THE ROLE OF STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES IN ENCOURAGING STUDENT INVOLVEMENT AND ITS IMPACT ON STUDENT PERCEPTIONS AND ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES

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THE ROLE OF STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES IN ENCOURAGING STUDENT INVOLVEMENT AND ITS IMPACT ON STUDENT PERCEPTIONS AND ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education
Career and Technical Education

by
Caren Kelley-Hall
May 2010

Accepted by:
Dr. Cheryl Poston, Dissertation Chair
Dr. Lamont Flowers
Dr. Greg Hawkins
Dr. William Paige
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the role of Student Support Services (SSS) in encouraging student involvement and its impact on student perceptions and academic experiences in three technical colleges in upstate South Carolina. By examining Alexander Astin’s theory of student involvement in the services provided by the program, a better understanding of the existing functions of SSS may be obtained. The study may offer information to increase knowledge and awareness about the college experience for a diverse group of college students. It is hoped that the study will help to better understand unique experiences of SSS participants and how to create better ways of meeting their needs.

In order to explore the role of SSS qualitative methods were employed to conduct this research within the population of three Student Support Service programs housed in South Carolina’s upstate technical colleges. Focus groups were conducted in the spring of 2009 with a total of 100 students. Transcripts of the focus groups were thematically analyzed for this study. Findings revealed evidence that supports Astin’s student involvement theory and Tinto’s student retention model and the impact that the SSS Program has on participant student involvement, student perceptions and academic experiences. The impact of involvement is multifaceted because it influences the program participants’ certainty of choice of major, helped focus students on attainment of their goals and careers, willingness to stay in school, and improved overall academic experiences.
In terms of academic experiences, program participants reported high levels of satisfaction with their grade point averages, advising services, improved test scores, cultural enrichment, transferability, confidence, and overall program experiences. In terms of barriers to student success that were discussed, students were much more likely to discuss barriers that were outside of their control, such as the lack of facility space.

Results of this study may contribute to the existing research concerning student involvement in Student Support Services. The findings may be used to help improve services rendered and provide much needed high quality educational programming for academically disadvantaged students. The results may contribute to the understanding of how student perceptions and experiences may impact future policies as well as the restructuring of other academic support programs based on student involvement. This research may also help analyze and identify best practices of upstate South Carolina’s Student Support Services program which may be used to benchmark evaluations to assess services provided and program effectiveness.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I thank God for the grace provided me each day, motivation, and family support needed to take on a project of this magnitude and to bring it to fruition. The entire list of people who have supported me in this effort is far too long to include here, but I am thankful to have the opportunity to appreciate those who are most vital to the completion of my dissertation.

This project was accomplished because of the assistance and support of many individuals. I start by thanking the students who gave of themselves by participating in this study; I wish them all the best in their future endeavors.

I am deeply indebted to my committee members for their commitment and dedication for making it possible to successfully execute this project. Words cannot express how grateful I am to each one of them for sharing their knowledge and experiences from the conception, design, and implementation of my study. I feel very fortunate to have been advised by them and to have had experienced their commitment to excellence and high standards. Special thanks go to Dr. Cheryl Poston my committee chair for her dedication to my success, encouragement, and support. Special thanks go to Dr. Lamont Flowers for his motivation and help with all of my questions. Extraordinary thanks goes to Dr. Greg Hawkins for being such a wonderful mentor during various stages of my research and Dr. William Paige for warmly welcoming me into the Career and Technical Education doctoral program and providing me with multitudes of learning opportunities in the field that I so dearly love.
Thanks to Dr. Norman Hoyle, Reference Librarian at Tri-County Technical College for providing me with the abstracts and articles that I needed in a matter of minutes. Special thanks to my colleagues both at Tri-County Technical College and Clemson University for their encouragement and support. I give thanks to Ms. Christie Medina and Mr. Vikram Bhide for their assistance with the data review.

I give gratitude and thanks to my Pastor, John W. Jones, for lifting my spirits with his sayings “you can do it”, “I’ve got my eye on you” and “hey there Hollywood”, and to my entire church family at Zion for their text messages, emails, prayers, and hugs.

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Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to my husband of 9 years, Steve, children, Jones and Kennedy, without whose support, encouragement, and love, I would not have completed my dream and goal. I thank them for their sacrifices and patience, which made this accomplishment possible.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The Student Support Services program aims to provide academic assistance and encouragement to academically disadvantaged populations. The program is one of the largest federal Trio programs and specifically created to address the special needs of academically disadvantaged populations and to offer guidance in directing them to earning a baccalaureate degree (Burd, 1999; Devaries, 2002; Frost, 1993; Laff, 1994; Thayer, 2000). Trio comprises several support programs constructed to help to improve students’ learning capacities during the transitional experience. Trio has a rich history in that it materialized from several legislative acts such as the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 (see Appendix G). Trio offers academic support programs that recognize and aid students from disadvantaged backgrounds who have the displayed the aptitude to be successful in college. Trio goals include assisting students with completion of high school and transition into higher education.

Student Support Services was Trio’s third academic support program launched. Student Support Services provides students with instruction in mathematics through the pre-calculus level, laboratory science, foreign languages, writing composition, and literature, as well as the basic study skills necessary for success in academics beyond the high school level. Financial counseling entails advisement on the opportunities available for financial aid to go to college, as well as direct involvement in helping students secure admission to college and financial assistance for college, graduate or professional programs (Andrepont-Warren, 2005).
Student Support Services has existed in technical colleges of Upstate South Carolina for at least 25 years (Trimmer-Lee, 2009). Each SSS site serves at least 175 students annually. The primary mission of Student Support Services is to enhance academically disadvantaged students' opportunities for developmental involvement in their educational experience. Academically disadvantaged students need advisement in order to become academically and socially integrated into post-secondary education (Tinto, 1975). Student Support Services considers the academically disadvantaged to be those students who are ethnic minorities, have disabilities, are of low socioeconomic status, on academic probation and/or first generation college students.

Many of America’s academically disadvantaged students are faced with obstacles that will impede their academic journey. Chute (2008) found many college students are going to face hurdles that will slow them down or stop them altogether. Student Support Services participants have a lack of college preparation, motivation, study skills, and reading comprehension and writing skills. The participants are unfamiliar with the college environment and come to college with financial management and personal problems (Andrepont-Warren, 2005). All of these are issues that may negatively impact their academic achievement. Table 1 describes these problems and other related issues encountered by Student Support Services participants.
Table 1. Problems Encountered by Eligible SSS Students.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of College Preparation</td>
<td>The majority of students who have been referred to comprehensive studies and/or seeking tutorial services with SSS have not taken college preparatory classes to prepare them for the academic standards they must achieve. Students who were displaced from their jobs, many of whom did not complete high school, are woefully under-prepared academically. Tutoring and supplemental instruction is essential for them to be successful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Study Skills</td>
<td>Academic placement test results, faculty, and counselor observations indicate that students lack sufficient skills to be successful. Thus, the need for study-skills workshops that include: how to study, improving time management skills, goal setting, note-taking and improving test-taking skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Reading Comprehension/ Writing Skills</td>
<td>Based on instructor referrals and tutor evaluation, students seeking tutorial services (65% show a need for upgrading in this area), know how to read but cannot comprehend what they are reading nor can they write essays on what they have read. Tutoring and supplemental instruction is needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need to Improve Analytical Skills</td>
<td>Based on a survey given to math instructors, the major weaknesses of students is the inability to analyze problems and work through to a solution. Supplemental instruction is needed to teach students how to work through problems and be able to articulate how they arrived at the answer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Motivational Level</td>
<td>Due to a lack of exposure, many students fail to see the need for putting forth maximum effort to achieve goals that do not provide immediate rewards. Counseling, tutoring and mentoring are needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Problems</td>
<td>The major reason students leave school is their inability to balance their personal issues with the demands of college. This problem is compounded by the fact that these students often lack life-coping and attitude adjustment skills. Counseling and mentoring are needed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Table 1. Problems Encountered by Eligible SSS Students (continued).

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<tr>
<td><strong>Financial Management Problems</strong></td>
<td>To minimize economic barriers to education, the College and SSS staff makes every effort to inform the student body and service area about the availability of financial aid. Many low-income students have poor financial management skills and were not taught these skills at home and therefore encounter financial problems that prevent them from completing school, especially obtaining loans. Life-skills, financial aid/management workshops and counseling are needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unfamiliarity with College Environment</strong></td>
<td>78.1% of students who took that placement test are first-generation college students; therefore they have no role models to explain the college experience. They are inexperienced in approaching professors if they do not understand an assignment. Counseling and mentoring are needed to help with the transition to college.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Source: 2005 Tri-County Technical College Grant Abstract

Table 1 displays the daunting obstacles that many of the SSS participants have to overcome. If these academic disadvantages continue, 1 in 3 of today's freshmen will not earn a bachelor's degree from a four-year school $8\frac{1}{2}$ years from now and for those entering community college, only 17% will earn an associate's degree or certificate in three years, although nearly half will still be enrolled (Chute, 2008). According to Tinto (2009) for some high school graduates, the journey is difficult from the first day because they are not prepared for college-level courses. Academic preparation is the single most important element prior to college (Tinto, 2009).

According to Mills (1992), it was estimated that 25 million of the nation's 63.6 million children under the age of 18 were academically disadvantaged when 1 of 5 risk factors were considered: race or ethnicity, poverty, family structure, language background, and mother's education. Traditionally, the educational system has assumed
the responsibility of providing educational experiences, which will enable individuals to assume their roles in the world of work. However, not all students are able to achieve academic success in the regular college curricula. Therefore, they often do not have a positive attitude toward education.

Sherman (2002) characterized concerning the educational divide between the academically disadvantage and white students (see Table 2). Sherman researched a litany of statistics from various sources, including the National Center for Education Statistics (1999), the National Task Force on Minority High Achievement (1999), and the Education Trust (2010).

Research has not fully examined how successful the services provided by Student Support Services are and whether or not both the advisor and the advisee feel that the support or involvement help in any way (Andrepont-Warren, 2005). There is minimal awareness concerning the value of these program activities offered based on the student involvement theory which underlies the administration of such services. Therefore, further research is needed to explore the role of Student Support Services (SSS) in encouraging student involvement and its impact on academic achievement. This may offer solutions to improve program assessments, better serve academically disadvantaged populations, and determine best practices of Student Support Services.

Student Support Services and Student Involvement

It is difficult to find an institution that does not deliver some sort of program or services to assist academically disadvantaged students (Lewallen, 1992). However, due
Table 2. Obstacles That Contribute to the Educational Divide.

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<th>Academically Disadvantaged In Comparison To:</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
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<td>White Students and Completion of a Bachelor's Degree and/or Obtain Some Level of a College Education</td>
<td>Out of every 100 White kindergartners, 88% will graduate from high school or obtain a GED, 59% will complete some college, and 26% will obtain at least a bachelor's degree. For Black students, the numbers are 82%, 45%, and 11%; for Hispanics, 63%, 35% and 8%; and among Native Americans, 58% will graduate from high school and seven will obtain at least a bachelor's degree.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Students</td>
<td>Only one in 100 17-year-old Black and one in 50 Hispanics can read and understand the science section of a newspaper, compared to one in 12 White students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Students</td>
<td>Only one in 100 17-year-old Black students compared to one in 10 White students can solve a multistep math problem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Students with 8th Grade Knowledge</td>
<td>When Black and Hispanic students graduate from high school, they have attained the same level of performance in reading and math on average as White students attain at eighth grade.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fraction Computation</td>
<td>Only three in 10 Black students and four in 10 Hispanic 17-year-old students have mastered the usage and computation of fractions, commonly used percents, and averages, compared with seven in 10 White students.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. Obstacles That Contribute to the Educational Divide (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academically Disadvantaged In Comparison To:</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of College Degrees</td>
<td>While Black, Hispanics, and Native Americans together make up 30% of the U.S. school-age population, nationally, in 1995 they accounted for only about 13% of bachelor's degrees, 11% of professional degrees, and 6% of doctoral degrees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/ Pacific Islanders and White Students National Educational Goals Panel's Proficient Performance Standards</td>
<td>In the eighth grade, just 3% of Black and 8% of Hispanic students met the National Educational Goals Panel's proficient or advanced performance standards in math, compared with 44% of Asian/Pacific Islanders and 32% of White students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Nation's Report Card and Demonstration of Basic Skills</td>
<td>In 2002 the nation's report card found that among White students, 27% were below basic, while 63% of Black students and 58% of Hispanics were unable to demonstrate basic skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Students and the Nation's Report Card</td>
<td>Just 10% of Black and 13% of Hispanic fourth-graders were considered proficient in reading on the last nation's report card, compared with 29% of White students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College-Prep Courses for Asian American and White 10th-graders</td>
<td>While 42% of Asian American and 34% of White 10th-graders take college-prep courses, only 26% of Black and 23% of Hispanic 10th-graders do so.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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to a lack of guidance, indecisiveness, and poor placement scores, it has become critical for institutions to provide effective and outcome driven academic support programming that strongly encourages student involvement. The Student Support Services program
recognizes that each student attempts college with different learning needs and experiences. Regardless of the program participants’ academic needs, one key to their success is involvement in collegial activities whether academic or non-academic. Students who are actively involved in campus life, in particular focusing on their academics, through academic support programming, personal peer groups, study partners, consistent communication with faculty, and participation in other scholarly organizations, better position themselves for superior achievement and skill development.

Student Support Services (SSS) programs at most colleges encourage students to get involved and integrated into campus life. The program provides students with a variety of educational services and places an emphasis on academic success. All services are designed to give students the academic skills and confidence that are necessary for success in college. The program is committed to helping students learn subject matter through activities such as supplemental instruction, course instruction, computer-assisted instructional laboratories, study groups, and tutoring (Eisner, 1992). Mallette and Cabrera (1991) found that the more students are academically integrated in the life of the institution, the greater the likelihood that they will persist. The most influential types of involvement are academic involvement, involvement with faculty, and involvement with student peer groups (Astin, 1996). These are three areas of focus for the Student Support Services program discussed in this research study. The creation of these programs is consistent with research linking collegiate involvement to developmental gains (Astin,
The Student Support Services program contributes to a collaborative approach to learning and positions academically disadvantaged students for academic success.

The importance of academic support services to students' learning and involvement is well documented (Boettcher, 2004; Kretoviks, 2003; Ludwig-Hardman & Dunlap, 2003; McCracken, 2004; Palloff & Pratt, 2003; Wiley, 2005). Furthermore, a strong correlation has been determined between the dynamic nature of learning, consistent academic achievement, and a corresponding need for support services to facilitate the development of intelligences and abilities (Chambers, 2004; Oliaro, 1996; Thorpe, 2002; Yalama & Aydin, 2004). Student Support Services aims to help its academically disadvantaged students make a smooth educational transition into college life and increase the graduation rates of the program participants and institution (Tri-County Technical College Student Support Services Brochure, 2005). The Student Support Services program seeks to further the academic opportunities of academically disadvantaged students. The program engages these students with a variety of services and activities that will allow them to graduate, work, and be successful in today’s global environment. According to Andrepont-Warren (2005), academically disadvantaged students can be just as successful in college as any other student population. Their study confirmed that if students are offered and inquire about advising services, they can be successful in college, which supports Astin’s theory of student involvement in addition to offering further support services to academically disadvantaged students.
Theoretical Framework

The purpose of this study was to explore the role of Student Support Services (SSS) in encouraging student involvement and its impact on academic achievement in three technical colleges in upstate South Carolina. To better understand the relationship of Student Support Services program to theory, it is important to look at Alexander Astin’s 1984 student involvement theory related to program participant engagement, experiences, and academic achievement. In addition, for Student Support Services to be considered effective by educational researchers, the practices and services offered by the program should link theoretical frameworks addressing concerns of involvement, attrition, and success of academically disadvantaged students in post-secondary education.

This research study includes the theoretical framework built upon Alexander Astin’s theory of involvement. Astin's (1984) theory states that the more students learn, the more they are involved in both the academic and social aspects of the collegiate experience. Juillerat (1995) also determined students who actively participate in their learning experience possess higher satisfaction rates than less involved students. Astin (1984) further proposes that the effectiveness of an educational practice is directly related to the capacity of that practice to increase student involvement. Astin’s involvement theory suggests that student involvement has a positive impact on development and learning. Student involvement theory states that the student plays an integral role in determining his or her own degree of involvement in college classes, extracurricular activities and social activities. Therefore, the more quality resources assessable to
students, the more likely those students will develop academically and holistically. Hutley (2008) found that faculty interaction inside and outside the classroom and high quality institutional programs and polices reflective of institutional commitment to student learning are necessary for student growth.

Student involvement has both quantitative and qualitative features; quantitative is the amount of time devoted studying and qualitative is the seriousness of approach to reviewing and comprehending assignments. Astin’s (1984) theory indicates that student learning and personal development is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement. In order for student growth and development to occur, students need to actively engage in their environment. These components are important to the theory as they connect to the methodology of this study.

The student involvement theory and all of its factors will be used to inform the study and its methodology. Because the methodology includes contained self-reported information of participant involvement experiences and academic and social achievements, the focus group sessions were considered to be a fitting data collection process for the current research. Therefore, the methodological structure in this research study was centered on the concept that there may be correlation between achievement and both academic and co curricular involvement.

In order to explore the role of Student Support Services in encouraging student involvement and its impact on academic achievement, this theoretical framework will be used to focus on correlations between involvement and student achievement. Similarly, a 1994 research study used Astin’s (1984) student involvement theory as a theoretical
framework yielding impactful results based on participant self-reported data. The researchers concluded that the amount of time and effort students put into their own achievement and development are important in determining their educational outcomes (Andrepont-Warren, 2005).

**Problem Statement**

Statistical data demonstrates that technical colleges are an important part of our nation’s higher education system. From their beginning, technical colleges were designed to meet the needs of students who are, on average, affected by social risk factors such as delayed enrollment, lack of high school diploma, income independence, part-time enrollment, single parenthood and/or dependent children, and full-time work during enrollment (American Association of State Colleges and Universities, 2006). However, throughout the history of technical colleges, there has been an overriding issue of retaining and graduating academically disadvantaged students.

According to Woods (1997) one major factor contributing to a low graduation rates in South Carolina’s technical college system is many students entering the technical institutions do not successfully pass the placement tests to enter a challenging curriculum. These students begin remedial courses that they consider irrelevant to their chosen major. Even those who enter remedial courses become discouraged, drop out, or change majors. These realities result in a decrease of students successfully progressing towards their 2-year degree and derail them from their ultimate goal of graduation.

Using the literature and related data, this study seeks to address the existing problem of the lack of student involvement in academic support programming, low
retention, graduation, and achievement rates of the community college student by exploring the role of Student Support Services (SSS) in encouraging student involvement and its impact on academic achievement. Statistics have shown that the mainstream of students entering 2-year degree programs do not learn as effectively in the traditional lecture, teacher-centered instructional settings as opposed to learning in a contextual, student-centered, active-learning atmosphere (Andrepont-Warren, 2005). The academic foundation of most incoming technical college students is inadequate to meet secondary education level standards. The Student Support Services program assists students who are at risk of negative educational outcomes by improving student achievement. While Student Support Service programs continue to help academically disadvantaged students to reach their individual potential by rigorously providing support during their educational journey, little research has been dedicated

As America’s President Obama continues to set educational goals for the United States to be the global forerunner in college degree attainment by the year 2020, the higher education community should not ignore the of retaining and graduating academically disadvantaged students in the technical college sector. Ignoring this issue may play a more progressively important role in our nation’s ability to prepare for increased universal and comprehensive competition. More specifically, in terms of program improvements, little research has been devoted to enhancing accountability for educational outcomes, program effectiveness, student satisfaction, and self-reported learning gains of Student Support Services as it contributes overall to retaining and graduating academically disadvantaged students. Thus, a study of the role of Student
Support Services in connection to student involvement, participant experience, and academic achievement is needed.

Obtaining a college education is an intricate part of opportunity, employment, and success of the American culture. Economic productivity and innovation rely on the education level and norms of a society. However, for academically disadvantaged students, the luxury, convenience, and opulence of attaining a college degree may be restricted due to the many barriers and complications that may face. The achievement gap in education may be a powerful barrier to economic and social success faced by disadvantaged groups in the United States today (The Education Trust, 2010). The costs to our society are profound in terms of lost income, under- and unemployment, workforce readiness, family dysfunction, and continuing the cycle of poverty. Students with parents who did not attend college are significantly less likely to attend college themselves. Addressing these challenges through research may enhance public support for higher education for disadvantaged students. It may also assist Student Support Services in delivering high-quality engagement activities and services.

Student Support Services considers academically disadvantaged students to be those students whose disadvantaged condition is a contributing factor to a lack of success. These students are often placed on academic probation and cannot be expected to achieve something without guidance or special assistance. On the front-end, research has shown that both the high cost of college and the complexity of the application process serve as real barriers to college attendance (The Education Trust, 2010). Many of these students performed at or below the 25th percentile on a standardized achievement or aptitude
testing in math, reading, and reading comprehension (Tri-County Technical College Student Support Services Brochure, 2005).

According to Morrison (1973), there are many ways of defining disadvantaged students. For example, the Federal government has defined such a student as possessing one or more of the following characteristics: (1) inadequate high school preparation, (2) recipient of welfare or vocational rehabilitation program benefits, (3) lives in public housing for the poor, (4) has standard English as a second language, and (5) has a cultural heritage not sufficiently or accurately represented in the traditional curriculum. Today’s educational system is much more diverse than in years past, therefore constant evaluation for improvement to meet the needs to these students is essential.

