enrolled students at the institution were classified as commuters at the time of the study; 87.5% was the average

commuter student population for the last five years at the institution (Institutional Data, 2018).

Instrument. Use of interview questions was a limitation because information may not be equitably articulated by participants of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Information was limited to that which participants were willing to share. However, Seidman (2013) explained qualitative interviews are popular in educational research because of their ability to capture a rich understanding of lived experiences from the perspectives of those being interviewed.

The following assumptions were accepted:

1. The responses of the participants were offered honestly and without bias.
2. Participants agreed to be in the study out of sincere interest in the research topic.

Researcher bias. Because researchers are human, they inherently bring their beliefs to the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Creswell and Poth (2018) explained interpretations in a qualitative research study can be affected by the researcher's background, values, and biases. Also, the presence of the researcher during interviews may create bias responses (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). At the time of the study, the researcher was employed at the institution being studied. To address the issue of researcher bias, reliability procedures for qualitative research were used including cross-checking, bracketing, triangulation, and member-checking (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Summary

The topic of commuter student persistence was introduced in this chapter. Background information was provided about the history of persistence and retention

research in higher education leading up to more recent research information specific to residential living benefits and commuter student studies. Strange and Banning's (2015) campus ecology model was explained as the conceptual framework for the study. The overarching issue of low college completion rates in the United States was described, which was narrowed to the problem of perceived disadvantages of students who do not live on-campus. Obtaining a better understanding of the commuter student population through a mixed methods approach was established as the purpose of the study, and research questions were noted. A description of the rationale for the significance of the study, key term definitions, information about limitations and assumptions of the study, and a summary of chapter contents were provided.

Chapter Two begins with a summary of the problem and purpose of the study. An in-depth review of the conceptual framework guiding the study is provided. Topics presented in the review of literature include persistence and retention in higher education, a comparison of commuter students and other student populations, and key issues of today's commuter students. A summary of the contents of Chapter Two is provided at the end of the chapter in addition to a preview of Chapter Three.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

Exploring factors, identified by both students and faculty, which affect retention and graduation rates at institutions of higher education can fill a gap in literature pertaining to commuter students (Burlison, 2015). Studying commuter students within the context of a unique institutional setting is important for guiding university personnel to make the best decisions regarding policy and procedures affecting students (Dugan et al., 2008; Jacoby, 1989). Understanding students' social and academic interactions within their educational environment has potential to increase both their satisfaction with and success at the institution (Astin, 1985; Jacoby, 2015; Strange & Banning, 2015).

An overview of research relative to commuter students and the study is included in Chapter Two. First, an in-depth look at the conceptual framework, which shaped the study, is presented. Foundational information about campus ecology theory, the basis of Strange and Banning's (2015) campus ecology model, is provided. Details of Astin's (1985) theory of student involvement are also explained, followed by a comprehensive review of Strange and Banning's (2015) campus ecology model. Second, specifics of the history, theories, and current landscape of retention in higher education are explained to provide context for the need for the current study. Next, a comparison and contrast of the commuter student population to residential students and nontraditional students is explored. In conclusion of the review of literature, a comprehensive review of key concerns of commuter students as well as strategies with which to address these concerns is provided.

Conceptual Framework

Strange and Banning's (2015) campus ecology model, made up of four components of human environments, guided the examination of commuter students' interactions with the campus environment for this study. The physical, aggregate, organizational, and socially constructed environments of the campus were the foundation upon which the study's interview questions were built (Strange & Banning, 2015). To further understand the framework proposed by Strange and Banning (2015), it is important to explore campus ecology theory. Based on the ecological perspective, campus ecology theory gained momentum during the 1970s and encompasses psychological and social components within the person-environment relationship (Banning & Bryner, 2001). Additionally, Astin's (1985) student involvement theory was one of the first to incorporate the person-environment relationship into the concepts of student involvement and student development theory (Gillett-Karam, 2016). Campus ecology theory and Astin's (1985) student involvement theory help frame the scope and historical roots of Strange and Banning's (2015) campus ecology model.

Campus ecology theory. Human ecology is "the scientific study of the relationships between individual humans and human societies, and their external natural, built, and social environments" (Allaby, 2015, "Human Ecology"). The ecological perspective explains both environments and people have the ability to influence one another (Banning & Kaiser, 1974). Lewin (1936) was first to create a formula to explain how the combination of people and their environments work together to determine behavior. Translating the concept of person-environment relationships to higher education, and grounded in both ecological and psychological perspectives, campus

ecology is the study of student-campus interactions (Banning, 1978; Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2016). Proponents of campus ecology focus on not only characteristics of both students and their environments but also relationships between them (Banning, 1978). Walsh (1978) argued student behavior can be better understood by virtue of a thorough understanding of the campus environment in which the behavior occurs.

Six researched theoretical approaches have been explained as foundational to the establishment of campus ecology (Evans et al., 2016; Walsh, 1978). In each of these approaches, researchers believe behavior is an outcome of the person-environment interaction (Walsh, 1978). Walsh (1978) ordered the theoretical approaches from least to most phenomenologically-oriented: Barker's (1968) behavior setting theory, Clark and Trow's (1966) subculture approach, Holland's (1973) theory of personality types and model environments, Stern's (1970) need x press culture theory, Moos' (1973) social climate dimensions, and Pervin's (1968) transactional approach. According to Walsh (1978), a more phenomenologically-oriented approach is one which focuses more on perceptions of the environment as opposed to an objective view of the environment. Strange and Banning (2015) integrated all six approaches into their campus ecology model.

Barker's behavior setting theory. Barker's (1968) behavior setting theory emphasized environmental effects on inhabitant's behaviors. A behavior setting is a situation, both physical and social, in which behavior occurs (Barker, 1968; Strange & Banning, 2015). For example, a college campus represents a behavior setting because it

includes human aspects, such as students and faculty who inhabit campus, as well as physical aspects, such as buildings which make up the site (Strange & Banning, 2015).

In behavior setting theory, environment is a better predictor of behaviors than an individual's characteristics (Barker, 1968; Evans et al., 2016; Glanz, Rimer, & Viswanath, 2015; Strange & Banning, 2015; Walsh, 1978). Strange and Banning (2015) argued social and physical parts of a behavior setting can be either supportive or antagonistic of a desired human behavior. For example, a faculty member desiring to facilitate small group discussions in a classroom where chairs are bolted to the floor demonstrates how the physical aspect of the behavior setting is not supportive of the social aspect of the behavior setting (Strange & Banning, 2015). In this example, the physical environment is not conducive to creating a space which promotes the desired behavior of students having small group discussions (Strange & Banning, 2015).

Clark and Trow's subculture approach. Much like the behavior setting theory, the subculture approach suggests environment influences behavior of individuals who reside in the environment (Clark & Trow, 1966; Evans et al., 2016; Strange & Banning, 2015; Walsh, 1978). A subculture is similar to a behavior setting; a subculture is not a student type but is a group of individuals who both interact with each other and behave like each other (Roufs, 2016; Walsh, 1978). Clark and Trow's (1966) subculture approach included four student subcultures on a college campus: academic, nonconformist, collegiate, and vocational.

The academic subculture included serious students, who highly valued learning and their relationships with faculty; they were most likely to pursue post-graduate degrees (Clark & Trow, 1966; Roufs, 2016; Strange & Banning, 2015). Activists, who

were more individualistic and detached from campus, made up the composition of the nonconformist subculture (Clark & Trow, 1966; Roufs, 2016; Strange & Banning, 2015). Clark and Trow (1966) described collegiate subculture as loyal students who were very socially engaged on campus. Students in the vocational subculture were primarily concerned with efficiently obtaining a degree and a job (Clark & Trow, 1966; Roufs, 2016; Strange & Banning, 2015).

These four subcultures were created based on students' identification with not only ideas but also their institutions (Clark & Trow, 1966; Strange & Banning, 2015; Walsh, 1978). The subcultures, and their interactions and influences, help shape the culture of the institution (Strange & Banning, 2015). For example, Princeton has a strong history of academic subcultures, which has shaped the present academic prestige of the university (Strange & Banning, 2015). Strange and Banning (2015) also described the example of the robust collegiate subculture apparent through its athletics, Greek, and campus life traditions at Indiana University.

Holland's theory of personality types and model environments. Understanding an environment's prevailing features can be realized through the collective personalities of which it is made (Holland, 1973). Walsh (1978) explained, "the underlying rationale of Holland's theory is that human behavior is a function of personality and environment" (p. 10). Holland's six categories of personality and vocational types provide a framework through which human aggregates can be understood (Strange & Banning, 2015). Holland's six vocational interest-personality types are referred to as: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional (Holland, 1973; Strange & Banning, 2015; Walsh, 1978).

Through the use of personality and vocational assessments, Holland developed a theory which explained people are inclined to select environments which are both reflective of and congruent with their personality types (Walsh, 1978). For example, individuals with a realistic personality type would search for a realistic work environment and individuals with an investigative personality type would search for an investigative work environment (Holland, 1973; Strange & Banning, 2015; Walsh, 1978). Furthermore, Strange and Banning (2015) explained a social environment would promote and strengthen behaviors and interests compatible with characteristics of the social personality type. Holland proclaimed person-environment congruence can be predictive of individual outcomes and can lead to an individual's satisfaction and stability within an environment (Holland, 1973; Strange & Banning, 2015; Walsh, 1978). In addition to promoting higher satisfaction, a good person-environment fit allows individuals to feel more comfortable engaging within the environment, which can lead to higher retention rates on a college campus (Strange & Banning, 2015).

Stern's need x press culture theory. Similar to Holland, Stern (1970) focused on the individual as it pertained to the person-environment function and suggested "behavior is a function of the relationship between individual (needs) and environment (press)" (Walsh, 1978, p. 11). Press can be further defined as the perceived demands inhabitants have of their environment (Stern, 1970; Walsh, 1978). A culture is formed through the accumulation of individuals' behaviors, which, in turn, helps create an environmental press on individuals (Evans et al., 2016; Stern, 1970).

Strange and Banning (2015) explained if the majority of students on a college campus spend a lot of time completing community service projects, then it could be

inferred there is a press towards philanthropy on the campus. Often, college campuses are made up of individuals whose needs match existing environmental presses (Evans et al., 2016). It is presumed a needs-press congruency harvests individual growth, while an incongruency between individual needs and environmental press could restrict an individual's growth and cause displeasure (Strange & Banning, 2015).

Moos' social climate dimensions. Moos' (1973) social ecological approach posited environments have unique personalities, just as people do. Two assumptions were made in Moos' approach: first, environments can be described through perceptions of people residing within them; and second, behaviors of people within their environment are influenced by their own perceptions of their environment (Evans et al., 2016; Moos, 1973; Walsh, 1978). Through his work in higher education, Moos concluded interactions between students' perceptions of their environment and students' personalities ultimately creates their behaviors (Evans et al., 2016; Walsh, 1978). Walsh (1978) explained the perceived environment could have psychological health and well-being effects.

Moos and his colleagues developed perceived climate scales to measure higher education environments such as classrooms and residential living groups (Evans et al., 2016; Moos, 1973; Strange & Banning, 2015; Walsh, 1978). Moos' research with the scales suggested relationship, personal growth and development, and system maintenance and change were three most common dimensions of social environments (Moos, 1973; Strange & Banning, 2015; Walsh, 1978). Inclusion of physical aspects of the environment, such as architectural settings, makes Moos' work unique in the advancement of social ecology (Evans et al., 2016; Strange & Banning, 2015).

Pervin's transactional approach. Walsh (1978) argued Pervin's (1968) transactional approach to campus ecology is the most phenomenological in nature because of his focus on an individual's self-perception in the person-environment relationship. Pervin (1968) hypothesized individuals try to decrease the difference between their perceived selves and perfect selves. Individuals seek out environments which will help them achieve their ideal selves (Evans et al., 2016; Pervin, 1968). Walsh (1978) explained previous studies about Pervin's approach suggested when self-environment congruency exists, individuals self-report satisfaction with the college environment.

Astin's theory of student involvement. Simply stated, Astin's (1985) theory of student involvement is "students learn by becoming involved" (p. 133). Astin (1985) proclaimed his theory could help campus employees more effectively design learning environments because the theory was applicable to both students and faculty, supported most of the existing empirical research relative to the environment's influence on a student's development, and embraced principles from a wide array of concepts such as psychoanalysis. Strange and Banning (2015) described how Astin's foundational work in measuring student involvement continues to help campus constituents understand the effects of a specific campus environment.

Strange and Banning (2015) explained today's higher education phrase, student engagement, is rooted in Astin's student involvement works. Student involvement is "the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (Astin, 1985, p. 134). Astin (1985) further defined the concept of involvement as behavioral in nature. For example, a student could be considered highly

involved by exhibiting the behaviors of spending time studying in the library or actively participating in campus organizations (Astin, 1985). An uninvolved student would be one who refrained from such behaviors (Astin, 1985). Strange and Banning (2015) concluded differences in collective behaviors among students are a reflection of how much the campus environment has influenced students' interests. Ultimately, the more a student is involved in college, the more the student will both learn and personally develop (Astin, 1985).

Astin outlined five postulates in his theory (Strange & Banning, 2015). In Astin's (1985) first postulate, he described involvement as how much energy, both physical and psychosocial, is put into various generalized or specific objects. The second postulate stated involvement of individuals is continuous, with students applying different degrees of energy to different types of objects (Astin, 1985). In the third postulate, Astin (1985) explained how involvement includes both qualitative and quantitative characteristics. Astin (1985) explained the last two postulates offer hints as to how to design educational programs most effectively. Directly proportionate to learning and development in students is the quality and quantity of involvement of students (Astin, 1985). Last, policy effectiveness is demonstrated by the ability of the policy to increase involvement (Astin, 1985).

Astin's (1985) theory of student involvement is based on his 1975 longitudinal study about college dropouts. Just after Arthur Chickering declared commuter students as "have nots" in his 1974 book, *Commuting versus Resident Students: Overcoming the Educational Inequities of Living off Campus*, Astin published his 1975 book *Preventing Students from Dropping Out*. Astin (1975) used Cooperative Institutional Research

Program (CIRP) data from 1968-1972 to conclude first-year, on-campus students were nearly 10% less likely to drop out of college than students who resided anywhere else, regardless of an institutionally imposed first-year residence requirement (p. 92). Further, first-year commuters who still resided with their parents did not persist at as high a rate as residential students (Astin, 1975). Male commuters who did not live with their parents, but rather in an apartment or a private room, were better off than their female counterparts (Astin, 1975). When Astin (1975) examined longitudinal data through the first two years of college, he found students who lived in on-campus or Greek housing had higher persistence rates than commuters and commuters who lived with their parents but later became residential students showed increased persistence rates. Astin (1975) also found first-year residential students who later moved back in with their parents were more likely to drop out of college.

Astin (1975) and Chickering (1974) were two of the first researchers to investigate the commuter student population in higher education. Both Astin (1975) and Chickering (1974) found commuter students to be disadvantaged compared to students who lived on-campus. Astin continued to analyze CIRP data and publish his findings through the 1990s, challenging institutional personnel to rethink their traditional definitions of excellence in higher education (Astin, 1975, 1977, 1993). In both 1977 and 1993, Astin's research painted a sad picture for commuter students. Using 10 years' worth of CIRP data, Astin concluded commuters were less likely to pursue an advanced degree, were less satisfied with their college experience, and earned lower grade point averages (Astin, 1977). In analyzing nearly 200 variables in CIRP data from 1985, Astin (1993) did not find any positive correlations with commuting. In addition to similar

findings from previous studies, he also concluded commuting to college raised stress levels and had negative health effects on undergraduate students (Astin, 1993).

Strange and Banning's campus ecology model. An adaptation of Rudolph Moos' four main elements of environments, the four parts of Strange and Banning's (2015) campus ecology model include physical, aggregate, organizational, and socially constructed environments (Schuh, Jones, & Torres, 2017). These four environmental dimensions can either support or diminish students' chances of experiencing safety and inclusion, participation and involvement, and a sense of community on-campus (Strange & Banning, 2015). Jacoby (2015) postulated commuter students' capability to successfully function in college is influenced by Strange and Banning's (2015) four environmental models.

Strange and Banning (2015) proposed a "hierarchy of environmental design," (see Figure 1), which is similar in nature to Maslow's (1982) hierarchy of needs (p. 140). Individuals cannot build a sense of community within an environment without first tending to a solid foundation of inclusion and safety as well as a culture of engagement (Strange & Banning, 2015). Effectiveness of conditions toward the bottom of the pyramid promotes the success of the layers moving towards the top of the pyramid (Maslow, 1982; Strange & Banning, 2015). The physical, aggregate, organizational, and socially constructed environments make up conditions of community, which each play a key role both individually and collectively in achieving a successful environmental design on a college campus (Strange & Banning, 2015).

Figure 1. Strange and Banning's (2015) hierarchy of environmental design from *Designing for learning: Creating campus environments for student success*. Copyright © 2001, 2015 by John Wiley & Sons, Inc. All rights reserved (see Appendix N). Adapted from Maslow's (1982) hierarchy of needs model. Bottom of pyramid represents foundational concepts required to achieve before reaching the top.

Physical environment. The physical environment, similar to the concept of place, consists of built environments and man-made objects which interact with people (Strange & Banning, 2015). In addition to social aspects of an environment, physical aspects of an environment help shape a behavior setting and have an impact on human behavior (Barker, 1968). Everything from the basic layout of campus to building color schemes not only contributes to a campus's sense of place but also shapes critical initial impressions (Eckert, 2013; Strange & Banning, 2015). Okoli (2013) learned students who develop a sense of place are more likely to be academically engaged on the college campus. Both academic and social engagement are related to college student retention (Astin, 1975, 1993; Blimling, 1993; Chickering, 1974; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Soria & Taylor Jr., 2016; Sriram et al., 2017; Wolfe, 1993). As a place in which many students

experience the transition to adulthood, the college campus is a memorable location in which individuals build an attachment (Strange & Banning, 2015). A well-planned college campus is likely to achieve its designed purpose—a place to stimulate learning (Strange & Banning, 2015).

Strange and Banning (2015) explained functionality and symbolism within the physical environment of the campus place can elicit various human responses through nonverbal communication. For example, the second-floor location of a specific office on campus may be functional for the program for which it was designed; however, the second-floor location may also send a symbolic message to others the office is inaccessible and thus unimportant to the institution's mission (Strange & Banning, 2015). Nonverbal messages about campus culture can be conveyed through campus artifacts such as signs and artwork (Strange, 2000). Heeren and Romsa (2017) concluded two sculptures, one of the World Trade Center and one of Peter washing Jesus' feet, signified domestic loyalty and Christian values. Behavioral traces, like a worn path through the grass, illustrate how the physical environment can send a nonverbal message to campus administration to install a sidewalk (Strange & Banning, 2015).

The physical environment also plays a key role in the establishment and perception of an inclusive and safe campus (Strange and Banning, 2015). Painter et al. (2013) determined physical learning spaces on a college campus can be categorized into three groups: formal learning spaces, informal spaces, and campus as a whole. Campus as a whole can be perceived as inclusive and safe if it makes all individuals feel welcome (Strange & Banning, 2015). Strange (2000) and Remy and Seaman (2014) explained some federal laws, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act and Rehabilitation Act of

1973, were designed to promote safety and inclusion within the physical environment. Physical aspects of the environment such as its geographic location, outdoor lighting in parking lots and along sidewalks, elevators, the arrangement of buildings, and sloped entrances all promote or detract from a message of inclusion and safety (Strange, 2000; Strange & Banning, 2015). Formal and informal learning spaces like classrooms and social gathering areas are physical spaces which should be created to be accessible, comfortable, inviting, and conducive to learning and emotional well-being for all individuals (Painter et al., 2013; Remy & Seaman, 2014; Strange, 2000; Strange & Banning, 2015).

Just as the physical environment can impact an individual's feeling of security, it can also foster engagement (Astin, 1968; Strange, 2000; Strange & Banning, 2015). Moos' (1973) work with perceived climate scales measured formal and informal educational environments, finding relationships to be a primary factor in a social environment. Painter et al. (2013) found formal learning spaces, infused with technology and inclusive of swivel desks and other flexible designs, promoted higher levels of student participation and collaboration in the academic classroom. Convenient, comfortable, and flexible designs for informal learning spaces such as the library, student union, or residence halls also contribute to student learning and interaction (Painter et al., 2013; Strange & Banning, 2015). Student involvement and participation is critical to personal development and learning, which can lead to student satisfaction and success (Astin, 1985).

Strange and Banning (2015) suggested physical environments can also help shape a community of learning. At the top of the hierarchy of environmental design,

community offers a sense of security and belonging to its inhabitants (Strange & Banning, 2015; Tinto, 1993). A student's sense of belonging, or mattering, can affect student success (Jacoby, 2015; Schlossberg, 1985; Tinto, 2017). Examples of physical features of a college campus, which can cultivate engagement and a sense of community, include territory, proximity of buildings, accessible and inviting spaces, variable lighting and sound options, flexible and comfortable spaces, and actionable places (Strange & Banning, 2015).

Aggregate environment. The aggregate environment is that which is transmitted through humans who inhabit it (Holland, 1973; Strange & Banning, 2015). As an environment of people, subtleties of human aggregates are contributing factors to student success (Strange & Banning, 2015). Holland (1973) found person-environment congruence to be related to an individual's comfort and satisfaction with the environment. Collective characteristics of those who inhabit the space influence others' attraction to, fulfillment with, and retention within the environment (Moos, 1986). Conversely, Strange and Banning (2015) explained a campus dominated by a specific demographic or psychological type could discourage an individual, who does not share those same traits, to be a part of that campus. Satisfaction with the environment makes college persistence more likely (Strange, 1999).

Different groups of individuals on college campuses have been examined by many researchers for the last 50 years (Strange & Banning, 2015). Clark and Trow (1966) referred to these influential peer groups as subcultures. Strange and Banning (2015) described once the concept of subcultures was discovered, researchers began to create categories and names for them through a variety of contexts such as work interests,

personality types, and learning styles. In addition, Astin (1993) created a typology using responses from the CIRP survey through which he identified seven student types that help describe college student aggregates. For example, an institution with many scholars would likely highlight academic activities, which would create an intellectual influence on individuals within the institution (Astin, 1993; Strange & Banning, 2015).

Dominant features of a college campus can be predicted through assessment of inhabitants' collective characteristics (Holland, 1973; Strange & Banning, 2015). Highly differentiated or undifferentiated environments perpetuate their relative characteristics; thus, creating unique cultures perceptible to both internal and external constituents (Strange & Banning, 2015). Dominant campus characteristics can be positive for students with person-environment congruence; however, they can also pose a challenge to creating safe and inclusive environments for students who do not share the dominant characteristics (Strange & Banning, 2015). College environments can sometimes be unwelcome, or even hostile, for minorities such as the LGBTQQ community (Pitcher, Camacho, Renn, & Woodford, 2016; Strange & Banning, 2015). It is vital campus administrators are aware of aggregate populations to plan appropriate interventions and create policies and procedures which provide students with a sense of security (Strange & Banning, 2015).

Once a sense of security is established, creating a sense of belonging early on during the college experience is essential to fostering relationships (Chambliss & Takacs, 2014; Strange & Banning, 2015). Strange and Banning (2015) explained individuals are attracted to others who share similar interests, which cultivates a reinforcement of those interests within the group. When there is person-environment congruence, an

individual's needs are met and satisfaction with the environment likely ensues (Holland, 1973). A person-environment fit encourages participation and involvement (Strange & Banning, 2015). Astin (1985) postulated in his theory of involvement personal learning and development increase when the quality and quantity of student engagement is high. Heeren and Romsa (2017) hypothesized students who had to work or take care of family responsibilities had trouble feeling connected to the institution. Strange and Banning (2015) explained person-environment incongruence drives inhabitants to either look for a new environment, recreate the existing environment, or conform to the dominant culture's existing characteristics.

Communities have been found to be highly differentiated (Strange & Banning, 2015). Over time a community becomes self-sustaining and consistent in its membership through shared experiences and interest (Strange & Banning, 2015). Strange and Banning (2015) explained a community of homogenous aggregates is an environment more likely to keep and satisfy its members. Blimling (2015) described the concept of a living learning community, which includes similar-aged students with like majors who are assigned to a specified on-campus residence. Room assignments which place students with similar personalities and interests together in on-campus housing create an engaging environment ripe for personal growth and academic success (Heeren & Romsa, 2017). On-campus living learning communities allow students an opportunity to reach full membership in the educational environment; thus, reaching the peak of the hierarchy of environmental design (Blimling, 2015; Strange & Banning, 2015).

Organizational environment. Organizational environments are intentionally created for a specified purpose (Galbraith, 2014; Strange & Banning, 2015). Universities

are an example of an organized environment; they are created for the purpose of serving the community through the delivery of knowledge to students (Brown, 2014; Strange & Banning, 2015). Discussions about an organization's purpose are often prompted when resources become scarce, a new program is proposed, or authority is disregarded (Strange & Banning, 2015). Strange (1999) explained the way in which an institution is organized enables or restricts behaviors.

Strange and Banning (2015) explained an attempt to get organized requires many decisions to be made. Decisions made about how work will be divided, how power will be distributed, or how personnel will be evaluated prompt the implementation of structures which influence participants' experiences within the environment (Strange & Banning, 2015). Organization and order are part of Moos' (1973) system maintenance and change dimension, which Moos claimed is one of three common dimensions existing in social environments. Perceptions of how an environment is organized shapes inhabitant's behaviors (Moos, 1973).

According to Hage and Aiken (1970) systems within an environment function within a range from static to dynamic. Static environments are fixed and resistant to change, while dynamic environments are flexible and more accepting of change (Hage & Aiken, 1970; Strange, 2000). In addition to organizational size and mission, seven organizational structures not only contribute to the system's place along the static-dynamic continuum but also impact inclusion and safety of, engagement in, and community-building within a college campus (Hage & Aikin, 1970; Strange & Banning, 2015).

Two organizational factors which can shape the behavior of inhabitants are the mission and size of the organization (Strange & Banning, 2015). An institution of higher education's mission is an example of how the organizational environment can support inclusion efforts (Strange & Banning, 2015). A large campus with more people than available tasks to complete can leave students feeling less committed to the success of the environment, which can impact the climate of inclusion within the institution (Strange & Banning, 2015). Strange (2000) claimed the larger the institution the more challenging it is to respond to individual needs. Strange and Banning (2015) explained both personalization and affirmation can reinforce inclusion.

A larger college campus can also make students feel anonymous (Strange & Banning, 2015). Moos (1986) concluded as organizational size increases so does the frequency of absenteeism. Many college campuses create organizational subunits like first-year experience programs or living learning communities to mitigate oversizing and to enhance student engagement (Blimling, 2015; Strange & Banning, 2015). The complexity of an organization can affect participant engagement levels (Strange & Banning, 2015). Levels of centralization; how power is shared for decision-making; and formalization, the degree to which power is formalized through rules; can encourage or discourage participation within an organization (Strange 1999; Strange & Banning, 2015). For example, a dynamic environment with low levels of centralization and formalization encourages engagement, which is important for stimulation of student growth and development (Astin, 1985; Strange, 1999).

Astin (1993) suggested the quality and quantity of a student's involvement affects student success. Involvement is one of four criteria used in evaluating the advancement

of communities (Strange & Banning, 2015). Strange and Banning (2015) explained how a community should be designed to balance a foundation of stability with flexibility to respond to change. Some levels of formalization combined with other organizational structures such as stratification and routinization help communities maintain their traditions (Strange & Banning, 2015). However, the degree of dynamic design within a community can stimulate innovation, which can lead to community member satisfaction (Strange & Banning, 2015).

Socially constructed environment. The socially constructed environment is framed by both Stern and Moos' ecological approaches (Strange & Banning, 2015). In a constructed approach, cumulative subjective perceptions of the environment create a press, or a culture, by which behavior is directly influenced (Moos, 1973; Stern, 1970; Strange & Banning, 2015). Inhabitants' perceptions of their environments are their realities; therefore, to understand how inhabitants will react in environments it is necessary to study their shared viewpoints (Strange & Banning, 2015). Strange (1999) said positive perceptions predict stability and satisfaction while negative perceptions promote instability and dissatisfaction.

Strange and Banning (2015) explained organizational and campus culture also help frame a constructed approach. Schein and Schein (2017) wrote:

> The culture of a group can be defined as the accumulated shared learning of that group as it solves problems of external adaptation and internal integration; which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, feel, and behave in relation to those problems. This accumulated learning is a pattern or system of beliefs,

> values, and behavioral norms that come to be taken for granted as basic assumptions and eventually drop out of awareness. (p. 6)

Physical, verbal, and behavioral artifacts help form a culture (Strange & Banning, 2015). For example, a historical bell tower, a legendary story of a campus leader, and a traditional campus ritual can each aid in shaping an institution's culture (Strange & Banning, 2015). Strange and Banning (2015) described values and assumptions as two additional abstract levels of culture on a college campus. Values and assumptions can be found in an institution's mission and goals (Strange & Banning, 2015).

Campus culture can either prevent or support student safety and inclusivity (Strange & Banning, 2015). Strange and Banning (2015) further explained when there is person-environment incongruence, there is potential for some students to feel like outsiders. For example, on college campuses where protests occurred regarding inappropriate sports team mascots, some Native American students felt threatened (Strange & Banning, 2015). Also, physically disabled students would feel excluded if a convocation ceremony were inaccessible (Strange, 2000; Strange & Banning, 2015). An inclusive environment is one which both allows and encourages participation (Strange, 1999). Campus culture centers and safe spaces are two examples of strategies which can help create an institutional culture that promotes a sense of belonging (Strange & Banning, 2015).

Participant engagement levels are also affected by the socially constructed environment through social climate and cultural features (Strange & Banning, 2015). Relationship dimensions across many settings including living environments and task-oriented groups evoke student involvement, which can both foster a sense of attachment

to and maintain satisfaction with the institution (Moos, 1986; Strange & Banning, 2015). Astin (1975) found involvement on a college campus contributes to retention of students. An institutional culture of involvement is both apparent and attractive to outsiders, which is why administrators fund initiatives created for the purpose of communicating the essence of this culture to prospective and incoming participants (Strange & Banning, 2015).

Strange and Banning (2015) wrote, "socially constructed dimensions form the glue that holds a community together" (p. 223). Kretovics (2015) suggested there is a positive relationship between persistence and a student's connection to the campus community. Communal environments are powerful settings wherein involved members share experiences and create unique memories (Strange, 2000). Synergy of participants with a shared interest, an inviting and engaging environment, and purposeful cultural artifacts create a thriving community (Strange & Banning, 2015).