As the United Stated continues to evaluate and contemplate how to address education policy in the years ahead, there is a consensus on one point: Today’s educational system is in need of an overhaul (Kiplinger, 2010). Wilson (1996) found that higher levels of education have become increasingly more important as America has moved into a new global economy. Now more than ever, higher education is challenged to educate the leaders of tomorrow and to connect those future leaders with the world of today (Hollander, 1999). Many middle-class jobs requiring only a high school education have disappeared, and post-secondary education has been transformed into a must-have for many who want a middle-class, or better, standard of living (Chute, 2008). Despite increases in federal, state, and local spending on schools in recent decades, policymakers, education advocates and experts, parents, employers, and educators concur: The nation’s children need better preparation for 21st century life and careers (Kiplinger, 2010).
Work is being carried out today to reach underserved populations, but more is needed (American Association of State Colleges and Universities, 2006). According to Education Trust (2010), the key is providing access and the right set of supports in college. Many academically disadvantaged students enroll in public two-year colleges, but they are often not equipped to address the challenges facing those students who are most likely to drop out before graduation.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore the role of Student Support Services (SSS) in encouraging student involvement and its impact on academic achievement in three technical colleges in upstate South Carolina. Astin's (1984) theory states that the more students learn, the more they are involved in both the academic and social aspects of the collegiate experience. Reinforcing the acquisition of academic skills and behaviors is paramount for the success of academically disadvantaged students (Chute, 2008). At-risk students tend to have less academic preparation for college and generally experience less fruitful integration on college campuses (Devaries, 2002; Fields, 2001; Thayer, 2000). Studies have shown that academically disadvantaged students carry with them a record of experiences and achievements that leave them vulnerable to failure in college (Andrepont-Warren, 2005). Differences in ethnicity, culture, gender, previous family college experience, income, and socioeconomic background exacerbate their issues.

This study lies in its potential to offer information for improvement of SSS program practices, student experiences, and assessment. According to Andrepont-Warren (2005) these services have been shown to greatly impact the retention rate of
academically disadvantaged students. It is believed that SSS helps students persist in education because the advising takes into account a comprehensive view of the student, covering financial aid, career concerns, personal issues, and transfer and graduate school counseling as well (Burd, 1999; Devaries, 2002; Frost, 1993; Laff, 1994; Thayer, 2000).

Based on Alexander Astin’s (1984) theory of involvement with a focus on participant experiences of the Student Support Services programs, the primary research question is:

**Primary Research Question:**

*What is the role of the Student Support Services program in connection to student involvement and its impact on academic achievement according to 2008-2009 Student Support Services program participants in three technical colleges of upstate South Carolina.*

**Additional Questions:**

1. *What Student Support Services Programs practices appear most important in determining academic achievement and student satisfaction?*

2. *According to the 2008-2009 Student Support Services program participants, what are the perceptions of program’s effectiveness?*

The research participants may offer insight to identify best practices that may in turn contribute to an improved Student Support Services program that may perhaps model attempts to improve the involvement, retention, and success rates of academically disadvantaged students in technical colleges of upstate South Carolina. Implementation of these practices within a comprehensive program of school-based support services may
help students become self-sufficient, healthy, productive, and resilient adults who value themselves and others (Connecticut State Board of Education, 1998).

**Assumptions**

The following assumptions were observed in this research investigation.

1. It was assumed that participants responded honestly to the questions on the survey instrument.

2. It was assumed that responses received during the focus groups sessions were representative of others of the same population.

**Definitions**

For the purpose of this study the following definitions were used:

1. **Academic Achievement**: Distinction and excellence in all academic disciplines, in class as well as extracurricular activities. It includes excellence in sporting, behavior, confidence, communication skills, punctuality, assertiveness, Arts, Culture, and the like (Tri-County Technical College Student Support Services Brochure, 2005).

2. **Academically disadvantaged**: Those students who are first generation college students, ethnic minorities, have disabilities, of low socioeconomic status, and/or on academic probation (Andrepont-Warren, 2005).

3. **Retention**: An institution’s ability to retain students from one year to another (McAdams, 2000).

4. **Student Involvement**: The amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience. For student growth to take place, students need to actively engage in their environment (Astin, 1984).

5. **First-generation**: Students whose parents have never been enrolled in college, meaning their highest educational attainment was a high school degree or the equivalent (Andrepont-Warren, 2005).

6. **Best Practice**: Those practices and standards that have produced outstanding results and that could be adapted and applied to an existing custom or system (Habley, 2000).
7. **Program Effectiveness**: A measure of Student Support Services program’s ability to deliver a specific set of required or desired outcomes which are qualitatively measured (Hoffman, 2002).

8. **Student Perceptions**: Student Support Services program participants’ beliefs related to program effectiveness, mentoring, student motivations, and many other topics. Information gathered is used for qualitative data (Grantham, T., & Ford, D., 2003).

9. **Academic Support Program**: Any college or university program designed to provide academic assistance to students to help achieve academic success. These programs also foster warm, welcoming, and supportive environments for the diverse members of the campus community (Gullat, Y., & Jan, W., 2002).

10. **Trio Program**: Educational opportunity outreach programs designed to motivate and support students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Trio includes six outreach and support programs targeted to serve and assist low-income, first-generation college students, and students with disabilities to progress through the academic pipeline from middle school to post baccalaureate programs (Eisner, 1992).

11. **Student Support Services (SSS)**: An academic support program that provides opportunities for academic development, assists students with basic college requirements, and serves to motivate students toward the successful completion of their postsecondary education. The program helps approximately 175 students, who qualify and who are enrolled at Tri-County Technical College, Greenville Technical College and or Piedmont Technical College achieve their academic goals and address successfully any problems which might cause them to withdraw from college (Tri-County Technical College Student Support Services Brochure, 2005).

12. **Talent Search**: An academic support program that recognizes and aids students from economically challenged backgrounds who have the displayed aptitude to be successful in college. Program goals include assisting the student with completion high school and transition into higher education (Eisner, 1992).

13. **Focus Groups**: A group of 8 to 20 students brought together by the researcher to concentrate on their specific program experience. Discussions are elicited from formal questions, and produce qualitative data (perceptions and beliefs) that may or may not be representative of the larger program participant population (Kruegar, 1994).
14. **Themes**: Units derived from patterns such as participant conversation topics, vocabulary, recurring activities, meanings, and/or feelings (Gibson, 2006).

Additional terms, concerning the research study, will be revealed through analysis of the focus group data.

Through focus group sessions, this study may help to develop an understanding of the role of Student Support Services and its practices. The results of the study may also be utilized for 5 academic support programming areas in the technical college system the results may;

1. Help to improve services rendered and provide high quality educational programming for academically disadvantaged students;

2. Be used to distinguish more advantageous advising behaviors in the Student Support Services programs of upstate South Carolina technical colleges;

3. Contribute to the understanding of how student perceptions and experiences can impact future policies as well as the revamping of other academic support programs based on student involvement;

4. Help to analyze and identify best practices of upstate South Carolina’s Student Support Services program which will in-turn help to devise outcome/benchmark based evaluations to assess services provided and program effectiveness;

5. Be used in the training of Student Support Services counselors, coordinators, and program directors in serving academically disadvantaged populations.

**Summary**

This research study will capture over 100 unique Student Support Services program participant experiences. The feedback may be of value to all 16 Student Support Service programs in the South Carolina technical college system. The results may also show how useful and informative frequent student focus group feedback may be to the
assessment processes. Astin (1993) found that effective assessment findings should provide greater understanding of causal connections between the practice and outcomes of education. Overall, the findings in this study may provide data to strengthen standards and examine how the Student Support Services programs practices should be challenged or changed.

This chapter has identified the primary research question that will guide the study. Chapter II will provide a literature review concerning Astin’s theory of student involvement, the need for academic support programs, best practices of academic support programs, student engagement, and assessment. Chapter III explains the methodology used in the research study. Chapter IV will present an analysis of the data collected and discuss the quality of research. Chapter V will reveal the conclusions of the study and make recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Theoretical Framework: Alexander Astin’s Student Involvement Theory

The development of the student as a person is the central aim of all education (Sanford, 1962). One unifying purpose of higher education then is to facilitate human development using a variety of programs and resources (Chickering, 1981). According to Lewallen (1992), involvement is neither mysterious nor esoteric; quite simply, student involvement refers to the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience. Astin (1984) found the principle advantage of the student involvement theory over traditional pedagogical approaches (including subject-matter, resource, and individualized or eclectic theories) is that it directs attention away from subject matter and technique and toward the motivation and behavior of the student. It views student time and energy as institutional resources, albeit finite resources.

American community colleges, urban ones in particular, face unique challenges with their first-generation, immigrant, economically disadvantaged, non-White, and limited English ability students (Chaves, 2003). Furthermore, students are inadequately prepared, academically and psychologically for post-secondary work and learning. These challenges can be exacerbated by students' failure to connect and become involved in college at the level necessary for academic and workplace success.

Hutley (2008) found the most basic tenet of Astin's Theory of Involvement is that the more students learn, the more they are involved the academic and social aspects of the collegiate experience. An involved student is one who devotes considerable energy to
academics, spends much time on campus, participates actively in student organizations and activities, and interacts often with faculty. Astin (1999) states the involvement theory has five basic postulates: (1) Involvement refers to the investment of physical and psychological energy in various objects. The objects may be highly generalized (the student experience) or highly specific (preparing for a chemistry examination); (2) Regardless of its object, involvement occurs along a continuum; that is, different students manifest different degrees of involvement in a given object, and the same student manifests different degrees of involvement in different objects at different times; (3) Involvement has both quantitative and qualitative features. The extent of a student’s involvement in academic work, for instance, can be measured quantitatively (how many hours the student spends studying) and qualitatively (whether the student reviews and comprehends reading assignments or simply stares at the textbook and daydreams); (4) The amount of student learning and personal development associated with any educational program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program; and (5) The effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase student involvement.

The theory of student involvement argues that a particular curriculum, to achieve the effects intended, must elicit sufficient student effort and investment of energy to bring about the desired learning and development. Simply exposing the student to a particular set of courses may or may not work. The theory of involvement, in other words, provides
a conceptual substitute for the black box that is implicit in the three traditional pedagogical theories (Astin, 1984).

According to Astin (1999), if an institution commits itself to achieving maximum student involvement, counselors and other student personnel workers will probably resume a more important role in institutional operations. Because student personnel workers frequently operate on a one-to-one basis with students, they are in a unique position to monitor the involvement of their clients in the academic process and to work with individual clients in an attempt to increase that involvement (Astin, 1999). One of the challenges confronting student personnel workers is to find a hook that will stimulate students to get more involved in the college experience such as taking a different array of courses, changing residential situations, joining student organizations, participating in various kinds of extracurricular activities, or finding new peer groups (Astin, 1999).

Another challenge exists at the core of the involvement theory, and that is the challenge to institution’s business as usual mentality (Astin, 1985). The theory challenges the very notion of academic excellence as it has been traditionally defined by academe. According to Astin (1985), rather than judging educational excellence on the basis of institutional reputation and resources, high quality institutions should be judged according to the degree to which they maximize the intellectual and personal development of students. The involvement theory focuses less on what the educator does and more on what the student does, leading the student to be an active participant in the process of learning.
According to Lewallen (1992), in many ways, the construct of student involvement is similar to a more commonly known construct in psychology, that of motivation. Astin (1984) prefers the term involvement because it connotes something more than just a psychological state: it connotes the behavioral manifestation of that state. Involvement is more susceptible to direct observation and measurement than is the more abstract psychological construct of motivation. According to Rust, Dhanatya, Furuto, and Kheitash (2007), Astin’s theory of involvement is closely aligned with Tinto’s (1997) theory of academic and social integration. Involvement also plays a key role in Tinto’s theory which argues that the more students are involved, academically and socially, in shared learning experiences that link them as learners with their peers, the more likely they are to become more involved in their own learning and invest the time and energy needed to learn.

Astin (1984) introduced the student involvement theory to explain student development and change. The roots of his theory were formed in a longitudinal study of college dropouts aimed at identifying factors in the college environment that significantly affect the students persistence in college. Many significant effects could be explained in terms of the involvement concept (Lewallen, 1992). Astin’s research indicates that there are numerous benefits to involvement and reveals those students who are involved receive better grades, are more successful in their academic program, are more likely to stay in school and graduate timely, feel more satisfied with their college experience, are more marketable when job searching and for applying to graduate school, and develop valuable leadership and interpersonal skills. More importantly, involvement offers
students the opportunity to connect with peers and university faculty and staff members (Astin, 1984).

Hunt (2003) researched Astin's theory of involvement and reported ways to use this theory to generate pedagogical practices designed to promote learning. According to Hunt, research demonstrates that students approach learning using the following strategies: (a) surface strategies (meeting requirements at a minimal level, usually through rote learning), (b) achieving strategies (striving to receive high grades, even if the subject is not of interest, by performing the activities typical of good students), or (c) deep strategies (working to develop competence and interest in the subject, such as trying to relate new knowledge to previous knowledge). Deep learning is more likely to occur in situations where students are highly involved and engaged in the learning process.

Lundberg (2007) discovered the impact of student involvement and institutional commitment to diversity predicted student learning. Lundberg noted that students reported higher levels of learning when the institution's commitment to diversity was strong and when students were frequently engaged in discussion with others. Higher levels of learning were also reported when these discussions required students combine information from a variety of resources and talking points. Lundberg used a national sample (n = 643) of Native American students who took the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ). Lundberg then made recommendations for student affairs leaders to increase the frequency of peer discussions while enhancing the institutional emphasis on diversity.
Rust, Dhanatya, Furuto, and Kheitash, (2007) examined a study abroad program in connection with Astin’s (1984) student involvement theory and academic and social integration. Theoretical approaches by Alexander Astin and Vincent Tinto provide a good starting point to investigate study abroad as part of the college experience. Rust, Dhanatya, Furuto, and Kheitash, (2007) found that Astin and his colleagues have developed a theory of student involvement that is defined as the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience.

Flowers (2004) investigated the extent to which student involvement experiences impacted educational outcomes for African Americans in college. According to Flowers, the amount of existing research using Astin's theory indicated that student involvement experiences positively impact college student development in a variety of important ways including leadership skills, moral development and cognitive development. Thus, Flower’s research study is based on Astin's view that student involvement experiences promote students' developmental gains in college. Flowers used the Revised 3rd Edition of the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ) as the data source for this research. The questionnaire explores 82 student involvement experiences on measures assessing African American students' development in college. In this study, Flowers discovered that the 2004 research study supports Chickering and Reisser's (1993) work and Martin's (2000) study that found that educational outcomes were impacted by students' interactions with faculty, interactions with students, and through their participation in campus organizations (Flowers, 2004). Flowers gives an account that the overall findings of this study supports Astin's (1984) theory of student involvement,
particularly Astin's fourth proposition, which suggests that student development is directly related to the amount of student involvement experiences that students have on campus.

Chaves (2003) examined Astin’s (1984) involvement theory at the community college level. Community colleges continue to educate a unique group of traditional and non-traditional students. Many of the students that the 2-year colleges serve are unprepared for traditional college-level academics and require assistance and involvement opportunities to successfully achieve their academic goals (Chaves, 2003). Since an increasing number of community college students work full-time or can only attend classes part-time, finding the opportunity to connect and become involved in the college environment is a continuing challenge. According to Chaves (2003), in order for effective involvement to take place at the community college level students should partake in orientation programs, receive on-going academic assistance, and experience a curriculum that connects classroom requirements to workplace relevance and skills. Community colleges should involve their students effectively by placing a focus on serving them through a variety of activities that may lead to critical engagement needed for improved learning and retention.

Serving the students through a variety of activities that include workshops on persistence and setting goals may be beneficial. According to the College Student Journal (2007), academic persistence is positively associated with college grades. This study examined undergraduate students' academic achievement and its association with students' involvement in relationships with faculty and peers and learning at a
Midwestern public University. The research study used three years of data (2003-05) collected through the administration of the National Survey of Student Engagement in order to explore academic achievement.

Several studies have been conducted on students’ in-class involvement. Pascarella and Terrenzini (1991) found that students are more attentive and involved in the events of class when they are required to take notes. Taking notes in class had positive effects on achieving high grades. The greater the student’s investment of time in taking notes, participating in class discussions, and answering questions, the higher the cognitive development.

Using regression analysis, the study concluded that students' active involvement with learning positively influences their academic achievement. Moreover, students' relationships with faculty influence their academic achievement significantly. The findings of this research study provided valuable information in developing curricular and co-curricular programming based on Astin’s theory of student involvement (College Student Journal, 2007).

According to Foubert and Grainger (2006), student involvement has long been studied as a significant contributor to desirable outcomes of the college student experience. Some studies have explored how student involvement is defined and others have explored different ways students become involved. In addition, further research has explored the links between student involvement and different kinds of student development (Astin, 1996). The concept of campus involvement is well-known to higher education researchers and practitioners. Huang and Chang (2004) suggest that the more
involved college students are in the academic and social aspects of campus life, the more they benefit in terms of learning and personal development.

Student involvement has staged institutional goals for student education all through history. This involvement was first documented in the early 1880s when students created literary societies to supplement the prescribed classical curriculum of the period (Wade, 2006). Today, college extracurricular activities and programs are defined by a wide variety of student interests related to academic and social goals. With a constant interest and participation by students in campus activities, it is reasonable to expect that colleges will make extracurricular activities and programs available to students.

Woo and Bilynsky (1994) found high involvement in extracurricular activities had a positive impact on students’ evaluation of their college experience. The study defined involvement by time commitment to campus activities. A self-report was administered and measured adjustment and used the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire. Students who had high or moderate time commitment to a group gained positively with respect to social adjustment and attaining academic goals.

Astin’s (1993) research on student involvement included fraternity and sorority membership, participation in intramural sports, volunteer activities, tutoring other students, participation in group class projects, and class presentations. The effect of a student’s involvement experience is determined by the amount and quality of the individual student’s effort. The impact of a student’s involvement is also directly related to the extent to which a student connects to a network of people, leadership positions,
facilities, and a variety of opportunities provided by the college (Astin, 1993). Cooper, Healy, and Simpson (1994) examined students’ involvement in organizations and leadership positions throughout their time in college. This research found student leadership roles provided students with opportunities to develop leadership skills in areas of maturity, commitment, negotiation and volunteerism.

Fitch (1991) examined volunteer involvement among college students and found students involved in volunteer community service activities have different demographic characteristics and interpersonal values than other students. A total of 330 surveys were sent to a sample of students from different academic classes at a major southeastern university. The instrument used was the Survey of Interpersonal Values. Students involved in community volunteering are also more religiously affiliated than other students. Fitch (1991) found that students living on campus scored higher on involvement overall and involvement in community volunteering.

**Populations Served by Student Support Services**

The community college has traditionally attempted to make education accessible to all persons by breaking the economic, geographic, and motivational barriers to opportunity. This attempt has become known as the open door philosophy (Henderson, 1982). According to Horn, Peter, and Rooney (2002) in 1999–2000, 42% of all undergraduates were enrolled at public 2-year institutions. The lower fees and open-access policies at community colleges have broadened access to postsecondary education for students facing barriers to entry such as poor academic performance in high school, limited English-language skills or other basic skill deficiencies, or financial hardship.
(Grubb 1999). On the other hand, while access to community colleges is easily attained, research has shown that a significant number of students who enter community colleges do not complete a formal credential (Berkner, Horn, and Clune, 2000).

All Student Support Services programs are mandated to serve academically disadvantaged students (Eisner, 1992). Student Support Services considers the academically disadvantaged to be those students who are first generation college students, ethnic minorities, have disabilities, of low socioeconomic status, and/or on academic probation. The terms at-risk or high-risk students are used to define those students whose probability of withdrawal from college is above average (Eisner, 1992). These students, mostly found among the underrepresented in higher education, rate of attrition is disproportionately higher than the general student population.

Venezia, Kirst, and Antonio (2003) completed a research study concerning at-risk students. The researchers summarized the ability of schools and colleges to address the issues of inadequate preparation for college, high levels of remediation, and low rates of college completion. Venezia, Kirst, and Antonio (2003) found one of the major problems discovered is the lack of clear understanding makes college preparation difficult and discouraging. This problem is compounded by the fact that many high schools students, especially the most academically disadvantaged, receive inadequate counseling and opportunities for college preparation.

Venezia, Kirst, and Antonio (2003) examined the knowledge of high school students concerning their thoughts and views on college and the overall college experience. Throughout the discussions with students, it became apparent that they had
many misconceptions about college preparation and attending college. Table 3 reveals the top ten myths that students believe about college according to Venezia, Kirst, and Antonio.

Table 3. Students Misconceptions about College.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Many students believe that</th>
<th>In truth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I can’t afford college.</td>
<td>Students and parents regularly overestimate the cost of college.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can take whatever classes I want when I get to college</td>
<td>Most colleges and universities require entering students to take placement exams in core subject areas. Those tests will determine the classes students can take.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Meeting high school graduation requirements will prepare me for college.</td>
<td>Adequate preparation for college usually requires a more demanding curriculum than is reflected in minimum requirements for high school graduation, sometimes even if that curriculum is termed “college prep.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting into college is the hardest part.</td>
<td>For the majority of students, the hardest part is completing college.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community colleges don’t have academic standards.</td>
<td>Students usually must take placement tests at community colleges for college-level work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s better to take easier classes in high school and get better grades.</td>
<td>One of the best predictors of college success is taking rigorous high school classes. Getting good grades in lower-level classes will not prepare students for college-level work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>My senior year in high school doesn’t matter.</td>
<td>The classes students take in their senior year will often determine the classes they are able to take in college and how well-prepared they are for those classes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Many students believe that | In truth
---|---
I don’t have to worry about my grades, or the kind of classes I take, until my sophomore year. | Many colleges look at sophomore year grades, and, in order to enroll in college-level courses, students need to prepare well for college. This means taking a well-thought out series of courses starting no later than 9th or 10th grade.

I can’t start thinking about financial aid until I know where I’m going to college. | Students need to file a federal aid form prior to colleges mailing of acceptance letters. This applies to students who attend community colleges too; even though they can apply and enroll in the fall of the year they wish to attend.


In order to address several of the misconceptions and myths about the college experience, Student Support Services staff use information in Table 4 to identify eligible Student Support Services program participants.

Student Support Services seeks out academically challenged students to offer them tutorial assistance. Tutorial assistance and academic support is also offered to students that have a GPA lower than a 2.0 who may be facing academic probation. Once a pool of potential eligible students is gathered, letters and brochures outlining the program services and requirements are sent to all prospective students. The potential program participant is then asked to complete a Student Support Services application. The application requests information that will enable the staff to determine prospective participant’s eligibility for the program. The student information provided on the program application is verified through a variety of offices, including the admissions, financial aid, and disability services. A needs analysis is conducted by the Student
Table 4. Identification of Participants with Academic Need.