Campus design matrix. Using the four environmental models and hierarchy of environmental design concepts, Strange and Banning (2015) created a campus design matrix (see Figure 2). By answering three main questions about components, impacts, and purposes within the matrix, college campus administrators can assess their own campus environments to determine if they are realizing the potential of their intended designs (Strange & Banning, 2015). Strange and Banning's (2015) three questions included: "What components are involved in this particular environmental assessment or action? What is the impact of the current design? What is the intended focus or purpose of this design?" (p. 275). Using this assessment tool can also help institutional leaders in the development of new campus environments (Strange & Banning, 2015).

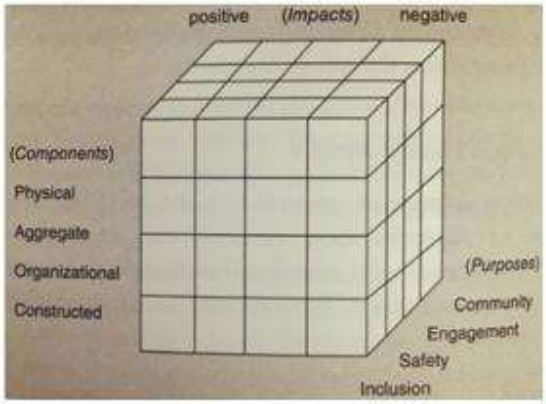

Figure 2. Strange and Banning's (2015) campus design matrix from *Designing for learning: Creating campus environments for student success*. Copyright © 2001, 2015 by John Wiley & Sons, Inc. All rights reserved (see Appendix N). Components, impacts, and purposes of the campus environment are assessed using this three-dimensional design.

Retention in Higher Education

Voight and Hundrieser (2008) explained students who are retained by their college are more likely to complete a degree or certificate. Students with low academic performance often do not finish their programs of study; thus, it can be inferred students who remain academically eligible have potential to earn credits and make progress towards a certificate or a degree (Barouch-Gilbert, 2016). By virtue of continuing their enrollment, college students also continue to be exposed to both social and academic engagement opportunities with the college campus and its constituents (Ishitani & Reid, 2015; Tinto, 1975). Students who engage on-campus are more likely to feel they belong in the campus environment and are more likely to persist (Astin, 1993; Ishitani & Reid, 2015; Tinto, 1975).

As the commuter student population has grown and diversified, so has the general college student population (Berger et al., 2012; Darling, 2015; Skomsvold, 2014).

Diversification and expansion in the higher education student population have created more complex issues related to student persistence and retention issues, with many variables affecting a student's ability to remain enrolled in college (Berger et al., 2012). The campus environment is one such variable (Astin, 1993). Astin (1993) hypothesized retention is the function of how well students' needs are met by the design of the campus environment. Creating campus environments which promote inclusion, safety, involvement, and community building can foster student persistence and retention (Strange & Banning, 2015). Understanding history, theories, relative variables, and current landscape of persistence and retention in higher education can aid campus administrators in the development of policies and procedures as well as institutional environments which ultimately enhance college completion (Jacoby, 2015).

History of retention and retention theory. The focus on retention in higher education was uncharted territory in the United States for just over three centuries (Berger et al., 2012). Berger et al. (2012) explained the culture of early higher education was more focused on survival as opposed to student completion. Urban growth during the 19th and 20th centuries sparked expansion of higher education opportunities (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011). Evolving over time, retention in higher education became a concern and topic of theory and inquiry during the 20th century (Berger et al., 2012). Demetriou and Schmitz-Sciborski (2011) explained as more people desired to pursue degrees and higher education became more structured in its delivery of knowledge, attention to retention and graduation increased. Although the first studies on undergraduate retention appeared during the 1930s, it wasn't until the 1960s the subfield of retention in higher education started to take off (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski,

2011). A retrospective view of retention and its importance in higher education offers insight as to why this study was pursued.

Prior to World War I, attrition rates at four-year universities were high even though the student population at the time was relatively homogenous and enrolled in a full-time program of study (Thelin, 2015). The time between the Civil War and World War I marked a notable transformation in collegiate student life when activities such as fraternities and athletics began to draw a more diverse student population to attend college (Brubacher & Rudy, 2017). Brubacher and Rudy (2017) noted this historical timeframe also represents the descent of the dormitory system in higher education, a tradition American college inherited from the English which had remained dominant in the United States for two centuries. Thelin (2015) explained during this time in higher education's history graduation rates hovered between 15% to 20% (p. 587). American institutions of higher education experienced a 1000% increase in enrollment during the first half of the 20th century (Brubacher & Rudy, 2017).

Following World War II, enrollment in higher education institutions in America increased at an extraordinary rate with the addition of branch campuses, community colleges, and a movement towards open admissions (Brubacher & Rudy, 2017; Strange & Banning, 2015). Changing norms in American society also contributed to higher enrollment rates with more women desiring a college degree (Bean & Metzner, 1985). Brubacher and Rudy (2017) explained degree programs had over three million enrollees by 1956 and nearly seven million by 1968 (p. 424). During the 1960s and 1970s displays of student disruption were publicized and a distrust of universities developed, which caused a societal demand for more accountability from higher

education in the form of productivity and efficiency (Brubacher & Rudy, 2017). Additionally, as academic programs became more complex, access to higher education increased, the student population diversified, and enrollment rates were predicted to drop, student retention grew to be problematic and noticeable at the institutional level (Berger et al., 2012; Brubacher & Rudy, 2017; Powell, 2013). Powell (2013) explained retention research arose out of a need to respond to these factors as well as new diverse student needs.

Astin was one of the first authors to tackle the topic of college student retention (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011). His initial publications in the 1960s and 1970s sparked interest in the research of retention and graduation in the college student population (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011). Astin's (1975) longitudinal study illustrated four-year graduation rates for the 1968 freshmen cohort as 41.2%, with an additional 11.9% having completed four years of college and still enrolled as degree-seeking full-time students (p. 11). In addition to Astin's work, which was discussed in detail in the conceptual framework section of this chapter, many other scholars including Spady, Tinto, Bean, and Metzner have investigated and developed theories about student persistence (Berger et al., 2012; Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011).

Spady was also one of the first and most influential theorists who contributed to explaining attrition (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Berger et al., 2012; Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011; Powell, 2013). Spady's (1971) empirical study supported most of his initially proposed sociological model of student dropout in that he found student attrition to be strongly linked to academic performance. Spady explored attrition through a sociological perspective, where he described a person-environment congruence

relationship to persistence (Berger et al., 2012; Spady, 1971). Specifically, he described interaction between student attributes, such as values and skills, and norms of an environment, such as faculty and peers (Berger et al., 2012; Spady, 1971). Berger et al. (2012) described Spady's work as both the initial attempt at piecing together an organized conceptual framework for explaining student departure and a precursor to Tinto's landmark work.

Building on Spady's sociological perspective, Tinto developed a ground-breaking student integration model in which he postulated the successful social integration of students into the campus community would increase students' institutional commitments as well as their likelihood to graduate (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Burrus et al., 2013; Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011; Tinto, 1975). Tinto described student persistence as a function of collective and ongoing interactions of students within both academic and social environments (Burrus et al., 2013; Powell, 2013; Tinto, 1975, 1993). Tinto (1993) explained students could feel marginalized by negative experiences, which would cause them to withdraw from the institution. Conversely, positive experiences with the campus community, or subsets of the campus community, could promote a sense of mattering, or a sense of belonging (Tinto, 2017). This sense of belonging facilitates student persistence, or ability to overcome challenges for the purpose of attaining a goal (Tinto, 2017).

Another American researcher at the forefront of college retention theory was Bean (Berger et al., 2012; Burrus et al., 2013; Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011). Similar to Tinto, Bean partnered with Metzner and further developed a conceptual model of college student attrition; however, their model specifically addressed drop out

tendencies of the nontraditional undergraduate student population (Bean & Metzner, 1985). In addition to the effects of background characteristics on persistence, Bean and Metzner (1985) also studied the impact of external factors beyond the institution's control such as a student's time. Bean and Metzner (1985) found the external environment affected nontraditional students more than the social integration variables commonly affecting attrition in traditional students.

Following the establishment of retention theory, during the 1980s the studying of retention became more popular (Berger et al., 2012). The term *enrollment management* began to take hold, which defined a practice of collaboration across campus divisions for the purpose of tracking enrollment from the point of recruitment to graduation (Berger et al., 2012; Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011; Powell, 2013). Demetriou and Schmitz-Sciborski (2011) explained how both Bean and Astin continued to dominate retention literature written during this decade. Also, the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), which houses common retention and graduation data sets for all institutions of higher education, was established during this timeframe (Department of Education, 2018). National-level graduation rates data did not exist until 1985, which was a movement prompted by the National Collegiate Athletics Association's desire to compare institutional academic performance rates of student-athletes (Cook & Pullaro, 2010).

As the college student population became even more diverse and many empirical studies on retention had been conducted, underrepresented populations appeared as the focus of the 1990s retention literature and research (Berger et al., 2012; Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011). Berger et al. (2012) described how several scholars attempted

to not only elaborate on Tinto's theory from a variety of perspectives but also empirically test his theory. Tinto and others also began establishing retention interventions related to topics of student transitional periods, cross-campus collaborative efforts, student finances, counseling, and advising (Berger et al., 2012; Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011). Berger et al. (2012) explained during this time in retention history, the terms persistence and retention were defined as distinct from one another. It was not until 1996 the Department of Education collected graduation rate data from institutions of higher education (Cook & Pullaro, 2010). During the late nineties, six-year graduation rates were 52% in the United States (The National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, 2018, p. 1).

Current landscape of retention. Retention literature in the 2000's has continued to stress a holistic approach involving the entire campus community in retaining students (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011). Campus officials have designed programs which support retention and encourage active social and academic involvement in both formal and informal settings on-campus (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011). Berger et al. (2012) explained how retention has become not only a key policy issue but also a recognized professional realm within higher education. Academic journals dedicated to the subject have been established and exist as published sources to many researchers studying the topic (Berger et al., 2012). In 2008, the Higher Education Opportunity Act was established, which required institutions to disclose graduation rates as consumer information (Cook & Pullaro, 2010).

Despite the amount of retention research completed up to this point in American history, retention rates have remained relatively steady and lower than institutional

officials' desire (Berger et al., 2012; Brown, 2015; The National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, 2018). The focus of higher education has shifted from providing students access to measuring student outcomes (Nailos & Borden, 2014).

According to The National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (2018) for the first 15 years of the 21st century, six-year graduation rates in the United States have averaged around 55% (p. 1). First- to second-year retention rates for four-year public institutions in America have averaged around 78% since 2004 (The National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, 2018, p. 1). First- to second-year retention rates represent a key performance indicator of institutions of higher education and have a positive association with graduation (Bingham & Solverson, 2016). Burkholder and Holland (2014) reported the United States' college completion rates are lower than the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development average.

Stagnant attrition rates have caught the attention of the public, philanthropic organizations, accrediting agencies, and government (Brown, 2015; Burkholder et al., 2013; Jobe & Lenio, 2014; Xu, 2017). Jobe and Lenio (2014) described how the United States' economic struggles, as well as the increased demand for jobs requiring a college education, have made retention more important than ever. In 2009, former President Obama announced college retention as a key initiative to Congress (Powell, 2013). Nailos and Borden (2014) further explained the Obama administration challenged higher education to increase their degree completion rate by 20% by 2020 (p. 415). These federal goals have prompted The Lumina Foundation and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to each set postsecondary credential goals (Nailos & Borden, 2014).

Policymakers at both state and national levels have implemented performance funding as a strategy to entice institutions of higher education to perform better on performance indicators such as retention and graduation rates (Dougherty et al., 2016). Denson and Bowman (2015) proclaimed nearly half of the United States disburses a portion of state funding to institutions of higher education based on graduation rates rather than enrollment counts.

College student attrition has financial implications for students, institutions they attend, and overall economy (Foss et al., 2014; Jobe & Lenio, 2014). As state and federal governments' financial assistance to colleges has decreased, cost of education to students has increased (Burkholder & Holland, 2014). American students are defaulting on their student loans at a higher rate and going into further debt than previously (Greenstone, Looney, Patashnik, & Yu, 2013). Raisman (2013) reported during the 2010-2011 academic year attrition cost nearly $16.5 billion in revenue to the 1,669 institutions he reviewed (p. 4). Billions of dollars are also lost in wages for students who do not complete college, and those students have an unemployment rate of 10% higher than college completers (Foss et al., 2014, p. 2; Jobe & Lenio, 2014, p. 12).

Lost revenue and low retention outcomes ill-effect an institution's reputation (Jobe & Lenio, 2014). Higher education is an increasingly competitive environment and is becoming more of a consumer-oriented enterprise (Denson & Bowman, 2015). This customer-driven system of accountability has been manifested through trends such as national rankings of colleges and has captured the attention of many (Berger et al., 2012). Denson and Bowman (2015) explained how recent attention to retention can be attributed to this changing landscape of higher education and expanded concern regarding the value

of the student experience. When customers, or students, are retained at a higher rate there is less pressure on an institution to recruit new students (O'Flaherty & Heavin, 2015). Recruiting new customers is not as cost efficient as retaining current ones (Vlanden & Barlow, 2014).

The recent focus on college student outcomes has provoked more research about persistence and retention (Berger et al., 2012; Nailos & Borden, 2014). In fact, Vlanden and Barlow (2014) claimed within the United States higher education realm college student persistence is the most frequently studied issue. Although there exists a large body of knowledge regarding student success, college student attrition continues to be a significant puzzle (Vlanden & Barlow, 2014). However, Jobe and Lenio (2014) suggested regardless of the size or type of institution, research indicates retention issues are similar in nature and may present a chance for shared solutions. A variety of variables influence student persistence and completion and each of these factors needs to be examined in order to determine appropriate strategies for overcoming attrition issues (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011).

Variables which affect retention. Because accountability in higher education has recently become a public focal point, institutional assessment of variables which impact retention has become a necessity (McCoy & Byrne, 2017). Demetriou and Schmitz-Sciborski (2011) explained there are many factors discovered through decades of research which have been found to directly or indirectly impact college student retention. Attrition can be attributed to a compilation of factors and does not necessarily demonstrate a program has failed (Mooring, 2016). According to Fain (2016), most colleges use demographics, academic indicators, and enrollment status as standard

measurements for predicting college student success. Demographic characteristics, educational and family backgrounds, social and academic engagement, finances, and academic preparedness are cited most often as variables affecting undergraduate retention (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011; Jia & Maloney, 2015).

As demonstrated in past studies, student demographic characteristics substantially influence retention (Jia & Maloney, 2015; Pike & Graunke, 2014). Significant factors which predict retention include demographic characteristics of gender, race, and ethnicity (Bingham & Solverson, 2016; Burrus et al., 2013). Jia and Maloney (2015) posited the likelihood of not completing a course can be substantially impacted by ethnicity. Gender has been found to predict retention as a stand-alone variable as well as when combined with race (Astin, 1975; Bingham & Solverson, 2016). Vlanden and Barlow (2014) found an association between student loyalty and race and that gender was statistically significant in predicting student loyalty. In Bean and Metzner's (1985) model they suggested gender has an indirect impact on attrition, both positive and negative, through family responsibilities.

A student's family and educational background is another factor impacting student retention (Jia & Maloney, 2015). Demetriou and Schmitz-Sciborski (2011) described the educational level of a student's parents to be a factor related to retention. For example, Bingham and Solverson (2016) explained students were found to be retained at a higher rate if they had a parent who had previously earned a four-year degree. Also, there is a relationship between retention and when a student's mother has a low level of education (Márquez-Vera et al., 2016). Demetriou and Schmitz-Sciborski (2011) shared three studies from the early 2000's which illustrate difficulties first-

generation students have and how those difficulties contribute to increased likelihood of student dropout. Demetriou and Schmitz-Sciborski (2011) also explained first-generation students frequently come from low-income families. Jia and Maloney (2015) concluded high non-completion course rates and high non-retention rates are associated with high school graduates from poor socioeconomic locations.

Student success is dependent upon student engagement, both academic and social in nature (Astin, 1985; Burrus et al., 2013; Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011; Powell, 2013; Tinto, 1975, 1993). Over 30 years' worth of retention research has focused on the relationship between student success and student engagement (Berger et al., 2012; Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011). Demetriou and Schmitz-Sciborski (2011) explained retention is positively influenced by student participation in on-campus organizations and social traditions. Márquez-Vera et al. (2016) found a relationship between student success and social conditions.

Demetriou and Schmitz-Sciborski (2011) indicated family income is also a piece of the retention puzzle. Other financially related retention factors include financial dependency, work status, and the means with which tuition is paid (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011). Pike and Graunke (2014) found a negative relationship between students who received federal grant money and their retention rates. Students demonstrating a high financial need usually have other characteristics which have been empirically tied to high attrition rates (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011). Chen and Hossler (2017) found although Pell grants and loans help reduce the risk of attrition, they do not contribute to timely graduation for nontraditional students.

Research on academic performance, both before and during college, shows empirical evidence related to college persistence (Burrus et al., 2013; Harvey & Luckman, 2014). For example, Bingham and Solverson (2016) indicated research shows standardized test scores and high school GPAs as two significant predictors of college student retention. In a study conducted by Pike and Graunke (2014), a positive relationship between the incoming cohort's retention rate and ACT composite score was found. Chances of dropout could increase if a student had a poor high school GPA (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Tinto, 1975). In addition to pre-college academic work, a common key performance indicator reported by colleges is first- to second-year retention rates (Bingham & Solverson, 2016). Harvey and Luckman (2014) found academic performance during the first-year of college more strongly predicts attrition than a student's educational background or demographics. Students are less likely to drop out when they are pleased with their academic performance (De Freitas et al., 2015).

Comparing Commuter Students and other Student Populations

By definition, the only difference between commuter and residential students is the location in which they reside (Alfano & Eduljee, 2013; Gianoutsos & Rosser, 2014; Jacoby, 1989; Martin & Kilgo, 2015). Often compared to one another, commuter students and residential students may also have differing characteristics (Astin, 1975, 1993; Biddix, 2015; Chickering, 1974). Some of these characteristics of commuter students are also shared by non-traditional students (Campus Explorer, 2018). A comparison and contrast of the complexities of these three student groups are explored in this section.

Commuter students. Although most researchers define commuters as individuals who do not reside in housing owned by the institution, the definition of this group can be more nuanced than it seems (Biddix, 2015; Gianoutsos & Rosser, 2014; Jacoby, 1989; Jacoby & Garland, 2004). Lines have been blurred as higher education personnel have worked towards creative solutions to meet the demand for on-campus housing (Jacoby & Garland, 2004). Ideas such as building houses near campus through a private developer or extending services to geographically nearby rental properties are two ways student demands for housing have been met, which muddy the water when it comes to clearly defining the commuter student population (Jacoby & Garland, 2004). The inability to provide enough on-campus rooms is a contributing factor in the increase in diversity and number of American students deciding to commute to college (Darling, 2015; Gianoutsos & Rosser, 2014; Kirk & Lewis, 2015; Schudde, 2011; Skomsvold, 2014).

Biddix (2015) argued only making a differentiation of commuter student versus noncommuter student does not consider the many characteristics which help truly portray the complexity of the commuter student population. For example, a commuter could be a full-time, traditionally-aged student living at home with parents or a part-time, nontraditionally-aged student with a job and a family (Jacoby & Girrell, 2015; Kretovics, 2015). A commuter may drive his or her personal automobile from a relatively close town, walk or bike from a nearby apartment, or use public transportation to get to campus (Jacoby & Girrell, 2015; Kaplan, 2015). Kretovics (2015) contended distance education students should be included in the commuter student population too, because they exhibit more similarities to physical commuters than do students taking face to face classes.

Because of its size and diversity within, the commuter student population does not have a single profile which can accurately depict the group (Biddix, 2015; Darling, 2015; Kretovics, 2015).

Over 75% of public four-year undergraduates are commuter students (Skolmsvold, 2014, p. 93). Described as the "invisible majority," Kretovics (2015) proclaimed commuter students are the largest college student population, but they are not the most engaged students when it comes to on-campus activities (p. 69). On-campus engagement has been found to be positively related with retention, and students who live on-campus have been found more likely to be engaged (Astin, 1993; Blimling, 1993; Chickering, 1974; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Wolfe, 1993). Chickering (1974) and Bean and Metzner (1985) indicated commuter students are less participatory in extracurricular activities and they do not engage faculty as much nor have as many friends as their residential counterparts. Persistence is facilitated when students develop relationships with other students as well as faculty (Bonet & Walters, 2016).

Kirk and Lewis (2015) noted the National Survey of Student Engagement survey results indicated commuter students participate in co-curricular activities at a rate of 16% less than residential students (p. 49). Commuter student outcomes decrease as a result of the inability to identify with the institution paired with low levels of institutional engagement (Kretovics, 2015; Newbold et al., 2011). Simply stated, commuter students are not as socially integrated into the campus community as students who live on-campus, which increases their likelihood of dropping out of college (Bean & Metzner, 1985).

Also referred to as the "neglected majority," Jacoby & Girrell (2015) indicated some institutions lack acknowledgment of commuter student presence, which renders the need for an increase in advocacy from student affairs professionals through research (p. 36). Dominance of the residential tradition has obstructed higher education personnel from responding to the commuter student population presence (Jacoby & Garland, 2004). Pokorny, Holley, and Kane (2017) contended another group of commuters often overlooked when considering institutional policies and practices is students who live at home with parents or other family members, who reside close to school. Jacoby and Garland (2004) argued policies and procedures at institutions of higher education have not sufficiently met the unique needs of commuter students. Policies and practices should take into account the special needs of commuter students, so they may balance all of their obligations; thus, supporting college completion efforts (Braxton et al., 2014).

The idea commuter students have unique needs comes from the thought most commuters have additional responsibilities, other than school-related tasks, with which to contend (Braxton et al., 2014; Jacoby & Garland, 2004; Kirk & Lewis, 2015). Balancing the responsibilities of family, work, and college can create a sense of conflict for commuter students (Chen & Hossler, 2017; Tinto, 1993). Sometimes these extra responsibilities prohibit commuter students from engaging on-campus, which contributes to the myth they are apathetic to campus life (Jacoby & Garland, 2004). A commuter student's external environment may be negatively impacted by the sum of his or her commitments, which can result in the student's departure from college (Braxton et al., 2014). It is these multiple life roles and diversity of the group which makes commuter

students similar to and often encompassed within the nontraditional student population (Jacoby & Garland, 2004; Non-Traditional Student Populations Network, 2018).

Nontraditional students. Discrepancies in the definition of nontraditional students are even more apparent than those for commuter students (Bean & Metzner, 1985; National Center for Education Statistics, 2018; Non-Traditional Student Populations Network, 2018). Tilley (2014) explained the distinguishing factor between traditional and nontraditional students in research is usually age, specifically older than 25. Brinthaupt and Eady (2014) use age as 25 years or older as a distinctive factor to describe nontraditional students and use the phrase, adult learners, interchangeably with nontraditional students.

Even different institutions of higher education have varying definitions of nontraditional students (Quiggins et al., 2016). Lack of consistency in the nontraditional student population definition is illustrated through previous research and can cause issues in the development of future policies and best practices (Gordon, 2014; Reichert, 2013; Thompson, Miller, & Pomykal Franz, 2013; Trenz, Ecklund-Flores, & Rapoza, 2015; Warden & Myers, 2017). In understanding discrepancies of the nontraditional student definition, it may be helpful to review a side by side comparison of three readily available definitions (see Figure 3). Considering variations and prominent use of the term nontraditional students as well as the fact the group shares similar characteristics with the commuter student population (Lowe & Gayle, 2007), it is important to look closely at the definitions within each study to determine if results are meaningful to the commuter student population. Commuter students can be traditional or nontraditional in age (Jacoby & Girrell, 2015); however, if a nontraditional student is defined by age only

(over 25), then the student is highly likely to be a commuter as well (Campus Explorer, 2018).

Key issues that overlap the commuter student population and nontraditional student population include work and family commitments (Newbold, 2015; Trenz et al., 2015). Because of this overlap in work and family responsibilities, commuter students experience some of the same effects described in some nontraditional student research and retention theory. For example, maintaining a balance between school, work, and family is mentioned in commuter research and literature (Alfano & Eduljee, 2013; Biddix, 2015; Burlison, 2015; Nelson et al., 2016; Newbold, 2015), nontraditional research (Chen & Hossler, 2017; Kretovics, 2013; Quiggins et al., 2016; Soloman, 2016), attrition theory (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Tinto, 1975, 1993) and student involvement theory (Astin, 1975, 1985, 1993); in each case insinuating or illustrating negative effects on student engagement or student persistence. Both nontraditional and commuter students have been positioned in a deficit perspective compared to their residential peers (Chickering, 1974; Jacoby, 1989).

Definition category	Bean & Metzner	National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES)	The Association for Orientation, Transition, and Retention in Higher Education (NODA)
Academic concerns and status	Chiefly concerned with institution's academic offerings (especially courses, certification, and degrees)	Students who did not receive a standard high school diploma but who earned some type of certificate of completion	Non-degree; online/distance learners; does not have high school diploma
Age	Older than 24	The age selected to define older than typical was 1 year above the modal age at the time of the survey for each year in school	Adult learners, 25 and older; senior citizens
Enrollment status	Part-time student	Students who delayed enrollment in postsecondary education by a year or more after high school or who attended part-time were considered non-traditional	Part-time, re-admits and re-entry
Family status	N/A	Having dependents other than a spouse, being a single parent	Has dependents other than a spouse/partner
Influences	Is not greatly influenced by the social environment of the institution	N/A	N/A
Residence	Does not live in a campus residence (e.g., is a commuter)	N/A	Commuter
Work Status	N/A	Working full-time while enrolled	Works full-time
Other	Any combination of the first three factors listed	Being financially independent from parents	Veteran

Figure 3. Comparison of definitions of non-traditional students from the literature (Bean & Metzner, 1985, p. 489; NCES, 2018; and NODA, 2018). Categories on far-left column represent ways in which non-traditional students can be defined. Three columns to the right represent applicable definitions from three sources.

Residential students. What is thought of as the typical collegiate student, an individual fresh out of high school, ready to move into a dorm, and work on studies full-time while relying on parents to pay for the entire bill, is now more of the exception than the rule (Latinen, 2013). Less than 15% of the college student population is made up of students living on-campus (Skolmsvold, 2014, p. 93). Students living on-campus are referred to as residential students (Martin & Kilgo, 2015). For those who reside on-campus, "college and home are synonymous" (Gianoutsos & Rosser, 2014, p. 615).

The individuals responsible for the initial research about retention and retention theory concluded students who lived on-campus had an advantage over those students who lived off-campus (Astin, 1975, 1993; Blimling, 1993; Chickering, 1974; Wolfe, 1993). Labeling commuters as "have nots," Chickering (1974) referred to residential students as "haves." Astin (1977, 1985, 1993) discovered many positive links between living on-campus and college persistence when conducting longitudinal studies using CIRP data. For example, faculty, student government, and Greek life involvement have been found to be positively associated with living in the dorms (Astin, 1975). Others have found a positive link between learning outcomes and residential living (Blimling, 1993; Pike & Kuh, 2005). Overall, research has shown living on-campus allows students an opportunity to integrate themselves both academically and socially into the campus community (Pike & Kuh, 2005).

Recent research and literature also show a positive relationship between living on-campus and student success (Bronkema & Bowman, 2017; Schudde, 2011; Walsh & Robinson Kurpius, 2016). For example, residential living allows students to be in close proximity to campus resources such as advisors and housing staff (Schudde, 2011). Also,

Ike, Baldwin, and Lathouras (2016) explained on-campus accommodations are perceived as safe because of the proximity of security and good lighting.

According to Ike et al. (2016), many scholars have indicated residential students are more likely to graduate than commuter students. Walsh and Robinson Kurpius (2016) found more positive persistence decisions being made by students residing on-campus. Albeit may be indirect, living on-campus is predictive of student success because it promotes social integration and a sense of belonging (Bronkema & Bowman, 2017; Tinto, 1993). Schudde (2011) found first- to second-year retention to be stronger for campus residents compared to commuters.

As explained by Astin (1985), "simply by eating, sleeping, and spending their waking hours on the college campus, residential students have a better chance than do commuter students of developing a strong identification and attachment to undergraduate life" (p. 523). On-campus living encourages greater interactions between peers who are having similar experiences, which may enable opportunities for more social support (Schudde, 2011). Easterbrook and Vignoles (2014) explained features of residence life including physical spaces as well as residential personnel can both foster student well-being and facilitate friendships. Improved social integration due to residing on-campus can lead to greater student success (Mayhew et al., 2016).

The decision to live on-campus could be reflective of a student's financial and family situation (Schudde, 2011). Walsh and Robinson Kurpius (2016) explained the higher the level of a mother's education in addition to the value a student's parents place on education are related to the student's tendency to live on-campus. The self-selection process in deciding where to live during college makes comparisons of residential

students and commuters more difficult because researchers need to control for pre-treatment differences by using quasi-experimental methods (Mayhew et al., 2016; Schudde, 2011). Mayhew et al. (2016) argued previous evidence indicating relationships between living on-campus and student success may not be as strong as previously thought either because of research methodology improvements or because the impact of residential living over time may have decreased.

Key Concerns of Commuter Students

Making up most of today's college student population, commuter students represent a diverse group of individuals (Darling, 2015; Gianoutsos & Rosser, 2014; Skomsvold, 2014). Although they are a diverse group of individuals, according to recent literature a common set of key concerns affect commuter students (Darling, 2015). It is important to note key concerns for commuter students are interconnected, and they can and do overlap; woven together, they help in further understanding the commuter student population.

Transportation. Maslow's (1982) hierarchy of needs is a motivation theory which places basic human needs into a pyramid-like shape illustrating a sequence of needs. The bottom row of the pyramid represents the most fundamental needs such as food and shelter; the top row of the pyramid represents self-fulfillment needs, called self-actualization (Maslow, 1982). An individual cannot reach one's potential, or the top of the pyramid, without having basic needs at the base of the pyramid fulfilled (Maslow, 1982). Jacoby (2015) argued life issues of commuter students, such as housing and transportation, often places commuter students at the bottom of Maslow's pyramid.

These life issues leave commuter students unable to focus on achieving academic goals or developing a sense of belonging at the institution (Tinto, 1993). In a survey conducted in 2012, 66% of respondents at Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis indicated "factors such as work, transportation, finances, and family influenced their ability to become involved" (Burlison, 2015, p. 30). Students report being less satisfied with the institution the more they commute (Astin, 1993). Also, substantial commuting increases stress, which corroborates findings of the negative effects commuting has on emotional well-being (Astin, 1993). Transportation alone poses many issues, such as owning and maintaining reliable transportation, scheduling around fixed transportation itineraries, navigating weather conditions and traffic, or dealing with parking — all of which can consume more of a commuter student's time and energy (Jacoby & Garland, 2004; Newbold, 2015). Kirk and Lewis (2015) identified transportation and class scheduling as distinct barriers for commuter students who seek to make a campus connection.

Time. Another shared characteristic of commuter students is they all spend time traveling to and from campus for classes (Burlison, 2015). By virtue of living in on-campus facilities, residential students spend less time getting to and from class (Gianoutsos & Rosser, 2014). Darling (2015) contended campuses should be welcoming and accessible, with ample parking and a place where students can feel comfortable between courses, to increase a commuter student's chance of spending time on-campus. Other identified key concerns for commuter students such as transportation, work, and family, all have a direct association with the amount of time a commuter student has to spend on-campus (Alfano & Eduljee, 2013; Astin, 1985; Newbold,

2015). Soloman (2016) elaborated a commuter student's family and work responsibilities combined with a long commute time results in a dislocation from the academic community. The concept of time is interwoven with other key concerns identified in this section.

Sense of belonging. Closely related to Maslow's (1982) hierarchy of needs theory is the concept of mattering, an individual's perceived significance to others (Jacoby, 2015). Mattering is similar to a student's sense of belonging, or how connected a student feels to the institution (Jacoby, 2015). Chen and Lin (2014) explained when individuals have a sense of belonging, share common interests, demonstrate a willingness to sustain friendships, and are mutually dependent of one another, a sense of community can be formed. A lower sense of community has been reported by commuter students through previous research (Kirk & Lewis, 2015). Kretovics (2015) argued it is very challenging to create a sense of community when dealing with a diverse group of students. Because of outside commitments and time constraints, fostering relationships with other students on-campus is less likely to occur with commuter students (Martin & Kilgo, 2015).

Failure to connect with other students can result in a commuter student's deficiency in feeling a sense of belonging at the institution (Martin & Kilgo, 2015). In a study about persistence and its relationship to a student's sense of belonging, Ishitani and Reid (2015) found the more a student academically integrated during the first-year of college, the more the student felt he or she belonged at the institution. Further illustrating how commuter students do not have as strong of a connection to an institution, Martin and Kilgo's (2015) study with community college students revealed a lower level of

psychological well-being in commuters compared to residential students. Psychological well-being is a predictor of first- to second-year retention (Martin & Kilgo, 2015).

Marginality, the opposite of mattering, was identified by Schlossberg (1985). Jacoby (2015) argued policies and procedures should be developed to make commuter students feel less marginal during their transition to higher education. A student's failure to engage academically and socially can cause a sense of marginalization (Darling, 2015).

Family. Institutional policymakers should pay careful attention to their institution's policies and procedures because they can influence not only what students do with their time but also how devoted students are to their education (Astin, 1985). Astin (1985) proclaimed, "The student's investment in matters relating to family, friends, job, and other outside activities represents a reduction in the time and energy the student has to devote to his or her education development" (p. 143). Family plays an integral role in the life of commuters, either because they are still of an age to live at home with their parents or because they have their own family for which to care (Newbold et al., 2011). According to Kodama (2015), literature portrays family and home communities as having a large effect, either positive or negative, on college students' experiences.

Commuter students often have family commitments which prevent them from taking advantage of on-campus academic support opportunities (Darling, 2015). Topics such as child care and parenting were frequently discussed during advising appointments at community colleges, which are typically commuter campuses (Darling, 2015). According to Newbold (2015), commuter students can be tempted to skip class or completely withdraw due to feeling guilty about missed time with family.

First generation commuters and commuters of color may not have the support they need by virtue of their family not understanding the amount of time and energy needed to complete college (Kodama, 2015). However, family can be a source of support for commuters of color (Gefen & Fish, 2013; Patton, Harris, Ranero-Ramirez, Villacampa, & Lui, 2014). For example, the spiritual aspect of a student's home community can help commuter students' abilities to socially adjust and persist in college (Gefen & Fish, 2013; Patton et al., 2014).

Work. Often cited alongside the matter of family commitments is the topic of work. Two out of four work-related characteristics of students who attend commuter institutions include "nontraditional-aged students with established jobs or careers and traditional-aged students who live and work off-campus" (Brown, 2015, p. 406). Skomsvold (2014) revealed over 60% of commuter students from 2011-2012 were either working full-time, over the age of 30, or married (pp. 93-94). Commuters are more likely to work not only off-campus but also for more time than residential students (Biddix, 2015). One study, at a midsized state university in the Southwest, found 85% of commuter students worked while attending school (Burlison, 2015, p. 28). Also demonstrating a connection between work and commuter students, Nelson et al. (2016) concluded commuter students attending college are more likely to have a full-time job.

There is conflicting evidence indicating the possibility work has a negative impact on a commuter student's academic performance. One study found students' academic performance decreased the more a student worked (Nelson et al., 2016). Márquez-Vera et al. (2016) concluded there is a relationship between retention and working over four hours per day. Conversely, Maksy and Wagaman (2016) concluded distraction variables

such as work or large course loads were not negatively associated with student performances in upper-level accounting courses at both residential and commuter campuses. Additionally, Alfano and Eduljee (2013) established while there was no significant relationship found between a commuter student's GPA and the amount of time the student spent working, there was evidence commuter students demonstrated a lack of involvement in school activities. Regardless of the impact on a student's academic achievement, it is fair to conclude work and other outside commitments could both distract and take time away from school-related tasks and activities (Nelson et al., 2016).

Bridgewater State College found data which showed commuter students worked more off-campus than residential students, and commuter students were less likely to be involved in on-campus activities than residential students (Alfano & Eduljee, 2013). Alfano and Eduljee (2013) indicated working residential students reported lower levels of stress than working commuter students. When compared to working residential students, commuter students with jobs reported higher earnings (Newbold et al., 2011).

Finances. Commuter students do not work without good reason; the majority of working commuter students indicated the reason they worked was to pay bills and school expenses (Alfano & Eduljee, 2013). Financing education is of greater concern to commuters than residential students (Chickering, 1974). Gianoutsos and Rosser (2014) indicated commuter students are more likely to have a lower socioeconomic status than residential students. It has also been established students with a low socioeconomic status are increasingly attending commuter campuses (Brown, 2015). Further, students enrolled at residential institutions typically have more financial resources than students

attending commuter institutions (Brown, 2015). Jacoby (2015) explained because of family or financial issues, commuters may find it necessary to stop out of college.

Strategies for overcoming key concerns. According to Newbold et al. (2011), when it comes to providing resources focused on their unique needs, commuter students do not have high expectations. Even at institutions with a strong culture of assessment, few resources are designated for the purposes of assessing the needs of commuter students (Biddix, 2015). The quality and quantity of time devoted to one's education can be affected by institutional policies and procedures (Astin, 1985). To have a substantial impact on commuter student success, institutional personnel need to make an extreme adjustment to their priorities (Kretovics, 2015).

A variety of resources and interventions relative to key concerns for commuter students have been explored in past and recent literature. Some strategies such as enhancing use of technology (Kretovics, 2015), developing learning communities (Blimling, 1993), using peer mentors (Trenz et al., 2015), or creating a commuter-friendly course schedule (Laitinen, 2013; Quiggins et al., 2016) are used to help to address commuter student academic integration issues. Kretovics (2015) recommended using distance education classes to alleviate commuter scheduling issues. Other strategies such as creating inclusive and comfortable physical spaces, creating a specific on-campus office for commuters, and creating a designated student support group could help address commuter student social integration (Jacoby & Garland, 2004; Quiggins et al., 2016; Soloman, 2016; Strange & Banning, 2015). Kirk and Lewis (2015) shared an idea implemented at another institution which has renovated a space in a residence hall for commuters to either hangout or reserve a room for the night if needed. Campus

activities should be scheduled when commuter students are on-campus (Kirk & Lewis, 2015).

On-site childcare, financial planning, and counseling services could specifically address issues related to additional stress that comes with working and parenting (Laitinen, 2013; Trenz et al., 2015). Godfrey et al. (2017) recommended other parenting-friendly strategies like adding changing tables to restroom facilities, providing lactation rooms for nursing mothers, and providing a family-friendly atmosphere in dining locations on-campus. Godfrey et al. (2017) even created a family reading room within the on-campus library.

Regardless of strategies developed to enhance the commuter student college experience, institutional leaders should consider and assess the unique institutional context in which commuter students exist because of variances inherent within each educational environment (Biddix, 2015; Dugan et al., 2008; Jacoby, 1989). A commitment to determining the needs of students requires time and effort (Brinthaupt & Eady, 2014). Campus personnel need to not only find innovative ways to help commuters overcome obstacles preventing them from degree completion (Kirk & Lewis, 2015) but also effectively communicate to students regarding resources available to them (Quiggins et al., 2016).

Summary

An examination of literature related to the commuter student phenomenon was provided in Chapter Two. A comprehensive exploration of the conceptual framework for the study was reviewed. In addition to the theoretical background for the conceptual framework, an in-depth description of retention in higher education, a comparison of

commuter students and other relevant student populations, and key concerns for commuter students was discussed.

In Chapter Three, the methodology for the study is discussed. A brief scope of the problem and purpose of the study is provided, followed by a review of the research questions. Explicit details of the qualitative research design are described. Detailed information about the population and sample is explained as well as the type of instruments used to conduct the study. Further clarifying how the study was conducted, the data collection and analysis strategies are expanded. An explanation of ethical considerations and a chapter summary are provided at the conclusion of the chapter.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Implicit in Strange and Banning's (2015) campus ecology model, and predicated in ecology theory, is the idea institutions of higher learning are obligated to create environments which support educational endeavors of their students. As explored in the conceptual framework sections of Chapters One and Two, different individuals may not only have a variety of responses to the same environment but also have varying influences on an environment (Strange, 1999). Increasing ways in which commuter students interact with the campus environment could enhance their engagement with the institution (Astin, 1985; Jacoby 2015). Previous research has illustrated students who live on-campus are more likely to engage on-campus both academically and socially, which has a positive impact on retention (Astin, 1993; Blimling, 1993; Chickering, 1974; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Wolfe, 1993). Because of prior studies' findings of a positive relationship between living on-campus and retention, differences between retention and six-year graduation rates of commuter and residential students were measured in this study.

Knowledge of physical, human aggregate, organizational, and socially constructed components of a campus environment has potential to empower campus leaders to make a positive mark on commuter student success (Jacoby, 2015; Strange, 2000; Strange & Banning, 2015). Through the lens of Strange and Banning's (2015) four environmental components, commuter student perceptions of how the physical campus and its community either supports or provides barriers to retention were evaluated. Additionally, faculty perceptions of how the campus environment affects commuter students were explored.

The beginning of Chapter Three includes an overview of the problem being studied, purpose of the study, and research questions developed to guide the study. The methodology, including a detailed description of the mixed methods research design, is explained next. Population and sample information for participants of this study are examined as well as a depiction of instrumentation used to gather data. The comprehensive process for data collection and methodology for data analysis are both explained. Finally, specifics regarding ethical considerations are described, and the chapter concludes with a summary.

Problem and Purpose Overview

Nailos and Borden (2014) described how recent state and federal initiatives have placed an increased emphasis on holding institutions of higher education in the United States more accountable for college persistence and completion rates. Accrediting agencies have been requiring retention and graduation rates as core indicators of success for institutions of higher education for the last decade, and some states are using such measurements to make determinations regarding resource funding (Berger et al., 2012). About 42% of American undergraduate students are not earning a degree within six years of initial college enrollment (Turner & Thompson, 2014, p. 94). The impact of non-completers affects students, institutions, and society; students lose the ability for obtaining jobs and more earning power, institutions of higher education lose credibility with the public for low graduation rates, and economies struggle with a less competitive and financially engaging workforce (Turner & Thompson, 2014).

The call for accountability has spawned several foundational retention studies and intervention strategies across the United States, but many issues remain unresolved and

require further study (Berger et al., 2012). During the timeframe in which the primary focus of the federal government has shifted from educational access to institutional accountability the college student population has become more diverse (Berger et al., 2012; Turner & Thompson, 2014). Berger et al. (2012) iterated the diverse student population in higher education has prompted retention research within a variety of institutional settings as well as specific groups of students. One particular group of growing and diverse students is the commuter student population (Darling, 2015; Gianoutsos & Rosser, 2014; Skomsvold, 2014).

Brown (2015) explained previous persistence and retention research has found commuter students are not retained and do not graduate, at as high of rates as residential students who live on-campus. Because commuter students now make up the majority of the college student population and four-year graduation rates and freshman persistence rates have remained relatively steady over the last thirty years, research on the commuter student population is important (Brown, 2015; Skomsvold, 2014). Being able to understand factors which influence commuter student retention within a specific institutional context has potential to positively influence a campus' ability to provide both meaningful and effective strategies for individual student success (Berger et al., 2012).

Research questions and hypotheses. The following questions provide the foundation and guide this study:

1. What significant difference exists, if any, between the first- to second-year retention rates of first-time freshmen-who lived on-campus and similar first-time freshmen-who commuted to campus at a public four-year Midwestern university?

$H1_{0:}$ There is no significant difference between the first- to second-year retention

rates of first-time freshmen-who lived on-campus and similar first-time freshmen who commuted to campus at a public four-year Midwestern university.

$H1_{a:}$ There is a significant difference between the first- to second-year retention rates of first-time freshmen-who lived on-campus and similar first-time freshmen who commuted to campus at a public four-year Midwestern university.

2. What significant difference exists, if any, between the six-year graduation rates of first-time freshmen-who lived on-campus and similar first-time freshmen who commuted to campus at a public four-year Midwestern university?

$H2_{0:}$ There is no significant difference between the six-year graduation rates of first-time freshmen-who lived on-campus and similar first-time freshmen-who commuted to campus at a public four-year Midwestern university.

$H2_{a:}$ There is a significant difference between the six-year graduation rates of first-time freshmen-who lived on-campus and similar first-time freshmen-who commuted to campus at a public four-year Midwestern university.

3. What factors, both institutional and personal, do commuter students at a public four-year Midwestern university perceive as supporting their efforts towards retention and degree completion?

4. What factors, both institutional and personal, do commuter students at a public four-year Midwestern university perceive as obstacles in their efforts towards retention and degree completion?

5. What factors, both institutional and personal, do faculty at a public four-year Midwestern university perceive as supporting commuter students' efforts towards retention and degree completion?

6. What factors, both institutional and personal, do faculty at a public four-year Midwestern university perceive as obstacles for commuter students' efforts towards retention and degree completion?

Research Design

Research is a systematic, multiple-strategy approach used to actively generate useful and understandable knowledge about humans (DePoy & Gitlin, 2016). Creswell and Creswell (2018) described three major types of research design; qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. A qualitative approach to research does not adhere to a strict definition of amounts and attempts to categorize variables by specific attributes (Bluman, 2015). When using a quantitative approach to research, specified numerical amounts, which can be identified as continuous or discrete, are used (Bluman, 2015). Qualitative and quantitative studies signify two ends of the research spectrum, with a mixed methods approach to research falling in the middle since it integrates components from both qualitative and quantitative approaches (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Although there has been abundant debate amongst researchers about which method is better, dialogue over the years indicates both qualitative and quantitative approaches as viable tools in the quest for answers to different types of research questions (Davies & Hughes, 2014).

The type of research design chosen for the study was driven by the research questions (Doyle et al., 2016). While quantitative research design answers questions by using numbers and statistics, qualitative research design answers questions by using words (Bernard, 2018). Because the research questions in this study were both qualitative and quantitative in nature, a mixed methods approach was used (Creswell &

Creswell, 2018). One advantage of a mixed methods research design is it allows a more complete exploration of the phenomena being studied (Doyle et al., 2016). Additionally, a mixed methods approach allows different types of data, in various forms, to be collected and examined (Fraenkel et al., 2015). Fraenkel et al. (2015) predicted an increase in mixed methods studies in educational research of the future.

Two of the six research questions were used to guide the quantitative aspect of this mixed methods study (Doyle et al., 2016). Quantitative research tests theories by using statistical procedures to explore differences between variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Variables, which take on the form of numbers, were examined to determine if associations existed amongst them (Fraenkel et al., 2015). Commuter student and residential student data were collected and analyzed to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between retention and graduation rates of the two student groups.

The students' residential status and academic success rates were two sets of existing data, which were analyzed quantitatively through a causal-comparative methodology (Fraenkel et al., 2015). Creswell and Creswell (2018) described causal-comparative methodology as research designed to search for associations among variables as well as significant differences between variables. Fraenkel et al. (2015) further explained differences examined in causal-comparative research have already occurred and are examined after the fact. Dependent variables included first- to second-year retention rates and six-year graduation rates; the independent variable was the residential status of students (Field, 2017).

Creswell and Creswell (2018) posited a researcher's beliefs and worldviews influence the type of research design selected for a study. The social constructivist worldview, typically aligned with qualitative research, is a perspective wherein individuals seek to derive varied and subjective meanings about objects (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The existence of several subjective realities, as opposed to one world reality, is a prevalent concept amid qualitative researchers (Nicholls, 2017). In this study, subjective realities of both commuter students and faculty as they relate to factors impacting commuter student retention were examined. By using qualitative research, the desired outcome is to not only make sense of these multiple realities but also provide for an in-depth exploration of them (Taylor, Bogdan, & DeVault, 2015).

Although diverse, the commuter student population does share common characteristics (Darling, 2015). Shared characteristics of commuter students have been discovered through recent quantitative studies, which have helped to establish a profile of this student group. For example, Newbold (2015) found students who commute tend to be older than residential students. In addition, Nelson et al. (2016) found commuters are more apt to work full-time while attending college, and Brown (2015) found students who attend commuter institutions tend to have more financial constraints than students who attend residential institutions. Burlison (2015) also conducted a literature review of commuter students, which identified only a single qualitative study about commuter students in Australia. Because of the void in qualitative research, a study about commuter students including this methodology can provide a more holistic focus on the topic (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

In seeking to understand the factors associated with commuter student retention from both student and faculty perspectives, open-ended questions helped the researcher make meaning within social and cultural contexts of these individuals' lives (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A strategy of inquiry known as phenomenological research was utilized as a method to understand issues affecting commuter students' ability to persist in college as described by participants in the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Phenomenological research originated in the 20th century and is implored by researchers who desire to make sense of lived human experiences (Wilson, 2015). Ograjensek and Gal (2016) explained assumptions are made in phenomenology about events which occur in people's lives not completely understood unless the context in which people live is considered. The study of the phenomenon of commuter students' retention in college was captured through documented experiences of both commuter students and faculty.

A challenge with a phenomenological study design is the researcher must be aware of preconceptions or assumptions related to commuter student retention to see commuter students' and faculty members' lived experiences with retention more objectively (Wilson, 2015). Although it may be impossible to fully set aside all assumptions, the concept of bracketing is a strategy used in qualitative research to aid in putting aside assumptions to understand another's viewpoint more fully and to be more open-minded when observing phenomena (Sorsa, Kikkala, & Astedt-Kurki, 2015). Bracketing was used before and during the study as well as during the evaluation of the study to illustrate conscientious choices were made in alignment with the research methodology, thus increasing the rigor of the study (Wilson, 2015).

The importance of understanding perspectives of commuter students and faculty as they relate to the context in which these individuals work and live was also explored through the qualitative aspect of this study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Using triangulation, or convergent, mixed methods research design, quantitative and qualitative data were collected simultaneously for this study (Fraenkel et al., 2015). Doyle et al. (2016) explained qualitative and quantitative data are equally prioritized and findings are not dependent upon each other in a convergent design.

Utilizing a mixed methods approach for this study allowed for a more holistic picture of the phenomenon (Fraenkel et al., 2015). Schoonenboom (2017) posited more objectivity is gained by the researcher as a result of a mixed methods approach. By looking for significant differences in the academic success between commuter and residential students, the researcher was able to quantitatively determine if the institution falls in line with previous theory established about commuter students (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Additionally, speaking to commuter students and faculty about their lived experiences opened up the opportunity to learn something new about the phenomenon as it relates to this unique campus (Wilson, 2015).

Population and Sample

The population of this study included commuter students and faculty at a public four-year Midwestern university. The liberal arts institution used in this study is state-supported, offering both undergraduate and graduate degree programs. Located in the Midwest, the moderately-selective institution is settled in a mid-sized town with a population of about 50,000 residents. First- to second-year retention rates for the last decade have ranged between 60% and 66% (Institutional Data, 2018). An average rate of

33% of students have graduated within six years for the most recent five cohorts (Institutional Data, 2018). For the last decade, a mean of 320 faculty per year were employed by the institution (Institutional Data, 2018). On average, the institution has had an eighteen to one student to faculty ratio (Institutional Data, 2018). An average of 64% of faculty at the institution were employed full-time with an average of 59% as tenured for the past ten years (Institutional Data, 2018).

Total student enrollment headcount at the institution has ranged between 5,200 and 6,200 students during the last decade (Institutional Data, 2018). About 80% of students attending the institution are from the same state in which the institution is located (Institutional Data, 2018). Approximately 95% of student applicants are admitted to the institution, and 50% of those applicants enroll (Institutional Data, 2018). For the last 10 years, first-time freshmen ACT scores have ranged from 21.1 to 21.8 and high school grade point averages have ranged from 3.2 to 3.3 (Institutional Data, 2018). Since 2008, a mean of 68% of the student population was 24 years of age or younger (Institutional Data, 2018). Historically, commuter students make up between 86% to 89% of the student population (Institutional Data, 2018).

The quantitative research sample included the entire student population, or target population, for the most recent three years of data at the institution (Fraenkel et al., 2015). For research question number one, deidentified data were requested for 2014, 2015, 2016 cohorts; for research question number two, deidentified data were requested for 2008, 2009, 2010 cohorts. A threat to internal validity for this causal-comparative research was reduced by homogenizing student comparison groups (Fraenkel et al., 2015). Students in both residential and commuter groups were within the same cohort,

24 years of age or younger, and had a permanent home address within 75 miles of the institution. Distance learners, those students who take all their classes online, were removed from each of the groups. Because student groups in this non-random sample were of interest, and results of the study apply to this institution, this population was studied (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Although authors of qualitative research methods commonly agree about the impossibility of specifying a sample size prior to completing a study, there is recognition proposal approvals may require such information (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, & McKibbon, 2015). In a recent study about sampling practices in qualitative research, Guetterman (2015) found the mean sample size for phenomenological educational studies was 15. Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested three to 10 cases for phenomenological studies. Others have suggested there are no concrete numbers for sample sizes in qualitative research, and the researcher should consider all factors involved and use judgment to decide (Guetterman, 2015). Creswell and Poth (2018) recommended using fewer participants or sites in qualitative research to collect extensive data about those participants or sites.

Commuter students and faculty from the 2017-2018 academic year were eligible to participate in the study. For purposes of the qualitative aspect of this study, selection of participants was completed through a combination of stratified randomization, convenience, and purposive selection (Robinson, 2014). Because a large amount of time is spent with qualitative study participants to reach data saturation, combining convenience and purposive selection can be essential (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Commonly defined and used as a technique in qualitative research literature today,

purposive, or purposeful sampling, is used to "select participants or sites (or documents or visual material) that will best help the researcher understand the problem and research question" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 178; Gentles et al., 2015).

Etikan, Musa, and Alkassim (2016) described convenience selection as an easy procedure in choosing individuals who are readily available to partake in the study. Prior to the purposive convenience selection, a stratified randomization was conducted to proportionately represent both student and faculty populations at the institution (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Since the qualitative piece of the study was conducted to explore and analyze perceptions of students and faculty in regard to college retention, a small sample size was necessary to provide for an extensive study (Guetterman, 2015). Fifteen to 20 commuter students and 8 to 12 faculty members were two pre-identified sample size ranges for the study. To ensure data saturation, or point at which no new data appears, the researcher interviewed one more participant after perceived saturation had occurred to ensure no new themes in the data emerged (Guetterman, 2015).

Instrumentation

The quantitative part of the study used archival data. Examining the most recent three years of available data provided a clearer picture of the effect of the commuting phenomenon at this specific institution. Fraenkel et al. (2015) explained causal-comparative research is susceptible to internal validity threats because the independent variable has already been exposed to manipulation. Homogeneous subgroups were created to protect against internal validity threats in the quantitative analysis (Fraenkel et al., 2015). Microsoft Excel was used to conduct a statistical analysis of both quantitative research questions.

Original interview questions were developed and used for focus groups (see Appendix A). Focus group participants completed a participant information form, which was created to provide further context about the students in the study (see Appendix B). Unique questions were also developed for use in faculty interviews (see Appendix C). Questions for each group were established through the examination of the conceptual framework and aligned with the qualitative research questions. Specifically, all questions were designed to encompass Strange and Banning's (2015) four basic models of human environments: physical, aggregate, organizational, and constructed. Interview questions for both one-on-one interviews with faculty and student focus groups were provided to study participants ahead of time so they could be fully prepared to engage in discussion.

Usually informal, qualitative interviews are directed through interview guides, which are designed to prompt open-ended responses from participants about the phenomenon of the study (Neuman, 2014). Protocols for this study were designed to guide focus group questions for students and in-person interviews of faculty (see Appendices D & E). Creswell and Creswell (2018) recommended creating an interview protocol that includes a heading, standardized instructions, interview questions and an ice-breaker question, probing questions for follow-up on interview questions, space to record observations and answers, and a thank-you statement.

Interview protocols also included flexibility for unexpected themes which could have arisen during interviews (Neuman, 2014). This strategy allowed for the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of commuter student and faculty perceptions (Neuman, 2014). Neuman (2014) recommended the use of a question at the end of interviews to inquire from participants what has not been asked of them that would be important to

know about the phenomenon. Also incorporated into interview protocols for this study was acknowledgment all interviews would be audiotaped and transcribed.

Interview and focus group questions were reviewed and approved by the three committee members as well as an additional researcher with qualitative research expertise. A pilot test of interview and focus group questions was used with three commuter students and two faculty members before data collection occurred "to determine if the questions work as intended" and to determine if any revisions needed to be made (Maxwell, 2005, p. 93). Conducting a pilot study of an instrument is a strategy used to ensure validity is achieved (Dikko, 2016). The triangulation of data obtained from student and faculty pilot interviews aided to validate interview questions used in the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Further validation was obtained by allowing participants of the study to provide remarks about findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Before an instrument can be deemed a good measure, an instrument must also be reliable (Dikko, 2016). Reliability in its simplest form involves consistency (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). To ensure reliability of the instrument used in the study, the following strategies suggested by Gibbs (2017) were employed: transcripts of interviews and focus group sessions were checked to ensure there were no transcription errors; codes were continually checked to safeguard against drifting in code definitions; a third party was used to cross-check codes for agreement; and qualitative computer software, NVivo, was used to check for reliability in coding and in establishing themes.

Data Collection

Ensuring procedures for data collection are in place and present a logical and manageable process is essential for conducting proper research (Creswell & Creswell,

2018). Permissions must be sought out prior to any steps in the research process being taken, and permissions may be required from more than one source (Bell & Waters, 2014). Taylor et al. (2015) explained research involving human subjects requires Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. First, upon completion of required training related to the treatment of human subjects during research, IRB approval was obtained from Lindenwood University (see Appendix F). Next, required training was completed and IRB approval was sought from the institution represented in the study in accordance with the institution's policy and timeline (see Appendix G).

The IRB requirements may vary from institution to institution (Taylor et al., 2015). Required to be submitted with IRB applications for Lindenwood University was the informed consent form, which was signed by all participants of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) (see Appendices H & I). The informed consent form notifies participants of how their rights will be protected during the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). To increase chances of IRB approval, Taylor et al. (2015) recommended providing an explicit and clear methodology for the study, expecting to provide informed consent to participants, explaining risks of the study and how they will be overcome, and providing questions to be asked during the study.

In addition to IRB approval, gatekeeper approval was sought (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Roller and Lavrakas (2015) defined a gatekeeper as a person who could approve or deny access to participants desiring to be studied. The Vice President of Student Affairs of the institution being studied was asked for permission to have access to students on-campus for the study. This written letter included details about the length of the study and facilities being used for the study (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015) (see Appendix

J). Information about potential outcomes and benefits of the study were also shared (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Bracketing of personal experience. Also known as epoché, bracketing is a common practice originating in phenomenological research (Englander, 2016). Moustakas (1994) described bracketing as an opportunity for the researcher to divulge personal involvement with the phenomenon. Disclosing these experiences, including feelings and opinions, aids the researcher in evading personal bias or predispositions while conducting the study (Moustakas, 1994). Described as a fundamental technique in phenomenology, bracketing sharpens awareness of the researcher's feelings on the topic so the study can be completed from a fresh vantage point (Moustakas, 1994). Through bracketing a researcher can better focus on participants' perspectives of the phenomenon being studied (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Moustakas, 1994). Bracketing was used by the researcher before the study, during the study, and after the study (Sorsa et al., 2015). The researcher used an electronic reflexive journal as a method to conduct bracketing (Tufford & Newman, 2010).

Once the bracketing process had been started, and institutional IRB approvals were secured, a request for commuter student and faculty data was sent to the institution (see Appendix K). When quantitative data were received, they were stored securely until they were ready for statistical analysis. Once permission was given to use the email listservs at the institution being studied, recruitment letters were emailed to current students and faculty for focus groups and interviews (see Appendices L & M). When desired and proportionate samples were achieved, focus groups and interviews were scheduled. Letters of informed consent were emailed to all participants of the study and

verbally reviewed in-person during the scheduled interview and focus group times. Prior to the start of interviews and focus groups, participants signed a letter of informed consent and were provided a copy. Next, interviews and focus groups were conducted.

Qualitative data were collected using in-person semi-structured interviews with faculty, and in-person focus group interviews with students (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). With a preference of natural settings in qualitative research in mind, faculty were interviewed in a one-on-one setting in the faculty member's office and focus group interviews with students were conducted either in the library quiet room or a classroom (Ormston, Spencer, Barnard, & Snape, 2014). According to interview protocols for both interviews and focus groups, the researcher began with open-ended questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). When needed, follow-up or probing questions were asked based on participants' responses to gain more in-depth perceptions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

All responses during interviews and focus groups were recorded and detailed notes of each interaction with students and faculty were taken (Taylor et al., 2015). Video recording was used for focus groups to best capture the nonverbal language of participants during the study (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Expanded field notes for both interviews and focus groups were organized using a pre-determined organizational structure to keep comments, observations, raw notes, and tentative conclusions distinct from one another (Neuman, 2014). Interview protocols include room for expanded field notes. To ensure quality and efficiency, the researcher scheduled time immediately after each interview to finalize expanded field notes (Neuman, 2014).