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Comprehensive Studies provides a list of students who scored low on the college placement test to the Student Support Services program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Student Records provides the project with information concerning students who have earned a GPA of less than a 2.0 for the previous semester.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Instructors from various departments refer students with academic need to the program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>The Student Support Services program obtains a list of students receiving PELL, WIA (Workforce Investment Act) CAP (Child Care Assistance Program) and services from the Disability officer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Walk-in students inquiring about Student Support Services are interviewed briefly and an on-site determination is made concerning the possible eligibility; eligible students are given an application while ineligible students are referred elsewhere on campus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Letters and brochures outlining the project are sent to all eligible participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Applications are given to eligible students requesting information concerning eligibility status type of financial aid received or applied for, admissions information, College placement test scores, and the type of academic support requested from SSS.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Tri-County Technical College Student Support Services Grant Abstract (2005)

Support Services staff. All students are interviewed within two days of application submission. During the interview process, Student Support Services requirements are discussed along with goals and what the student feels is their academic need and what services they need to be successful.

General SSS Selection of Program Participants with Academic Need

The typical selection of Student Support Services (SSS) eligibility is determined by the Trio Director and the Student Support Services Coordinator after reviewing the applications and interviews. The academic need component is the main criteria that all
applicants must meet. The SSS counselors and coordinators review the students’ record placement test scores, personal issues that interfere with their academic performance, documented disability, low college and high school grade point average, and/or instructor referral. After Student Support Services coordinators review each eligible application, priority is given to students with an academic need and who meet more than one of the eligibility requirements. Coordinators ensure the application acceptance meets all requirements due to the mandated federal regulations for program participation (see Appendix I). Once the program’s maximum active participants (175) has been reached, the remaining applications of eligible participants are held in a pending file. Applications are pulled from this file to fill openings occurring due to attrition, graduation, or transfer.

Once a student has demonstrated an academic need for Student Support Services, efforts are made to retain the student in the program so that his or her academic progress is maintained. In doing so, the program abides by the information in Table 5.

The academic needs of the participating students can change from one semester to the next. Student Support Services coordinators and counselors review augment each student’s individual educational development plan each semester. This ensures that the program participant receives appropriate services. This also serves as a means to keep the student active and retain program participation.

Monitoring the academic progress of each participant is an essential part of the program. Program participant’s progress reports are distributed to their class instructors. The instructors are then asked to complete the form regarding the student’s class participation, academic progress, attitude, and motivation. If the student receives an
Table 5. Guidelines for Student Support Services Counselors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Conduct at least two counseling sessions per month with each student.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Meet with participants to assess their continued need for Student Support Services and offer other needed assistance such as financial aid, counseling, community referrals, tutoring, supplemental instruction to continue enrollment in college.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Complete a need analysis on each student within the first 30 days of enrollment Student Support Services, taking into consideration problems noted by the student with faculty input.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Progress reports are sent to instructors to complete indicating the academic progress of the student. The counselor schedules a session with the student to discuss the results and a plan to improve performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Track the adherence to the student’s Educational Development Plan, to ensure that the student is taking the necessary classes required to complete his or her decree or transfer requirements.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Tri-County Technical College Student Support Services Grant Abstract (2005).

unsatisfactory report, attempts are then made to make improvements in the documented problem area. These students are required to meet with their Student Support Services counselor once a week until the end of the semester. Non-compliance to the program requirements will result in removal of program resources and benefits.

Supplementary tutoring sessions are offered to those students who are struggling academically while in the Student Support Services program. Referrals are also made to other on-campus resource centers such as student life counseling services for additional support. Student Support Services staff have access to the institutional data base systems and are allowed to track students’ grades, admissions information, credit hours earned, programs enrolled, and etc.
Academically disadvantaged students have a need for intentional advising. According to Heisserer and Parette (2002), the importance of intense advising at-risk college and university students has been repeatedly emphasized in the professional literature. Intrusive advising strategies are typically used with at-risk students, and are special techniques based on prescriptive, developmental, and integrated advising models. Academically disadvantaged students require many needs and continue to face difficulties in college; therefore, the Student Support Services program is critical to their success. Recommendations for college and university advisors include the need for a comprehensive plan that addresses intrusive advising, adequate faculty and advisor training, web supports for targeted students, development of comprehensive databases for managing student data, and ongoing research to evaluate intervention effectiveness (Heisserer and Parette, 2002).

First Generation College Students:

First-generation undergraduates are students whose parents have never been enrolled in college, meaning their highest educational attainment was a high school degree or the equivalent. Andrepont-Warren (2005) found that first generation college students have received a significant amount of attention and may be taken as exemplary of the population served by Student Support Services. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2005), students who are the first in their family to attend college come from a variety of backgrounds. In 2004, 36% of the students in two-year public institutions were the first in their families to ever attend college. However, this population of academically disadvantaged students struggle with oppositions while
making every effort to complete their curriculum or degree. Nationally, 39% of first-generation students took remedial classes compared to 29% of students whose parents have bachelor's degrees.

First generation college students have special needs that greatly differ from those of second-generation students in terms of their academic and social integration into college life as well as in their academic performance and persistence rates (McConnell, 2000). While enrollment in the two year technical college system is less expensive, many of these institutions lack the requirements for providing support services to first generation college students. Once enrolled in postsecondary education, first generation students tend to work more hours off campus than their non-first generation counterparts (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005). In addition, many of these students are enrolled as part-time students. Part-time students constitute a particularly challenged subgroup of at-risk, low-income students. Because part-time students spend less time on campus, they choose academic advisors who can accommodate them quickly and, as a result, receive only prescriptive advising. Overall, part-time first generation community college students have limited opportunity to receive a holistic form of advising that requires more time (Andrepont-Warren, 2005).

First generation college students enter college undecided about a field of study, without as much preparation, get lower grades, and they are more likely to drop out (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005). Students with a strong foundation and clear sense of their goals and direction typically do well in higher education; however; first generation students delay due to lack of support and unpreparedness. According to
the National Center for Education Statistics (2005) in 2005, a third of first generation
students entered college without an intended major.

First generation students are more likely than other students to pick business or
vocational fields, and are less likely to end up in the sciences or humanities. Table 6
shows the percentage of students in certain categories who majored in particular areas.
The table also shows the differences in the choices of majors of students whose parents
did and did not go to college (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005).

Table 6. Percentage of Students in Various Categories Who Majored in Particular Areas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major</th>
<th>First Generation</th>
<th>Parents With Some College</th>
<th>Parents With Bachelor's Degrees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education/social work</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering/architecture</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer science</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanities</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts/applied arts</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social sciences</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health science/services</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalism/communications</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human/protective services</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational/technical</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The first generation college student population may continue to increase, provided
the changing nature of an American educational system focuses on access for all
(Andrepont-Warren, 2005). In order for postsecondary institutions to better understand
the unique needs of first generation students, more must be known about who they are
and their particular enrollment experiences (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005). Though some argue that the literature concerning the issues facing first generation college students is limited, studies focusing on the pre-college expectations, first-year attrition rates, and continued needs through college have emerged (Andrepont-Warren, 2005).

**Ethnic Minorities:**

The twenty-first century marks a time in United States history when the number of minorities will begin to escalate significantly (Andrepont-Warren, 2005). We will continue to see, a shift in the United States population from a predominately White population to a minority dominated population. Higher education institutions can no longer ignore the under-representation of minorities in higher education. The national goal of providing ethnic and racial minorities with equal access to quality institutions and opportunities for academic success, has yet to be realized (Andrepont-Warren, 2005).

Students who are well prepared academically and highly motivated tend to do well in college and persist to graduation, but for various reasons, some of which are beyond their control, many students lack the requisite academic background for college level work (De Sousa, 2005). The *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* (2006) reported that, according to the most recent statistics, the nationwide college graduation rate for black students stands at an appallingly low rate of 43%, as compared to the 63% of Caucasian students. The black-white gap in college graduation rates remains very large and little or no progress has been achieved in bridging the divide (*Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 2006).
The federal government's Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance indicates that each year nearly 400,000 academically qualified students fail to pursue a postsecondary education because they cannot afford it (American Association of State Colleges and Universities, 2006). According to Ford-Edwards (2002), over the past twenty years while enrollment for other minority groups has increased by more than 50%, enrollment for Black students has only increased by 38%.

Swail (2003) reports that lower retention and graduation rates among Black students have been linked to a variety of factors including negative racial climates, racial isolation and alienation, and low educational expectations. This simply reiterates the fact that numerous minority children do not live in an environment that emphasizes education or the steps to take towards a college education. An academic support program with proven successful outcomes could contribute to increasing these graduation and retention rates.

From the start of school, Black, Hispanic, and Native American students have much lower average levels of achievement than Whites and Asians by traditional measures, such as grades, standardized test scores, and class rank; and, these achievement gaps persist on through graduate and professional school (National Task Force on Minority High Achievement, 1999). The high level of attrition in college generally, and among black students in particular, clearly indicates the need for academic support programs (Swail, 2003).

Henderson and Kritsonis, (2007) found low income and minority students are far more likely to be educated in under-resourced, understaffed schools that expect far too
little of their students and therefore, get minimal effort in return. These same minority students have been hindered because of under-resourced schools and the requirements for going to college may be overwhelming. Without the requisite skills needed to survive the rigorous curricula of most college campuses, many students leave college during their freshman year or before their sophomore year begins. The *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* (2006) reported a nurturing environment for Black students is helpful in having a positive impact on Black student retention rates. The nurturing environment can include mentoring and academic programs. A lack of requisite skills, under-resourced K-12 schools, and the requirements for college are significant causes for academic support and mentoring programs for minority students.

Poor and inadequate schooling accounts for minority communities having fewer students who are prepared for college (Watson, 2002). Therefore, academic support program efforts, and student services, are key to helping this population enter college and graduate. Sherman (2002) found that the reasons for the lagging performance of minority students are complex but may be narrowed down to at least five factors that help account for the educational gap: (1) poverty, (2) schools with inadequate resources, (3) racial and ethnic prejudice resulting in low expectations for minority children, (4) limited educational resources of minority families, and (5) cultural differences of certain ethnic and racial groups toward learning.

Another concern and obstacle faced by minority students which creates a need for more academic and mentoring programs is their struggle for an identity. Ford (1995) found blacks and other racially and culturally-diverse students live in a world and learn in
schools that seldom affirm their dignity and worth as racial beings. This impacts their ability to perform well academically. Ford found these students frequently face negative peer pressures relative to doing well in school. Many of these students, like their adult counterparts, struggle in developing a healthy sense of self, which includes views about their personal social worth as racial beings. There are many mentoring and academic support programs that aim to help students establish their identity and build confidence. When Black students develop healthy racial identities, they are freer to focus on the need to achieve. Oakes (2003) found that race and culture play an important role in shaping students’ college going identities, and this role is related to the historical under-representation of many minorities in college.

Academic support programs often aid academically disadvantage students in overcoming the obstacles that stand in their way of college success. Assistance programs are needed to help students be triumphant in developing new learning strategies, and being successful during and after their academic journey. Realizing this goal is critical to both national competitiveness and economic opportunity for all Americans (Soares, 2009). America’s President Obama set a goal to take back the worldwide lead in college degree attainment by 2020. Education Trust (2009) found that completion of this goal depends not only on better K-12 preparation and increased college-going among minority students, but on higher education becoming serious about the success of these students. In order for this mission to be accomplished, academic support programs are needed for various academically disadvantaged populations.
Table 7 suggests intervention strategies to use when working with minority students. These strategies focus on providing support they need to feel confident in their abilities, motivation, and overcoming academic shortcomings (Grantham and Ford, 2003).

Early intervention programs are a key element of providing a solid framework to increase the retention of minority students. Black and Latino students are less likely to graduate from college and complete a four year degree in comparison to White students, especially at predominately White institutions (Harper and Quaye, 2009). Higher education leaders conclude that in spite of the Black student enrollment and degree attainment, the Black student college under-representation in require either immediate action or perhaps greater research in search of appropriate remedies.

Thus, the concern for minority students in higher education does not stop with access into the institution but continues with providing the resources to retain these students (Harper and Quaye, 2009). The fact that minority students collectively will soon become a majority on American campuses necessitates that institutions redirect their focuses to make sure that minority populations feel comfortable, safe, and engaged. By implementing on-going educational programs and student support services at post-secondary institutions, minority student concerns and issues in higher education are addressed at an early stage of college student development.

**Students with Disabilities or Specific Learning Needs:**

Student Support Services (SSS) also serves students with disabilities or specific learning needs. The term students with special needs is used to refer to students with
Table 7. Intervention Strategies with Multicultural Counseling as the Foundation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Goal/Objective</th>
<th>Recommended Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intrinsic</strong></td>
<td>To help students to understand the benefits of participating in gifted education classes</td>
<td>*Positive reinforcement, with constructive and consistent feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategies</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>*Personally meaningful and relevant coursework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*Multicultural and urban education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*Mentors and role models</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*Biographies with Black characters who face and cope effectively with social issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Supportive</strong></td>
<td>To affirm gifted Black students’ belief in their ability to succeed in gifted education classes</td>
<td>*Conflict resolution skills and anger management skills to cope with peer pressures and other social pressures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategies</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>*Weekly or monthly opportunities to meet with counselors and/or teachers to discuss personal, social, and academic concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*Small group counseling with other gifted Black students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*Affective and student–centered classrooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*High teacher expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*Mentors and role models</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Remedial</strong></td>
<td>To improve gifted Black students’ academic performance, engagement, and work ethic in specific areas of difficulty</td>
<td>*Academic counseling (e.g., tutoring study skills, test-taking skills)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategies</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>*Small-group interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*Test-taking skills training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*Accommodation of learning styles and teaching styles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


learning disabilities, ADD, or mental health problems that interfere with their ability to function fully without assistance in the academic setting (Hemphill, 2002). In 1999, an estimated 428,280 students with disabilities were enrolled at two-year and four-year colleges and universities (National Center for Education Statistics, 1999). According to Henderson (1999), the number of full-time freshmen with a disability increased from
2.6% in 1978 to 9% in 1998. Learning disability is the fastest growing category of disability, and the most commonly cited in 1998 by 41% of freshmen. Other disabilities included visual impairment at 13%; orthopedic-related impairments at 9%; speech impairments at 5.3%; health-related and other disabilities at 22% (Henderson, 1999).

The Americans with Disabilities Act is the most comprehensive civil rights law protecting people with disabilities in history (Henderson, 1999). In terms of higher education for students, the Americans with Disabilities Act apply to every college and university in America. Although the Americans with Disabilities Act provide college access to those with diagnosed or non-visible disabilities, academic challenges and obstacles remain. Educational barriers are less noticeable, but no less demanding, for students with disabilities. Students with mental or physical disabilities increasingly contribute to diverse populations on college campuses (Hemphill, 2002).

Faced with numerous challenges to being successful in higher education, students with disabilities are more likely than other students to leave college before attaining a degree (Henderson, 1999). According to Hemphill (2002), students with learning disabilities have processing disorders which affect the manner they take in information, organize it, retain it and express the knowledge and understanding they have. This population of students often come to college with noted deficits in reading, spelling, written expression, quantitative reasoning, and/or have difficulty with structure and organization.

According to a study by Elacqua, Kruse, and Rapaport (1996), the most problematic of these include; a lack of diagnosis for many students with learning
disabilities that would identify their particular learning needs; a general lack of awareness of strategies and services that could be used by students with special learning needs; and a reluctance to communicate their needs to others. This is especially true for students with invisible disabilities (e.g., ADD, ADHD, brain injury, mental illness); a tendency of parents to attempt to intervene for their children, even though the most effective intervention is student self-advocacy; a lack of peer or classmate acceptance of students with special learning needs; a lack of campus staff, equipment, and services to adequately serve this growing campus need; a faculty perceived by students with disabilities as having a general lack of awareness or even skepticism about the realities of learning challenges for college students and a reluctance by faculty to provide classroom accommodations; and a general suspicion that students with a learning disability are being deceptive about their needs in order to secure accommodations related to classroom work. Therefore, academic programs such as Trio’s Student Support Services, in conjunction with other student disability services on campus, provide disabled students with those accommodations needed to secure their full participation in the various curriculums offered by the institution (Hemphill, 2002).

According to Harper and Quaye (2009), support programs and approaches created to improve students' views of themselves as learners, their motivation to learn, and their self-sufficiency as scholars, are especially important for students with special learning needs. Most colleges and universities provide general learning assistance to increase student success. Many campuses are focused on becoming learning-centered campuses
that emphasize broad approaches to learning designed to create positive academic outcomes for increasingly diverse student populations.

Low Socioeconomic Status:

Another population of students that the Student Support Services (SSS) program serves is students from a low socioeconomic background. Students from a low socioeconomic background were defined as those whose family income was below 125% of the federally established poverty level for their family size (Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance, 2001). According to King (2005), students of lower socioeconomic status are disadvantaged in the competition for academic rewards because their social environment may not provide the types of cultural capital required for success in school, such as academic attention, certain linguistic patterns, behavioral traits, orientation towards schooling, high expectations, or encouragement of college aspirations. Individuals from low socioeconomic backgrounds are often less likely to attend college and those who do attend college are less likely to graduate than their higher income peers (King, 2005). These financial barriers prevent 48% of college-qualified, low-income high school graduates from attending a four-year college, and 22% from attending any college at all, within two years of graduation (Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance, 2001).

There are several factors associated with lower levels of adjustment to college connected to a student’s low socioeconomic status. According to Terenzini (1995), increased experiences of stress, decreased social and academic resources, lower incidence of parents with college education, and increased levels of depressive symptoms have all
been associated with low income college students as well as lower levels of adaptation to college. Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds may be at higher risk for maladjustment to college because of their exposure to factors generally related to lower adjustment to college (King, 2005). Many low-income, non-traditional students are the first in their families to go to college, and as a result, have little exposure to the higher education system. Thus, educational assistance, such as guidance to complete college applications, federal and grant aids are essential.

Grant aid is important for many students. A promise of sufficient grant aid can also bolster the power of intervention efforts designed to prepare younger students for enrollment in college and ensure persistence (Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance, 2001). Most community colleges pursue strategies for enhancing student services, including offering one-stop shopping, which provides students with multiple services at the same time and place. According to King (2005), programs targeted to low-income and nontraditional students offering combinations of academic, personal, and financial counseling, such as Trio’s Student Support Services found in most community colleges around the country, helps to ensure that students can afford to stay in college and attain a bachelor's degree.

Impact of Student Involvement on Retention and Achievement

In the past twenty years, the United States has witnessed and responded to a growing and intensified public demand to raise student academic achievement (Robinson, 2009). This demand mirrors the shifts in the economy and society. The features of success have intrigued many of those working to understand the nature of the human
mind. For some, success is a process, for others it is considered a product (Robinson, 2009). For the purposes of this study, academic achievement is defined as those fundamentals of the Student Support Program participant’s collegiate experiences that relate to involvement, retention, transferability, and graduation. Holistic achievement is academic success brought about by effort, including grade point average, but it goes beyond grades. Other factors involved in scholastic achievement are making progress to obtaining a degree, making efficient use of academic resources on campus, establishing purpose, and participating in the learning process (Robinson, 2009).

The Student Support Services Programs in South Carolina have served academically disadvantaged students for over 30 years. According to Andrepont-Warren (2005), because the Trio programs have been serving academically disadvantaged students for years, the services have been at the vanguard of retention advising programs. Student Support Services, like countless academic support programs, craft an atmosphere specifically for academic success. Many of these programs target at-risk students in order to improve the currently deplorable percentages of retention and graduation for disadvantaged students (Andrepont-Warren, 2005).

Andrepont-Warren (2005), found the primary strategy used by Student Support Services is the implementation of learning communities. Groups of students take the same classes in order to build a sense of community around an academic focus. The Student Support Services program is the cutting edge of numerous efforts to improve students’ chances of graduating from college. There is evidence that a comprehensive
approach to the advising process is essential to the successful completion of academic goals (Andrepont-Warren, 2005).

In effort to reduce the number of college drop-outs among academically disadvantaged students, the Student Support Services program provides engaging activities that keep students motivated, confident, focused, and driven. According to Andrepont-Warren (2005) Student Support Services include instructional courses, workshops, opportunities to attend cultural events, professional advising, peer tutoring, learning labs, special services for handicapped students, and self-esteem classes. Mentoring is also a major component of the Student Support Services program that contributes to the institutions overall increased graduation percentages. Student Support Services programs incorporate elements of both developmental and intrusive advising (Andrepont-Warren, 2005).

According to Andrepont-Warren (2005), advising is a developmental process which assists students in the clarification of their life/career goals and in the development of educational plans for the realization of these goals. The advisor serves as a facilitator of communication, a coordinator of learning experiences through course and career planning and academic progress review, and an agent of referral to other campus agencies as necessary. Andrepont-Warren (2005), found that advising in Student Support Services has been found to be highly influential in integrating students into college life.

College life is made easier for most academically disadvantaged students through the help of an advisor. At minimum, the advisor should (1) be a specialist in the student's discipline and be familiar with the field's academic requirements and career
opportunities; (2) be knowledgeable about the college's regulations and its resources; (3) know when to make referrals; and (4) have a basic understanding of human behavior and communication. A theme of Student Support Services studies and related advising programs is that the old system of a student and teacher meeting twice a year is no longer adequate for most students and is clearly inadequate for academically advantaged students (Andrepont-Warren, 2005).

Time after time, research studies have recommended that student’s probability for graduation increase with interaction and connection with faculty outside of the classroom. Nilsen (2009) found developmental academic advising is organized around two principles: (1) higher education provides opportunities for people to plan for self fulfilling lives, and (2) teaching includes any experience that contributes to personal growth and can be evaluated. Developmental advising is a rational process built on interaction with others and with the environment. Advising provides a natural context within which to strengthen a student’s link to the campus (Andrepont-Warren, 2005).

Nilsen (2009) found effective advising systems meet the needs of the college's constituencies and further the goals of the institution. The improvement of academic advising may promote students satisfaction with the college experience and encourage them to remain in college long enough to fulfill their educational goals. According to Andrepont-Warren (2005), literature acknowledges that advising has a measurable impact on students and must be recognized by institutions as important. Advising practices are essential to the Student Support Services programs. Concern for the quality of advising
and recognition of the important role it can play in promoting student retention and success emphasize efforts to improve advising (Nilsen, 2009).

According to Nilsen (2009), when a person experiences success or mastery, it will raise both motivation and self-efficacy. Success raises motivation and self-efficacy while failure lowers it. Success has to be experienced on a real challenge in order to influence motivation and self-efficacy. Ryan and Deci’s (2000) self-motivation theory carefully distinguishes between different types of motivation based on the different reasons or goals that give rise to an action. The most significant distinction is between intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation (Nilsen, 2009). Intrinsic motivation is the tendency to engage in tasks because one finds them interesting and enjoyable. Extrinsic motivation is motivation that comes from the outside of an individual. The motivating factors are external rewards such as grades. These rewards provide satisfaction and pleasure that the task may not provide (Nilsen, 2009).

High motivation and self-efficacy lead to increased persistence, satisfaction, and pleasure which will lead to more success. Motivation, self-efficacy, and value-expectancy are the most influencing factors on students-academic performance. If motivation and self-efficacy are increased among students, they are more likely to work harder and persist longer than with low motivation and self-efficacy (Nilsen, 2009).

Nilsen (2009) found students with more intrinsic motivation persist through difficult problems and learn from their mistakes. According to Vansteenkiste, Lens, and Deci (2006), extrinsic motivation is the tendency to engage in tasks because of task unrelated factors such as the expectation of reward or punishment, for example, to pass
the exam or get a good grade. Nilsen (2009) found that intrinsic motivation may influence student behavior in a positive way, because students who are intrinsically motivated to perform a task will usually be more self-regulated; they can work over time and use a repertoire of strategies to manage challenges.

Students who are intrinsically motivated devote considerable time to their studies, spend time on campus, actively participate in student organizations, and interact frequently with faculty. According to Astin (1999), student involvement refers to the quantity and quality of the physical and psychological energy that students invest in the college experience. Such involvement takes many forms, such as absorption in academic work, participation in extracurricular activities, and interaction with faculty and other institutional personnel. The greater the student’s involvement in college, the greater will be the amount of student learning and personal development (Astin, 1999).

The essence of Astin’s (1984) theory is, the greater the students’ involvement in college, the greater will be the amount of student learning and personal development. The effects of involvement are multidimensional. Involvement will not only improve student abilities to persists towards his/her educational goals, but will also intensify the developmental impact of the undergraduate experience on student personality, behavior, career progress, satisfaction, and achievement (Nilsen, 2009). Astin’s (1984) theory supports actively involving students in their educational experience. Through involvement, their talents are developed; they become involved with people and activities at the institution and stay through graduation. In addition, Astin’s (1984) theory of
involvement supports the notion that the student plays an integral role in determining
his/her own degree of involvement.

Student involvement positively affects the educational gains and academic
achievement of students. MacKay and Kuh (1994) used the Community College Student
Experiences questionnaire to determine the effect of college services on student
achievement. They found that not only was the amount of student use of services related
to their overall achievement in school, but that this overall level of student involvement
was actually preferable to traditional predictors. Based on this research study, it was
recommended that various methods that college and university personnel could use may
help improve student achievement in college through student services.

A recommended method that college and university personnel may use to help
improve student success through student services is helping the student with social
adaptation. Social adaptation relates to associating with the campus in a way that
produces a good match of the environment such as the college’s physical features, the
atmosphere, and the composition of the student population for the student. The
institutional setting and services provided play a role in enhancing student achievement.
However, the student must be aware of the campus surroundings and partake of the
services that are made available. According to Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), the
greatest impact on student learning appears to stem from students’ total level of campus
engagement, particularly when academic, interpersonal, and extracurricular involvements
are mutually reinforcing, and relevant to a particular educational outcome. These
educational outcomes include making progress to the degree, grade point average,
number of units taken, understanding academic requirements, making use of resources by using academic services, understanding academic policies, time with advisors, participation in the learning process, attendance, active involvement in class, time spent studying, establishing purpose, and setting goals for career (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005). Developing competence, integrity, and purpose, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward independence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, and establishing identity are stages to describe the development of the college student (Hastings and Grosset, 2007). Self-perception of abilities in college is a factor into student involvement, development, and success. There is a collective agreement that higher self-perceptions of abilities have a greater impact on academic achievement (Bauer and Liang, 2003).

According to the Survey of Entering Student Engagement (2008), the imperative for improving student success encourages community colleges to envision, plan, and implement the bold changes that will lead to far reaching success. This process begins with a focus on the beginning of the student’s college experiences. Achievement at community colleges cannot meaningfully improve when nearly half of all new students leave after only one or two terms. To attain significant educational goals, students must, at a minimum, stay in school. But the real reason colleges must focus on entering students and establish benchmarks is that early success sets the stage for future achievement (SENSE, 2008).

According to Hastings and Grosset (2007), the Community College Survey of Student Engagement utilizes a set of five benchmarks of effective educational practice in
community colleges. The five benchmarks are; (1) active and collaborative learning; (2) student effort; (3) academic challenge; (4) student-faculty interaction; and (5) support for learners. These benchmarks allow member institutions, with missions focused on teaching, learning, and student success, to gauge and monitor their performance in areas that are central to their work. Table 8 provides a description of the five benchmarks used to observe institution performance.

The five benchmarks encompass 38 engagement items from the Community College Survey of Student Engagement survey that reflect many of the most important aspects of the student experience (Community College Survey of Student Engagement, 2008). These institutional practices and student behaviors are some of the most significant contributors to effective teaching, learning, student retention, and student success. Benchmark scores provide a useful way to look at an institution’s data by creating groups of conceptually related items that address key areas of student engagement. These are five areas that have been shown through research to be important in high-quality educational practice. According to the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (2008), benchmark scores allow the college to understand that the results are above the average for participating institutions on one benchmark and below average on the other. Thus the data may be used both to identify relative strengths and to zero in on areas in which the college may need to.

Higher education administrators have paid considerable attention to the retention and persistence of undergraduate students in hopes of reducing the percentage of students who leave college prematurely (Ford-Edwards, 2002). Institutions must work towards
Table 8. Five Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice in Community Colleges.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CCSSE Benchmark</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACTIVE and COLLABORATIVE LEARNING</td>
<td>Students learn more when they are actively involved in their education and have opportunities to think about and apply what they are learning in different settings. Through collaborating with others to solve problems or master challenging content, students develop valuable skills that prepare them to deal with the kinds of situations and problems they will encounter in the workplace, the community, and their personal lives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STUDENT EFFORT</td>
<td>Student’s own behaviors contribute significantly to their learning and the likelihood that they will successfully attain their educational goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACADEMIC CHALLENGE</td>
<td>Challenging intellectual and creative work is central to student learning and collegiate quality. Ten survey items address the nature and amount of assigned academic work, the complexity of cognitive tasks presented to students, and the standards faculty members use to evaluate student performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STUDENT-FACULTY INTERACTION</td>
<td>The more contact students have with their teachers, the more likely they are to learn effectively and persist toward achievement of their educational goals. Through such interactions, faculty members become role models, mentors, and guides for continuous, lifelong learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUPPORT FOR LEARNERS</td>
<td>Students perform better and are more satisfied at colleges that are committed to their success and cultivate positive working and social relationships among different groups on campus.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Community College Survey of Student Engagement (2008).

providing students with a meaningful learning environment, so that these students will become connected to the institution by developing a sense of belonging within the student body. Therefore, every effort must be made to retain students while they are on campus.
Retention refers to an institution’s ability to retain students from one year to another. Since the 1980s, American institutions have experienced a major problem retaining students (Lau, 2003). According to Wade (2006), types of outcome goals that all constituents should expect out of student involvement is retention. A healthy thing happening on campuses now is the creation of retention committees that bring together the fiscal people, who want the bodies because they bring in money; the faculty, who want some continuity with the students rather than having this revolving door situation; and the student personnel people, who are interested in retention because it reflects a culmination of their efforts to an extent. Of all the constituents, students have the greatest to gain from the common goal of retention (Wade, 2006). Retention also affects the future labor market, because students who do not have proper training for the workforce are generally unprepared to meet the expected roles and responsibilities associated with particular vocations. Academically disadvantaged students and their retention have a substantial impact on both institutions of higher education and society in general (Wade, 2006). Specifically, retention affects (a) funding patterns, (b) facilities planning, and (c) academic curricula offered.

According to Astin (1993), there appears to be an association between student satisfaction and retention in college. The strength of these associations and their prevalence across all measures suggest that one promising way to reduce an institution's dropout rate is to focus more attention on student satisfaction as an intermediate outcome. Rust, Dhanatya, Furuto, and Kheitash, (2007) found that through involvement, students become more socially and academically integrated into the college environment, thereby
better ensuring the possibility of success and overall contentment while in college. Involvement not only facilitates persistence in the college environment, but also allows students to become more actively and socially engaged in the institution.

According to Tinto (2006), the actions of the faculty, especially in the classroom, are key to institutional efforts to enhance student retention. Contact with a significant person in an institution of higher education is a crucial factor in a student's decision to remain in college. While faculty, administrators, and student affairs professionals serve as student advocates and play an integral part in student retention and attrition, advisors are typically in the best positions to assist students in making quality academic decisions (Tinto, 2006). The most important factor in predicting a student’s eventual departure from college is absence of sufficient contact with others.

According to Habley (2000), few campuses have created one-stop success centers where students can receive integrated assistance from academic advisement and career development services. Habley (2000) found one critical aspect of developing such training programs and resources is a clear delineation of the necessary content components essential to effective advisor training and development. It is evident that while exemplary practices exist for the development of advisors at many institutions, much remains to be accomplished in order to lift the level of advising effectiveness.

According to Tierney and Hagedorn (2002), a college degree can no longer be considered a luxury, but rather a necessity. There are numerous school-college partnerships seeking to create opportunities and incentives for pre-college students to succeed academically. Important objectives of most programs are the transition from
high school to college, improvement of study habits, increase of general academic readiness, and expansion of academic options. Many programs include careful attention to student guidance, advisement services, and the improvement of curriculum and instructional support services.

A student's success is influenced tremendously by the individual academic ability, characteristics, and involvement with the learning activities in academic institutions (Arbona, 2004). Collaborative experiences in the classroom, as well students’ perceptions that their academic program promotes diversity, tolerance, and respect for differences contribute to the development of student group skills. Students’ in- and out-of class experiences also moderately influence development of their design and analytical skills. Clarity of instruction, collaborative work in courses, and the amount of interaction with, and feedback from, faculty play a part in students’ development of skills. According to Svanum and Bigatti (2009) advisor encouragement of student course engagement and programs designed to enhance course engagement would likely have broad and favorable consequences, including enhanced graduation rates and potentially increased retention rates as these are likely influenced by the degree of student success. Thus, student motivation that translates into more engagement can tangibly improve college success, encourage self-sufficiency, and allow students to exert greater control of their college destiny (Svanum and Bigatti, 2009).

According to the College Student Journal (2007), higher education institutions are struggling to identify programs and services that could help students achieve their educational goals. Svanum and Bigatti (2009) found that college success is demonstrably
influenced by the academic behaviors and campus involvement of students. The level of student academic engagement in course work, such as attending class, reading, and reviewing course material, not only influences course success as measured by grades, but also influences other indices of college success including an increased probability of degree completion, less time to degree completion, and greater grade-measured college success. Institutions continue to seek methods that could be effective in improving students' achievement.

The Two-Year Technical College

The mission of the American community college is to provide access to postsecondary educational programs and services that lead to stronger, more vital communities (Carnevale, 2010). The way individual community colleges achieve this mission may differ considerably. Some colleges emphasize college transfer programs; others emphasize technical education. The mission of offering courses, programs, training, and other educational services, however, is basically the same for all community colleges (Carnevale, 2010).

The American community college arose from several factors; a movement to reorganize higher education for greater efficiency, the nation’s need for skilled workers, and the democratizing of educational opportunity (Harada, 2010). The new junior colleges would then take on the first two years of university instruction, and with rapid growth of industry, business, and commerce caused the community college to become a primary mechanism for extending mass higher educational opportunity.
Venezia, Kirst, and Antonio (2003) found community colleges are unique in mission and function: they provide open access and welcome all who can learn from the instruction they provide. Because community colleges serve as the point of entry for almost half of U.S. undergraduates, particularly for economically disadvantaged students, they play an important role in the high school-to-college-transition (Venezia, Kirst, and Antonio, 2003). The community college can also be a center for problem solving in adult illiteracy, or the education of the disabled. It can be a center for leadership training, too. It can also be the place where education and business leaders meet to talk about the problems of displaced workers. It can bring together agencies to strengthen services for minorities, working women, single parent heads of households, and unwed teenage parents. It can coordinate efforts to provide daycare, transportation, and financial aid. The community college can take the lead in long-range planning for community development. Also, it can serve as a focal point for improving the quality of life in the inner city (Venezia, Kirst, and Antonio, 2003).

Over the past 100 years, the community college system has become a key part of the higher education system, enrolling 5.5 million students in credit courses and employing almost 300,000 faculty members nationwide (Carnevale, 2010). Another 5 million students participate in some kind of noncredit activity at their local community colleges, often related to workforce training.

Because differences in how students are counted, no accurate national data exist on noncredit enrollment. Community colleges play an active role in the short-term training that welfare-to-work individuals need for entering the workforce. In addition,
these schools serve many adults returning for education or training beyond the bachelor’s degree; by some estimates 8 to 12 percent of community college students have a bachelor’s degree or beyond. Community colleges also provide an educational opportunity for individuals who traditionally have not been well-served by the higher education system (Carnevale, 2010).

According to Carnevale (2010), compared to students in four year colleges, students who begin in community colleges tend to be more racially and ethnically diverse. While about 60 percent of four-year college students are 18 years old or younger, only 38 percent of community college students are in that age bracket. While 26 percent of community college students are 24 years old or older, only about 5 percent of four-year college students are that old. Minority students are more likely than non-Hispanic White students to enroll in community colleges rather than four-year schools. While Black students make up 12 percent of the community college student population, they comprise only 8 to 10 percent of four-year college enrollment (American Association of Community Colleges, 2010). Figure 1 shows 1995-1996 enrollment data by race/ethnicity and sector of first institution attended.

According to Phillippe and Patton (2002), the institution of community colleges in the United States strives to make higher education possible for all persons, especially low-income and minority groups. With access to the education of this population, the Community college has a special obligation to educate for citizenship and empowerment. A large percent of America’s minority students enroll in college for the first time in two-year colleges. Minority students now account for more than 40 percent of public
community college enrollment. In addition, more minority students attend community colleges than all other higher education institutions combined.

Regardless of race, economic status, disability, and first generation college student status, the community college helps individuals learn what they need to know to be effective, responsible members of their society. While its place in the history of American higher education maybe assured, the future success of the community college system will depend on how well it adapts to the changing needs of society.

According to Carnevale (2010) the demand for community college education and training in the years ahead will likely increase both for demographic and economic reasons. The post-industrial workforce, with its emphasis on adaptable skills, problem-
solving ability, and technological savvy, will have education and training requirements that match up well with the strengths of the modern community college. Carnevale (2010) has outlined five crucial roles that community colleges will play in the new economy and in the new multicultural America; (1) minimum educational qualification for access to good jobs; (2) stepping stone to bachelor’s and graduate degrees; (3) pivotal education institution in the nation’s job training and retraining system; (4) primary education provider for the least advantaged; and (5) first chance at American higher education for the surging immigrant population.

Engagement in Connection with Academic Support Programs and Best Practices

Academic and extracurricular engagement is critical to positive student outcomes and student benefits. Tait (2000) found student campus engagement as an essential characteristic of academic support programming to meet the needs and goals of multiple learning domains, for example, cognitive (supporting and developing learning); affective (related to the emotions that support learning and success); and, systemic (helping students manage rules and systems of the institution in ways that that support persistence). Wolf-Wendel, Ward, and Kinzie (2009) found engagement is the amount of time and effort students put in educationally purposeful activities. It is also defined as how institutions of higher education allocate their resources and organize learning opportunities and services to encourage students to participate in and benefit from such activities.

Student engagement represents the effort, in time and energy, students commit to educationally purposeful activities as well as the institutional conditions that encourage
students to engage in such practices (Kuh and Vesper, 2001). Academic support and mentoring programs position themselves for positive outcomes when combined with activities that include student engagement. Student engagement has a positive effect on desired academic support program outcomes. In order to achieve this desired effect several community colleges have used the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE, 2003) to assess and enhance student achievement and engagement.

National Survey of Student Engagement results have been used to produce a set of national benchmarks of good educational practice that participating schools are using to estimate the efficacy of their improvement efforts (Kuh and Vesper, 2001). The results from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE, 2003) also allow faculty and staff members to record models of student-faculty interactions. The results reveal the rate of recurrence for student engagement in other educational activities and programs. The 2003 NSSE results may give leaders the tools to directly and indirectly influence and improve student learning.

The purpose of the National Survey for Student Engagement (NSSE, 2008) is to study the quality of the students’ academic experiences in and out of the classroom. The survey allows institutions to understand student perceptions concerning their academic experiences (NSSE, 2008). The Survey of Entering Student Engagement National report (2008) found a growing number of community colleges are intentional about using evidence to make decisions. The National Survey of Student Engagement has over 400 colleges and universities and 500,000 students participating yearly. The single best predictor of how students manage and spend their time devoted to educationally
purposeful activities is the single best predictor of their learning and personal development.

The National Survey of Student Engagement (2008) measures (1) the level of academic challenge; (2) the amount of active and collaborative learning; (3) student-faculty interaction; (4) the types and amount of enriching academic experiences that students have; and (5) support of the campus environment. These measurements aim to research effective educational practices. The survey is prominent and has been tested for reliability and validity. The survey has been stable over time and has high credibility of self reported data. The data offers a well-rounded perspective on student engagement and is considered important to academic support programming’s best practices and effectiveness.

Success in college, in terms of learning and academic achievement, also depends upon students' level of engagement (NSSE 2000, 2003). The National Survey of Student Engagement (2003) results are an indicator of what students devote towards their education. The survey focuses on student participation in active and collaborative learning environments (Astin, 1993). Success also depends on the amount of time students study and utilize college resources (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005). Participation in mentoring and academic support programs may also enhance students’ abilities to perform well socially and academically. Outcomes of college student participation and engagement are based on what students actually do during their academic journey.
Student engagement outcomes and research on college student development shows that the time and energy students devote to educationally purposeful activities is the single best predictor of their learning and personal development (Astin, 1993; Pace, 1980; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991). Institutions that engage their students in a multiplicity of activities better position themselves to be of advanced quality compared to paralleling institutions.

Cruce, Wolniak, Seifert, and Pascarella (2006) found that caring adult advocates who provide specific information and encouragement for college bound students help them to achieve. Students benefit from sharing their personal interests and participating in on and off campus activities together for an enriching experience. Mentoring programs can have as large of an impact as programs that focus solely on academics. Nilsen (2009) found students in such groups and programs support one another’s aspirations, share information, and counter the many forces and obstacles in low-income communities that work against high achievement.

Minorities have benefited from engagement in various campus resources. African American and Hispanic college students achieved and/or persisted at higher levels than their White counterparts as their engagement increased. In addition, recent studies suggest that engagement may be particularly important for minority and academically underprepared first-year college students (Cruce, Wolniak, Seifert, and Pascarella, 2006). Engagement can include participation in diversity workshops, cultural enrichment activities, intramural sports, peer mentoring and academic support programs. Kuh (2007)
found that engagement had compensatory effects for historically underserved and minority students.

Colleges may improve awareness and use of student services for all students regardless of ethnicity, social status, learning capabilities, and academic disadvantages by integrating them into the classroom experience (SENSE, 2008). The use of academic and mentoring programs’ services in the classroom yield positive outcomes by motivating students to graduate. Academic advisors can play an integral role in promoting student success by assisting students in ways that encourage them to engage in the right kinds of activities, inside and outside the classroom (De Sousa, 2005). Graduation is the number one goal for many students that participate in these academic and mentoring programs.

Academic programs noted for being successful and putting their best practices to the test offer strategies that allow participating students to make the most of their academic efforts. Programs that offer an extensive array of services and opportunities simply prepare students for college and enhance student retention and timely graduation. De Sousa (2005) found many of the high performing institutions became successful in promoting student success through a perpetual learning mode focusing on where students are, what they are doing, and where they want to go.

Student engagement and faculty support is critical to the success of academic support and mentoring programs. It is suggested that institutions should demonstrate a shared responsibility for educational quality and student success (Kuh, Kinze, Schuh, and Whitt, 2005). Programs that foster students’ social and academic integration into the institution, through structured learning experiences may result positively in the skills and
behaviors they need to achieve academic success and reach their educational goals (De Sousa, 2005).

In order to demonstrate responsibility for educational quality and student success the utilization of assessment tools and national surveys are considered to be a best practice in academic support programming. The 2008 National Survey of Student Engagement helps institutions review the student holistically and the results assist with academic and programmatic planning (NSSE, 2008). The data collected from the National Survey of Student Engagement helps institutions to identify those facets that are not supportive or parallel to the college and university mission. This contributes to defining poignant best practices. The survey identifies weaknesses and strengths in educational programs. It helps institutions know what to focus on to improve student learning and success.

Nationally Recognized Academic Support Programs and Best Practices

Brigman, Webb, and Campbell, (2007) found significant gains in targeted skill areas for students receiving the Student Success Skills intervention. The Student Success Skills program aims to promote academic, social, and self management skills by providing group counseling experiences and classroom intervention methods. The goal was improved behavior associated with school success and higher student achievement in math and reading as measured by state-mandated standardized tests. Due to the program’s positive results, the procedures and methods have been replicated at other institutions.
The Student Success Skills approach used was built on a set of skills and strategies consistently correlated with positive social skills and academic achievement implemented through classroom guidance lessons followed by group counseling for students who need additional support. According to Brigman, Webb, and Campbell (2007), the Student Success Skill program links motivation, engagement and confidence to improved academic and social outcomes. Academic achievement data from four previous Student Success Skills (SSS) studies were aggregated and examined to determine if there were differentials effects in improved test scores among White, Latino, and Black students (Miranda, Webb, Birgman, and Peluso, 2007).