Data Analysis

Analysis of the quantitative research questions and hypotheses were conducted using Microsoft Excel. A *z*-test for two proportions was used to determine if there were significant statistical differences between retention and graduation rates of commuter and residential students (Bluman, 2015). Bluman (2015) explained a comparison of proportions of two groups is possible using a *z*-test for two proportions. The *z*-test for two proportions was selected for the statistical analysis technique because two large independent populations were being studied (Bluman, 2015). A significant proportional difference in retention and graduation rates of commuter and residential students were examined at the 95% confidence level, or α of 0.05 (Salkind, 2016).

Once transcripts of interviews with students and faculty were fully transcribed and checked for accuracy, a complete record of the study was ready for analysis (Neuman, 2014). Creswell and Creswell (2018) explained once data are organized, it should be read through in full to gain an overall sense of the information. Neuman (2014) posited data are analyzed not only within segments but also across segments to find predominating themes. Themes, or categories, will emerge from qualitative data and Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggested the themes be used to classify major findings of the study. Faculty interviews and student focus group transcripts were analyzed separately, and themes were identified among the two groups of data.

For the first cycle of coding, a descriptive coding process was used (Saldaña, 2016). The second cycle coding method used was focused coding (Saldaña, 2016). To protect from drifting in codes, frequent checks were conducted (Gibbs, 2017). Cross-checking for code agreement was completed by a third party (Gibbs, 2017). The

qualitative computer software program, NVivo, is used by the institution being studied and was implored as an effective and efficient strategy for checking code reliability (Creswell & Creswell 2018; Gibbs, 2017). The initially established set of codes changed as new themes emerged and as the researcher continuously engaged with the data (Gibbs, 2017). Neuman (2014) claimed coding is complete when information gathered reflects a complete map of the studied phenomenon.

Ethical Considerations

Creswell and Creswell (2018) explained the importance of both anticipating ethical issues and making good ethical decisions when conducting research. Ethical considerations were made throughout the study. Prior to the study, the necessary time commitment and benefits of the study were explicitly described in the recruitment materials sent to prospective participants (Fraenkel et al., 2015). Safeguards were made by setting up password-protected computer files for all study documents (Fraenkel et al., 2015). IRB approval was sought to ensure participants were not being put at risk by participating in the study (Taylor et al., 2015).

During the data collection process, ethical decisions were made. Informed consent forms were signed so participants were fully aware of their rights throughout the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Additional information was provided to participants informing them participation was voluntary and could end at any time during the study, and participants had the right to refuse to answer any question (Fraenkel et al., 2015). In overt research, the relationship between the institution and the researcher will be revealed to participants, and research objectives will be articulated (Taylor et al., 2015).

Participants also learned the way in which data were collected and stored during the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Ethical considerations were made during the data analysis process. To protect the identity of participants, pseudonyms were used (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Only the transcriber and researcher had access to interview data to help ensure confidentiality (Fraenkel et al., 2015). Member checking was conducted, allowing all participants to review an initial draft of the study results to determine if the researcher had accurately described their perceptions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Once the study was complete, transcripts were shredded, and audio was destroyed.

Summary

Following a brief review of the problem, purpose, and research questions of the study, Chapter Three described the mixed methods research design. Specific information about the population and sample for the study was provided. Details regarding the development of the instrument as well as the validity and reliability of the instrument were revealed. The data collection process was explained, followed by comprehensive information about how data were analyzed. The chapter concluded with an explanation of ethical considerations for the study.

A brief review of the problem and purpose of the study are provided at the beginning of the following chapter. Next, a description of the instrument designed to conduct the study is shared. The majority of information explained in Chapter Four is the detailed analysis of data collected. After the results of the study are revealed and explained, a chapter summary is provided.

Chapter Four: Analysis of Data

Lack of significant growth in educational outcomes, or retention and graduation rates at institutions of higher education, has become a focal point for not only the public but also governmental agencies and accrediting bodies (Brown, 2015; Burkholder et al., 2013; Jobe & Lenio, 2014; Xu, 2017). Because financial implications of non-completers ill-effects students as well as society, retention research has been increasingly prompted by virtue of the microscope placed on college student outcomes (Berger et al., 2012; Nailos & Borden, 2014; Turner & Thompson, 2014). A large and diverse population of students attending institutions of higher education today are commuter students (Darling, 2015; Gianoutsos & Rosser, 2014; Skomsvold, 2014).

Brown (2015) described how historical research indicated living on-campus has been associated with higher persistence and retention rates. Investigating factors which affect the academic success of a specific student population within a specific institutional context can help institutions of higher education better influence student success rates (Berger et al., 2012). The purpose of this study was to not only determine if there was a signficant difference in student success rates of commuter and residential students at the institution but also investigate factors which either supported or detracted from commuter student success.

Chapter Four is used to present an analysis of the data. First, an overview of participant demographics is provided. Next, in the data analysis section, research questions are answered. The first two research questions were quantitative in nature and a statistical analysis is illustrated for each question. The last four research questions were qualitative. An analysis of commuter student perceptions is explored first by providing

answers to each of the focus group questions. An analysis of each faculty interview question follows, which describes faculty perceptions of commuter students. The chapter concludes with a description of themes of the study in addition to a chapter summary.

Demographics

The mixed methods study included both quantitative and qualitative research. Demographics for the quantitative portion of the study are explained first. Demographics for the qualitative portion of the study follow.

Quantitative research. In comparing first- to second-year retention rates of commuter students and residential students, the three most recent years of institutional data were used. This information included the 2014, 2015, and 2016 freshman cohorts as defined by Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) (n = 2,549) (Institutional Data, 2018). First- to second-year retention rates at the institution for 2014, 2015, and 2016 were 65%, 61%, and 65% respectively (Institutional Data, 2018). Approximately 74% of students in these cohorts attended the institution full-time and about 72% were age 24 or younger (Institutional Data, 2018). An average of 85% of the overall student population were commuter students during these three years (Institutional Data, 2018).

The three most recent years of data were also analyzed regarding six-year graduation rates, which included the 2008, 2009, and 2010 IPEDS freshmen cohorts (Institutional Data, 2018). The institution's six-year graduation rates for 2008, 2009, and 2010 were 36%, 30%, and 30% respectively (Institutional Data, 2018). Approximately 73% of students in these cohorts attended the institution full-time and about 66% were

age 24 or younger (Institutional Data, 2018). An average of 88% of the overall student population was commuter students during these three years (Institutional Data, 2018).

Deidentified data collected for the quantitative portion of the study included dates of birth, addresses, residence status, retention and graduation results, and whether or not students had been enrolled as full-time, online education students. To decrease chances of an internal validity threat, the two student groups, commuter students and residential students, were homogenized (Fraenkel et al., 2015). Groups were narrowed by age, distance from campus, and course delivery mode. The non-random sample (n = 1,667) for first- to second-year retention included all students in the 2014, 2015, and 2016 cohorts; the non-random sample (n = 1,599) for six-year graduation rates included all students in the 2008, 2009, and 2010 cohorts (Institutional Data, 2018).

Qualitative research. Commuter students and faculty members from the 2017-2018 academic year were eligible for participation in the study. At fall 2017 census, total student headcount at the institution was 6,175 (Institutional Data, 2018). In the 2017-2018 academic year, 60% of the undergraduate students were female, 25% were a race other than White, 66% were between the ages of 18-24, and 73% were enrolled full-time (Institutional Data, 2018). Commuter students made up 83% of the student population (Institutional Data, 2018). Also, in 2017-2018, there were 339 faculty members of which 43% were adjunct (Institutional Data, 2018).

Five student focus groups and nine faculty interviews were conducted for the qualitative portion of the study. Student focus groups were used to answer research questions three and four, while faculty interviews were used to answer research questions five and six. Of five student focus groups conducted, three occurred in the quiet room of

the institution's library and two occurred in a classroom. Faculty interviews were conducted in each of the faculty member's respective offices. Student focus groups were asked a total of 14 questions and faculty interviewees were asked ten questions. Pseudonyms have been used for all qualitative research participants.

Student focus groups. Student focus groups were asked to complete a demographic information form at the beginning of the interview session. Information obtained from this form indicated a variety of self-reported data. A total of 16 students participated in focus groups including four sophomores, four juniors, and eight seniors. Representation from each School of the institution was present. One student was a general studies major and another was undeclared. Two students were in the dental hygiene program, a major in the School of Health Science. Three students had majors in the School of Arts and Sciences, including mathematics, political science, and criminal justice. The School of Business had representation from four students with majors in finance/business administration, general business, management/human resources, and industrial engineering. Five students were seeking a major in the School of Education, including early childhood education, elementary education, and health promotion and wellness.

All but four student respondents were traditionally-aged, between the ages of 18-24. Only one student identified as a part-time student, while the rest indicated they were full-time students. Three student respondents specified they were married, of which two had two or more children.

Fourteen students indicated they had jobs. One student identified as working full-time, five students said they worked between 20-39 hours per week, and eight students

reported working 1-19 hours per week. Fifty-seven percent of students who reported having a job were employed on-campus. Fifty percent of student respondents indicated they could be claimed as dependents.

All student respondents reported an automobile as their main source of transportation used for their commute to campus. The average distance traveled to campus by all student respondents was 13 miles. The student who was determined to live closest to the institution reported living only one mile away. Fifty miles was the farthest a student respondent commuted among members of all focus groups.

Faculty interviews. A total of nine faculty members were interviewed. Two faculty members, one male and one female, from each of the four Schools of the institution were interviewed. One additional female faculty member from the School of Education was interviewed to ensure data saturation (Guetterman, 2015). Although the study was open to all full-time and adjunct faculty, all faculty participants were designated as full-time employees.

Data Analysis

The first two research questions represented the quantitative portion of the study. A statistical analysis was conducted to compare first- to second-year retention rates and six-year graduation rates of commuter students and residential students. Questions three through six represented the qualitative portion of the study, which examined student and faculty perceptions of both supportive efforts and obstacles to student retention and degree completion. Questions three and four examined commuter student perceptions, and questions five and six explored faculty perceptions.

Research question number one. The first research question, "What significant difference exists, if any, between the first- to second-year retention rates of first-time freshmen who lived on-campus and similar first-time freshmen who commuted to campus at a public four-year Midwestern university?" was analyzed using a z-test for two proportions. The three most recent cohorts of available data were combined to answer this question. Data indicated 275 out of 435 residential students and 814 out of 1,232 commuter students persisted from their first-year to their second year at the institution. The z-test for two proportions was used to compare the proportion of commuter students' first- to second-year retention rates (.6321) to the proportion of residential students' first- to second-year retention rates (.6607). An alpha at 0.05 was used to ensure 95% confidence the differences did not ensue randomly (Salkind, 2016).

The z-test for two proportions found a Z-score of 1.0748 and a p-value of 0.2846. Because $p > 0.05$, the null hypothesis was not rejected. Therefore, there was not a statistically significant difference in first- to second-year retention rates between students who commuted to campus and students who lived on-campus. In Table 1 the results are illustrated.

Table 1

Fall to Fall Retention Rate Proportions

Sample Group	Students Retained	Sample Size	Proportion
Commuter Students	814	1,232	.6321
Residential Students	275	435	.6607

Note. Confidence interval, $\alpha = .05$; Z-score = 1.0748; p-value = 0.2846. Using 2014, 2015, 2016 cohorts combined.

Research question number two. The *z*-test for two proportions was also used to answer the second research question, "*What significant difference exists, if any, between the six-year graduation rates of first-time freshmen who lived on-campus and similar first-time freshmen who commuted to campus at a public four-year Midwestern university?*" The three most recent cohorts of available data were combined to answer this question. Data indicated 134 out of 382 residential students and 410 out of 1,217 commuter students graduated from the institution within six years of their initial enrollment. The proportion of commuter students' six-year graduation rates (.3507) was compared to the proportion of residential students' six-year graduation rates (.3368). To ensure 95% certainty differences did not happen randomly, an alpha at 0.05 was used (Salkind, 2016).

The *z*-test for two proportions found a Z-score of 0.4999 and a *p*-value of 0.6170. Because $p > 0.05$, the null hypothesis was not rejected. Therefore, there was not a statistically significant different in graduation rates between students who commuted to campus and students who lived on-campus. In Table 2 the results of this analysis are presented.

Table 2

Six-Year Graduation Rate Proportions

Sample Group	Students Retained	Sample Size	Proportion
Commuter Students	410	1,217	.3507
Residential Students	134	382	.3368

Note. Confidence interval, $\alpha = .05$; *Z*-score = 0.4999; *p*-value = 0.6170. Using 2008, 2009, 2010 cohorts combined.

Research questions numbers three and four. The third and fourth research questions, "*What factors, both institutional and personal, do commuter students at a public four-year Midwestern university perceive as supporting their efforts towards retention and degree completion?*", and, "*What factors, both institutional and personal, do commuter students at a public four-year Midwestern university perceive as obstacles in their efforts towards retention and degree completion?*" were answered through the use of student focus groups. Focus groups were asked a total of fourteen questions to determine answers to these research questions. The first question was used to allow participants to introduce themselves to one another. The remaining thirteen focus group questions are discussed below.

Focus group question #2. *Tell me your most entertaining story about your commuting experience at this institution.* Most student respondents described stories about their automobiles. Louise explained she likes to "dance like nobody's watching" inside her car to make her five-mile commute go by faster. She also recalls locking her keys in her car once. Two stories about driving were related to weather conditions. Jackson told a story about the first day of school last semester when he experienced one of his scariest drives to campus, driving only a few blocks but in icy conditions. Tara remembered a time during a previous winter when it was so cold her car doors were frozen shut, and she walked the short distance from her apartment to campus.

Three different stories related to car troubles were shared. Sheryl blew a tire out on her way to campus once. Austin's "shifter pulled out of his transmission" but he was able to fix it. Tara's car broke down once and some visiting bicyclists helped her jump it to get it started.

Three student respondents also told stories about getting traffic tickets. Sheryl and Ellie were issued tickets by campus police because they parked in grassy areas. Ellie said, "It kind of broke my heart because there was nowhere else to park." Jane indicated she had received several tickets on a major street coming in to campus in which the speed limit changes from 45 mph to 35 mph on a downhill slope. She said she lives close to campus and always thinks she will make it to campus quicker than she actually does.

Other than parking tickets, four other stories were related to parking incidents. Jeff told a story about the first time he came to campus. He parked in an area which appeared pretty open and was frustrated with another student who chose to park extremely close to him, even though there were many other available spots. Katie complained about other drivers always cutting each other off in two narrow exits of the parking lot referred to as "the pit." She also mentioned she arrives at campus 15-20 minutes early to allot enough time to find a parking spot when she has a class in the 9 a.m. hour.

Amy expressed a similar feeling regarding busy times and explained, "Fighting for a parking spot is fun. I'm like, I called it; it's mine! And then you race to it, like in the pit, at like 11 a.m. It's like the prime time to park…" Tara explained how she herself, not her car, was nearly hit in the parking lot three times during her first month of attendance at the institution.

Three students told stories of varying topics related to commuting. First, Jonathan remembered a time he got to the institution 30 minutes early for class only to realize he had forgotten a textbook. He had to go back home to get it and ended up being 10 minutes late to class. Second, Edward shared a story about how a campus police officer

attempted to cite him with a jaywalking ticket, but he kept on walking, jumped over the barrier dividing the four-lane road, and refused to identify himself. Finally, Emma explained she gets dropped off at the institution by her mother every day. Emma remembered a time when her mom dropped her off on a Sunday morning to study and no buildings were open. She went to a nearby Starbucks for six hours because the earliest a building is open on a Sunday is noon.

Focus group question #3. *Tell me about how you decided to attend this institution.* Many reasons were provided by students regarding their decisions to attend the institution. Over half of student respondents cited proximity of their home to the institution as a reason for choosing the institution. The next highest reason was the institution's affordability, which was shared by just over 37% of respondents. Louise explained, "…it's close and it's affordable." Over 37% of student respondents also indicated they chose the institution because of a specific program's outstanding reputation.

One quarter of students had a family member who had graduated from the institution and positively influenced their college attendance decisions. Ann said she followed her sister to the institution and her sister "had really good things to say." Sheryl and Tim chose to attend the institution because of scholarships they received. Amy and Anne both liked the small school and community feel, which played into their decisions. Amy exclaimed, "The teachers really care about you and . . . they know you very well and you're not a number here."

Out of four student respondents who had transferred to the institution, two mentioned their credits easily transferred. Emma attended the institution during high

school as a dual credit student and did not have to pay an admissions fee to get in. Ellie said although she could have taken an online program elsewhere, she chose this institution for face to face, in-class experiences and interactions.

Focus group question #4. *Why did you decide to commute to campus as opposed to living on-campus?* Student respondents had an assortment of reasons as to why they chose to commute to the institution. The most cited reason was students perceived it to be cheaper to live off-campus than to live on-campus, with 50% of respondents providing this as a reason to commute. Anne explained, "I didn't want to graduate college with huge student debt and student loans and living on-campus would've significantly increased my debt." Austin shared he "just didn't really see the benefit" when there were similarly priced apartments near campus.

The next highest reason given by participants was related to the need for the students to have their own space. Six student respondents indicated they had already had a previous dorm experience with roommates. Nearly 40% of student respondents said they enjoyed their privacy and living without roommates. Michelle said, ". . . the most important thing for me moving off-campus is that I just needed some time . . . to be in my room. To be alone and not be with someone else." Tara had applied for a private on-campus housing unit, but the institution was unable to accommodate her request.

Five student respondents said they already live extremely close to the institution and so it did not make sense to live on-campus. Jonathan commented, "I live close enough away that that would be kind of a waste of money to live in the dorms." Three student respondents indicated they were non-traditionally aged and had families. Louise did not think it would "be too good to live on-campus" with her husband and two

children. Jane and Katie related they enjoy freedom and independence living off-campus provides. Austin said he was not interested in living on-campus because the lack of full-sized appliances did not fit his meal preparation needs.

Focus group question #5. *Describe a typical day in which you come to the institution for class.* Just over half of students described themselves as early risers. Louise stated she gets up early so she can help get her kids ready for school before coming to class and working on campus for the day. Ellie related she and her husband workout and eat breakfast together before she heads to class in the morning. Edward said he likes to get up and do his readings for the day prior to leaving for class. Austin reported he gets up to do chores in the morning before leaving the house for school.

Other student respondents sleep as late as they can, ranging their wake-up times anywhere from 25-45 minutes before their first classes begin. Two of these students self-reported they are usually right on time or just a few minutes late to their first class. Amy explained, "I wake up at the last minute. I live . . . really close."

Regardless of the time they wake up, nearly half of student respondents reported arriving at campus at least 10-15 minutes early to find a parking space. Louise stated:

> I always try to get here between an hour and an hour and a half before my classes started so I can make sure to get a parking spot because I have cut it close. I have got here at 45 minutes before class started and I wasn't able to find a parking spot [*sic*].

Tim related he likes to arrive about 30 minutes before class so he can "sit and relax and get ready for class."

Once classes are over, student respondents reported they either go to their on-campus job, go to their off-campus job, hang out on campus, or go home. Most students with an on-campus job go to class, go to their job, and then go home. Five students indicated they go to class and then leave right after. However, others reported they hang out on campus during the day. Tim reported he likes to hang out in the honor's program lounge, and Emma related she spends time in a federal grant program's office. Michelle responded she stays on campus for long days to participate in Student Senate and campus activities office. Jackson, Emma, Jeff, and Katie reported they sometimes spend time in the library to study either between or after classes.

Focus group question #6. *As a commuter student, what is your biggest advantage and what is your biggest challenge?* Student respondents shared a multitude of answers regarding advantages to commuting. One topic rose to the top as an advantage, which was parking. Six students discussed how commuter parking lots were closer than having to walk to campus buildings from the dorms. The shorter distance to classes from the commuter lots was appreciated, especially in times of bad weather. The second most common answer, shared by five students, was freedom. Students who talked about freedom made comments about being able to live independently and go where they needed to go. Edward explained, "You just get to develop your own schedule."

Two student respondents indicated their family was an advantage. Louise said her family is "a built-in support system." The ability to keep pets was mentioned as an advantage of being a commuter student by two student respondents. Other responses varied and were only mentioned by one student each. Ellie felt it was advantageous to eat at home instead of purchasing a meal plan. She also said the biggest advantage for

her is cost savings. Jonathan said he feels it is to his advantage to not have to live with strangers.

Ironically, parking was also mentioned by most as a disadvantage to commuter students. Five students shared they felt there was not enough parking for commuters, lots were too small and inconveniently located, and traffic in parking lots was stressful during peak times. Three student respondents felt a disadvantage of being a commuter student was it was harder to make friends. Coordination of group projects was mentioned as being a disadvantage by two student respondents. Louise explained, "Just because between class and work and family commitments, it is very hard for me to be able to get on the same page and schedule as some of my other classmates were."

Focus group participants shared a few other disadvantages. Katie said she thought commuter students may not be as involved in school activities as on-campus residents. She also talked about the disadvantage of gas expenses. Austin shared his perception residents do not like to interact with commuter students.

Focus group question #7. *As a commuter student, what physical features/attributes of campus do you feel support you and what physical features/attributes of campus do you feel create obstacles for you? Why?* Parking was the most commonly mentioned physical feature of campus and was discussed by each of the five focus groups when answering previous questions. However, a few new thoughts emerged with regard to parking in answering this question. Four student respondents said they had trouble figuring out where to park based on their schedules for the day. Two students shared they park in the middle of the locations of their classes and two students said they park closer to where their first class is located.

Students with education majors indicated they were much happier with their parking situation and "it's not quite as stressful" once they started taking courses only in their major. Michelle noted campus construction had caused one smaller parking lot to be unavailable with the addition of the new annex building. Amy said in times of snowy weather snowplows cover up some of the parking spots, and Tara commented the lots are often covered in ice, making it difficult to get out. Emma said she would like to see more parking lot and road upkeep at the institution.

A few students reiterated the difficulty they had finding available spots in the main parking lot during peak hours as well as dangers posed when walking from this busy lot to class. Ellie commented on the walkways in the parking lot saying, "It's not well marked—the walkways. You know it's on the ground, but it's not really marked as stop signs or anything for people to walk that way."

As a commuter who gets a ride to school, Emma commented there are only two safe places on-campus in which to be dropped off. When she is dropped off in a different location Emma said, "I feel like I need to hurry and then I'm . . .going to leave something behind that I need." A few driving commuters discussed how they did not like waiting on pedestrians at busy crosswalks during peak hours.

Students in focus group one mentioned the on-campus dining facility in the student center as a building that is supportive of them as commuters since it provides a place to grab a bite to eat during the day. They also expressed an appreciation for the library. Agreeing the library was supportive of his success, Jackson stated, "I really focus there a lot more than I do at home." Students in focus group one had all taken evening classes at one point in time during their enrollment at the institution. They

agreed lighting in the parking lots is ample and also commented they had never felt unsafe on campus at night. One student in this group also mentioned enjoying having access to the recreation center.

Signage came up as another physical feature of campus impacting commuter students in the study. Katie related she found it difficult to navigate to a new annex building due to lack of proper signage, but Ellie said she used the online map to figure out where the annex building was located. Austin expressed he felt larger building markers would be helpful. He also mentioned signage for commuter parking is very clearly marked and visible. However, Tara said the parking lots needed to be labeled more clearly. Jane said some things can be confusing such as the two buildings with the same namesake.

Jane believed the campus was well laid out and said, "you can find your way fairly easy" compared to some bigger schools she has seen. However, Jonathan felt the benefit of the proximity of buildings was relative to a well-built schedule. He said it can be tough to get to different levels in two different buildings across campus from one another during the allotted time in between classes. Amy added how steep and tough one particular hill was to walk up in between two of her classes.

Focus group question #8. *As a commuter student, who and/or what program(s) do you feel supports you and who and/or what program(s) do you feel create obstacles for you on this campus? Why?* People most commonly mentioned by students as being supportive were faculty and advisors. Six student respondents spoke positively about their professors and willingness to work with them as commuters, especially in times of bad weather. Jane explained her teachers and advisors "really support you, want you to

do the best, and will really help you work things out." Five student respondents felt their advisors were very accommodating not only when scheduling meetings with them but also in helping students create desired course schedules.

Jane told a story about being short one course for graduation, a course which was no longer going to be offered in her last planned semester of attendance. She felt very supported in that difficult time because multiple professors offered to create an independent study, so she could graduate on time. Louise and Jackson stated they were also appreciative of the support they received from professors; Louise had a large health scare and had to be gone for two and a half weeks, and Jackson had to miss class for a classmate's funeral.

Programs described as supportive varied. Ellie and Katie said the tutoring center was very accommodating to their needs. Jeff and Jane talked about how they perceive the campus to be very friendly. Jeff complimented a cafeteria employee who helped him navigate the dining hall for the first time. Jeff also said ". . . you're not thinking about social inequalities because of how you appear" when talking about how comfortable he felt on campus. Jane described the honor's program personnel to be supportive, especially during enrollment times. She said she felt lucky to have them as advisors because some of her friends had experienced difficulties with their advisors in other programs. In her role as a student employee, Jane also mentioned having seen the career services personnel help students in times of need. Emma felt the federal grant program was supportive of her success.

Student participants also described their perceptions of people or programs who created obstacles for them. Austin felt the campus police department did not adequately

ticket residents who parked in commuter spots throughout the year. Austin also did not find the student center to be welcoming. Jonathan expressed his desire to see more warning tickets than actual tickets during peak seasons such as when it is time to pick up textbooks.

Timing of campus activities arose three times. Emma felt events were held too late in the evening and Edward agreed. Since he finished class at 4 p.m., Edward said, "I have to find something to do for three hours, and I just can't quite justify sitting in my car for three hours to go to this event, so I typically just end up going home." Jonathan proclaimed, "it would be more incentive to stick around" if the coffee shop was open later in the day. Ellie also felt the coffee shop hours could be increased, especially with regard to being open before 8 a.m. classes start. Jonathan also felt the library closed too early at night.

Focus group question #9. *What policies and procedures support you and what policies and procedures create obstacles for you as a commuter student?* Students in focus group one were unable to come up with any answers to this question. Students in other focus groups only described policies and procedures which created obstacles for them. The most commonly discussed obstacle was the new finals schedule. Student respondents talked about hardships the new schedule created for them. For example, with set transportation, Emma related to the struggle she has to figure out how to get to campus for a final scheduled an hour earlier than she normally gets dropped off to campus. Sheryl described the new schedule as "super random" regarding the different times and room locations. Edward admitted he missed four days of work because he "had no idea what finals are going to be, where, or when." He further explained his

perception faculty could reserve the right to make changes any time they wanted. Anne also felt the finals schedule created problems with her work schedule "because the finals aren't at the same time that you have your normal classes."

Other obstacles varied in nature. Edward felt the car registration policy, which only allows commuters to register one car, was too restrictive. Jane talked about her difficulties with the Bursar's office and how she had to make multiple trips to campus to figure out her payment plan. She also mentioned, since the Bursar closes at 5 p.m., how hard it was to catch them when they were open between her work and school schedule.

Katie had to make several cross-campus jaunts when working with the Registrar regarding her academic records from other institutions. Austin cited a semester in which a campus organization's event was rescheduled, but the notification of the date change only occurred two hours prior to the start of the event via Twitter. He exclaimed, "Just out of the blue, it's there, and by the time I find out, it's done." Tim, Michelle, and Tara described their annoyance when professors cancel a class by putting a note on the door with no additional notice or when ". . . you show up to class, and you sit there like 15 minutes and no one ever comes."

Focus group question #10*. Tell me about times you come to campus for purposes other than attending class?* Student respondents return to campus for reasons other than class. Most students return to campus for campus events and activities either hosted by the student activities association or academic departments. For example, some students mentioned they drive back to campus to see a movie or an entertainer or to attend campus picnics. Jackson said he "went to almost every single one because the movies are just pretty intriguing." Other students shared they come back for plays, musical

performances, and academic ceremonies. Three student respondents said they come to campus events because it is either required by their academic program or have been offered an extra credit opportunity for attendance. Edward commented, "The only thing I stay for is for the extra credit for those events."

The second most popular reason for student respondents to come to campus, outside of class, was to attend meetings for campus clubs and organizations. Five students discussed their club involvement. Two students said they return to campus for group work on school projects. Two students also said they drive back to campus to use the library. A variety of other reasons were mentioned by student respondents one time including sporting events, the job fair, a blood drive, work, an advisor appointment, to work out in the recreation center, academic meetings, and for an internet connection.

When prompted further regarding what would entice them to come back to campus more, a variety of answers ensued. Emma and Tara shared how they used to go to more campus events when they lived on-campus. Emma explained she would stay on-campus for events if they occurred earlier in the day. Austin confessed, "It comes down to . . . I get the feeling that . . . it's designed for people who live on-campus." Louise, Sheryl, and Tara explained how their other obligations keep them too busy to come back to campus outside of class. Louise said for her to come back for an event, the event would have to be family-friendly. Two students shared once they are home, they are home for good.

When further asked about what makes students feel connected to the institution, many answers were shared. Six student respondents said their friendships helped them feel connected to the institution. Jane said, "I've met a lot of people here. Some of my

best friends are here." The institution's professors were mentioned by four student respondents as helping them feel connected. Three student respondents indicated their participation in clubs and organizations helped them feel connected to the institution. Other answers regarding what made students feel connected were listed by student respondents one time including working towards a great goal, the academic department, student support services, the student leadership academy, and work. One student admitted he did not feel a connection with the institution at all.

Focus group question #11. *Does the way in which your academic program is structured provide you with the support you need to graduate? Explain.* Although a multitude of topics arose out of student focus group discussions regarding answers to this question, 10 student respondents did comment positively about people who have helped them progress toward graduation. Sheryl was thankful for the "swift kick" she sometimes needed from her faculty and advisor to keep forging ahead. Several of the 10 students mentioned how their advisors provided them with plans of study documents to help them plot out their paths to graduation. A few student respondents complimented their faculty and advisors for pushing them, staying on top of recent graduation requirements, and setting them up for success during their time here.

Three student respondents discussed specific experiences within their academic departments which supported their progress towards graduation. Austin was thankful for the hands-on experiences he had ". . . which showed us how we would be actually applying those things we're learning." Amy explained how students in her academic field were required to complete an internship experience just before graduation. Michelle

was complimentary of her advisor who was helping her with post-graduation activities such as helping her complete law school applications and prepare for the entrance exam.

A few student respondents felt they had to take some unnecessary coursework in their degree programs. Specifically, students felt coursework was either excessive or unrelated to their majors. Edward changed his major because he did not feel some of the classes he was taking were going to lead him to his ultimate goal of being a lawyer. However, Katie said she would have taken extra classes if the ones she desired to take were still offered by the institution.

Louise, Ellie, Katie, Tara, and Jane shared their dismay at times when classes were only offered in a certain way at a certain point in time. Louise said since she is now taking upper division courses "there's only certain times they're offered." Ellie mentioned sometimes classes are only offered online or during a specific semester and "sometimes the only way to finish your degree is to take an online class that you didn't want to take online." Katie and Tara echoed that same sentiment. Ellie further proclaimed, "If I wanted to take all my classes online I could have gone anywhere!" Jane had a personal experience with this when she needed a class in her final spring semester only to find out it would not be offered again until fall.