Student Success Skills approach results showed that posttest scores for the treatment group were significantly higher that the comparison group in math and reading. The program teaches these skills through enrichment and educational activities. All students, regardless of race, creed, or economical status, must have a core set of learning, social, and self-management skills to be successful. White, Latino, and Black students showed similar gains after Student Success Skills participation.

Northwest Vista College in Texas is also among the ranks of noted and successful programs with best practices. The Student Success Seminar requires all first-time college students to enroll in this graded credit course. Faculty members from almost every discipline on campus teach the main course and serve as resources for incoming students; many also maintain an informal mentoring role for years (SENSE, 2008). The mentoring component has also contributed to the program’s success and best practices. Students
connect with faculty members with whom they share a career interest or from whom they can get needed assistance.

The Cuyahoga Community College in Ohio has been successful in providing mentoring and academic support services to their students. Student mentoring has been a determining factor in the program’s positive results. Student ambassadors are trained and become mentors for the program’s students. The ambassadors help their peers discover and use campus resources, make connections on campus, and successfully navigate their way to provide peer-based student services, and in 2008, it expanded as student ambassadors were trained to be mentors to a particular group of scholarship recipients. The college has noted higher retention rates among students who had mentors (SENSE, 2008).

Prairie State College in Illinois designated time for four Black male faculty members (one each from English, communications, sociology, and psychology) to spend time together immersed in the literature on practices that foster academic success for Black male students (SENSE, 2008). The professors also teach a college skills success course geared towards Black male students and their progression through their academic journey. Faculty involvement outside of their normal routines has been a key component in the program’s success. These tactics are useful in generating greater student classroom participation. The instructors promote active listening and help students to actively think about the material that they are learning.

Lane College in Tennessee has been recognized for their academic program’s success and best practices. Fast Lane to Success is a learning community for first-year
college students that began with two linked classes, Effective Learning and a college success course that focused on helping students develop academic and personal skills. The college had a positive response to the program and its offerings. Fast Lane to Success was then expanded to include three levels of writing classes and plans are underway to develop a section that includes a math class. The program had a positive impact on the students and helped them in many aspects of their academic careers. Student surveys indicate that those who participated in Fast Lane to Success were more engaged with their studies, instructors, fellow students, and the college overall than their peers who did not participate (SENSE, 2008).

Florida Community college is also recognized for their academic programs, services, and best practices. Florida Community College in Jacksonville, Florida, created its Toolbox Scholar Project to provide maximum resources to students with developmental needs in mathematics (SENSE, 2008). The project gives college-prep (developmental) mathematics faculty a “toolbox” of support resources for their students, including the use of master’s students for supplemental instruction (both in the classroom and in the student activity center), diagnostic and prescriptive software packages, and tracking systems for student progress (SENSE, 2008). The participating students’ academic progress is reinforced through tutoring and close monitoring by designated faculty members. Tracking students’ progress allows faculty to intervene quickly, either with individual or small-group sessions on topics of concern. Assigning mandatory sessions in the student activity center for all students in the class removes the stigma of seeking tutoring. The program has not only helped the students with their mathematics,
but it has also encouraged them to seek assistance or academic support for those subjects that are most difficult to them. Initial data indicate that students who have been engaged in this project have been more willing to seek assistance in the student activity center in subsequent semesters (SENSE, 2008).

The Meyerhoff Scholars Program at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, also leads in best practices and excellence. The program has been at the forefront of efforts to increase diversity among future leaders in science, engineering, and related fields (Harbowski, Maton, and Greif, 1998). The program’s success is built on the premise that, among like-minded students who work closely together, positive energy is contagious. The Meyerhoff Scholars Program has been acknowledged by the New York Times, National Science Foundation, and other prestigious institutions as a national model. This academic support program has strengthened over the years and now has more than 800 sites at colleges and universities across the nation. By assembling such a high concentration of high-achieving students in a tightly knit learning community, students continually inspire one another to do more and better. The academic program emphasizes a structured learning environment outside of the classroom and offers the encouragement and support needed for its participants to succeed. The College Board’s National Task Force on Minority High Achievement praised the Meyerhoff Scholars Program as an example that could provide broader educational lessons (Harbowski, Maton, and Greif, 1998).

Another nationally recognized academic support program is the Talent Search Program (Eisner, 1992). The program identifies and assists individuals from
disadvantaged backgrounds who have the potential to succeed in higher education. Talent Search offers academic, financial aid, and career counseling to its program participants. The program helps the students set personal goals and helps them to graduate from high school and transition into a postsecondary institution. Three hundred forty-nine Talent Search projects reported serving a total of 307,451 participants, or an average of 8813 participants per project (Eisner, 1992).

Noted for its best practices is the Upward Bound Program (Eisner, 1992). The Upward Bound Program aims to assist in increasing the recruitment and retention rate of students whose chances for success in postsecondary education may have been adversely affected by their socioeconomic backgrounds and/or limited family educational experiences. The program best practices are built upon several themes; encouragement of effective citizenship by cultivating respect for human dignity and individual responsibility; assurance of quality instruction and student advisement; exploration and development of innovative approaches to pre-college services; cultivation of a genuine desire for learning; the stimulation of the spirit of enquiry and the free exchange of ideas; enrichment of the learning environment through the application of computers and other technologies; and provision of unique opportunities for cultural enrichment and personal growth (Eisner, 1992).

Upward Bound Programs aims to become the college preparatory service of choice for first-generation college and limited-income students. The program provides preeminent college preparatory services (Eisner, 1992). Students are given the opportunity to bond, transfer their knowledge to the classroom setting, and increase their
chances to graduate and excel. Proactive quality academic support programs and services help students not only to succeed but to do extremely well in their academic performance and endeavors. The program continually measures outcomes and uses the data to enhance services (Eisner, 1992).

Overall, long-term studies at community colleges across the nation, such as the Community College of Denver, North Seattle Community College, Daytona Beach Community College, and LaGuardia Community College, report that students participating in academic support programs and in learning communities have significantly higher retention, persistence, and graduation rates and higher levels of academic achievement (Tri-County Technical College Quality Enhancement Plan, 2006).

Learning communities can be found within academic support programs. Cross (1998) found that the individual and the environment interact in a continuing dialogue that leads to increased knowledge and new perceptions of experience. The literature in higher education suggests that learning communities realize the positive results on academic achievement and student success (Tri-County Technical College Quality Enhancement Plan, 2006).

Common Best Practices of Academic Support Programs

Developing a quality academic support program requires careful planning, invested individuals, assessment, and effort. Best practice recommendations can be determined by a program’s history and experiences. Best practices of an academic support program have the potential to greatly assist expansion and integration of a higher education institution. Academic support programs may work for many different kinds of
students—White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, rich, poor, older, younger, male, female, well-prepared, or underprepared. Cooper, Healy, and Simpson (1994), found that among programs intended to increase academic achievement, those that provide greater structure, a stronger link to the school day curriculum, well-qualified and well trained staff, and opportunities for one-to-one tutoring seem particularly promising. These inputs can also be considered best practices of an academic support program.

Academic support programs that assist students with communication, interpersonal skills, engagement, academic growth, and critical thinking, provide all-encompassing access to the larger institutional community and its resources for further development. Thorpe (2002) found academic support programming to be central to high quality learning. High quality learning hinges on strategies that permeate institutional change for the best interest of its students. This begins with identification of best practices, and continues with collaborations with inter and intra institutional experts (McCracken, 2004).

Identification of best practices and changes in education should be grounded in knowledge derived from research. Wang, Haertel, and Walberg (1994) capture best practices of what helps students to learn. By analyzing the content of 179 handbook chapters and reviews, compiling 91 research syntheses, and surveying 61 educational researchers, Wang, Haertel, and Walberg (1994) compiled a knowledge base comprised of 11,000 statistical findings that shows consensus on the most significant influences on student learning. The researchers found twenty-eight categories of influence on student learning. The estimates obtained on the effectiveness of various educational strategies
for improving student learning provide a set of considerations for formulating educational
policies and practices as well as a way to identify school improvement priorities (Wang,
Haertel, and Walberg, 1994). The findings reveal an innovative approach to best
practices that emphasize psychological, instructional, and contextual influences.

In order to assess and take an innovative approach to determine best practices, leaders of community colleges are gathering valuable data through focus groups, surveys, and student input, and putting the collected data to use. This willingness to act on fact, rather than on assumptions or wishful thinking, is a critical first step in helping more students thrive (SENSE, 2008). McCracken (2004) found the environment in which post secondary institutions plan and implement instructional programming has grown increasingly complex, requiring the balancing of instructional, administrative, and financial priorities. First-rate academic support programs are successful year after year based on the achievement of their outcomes and implementation of their best practices.

Frequent student-faculty contact in and out of classes is the most important factor in student motivation and involvement (McCracken, 2004). The relationship building that occurs between faculty and students inadvertently helps students to overcome obstacles and provides encouragement. Astin (1993) found that student-student interaction and student-faculty interaction are the two most important sources of influence on growth and development in the undergraduate years.

Group projects in the classroom, student-student interaction is a form of collaborative learning that contributes to the list of academic support program’s best practices. Working with others often increases involvement in learning (McCracken,
Responding and collaborating with other students may develop thinking skills and broaden conceptualization skills. Creating a solid learning community within the academic support programming environment is a customary best practice. In reference to learning communing and collaborative learning as it related to academic support programming, according to Tinto (2002), students in learning communities (1) spent more time together out of class than did students in traditional, unrelated stand-alone classes and they did so in ways which students saw as supportive; (2) became more actively involved in classroom learning, even after class; (3) participation in the learning community seemed to enhance the quality of learning and students perceived themselves as having made significantly greater intellectual gains over the course of the semester than did similar students in comparison classes; (4) persisted at a substantially higher rate than did comparable students in traditional curriculum; and (5) reported an increased sense of responsibility to participate in the learning experience, and an awareness of their responsibility for both their learning and learning of others. Learning communities have a positive influence and can help students to make dramatic gains in confidence and readiness for the traditional college curriculum (Rasmussen and Skinner, 2006).

An additional best practice includes the involvement of passionate and committed persons in leadership positions. Program managers should be champions for mentoring, and extol its benefits. Committed coordinators, counselors, ambassadors, tutors, and advisors should be able to provide clear and consistent information about why their academic support or mentoring program it is needed and recommended. They should also be able to promote the benefits of their program and why the program is effective
and successful. Program managers and staff also need to be accountable; they should set the example by striving to develop positive relationships with staff, mentors and mentees (Sherk, 1999).

A further best practice includes a clear, defined, and implemented mission and vision of the academic support program. The first consideration for an academic program needs to be the formation of a clearly defined vision (Sherk, 1999). The mission, vision, and goals are the foundation of the program. Program managers and other personnel should consider their mission and goals throughout all aspects of their program. The mission and vision capture articulated goals that define academic program and targets. Consistently, emphasizing the program’s mission and goals help participants to feel secure and cared for (Sherk, 1999). Academic programmers and evaluators note that the accomplishment of a vision is a process that requires time and dedication which will hopefully lead to a best practice of the program.

Connecting student to co-curricular learning opportunities is also considered a strong best practice of academic support programs. De Sousa (2005) found another way advisors can promote student success is by encouraging students to participate in complementary learning opportunities outside of the classroom. These learning opportunities include connecting with peer groups before classes start, as well as civic engagement, and service learning. Connecting with peer groups before classes start, civic engagement and service learning are best practices that give programs a boost to help move them from the standard and common routines. An academic support program that
encourages a sense of purpose appeals to participants, program and community partners, and funders.

De Sousa (2005) researched six conditions that contribute to student success and what advisors can do to initiate. These conditions include (1) living the mission which focuses on engagement, and lived educational philosophy; (2) an unshakeable focus on student learning; (3) environment adapted for educational enrichment; (4) clear pathways to student success; (5) improvement-oriented ethos; and (6) shared responsibility for educational quality and student success. These best practices and conditions encourage students to seek out and learn from experiences with different forms of diversity.

De Sousa (2005) found there is considerable evidence that experiencing diversity is associated with many desirable benefits, such as enhancing leadership skills, developing the ability to work with people from different backgrounds, viewing the learning environment positively, and interacting more frequently with peers and with faculty members. Academic and mentoring programs that uphold this philosophy lead the way for placing students on the path to success. The opportunities to learn about self and others create powerful enriching educational experiences (De Sousa, 2005). Diversified educational experiences contribute to developing the student holistically and can be interwoven into the classroom.

Academic programs can only be as successful as the investment made by the students into the program. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) found that because individual effort and involvement are the critical determinants of impact, institutions should focus on the ways they can shape their academic, interpersonal, and extracurricular offerings to
encourage student engagement. Ample evidence shows that learning strategies are related to desired student outcomes, such as persistence and academic achievement (SENSE, 2008). Overall, an academic program that is strategically positioned to provide foundational knowledge, critical thinking skills, and values also yields good practices. Critical thinking is strengthened as students are exposed to multiple, and sometimes conflicting, perspectives on the same issues (Rasmussen and Skinner, 2006). Academic support programs projected to boost academic achievement and offer opportunities for mentoring, networking, and cultural enrichment can also amplify high quality learning (McCracken, 2004).

High quality learning consists of plans and tactics that holistically boost students’ educational development. Yalama and Aydin (2004) reported a combination of strategies that reinforced students' development of skills, intelligences, and abilities, including instructional strategies such as cognitive, affective, meta-cognitive and motivational; and, skills such as informing, advising, and counseling, assessing, enabling and feeding back. It is generally believed that student retention through academic programming increases as equal access to integrated services such as writing/math tutoring, computer skills training, career development and placement, and co-curricular activities are visible, accessible, and responsive via the instructional medium by which a student learns. Getting students started on the right path through the institution to graduation begins with meeting their transition and adjustments needs when they enter (Levitz, Noel, and Richter, 1999).

Programs of all types appear to benefit from consistent structure, active community involvement; extensive training for staff and volunteers, and responsiveness
to participants’ needs and interest (Yalama and Aydin, 2004). The tested and tried practices of academic support programs provide appropriate levels of challenge and support for program participants. They aid in empowering students to lead and become successful throughout their academic journey. Programs that offer mentors, faculty connections, role models, communication, problem solving, conflict management and customer service better position the students for a positive academic outcome.

Role of Assessment in Effective Academic Support Programming

Assessment plays an important role in effective academic support programming. The 2001 No Child Left Behind Act placed even stronger responsibility on states to raise student performance. As a result of these accountability standards, states must now administer standardized tests to measure yearly progress of all students (Educational Act, 2001). Community colleges have begun to undertake the discipline of using standardized tests data to develop an understanding of student experiences (SENSE, 2008). Assessment in higher education is defined as gathering information about how students, staff, and institutions function (Astin, 1993). Increased use of formative assessment or assessment for learning leads to higher quality learning (Black and Jones, 2006). An excellent learning environment can be characterized by three conditions: student involvement, high expectations, and assessment and feedback (Astin, 1999).

Assessment is important to enhance learning and to provide feedback to both teachers and students (Cross, 1999). McCracken (2004) found the environment in which post secondary institutions plan and implement instructional programming has grown increasingly complex. Therefore, academic support program assessments that
concentrate solely on the participant experience, diverse student demographics, student involvement, the impact of technology on learning, implantation, and evolving needs and goals of academic support programming are necessary for ascertaining a documented extracurricular foundation, improved strategies, and award winning outcomes. It is important for support services specialists to analyze existing research to identify best practices in the provision of student support services, and design evaluation studies to assess effectiveness of district programs and services (Connecticut State Board of Education, 1998).

Assessments may be used to make better use of education data. Conducting good assessment studies and using them to influence policy and practice may well determine the future of student affairs. Institutions should take advantage of what is already implemented and put into practice and formalize the process by employing an assessment process. Cartwright, Weiner, and Streamer-Veneruso (2009) found one of the great advantages of assessment is that when done in a systematic way, it has benefits for people throughout the institution, from our students to the faculty to the administration.

Tinto (2006), suggests the strategic use of data on program impact can be employed to validate the claim that resources committed to the program is in fact an investment that generates benefits to the institution that outweigh the costs of the program. However, students are the main beneficiaries of the assessment process. Table 9 displays benefits from outcomes assessment.
Table 9. Benefits from Outcomes Assessment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GROUP IMPACTED</th>
<th>ASSESSMENT WILL:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Students       | • Communicate clear expectations about what’s important in a course or program;  
                  • Inform them that they will be evaluated in a consistent and transparent way;  
                  • Reassure them that there is common core content across all sections of a course;  
                  • Allow them to make better decisions about programs based on outcomes results. |
| Faculty        | • Help them determine what's working and what's not working in their courses or programs;  
                  • Facilitate valuable interdisciplinary and intercampus discussions;  
                  • Provide powerful evidence to justify needed resources to maintain or improve programs;  
                  • Allow them to tell their story to individuals outside their area (e.g. administrators, politicians, employers, prospective students, transfer institutions);  
                  • Provide reassurance that all faculty teaching a particular high demand course agree to address certain core content. |
| Administrators | • Provide valuable data to support requests for funds from state and local government and private donors;  
                  • Demonstrate accountability to funding sources;  
                  • Provide valuable data for academic planning and decision-making;  
                  • Enable them to inform elected officials, local businesses, and potential donors about the college's impact on our students and our community in a very compelling and convincing way and demonstrate an institutional commitment to continually improving the academic programs and services offered by the college. |

Source: Tinto (2006)

According to Gosling and Moon (2002), the primary purpose of assessment is to enable students to develop and demonstrate their potential. Gosling and Moon (2002) suggest that it is important that assessment tasks are devised to link the level and wording of the outcomes. One important aspect of this is to find the right words to define exactly
what students should do (it is important to share the meaning of the words with students as well). Drawn from Bloom’s Taxonomy, Table 10 displays the vocabulary suggested by Gosling and Moon.

The outcomes of higher education assessments should be used to evaluate the effectiveness of academic programs and activities, and student services. Cartwright, Weiner, and Streamer-Veneruso (2009) found assessment should be as simple and manageable as possible. The process cannot become so onerous that it hampers or interferes with the delivery of the educational experience that it attempts to assess and improve. The process should be constant and consistent. Assessments cannot be episodic; in essence, it must become an academic habit.

Table 10. Gosling and Moon’s Words for Student Oriented Outcomes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OUTCOMES/ASSESSMENT TASKS</th>
<th>DESCRIPTORS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>describe, recall, define, state, recognize, name, list, underline, reproduce, measure, write, label, identify, acquire, record</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding Comprehension</td>
<td>draw, interpolate, extrapolate, predict, have insight into, translate, give examples of…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application</td>
<td>show, demonstrate, perform, use, relate, develop, transfer, infer, construct, translate, illustrate, experiment, refine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td>identify, detect, distinguish, separate, compare, categorize, investigate, seek out, explore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synthesis</td>
<td>combine, restate, summarize, précis, generalize, conclude, derive, organize, design, deduce, classify, formulate, propose, visualize, solve, realize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>judge, decide, argue, choose, recommend, critically analyze, select, defend, assess, self assess, hypothesize, review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills</td>
<td>communicate, present, work in team, debate, collaborate, negotiate, reflect on, assess, resolve, plan, perform</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Gosling and Moon (2002).
According to Astin (1993), educational assessments should provide some understanding of causal connections between practice and outcomes of education. According to Daugherty (2009), assessment is a method for faculty to collect feedback on how well students are learning. The purpose of assessment is to provide faculty and students with information and insights needed to improve student learning, teaching strategies, and curriculum. Table 11 shows the steps for improving student learning through assessment practices.

Assessment places the responsibility for learning directly on the student. Daugherty (2009) found that assessment opens a dialogue between faculty and student on the teaching/learning process. Faculty members provide continuous feedback to students to help students improve their learning strategies and study habits so that they can become more independent, successful learners. Assessment procedures in colleges and universities parallel with the importance of creating a culture in which institutional effectiveness and student learning are vastly esteemed by higher education and stakeholders.

Creating a culture in which institutional effectiveness and student learning are central, Martinez and Klopott (2002) made recommendations for quality evaluations as a component for new efforts towards student programming. Martinez and Klopott (2002) found significant data regarding the success rates of pre-college programs for low-income and minority students, and concluded that without this type of data, program effectiveness cannot be documented. In support of Martinez and Klopott, Gullat and
Table 11. Continuous Improvements for Student Learning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IMPROVEMENT STEPS</th>
<th>ACTION PLAN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>STEP ONE: PLAN</td>
<td>Identify intended learning outcomes and benchmarks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEP TWO: APPROACHES</td>
<td>Identify (APPROACHES) to measure selected program and general education outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEP THREE: DATA</td>
<td>Gather (DATA) exhibits, presentations, projects, presentations, portfolios, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEP FOUR: SHARE</td>
<td>Review and discuss data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEP FIVE: CLOSE THE LOOP</td>
<td>Make changes-teaching strategies/curriculum</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Jan (2002) suggested that institutions conduct well-designed evaluations that link reform practices or outreach initiatives to indicators of college preparedness.

According to Martinez and Klopott (2002), assessments should be designed to collect data on the program of study and the assessment instrument should compare the success rates of students who complete the program to a similar group of students who did not complete the program. Assessments should also collect data on college graduation rates and outreach programs designed to help students enter and succeed in college. Institutions should continue to collect data on the number of students that go through the program and graduate from college. These evaluations should compare the success rates of students who complete the program to a similar group of students who did not complete the program (Gullat and Jan, 2002; Martinez and Klopott, 2002).
The interaction between students, faculty, and academic support program coordinators offer a way to share best practices. According to Cartwright, Weiner, and Streamer-Veneruso (2009), institutions of higher education across the country, and internationally, have recognized that a full commitment to teaching and learning must include assessing and documenting what and how much students are learning and using this information to improve the educational experiences being offered.

According to Cartwright, Weiner, and Streamer-Veneruso (2009), many other strategies are available for conducting assessments. Student needs may also be evaluated by using needs assessment instruments or focus groups to determine whether the programs and services offered match what students need. Questions that are asked for an appropriate assessment are: are we providing services that no one needs; are there services that we do not provide that we should; was the program of value to participants; and how might it be improved? Student satisfaction may be assessed to determine whether students perceive that a program has met its goals (Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, 1991).