Students in focus group five held a discussion about feedback while answering this question. First, the topic of course evaluations was discussed in a positive light. Students in this group were impressed with their professors' and programs' desire to obtain feedback about courses and pedagogy. The consensus of the group was they felt valued when asked for their opinions. However, Tara said when professors hand out a paper evaluation instead of an online evaluation she "was like oh, okay, they really

wanna know." The group expressed a dislike regarding the number of email reminder prompts to complete end of course surveys.

Second, the topic of grading feedback was discussed in a negative light. Tara described her bad experiences in some online courses when her professor did not provide timely feedback. She said she made it to week seven in one class to find out her grade, which made her anxious about midterms. Amy shared she has had similar experiences in face to face classes as well. Amy said, "I would just really like to see my grades updated frequently. If I'm doing it the wrong way the first time, then how do I know if I'm doing the other three correctly?"

Focus group question #12. *Do you plan to come back to the institution next fall? Why or why not?* Every single student participant who was not graduating indicated they planned to return to the institution the following semester. Jeff said, "I'm here til the wheels fall off [*sic*]." Jane and Shelby said they planned to get their master's degrees from the institution, but Ellie was planning on going elsewhere for her graduate degree.

Focus group question #13. *Do you plan to graduate from the institution? Why or why not?* All student participants described intentions of graduating from the institution. Tara was excited to share she was graduating a few days after the focus group interview occurred. Others expressed how close they were to graduating.

Focus group question #14*. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience as a commuter?* Many repetitive topics which came up in this discussion were added to narratives of previous applicable questions. A few new topics emerged through focus group discussions. First, Jeff said he appreciated how far campus had come with the design of walkways, painted lines, trolley stop, and walking path to the

mall. He also complimented the new degree evaluation system in place. Second, students in focus group five expressed their lack of appreciation for the institution's delay in announcing cancellations for bad weather. The consensus was the earlier the better for commuter students to have time to plan accordingly. Also, they did not feel there was a consistent notification system for weather related cancellations. Amy said she "got a text from a screenshot of a tweet" one time this year when the school made a late call to cancel.

The last new topic to emerge was discussed by Edward and Jonathan in focus group two. Both students transferred to the institution from a community college. Edward said, "Then, coming to here, I always felt fairly marginalized [*sic*]," even though he thought the majority of students were commuter students at the institution. When prompted further the two men were unable to describe why they felt that way.

Research questions numbers five and six. The fifth and sixth research questions, "*What factors, both institutional and personal, do faculty at a public four-year Midwestern university perceive as supporting commuter students' efforts towards retention and degree completion?*" and "*What factors, both institutional and personal, do faculty at a public four-year Midwestern university perceive as obstacles for commuter students' efforts towards retention and degree completion?*" were answered by conducting faculty interviews. To answer these research questions faculty were asked a total of 10 questions. Each of the interview questions will be discussed in the following section.

Faculty interview question #1. *Describe the typical commuter student you see in your classroom at the institution.* There were a variety of responses with regard to the

perceived age of commuter students. One-third of faculty respondents described commuter students as both traditional and non-traditional aged. Another one-third of faculty respondents perceived commuter students to be non-traditionally aged and specified the following age ranges: 20-40 years old, 20-50 years old, and 25-30 years old. Lisa perceived commuter students to be traditionally-aged, specifying an age range of 18-24. Two faculty members did not describe a commuter student by using terminology related to age.

The majority of faculty respondents indicated there was not any way in which to tell by appearance if a student was a commuter. Mary said, "I don't know if they look different from the rest of campus or not, but the typical commuter student is our typical student because there are so many of them." However, Kara did indicate she could tell a commuter student apart from a residential student, because commuter students tended to be carrying more bags and personal belongings with them. Kara also described commuters within her academic program as female and Caucasian. Tom explained commuter students in his academic unit were likely to be more professionally dressed in preparation to get to a job after class. Although most of them could not tell by looks, faculty did mention they usually find out if their students are commuters through introductory activities during classes or general conversations with students.

Mary explained, "Being a commuter student—I know it just means that they're driving to campus, but I know that for most of our students that comes with a whole separate set of characteristics." Family and work were repeatedly mentioned by all faculty respondents as the perceived responsibilities of commuter students. Family in the sense of having a spouse and children was specified by eight faculty respondents.

Melissa indicated times when she assumed a student was a commuter if the student brought their child to class. Deklin described family with regard to a traditionally-aged student living at home with parents. Work was mentioned by five faculty respondents as something commuter students balance along with school work.

Because of these additional responsibilities of family and work three faculty members further described their perceptions commuter students do not spend extra time on-campus. Mary explained, "Most of them come right before class. They leave right after class unless they have a gap." Molly said, "Once they leave campus they do not return." Lisa described how most of her commuter students tend to be on-campus in the morning hours and some of her commuter students take online classes, so they can avoid being on-campus during the afternoon. As a result of the perception commuter students spend on-campus time attending classes, these faculty also perceived commuter students to lack social involvement.

A few faculty members described transportation topics in relation to commuter students. Melissa and Mary specifically mentioned they can tell who the commuter students are when they overhear conversations about searching for parking spots. Deklin and Melissa perceived students who ran late to class as commuter students (because of parking difficulties), but Deklin explained how his assumption was incorrect regarding a specific student last semester. Michael mentioned he sometimes finds out who the commuter students are when they cited car troubles as a reason for being tardy or absent from classes.

Faculty interview question #2. *Name specific ways you try to support commuter students as a faculty member and as an advisor.* Most faculty respondents answered this

question either specifically using terms such as flexibility or leniency or citing examples of how they have previously been flexible or lenient with commuter students through teaching and advising. Lisa shared an example of a working commuter student who needed to miss class for a mandated state training; she said she tries to be flexible when it comes to issues such as this one. Another story was shared by Kara, who was aware of a wreck having occurred nearby the institution. She waited an extra 15 minutes into the lecture before providing details regarding topics for that day so commuter students would not miss out on new information. Mary discussed an issue her commuter student had with the final exam schedule. The student's final exam for the course was scheduled at 8:00 a.m., which was a different time than the course had been held all semester. The student needed to be late to the final in order to have time to drop off his daughter at daycare that morning.

Lisa, Mary, and Melissa specifically mentioned the importance of flexibility with regard to scheduling advising appointments. Mary shared, "I've got them from far distances who drive here every day . . . so, as an individual I try to be flexible." Michael explained how his office hours are not necessarily his set office hours; he tries to be as flexible as possible with them. Deklin said when a student calls him in need of something he always asks if the student is near campus or not in an effort to save the student an extra trip. Melissa approximated she had completed 80% of her advising virtually last semester in an effort to be accommodating to the commuter student population needs. Tom also perceived his electronic approach to advising was not only "freaky fast" but also convenient for commuter students.

Use of electronic communication arose in faculty responses regarding other aspects of teaching and advising. Molly postulated, "There seems to be a lot more communication with commuter students electronically." She further explained commuter students tended to use emails and text messages more than residential students for the purpose of seeking clarifications about academic work. Melissa explained the importance of ensuring course materials are all posted online in the learning management system for commuter students who may travel for work.

Mary uses an online booking appointment software her students can use for free and from anywhere to help effectively and efficiently schedule advising appointments. Lillian encourages her commuter students to record class lectures, so they can make the most of their commute time and study while they are on the road. Lillian exclaimed, "I could not believe how many students thought that that was a new concept as recently as last semester!"

Having been a commuter student himself, Deklin uses the learning management system to post class cancellations. He shared, "One of the first things I'll do is whip out my phone and post an announcement on Blackboard saying I won't be there because I don't want somebody to drive all the way to campus for my class as their first class of the day and then discover that we don't have class that day." Kara and Lillian explained how they mimic a real-world expectation at the beginning of the semester for their students, who must notify teachers in advance of any absence or tardy. Several faculty respondents indicated they realized commuter students were likely to be late to or absent from class for a variety of reasons including travel problems, such as weather or unreliable transportation, or work and childcare issues. Kara said she likes to know why

students are absent, so she can have an opportunity to further help the student with the concern.

For faculty respondents who are also advisors, the topic of student course schedules came up often. Deklin explained how commuter students like to condense their course schedules within certain time-frames during the day, leaving them time to work. Molly echoed that sentiment and described how some of her commuter students did not like early morning courses, sometimes preferred online courses to save time, and sometimes desired to eliminate some days altogether when making their course schedules. Some faculty expressed lack of variety in the times certain courses are offered within their academic programs, which can cause scheduling conflicts for commuters with jobs.

Faculty interview question #3. *In your opinion, what are the biggest challenges and advantages for commuter students on this campus?* Faculty perceptions varied regarding challenges and advantages of commuter students. Two items discussed came up as both challenges and advantages for commuters. Family was cited by 55% of respondents as a challenge if the family was unsupportive or if childcare was involved. However, 44% of respondents indicated family would be an advantage because they would provide a financial and emotional support system to commuter students.

Access to campus resources like the library was mentioned by Deklin as a challenge in that commuter students would have to possibly make a trip back to campus to use it. However, Lisa argued with increased technology, online access to the library and its resources were an advantage for commuter students. One-third of faculty respondents started their answers by indicating they could not think of any advantages a

commuter student would have but eventually shared at least one advantage as the interview progressed.

The other most commonly perceived advantage of being a commuter student, according to faculty respondents, is freedom. Forty-four percent of faculty respondents indicated freedom as an advantage for commuters. Lisa explained, "Commuter students have access to independent transportation as opposed to ride shares or the trolley or asking a friend." Thirty-three percent of faculty respondents perceive commuting is cheaper than living in the dorms. Two faculty members perceived commuters to be more invested in their education than residential students. Tom mentioned commuter students are able to avoid being paired with a strange roommate and Deklin commented on the advantage of commuters not having to deal with dorm party life on weekends.

Issues related to transportation were cited by all but one faculty respondent. Vehicle maintenance and gas prices were perceived to be the most challenging issues related to transportation. Flat tires, weather, and safety were also perceived to be challenges for commuter students related to transportation. The next largest challenge for commuter students as perceived by 55% of faculty respondents was the lack of a sense of community. Lisa said, ". . . there's the community on the dorm side that the commuter student misses out on." Forty-four percent of faculty respondents perceived parking as a challenge for commuter students. Mary argued, "I don't think the institution has a huge parking issue because I've been at other institutions, but the students look at that as a challenge." Two faculty respondents mentioned they thought work was a challenge for commuter students. Also, two faculty members perceive commuter students to be less

flexible or less involved because too much effort is required to come back to campus once students have traveled home for the day.

Faculty interview question #4*. How does the institution set commuter students up for success?* Four of nine faculty respondents initially vocalized they were not aware of anything specific the institution does to set commuters up for success. After a conversation about some of his perceptions of commuter students' obstacles, Deklin explained since the institution has so many commuters, "we just sort of know that a lot of people might have these issues and take that into account." However, upon further discussion, a large variety of perceptions were shared by faculty regarding this question.

Parking came up the most and was mentioned by four faculty respondents. Faculty perceived student parking to be ample and provided to students at a reasonable cost, although they do understand students perceive parking to be an issue. Tom explained there may not be a cost benefit to the institution by adding more parking. Kara felt a need for closer parking to each academic discipline for employees and Tom expressed a desire to have more parking near the bookstore. Michael suggested the possibility of "putting the customers first" and changing all faculty and staff parking to commuter student parking.

The next highest repeated response about how the university sets its commuter students up for success was related to campus-wide events and activities. Three faculty respondents indicated they perceive the institution does a good job at providing timely and convenient events for commuter students. Melissa noted, ". . . for instance a lot of the stuff in the middle of campus is at lunch and that catches a lot of those commuter

students who either can come before their afternoon class or are here for our morning class."

However, there was some concern about whether commuter students actually engage in those activities. Lisa said, "My impression is they don't take advantage of them, but it seems like it's a concerted effort on the part of the student activities and departments and such to have activities that would get the students involved." Molly came to a bold conclusion during her interview stating:

> And now that we're talking about this, it is my responsibility. You know, I think it's my responsibility to promote activities on our campus and to engage our students in what's going on. But had I thought about it before today? No.

Michael and Molly mentioned the institution provides student affairs support services, including a federal grant program, Admissions, Financial Aid, Registrar, Advising, Counseling, and Testing Services in one building. Two faculty respondents from the same academic area mentioned how they perceive the institution provides students with a variety of course formats such as night, hybrid, and online classes at varying times of the day; however, two other faculty members from different academic areas felt the university should expand its selection of hybrid and evening classes.

Melissa explained her perception of low turnout for 8:00 a.m. classes was students are dropping their children off at school at that time. Another thought shared by Lisa and Melissa was they perceive faculty at the institution to be flexible with students regarding how and when they meet students whether for advising meetings or for clubs and organizational meetings. Also, two faculty respondents indicated the university does a good job using technology, such as the early alert system, email, degree evaluation

program, student portal, and Blackboard, to communicate with students. However, Tom felt like the institution over-communicates to the point of being detrimental and further explained how over-communication makes students unable to discern which messages from the institution are truly important.

Other faculty perceptions varied and were non-repetitive. Mary shared how the new final exam schedule may have helped faculty but created hardships for students last semester. Michael mentioned how the library not only has close visitor parking but also provides a convenient drive-up book drop box. One faculty member, Melissa, shared many insights. First, she perceived the on-campus dining facility in the student center to be helpful to commuter students in that it "provides them an opportunity to have an outlet to sit and study and eat and do all of those things that's outside of the dorm life." She also felt the institution did a great job with timely warnings of campus closings related to bad weather. An area Melissa felt could be improved was related to textbook pickup. Because the institution is on a rental system, students are unable to immediately pick up their books for the next semester because the books have not yet been returned from the previous term. This causes an extra trip to campus.

Molly discussed a retention tactic used by faculty and advisors in her academic department. Advisors in the department added an extra meeting with advisees, two weeks before midterms. Molly said, "It's a simple touch to see how they're doing academically." If students evaluated themselves low on one of the five check-in questions, then advisors knew to prompt further discussions to help students problem solve the issues. Molly said in her experience commuter students have more issues than residential students.

Lillian described an idea she saw carried through at an institution in which she was previously employed. She explained how personnel at the institution's foundation created an emergency fund for students. This emergency fund was often used by commuter students, who may have needed to fix their automobiles, so they could get to class and to work. Lillian said students at the institution were grateful to "get out of the vicious circle" of no money, no car, no job, no school.

Faculty interview question #5. *How does your academic program support commuter student completion?* A wide variety of answers were provided by faculty respondents regarding how their specific academic programs supported commuter student completion. One common response was flexibility. Lillian shared some advisors in her department had traveled to an advisee's place of employment to have face to face discussions when there were meeting scheduling challenges. Similarly, Melissa said their department's advisors work together to ensure their advisees always have a person to talk to even if the student's assigned advisor is not there when the advisee shows up. Melissa also explained how their department tries to "provide a path of least resistance" for the students by doing things like approving academic petitions.

Molly mentioned she is flexible about how assignments are completed when applicable. For example, if an observation of youth must be completed as part of a class, then she does not restrict commuters from observing youth in their home communities where it may be more convenient for them. Kara explained how faculty in her academic department like to be as flexible as they can be regarding commuters and bad weather difficulties, although due to the nature of her academic program "that poses a quandary because we have a certain number of clinical hours mandated by the accrediting body."

Faculty in Kara's academic department make it a departmental practice to find out who commuter students are from the very beginning of the semester, so they can be proactive in helping their commuter students in times of bad weather. They also encourage carpooling for commuters in addition to sometimes working to find childcare backup options for clinical days.

Mary felt her academic program could use more flexibility in the way their courses are scheduled. This perception was shared by Kara, Lillian, and Deklin. Kara and Lillian described how the nature of their academic program required their students' course schedules to be fairly set, with students not getting an option of when they would take certain classes. Their program also requires students to drive more since students spend time both on-campus and in an off-campus clinical setting. However, they do try to offer more online courses in the summer to allow students to spend that time at home or working. Deklin was concerned about the lack of delivery mode and time options for students needing upper division courses in his academic program. Tom mentioned the progressive decrease in the number of full-time faculty in his academic program, which he predicted would ill-effect future students' opportunities for delivery mode and time variations in course scheduling. Conversely, Michael perceived courses in his academic program to be compactly scheduled, providing ample time for a student to work.

The topic of convenience was mentioned by Molly, who explained using a flipped classroom model in her academic program allowed commuter students to learn in the comfort of their own homes. The flipped classroom concept was also discussed by Kara, who felt faculty could look for these types of opportunities within their individual courses

to allow a commuter student the opportunity to have breakfast with their child every now and then.

Lisa described the lengths she went to in scheduling convenient meeting times for her academic program's club. She said, "We would think about how to schedule events and activities that would be accessible to the commuter student." Lisa remembered the club periodically meeting at local restaurants in the community for the convenience to the commuter students in the club. Regarding her academic department clubs and activities, Molly shared faculty do a good job of promoting those events by word of mouth. However, she also acknowledged they could always provide more communication about their departmental events through social media.

Faculty interview question #6. *What physical features/attributes of the campus do you feel are supportive of commuter students and what physical features/attributes of campus do you feel create obstacles for them?* All nine faculty members provided information and perceptions regarding parking. The majority of faculty do not perceive parking as an issue but realize students perceive parking as a problem. Mary explained, "The parking I just have a different perspective on because I've been at larger institutions where parking is really a challenge."

Deklin said his commuter students will come in late with the explanation they could not find a parking spot in the main lot, to which he responds by looking out the window at empty spaces in a different lot not much further away. Michael pointed out the difficulties of a particular parking lot and mentioned the need for more motorcycle and small car parking. Tom noted the short-term parking spots next to the bookstore, but the lack thereof near the student services building. Lisa suggested the addition of more

cameras to the parking lots for safety. Melissa pointed out how inexpensive it is to get a parking permit at the institution.

Faculty respondents declared two major four-lane roadways, which surround the campus, as obstacles for commuters. They explained neither of the roadways has sidewalks or paved shoulders for walking or cycling commuters. Deklin commented you are "taking life in your own hands during those busy times" when attempting to ride a bike on one of these streets. One particular crosswalk was mentioned three times as being extremely dangerous for commuter students.

Multiple conversations emerged regarding the institution's student center, which houses a recreation center, health center, and food court. Four faculty members perceived the student center as a physical space which supports commuter students. Deklin said the student center was a good place to hang out with friends and mentioned the large, comfortable seating areas. Michael talked about the convenience of having the student center services on-campus, which would prevent commuters from having to leave and come back during the day. Conversely, Melissa shared how some of her past commuter students have complained about having to pay fees for student center facilities they do not use. She explained, "I think for some of our commuter students, they don't see the value in it." Also, one faculty member perceived the students using the student center space as non-commuters stating, "I don't notice a lot of commuter students wearing gear."

Faculty respondents also discussed other aspects of campus gathering spaces or lack thereof. Mary pointed out how her building does not have good social spaces. On the other hand, Kara and Lillian mentioned gathering spaces within their building were

mandated by the state board because of the high amount of commuter students enrolling in the programs. Microwaves and a refrigerator are present in gathering spaces. Lillian shared how student organizations sometimes provide food for students in the spaces. Kara appreciated the indoor gathering spaces in her building; however, she expressed a desire to see more covered outdoor gathering areas on her side of campus. Reflecting on her own experience as a commuter student, "My only time to be outside was driving in the car." Kara also suggested enhancing campus with covered walkways and covered areas near crosswalks to use during times of bad weather.

Other physical aspects of campus discussed by faculty respondents varied in nature. Two faculty respondents mentioned how the proximity of campus buildings was supportive of commuter students. Outdoor signage was perceived to be much better than in the past by one faculty member, but a lack of indoor signage for elevators was noted as an obstacle. Handicap accessibility in older buildings was described by one faculty member as a hindrance. Another faculty member noted multiple avenues students could use to cross the campus were supportive to commuters because students would not have to re-park for classes on the other side of campus. The presence of a vehicle charging station was suggested as supportive, but a lack of bike lanes on campus roads was suggested as an obstacle to commuters and residential students.

Faculty interview question #7. *Regarding commuter students, who and/or what program(s) are supportive and who and/or what program(s) create obstacles for them? Why?* Only one faculty respondent was unable to identify an answer to this question. Two obstacles were shared. The first obstacle shared was the removal of the Dean of Students position, which was perceived to be a student point of contact for issues outside

the realm of academics—including commuter student issues. One faculty member also thought the library should be open later for commuter students; however, a different faculty member perceived the library hours to be supportive to commuter student success. All other faculty respondents shared multiple and varying examples of people and programs who either support or pose obstacles for commuter students.

The most commonly named program which supports commuters at the institution was a federal grant program mentioned by three faculty members. Although the federal grant program is not a commuter-specific program, faculty who provided this response perceive the program's students to be commuters. Michael described how his personal experience as a first-generation student in the federal grant program taught him how a university functions, which was critical to his success.

The student activities, career services, and university policy offices were the next most commonly mentioned programs, cited by two faculty respondents each as being supportive for commuters. Molly shared the student activities director, "is trying to create things during the day" in an attempt to attract more commuter student engagement. Lisa felt student activities scheduled worthwhile events, but she worried the office may not be getting "the return on their time investment." The online presence of career services, specifically the résumé review process, was perceived by Mary to be a service to commuters because it saves them a trip to campus for the service. Also, the campus police provide services such as jumping cars that won't start and helping commuters when they lock their keys in their cars.

Other supportive programs included the on-campus daycare, financial aid office, admissions office, advising office, and the tutoring center. One faculty respondent

mentioned the ability to purchase a meal plan as a benefit to commuters. The registrar's office was considered supportive in the sense the personnel are attempting to have a better online presence.

Faculty interview question #8. *What policies and procedures support commuter students and what policies and procedures create obstacles for commuter students?* A few policies and procedures were perceived as supportive to commuter students. For example, Michael talked about the policy which only allows commuter students to park within commuter lots. He explained residential students may only park on the dorm side of campus. Molly said the policy which requires all faculty to post their syllabi on the learning management system is helpful for commuter students. Allowing students to enroll themselves with an alternate pin number was described by Lisa as a "double-edged sword." On one hand it is convenient for commuter students, but on the other hand commuter students miss face to face contact with their advisors.

Although some of the paperwork for graduation has moved online, the overall graduation process was perceived to be an obstacle for commuter students. Mary discussed how students must make multiple trips back to campus for the graduation expo, regalia pick-up, and to get signatures on the triplicate graduation checklist form. Other triplicate forms such as the drop slip and academic petitions were cited by two faculty respondents as academic procedures which created obstacles to commuter students.

Two faculty respondents spoke very passionately about a recent policy change regarding faculty office hours reduction and the potential negative impacts of the change. Molly stated her concern about the policy enabling a lack of faculty presence, which she feels "doesn't create a very good atmosphere for students and for colleagues." Mary

echoed the same sentiment positing “engagement and morale is just going to only decrease.”

Kara shared how the institution’s catering policy is a detriment to commuters because it limits what food can be brought in for students. For example, she explained how her department would like to see more hot food vending options, but the catering contract prohibits this. She argued it is difficult for commuter students, who may have forgotten their lunches, to grab a quick bite to eat on her side of campus. With 10 minutes in between classes, there is not enough time for students to make it to the on-campus dining facility in the student center and back. Kara also discussed the policy which prohibits food and drinks in classrooms in her building. She feels commuter students are the ones who suffer the most because of this policy and a small modification to a policy such as this one could go a long way to make the institution more welcoming to commuters.

Faculty interview question #9. *Tell me your most entertaining story about working with a commuter student.* Eighty-eight percent of faculty respondents had at least one story to share about working with commuter students. Five of eight stories were related to automobiles. The respondent who did not have a specific story to share described issues related to cars such as flat tires and reliable transportation. Kara shared the story of a student who had a wreck, was stuck in a ditch, but still managed to call (from the ditch) at least one hour before class started to notify her professor of her absence.

Another student’s car broke down on the way to clinicals and so she took a cab to the clinical location only to have to wait for an hour in the dark for the doors to be

unlocked. This student's professor drove up to wait with her. Melissa told a story of how she intervened for two victims of racial profiling. Two of her advisees were minority students, who were being pulled over nearly every morning on their commute to class.

Lisa explained how some of her students decided to complete some video assignments from their cars in the institution's parking lot. Rather than coming in to a campus building, students would drive to the parking lot for free wifi to complete these assignments. Finally, Deklin told the story of a student who had a flat tire on the way to class and texted play by play updates to another student in class so that he would be aware of what was going on. He also remembers when gas prices were up to $4.50 per gallon and how most of his commuting advisees would request to schedule all their classes on Tuesdays and Thursdays only, which was a tough request to fill.

The remaining stories included information about work and family. One student had a baby on a Friday and came back to class on the following Monday, according to Lillian. A success story of a working, first-generation, single parent, who had overcome a meth addiction was told by Melissa. Tom told the story of a poor female student from El Salvador, who had no family support. She obtained a job with Wal-Mart and only took classes as she could pay for them. She graduated with no debt. Molly told the story of a non-traditionally aged working father of five children who just couldn't juggle his school work with his other responsibilities.

Faculty interview question #10. *Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences with commuter students?* Topics which arose out of answering this question that provided insights about a previous question were added to and

described within the narrative of the applicable question. For example, one faculty respondent thought of a policy not previously discussed when answering this question and that information has been added to the question number eight narrative. Many discussion points were repeated by faculty members in response to this question and most respondents summarized their previous answers to the other questions. However, a few important thoughts were provided that did not necessarily fit into a previous question's narrative.

In summarizing his final thoughts about commuter students, Deklin said, "I think it's much harder to feel connected to what's going on on-campus." When asked what he thought it would take to get a student who has commuted home to come back to engage in an on-campus activity Deklin said the activity would likely have to be tied to a course grade as an incentive. In her final interview thoughts, Lisa said, "If I'm going to generalize as a whole, commuter students—it's like clock in-clock out." Melissa's concluding thought was commuter students do not have a desire to be involved because they are "burning the candle at both ends."

In discussing commuters who live in the same city as the institution Deklin proclaimed, "it's not that different from living right here on campus." In expressing her desire to know more Kara admitted there was a lot she could still learn about the campus and commuters. Having previously worked at a primarily residential institution which had a dedicated office to work with a relatively small amount of commuter students, Mary concluded her interview wondering how such a model could work when commuter students make up the majority of the student population at this institution. At the end of his interview, Michael worried commuter students sometimes demonstrate an entitled

attitude regarding tardies and absences and they expect faculty to just "deal with it." He also expressed concern regarding commuter students who come back to school to get a degree in his field without understanding the expectations and sacrifices relative to the time it will take to complete the degree.

Themes

As transcripts of student focus groups and faculty interviews were coded potential themes were noted. Upon finalizing codes for both groups of data and answering the research questions, another review of the combined qualitative data ensued. Four themes emerged through the cumulative qualitative data analysis process including getting from here to there, the double-edged sword of convenience, independence, and it is who we are. These themes aid in a more comprehensive understanding of the factors which either support or create obstacles to commuter student success. The four themes are explored independently and provide further insight into the commuter student phenomenon.

Getting from here to there. Both student and faculty respondents perceived issues related to transportation as one of the primary obstacles to commuter student success. Although a few individuals made mention of walking or cycling commuters, the overwhelming majority of all participants in the study provided answers through the lens of driving commuters. Every single participant in the study discussed at least one aspect of getting from one place to another, in talking either about the commute to and from campus or the on-campus navigation experience.

Getting to and from campus was perceived to be an extra obstacle for commuter students which residential students do not have to face. Mary, a faculty respondent, shared, "You know a lot of them commute but they're commuting with unreliable

transportation." When faculty respondents had the opportunity to tell entertaining stories about their experiences with commuter students many of them revolved around automobile issues.

Stories of cars breaking down, wrecks, and flat tires were told by faculty respondents. Deklin remembered how a former student of his "was going on crying because she was so worried that I would be upset if she was late" when she blew a tire out on the way to class. Stories told by students in focus groups supported faculty respondents' perceptions of transportation hardships encountered by the institution's commuter student population. Student respondents described automobile issues such as tire blow outs and car break downs. Tara shared a story about a time her car broke down in the institution's parking lot, "I had nothing. I was not prepared for it." Student respondents also discussed how weather could sometimes ill-effect their vehicles. Ally explained, "It was the coldest day of the year and . . . my car is like locked—it was frozen shut." Even though he was able to get into his car during the extremely cold and snowy weather, Jackson exclaimed, "That was one of my most scariest drives [*sic*]."

The topic of weather uncovered another obstacle relative to students getting from home to campus—class cancellations. Student respondents described being irritated regarding the late timing of weather cancellation announcements from the institution. Michelle pleaded her argument for early notification, "I need to know to plan ahead for what I need to do the next morning" because she must take unplowed backroads on her commute to campus. Tim, Amy, Anne, and Tara concurred with Michelle about the importance of timely weather cancellation notifications and discussed how difficult is to

stay up late waiting to be informed. Tara commented, "I felt, like with it being such a commuter-like population, like that should be, like a priority in my opinion [*sic*]."

Contrary to what students perceived about the timing of campus closure announcements, a faculty respondent, Melissa, said she thinks the institution:

> Does a really good job for our commuter students, of giving them a lot of warning as to whether or not school is going to be open or closed, or in terms of faculty for some reason we have to cancel.

Melissa further explained, "I am very cognizant of my commuter students" when she needs to make the call to cancel her classes. Another faculty respondent, Deklin, also said he is "conscientious about announcing class cancellations" and desires to be as timely as possible in notifying students because of his bad experiences with this issue as a former commuter student himself. Individual course cancellations were discussed among members of focus group number five, who had all experienced unpleasant times of late notifications or teachers not showing up to class. Kyle said when he has received a cancellation notification via text message from a teacher only ten minutes prior to the start of class he wonders, "Why did I even bother coming in?"

Another frustration expressed by student respondents, which was unveiled during the weather cancelation discussion, revolved around when the weather is bad, but class does not get cancelled. Kyle said, "And then you drive here, and the entire parking lot is covered in ice. You can't even see the parking spots." Tara explained in her experiences in this situation, even though campus did not officially close, "the teacher decided that they didn't want to come." Students in focus group five concurred since the school is mainly a commuter institution, then parking lots and sidewalks should be thoroughly

cleared if school is open for the day. One faculty respondent shared how adding more covered walkways "gives them protection from whatever the weather may be."