Astin (1993) recognized the role that assessment plays in effective academic support programming. In order to assist research endeavors of educational assessment, Astin (1993) cultivated the Input-Environment-Outcome (I-E-O) model. This framework was used as a prototype for developing assessment and evaluation activities in the traditional classroom setting. The Input-Environment-Outcome concept has been used as a prevalent apparatus to steer assessment exercises. According to Guerrazzi (2002), the input-environment-outcome (I-E-O) model was originally developed to produce results that may be of use to educational policy.
Efficient and organized assessments are now a requirement for accreditation by all higher education accrediting organizations (Cartwright, Weiner, and Streamer-Veneruso, 2009). The Input-Environment-Outcome (I-E-O) paradigm provides a compelling structure for the design of assessment procedures. Since educational practitioners must select from a wide array of activities in serving students, the I-E-O model can be used as an aid to educational decision-making by providing information on the likely impact of alternative environmental variables (Guerrazzi, 2002).

According to Daugherty (2009), the Assessment for Student Learning handbook provides a framework for continuous improvement of student learning and a commitment to program excellence. Learning outcomes are observable and are performed by the student; curriculum alignment provides the opportunity for students to achieve these outcomes because the curriculum is driven by intended learning outcomes and assessment evidence; learning opportunities are consistent and contribute to student learning; successful program completion provides students with the requisite skills and abilities described in the general education goals and are clear enough to be understood by our stakeholders; and faculty provide students with multiple integrated learning opportunities to assure that students will be able to do outside the classroom in context with what they have learned through their learning experiences (Daugherty, 2009). The assessment of student learning begins with educational values (Daugherty, 2009). Assessment is not an end in itself but a vehicle for educational improvement. Its effective practice, then, begins with and enacts a vision of the kinds of learning we most value for students and strive to help them achieve. It incorporates up-to-date thinking on
assessment design and reflects recent changes in policies, approval, and review. Table 12 shows nine principles to underpin assessment across all programs.

Table 12. Assessment Principles and Purposes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment will be reliable and each program will include a variety of assessment types</th>
<th>Do the results reflect the student’s performance? Would a repeat of the assessment produce a similar result/performance?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information about assessment will be explicit and accessible</td>
<td>Do all involved (students, examiners, employers) understand the assessment purposes and processes? Do students receive clear detailed briefs?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment will be inclusive and equitable</td>
<td>Are assessment methods, materials and examination processes fair regardless of gender, race, disability, age, class, wealth and sexuality?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment will be relevant to the program aims and outcomes</td>
<td>Have assignments been designed to reflect the broader aims of the program (these in turn will reflect the subject benchmark and the SEEC generic skills)? Are assessment criteria appropriate to the level of study?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The amount of assessed work required will be manageable</td>
<td>Can the work be done in the time available and within existing constraints (facilities, numbers etc.)? Are students over-assessed? Is the workload for staff achievable while maintaining standards?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formative and summative assessment will be included</td>
<td>Are both types of assessment included in the module? Is formative assessment designed and timed so that it helps students to improve their summative assessments?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback will be an integral part of the assessment process</td>
<td>Is feedback precise and detailed enough to guide future learning? Is the language used positive and constructive?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Gosling and Moon (2002).
The power of assessment is the importance it gives to closing the loop (Cartwright, Weiner, and Streamer-Veneruso, 2009). The evaluation results should be used to enhance the program, curriculum, or the core that is being assessed. Cartwright, Weiner, and Streamer-Veneruso found (2009) that it is vital that the discipline discuss the results and use them to celebrate and build on its strengths and to discuss and remediate its weaknesses. Failing to conduct and implement an assessment process damages a program’s capability to produce essential data for improvement and the chance to receive funding and resources that is essential to program institutionalization (Tinto, 2006).

Evaluation allows for a systematic assessment of program strengths and limitations in order to improve the service delivery process and outcomes (Tinto, 2006). Linking program process or performance with participant outcomes helps staff to evaluate progress and modify the program as appropriate. Discovering what works, however, does not solve the problem of program effectiveness. Once models and best practices are identified, practitioners are faced with the challenge of implementing programs properly (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2004). A poorly implemented program positions itself for misfortune and program failure. Proper implementation is essential.

According to Martinez (2005), well-run organizations and effective programs are those that can demonstrate the achievement of results. Results are derived from good management. Good management is based on good decision making. Good decision making depends on good information. Good information requires good data and careful analysis of the data. These are all critical elements of evaluation. Cartwright, Weiner,
and Streamer-Veneruso (2009), found a successful student learning outcomes assessment project requires the participation of many people throughout the college. Students who know what is expected of them, in terms of their learning, have a framework for learning and are more successful. Assessment allows us to systematically examine the alignment between student learning, instructional or institutional expectations, and instructional activities. The role of assessment is as significant as the academic program itself. Effective academic support programming rests on the foundation of quality assessment measures.

Summary

This chapter included a review of the literature as it pertains to the purpose of the study which was to explore the role of Student Support Services (SSS) in encouraging student involvement and its impact on academic achievement in three technical colleges in upstate South Carolina. Resources are cited that expound on the populations served by Student Support Services, the impact that student involvement has on retention, populations served by SSS, the community college, nationally recognized academic programs and their best practices, common best practices of successful academic support programs, student engagement as it relates to best practices, the role that assessment plays in effective academic support programming, and Astin’s theory of student involvement, the theoretical framework by which this research study is guided.
CHAPTER III  

METHODOLOGY  

Focus Group Research Design  

This study explored the role of Student Support Services (SSS) in encouraging student involvement and its impact on academic achievement in three technical colleges in upstate South Carolina. Studying the role of Student Support Services in encouraging student involvement and its impact on student perceptions and academic experiences may be explored through several methods of research including phone interviews, observations, participant questionnaires, or face-to-face interviews. However, for the purposes of this research study, focus groups were used as a process of collecting qualitative data. A focus group is defined as a group of interacting individuals having some common interest or characteristics, brought together by a moderator (Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990). This method of data collection can provide detailed information concerning student perceptions, feelings, and attitudes towards their academic experiences. The facilitator can use the dialogue of the members as a means to gain information about student programs and outcomes.

Strategic planning, needs assessment, and program evaluation are critical processes for improving programs and services (Kruegar, 1994). Palomba and Banta (1999) found focus groups provide an excellent opportunity to listen to the voices of students, explore issues in depth, and obtain insights that might not occur without the discussion they provide. Focus group data are collected by asking students directly about their collegiate experiences, satisfaction with their coursework, school, self-assessments
of improvement in their academic abilities, and educational and employment plans (Chun, 2002).

Kuh and Andreas (1991) found unlike quantitative research, which yields numbers that categorize student behaviors, qualitative research yields words as data that capture students’ experiences. The data collected through focus groups should be taken at face value and not altered. Grounded in the daily experiences of college students, qualitative research is particularly powerful because it represents an active interface between the investigator(s) and participant(s) (Kuh and Andreas, 1991). Through the various qualitative methods and processes of inquiry, researchers learn how individuals construct and assign meaning within the context of the phenomenon under study.

The implementation of a focus group series has conditions that must be met before the participants assemble. According to Dean (1998), the conditions are that focus groups are held with a small group of people, usually no more than twelve; second, a number of focus group meetings are held concerning a certain subject in an attempt to establish trends and general opinions as well as to ensure that an unresponsive group does not jeopardize the study; third, participants must be similar enough to each other to feel comfortable sharing information with the group, but unfamiliar enough to ensure that knowledge of opinions is not assumed within the group but is shared; fourth, focus groups are used to collect information, usually for research purposes, and specifically are used to collect qualitative data; finally, focus groups, as the name implies, usually concern a specific topic and require a subtle but very structured direction provided by the interviewer. Interactions between the moderator and participants allow the moderator to
probe issues in depth, address new issues as they arise, and to request contributors to elaborate on their responses. In order to launch rich conversations and dialogues, the investigator must determine if they prefer to use rewards and incentives to attract the students. Incentives can be anything that draws or encourages participation, such as extra-credit, free food, or monetary rewards (Krueger, 1994).

The data collected through focus groups requires a qualitative analysis. Therefore, an important part of analyzing focus group data is to have a good understanding of the notes taken (Kruegar, 1994). An acceptable qualitative analysis of the data is significant for a clear interpretation of the data collected and the results that it yields. As it relates to this study, qualitative measurements include motivation, self-concept, self-esteem, learning styles, and other factors not examined on traditional, standardized intelligence and achievement tests (Kruegar, 1994). Hence, it is critical that researchers have a clear understanding of the notes taken when analyzing focus group data.

**Population and Sample**

The 100 subjects used in this study were Associate in Science (AS) and Associate in Arts (AA) students who were enrolled and participated in the 2008-2009 academic year Student Support Program (SSS) in three technical colleges of upstate South Carolina. Student Support Services was defined as an academic support program that provides opportunities for academic development, assists college students with basic college requirements, and serves to motivate students toward the successful completion
of their postsecondary education. Each of the three upstate South Carolina SSS programs serve approximately 175 students to help them achieve their academic goals.

Students participating in the Student Support Services program are required to meet all program conditions and prerequisites. Since the purpose of this study was to determine what contributes to the best practices and effectiveness of the Student Support Services Program in three technical colleges in the upstate of South Carolina, focus groups were conducted at each institution to capture and collect student perceptions data from only those students who consented to participate in the research study.

Research Environment

Piedmont Technical College is located in Greenwood, South Carolina. The institution serves seven surrounding counties (Abbeville, Edgefield, Laurens, McCormick, Newberry, and Saluda) with over 5,000 students enrolled in 81 academic programs. The technical college offers transfer opportunities to over 40 colleges and universities throughout the state of South Carolina. Piedmont Technical College has served a host site for the Student Support Services Program for more than 25 years and is part of the statewide system of 16 technical colleges.

Greenville Technical College is located in upstate South Carolina between Charlotte, North Carolina, and Atlanta, Georgia. The institution originated in the 1960s and now serves over 14,000 academic students. Greenville Technical College hosts the only University Transfer Honors program at a two-year college in South Carolina. The institution offers campus apartments for residential life. Greenville Technical College
has been a host site for the Student Support Services for over 25 years and is part of the statewide system of 16 technical colleges.

Tri-County Technical College is located in northwestern South Carolina, in the town of Pendleton. The institution is positioned at the foot of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Established in 1962, Tri-County offers more than 70 degree programs. Tri-County Technical College is surrounded by a rural area and serves Anderson, Oconee, and Pickens counties. The technical college serves over 10,000 students through continuing education and academic programs. Tri-County Technical College has served a host site for the Student Support Services Program for more than 30 years and is part of the statewide system of 16 technical colleges.

**Description of Research Procedure**

The Student Support Services program participant data were collected from each of the three technical college institutions of upstate South Carolina through focus group session. One-hundred active Student Support Services program participants participated. A total of 5 focus group meetings were conducted. The data collected was based on the number of willing student participants in surveys and focus groups.

Permission to conduct the study and focus groups was granted by the senior staff and/or personnel at each of the three participating technical colleges of upstate South Carolina (Appendix B). Each focus group was digitally recorded, with consent of participation by each student. Consent forms were signed by each of the research study participants (Appendix C). Exemption was also received from the Clemson University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the proposed activities involving human
participants (Appendix D). Additionally, each digital recording was transcribed professionally to a database format. The transcriptions were coded for consistent major themes related to student involvement, academic achievement, positive student experiences, and program satisfaction.

Focus groups may also be classified in three different purposeful categories. Fern (2001) found that exploratory groups for creating, collecting, identifying, discovering, explaining and generating thought feelings and behaviors; experiential groups for sharing common life experiences of the group; and clinical groups used particularly in marketing to uncover individual's motives and biases. Dissecting the groups into these categories makes qualitative data collected more purpose driven

Data Analysis

The research study used a qualitative thematic analysis. A thematic analysis approach included the formation and application of codes to data collected from video footage, policy and procedure documents, interview transcripts, and field notes (Gibson, 2006). Coding is the process of creating categories within data. It groups together different instances of datum under an umbrella term that can enable them to be regarded as of the same type. There is a clear link between this type of analysis and Grounded Theory. Grounded theory is a systematic qualitative research methodology in the social sciences emphasizing generation of theory from data in the process of conducting research. The main data points are noted with a sequence of codes which are removed from the transcript. The codes are grouped into similar concepts in order to make them
more workable. These concepts produce categories which are then projects the foundation for the creation of a theme.

A digital audiotape recording was used during each of the focus group sessions. After each focus group, the tapes were transcribed according to tape-based analysis. A tape-based analysis involves the researcher listening carefully to the tape and preparing an abridged transcript (Andrepont-Warren, 2005). According to Krueger (1994) this transcript includes descriptive summary statements that are based on raw data followed by illustrative examples of raw data and provides typical or illuminating quotes. Recording and transcribing the sessions, allows the researcher to listen and re-listen to the tape recording as well as reading and rereading the transcription. This helped to ensure that responses were not overlooked or misunderstood.

The focus group data were coded and analyzed manually using a Microsoft (Excel) database. There can be value in creating links between, people’s attitudes or beliefs, and comparing opposing cases can be a very effective way of throwing things into relief (Miles, 1994). Participant views and feelings concerning the overall role of Student Support Services during their academic journey, in involvement, program satisfaction, and academic achievement were examined by defining common themes in the documented transcripts prepared from the interviews. When all data had been processed, they were used to respond to the research questions of the study.

Pike (1995) found that the survey and focus group responses and self-reports are likely to be valid under five general conditions: (1) when the information requested is known to the respondents; (2) the questions are phrased clearly and unambiguously; (3)
the questions refer to recent activities; (4) the respondents think the questions merit a serious and thoughtful response; and (5) answering the questions does not threaten, embarrass, or violate the privacy of the respondent or encourage the respondent to respond in socially undesirable ways. The questions used in the focus group questions were purposefully created to satisfy all these conditions.

In order to verify inter-rater reliability and homogeneity, the data were coded and rated by three additional volunteer raters. This helped to determine if a particular scale was appropriate for measuring a particular variable. The raters agreed that the focus group coding scale was effective. The results from the focus groups may be determined as diagnostic and help institutions look holistically at the student’s program experience. The information may help pinpoint aspects of the program not in line with the current program mission. The data may identify strengths and weaknesses of the Student Support Services and assist in determining measures are that needed to improve student learning and overall program success.

**Internal Validity**

Potential threats to internal validity in this study were extraneous variables such as focus group participation anxiety, inability of participants to provide honest feedback, and program coordinator bias. The accuracy of self-reports can be affected by two general problems: the inability of respondents to provide accurate information in response to a question (Wentland and Smith, 1993); and a possible unwillingness on the part of respondents to provide truthful information (Aaker, Kumar, and Day, 1998). Focus group participation, student surveys, and self-reports are prone to the halo effect.
Pike (1995) found that there is a possibility that students may slightly inflate certain aspects of their behavior or performance, such as grades, the amount they gain from attending college, and the level of effort they put forth in certain activities. To the extent this halo effect exists, it appears to be relatively constant across different types of students and schools. The absolute value of what students report may differ somewhat from what they actually do, the effect is consistent across schools and students so that the halo effect does not appear to advantage or disadvantage one institution or student group compared with another (Pike, 1995).

**Limitations of the Study**

The study was limited in that the research was not longitudinal. The role of Student Support Services and its impact on student involvement, perceptions, and overall academic achievement were assessed for the 2008-2009 academic year only. Therefore, pre-post activity and data were not documented. The study evaluated the program inputs, facilities, and participants of three public two-year institutions of South Carolina’s Technical College system rather than collecting data from several institutional types which could include 4-year institutions both public and private. The research environment was limited to technical college characteristics and the distinct populations they serve as opposed to the characteristics of 4-year colleges and universities at which students have an option to live on campus. Specific aspects of student engagement can be obtained from this study due to the community college/two-year technical college structure.
The results of this research study were also limited to the qualitative data collected in the focus group sessions provided by research participants. Information collected from focus groups was based on student participant experiences only. Also, the qualitative information collected in the study was of a self-report nature which, depending on the subject areas being queried, may be prone to some inaccuracy. Additionally, the focus group data may also be prone to the halo effect. Focus group participants may have drawn incorrect conclusions as it related to the session questions, purpose of the study, and their academic experiences based on cognitive aspects rather than evidence.

Furthermore, the thematic analysis process had the potential to be incoherent due to interpretivism. Interpretivism means that researchers are interpretive in their actions and in their understanding of the actions of others; that they impose meaning on the world; that they inhabit cultural worlds and engage in cultural practices that are defined by shared interpretations; they do not operate as isolated individuals in their interpretive actions, but share with groups of people, certain interpretations (Gibson, 2006). This is not to suggest that thematic analysis is destined to failure, but merely to point to one of the dilemmas that researchers inevitably face while dealing with data using this approach relief (Miles, 1994).

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the role of Student Support Services (SSS) in encouraging student involvement and its impact on academic achievement in three technical colleges in upstate South Carolina. Focus group sessions were used as a
process of collecting qualitative data from participants concerning student involvement inside and outside of the classroom, collegial experiences, academic achievement, and overall satisfaction with SSS. Kuh, Schuh, and Whitt (1991) found institutional factors such as culture, climate, norms, beliefs, and mission can be codified using qualitative methods. These factors are suitable for researching college programs. The focus group sessions also allowed program participant reflection for possible SSS program improvements. Qualitative research allocates merit to the experience, point-of view, and story of the focus group participants.

The current research study used focus groups that were made up of SSS program participants from three distinct technical colleges of upstate South Carolina. This type of research functioned to create interaction between the researcher and participants with a specific purpose for the researcher to discover facets of the members’ experiences. The qualitative research conducted aimed to uncover parallel and thematic views among the SSS participants in order to explore the role of Student Support Services (SSS) in encouraging student involvement and its impact on academic achievement.
CHAPTER IV
RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to explore the role of Student Support Services (SSS) in encouraging student involvement and its impact on student perceptions and academic experiences in three technical colleges in upstate South Carolina. In this qualitative study, the variables associated with the role of SSS in student involvement ask the research question in relation to Alexander Astin’s (1984) involvement theory: What is the impact of the Student Support Services program on student involvement, student perceptions, academic experiences according to 2008-2009 Student Support Services program participants in three technical colleges of upstate South Carolina?

The Sample

The 100 subjects participating in this research study were Associate in Science (AS) and Associate in Arts (AA) students who were enrolled and participated in the 2008-2009 academic year Student Support Program in three technical colleges of upstate South Carolina. Student Support Services was defined as an academic support program that provides opportunities for academic development, assists college students with basic college requirements, and serves to motivate students toward the successful completion of their postsecondary education. The program helps approximately 175 qualified students per semester who are enrolled in one of the three technical colleges of the upstate. Focus groups were conducted at each institution to record detailed student perceptions at face value. The focus group sessions provided data as it related to
feelings, student perceptions, and attitudes towards their academic experiences. Thus, a thematic analysis was conducted. Reported data provided evidence to support Astin’s (1984) student involvement theory and Tinto’s (1975) student retention model as it also relates to academic and social integration.

**Thematic Analysis**

Themes emerged from the data and were not imposed upon by the researcher. Themes are defined as units derived from patterns such as conversation topics, vocabulary, recurring activities, meanings, feelings, or folk sayings and proverbs (Taylor and Bogdan, 1989). The consistency of student responses came together in a consequential way when linked together and created themes in the data. Themes are identified by bringing together components or fragments of ideas or experiences, which are often meaningless when viewed alone (Leininger, 1985). This research study has themes that emerged from the program participants’ experiences, self-reports, perceptions that are tied together to shape an all-inclusive depiction of their shared experiences.

The first themes that emerged from the qualitative data and connected evidence to support Astin’s (1984) student involvement theory and Tinto’s (1975) student retention model as it also relates to academic and social integration, were the appreciation and satisfaction with information dissemination. Students stated that the SSS program and its coordinators provide necessary information to them that will assist in navigating through the semester. Students felt that their academic abilities and chances of success were heightened because of this. Students collectively stated that the counselors impacted them on an individual level by talking with them about orientation processes, providing
them with a Student Support Services hand-book, and supplying them with book costs, curriculum cut-off dates, campus workshops, and other needed academic information. The Student Support Services counselors and coordinators provides information on additional resources, funding for class needs, strategies for success, and on-campus trainings related to career development, including and professional development activities. Through the staff involved with the Student Support Services, participants were made aware of activities first-hand and face-to-face. This increased their probability in partaking in the opportunities offered.

Student Support Services Counselors are a program strength and a main reason for student academic success. Participants stated that the counselors and tutors are the program’s strength because they keep track of student grades and progress in class. The counselors and tutors also help with communication with instructors. Counselors are said to help with personal problems and issues as well as academic obstacles. Program participants conveyed their gratitude toward their Student Support Services counselors because they felt like these particular adults genuinely cared about them. The Student Support Services program counselors have a real interest in their family and personal lives as well as their academic journey. Students reported that their Student Support Services counselor encouraged them to do their best and not to give up. The counselors made them feel empowered. The counselors have an open door for questions at any time. Students collectively stated that the counselors help them to stay on track if their focus was off track. They reported being closer to their Student Support Services counselor than their own family members. Students stated that they would highly recommend their
Student Support Services counselor to other students in need of direction. Student Support Services counselors understand the challenges of the academically disadvantaged populations and the impact that is status has on the lives of students.

The second theme supporting the Tinto’s (1975) student retention model that surfaced was the appreciation and pleasure with the provision of resources and being a part of a family like atmosphere. Students collectively reported that they were at ease in study groups and in class because the Student Support Services program felt like a family environment. The participation in informal study groups allowed the students to get to know one another and share personal information. The groups met once or twice a week. The students met more often in preparation for test or major exams. The different peer support and study groups promoted learning and also served as a sounding-board for program participants. Additionally, the family-like peer to peer study groups provided a discussion forum for students. The sessions supported the dissemination of program information concerning dead-lines, campus events, exams dates, and other opportunities. The students basically described their experiences as if they are participating in a formal learning community.