Parking at the institution was discussed further in both student focus groups and faculty interviews. Feelings about the parking situation on campus varied among all study participants. Jane, a student respondent, said, "I think this could be an advantage and a disadvantage." She further explained how parking is an advantage because you do not have to walk as far as residential students do to get to campus buildings, but it can also be a disadvantage because the lack of parking spaces "can be stressful sometimes." Kara, a faculty respondent, said she desires to see "parking areas that are closer to each discipline's building strictly for commuters." Several faculty respondents said although they did not perceive the institution has a real parking issue as compared to other institutions, they do understand commuter students perceive parking as an issue.

Student respondents who considered parking as an obstacle to their success indicated their difficulties arose from trying to park in one particular parking lot. Student respondents perceived the lot to be extremely busy during mid-morning hours, and sometimes the inability to find a spot in the lot would cause them to be late to class. In response to student tardies caused by the inability to find a spot in the parking lot, Deklin said, "I look out the window and I'm like, that entire lot over there is empty and it's only a minute longer" of a walk than the lot in which they were navigating.

Sometimes when parking lots are perceived to be full, some of the student respondents get creative in finding a parking space. When looking for a space near a construction area on-campus Sheryl explained, "I got over there and there was no place to park, so I just parked in the grass and I got a ticket." Instances of on-campus ticket

citations as well as off-campus ticket citations were discussed by some of the student respondents. Traffic and parking tickets represented another obstacle for commuter students in getting from here to there.

The double-edged sword of convenience. Convenience is a theme which emerged from both student and faculty respondents in the study. Student respondents expressed a desire for convenience in many of their on-campus experiences. Faculty respondents discussed their perception of commuter students' need for convenience in several aspects of the on-campus experience.

The majority of student respondents indicated they decided to attend the institution because it was close to home and affordable. For example, Jonathan said, the institution "is nearby and is really cheap"; Anne commented, "It was a lot more affordable"; and Tara said, "It was close to where I live." A few faculty respondents concurred these were reasons commuter students attended the institution. Melissa explained students choose the institution because it "is convenient and it is close enough." Tom explained his son attended the institution as a commuter student because it was "by far the cheapest way to go."

Convenience of programs and services the institution provides was discussed among students in focus groups. Faculty also shared their perceptions of program and service convenience during their interviews. Both students and faculty perceived a specific federally funded program as being extremely convenient and supportive for commuter students even though the program was not specifically created to support commuter students. Some student and faculty respondents found programs and services to be convenient, while others did not.

While some students had an appreciation of the library as being a place they "could focus a lot more" compared to home, they also desired it to be "open a lot later." Some students talked about the inconvenience of the library's coffee shop hours. For example, Ellie said it is not open before her 8:00 a.m. class, and Emma said it is closed after her 1:00 p.m. class gets out. A few faculty members shared they feel the library is a comfortable and quiet place for commuter students to study, and one faculty member even recalled overhearing a student mention they wish the library was open later because of distractions at home. The outdoor library book drop box was mentioned as being accessible to the road and an opportune way for students to return library books.

Some students expressed their appreciation for free activities and sporting events the institution provided but admitted they usually only take advantage of them when extra credit is provided. One student perceived on-campus activities to be "designed for the residents." A few students felt like the timing of on-campus events needed adjusted; some desired earlier times and others desired later times. One faculty member admitted he was torn about providing credit for attendance at on-campus events outside of class time because he perceives for commuter students "it's very hard to take part in anything" with their outside commitments such a work or family. Several faculty members remarked they did not think commuter students took advantage of free activities and great care should be taken to ensure on-campus events are offered at convenient times for commuter students. One faculty member questioned, "How could you put events all throughout the day so that you can hit everybody? You can't."

Several student respondents reported being active members of campus clubs and organizations. A few mentioned these clubs make them "feel connected" to the

institution. Faculty respondents, who had been organization liaisons, said they take great care to be flexible with meeting times in order to accommodate commuters. One faculty member explained how the group "would do things out in the community" such as meet at a restaurant, so commuters would be more likely to attend.

A few students felt like the student center was a convenient place to go in between classes as it offers a recreation center, health center, bookstore, and dining area among other amenities. However, one student commented the student center "did not feel welcoming." The student center was considered by some faculty to host convenient services for commuter students, but one faculty respondent felt the recreation center was not as convenient of an option for commuters and "they still have to pay the fee" and "don't see the value in it."

Many faculty respondents perceived the "one stop shop" of many student support services in one building to be very convenient for students, but they also commented on the inconvenient parking situation relative to the building. The consensus among faculty was students desiring to take advantage of any student support services would not need to re-park their vehicles because "the worst parking spot on this campus is as good as the best parking spot at some other campuses." Student respondents did not comment about the convenience of the centrally located services; however, one student did mention it was difficult to set up a payment plan when the Bursar's office closes at the same time she gets off work. A few other students indicated their cue to leave campus was 5 p.m. when they perceive most of the academic buildings to be closed.

The new final exam schedule was brought up by both student and faculty respondents. Both groups were on the same page regarding the hardships it is creating

for commuter students. The inconvenience of the new schedule was brought up in two of five focus groups. One student explained she had "set transportation" which did not coincide with her need to be on-campus on a different day and time in which she had attended the class all semester. Faculty respondents told stories about students with work and family conflicts with the new schedule. One faculty member pointed out the change was intended to be more convenient because it "scrunched everything in to Monday through Thursday" and removing Friday.

Different aspects of technology were also explored by both respondent groups. Some students like the convenience of internet capable options and resources such as online course registration, courses, and evaluations. However, they also said they sometimes desire face to face interaction. One student said, "I like to have my advisor's opinion too . . . in-person." Another student came to the institution for the "in-class experience." One student perceived her opinion to be valued more by faculty who provided paper evaluations instead of electronic-only evaluations.

From the faculty point of view, technology issues discussed revolved around modes of course delivery options, online forms, and virtual advising. Some faculty perceived their academic departments to offer a large variety of course times as well as delivery options such as hybrid or online, while others felt they fell short in this area. One faculty member said, "I think finding a true balance between both having the digital option for those who are wanting it and then also still make sure that we have that physical presence" is key for future success. A few faculty specifically said they do not offer a lot of afternoon classes because commuters come to class in the morning and leave in the afternoon. Many faculty respondents mentioned the convenience of online

forms which save commuter students from “having to make extra trips” to campus. Virtual advising came up in two faculty interviews and was discussed in a positive light. However, two other faculty members were extremely concerned about a recent enactment of a policy designed to decrease office hours and provide the flexibility of serving some office hours virtually. One faculty member said we need to have “as much as possible available for them through digital means but also still maintaining that face to face” interaction with advisees. Another faculty member followed up a conversation about virtual advisement and push towards using technology more by stating:

> I think as we shift towards what the world is telling us – and that is everything needs to be online for convenience—I think for the four-year institution like ours . . . that's a detriment. I think our niche needs to be for those people that want that face to face and need that face to face to show up.

Independence. Through information provided both on student respondent demographic forms and during focus group discussions it is apparent commuter students in the study have responsibilities other than school. Two students indicated they have pets for which to care. Eighty-seven and a half percent of student respondents self-reported having a job. At least 62.5% of student respondents live with family members. Half of student respondents indicated they were still being claimed as a dependent on their parent’s taxes. Many faculty respondents also shared during their interviews how they perceived commuter students to have multiple responsibilities including work and family.

Out of students who reported having a job, just over 50% of them worked on-campus for 20 hours a week or less. When describing their typical days many student

respondents said they get up, go to class, go to work, go home, study, and start over again the next day. In explaining her day Amy said she goes "straight from class to work" and since she works on-campus, sometimes she will be on-campus from 9 a.m. until 5 p.m. Other working student respondents shared very similar stories.

Over half of faculty respondents said they perceived commuter students to have a job. Several faculty respondents talked about their role as an advisor and how scheduling classes for commuter students can be difficult at times because of trying to accommodate students' work schedules. Deklin said he understands "they want to come to school, have two or three classes in a row and then be done" so they can get to their jobs. Lisa, Melissa, and Molly all talked about the timing of when they think commuter students are on-campus. Lisa shared her commuter students are on-campus in the morning and "then they have another part of their life that takes shape around one in the afternoon." Melissa and Molly said they do not think their commuter students like or take 8:00 a.m. classes and sometimes even request "eliminating some days all together" or taking online classes. Melissa said, "a lot of our students are dropping their kids off at school and it's hard for them to make an 8:00 a.m. class when they are driving in."

Three student respondents reported they were married and two of them said they had children. Louise described how she gets up "super early" because she must get her children ready for school. Then, she goes to class, works on-campus, goes home and said, ". . . then depending on if my children had anything going would depend if I got to stay home or not." Ellie also gets up early, at 4 a.m., so she can work out with her husband and eat breakfast together before they part ways for the day. She explained she

goes to classes in the morning and leaves campus by noon every day. As a part-time student, Jeff mainly works during the day and tries to take online classes.

Seven student respondents said they live at home with family members, either their parents or relatives in town. Unlike their married counterparts, students living as dependents in their household did not make much mention of their families during focus group discussions. Dependent students who lived on their own in an off-campus apartment indicated they chose the institution because it was near their family. One student explained, "I wanted to still be able to see my family on the weekends." None of the student respondents perceived their families to be unsupportive to their academic success.

Most faculty respondents perceived commuter students to be living with family, either as a spouse, a parent, or a child. When faculty respondents told stories about commuter students three included information relative to the commuter student being a parent. During her interview, Kara exclaimed, "we always say it's not the nursing student that graduates – the family, they graduate because they've helped them through the whole program!" In describing commuter students Tom said, "they tend to be busy as far as family and work . . . . so, they're trying to balance that." Melissa and Tom perceived a lot of their commuter students to be working full-time.

Even though most student respondents had jobs and some lived at home with their families, none of them perceived those two aspects of their lives to be an obstacle to their academic success. A few student respondents did admit scheduling group projects could be challenging at times. Conversely, some faculty respondents did express concern regarding commuter students who work and have a family. Lisa said:

> I feel like the spatial relationship that the commuter students have with our campus is really temporal in the sense . . . they're not here all the time, but . . . dorm side students are. So, they have this sense of permanency that the commuter student doesn't. We're just one part of their day. Whereas for the dorm side it's all day.

For example, when discussing why commuter students do not take advantage of free on-campus activities Lisa reasoned, "they're so overcommitted." Molly described her perception commuter students are not only not as engaged in on-campus activities but also "not in tune with what's going on on-campus."

Several faculty respondents explained how they think once a commuter student gets home from class it is extremely difficult to get them to come back to the institution unless extra credit is involved. When Mary was describing commuter students having outside obligations such as work or family she said, "They leave right after class . . . and they're going somewhere with a purpose." Some student respondents corroborated faculty respondents' perception that once students are home, they are home. Edward affirmed, "When I get home I take my shoes off. I don't go anywhere unless someone is dying." Sheryl said, "I just feel like there's other things I can do instead of . . . campus events [*sic*]."

During focus groups, all commuter students articulated at least one advantage of being a commuter student as opposed to a residential student. Other than parking and cost savings, the rest of their answers could all be tied back to aspects of being independent adults. A few faculty members also perceived freedom and aspects of being independent as an advantage of being a commuter student. Jackson enjoys being able to

drive wherever he needs to go during the day. Sheryl felt like "it's just easier to . . . do stuff outside of school" such as the volunteer work she does at a local school district. Katie said she enjoys being "more independent" even though "it's harder to make friends" living off-campus. A few student respondents discussed how they liked living on their own and not having to deal with roommates. Two students liked the freedom to cook and eat at home as opposed to eating in the school cafeteria. The freedom to live with pets was also mentioned by two student respondents. Michelle said she likes to be able to go home at the end of her day and "not be around distractions" on-campus.

It is who we are. Comments were made by both student and faculty respondents which indicated they perceived campus to be primarily a commuter campus and had not thought about commuter students much differently than any other students on campus. A faculty member shared, "As far as academically, I don't see much of a difference between a commuting student and a resident." A sentiment was shared by a few other faculty respondents explaining as a heavy commuter institution "we don't assume that everybody lives right across the street" and "I think we all understand that that is who the majority of our population is." When asked to describe a typical commuter student, Michael said he "never really thought to distinguish between a commuter student and on-campus student." Deklin said, "I think probably everybody on this campus has had a student whose car broke down and they couldn't get it fixed."

A few students made comments in alignment with what faculty perceived about being a commuter institution. Amy mentioned she perceived most faculty "just automatically think, oh you drove here" because of the high number of commuters at the institution. Sheryl talked about how it is commonplace for students in her area to plan to

meet up somewhere off-campus after class “because they're going somewhere anyway.” Katie felt like she could identify the residential students easily because “usually commuters aren't with a big group of people.”

Student respondents thought overall their professors and advisors were both supportive and flexible. Jonathan said, “I would say my advisor is really helpful. He always tries to . . . accommodate me . . . . instead of me having to work around his schedule.” In discussing faculty in her academic program Katie stated appreciatively, “they push you to do your best.” Ellie felt employees at the institution had been supportive of her progress and helpful in “trying to stack things together so you don’t have to come three or four times a day to campus.” Ellie also liked the flexibility of the tutoring center staff as well. When talking about professors in her department Tara explained, “Because they drive, they understand.”

Four faculty respondents used the term conscientious when discussing how they handle commuter student issues such as being late or absent from class, creating schedules, or being less engaged outside of class. Melissa said, “I think generally the vast majority of us are very conscientious.” Examples of conscientiousness and flexibility emerged during interviews. Kara and Lillian’s academic program uses a questionnaire to acquire driving distances and locations to place students in clinical experiences and allow opportunities for carpooling. Lisa explained she tries “to be flexible when they have something unexpected” come up such as a work issue. Deklin said, “The first question I have when somebody needs a form or something like that. Are you near campus? If they say no . . . I'll just, you know, take care of that.”

Overall, many faculty spoke sincerely of their efforts to support commuter student success. They shared their stories and perceptions in a genuine manner, and a few expressed a desire to understand more about how we could help commuter students progress to graduation. For example, Kara ended her interview by admitting, “There's a lot I don’t know about our campus and what it may or may not be doing to foster the success of commuter students.” She was sincerely hopeful to learn more about both by participating in this study. Mary had a profound thought during her interview when comparing this institution to one at which she had been previously employed. She explained:

> I've seen whole offices and whole support systems specifically for commuter students when it wasn't the majority of the student population. And so, when it's the majority of your student population, I don't know what that looks like. It's like the whole campus should just be the support system.

Summary

In Chapter Four, an analysis of the data was provided. Demographics for both the quantitative and qualitative research questions were described and answers to the six research questions were provided. Using a *z*-test for two proportions, the first two research questions were tested. There was no significant difference between first- to second-year retention rates nor six-year graduation rates for commuter and residential students at the institution. To answer research questions three through six, detailed responses were provided. Answers to each student focus group question were individually presented to illustrate perceived supports and obstacles to commuter student success. Next, answers to faculty interview questions were provided to explain

perceptions of what supports or creates obstacles to the retention and graduation of commuter students. Overarching themes of the qualitative data were explored to conclude the chapter.

In Chapter Five, the summary of results of this mixed methods study is presented. Each of the six research questions is discussed in conjunction with relevant literature. Implications of this commuter student research and recommendations for future research about commuter students are discussed in the final chapter.

Chapter Five: Summary and Conclusions

This study was designed using a mixed methods approach for a more holistic view of the commuter student phenomenon within the context of a public four-year Midwestern university (Fraenkel et al., 2015). Through the use of quantitative analysis, differences between the student success rates of residential students and commuter students were examined. An exploration of both faculty and student perceptions of the factors which impact commuter student success represented the qualitative portion of the study. Focus groups were designed to investigate student perceptions and personal interviews were used to uncover faculty perceptions. Data for the qualitative piece of the study were analyzed to identify emergent themes.

Findings of both the quantitative and qualitative analyses are summarized at the beginning of this chapter. Then, discussion of the conclusions based on findings of the study, which are supported by the literature explored in Chapter Two, follows. Next, implications for practice and recommendations for future research about commuter students are provided. Chapter Five is concluded with a final summary.

Findings

Detailed results of the findings of the mixed methods study were presented in Chapter Four. The following section is a summary of those findings. Outcomes of the research questions are presented in numerical order, as they were listed throughout previous chapters.

Research question number one. The first research question, "*What significant difference exists, if any, between the first- to second-year retention rates of first-time freshmen who lived on-campus and similar first-time freshmen who commuted to campus*

at a public four-year Midwestern university?" was analyzed using inferential statistics. The proportion of first-time freshmen residential students who were retained from their first- to second-year at the institution was compared to the proportion of first-time freshmen commuter students who were retained from their first- to second-year at the institution. The *z*-test for two proportions provided a *p*-value greater than .05, which indicated the null hypothesis could not be rejected. Consequently, there is no statistically significant difference between the first- to second-year retention rates of residential and commuter students at the institution.

Research question number two. Inferential statistics were also used to answer the second research question, "*What significant difference exists, if any, between the six-year graduation rates of first-time freshmen who lived on-campus and similar first-time freshmen who commuted to campus at a public four-year Midwestern university?*" The proportion of first-time freshmen residential students who graduated within six years of initial enrollment at the institution was compared to the proportion of first-time freshmen commuter students who graduated within six years of initial enrollment at the institution. The null hypothesis could not be rejected because the *z*-test for two proportions provided a *p*-value greater than .05. Therefore, there is no statistically significant difference between the six-year graduation rates of residential and commuter students at the institution.

Research question number three. The third research question, "*What factors, both institutional and personal, do commuter students at a public four-year Midwestern university perceive as supporting their efforts towards retention and degree completion?*" was answered through the use of student focus groups. During the student focus groups,

student respondents were asked fourteen questions. Discussions among the students revealed answers to the research question.

A variety of supporting factors for commuter student success were mentioned by the student respondents throughout the interviews. Some students spoke very highly not only of specific academic programs but also of student support services on the campus such as the tutoring center. Additionally, the student center and the library were both mentioned as convenient places students go to grab a bite to eat or to study when they had time between classes. Hands-on experiences, internships, face to face classes, and credits transferring in were examples of academic aspects students indicated reinforced their journey to college completion. Student respondents also expressed an appreciation of their professors and advisors for helping them by creating plans of study, developing course schedules, and navigating post-graduation information. Being able to provide feedback through end of course evaluations made some students feel like their opinions could make a difference in the lives of future students.

The institution's proximity to students' homes and families as well as its affordability were two supporting factors students shared when discussing why they initially chose to attend the institution. Having the freedom to work either on or off-campus, live with family, make their own food, enjoy privacy, drive when and where they needed, and being free from the distractions of the dorms were all factors students described as advantages of being a commuter student. Students in the study felt the activities the campus provided such as student organizations and clubs, movies, or performances were beneficial to their experiences with the institution. Commuter parking lots and parking signage, the overall friendliness of campus, special program

gathering spaces or lounges, and the proximity of campus buildings were also mentioned as positive aspects of the institution which supported commuter student success.

Research question number four. The fourth research question was "*What factors, both institutional and personal, do commuter students at a public four-year Midwestern university perceive as obstacles in their efforts towards retention and degree completion?*" Research Question Four was also answered by students who participated in the focus groups. Answers to the research question were discovered during the focus group discussions.

Many obstacles to commuter student success emerged from the student focus group discussions. A few obstacles were academic in nature. For example, some students felt a few required courses were superfluous. Slow feedback on coursework and delayed grading of homework were mentioned as detractions to commuter student success. Some students explained their disappointment with the hours of operation for the academic buildings, the library, and the coffee shop.

Two focus groups talked about their difficulties with the new final exam schedule. A few students who worked or had families described they had trouble scheduling the face to face courses they needed at the times they desired. One student with a husband and children thought group work was difficult to complete because of scheduling conflicts; however, a student living at home with her parents shared how she and her peers met up outside of class for school work with no scheduling problems. Another student said in his experience with group work it was the residential students who showed up late, not the other commuter students.

A few factors relative to communication were identified by the students in the study as obstacles to their success. One example was described as when professors do not show up to teach a class, or there is a note on the door when the students arrive at class indicating the class was canceled. Commuter students from two focus groups also expressed their displeasure when campus personnel delay in making the call to close campus due to bad weather conditions.

Factors relative to the students' commutes such as owning reliable transportation, weather, parking, gas money, the institution's one-car registration policy, and traffic tickets were all mentioned as obstacles faced by commuter students. A few students also said it was irritating if they leave something behind at home they need for class and must drive all the way back to get it or go without it for the day. Issues related to on-campus navigation like parking upkeep and signage as well as parking lot and crosswalk safety were brought up as disadvantages of being a commuter student.

A few individuals felt it was more difficult to make friends as a commuter student because they were not around peers all the time like residential students were perceived to be. Some students admitted they were not as involved or participatory in on-campus activities as a commuter student and felt the timing of events hosted by the institution could be more convenient. Although they could not quite put their finger on why, two students said they felt marginalized from day one of attendance at the campus. One other student said he felt no connection to campus and perceived the residential students ran in cliques.

Research question number five. The fifth research question, "*What factors, both institutional and personal, do faculty at a public four-year Midwestern university*

perceive as supporting commuter students' efforts towards retention and degree completion?" was answered by conducting faculty interviews. During faculty interviews, the faculty respondents were asked 10 questions. Discussions with faculty exposed answers to the research question.

Many factors supporting commuter student success were mentioned throughout the interviews by faculty respondents. All faculty respondents discussed how they themselves, serving in the roles of professor and/or advisor, were supportive to commuter students' success. For example, faculty noted trying be flexible in scheduling advising meetings and club meetings, kept a variety of office hours, and offered virtual advisement opportunities through email, texts, and online registration pin disbursement. The use of technology such as uploading course content in the learning management system as well as using the early alert and degree audit systems were mentioned by faculty respondents. Faculty also felt they were helpful to commuters by making efforts to save students time, provide flexibility, and offer additional academic and advising support.

Several faculty members discussed the difficulties they have experienced in creating commuter students' schedules. Some faculty said scheduling around work posed issues. A few others mentioned it could be difficult in scheduling upper-level classes because there is a lack of flexibility in what is offered by the institution.

Other supportive aspects of campus were described by faculty. For example, some of the academic and student services areas such as the library and career services were described as having a strong online presence. Some of the student affairs offices such as the student activities office were perceived to be supportive of commuter students. A few faculty thought campus events were offered at convenient times for

commuter student attendance. Regarding academic departmental events, a few faculty respondents said they try to promote these events to students in class as well as through social media. Some faculty felt places like the library and the student center were places commuters could go to study, relax, socialize, or eat without having to re-park their vehicles. One faculty member felt the library had good hours of operation for the commuter student population. Two faculty mentioned the convenience of the gathering areas in their building, which provides not only a place to study but also a few appliances for commuters who brought their lunches. The on-campus daycare, as well as the opportunity to purchase a meal plan and use the campus Wi-Fi, were mentioned as commuter student benefits.

A few faculty respondents felt affordability, freedom, and being away from the distractions of residence life were advantages of commuting. One faculty member thought commuter students tended to be more invested in their education. Just under half of the faculty respondents felt family were financially and emotionally supportive.

The faculty respondents also discussed supportive factors of transportation or parking. Most faculty felt the commuter parking lots were an advantage to commuter students. One faculty member said the parking fee was extremely affordable. Another faculty member noted the benefit of having the locked door service available from the campus police department. Some faculty mentioned the advantage of close short-term parking areas near some of the student services areas like the bookstore and health center. Other supportive features of campus relative to transportation included: the proximity of campus buildings, mentioned by two faculty respondents; on-campus signage upgrades,

discussed by one faculty member; and the vehicle charging station, declared by one faculty member.

Research question number six. The sixth research question was "*What factors, both institutional and personal, do faculty at a public four-year Midwestern university perceive as obstacles for commuter students' efforts towards retention and degree completion?*" Research Question Six was also answered by faculty who participated in the interviews. Answers to the research question were explored during the interview discussions.

A variety of obstacles to commuter student success were brought forth during the faculty interviews. Some of the obstacles were related to academics. One faculty respondent explained how the new final exam schedule proved difficult for some commuter students. A recent policy change regarding a decrease in office hours was perceived by two faculty respondents to be a future detriment to commuter students. A few faculty mentioned some of the academic processes such as graduation or completing triplicate paper forms created obstacles for commuter students. Other factors perceived to be obstacles included a decrease in full-time faculty in one department, having to make an extra trip to campus to pick up rental textbooks, the removal of the Dean of Students position, the hours of operation for the library, and inflexibility in course scheduling due to either set block schedules or the low number of course delivery mode and time options.

Nearly all faculty respondents expressed a concern about the outside responsibilities of commuter students. They perceived because of commitments such as family or work, commuter students were less likely to be engaged on-campus. A few faculty felt the lack of social gathering spaces, both inside and outside of buildings,

prevented commuter students from developing a sense of community that residential students have by virtue of being around each other day and night. Promoting campus events and engaging more in social media were two things one faculty member thought she could do better. However, one faculty member felt institutional personnel were hurting the chances of commuter student engagement by over communicating information. Another faculty respondent felt some students with family and work responsibilities underestimated the amount of time and energy required to come back to earn a four-year degree.

Issues relative to transportation were shared by all faculty respondents except for one. Concerns about owning reliable transportation, spending time in the car on the commute, navigating tough weather conditions, and spending money on gas were shared regarding the students' commutes. One faculty member noticed the institution did not have an emergency funding system, a benefit at her previous institution of employment commuter students could use for problems like car repairs. The issue of racial profiling by an adjacent community's police force was brought up by one faculty respondent. Another set of issues arose concerning getting around safely on-campus once the students arrived. Those issues included a low number of security cameras in the parking lots, crosswalk safety, the lack of covered walkways, and having two major roadways surrounding the entrances to campus. Because of these transportation-related issues, many faculty shared commuter students are often tardy or absent from classes.

Most faculty explained although they did not think parking was an issue on-campus they understood students thought it was a problem. One faculty member did think the institution could use additional short-term parking spaces near some of the

student service areas. One faculty member noted there were no bike lanes for cycling commuters nor plentiful parking spaces for small cars and motorcycles. Another faculty member perceived indoor signage to be scarce and handicap accessibility to be a struggle.

A few other issues were perceived as obstacles to commuter student success. First, one faculty member shared she worried commuters do not see the value in paying fees for unused facilities like the recreation center. Finally, the lack of variety in quick food and vending options in all areas of campus was of concern to a faculty respondent.

Conclusions

All conclusions are explored within the scope of relevant literature provided in Chapter Two. The two quantitative research questions are explained first. Qualitative conclusions from research analysis are organized using the four emerging themes illustrated in Chapter Four.

Quantitative research questions. The null hypotheses were not rejected for either of the quantitative research questions. The *z*-test for two proportions was used for both quantitative research questions. It was found in results of Research Question One there was not a statistically significant difference in first- to second-year retention rates of commuter and residential students. First- to second-year retention rates were examined because they are positively associated with graduation rates (Bingham & Solverson, 2016). The proportion of commuter students who were retained from the first- to second-year for the 2014, 2015, and 2016 combined cohorts was 63.2%. Similar residential students from the same combined cohorts represented a proportion of 66.1%. Contrary to findings in the literature, residential students in this study are not retained from first- to

second-year at a significantly higher rate than commuter students (Schudde, 2011; Walsh & Robinson Kurpius, 2016).

Through an analysis of results for Research Question Two, it was found there was not a statistically significant difference in six-year graduation rates for commuter and residential students. Commuter students who graduated from the 2008, 2009, and 2010 combined cohorts represented a proportion of 35.1%. The proportion of similar residential students from the same combined cohorts was 33.7%. Ike et al. (2016) explained how scholars over the years have found commuter students to be less likely to graduate than residential students. This was not the case for this study. Overall, the lack of statistically significant differences in first- to second-year retention rates and six-year graduation rates of commuter and residential students in this study aligns with Mayhew et al.'s (2016) argument there may no longer exist as strong of a relationship between student success and residential living.

Qualitative research questions. The four qualitative research questions were used to prompt a more holistic and thorough examination of both institutional and personal factors affecting commuter student retention and degree completion (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Newbold (2011) described the need to better understand the complexity of the commuter student population. Studying perceptions of commuter students and faculty within the scope of a specific institution not only guides institutional personnel in future decision-making regarding commuters but also fills a gap in the qualitative research of the commuter student retention phenomenon (Berger et al., 2012; Burlison, 2015; Jacoby, 1989).

Because perceptions represent realities, examining the shared perceptions of inhabitants of an environment helps promote a better understanding of inhabitants' behaviors and that which influences them (Strange & Banning, 2015). Perceptions of commuters were explored through student focus groups to answer Research Questions Three and Four. Interviews were used to determine faculty perceptions regarding the factors which affect commuter student success, which answered Research Questions Five and Six. The four aspects of Strange and Banning's (2015) campus ecology model are used as the organizational structure within which the conclusions of the qualitative research are discussed.

Physical environments. The physical environment of campus is the combination of natural and synthetic objects which impact human behavior (Barker, 1968; Jacoby, 2015; Strange, 1999; Strange & Banning, 2015). Climate, color schemes, spaces, and proximity of objects are all examples of physical features which contribute to inhabitants' sense of place (Eckert, 2013; Strange & Banning, 2015). Okoli (2013) found a positive relationship between academic engagement and sense of place. According to Strange and Banning's (2015) hierarchy of needs, students who feel safe and included are more likely to engage in the environment and build a culture of community; thus, fostering student success.

Aspects of the physical environment had the most crossover in collective perceptions of student and faculty participants. In this study, perceptions of the physical environment related to convenience, safety, and time of commuter students. Through student focus groups and faculty interviews, participants of the study articulated

perceptions of how the campus' physical aspects both supported and detracted from commuter student success.

Convenient physical spaces on-campus promote engagement and learning (Painter et al., 2013; Strange & Banning, 2015). Student and faculty participants identified the library as a convenient and comfortable physical learning space supportive of commuter student success (Painter et al., 2013). One student said she goes "to the library to study until class," which was a comment echoed by students in other focus groups too. Some students described the student center and its services to be welcoming, convenient, and a place to engage with other students. Faculty thought the administrative building, housing many student support services, was supportive to commuter student success. The use of these facilities facilitated engagement with other students, which created a higher sense of satisfaction and belonging with the institution for the students in the study (Astin, 1985; Painter et al., 2013; Strange & Banning, 2015; Tinto, 2017).

Sometimes winter weather caused physical barriers such as icy conditions in the parking lots and on sidewalks. Students and faculty were also concerned about crosswalk safety, specifically regarding crosswalks across two large roadways surrounding the campus. Strange (2000) and Strange and Banning (2015) explained how the physical environment can convey a nonverbal message to individuals regarding the safety of the environment. Unkempt parking lots and sidewalks sent an unintended negative nonverbal message to some commuter students at this institution, which made the students feel they did not matter (Schlossberg, 1985). When individuals do not feel they matter, there are potential ramifications to student success and a student's movement

towards engagement and community in Strange and Banning's (2015) hierarchy of environmental design (Jacoby, 2015; Schlossberg, 1985; Tinto, 2017).