The provision of resources through counseling was a major component for participant productivity and success. The counselor provides personal advice to the participants and offers counseling sessions that extend beyond the average advising on majors, courses, and curriculum requirements sessions. The students stated that the counselors were more than willing to meet with them several times in one week. The Student Support Services counselors also tracked homework, quiz, test, projects, and
research paper results. The students collectively stated that this helps to keep them on track and encourages them to perform using their best abilities. The counselors consult with faculty regarding student learning needs. The Student Support Counselors orient the participants on the variety of technology resources, media, science materials and support instruments for student learning.

The third theme that emerged from the data analysis was the appreciation of workshops offered through the program. This also offers evidence to support Astin’s (1984) student involvement theory and Tinto’s (1975) student retention model as it also relates to academic and social integration. Students collectively felt they might not have otherwise been exposed to these topics and experience if they were not connected to Student Support Services. One student claimed that before joining the Student Support Services program, he had not traveled outside of South Carolina. The workshops support student learning and gave the participants exposure to various comprehensive programs that provided them with a range of enriching activities. Activities included diversity workshops and travel to various art centers for multi-cultural and multi-ethnicity exposure to develop the necessary skills for inclusion and inclusion awareness. Several of these workshops closely associated with the participating institutions’ mission to foster a climate that encourages the inclusion of all cultures into a unified, multi-dimensional campus. Largely, the workshops offered exercises and applications that promoted developmental, social, academic, and recreational opportunities for the program participants, all of which play a major role in supporting Astin’s involvement theory.
Finally, the most central theme that transpired from the thematic data analysis and closely linked supporting evidence to Astin’s (1984) student involvement theory and Tinto’s (1975) student retention model as it also relates to academic and social integration was program satisfaction. Many theories on college retention recognize the significance of student satisfaction as a positive factor in students’ persistence (Borden, 1995). Program participants identified various aspects of their programmatic and educational experience that are associated with their overall satisfaction. Program participants stated that they do not have any suggestions for program effectiveness. Participants stated that the program has a family-like feel and no changes were needed.

Participants stated that the Student Support Services Program helped them assess their strengths and opportunities for improvement with respect to their future career and success by helping them to set goals, determine a major, and prepare for graduation. Students also reported to have increased confidence as a result of taking an active part in activities, workshops, and frequent meetings with tutors, study groups, and counselors. Participants stated that resources, such as the counselors providing correct information on campus policies and procedures, counselor availability, Student Support Services handbook, CD-ROMs, computer labs, study groups, book funding, and laptops are the program’s greatest strength. These program inputs also helped several of the new students to make a smooth transition into college-life. Students reported having a solid plan for their career path.

Overall, students collectively stated that their confidence levels, study habits, appreciation for diversity, and grade point averages had improved. Results showed
satisfaction with program inputs, resources, student attitude and motivation. Students reported improvement in their communication skills, ability to handle problems, and productivity in group assignments. In addition, students reported being in a better academic position for transferring into a 4-year institution. These features of the student perceptions and their academic experiences are most closely related to high levels of satisfaction that have been noted to improve student learning. The thematic analysis also showed evidence to support Astin’s (1984) student involvement theory and Tinto’s (1975) student retention model. Themes of involvement and academic and social integration were interwoven throughout the thematic analysis results.

Focus Group Data Tables

The ultimate goal of the Student Support Services Program is to improve the academic skills of participating students in order to enhance their retention, academic achievement, and graduation rates. Therefore, research focus group participants were asked to respond to questions that rate program effectiveness. Table 13 reveals 12 dependent variables examined, which capture the SSS role in student involvement. During the focus group sessions, participants were asked 6 questions that best captured qualitative responses for student involvement. These six close-ended questions yielded the most thematic responses out of all variables listed in Table 13 related evidence to support Astin’s (1984) student involvement theory and Tinto’s (1975) student retention model. The 6 questions asked were: (1) are you familiar with the Student Support Services’ program goals and objectives (2) do you feel that the program goals and objectives have been met; (3) do you meet with your SSS counselor; (4) did you
Table 13. Dependent Variables Examined.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable I. Interaction with Student Support Services Counselor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Variable II. Phone and web advising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variable III. Assessment of individual strengths as it relates to participant future and career success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variable IV. Participation in all or several of program workshops/activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variable V. Equip participants with skills to enhance academic performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variable VI. Impact of peer to peer mentoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variable VII. Reported program strengths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variable VIII. Participation in Student Support Services program evaluations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variable IX. Available software in Student Support Services lab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variable X. Impact of software in Student Support Services lab on learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variable XI. Participant familiarity with goals and objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variable XII. Academic needs met through services</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

participate in phone advising, web advising, group advising; (5) has the SSS program equipped you with the skills and tools necessary to enhance your academic performance; (6) do you participate in SSS program evaluations; Figure 2 shows the response distribution of students participating in SSS program evaluations and their motivation for participation. Ninety-two percent of the students in the research study participated in SSS program evaluations. More than 50% willingly participated because they felt it would be helpful for the program while 22% of the participants considered it as a
Figure 2. Students Participating in SSS Program Evaluations Response Distribution.

requirement. The remaining students were satisfied with completing the SSS evaluation as they collectively agreed that the survey was not long and tedious.

Apart from some anecdotal evidence, and the occasional feedback offered to advisors from the individual, there is no consistent record of advisor and student perceptions of the value of Student Support Services (Andrepont-Warren, 2005). If quality services programs are provided, the data collected from assessments and longitudinal studies may be used to measure the program and institutional quality and effectiveness which may also aid in an increase of students accomplishing their educational goals.

Based on the focus group participant responses, participation in meeting with the Student Support Services counselor consistently, participation in phone, web, and group advising, participation in the program workshops, career fairs, cultural activities and seminars, participation in program assessments, and participation in the Student Support
Services computer labs were considered best practices. Students stated that their Student Support Services counselor was their first point of contact that informed them of important dates, helped them get connected with group and one on one tutoring sessions, alerted them when test, quizzes and homework grades were slipping, informed them of campus events, assisted in scheduling classes, and made referrals for personal issues or family-life problems. The students appreciated the support of these counselors because when faced with trouble or adverse circumstances, the Student Support Services counselor simply connected the student to institutional and community resources, expedited referrals, and facilitated communication between parties on behalf of the program participant. Table 14 shows the major topics and important information that SSS counselors discuss with program participants five or more times throughout the academic year.

The remaining variables provided additional evidence to support Astin’s (1984) student involvement theory concerning peer to peer leadership, first generation college student status, workshops attended, and etc. These variables also target student involvement and campus engagement. Table 15 shows the remaining qualitative variables and its point of reference to focus group questions.

Although one of the institution’s participants met with their counselors more than the other two institutions in this research study, there was not a statistically significant difference found between the institutions.

Table 16 shows the two key focus group questions of the research study. The first question in Table 16 addresses student involvement in meetings with counselors, participation in phone, web, and group advising. The second question in Table 16
Table 14. Information SSS Counselors Discuss With Program Participants Five or More Times.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Discussed Five or More Times</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SELECTING COURSES and SETTING GOALS</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLANNING A SCHEDULE</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRANSFER CREDIT and POLICIES</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADVANCED PLACEMENT</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAREER ALTERNATIVE</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROBATION and DISMISSAL</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POLICIES</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FINANCIAL AID</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTHER CAMPUS OFFICES THAT CAN PROVIDE ASSISTANCE</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STUDY SKILLS OR TIPS</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEGREE OR MAJOR CONCENTRATION</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PERSONAL CONCERNS OR PROBLEMS</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TALKING ABOUT OR</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EVALUATING ACADEMIC PROGRESS</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PURPOSES OF A COLLEGE EDUCATION</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DECLARING OR CHANGING MAJOR/CONCENTRATION</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TIME MANAGEMENT</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 15. Remaining Qualitative Variables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualitative Variable</th>
<th>Focus Group Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The most helpful SSS workshop attended</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of peer to peer mentoring in participant program experience</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First generation college student and college transition</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plans to transfer into a 4-year institution</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rate overall program experience</td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoyment of being a program participant</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program barriers and weaknesses</td>
<td>G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggestions for improved technology and resources</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ways computer lab and resources used</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Types of available software</td>
<td>J</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ways SSS program can potentially gain more recognition</td>
<td>K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ways computer lab and resources have impacted participant learning</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ways academic needs have been met</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes needed in regards to program effectiveness</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
addresses involvement in the program workshops, career fairs, cultural activities and seminars, participation in program assessments, and participation in the Student Support Services computer labs. These questions captured responses from the focus group participants who had indicated familiarity with the Student Support Services program goals and objectives earlier in the session. These participants were aware of the program’s outcomes and history.

The research study focus group sessions yielded similar results using qualitative methodology and thematic analysis. Thematic patterns and congruent relationships and were found within the student responses at all three institutions which were hyperlinked and summarized. Table 17 summarizes participant responses to focus Group Question A: What has been the most helpful activity/workshop that you have attended provided by Student Support Services and why? Several participants reported having more than one most helpful workshop. The type of workshops and activities that were reported to be the most useful were the career fairs/interviewing skills workshops. The diversity and plagiarism workshops had the least amount of participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you feel that the Student Support Services’ program goals and objectives have been met?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How often do you meet with your SSS counselor? (per month)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you participate in phone advising, web advising, group advising?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you participated/completed all of the activities that the SSS program recommended or expected?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 16. Student Support Services Program Goals and Objectives Familiarity.
Table 17. Most Helpful Workshops.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity/Workshop Type</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
<th>Selected Responses/Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Career Workshop</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>88% of the participants favored the career workshops the most. The career fairs and interview skills workshops were said to be the most helpful because they offered many networking opportunities, helped in deciding majors, and assisted with resume writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Support Services Orientation</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>83% of the participants reported the Student Support Services orientation helped familiarize them with all the campus resources that are available outside of the program, reviewed program expectations, made participants feel at ease about their college transition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dinner/Broadway Play</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>83% of the participants favored the dinner and or play because it offered great socializing opportunities, and chances to get to know other program participants outside of the classroom. Overall it was reported to be a refreshing experience. Participants appreciated the exposure to the arts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress Relief Workshop</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>71% of the participants reported enjoying this workshop because the information obtained in the session may be used at school and at home. The information is also said to be really helpful during exams.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test Preparation Workshops</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>68% of the participants favored the test preparation workshops because these workshops help them not to be nervous during exams. The workshops also offered tips on how to study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Skills Workshop</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>52% of the participants found the college skills workshop the useful because they feel that they can use the information throughout the college journey. The workshop also helped them to define their learning styles and familiarized them with several</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plagiarism Workshop</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>51% of the participants reported the plagiarism workshops to be useful because the information obtained helped participants with their English, Sociology, and Psychology papers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity Workshops</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>44% of the participants favored the diversity workshops because they helped them to get to know others. Several participants felt that the workshops were fun and appreciate the emphasis that is placed on increasing diversity awareness in the classroom and the workplace.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 18 summarizes participant responses to focus Group Question B: *What changes could be made in technology in the SSS program which would allow you to benefit more from the program's services?*

The majority of the participants reported that the program does not need any changes made to the technology provided by the Student Support Services program. Increasing the number of CD-ROMs had the least amount of reports. Figure 3 shows the different ways the students use computers in the SSS labs.

Table 19 summarizes participant responses to focus Group Question C: What role has peer to peer mentoring or peer to peer leadership played in your Student Services experience, if at all? There were 98 out of 100 respondents that reported having a positive peer to peer mentoring experience. There were 2 focus group participants with no response.

Table 18. Participant Suggestions for Changes to the Student Support Services Program.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suggested Program Changes</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
<th>Responses/Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Suggestions for Change</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Participant responses included statements such as “I don’t think any changes need to be made with the technology”, “the program’s technology is awesome”, and I would not change anything”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to Take Academic Software Home</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Participants stated that preparing and reviewing assignments would be easier if they were permitted to take the software with them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Updated Software in SSS Lab</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Participants stated that the software provided by Student Support Services needs to match the book editions used in the classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase the Number of Academic CDs (CD-ROM)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Participants felt that the number of CD-ROMs available could be increased.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 19. Role of Peer-to-Peer Mentoring.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Responses/Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Effective/Positive</td>
<td>98% of the participants reported having a positive peer to peer mentoring experience. Participants reported being a part of a “family-like” environment. Participants stated that peer to peer mentoring reinforces the study habits learned and helps when reviewing for a test. Participants reported having a “good”, “fun” and “positive” experience.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One of the large populations that the SSS program serves is first generation college students. As it has been noted in the literature review, first generational college students are unfamiliar with the expectations of college. This is sometimes an obstacle
that will cause them to limit their potential and refrain from considering transferring into a four-year institution. Tables 20 and 21 and Figure 4 summarize participant responses to focus Group Question D: *Are you a first generational college student? If so, in what ways has the SSS program helped you to transition into college life?* Figure 4 also reiterates the number of SSS first-generation college students that may be influenced to transfer into a four-year institution due to increased confidence, higher grade point averages, a better understanding of college-life and expectations after program participation.

Table 20. First Generation College Student Status.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Responses/Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Generation</td>
<td>88% of Student Support Services Participants reported being a first generation college student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not First Generation</td>
<td>12% of the focus group participants stated that they were not first college generation students. Therefore, either their parent or sibling attended college before them.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 21. College Transition Assistance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Responses/Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Program Helped Transition</td>
<td>100% of the focus group participants reported having had a smooth college transition due to the aid of the Student Support Services Program. Participants stated that the program helped them to understand the hurdles of college-life, and provided financial assistance. Participants who stated that they were financially challenged received funding for books and class materials through the Student Support Services Program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Didn’t Help Transition</td>
<td>None of the participants stated that the Student Support Services program did not help them with their college transition.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The majority of the Student Support Services focus group participants are first generation college students. All focus group participants stated that the Student Support Services assisted them with their college transition through counseling, orientation, and/or financial support.

Tables 22 and 23 summarize participant responses to focus Group Question E: *Are you planning to transfer into a 4-year institution? If so, how has the SSS program prepared you for this transition?*

Participants stated that the Student Support Services program prepared them for the 4-year college transition because they have better grades/GPA, and an opportunity that would not have had otherwise. Participants reported counselor helped with plans for the future/career. Participants claim to be focused and on track. Participants stated that
Table 22. College Transfer Plans.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plans and Transition</th>
<th>Responses/Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, Plans To Transfer Into a 4-Year Institution</td>
<td>50% of the SSS participants reported having plans to transfer into a 4-year college or university.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, Plans To Transfer Into 4-Year Institution</td>
<td>35% of the SSS participants reported having no plans to transfer into a 4-year institution because of family-life or satisfaction with 2-year degree and job placement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence To Transfer</td>
<td>91% of the SSS participants reported feeling confident and motivated to obtain a 4-year degree.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure/ Plans Not Finalized</td>
<td>15% of the SSS participants reported having uncertain plans to transfer into a 4-year institution. Participants reported being unsure due to family-life, or career. Participants stated that it is too early in their program of study to tell if they will pursue a 4-year degree or not.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 23. How Program Helped with Potential Transfer into a 4-Year Institution.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preparation/Program Prepared For Transition</th>
<th>Responses/Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GRADES</td>
<td>30% stated that the program helped them achieve better grades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COUNSELORS</td>
<td>28% appreciate the counselors’ efforts in helping them plan their future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOCUSED</td>
<td>25% feel they have become more focused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OPPORTUNITY</td>
<td>15% are thankful for the opportunity (to go to college) that they were given by the SSS program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WORKSHOPS</td>
<td>2% feel the workshops helped with skills, confidence, and exposure to the 4-year setting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the workshops provided assistance for transition as well. Table 23 shows how the SSS program helped students potentially planning to transfer into a 4-year institution.

Over half of Student Support Services focus group participants reported having plans to transfer into a 4-year institution. All of the responding participants who are planning to transfer into a 4-year institution stated that the Student Support Services program prepared them for a 4-year college or university transition.

Table 24 summarizes participant responses to focus Group Question F: Do you enjoy being a participant in the SSS program? What has been your experience? The table also shows evidence to support Astin’s (1984) student involvement theory and Tinto’s (1975) student retention model as it also relates to academic and social integration.

100% of the participants reported having a positive and enjoyable Student Support Services program experience. None of the participants reported having a negative or none-enjoyable experience. Participants were satisfied with program’s assistance and structure. In addition, Figure 5 shows the overall satisfaction and impact of the SSS program based on student responses. Borden (1995) found a strong relationship between satisfaction and persistence. Students with high levels of satisfaction in their freshman year were more likely to persist in college.

Table 25 summarizes participant responses to focus Group Question G: What are the program's strengths? Several participants stated that the program has more than one strength.
Table 24. Participant Experience.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Responses/Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, Positive Experience</td>
<td>100% of the participants stated that their grades reflected their positive program experience. Participants reported that the Student Support Services program has encouraged them to take college more seriously. Participants stated that they did not have anything negative to say about the program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, Negative Experience</td>
<td>There were no participants who reported having a negative Student Support Services experience. Participant stated that the program has made a difference in their life. Students reported being glad to participate in the program.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5. Overall Satisfaction and Impact of SSS Program.
Table 25. Program Strengths.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Responses/Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Counselors and Tutors</td>
<td>Participants stated that the counselors and tutors are the program’s strength because they keep track of student grades and progress in class. The counselors and tutors also help with communication with instructors. Counselors are said to help with personal problems and issues as well as academic obstacles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshops and Activities</td>
<td>Participants stated that the workshops, plays, stress relief seminars, orientation, dinners, and career fairs are the program’s strengths. The activities and workshops are a bonding factor. Participants stated that the activities allow the students to get to know one another outside of class. The workshops and activities also allowed them to learn outside of the classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Program</td>
<td>Participants felt that the overall program, structure is the program’s strength. Students reported that the program is organized and popular among minority students. Students stated that the program’s structure is the reason why they are successful. The program requirements help to maintain order and keep them on track.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>Participants stated that the resources such as the Student Support Services handbook, CD-ROMs, computer labs, study groups, book funding, and laptops are the program’s greatest strength.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attracts Academically Disadvantaged Students</td>
<td>Participants stated that the program’s ability to attract at-risk students is a strength. Students stated that the program caters to students who might not have had a chance to attend college otherwise.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The SSS program strengths were reported to be counselors, tutors, workshops and activities, resources, overall program organization and the programs ability to attract at-risk students. Focus group participants stated that the program’s workshops and activities are a strength of the program. The career, study skills, professional development workshops, and dinner and plays in Atlanta were the activities and workshops that were highly favored.
Table 26 summarizes participant responses to focus Group Question H: *Describe how this program has helped you to assess individual strengths and opportunities for improvement with respect to your future and career success?* The table reveals evidence to support Astin’s (1984) student involvement theory and Tinto’s (1975) student retention model.

All Student Support Services focus group participants reported to have had help with their assessment of individual strengths and opportunities for improvement with respect to their future careers and success.

Table 27 summarizes participant responses to focus Group Question I: *Are there any program barriers that you encountered? Program weaknesses?* The suggestions given by participants were not seen as program barriers, but more as points of improvements that may be useful while implementing or reconstructing the SSS program in the future.

Table 26. Help for Individuals Strength’s Assessment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Responses/Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helped With Positive Impact</td>
<td>100% Participants stated that the SSS Program helped them to assess their strengths and opportunities for improvement with respect to their future career and success by helping them to set goals, determine a major, and prepare for graduation Students also reported to have increased confidence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Help</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Eighty-two percent (82%) of the Student Support Services focus group participants stated that they did not encounter any program barriers or weaknesses. Eighty-two percent of the focus group participants are satisfied with the program and its inputs. Figure 6 shows the suggestions for strengthening the program reported by students. The figure also captures participant recommendations to focus Group Question J:  *What changes would you like to see made in regards to program effectiveness* (see Table 28)?
Figure 6. Suggestions for Strengthening Program.

Table 28. Changes for Program Effectiveness.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Changes For Program Effectiveness</th>
<th>Responses/Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Suggestions</td>
<td>32% of the program participants stated that they do not have any suggestions for program effectiveness. Participants stated that the program has a “family-like feel” and no changes are needed. Participants are satisfied with program’s assistance and structure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase Space for Programming</td>
<td>52% of the participants reported the need for larger programming spaces. Several students suggested designating a building on campus to house the Student Support Services program only. Participants stated that the tutorial spaces can become cramped at times, and many of the one on one sessions can be overheard due to small spaces.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 28. Changes for Program Effectiveness (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Changes For Program Effectiveness</th>
<th>Responses/Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increase Loaner Laptops</td>
<td>17% of the participants stated that the program could benefit from increasing the number of laptops that the program provides for students on a check-out/return system. Participants stated that the waiting time for a laptop can be an inconvenience at times.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase Evening Lab Hours</td>
<td>17% of the participants reported that longer lab hours are needed for the evening students. Many of the labs close before 9 pm. Evening student participants stated that it would be convenient if the lab were open after their last evening class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase Counselors and Tutors</td>
<td>4% of the participants suggested that the program increase the number of counselors for program effectiveness. The counselors have established strong relationships with the program participants however a number of students are assigned to one counselor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase Dinners/Plays/Cultural Exchange Activities</td>
<td>4% of the program participants stated that they would like to attend more dinners and plays. Students reported that the dinners and cultural exchange activities exposed them to views of the arts that they might not have otherwise been exposed to.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thirty-two percent of the focus group participants had no suggestions for program effectiveness. Fifty-two percent of the participants suggested that space needs to be increased for programming. Seventeen percent of the focus group participants suggested the program extend the Student Support Services lab hours for evening students. Seventeen percent of the participants suggested that the program increase the number of laptops available. Four percent of the participants suggested that the program increase the number of counselors and tutors for program effectiveness. Four percent of the participants suggested that the program offer more activities such as plays, dinners, and cultural exchange opportunities.
Table 29 summarizes participant responses to focus Group Question K: *Are you more motivated, engaged and/or better cooperative learners?* In addition the table also shows evidence to support Astin’s (1984) student involvement theory and Tinto’s (1975) student retention model. One-hundred percent of the focus group participants stated that they are more motivated, engaged, and better cooperative learners since participation in the Student Support Services program.

Table 30 summarizes participant responses in to focus Group Question L: *How could the SSS programs in South Carolina's upstate technical colleges gain more funding and recognition based on its performance, outputs, and success of its students?*

Fifty-three percent of the program participants suggested that the program be marketed to more high school students, minorities, and those students on campus who are unaware of the program’s services. Thirty-two percent of the participants suggested that students and counselors present program outcomes, testimonials, and graduation rates at conferences in order to gain recognition and funding.