Unsurprisingly, concerns relative to transportation were perceived by faculty and commuter students as obstacles to commuter student success, which were consistent with the literature (Jacoby & Garland, 2004; Newbold, 2015). Study participants cited scenarios involving high gasoline prices, unreliable transportation, and bad weather conditions, all which require additional time and effort on behalf of commuters as opposed to their residential counterparts (Jacoby & Garland, 2004; Newbold, 2015). Student respondents discussed the extra time they stayed up at night waiting for weather-related campus closure announcements as well as the extra effort they took to prepare themselves and their cars to get to class during winter weather months. One student explained, "There were many times at midnight I'm like, I'm still waiting because I know they're going to cancel and I'm staying up late [*sic*]."

Time spent looking for a parking space was another transportation concern and physical aspect of the campus environment which was perceived to be an obstacle by some commuter students (Jacoby & Garland, 2004; Newbold, 2015; Strange & Banning, 2015). Although many faculty participants did not perceive parking space on campus to be a valid concern, they did acknowledge students perceived it to be an issue. Ample parking is a physical aspect of campus which can send a nonverbal message to commuters they are welcome (Darling, 2015; Strange & Banning, 2015). Students and faculty did not verbally articulate whether they felt welcome or not based on ample parking space; however, students and faculty who perceived the space as ample felt it was advantageous compared to residential students. Students and faculty who thought

space was problematic related the issue to commuter student tardies and feelings of stress. According to Strange and Banning's (2015) hierarchy of environmental design, ample parking is a physical feature of campus which can promote a feeling of inclusion. When students feel included and safe they have a solid foundation to support their movement to the engagement level of the hierarchy (Strange & Banning, 2015). Further, transportation issues directly impact the time spent on-campus by commuter students (Newbold, 2015). Less time spent on-campus means less opportunity for engagement, which can ill-effect student success (Astin, 1985). Obstacles existing within the physical environment and experienced by the students in the study did not deter from retention and graduation as the literature suggests could have occurred.

***Aggregate environments*.** People on college campuses transmit the aggregate environment (Holland, 1973; Strange & Banning, 2015). The institution's ability to satisfy and retain students is influenced by the collective characteristics of the people on-campus (Moos, 1986; Strange & Banning, 2015). When congruence between a student and the aggregate environment exists, the student is more likely to be satisfied with and retained by the institution (Holland, 1973; Moos, 1986; Strange & Banning, 2015). Aspects of the aggregate environment included the largest variety of perceptions of student and faculty participants of the study.

The aggregate environment of the institution was generally perceived to be supportive to commuter student retention and graduation (Holland, 1973; Strange & Banning, 2015). Professors, advisors, and support staff from varying academic and support offices were described as friendly, helpful, and flexible. The prestigious reputation of some academic programs reported by the students is attributable to the

individuals who make up those programs. In describing her reason for selecting the institution one student commented the institution "has an amazing team . . . on a national level which a lot of people don't know that, but it just shows, like, how well run our program is." Students also discussed their relationships with other students at the institution, developed either through classroom experiences or registered student organizations and clubs. Relationships help create a sense of belonging and some students in the study attributed their relationships with employees and fellow students as their primary connection with the institution (Chambliss & Takacs, 2014; Strange & Banning, 2015).

Tactics already in place to facilitate commuter student success, concerns about how future policy would impact students, and worries of how to balance use of technology so as not to hinder face to face engagement validated the student's perception the aggregate environment was friendly, helpful, and flexible (Holland, 1973; Strange & Banning, 2015). Faculty perceived commuter students from a deficit perspective because they were aware of retention theory and literature which identified the benefits of living on-campus and explained the importance of academic and social engagement (Astin, 1975, 1985, 1993; Blimling, 1993; Bronkema & Bowman, 2017; Chickering, 1974; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Schudde, 2011; Soria & Taylor Jr., 2016; Sriram et al., 2017; Walsh & Robinson Kurpius, 2016; Wolfe, 1993). However, commuter students did not perceive themselves to be at a disadvantage compared to residential students. Although student participants identified obstacles to their success which were consistent with concerns identified within the literature, they did not see themselves as "have nots" in comparison with residential students (Chickering, 1974; Darling, 2015). According to the

quantitative data in this study, the findings from Research Questions One and Two corroborate this perception as it was found commuters and residential students are equally as likely to be retained or to graduate from the institution.

Faculty were overly concerned with commuter students' outside responsibilities such as work and family and how they would hinder social engagement on-campus. One faculty member explained, "Our commuter students are often working full-time."; another shared, "Most of them behave like they have full-time jobs," and another faculty participant said, "Also, many of them are full-time employees." A few students admitted they may not be as involved as they were when they lived on-campus, but then again, the students in the study were moderately to highly engaged on-campus either through student employment, clubs, academic group work, or campus activities and events. While a few students did address work and family obligations or the timing of campus events, the desire for independence was at the root of the rationale for not coming back to campus for social engagement opportunities. Faculty's high sensitivity to commuter students' outside obligations represents a characteristic which contributed to the aggregate environment perceived by commuter students as supportive of their success (Holland, 1973; Strange & Banning, 2015).

Disparity in student and faculty perceptions did exist regarding the aggregate environment (Holland, 1973; Strange & Banning, 2015). For example, students described being unhappy at times with issues related to delayed campus closure communications, individual class cancellations, and academic feedback from faculty. However, faculty perceived the institution doing a great job with communicating weather-related cancellations and described going to great lengths to try and provide

timely feedback for coursework, advising issues, and individual class cancellations. Although issues described by students were relatively small in quantity, the passion with which students described their frustration about these issues should not be overlooked. The positive collective characteristics of the people at the institution outweighed the negative, which were not strong enough to dissuade student satisfaction or retention for participants in this study (Moos, 1986; Strange, 1999; Strange & Banning, 2015).

Organizational environments. College campuses are representative of organized environments because they were created for a specific purpose (Galbraith, 2014; Strange & Banning, 2015). The organizational environment and its level of centralization and formalization can either promote or discourage inhabitant's participation within the environment (Strange 1999; Strange & Banning, 2015). Behaviors of students are influenced by mission and size of the institution as well as perceptions of the way in which powers are distributed, policies and procedures are structured and implemented, work is divided, and personnel are evaluated (Moos, 1973; Strange & Banning, 2015). The organizational environment of the studied campus was perceived to provide support to commuter students as well as create obstacles for commuter students. Perceptions of the organization of the institutional environment shaped the behaviors of the students and faculty in the study (Moos, 1973).

For example, positive perceptions about the affordability, campus size, scholarships, face-to-face classes, academic programs, and transferability of credit were described as reasons students decided to attend the institution. These organizational aspects of the institution prompted the behavior of students to enroll in the institution (Moos, 1973; Strange & Banning, 2015). The small size of the institution not only

prompted enrollment but also fostered academic and social engagement and a sense of community for two student participants (Moos, 1973; Strange & Banning, 2015). A student participant shared, “I really like this small community and this small school aspect.” Quality engagement and sense of belonging have both been found to cultivate college student satisfaction, retention, and graduation (Astin, 1993; Strange & Banning, 2015; Tinto, 1993).

Perceived obstacles of commuter student success included some of the bureaucratic policies and processes such as triplicate forms, traffic tickets, class cancellation announcements, course mode delivery options, hours of classes and support services, and the final exam schedule. Consequently, both student and faculty behaviors were impacted. For example, students who perceived the campus to close down at 5 p.m. were discouraged from staying on-campus after that time, which deterred them from using campus services and engaging in evening events. Lack of engagement could prevent students from establishing a sense of belonging with the institution, which threatens the ability to retain and graduate a student (Astin, 1993; Ishitani & Reid, 2015; Tinto, 1975).

Also, some students said they were forced to ask off work for the entire week of final exams with the newly implemented schedule. Faculty who perceived students only take classes at certain times because of work or family perpetuated an organizational cycle of only offering classes at certain times of the day. Faculty who dislike the triplicate forms changed the way they handle processes associated with them to better accommodate the commuter student population and promote student satisfaction.

Dissatisfaction with the organizational environment has the potential to facilitate student attrition (Strange, 1999; Strange & Banning, 2015).

Credit policies associated with a student's grade in class were also associated with engagement or lack thereof. Student participants explained they were more likely to engage both academically and socially if their grade was positively impacted by virtue of their involvement. Also, faculty did say they felt they could increase social engagement if they tied extra credit to student participation. However, some faculty did not think commuter students could be enticed to come back to campus for such engagement opportunities because of the commute time or responsibilities such as work and family. Time and the balance of work and family are cited in commuter student literature as being potential obstacles to commuter student success (Alfano & Eduljee, 2013; Biddix, 2015; Burlison, 2015; Gianoutsos & Rosser, 2014; Nelson et al., 2016; Newbold, 2015; Soloman, 2016). Faculty with such perceptions are inhibiting potential opportunities for increased academic and social engagement of the commuter student population. Astin (1985) suggested the higher the quality and quantity of engagement the higher the likelihood of learning and development.

Socially constructed environments. The socially constructed environment represents the culture of the institution (Strange & Banning, 2015). The sum of the physical, aggregate, and organizational components of the environment create a campus culture which influences student behavior (Strange & Banning, 2015). A well-formed socially constructed campus environment promotes a sense of community for students, which increases the chances for them to develop a sense of belonging and remain at the institution (Kretovics, 2015; Strange & Banning, 2015).

One student self-proclaimed his lack of connection to the institution, describing symptoms of person-environment incongruence (Holland, 1973). The student's lack of sense of belonging did ill-effect his ability to socially engage with other students at the institution, which supports the literature (Jacoby, 2015; Martin & Kilgo, 2015; Schlossberg, 1985; Tinto, 1993). Although the student reported a high level of academic engagement during his first-year of attendance, he still did not feel a sense of belonging, which is contrary to previous retention research (Astin, 1985; Ishitani & Reid, 2015). This student even explained his satisfaction with the faculty and advisors in his academic program and described them as, "Very supportive. Extremely helpful. Wonderful people." Two students who felt an unexplained sense of marginalization did not express an intention to withdraw from the institution, which is different from what retention theory and literature suggests would likely happen (Schlossberg, 1985; Tinto, 1993).

All other students shared at least one perceived or experienced obstacle of commuter student success. However, all students in the study articulated their intention to return to the institution the following semester or to graduate from the institution. These cumulative findings suggest the supportive factors in addition to the socially constructed environment of the institution outweighed the sum of the perceived and experienced physical, aggregate, and organizational obstacles at the institution (Strange & Banning, 2015).

Implications for Practice

In this study, there are several implications for practice. Strange and Banning's (2015) campus ecology model was a useful framework to guide the understanding of how commuter students experience the campus environment. Astin's (1985) theory of

involvement was a valuable lens through which to examine commuter student engagement.

Analogy of implications. A pictorial analogy (see Figure 4) was created to illustrate the overlap of how the conceptual framework, retention theory, and factors which affect commuter student success are related. The steering wheel, bicycle wheel, and footprints are used to signify ways in which commuter students travel to and from campus. Family, work, and independence are pictured working against the direction of the gears because they were all factors identified by students and faculty in the study as working against commuter student success. Work and family were also identified as concerns for commuter students in the literature (Astin, 1985; Biddix, 2015; Brown, 2015; Darling, 2015; Nelson et al., 2016; Newbold, 2015; Newbold et al., 2011).

Strange and Banning's (2015) hierarchy of environmental design is illustrated within the arrows turning the gears in a direction promoting movement towards retention and graduation, as signified by the graduation cap. The use of involvement and belonging represents retention theory and symbolizes the cultivation of traction towards student success because they are located where the gears fit together (Astin, 1985; Schlossberg, 1985; Tinto, 1993). The gears are used to symbolize the most common form of commuting in the study, driving an automobile. Additionally, gears are used to bring attention to the underlying issue for all campus constituents in achieving commuter student success—time. The analogy is shown in Figure 4.

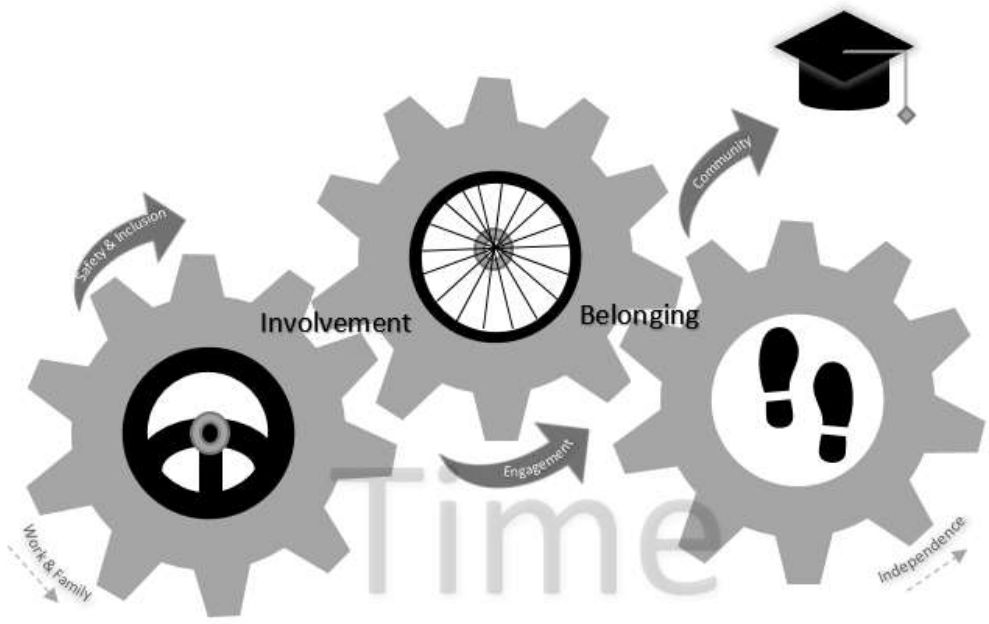

Figure 4. Analogy of implications. An analogy of implications representing the intersection of the conceptual framework, retention theory, and factors affecting commuter student success.

Future assessment of the campus environment. The use of Strange and Banning's (2015) campus ecology model enabled the researcher to uncover the person-environment relationships experienced by commuter students with the campus environment. By exploring all types of environments within which constituents interact on the college campus, institutional personnel can work towards an understanding of inhabitant's behaviors as well as push towards reaching the peak of the hierarchy of environmental design (Strange & Banning, 2015). The peak of the hierarchy is represented by achieving a culture of community (Strange & Banning, 2015). Future assessment of the campus environment should include the utilization of Strange and Banning's (2015) campus design matrix. The use of the campus design matrix allows institutional personnel to not only develop new environments but also determine if the educational environments they have created are reaching their intended purpose and

potential (Strange & Banning, 2015). Continued use of the matrix by institutional leaders will enhance their ability to achieve a culture of community (Strange & Banning, 2015).

Integrating engagement. Commuter students in the study reported being engaged in on-campus activities and student organizations and they all expressed the intent to either return to or graduate from the institution. Students also said they were more willing to participate in on-campus events when their grades were affected. One student commented, "Some of my professors offer extra credit for attending events." Other students affirmed their instructors sometimes tie extra credit to on-campus event attendance. Correspondingly, faculty articulated the importance of student engagement through the expression of worry commuter students were at a disadvantage because of obstacles preventing them from involvement. A faculty member said:

> I think it's very hard to take part in anything other than class . . . if there's a presentation and the professor says . . . I'll give you credit if you attend this presentation at 6 o'clock and it's noon and they're done or have to go to work.

Astin's theory of student involvement (1985) postulated the higher quality and quantity of student engagement the higher the chances are of student learning and development, which increases the likelihood of student satisfaction and success. Astin (1985) also argued a policy's effectiveness is affirmed through its capacity to increase student involvement.

If faculty feel engagement is important and students who report being involved intended to return or graduate, then institutional personnel should better promote engagement opportunities as well as the benefits of participation. A campaign for student engagement could be integrated into the classroom setting. All faculty could be provided

a master schedule of campus events and a master list of registered student organizations. Faculty could decide which events and organizations are relevant and worthy of credit and require attendance and participation. For events and clubs which are not relevant to the curriculum, faculty could announce events and explain their value to the student experience in a timely manner throughout the course of the semester. If all faculty and other employees were constantly conveying the value of student involvement, eventually student perceptions regarding the value of their involvement could increase as well as actual participation.

Transfer immersion. Two two-year transfer students in the study described feeling marginalized, although they could not articulate an exact rationale for their feelings. Even after the focus group discussion, one student wrote the researcher and explained:

> I am still unable to exactly place what made me think that when I got out of the car my first day of classes. The only thing I can come up with is it was a subconscious observation or just a hunch.

Marginality can ill-effect student success (Schlossberg, 1985). Tinto (1993) discussed students who feel marginalized may be more likely to withdraw. Institutional personnel should facilitate further discussions with these students as well as conduct student focus groups with other transfer students to ensure this phenomenon is not being experienced by other transfer students. If future findings suggest an issue exists, the addition of a required transfer orientation may mitigate feelings of marginalization.

Since students in the study said they felt this way from the first moment they arrived on campus, it would behoove institutional personnel to assess how to articulate a

more welcoming atmosphere on the first day of each semester. A welcoming campus helps institutional leaders meet the students' foundational needs of safety and inclusion established in Strange and Banning's (2015) hierarchy of needs. When a student's foundational needs are met, a student is more likely to be involved on-campus (Strange & Banning, 2015). Astin (1985) argued student involvement leads to learning, which can promulgate student success and satisfaction. Another strategy to make transfers feel more immersed in the campus community is to have institutional personnel change their semantics about these students. For example, employees should stop referring to these students as transfers and start calling them students.

Need-based scheduling. Course scheduling, specifically regarding modes of delivery and times of delivery, was discussed by student and faculty participants. Some students reported at times they could not find the classes they needed when they needed them; some faculty reported similar relative concerns. Also, some faculty participants perceived online classes were desired by commuter students because of their convenience; however, as one student stated about face to face classes, "The interactions between students . . . is priceless . . . . and you can't put that on a discussion board and get the same thing [*sic*]."

It is important to note a large majority of students in the study had jobs. Time, work, and family have all been identified as key concerns of commuter students (Astin, 1985; Darling, 2015; Jacoby, 2015; Newbold et al., 2011). Institutional personnel should review the course schedule to address these concerns. It would also be prudent to survey the students to find out how many students work and when they work to find optimal course offering times and modes of delivery for all students attending the institution.

Recommendations for Future Research

Although a mixed methods research design was used for this study in order to gain a more holistic picture of the commuter student phenomenon, it is important to note the study was not comprehensive (Fraenkel et al., 2015). Only one institution's commuter student population was studied. As explained in the review of literature, the number of college commuter students in the United States heavily outweighs the number of residential students (Skomsvold, 2014). Further research about commuter students is encouraged to better guide policy and practice (Jacoby, 1989, 2015).

Continuing data collection and broadening the scope. The investigation of how inhabitants interact with their campus environment was examined through the physical, aggregate, organizational, and socially constructed components of Strange and Banning's (2015) campus ecology model. Because the nature of any educational environment involves natural turnover of its inhabitants through attrition and graduation, the aggregate environment has potential to change (Berger et al., 2012; Strange & Banning, 2015). Changes in the collective characteristics of campus constituents can influence recruiting efforts, student satisfaction levels, and student success (Moos, 1986, Strange & Banning, 2015).

To monitor the aggregate environment, additional qualitative and quantitative data should continue to be accumulated and analyzed. Conducting commuter student focus groups over a longer period and with a more diverse group of commuters will provide a more thorough understanding of the aggregate environment and deeper insights into the commuter student phenomenon at the institution. Also, a continued analysis of

longitudinal quantitative data will enable institutional personnel to determine the effects of residential and commuter living at the school (Astin, 1975).

Future research should include additional student perspectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In addition to more commuter students, conducting focus groups with residential students, or students who have previously lived on-campus, may also be beneficial. Asking residential students about their perceptions could further illuminate the differences between their experiences and commuter student experiences. Residential student perceptions may also facilitate discussion among institutional leaders to enhance the success rates of residential and commuter students at the institution. Also, a survey could be created and disseminated to a large sample of currently attending commuter students to find out more about commuter student experiences.

The scope and dimensions of the population in the study could be broadened in future research (Fraenkel et al., 2015). Campus administrators and staff were not interviewed for the purposes of this study. However, obtaining the perceptions of these two groups of campus personnel would be helpful in providing a more complete exploration of the commuter student phenomenon at this institution. Although staff at the institution do not interact with commuter students as often as faculty, their insights and experiences with commuter students could bring value to the study since some of the student respondents did mention interactions with staff during the focus group discussions. Also, since campus administrators can approve revisions to institutional policy, any major disagreement in perceptions of this group versus commuter students could pave the way for future decisions and policy implementation impacting commuter students.

Unique students; unique institutions. Findings from previous retention research in higher education have found a difference in residential and commuter student success (Astin, 1975, 1985, 1993; Blimling, 1993; Bronkema & Bowman, 2017; Chickering, 1974; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Schudde, 2011; Soria & Taylor Jr., 2016; Sriram et al., 2017; Walsh & Robinson Kurpius, 2016; Wolfe, 1993). Data obtained through the quantitative portion of the study showed no statistically significant difference in retention and graduation rates between the two student groups. Data collected in the qualitative portion of the study indicated all commuter students planned to remain at the institution and graduate.

Because of increased diversity of today's student population researchers have suggested studying specific student groups within the institutional setting in which they participate (Berger et al., 2012; Biddix, 2015; Dugan et al., 2008; Strange, 2000). Jacoby (1989) and Dugan et al. (2008) contended to better guide institutional personnel in the revision and development of policies and practices, they should study commuter students within their unique institutional settings. A richer understanding of the lived experiences of commuter students, and those they interact with on the college campus, can be captured through additional qualitative research (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Seidman, 2013). Quantitative findings, which suggested a divergence from historical studies, could prompt personnel to further research residential life at the institution.

Overall findings and conclusions of this study support the idea institutions of higher education should continue to research unique student populations using a mixed methods approach and within the context of the individual institutions in which they reside (Berger et al., 2012; Fraenkel et al., 2012; Schoonenboom, 2017; Strange, 2000).

By using these approaches to research, institutional personnel may garner a more holistic and objective understanding of the campus environment and how it is perceived by its inhabitants (Berger et al., 2012; Fraenkel et al., 2015; Schoonenboom, 2017; Strange, 2000).

Ethnographic approach. An ethnographic study could guide future research of commuter students at institutions of higher education (Fraenkel et al., 2015). Ethnography is a qualitative research method which uses a combination of observations and interviews to understand the lived realities within an environment (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Fraenkel et al. (2015) explained a strength of an ethnographic approach is that it provides a comprehensive perspective of inhabitant's behaviors within a natural setting. Commuter students could be observed and interviewed over the period of a semester or an academic year to collect data that would provide further context of their lived experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Summary

As described in Chapter One, a background of college student retention and the researched benefits of traditional residential living were provided as a foundation upon which the focus of the study was established. Skomsvold (2014) reported there are over six times as many commuter students as residential students attending college in the United States. Billions of dollars are lost annually because of college student attrition (Foss et al., 2014; Jobe & Lenio, 2014). Commuter students are thought to be at a disadvantage because, historically, studies have shown residential students to persist at higher rates than commuter students (Astin, 1975, 1985, 1993; Blimling, 1993;

Bronkema & Bowman, 2017; Chickering, 1974; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Schudde, 2011; Soria & Taylor Jr., 2016; Sriram et al., 2017; Walsh & Robinson Kurpius, 2016; Wolfe, 1993).

Commuter student retention was the focus of the mixed methods study. The overarching purpose of this study was to deepen the understanding of the commuter student population at the public four-year Midwestern university being studied. First- to second-year retention rates and six-year graduation rates were compared for commuter and residential students using the most recent three cohorts of data respectively. Using Strange and Banning's (2015) campus ecology model as the conceptual framework for the study, the researcher explored the perspectives of both commuter students and faculty.

A comprehensive review of relevant literature was presented in Chapter Two. Detailed information about campus ecology theory, Strange and Banning's (2015) campus ecology model, and Astin's (1985) theory of student involvement were explained first. Various aspects of college student retention were explored including detailed information about retention history and theory as well as the variables which affect it and the current landscape of the field. To provide further clarity regarding who commuter students are, the research provided a comparison and contrast of commuter, nontraditional, and residential students. At the end of Chapter Two, literature regarding the key concerns of commuters and strategies to overcome them were described.

In Chapter Three, the methodology of the study was explained. The researcher desired to obtain a more holistic view of the commuter student experience, so a mixed methods approach was implored (Fraenkel et al., 2015). Two quantitative research questions were developed to examine the differences in commuter and residential student

success rates, specifically first- to second-year retention and six-year graduation rates. A *z*-test for two proportions was used to conduct the analyses (Bluman, 2015). Four qualitative research questions were asked to facilitate discussions with commuter students about their experiences with the institution and faculty about their experiences with commuter students. The conceptual framework was used to craft the qualitative research questions for the student focus groups and faculty interviews. Students and faculty were asked to identify the factors which impacted commuter student success.

Findings regarding the six research questions were detailed in Chapter Four. Results of the quantitative research questions did not reveal a statistically significant difference in the student success rates of commuter and residential students. Four emerging themes, facilitated by the qualitative research questions, were a result of the discussions had during the student focus groups and faculty interviews. The four themes were: getting from here to there, the double-edged sword of convenience, independence, and it is who we are.

Finally, in Chapter Five, conclusions were explained within the context of the literature discussed in Chapter Two. In Research Questions One and Two, it was found commuter students and students living on-campus do not persist from the first- to second-year or graduate within six years at a statistically significant difference. Factors which affect commuter student retention and graduation at the institution were identified through the findings of Research Questions Three, Four, Five and Six. Both student and faculty participants described supporting factors and obstacles to commuter student success.

Implications for practice were tied to the conceptual framework, retention literature, and emerging themes. Collecting data over a longer period, using Strange and Banning's (2015) campus design matrix to assess the campus environment, studying residence life and other unique populations within context of the institution (Jacoby, 2015), integrating engagement into the curriculum, creating a required transfer orientation, and conducting a needs analysis for course scheduling were all implications for practiced identified by the researcher.

Recommendations for future research included the idea to explore perceptions of other constituents of the institution including campus administrators, staff, additional commuters, and residential students. Also, an ethnographic approach could be used so observations of commuter students could be conducted (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Exploring additional perspectives about commuter students, or any unique student group, and observing lived experiences of them will not only deepen the understanding of the studied students but also provide opportunities for institutional personnel to achieve their ultimate goal—retaining students through graduation.

Appendix A

Focus Group Questions

1. Participant introductions:
    a. name, major, year in school (shared aloud)
    b. race/ethnicity, age, dependent/independent, work status, PT/FT status, married, family (handwritten on paper)
2. Tell me about how you decided to attend [redacted].
3. Why did you decide to commute to campus as opposed to living on-campus?
4. Describe a typical day in which you come to [redacted] for class.
5. As a commuter student, what is your biggest advantage, and what is your biggest challenge?
6. As a commuter student, what physical features/attributes of campus do you feel support you, and what physical features/attributes of campus do you feel create obstacles for you? Why?
7. As a commuter student, who and/or what program(s) do you feel supports you, and who and/or what program(s) do you feel create obstacles for you on this campus? Why?
8. What policies and procedures support you, and what policies and procedures create obstacles for you as a commuter student?
9. Tell me about times you come to campus for purposes other than attending class?
10. Does the way in which your academic program is structured provide you with the support you need to graduate? Explain.
11. Tell me your most entertaining story about your commuting experience at this institution.
12. Do you plan to come back to [redacted] next fall? Why or why not?
13. Do you plan to graduate from [redacted]? Why or why not?
14. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience as a commuter?

Appendix B

Focus Group Participant Information

A review of recent research revealed the concerns for commuter students revolve around the concepts of transportation, time, sense of belonging, family, work, and finances (Brown, 2015; Burlison, 2015; Nelson, Misra, Sype, & Mackie, 2016; Newbold, 2015; Newbold, Mehta, & Forbus, 2011). Please complete the following information to provide further context for the study.

Name: _____ **Year in School:** _____

Major: _____ **Age:** _____

Please circle the answers below that best describe you:

Enrollment status:

Full-time (12+ semester hrs) Part-time (1-11 semester hrs)

Marital status:

Married Single

Work status:

Full-time (40+ hrs/week) Part-time (20-39 hrs/week) Part-time (1-19 hrs/week)

Do you work on-campus? Yes No

Family status:

Do you have children/dependents? Yes No

If yes, how many? _____

Can anyone claim you as a dependent (on their taxes)? Yes No

Commuter information:

Approximately how far (in miles) is your commute from your home to campus? _____

What is your mode of transportation for commuting?

Automobile Public Transit Bicycle Walking Other _____

Appendix C

Faculty Interview Questions

1. Describe the typical commuter student you see in your classroom at [redacted].
2. Name specific ways you try to support commuter students as a faculty member and as an advisor.
3. In your opinion, what are the biggest challenges and advantages for commuter students on this campus?
4. How does [redacted] set commuter students up for success?
5. How does your academic program support commuter student completion?
6. What physical features/attributes of the campus do you feel are supportive of commuter students, and what physical features/attributes of campus do you feel create obstacles for them?
7. Regarding commuter students, who and/or what program(s) are supportive, and who and/or what program(s) create obstacles for them? Why?
8. What policies and procedures support commuter students, and what policies and procedures create obstacles for commuter students?
9. Tell me your most entertaining story about working with a commuter student.
10. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences with commuter students?

Appendix D

Interview Protocol - Focus Groups

Describe events just prior to focus group:

Focus Group #	
Date	
Time	

Script

Welcome, and thank you for your participation today. My name is Julie Wengert, and I am a graduate student at Lindenwood University conducting my commuter student study in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the doctoral degree of administration in higher education. I also work here at [redacted].

This focus group discussion will take about one hour and will include 12 questions, which were provided to you in advance, regarding your experiences as a commuter student and what might affect your decision to stay at [redacted] or graduate from [redacted]. I would like your permission to tape record and video record this interview, so I may accurately document the verbal and nonverbal information you convey. I will also be taking notes during the interview. All your responses are confidential. Your responses will remain confidential and will be used to develop a better understanding of how you and your peers view your academic success and what might influence it. The purpose of this study is to learn about the factors that both support and detract from commuter student retention and graduation.

At this time, I would like to remind you of your written consent to participate in this study. I am the researcher and you are participating in the research project: *Perceptions of Commuter Students and Faculty: A Mixed Methods Study on Commuter Student Retention*. You and I have both signed and dated each copy, certifying that we agree to continue this focus group. You will receive one copy, and I will keep the other under lock and key, separate from your reported responses.

To protect the integrity of this study, it is vital you respond to questions openly and honestly. It is truly my desire that through this study I will be able to provide the institution with information about your experiences as commuter students. It is my hope the information you share has an impact on future decisions regarding how [redacted] can better set commuter students up for academic success.

Your participation in this focus group is completely voluntary. If at any time you need to stop or take a break, please let me know. You may also withdraw your participation at any time without consequence. Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin? Then, with your permission we will continue.

Introductions:

Before I begin asking questions, let us get acquainted with one another. I am aware you all likely have not met before. Please use the participant information sheet you completed upon your arrival here to introduce yourself. Tell us your name, year in school, major, and commute mode.

Participant Name	Group Member #	Gender	Notes

Questions:

Legend -

PH: Physical	**HA: Human Aggregate**	**ORG: Organizational**	**CON: Constructed**
Numbers (1, 2, etc.): represent number of participant	**NV: Nonverbal observation**	**T: Tone of voice observation**	**E: Environment observation**

1. **Tell me your most entertaining story about your commuting experience at this institution.**

Look for…	Follow-up if needed	Notes/Observations/Feelings

Legend -

PH: Physical	**HA: Human Aggregate**	**ORG: Organizational**	**CON: Constructed**
Numbers (1, 2, etc.): represent number of participant	**NV: Nonverbal observation**	**T: Tone of voice observation**	**E: Environment observation**

2. **Tell me about how you decided to attend [redacted].**

Look for…	**Follow-up if needed**	**Notes/Observations/Feelings**
What feature was described 1st – PH, HA, ORG, or CON?		

Legend -

PH: Physical	**HA: Human Aggregate**	**ORG: Organizational**	**CON: Constructed**
Numbers (1, 2, etc.): represent number of participant	**NV: Nonverbal observation**	**T: Tone of voice observation**	**E: Environment observation**

3. **Why did you decide to commute to campus as opposed to living on-campus?**

Look for…	**Follow-up if needed**	**Notes/Observations/Feelings**
Could be clue to advantage of commuting question later.		

Legend -

PH: Physical	**HA: Human Aggregate**	**ORG: Organizational**	**CON: Constructed**
Numbers (1, 2, etc.): represent number of participant	**NV: Nonverbal observation**	**T: Tone of voice observation**	**E: Environment observation**

4. **Describe a typical day in which you come to [redacted] for class.**

Look for…	**Follow-up if needed**	**Notes/Observations/Feelings**
Mode of transportation Commute time Job info Family situation		

Legend -

PH: Physical	**HA: Human Aggregate**	**ORG: Organizational**	**CON: Constructed**
Numbers (1, 2, etc.): represent number of participant	**NV: Nonverbal observation**	**T: Tone of voice observation**	**E: Environment observation**

5. **As a commuter student, what is your biggest advantage and what is your biggest challenge?**

Look for…	**Follow-up if needed**	**Notes/Observations/Feelings**

Legend -

PH: Physical	**HA: Human Aggregate**	**ORG: Organizational**	**CON: Constructed**
Numbers (1, 2, etc.): represent number of participant	**NV: Nonverbal observation**	**T: Tone of voice observation**	**E: Environment observation**

6. **As a commuter student, what physical features/attributes of campus do you feel support you and what physical features/attributes of campus do you feel create obstacles for you? Why?**

Look for…	**Follow-up if needed**	**Notes/Observations/Feelings**
Parking, Location/Distance from campus, Climate, Social spaces, Study spaces, Classroom spaces, Comfortable spaces, Signage, Aesthetics of campus, cleanliness, grounds/green spaces, Gathering spaces, Buildings and upkeep thereof, Accessibility, Color scheme and décor, Campus design, Spacing of buildings, Architecture, Types of facilities available – rec center, library, etc., Walkways, Art, Lighting, Safety – pedestrian, auto, bicycle, general personal safety		

Legend -

PH: Physical	**HA: Human Aggregate**	**ORG: Organizational**	**CON: Constructed**
Numbers (1, 2, etc.): represent number of participant	**NV: Nonverbal observation**	**T: Tone of voice observation**	**E: Environment observation**

7. **As a commuter student, who and/or what program(s) do you feel supports you and who and/or what program(s) do you feel create obstacles for you on this campus? Why?**

Look for…	Follow-up if needed	Notes/Observations/Feelings

Legend -

PH: Physical	**HA: Human Aggregate**	**ORG: Organizational**	**CON: Constructed**
Numbers (1, 2, etc.): represent number of participant	**NV: Nonverbal observation**	**T: Tone of voice observation**	**E: Environment observation**

8. **What policies and procedures support you and what policies and procedures create obstacles for you as a commuter student?**

Look for…	**Follow-up if needed**	**Notes/Observations/Feelings**
Academic policy Student handbook policy Example if needed: Dropping a class and getting signatures all around campus. Or, online enrollment option.		

Legend -

PH: Physical	**HA: Human Aggregate**	**ORG: Organizational**	**CON: Constructed**
Numbers (1, 2, etc.): represent number of participant	**NV: Nonverbal observation**	**T: Tone of voice observation**	**E: Environment observation**

9. **Tell me about times you come to campus for purposes other than attending class.**

Look for…	**Follow-up if needed**	**Notes/Observations/Feelings**
Social and/or academic engagements	How do you engage academically and socially on campus? Is there anything prohibiting you from doing this? What would entice you to come to campus? What makes you feel "connected" to [redacted]?	

Legend -

PH: Physical	**HA: Human Aggregate**	**ORG: Organizational**	**CON: Constructed**
Numbers (1, 2, etc.): represent number of participant	**NV: Nonverbal observation**	**T: Tone of voice observation**	**E: Environment observation**

10. **Does the way in which your academic program is structured provide you with the support you need to graduate? Explain.**

Look for…	**Follow-up if needed**	**Notes/Observations/Feelings**

Legend -

PH: Physical	**HA: Human Aggregate**	**ORG: Organizational**	**CON: Constructed**
Numbers (1, 2, etc.): represent number of participant	**NV: Nonverbal observation**	**T: Tone of voice observation**	**E: Environment observation**

11. **Do you plan to come back to [redacted] next fall? Why or why not?**

Look for…	Follow-up if needed	Notes/Observations/Feelings

Legend -

PH: Physical	**HA: Human Aggregate**	**ORG: Organizational**	**CON: Constructed**
Numbers (1, 2, etc.): represent number of participant	**NV: Nonverbal observation**	**T: Tone of voice observation**	**E: Environment observation**

12. **Do you plan to graduate from [redacted]? Why or why not?**

Look for…	Follow-up if needed	Notes/Observations/Feelings

Legend -

PH: Physical	**HA: Human Aggregate**	**ORG: Organizational**	**CON: Constructed**
Numbers (1, 2, etc.): represent number of participant	**NV: Nonverbal observation**	**T: Tone of voice observation**	**E: Environment observation**

13. **Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience as a commuter?**

Look for…	Follow-up if needed	Notes/Observations/Feelings

Script

Thank you for participating in this study. I appreciate your willingness and your time. If you are interested in the results of this study, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Describe events just after the focus group:

Post-Interview Notes:

Appendix E

Interview Protocol – Faculty Interviews

Describe events just prior to interview:

Date	
Date	
Time	
Location	

Script

Welcome, and thank you for your participation today. My name is Julie Wengert, and I am a graduate student at Lindenwood University conducting my commuter student study in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the doctoral degree of administration in higher education. I also work here at [redacted].

This interview will take about one hour and will include 10 questions regarding your experiences with commuter students and what might affect their decision to stay at [redacted] or graduate from [redacted]. I would like your permission to tape record this interview, so I may accurately document the information you convey. If at any time during the interview you wish to discontinue the use of the recorder or the interview itself, please feel free to let me know. In addition to recording the interview, I will also be taking notes. All of your responses are confidential. Your responses will remain confidential and will be used to develop a better understanding of how you perceive the factors which impact the academic success of commuter students. The purpose of this study is to learn about the factors that both support and detract from commuter student retention and graduation.

At this time I would like to remind you of your written consent to participate in this study. I am the researcher and you are participating in the research project: *Perceptions of Commuter Students and Faculty: A Mixed Methods Study on Commuter Student*

Retention. You and I have both signed and dated each copy, certifying that we agree to continue this interview. You will receive one copy, and I will keep the other under lock and key, separate from your reported responses.

To protect the integrity of this study, it is vital you respond to questions openly and honestly. It is truly my desire that through this study I will be able to provide the institution with information about your experiences with and your perceptions of commuter students. It is my hope the information you share has an impact on future decisions regarding how [redacted] can better set commuter students up for academic success.

Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. If at any time you need to stop or take a break please let me know. You may also withdraw your participation at any time without consequence. Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin? Then, with your permission we will begin the interview.

Interviewee Name: _____

Notes:

Questions:

Legend -

PH: Physical	**HA: Human Aggregate**	**ORG: Organizational**	**CON: Constructed**
Numbers (1, 2, etc.): represent number of participant	**NV: Nonverbal observation**	**T: Tone of voice observation**	**E: Environment observation**

1. Describe the typical commuter student you see in your classroom at [redacted].

Look for…	**Follow-up if needed**	**Notes/Observations/Feelings**
	How can you tell if a student is a commuter or not?	

Legend -

PH: Physical	**HA: Human Aggregate**	**ORG: Organizational**	**CON: Constructed**
Numbers (1, 2, etc.): represent number of participant	**NV: Nonverbal observation**	**T: Tone of voice observation**	**E: Environment observation**

2. Name specific ways you try to support commuter students as a faculty member and as an advisor.

Look for…	**Follow-up if needed**	**Notes/Observations/Feelings**
	What could you do?	

Legend -

PH: Physical	**HA: Human Aggregate**	**ORG: Organizational**	**CON: Constructed**
Numbers (1, 2, etc.): represent number of participant	**NV: Nonverbal observation**	**T: Tone of voice observation**	**E: Environment observation**

3. In your opinion, what are the biggest challenges and advantages for commuter students on this campus?

Look for…	**Follow-up if needed**	**Notes/Observations/Feelings**
		Challenges:
		Advantages:

Legend -

PH: Physical	**HA: Human Aggregate**	**ORG: Organizational**	**CON: Constructed**
Numbers (1, 2, etc.): represent number of participant	**NV: Nonverbal observation**	**T: Tone of voice observation**	**E: Environment observation**

4. How does [redacted] set commuter students up for success?

Look for…	**Follow-up if needed**	**Notes/Observations/Feelings**
	What do you think [redacted] could do to promote success?	

Legend -

PH: Physical	**HA: Human Aggregate**	**ORG: Organizational**	**CON: Constructed**
Numbers (1, 2, etc.): represent number of participant	**NV: Nonverbal observation**	**T: Tone of voice observation**	**E: Environment observation**

5. How does your academic program support commuter student completion?

Look for…	**Follow-up if needed**	**Notes/Observations/Feelings**
	What do you think your program could do to promote success?	

Legend -

PH: Physical	**HA: Human Aggregate**	**ORG: Organizational**	**CON: Constructed**
Numbers (1, 2, etc.): represent number of participant	**NV: Nonverbal observation**	**T: Tone of voice observation**	**E: Environment observation**

6. **What physical features/attributes of the campus do you feel are supportive of commuter students and what physical features/attributes of campus do you feel create obstacles for them?**

Look for…	**Follow-up if needed**	**Notes/Observations/Feelings**
Parking, Location/Distance from campus, Climate, Social spaces, Study spaces, Classroom spaces, Comfortable spaces, Signage, Aesthetics of campus, cleanliness, grounds/green spaces, Gathering spaces, Buildings and upkeep thereof, Accessibility, Color scheme and décor, Campus design, Spacing of buildings, Architecture, Types of facilities available – rec center, library, etc., Walkways, Art, Lighting, Safety – pedestrian, auto, bicycle, general personal safety		**Supportive:** **Obstacles:**

Legend -

PH: Physical	**HA: Human Aggregate**	**ORG: Organizational**	**CON: Constructed**
Numbers (1, 2, etc.): represent number of participant	**NV: Nonverbal observation**	**T: Tone of voice observation**	**E: Environment observation**

7. **Regarding commuter students, who and/or what program(s) are supportive and who and/or what program(s) create obstacles for them? Why?**

Look for…	**Follow-up if needed**	**Notes/Observations/Feelings**
	Have you seen any programming at another institution for commuter students that you think would help [redacted] commuters?	**Supportive:**
		Obstacles:

Legend -

PH: Physical	**HA: Human Aggregate**	**ORG: Organizational**	**CON: Constructed**
Numbers (1, 2, etc.): represent number of participant	**NV: Nonverbal observation**	**T: Tone of voice observation**	**E: Environment observation**

8. What policies and procedures support commuter students and what policies and procedures create obstacles for commuter students?

Look for…	**Follow-up if needed**	**Notes/Observations/Feelings**
	Academic policies? Student handbook policies?	**Supportive:**
		Obstacles:
	Is there any sort of policy or procedure you think we should put in place to specifically support commuters?	

Legend -

PH: Physical	**HA: Human Aggregate**	**ORG: Organizational**	**CON: Constructed**
Numbers (1, 2, etc.): represent number of participant	**NV: Nonverbal observation**	**T: Tone of voice observation**	**E: Environment observation**

9. Tell me your most entertaining story about working with a commuter student.

Look for…	Follow-up if needed	Notes/Observations/Feelings

Legend -

PH: Physical	**HA: Human Aggregate**	**ORG: Organizational**	**CON: Constructed**
Numbers (1, 2, etc.): represent number of participant	**NV: Nonverbal observation**	**T: Tone of voice observation**	**E: Environment observation**

10. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences with commuter students?

Look for…	Follow-up if needed	Notes/Observations/Feelings

Script

Thank you for participating in this study. I appreciate your willingness and your time. If you are interested in the results of this study, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Describe events just after the focus group:

Post-Interview Notes:

Appendix F

LINDENWOOD

LINDENWOOD UNIVERSITY ST. CHARLES, MISSOURI

DATE:	April 11, 2018
TO:	Julie Wengert
FROM:	Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board
STUDY TITLE:	[1216179-1] Perceptions of Commuters
IRB REFERENCE #:	
SUBMISSION TYPE:	New Project
ACTION:	APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE:	April 11, 2018
EXPIRATION DATE:	April 10, 2019
REVIEW TYPE:	Expedited Review

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this research project. Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a study design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review (Cat 7) based on the applicable federal regulation.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the study and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the study via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the signed consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this office prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported to this office. Please use the appropriate adverse event forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to the IRB.

This project has been determined to be a Minimal Risk project. Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the completion/amendment form for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of April 10, 2019.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years.

Generated on IRBNet

If you have any questions, please contact Michael Leary at 636-949-4730 or mleary@lindenwood.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.

If you have any questions, please send them to IRB@lindenwood.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board's records.

Appendix G

[redacted]

DATE: April 16, 2018

TO: Julie Wengert
FROM: [redacted]

PROJECT TITLE: [1139008-1] Perceptions of Commuters [redacted]
REFERENCE #: 1139008-1
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE: April 16, 2018
EXPIRATION DATE:
REVIEW TYPE: Facilitated Review

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. [redacted] IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/ benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Facilitated Review based on the applicable federal regulation.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others (UPIRSOs) and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

This project has been determined to be a project. Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of .

Generated on IRBNet

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact [redacted]. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within [redacted].

Appendix H

LINDENWOOD

Research Study Consent Form

Faculty Interview

Perceptions of Commuter Students and Faculty: A Mixed Methods Study on Commuter Student Retention

Before reading this consent form, please know:

- Your decision to participate is your choice
- You will have time to think about the study
- You will be able to withdraw from this study at any time
- You are free to ask questions about the study at any time

After reading this consent form, we hope that you will know:

- Why we are conducting this study
- What you will be required to do
- What are the possible risks and benefits of the study
- What alternatives are available, if the study involves treatment or therapy
- What to do if you have questions or concerns during the study

Basic information about this study:

- We are interested in learning about the factors that both support and detract from commuter student retention and graduation.
- You will answer questions about your experience as a commuter student in a small group setting consisting of you and two to four other commuter students. The focus group will take approximately one hour of your time.
- Risks of participation include: we do not anticipate any risks related to your participation in the study.

LINDENWOOD

Research Study Consent Form

Perceptions of Commuter Students and Faculty: A Mixed Methods Study on Commuter Student Retention

You are asked to participate in a research study being conducted by Julie Wengert under the guidance of Dr. Rhonda Bishop at Lindenwood University. Being in a research study is voluntary, and you are free to stop at any time. Before you choose to participate, you are free to discuss this research study with family, friends, or a physician. Do not feel like you must join this study until all of your questions or concerns are answered. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form.

Why is this research being conducted?
We are doing this study to learn about the factors that both support and detract from commuter student retention and graduation. Perceptions of commuter students and faculty will be examined. The study will also compare retention and graduation rates of commuter students and residential students. We will be asking about eight to 12 other people to answer these questions.

What am I being asked to do?
You are being asked to participate in an interview with the researcher. The researcher will ask you questions about your perceptions and experiences with commuter students on the campus being studied. The interview will be audio recorded.

How long will I be in this study?
It will take about one hour to complete the study.

What are the risks of this study?
We do not anticipate any risks related to your participation other than those encountered in daily life. You do not need to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable or you can stop the interview at any time.

We are collecting data that could identify you, such as your name or your academic department. Every effort will be made to keep your information secure and confidential. Only members of the research team will be able to see your data. We do not intend to include any information that could identify you in any publication or presentation.

What are the benefits of this study?
You will receive no direct benefits for completing this study. We hope what we learn may benefit other people in the future.

What if I do not choose to participate in this research?
It is always your choice to participate in this study. You may withdraw at any time. You may choose not to answer any questions or perform tasks that make you uncomfortable. If you decide to withdraw, you will not receive any penalty or loss of benefits. If you would like to withdraw from a study, please use the contact information found at the end of this form.

What if new information becomes available about the study?
During the course of this study, we may find information that could be important to you and your decision to participate in this research. We will notify you as soon as possible if such information becomes available.

How will you keep my information private?
We will do everything we can to protect your privacy. We do not intend to include information that could identify you in any publication or presentation. Any information we collect will be stored by the researcher in a secure location. The only people who will be able to see your data are: members of the research team, qualified staff of Lindenwood University, representatives of state or federal agencies.

How can I withdraw from this study?
Notify the research team immediately if you would like to withdraw from this research study.

Who can I contact with questions or concerns?
If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research or concerns about the study, or if you feel under any pressure to enroll or to continue to participate in this study, you may contact the Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board Director, Michael Leary, at (636) 949-4730 or mleary@lindenwood.edu. You can contact the researcher, Julie Wengert directly at [redacted] or jaw327@lindenwood.edu. You may also contact Rhonda Bishop at rbishop@lindenwood.edu**.**

I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I will also be given a copy of this consent form for my records. I consent to my participation in the research described above.

_____	_____
Participant's Signature	**Date**
_____	_____
Participant's Printed Name	**Date**

_____	_____
Signature of Principal Investigator or Designee	**Date**
_____	_____
Investigator or Designee Printed Name	**Date**

Appendix I

LINDENWOOD

Research Study Consent Form

Focus Groups

Perceptions of Commuter Students and Faculty: A Mixed Methods Study on Commuter Student Retention

Before reading this consent form, please know:

- Your decision to participate is your choice
- You will have time to think about the study
- You will be able to withdraw from this study at any time
- You are free to ask questions about the study at any time

After reading this consent form, we hope that you will know:

- Why we are conducting this study
- What you will be required to do
- What are the possible risks and benefits of the study
- What alternatives are available, if the study involves treatment or therapy
- What to do if you have questions or concerns during the study

Basic information about this study:

- We are interested in learning about the factors that both support and detract from commuter student retention and graduation.
- You will answer questions about your experience as a commuter student in a small group setting consisting of you and two to four other commuter students. The focus group will take approximately one hour of your time.
- Risks of participation include: we do not anticipate any risks related to your participation in the study.

LINDENWOOD

Research Study Consent Form

Perceptions of Commuter Students and Faculty: A Mixed Methods Study on Commuter Student Retention

You are asked to participate in a research study being conducted by Julie Wengert under the guidance of Dr. Rhonda Bishop at Lindenwood University. Being in a research study is voluntary, and you are free to stop at any time. Before you choose to participate, you are free to discuss this research study with family, friends, or a physician. Do not feel like you must join this study until all of your questions or concerns are answered. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form.

Why is this research being conducted?
We are doing this study to learn about the factors that both support and detract from commuter student retention and graduation. Perceptions of commuter students and faculty will be examined. The study will also compare retention and graduation rates of commuter students and residential students. We will be asking about 15-20 other people to answer these questions.

What am I being asked to do?
You are being asked to participate in a focus group with three to five other commuter students. Upon arrival to the study, participants will be asked to complete a brief one-page demographic information form. Following the completion of the form, participants will be guided by the researcher for participant introductions. The researcher will then ask the participants questions about their experiences as commuter students on the campus being studied. Participants will provide answers to the questions and may discuss their answers with one another during the focus group. In order to capture both verbal and nonverbal communication accurately, the focus group is being audio recorded and video recorded.

How long will I be in this study?
It will take about one hour to complete the study.

What are the risks of this study?
We do not anticipate any risks related to your participation other than those encountered in daily life. You do not need to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable or you can stop the interview at any time.

We are collecting data that could identify you, such as your name or year in school. Because you will be participating in a small group, the possibility of being

identified is greater. Every effort will be made to keep your information secure and confidential. Only members of the research team will be able to see your data. We do not intend to include any information that could identify you in any publication or presentation.

What are the benefits of this study?
You will receive no direct benefits for completing this study. We hope what we learn may benefit other people in the future.

What if I do not choose to participate in this research?
It is always your choice to participate in this study. You may withdraw at any time. You may choose not to answer any questions or perform tasks that make you uncomfortable. If you decide to withdraw, you will not receive any penalty or loss of benefits. If you would like to withdraw from a study, please use the contact information found at the end of this form.

What if new information becomes available about the study?
During the course of this study, we may find information that could be important to you and your decision to participate in this research. We will notify you as soon as possible if such information becomes available.

How will you keep my information private?
We will do everything we can to protect your privacy. We do not intend to include information that could identify you in any publication or presentation. Any information we collect will be stored by the researcher in a secure location. The only people who will be able to see your data are: members of the research team, qualified staff of Lindenwood University, representatives of state or federal agencies.

How can I withdraw from this study?
Notify the research team immediately if you would like to withdraw from this research study.

Who can I contact with questions or concerns?
If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research or concerns about the study, or if you feel under any pressure to enroll or to continue to participate in this study, you may contact the Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board Director, Michael Leary, at (636) 949-4730 or mleary@lindenwood.edu. You can contact the researcher, Julie Wengert directly at [redacted] or jaw327@lindenwood.edu. You may also contact Rhonda Bishop at rbishop@lindenwood.edu**.**

I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I will also be given a copy of this consent form for my records. I consent to my participation in the research described above.

_____	_____
Participant's Signature	**Date**
_____	_____
Participant's Printed Name	**Date**

_____	_____
Signature of Principal Investigator or Designee	**Date**
_____	_____
Investigator or Designee Printed Name	**Date**

Appendix J

[redacted]

Student Affairs Office

Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board
Office for Human Research Protections
209 South Kingshighway Street
St. Charles, MO 63301

March 29, 2018

Dear Lindenwood University IRB:

On behalf of [redacted] I am writing to grant permission for Julie Wengert, an Ed. D. candidate at Lindenwood University, to conduct her research titled, "Perceptions of Commuter Students and Faculty: A Mixed Methods Study on Commuter Student Retention."

This permission is contingent upon Institutional Review Board approval from Lindenwood University and [redacted] if deemed a procedural step by the administration. I understand Mrs. Wengert will be utilizing institutional student and faculty data from the fall 2016 and spring 2017 semesters to identify participants for the qualitative portion of her study. For the quantitative portion of her study I understand she will be using institutional student data from Fall 2008 to present. Her study could lead to a better understanding of commuter student retention at our institution.

We at [redacted] are in full support of Mrs. Wengert's research and are excited to contribute to this work.

Sincerely,

[redacted]

Vice President for Student Affairs
[redacted]

Appendix K

March 2, 2018

Institutional Review Board
[redacted]

RE: Permission to Conduct Research Study

Dear [redacted] IRB:

I am currently a Lindenwood University doctoral student studying under the guidance of Dr. Rhonda Bishop. I am writing to request permission to conduct a research study at [redacted] The purpose of the study is to learn about the factors that both support and detract from commuter student retention and graduation. Perceptions of commuter students and faculty will be examined. The study will also compare retention and graduation rates of commuter students and residential students.

For the quantitative portion of the study, I would like to request the following data in de-identifiable format:

First to second year retention data for all enrolled students for the most recent three years (2014, 2015, 2016) of available data including:

- Student Age
- Permanent address including street, city, state, and zip code
- Residential status (on or off-campus)
- Retention status (returned in fall semester of second year or not)
- Distance learning status (100% online student or not)

Six-year graduation data for all enrolled students for the most recent three years (2008, 2009, 2010) of available data including:

- Student Age
- Permanent address including street, city, state, and zip code
- Residential status (on or off-campus)
- Graduation status (graduated in six years or not)
- Distance learning status (100% online student or not)

For the qualitative aspect of the study, I am requesting to recruit student participants for focus group interviews as well as faculty participants for one-on-one interviews. Specifically, I am looking for 15-20 students and 8-12 faculty members to participate in the study. Interested

parties, who volunteer to participate, will be given a consent form to be signed and returned to them at the beginning of the interview sessions. If approval is granted, all interviews will take place on-campus and should take no longer than one hour to complete. Neither your institution nor the participants will incur any costs for this study.

Your approval to conduct this study will be greatly appreciated. If you have questions you may contact me at my email address: jaw327@lindenwood.edu or contact my dissertation chair, Rhonda Bishop, at rbishop@lindenwood.edu

Sincerely,

Julie A. Wengert
Doctoral Student
Lindenwood University

Appendix L

Recruitment Letter, Focus Groups

[All-current-students] Commuter Student Research Opportunity

[redacted]

Wed Apr 18 08:12:24 CDT 2018

- Previous message: [All-current-students] Library's Operating Schedule for Summer
- Next message: [All-current-students] Career Readiness/Employer Expectations Workshop - This Wednesday!
- **Messages sorted by:** [date] [thread] [subject] [author]

This message is being sent on behalf of Julie Wengert, a Doctoral student at Lindenwood University. As part of her degree program she is conducting research on the factors that affect the retention and graduation rates of commuter students. Fifteen to twenty commuter students are needed for the study. Participants will meet on-campus here at [redacted] one time with the researcher and a small group of commuter students to discuss their experiences as commuter students. The focus group discussion should last approximately one hour.

If you are a student who does not live on-campus, you are eligible to participate in this study. Please contact Mrs. Wengert at [redacted] or wengert-j at [redacted]<mailto:wengert-j at [redacted]> to request to participate in the study or if you have any questions regarding the study. Thank you for considering this opportunity to learn more about the commuter student population.

Thank you,

[redacted]
Vice President for Student Affairs
[redacted]
[cid:image001.png at 01D3D6EC.E227C740]

[MSSU LOGO]

Confidentiality Notice:

IMPORTANT: This email may contain identifiable personal information that is subject to protection under state and federal law. This information is intended for the use of the individual named above. If you are not the intended recipient, be aware that any disclosure, copying, distribution or use of the contents of this information is prohibited and may be punishable

by law. If you have received this electronic transmission in error, please notify us immediately by electronic mail (reply).

---------- next part ----------
A non-text attachment was scrubbed...
Name: winmail.dat
Type: application/ms-tnef
Size: 42509 bytes
Desc: not available
Url : http://listserv.[redacted]/pipermail/all-current-students/attachments/20180418/742b46f7/attachment-0001.bin

---

- Previous message: [All-current-students] Library's Operating Schedule for Summer
- Next message: [All-current-students] Career Readiness/Employer Expectations Workshop - This Wednesday!
- **Messages sorted by:** [date] [thread] [subject] [author]

More information about the All-current-students mailing list

Appendix M

Recruitment Letter, Interviews

From: all-faculty-bounces@listser[redacted] all-faculty-bounces@listse[redacted] on behalf of [redacted]
Sent: Tuesday, April 17, 2018 4:46:42 PM
To: All-Faculty
Subject: [All-faculty] Request from Julie Wengert! Commuter Student Research – Faculty Participants Needed

Good afternoon, all. Please read the below from Julie and consider helping her if you can. Many thanks.

Recruitment Letter, Interviews

Email Subject: Commuter Student Research – Faculty Participants Needed

This message is being sent on behalf of Julie Wengert, a Doctoral student at Lindenwood University. As part of her degree program she is conducting research on the factors that affect the retention and graduation rates of commuter students. Eight to twelve faculty members are needed for the study. Participants will meet on-campus one time with the researcher to discuss their experiences with commuter students. The interview discussion should last approximately one hour.

All faculty, including adjuncts, are eligible to participate in this study. Please contact Mrs. Wengert at [redacted] to request to participate in the study or if you have any questions regarding the study. Thank you for considering this opportunity to learn more about the factors affecting the retention and graduation rates of the commuter student population.

Thank you.

[redacted]
Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs
[redacted]

Appendix N

John Wiley and Sons License Terms and Conditions for Figures

JOHN WILEY AND SONS LICENSE TERMS AND CONDITIONS

Nov 20, 2018

This Agreement between Mrs. Julie Wengert ("You") and John Wiley and Sons ("John Wiley and Sons") consists of your license details and the terms and conditions provided by John Wiley and Sons and Copyright Clearance Center.

License Number	4473270079760
License date	Nov 20, 2018
Licensed Content Publisher	John Wiley and Sons
Licensed Content Publication	Wiley Books
Licensed Content Title	Designing for Learning: Creating Campus Environments for Student Success, 2nd Edition
Licensed Content Author	C. Carney Strange James H. Banning
Licensed Content Date	Jul 1, 2015
Licensed Content Pages	1
Type of use	Dissertation/Thesis
Requestor type	University/Academic
Format	Print and electronic
Portion	Figure/table
Number of figures/tables	2
Original Wiley figure/table number(s)	Figure II.1 - Strange & Banning's Hierarchy of Environmental Design Figure 9.1 - Strange & Banning's Campus Design Matrix
Will you be translating?	No
Title of your thesis / dissertation	Perceptions of Commuter Students and Faculty: A Mixed Methods Study on Commuter Student Retention
Expected completion date	Dec 2018
Expected size (number of pages)	262
Requestor Location	Mrs. Julie Wengert [redacted]

[redacted]
United States
Attn: Mrs. Julie Wengert

Publisher Tax ID	EU826007151
Total	0.00 USD

Terms and Conditions

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Vita

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