Table 29. Motivation and Cooperative Learners.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivation, Engaged, Cooperative Learners</th>
<th>Responses/Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>100% of participants reported being more motivated, engaged, confident, and a better cooperative learner since participating in the Student Support Services Program. Students reported having a higher GPA, more confident in class, established a communication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>There were no participants who stated that that they were not more motivated, engaged, or cooperative learners.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 30. South Carolina’s Student Support Service Program Performance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methods To Gain Recognition</th>
<th>Responses/Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marketing Materials</td>
<td>53% of the participants suggested that the Student Support Services program cater to more high school students, minorities, and those unaware of the program on campus. Suggestions included, creating more brochures, collaboration with various academic programs, and promoting testimonials.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conference Presentations</td>
<td>32% of the participants suggested that students and counselors present program outcomes, testimonials, graduation and retention rates at conferences in order to gain recognition and funding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase Number of Counselors</td>
<td>10% of the participants suggested the program increase the number of counselors in the program in order to serve more students effectively.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration with Other South Carolina SSS Programs</td>
<td>5% of the participants suggested that the Student Support Services programs collaborate with other SSS programs to learn more strategies for success and programming ideas.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ten percent of the focus group participants suggested that the program increase the number of counselors in the program in order to serve more students effectively. Five percent of the focus group participants suggested that the program collaborate with other Student Support Services programs to share best practices, strategies, and programming ideas in order to gain more recognition and funding opportunities.

Given the analysis results related the role of Student Support Services (SSS) in encouraging student involvement and its impact on student perceptions and academic experiences in three technical colleges in upstate South Carolina; phone, group, web advising, workshops, career fairs, seminars and cultural events were all reported to have an impact on student involvement, student perceptions and academic experiences.
Students receive high-quality tutoring and are also offered the chance to participate in various activities such as the arts, small business enterprise, career development, diversity education, nutrition, stress relief, and college skills 101 class. These activities have also contributed to improving students’ academic experience based on student self-reports. Figure 7 depicts the top seven aspects that the Student Support Services program participants appreciated the most.

In addition to the most appreciated aspects of the program, participants stated that the Student Support Services program overall provided educational support and an opportunity for them to achieve their fullest potential. Students reported that the program helped them in becoming more accountable for their studies, more confident and

![Figure 7. Most Appreciated Aspects of SSS Program by Participants.](image-url)
effective learners. The Student Support Services counselors provided the students with assistance for books and laptops, tutorial resources, advice, connection to faculty outside of class. The students reported that the tutoring sessions, study buddies, and study groups were also beneficial. Peer-to-peer mentoring, goal setting, tracking grades, and determining learning styles were additional major factors for academic achievement as reported by students. Figure 8 shows the overall respondent distribution of program impact. Forty-one percent of the students reported that their grades and confidence had improved due to involvement in the SSS program. Fifteen percent stated that they were positively impacted by the program due to the counselors and counseling services, 20% attributed their success and program impact to the tutoring services, 15% stated that they were impacted by the program because of the resources provided by the program, and 12% felt that it is the overall program structure and inputs that caused their positive impact and success.

Finally, with respect to program consistency, all three institutions are equally satisfying the Student Support Services participants’ expectations in regards to the program’s goals and objectives. Table 31 shows the 10 major services and activities provided by all three Student Support Services program in upstate South Carolina.

**Summary**

The focus groups were conducted to gain information regarding participant perceptions and yielded parallel and thematic results. The data provided evidence to support Astin’s (1984) student involvement theory and Tinto’s (1975) student retention model as it also relates to academic and social integration. The thematic analysis of the
Table 31. Major Services and Activities Provided by Three SSS Programs in Upstate South Carolina.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SERVICE</th>
<th>ACTIVITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COUNSELING</td>
<td>Contact is made at least twice per month to assess the students’ academic progress, the existence of personal problems, attitudes and personal adjustments, need for community referrals, and other areas of difficulty in which the SSS information, testing and interpretation: provide access to FOCUS and KUDER. Assist transfers participants to obtain admission/financial aid assistance at the 4-year institution; assist students in scheduling job shadowing opportunities with area businesses and industries.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 31. Major Services and Activities Provided by Three SSS Programs in Upstate South Carolina (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SERVICE</th>
<th>ACTIVITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TUTORING</td>
<td>Tutoring is provided to any eligible participant when recommended by their subject-area instructor. The program offers tutoring in any subject. The tutoring program uses both peer and professional tutors in individual or small group settings. The Tutor Coordinator recruits, hires, supervises, assigns, and evaluates tutors. Department Heads are encourages to recommend their nest second year students to be tutors in their curricula area. In some math and science courses, graduate students from a near-by university are used. All tutors attend a tutor training retreat before the beginning of each semester. The SSS tutorial component is certified through the College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA). The Tutor Coordinator spearheads the training that includes informing and updating tutors on new initiatives best practices for working with students with disabilities, underprepared students from diverse backgrounds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXPOSURE TO CULTURAL EVENTS</td>
<td>Program staff encourages eligible participants to participate in cultural activities throughout the school year. At least six events are scheduled.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUPPLEMENTAL INSTRUCTION</td>
<td>Supplemental instruction is provided is provided for traditionally difficult academic courses, those that have a high percentage of D’s, F’s and W’s. The goals of supplemental instruction are to improve student performance in course content, reduce repeat enrollments and help students develop active learning strategies and study skills that enable them to become better students. Participants who have completed developmental courses are registered for College Algebra, Algebra, Trigonometry, Biology, and Chemistry. The Supplemental Instruction Leaders attend class take notes, and conduct three to four study sessions per week.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 31. Major Services and Activities Provided by Three SSS Programs in Upstate South Carolina (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SERVICE</th>
<th>ACTIVITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>COLLEGE CAREER FAIR</strong></td>
<td>The SSS program sponsors a College and Career Fair during the spring semester. University transfer participants are exposed to colleges in Southeastern states. Many participants work at least 20-30 hours per week and it is difficult for them to attend the college tours that are planned throughout the year. It allows all participants to meet with admissions counselors and apply on-site to institutions and in many cases receive a fee waiver for the application fee. Area Human Resource personnel from local businesses and industries are present to recruit potential employees. SSS conducts resume and job interview skills workshops leading up to the fair so that students can be prepared for potential questions that may be asked by the representatives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ORIENTATION</strong></td>
<td>Orientation is held for new and returning students at the beginning of each semester in order to reiterate program requirements, update them on new initiatives and meet with their counselors. Faculty and staff are also invited to inform them of new practices and maintain a good working relationship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MENTORING</strong></td>
<td>A mentoring orientation is held during the fall semester to introduce new SSS participants/first-year students to their mentor (who is a second-year SSS participant or faculty/staff member). Mentor and mentee are encouraged to meet at least three times during the semester to build a rapport and allow the mentor to provide the emotional support needed for the student to make a smooth transition to college and gain knowledge on how to be a successful student. Students are paired by major.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>JOB-SHADOWING OPPORTUNITIES</strong></td>
<td>Area businesses serve as job shadowing sites for program participants. Counselors schedule appointments for students to gain knowledge for their chosen profession.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3. Major Services and Activities Provided by Three SSS Programs in Upstate South Carolina (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SERVICE</th>
<th>ACTIVITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LAPTOP LOAN PROGRAM</td>
<td>SSS program provides laptops for students who do not have computers at home. Many are low-income, part-time students who also work and cannot stay at school to use the computer labs. Students are able to check-out laptops a week at a time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRANT AID AWARD</td>
<td>SSS program allocates $10,000 to assist first-generation and low-income students with the purchase of books and supplies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data collected for this study indicated responses to the primary research questions as: the role of Student Support Services (SSS) in encouraging student involvement had an impact on student perceptions and academic experiences in three technical colleges in upstate South Carolina.

This chapter included a presentation of qualitative findings for the research question. Findings were addressed for each focus group question and illustrated in table and graphic form. Chapter V will include a discussion of the findings and make recommendations for practice and additional research.
CHAPTER V
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

College life offers students the opportunity to learn and grow from all types of experiences. These experiences may impact the stimulation of growth for the post secondary student physically, cognitively, and socially. College students must overcome the challenges and factors that place them at risk for educational failure, including being a first generation college student, of an economically disadvantaged status, linguistic and ethnic differences, disabilities, and/or academic unpreparedness.

Defeating these odds requires a collaborative approach to service delivery that includes involvement, use of campus resources, learning experiences that encourage and accommodate individual student needs, life skills, and effective Student Support Services Programs. The principle function of the Student Support Services program is to enhance the students' opportunities for developmental involvement in their educational experience. Student Support Services serves as a collaborative model for service delivery. The structure of this program helps program coordinators to recognize academically disadvantaged students and their risks of academic and social failure.

Student Support Services provides needed assistance to academically disadvantaged populations. The program plays an fundamental role in improving student achievement by providing connecting activities that promote involvement, identifying student learning abilities and styles, exposing the students to cultural enrichment through workshops, musical plays, study groups, tutorial sessions, dinners, health seminars, career fairs, and helping program participants to better establish communicable relationships.
with faculty and other staff members. These are all factors that impact the college experience and academic achievement.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore the role of Student Support Services (SSS) in encouraging student involvement and its impact on student perceptions and academic achievement in three technical colleges in upstate South Carolina. Student Support Services had a significant role in encouraging student involvement and had a positive impact on student perceptions and academic experiences. The information obtained from the study also yielded supporting evidence for participants’ overall collegial experience and retention.

This research study attempted to understand the degree to which current practices in the Student Support Services program link to Alexander Astin’s theory of student involvement through focus group sessions. The research study aimed to illuminate the perceptions of program participants regarding their collegial experiences, program satisfaction, and how the program has guided them through their academic journey, while measuring the extent to which the services impacted their levels of involvement inside and outside of the classroom.

**Discussion**

Addressed in this section are the research results as they relate to the question of study.
The research question will be reiterated and the results will be discussed for each focus group question as it relates to involvement, participation, participant perceptions, participant experiences, academic achievement and significant results.

Research Question:

What is the impact of the Student Support Services program on student involvement, student perceptions, and academic experiences according to 2008-2009 Student Support Services program participants in three technical colleges of upstate South Carolina?

Additional Questions:

1. What Student Support Services program practices appear most important in determining involvement, student perceptions, and academic experiences?

2. According to the 2008-2009 Student Support Services program participants, what are the perceptions of program’s overall impact and best practices?

Summary of Major Findings

The subjects used in this study were 100 active participants of the Student Support Services programs enrolled one of three technical colleges of upstate South Carolina. Focus group data indicated that active participation in the Student Support Services program did positively impact students’ collegial experience, academic achievement, and motivation to stay in school. The study was designed to explore the role of the SSS program in student involvement and its impact on student perceptions and academic experiences.
Involvement:

What is the role of the Student Support Services program in connection to student involvement and its impact on student perceptions and academic experiences according to 2008-2009 Student Support Services program participants in three technical colleges of upstate South Carolina.

The information obtained by analyzing the focus group discussions suggested that one of the keys to having the Student Support Services program meet the needs of its students and achieve program objectives is high participation in meeting consistently with the Student Support Services counselor, participation in phone, web, and group advising, participation in all of the program activities and workshops, participation in program assessments, and use of the computer labs.

The results of this study parallel with Astin’s (1984) theory that states that the more students learn, the more they are involved in both the academic and social aspects of the academic experience. Students agreed or strongly agreed with focus group questions that were centered on the program meeting its goals and objectives. Student Support Services program coordinators and directors translate concepts into program activities that promote participant involvement. The program offers activities and assistance designed to respond to the needs to the academically populations that they currently serve. Students collectively reported that the program offered activities that they could immediately benefit from, such as workshops that focused on how to prepare for an exam, stress relief, nutrition, resume writing, career choices, program orientation and diversity awareness. The Student Support Services program coordinators ensure that the activities offered increase student participation and involvement, enhance study and
learning skills, and promote student academic success. The more students participated in the program and its inputs, the more likely they were to report that the Student Support Services met its program objectives, which may also be noted as the program’s best practices.

Student Perceptions:

What is the role of the Student Support Services program in connection to student involvement and its impact on student perceptions and academic experiences according to 2008-2009 Student Support Services program participants in three technical colleges of upstate South Carolina.

Largely, students reported that they have a positive perception of the Student Support Services program in respect to program’s role and effectiveness. Students collectively reported that the program provided services and opportunities to develop leadership skills and responsibility. The program encouraged participation and leadership in other campus activities and student organizations. Students stated that the program provided opportunities for networking with others with similar interests.

The diversity workshops were also appreciated by the students. Students reported the program offered opportunities to develop an understanding and appreciation of other cultures through National Coalition Building Institute (NCBI) workshops, controversial issues seminars, and other related multicultural trainings. Students reported that they had a clearer grasp of how they could become more involved on their campus, how to plan to further their education, and felt the experience had positively impacted their confidence and academic journey. In general, the research participants reported enjoying being a
Student Support Services participant and felt that the program helped to meet all of their academic needs through the services provided.

**Academic Experience:**

*What is the role of the Student Support Services program in connection to student involvement and its impact on student perceptions and academic experiences according to 2008-2009 Student Support Services program participants in three technical colleges of upstate South Carolina.*

One of the primary responsibilities of the Student Support Services program is to foster academic experiences. The program meets this goal by supporting diverse learning styles and providing high-quality instructional activities, tutorial resources, and addressing study habits. The program provides an environment that gives students the skills, opportunities, and encouragement that participants need for academic achievement. Students not only reported gaining a better understanding of class content and assignments, but also reported understanding the relationship of academics to the world of work, life at home, and in the community through participation in the Student Support Services program. Based on focus group results, students felt they had learned more about their career of interest, diversity, study skills, and college life in general. The Student Support Services program has helped in improving participant class attendance and classroom grades as well.

College is a time for embarking on an intellectual path and new experiences and for some, it may be a time filled with unanswered questions, ambiguity, and fear. Students reported benefiting from participation in the Student Support Services program because the program helped them to overcome their fears about college and feel more
connected to the campus. Participants reported that understanding college life was most important to their success and program satisfaction.

The Student Support Services program orientation and handbook helped students to feel at ease about entering college, finding their classrooms, meeting their instructors, completing the financial aid packet, and transferring into a 4-year institution. Students reported, because they were comfortable with the expectations of college, they invested more time in their classroom studies as well as campus life. Student Support Services program counselors, coordinators, and directors encouraged participants to get involved in campus life during the orientation program. Students felt that they were exposed to new experiences and people which will made their college life more fun and rewarding.

Research in higher education has shown a strong correlation between high student involvement in campus life and academic success (Astin 1984). Students, who participate in an academic club, volunteer service, or intramural sports, have the opportunity to meet other like-minded students. This helps them to immediately become comfortable with the college life atmosphere. According to the focus group data, the Student Support Services program exposed the participants to opportunities in leadership, teamwork, supervision, time management, civility and understanding and appreciating diversity. All of these topics were reported to enrich the academic experience. from "http://www.articlesbase.com/education-articles/the-importance-of-campus-life-for-college-students-1541853.html"

Overall, participants reported enjoying being a part of the Student Support Services program and felt that the program helps to meet all of their academic needs.
Program Barriers

When asked about program barriers or weaknesses, students collectively reported on physicality issues that were beyond their control. The students felt that the program could benefit from having larger tutoring spaces, or an entire building for programming. Several students reported that the program could benefit from offering more loaner laptops and access to take CD-ROM programs that correspond to their class assignments home. The students appreciate the software provided by the program, and reported that the software helped their quiz grades improved; however, the software has restrictions in that it is not to leave the SSS tutoring lab for licensure purposes. The students collectively feel could benefit even more by spending more time with the CD-ROMS at home or over the week-ends.

Many of the participants enjoyed the workshops and extracurricular activities, and felt that the program could benefit more by offering additional sessions. The workshops and extracurricular activities helped to create a family-like bond and closeness between program participants. These activities gave the students a chance to get to know each other outside the classroom and academic setting.

Recommendations for Practice

This study defined best practices as those practices and standards that have produced outstanding results and that could be adapted and applied to an existing custom or system.

Students who had frequent contact with their Student Support Services counselor, tutor, and study groups were more likely to report having an overall positive program
experience. These students reported having numerous opportunities for student reflection about their academic and career future, and program experience.

The first best practice derived from this Student Support Services research study was information about the nurturing and caring attitude of program counselors. This is considered a best practice because the caring and nurturing attitude of the counselors positively impacts the participants’ motivation, drive to finish the curriculum, retention, and overall involvement and collegial experience. Information and advice, support, involvement, and learning are all vital conditions that promote retention (Tinto, 1999). The Student Support Services programs serve a number of first generation college students. Therefore, having someone to guide them in their transition from high school to college is essential.

The Student Support Services counselors took the time to explain the purpose of higher education to program participants. Students collectively reported that the counselors expounded on the instructor and staff roles, responsibilities, and expectations. The program participants knew up-front the expectations of responsibility, integrity, conduct, and ethical use of technology provided by the program. Students reported that the counselors reviewed the class scheduling and registration processes. The counselors helped the students to set attainable goals and provided assistance in developing educational plans. The professional staff of the Student Support Services programs has the responsibility of developing an effective pedagogy for enhancing student learning and creating an environment connected to involvement and achievement.
The students also reported that the program offered interest inventories and study skills assessments. This provided information to the Student Support Services counselors to make appropriate referrals including academic counselors, department heads, and/or advisors who could provide information concerning chosen majors and similar certificate programs.

Students stated that the information given to them during the Student Support Services orientation was most helpful. One of the most basic items reported by students pertaining to the appreciation of the program and its services was that the program did not assume participants would know their way around campus after one week; therefore, the counselors provided information about the physical layout of the campus including the location of key offices and its functions.

The second best practice that emerged from this study was the Student Support Services structure of engagement activities believed to be critically influential on the students’ perceptions, collegial experience, and academic achievement. Students should participate in some type of meaningful extracurricular activity, as research has found that participation in these activities and socialization with peers outside of the classroom contributes to student development (Wade, 2006). Research has shown that programs can benefit both the institutions and students involved.

College students are sometimes inclined to undergo various stages and phases of development. This is even more apparent for the academically disadvantaged student. The activities and workshops offered by the Student Support Services program are often facilitated by experts from a wide range of professional fields. The activities also provide
students with the opportunity develop and practice their leadership skills. These workshops often serve more than one purpose in that they are also designed to prepare participants for job interviews, project collaboration, diversity exposure, and resume writing. These activities are established to expand the participants in the areas of independence, self-regulation, motivation, and engagement. These activities help the student obtain the vital capabilities in learning so that they can achieve their goals and be a successful individual. Concisely, the Student Support Services Program has a pivotal role in student involvement and student learning.

Another best practice that evolved from this study was the emphasis placed on program evaluation and assessment. Evaluating academic support programs is crucial to long-term sustainability. Resourceful evaluations determine if the funding is being used for its intended purposes and determine whether the program is having an effect on the program participants. Only by collecting data and conducting evaluations can senior leadership, community partners, and stakeholders, observe that the academic support program implemented has made an impact. This may be central to student learning and academic achievement.

Systematic and periodic evaluation of advising programs is essential to program effectiveness (Tinto, 2006). The ability to assess whether an advising system is meeting its goals rests with students and administrators. Students should be surveyed on a regular basis to determine whether their advisors: (1) are consistently available; (2) keep regular office hours; (3) get to know the students personally; (4) make appropriate referrals; (5) have a positive, constructive attitude; (6) are on time for appointments; (7) have the
information the students need; (8) discuss personal and academic goals; (9) keep the students up to date on their course of study.

Consistent and constant evaluation is essential to maintaining a flawless tracking system of student participation and satisfaction, program outcomes, and graduation rates. A Student Support Services evaluation strategy should be implemented in order to measure the impact that the program has on involvement, academic achievement, retention, and social outcomes. The program, along with the supporting institution, should construct a clear and deliberate plan for outcome data collection, analysis, and evaluation of the results.

Student Support Services planners and coordinators should analyze existing research to identify best practices and design instruments to evaluate services and overall program effectiveness. Accountability for educational outcomes has increased. Academic support programs, in collaboration with the institutions, should focus on the steps that are needed to document outcomes of higher education. This includes formal outcome assessments of student learning and academic achievement. In order for this tracking system to be implemented, the Student Support Services program coordinators should initially host round table problem-solving discussions related to the outcome data and include the institution’s senior administration. With the right elements in place and trailblazers around the table, this may develop a plan and direction for resources, time, and defined roles for Student Support Services programs and those who are involved. The program may then position itself to share the valuable information and assessment
results with other South Carolina technical college campuses. The information gathered could also be made available to policymakers and grant funders.

Conclusion

Trio programs have helped launch the successful college careers of thousands of low-income, first-generation college students. Research concerning the Student Support Services programs and its impact as it relates to student success, student persistence, retention, best practices, and overall participant satisfaction is limited. For this reason, it is essential for technical colleges to conduct longitudinal internal studies to measure program outcomes and participant satisfaction. This and other similar studies are vital to the continued development of Student Support Services research and academic support programming research in general.

This study showed the role of Student Support Services in student involvement activities and the effects it has on program participant’s and their academic achievement. The findings in this research study indicate that various student involvement activities and experiences positively influence academic achievement. In alignment of student involvement research, according to Flowers (2004), if this is true, as the study's findings indicate, then this information may suggest possible programmatic interventions that may be preferable over others. This information is economically relevant, given the rising costs of planning and implementing student affairs programs and services.

The findings in this study highlight the importance of qualitative and thematic studies in the two-year technical college system. The information gathered may be used to increase student involvement, improve the academic support program methods of
service delivery, and enhance overall program development. This may be mostly important for academically disadvantaged populations served by Student Support Services.

The rationale of this research study was to determine the role that the Student Support Services Program plays in involvement, impacting the collegial experience, and academic achievement. The qualitative data provided by this study may help to broaden the existing information concerning the need and importance of academic support programs. This research provides information to increase awareness of the role that Student Support Services plays in involvement, student participant perceptions, and academic achievement. However, it is limited in that the findings cannot be generalized to other South Carolina technical college populations.

Because of the lack of existing research regarding the Student Support Services programs and its impact on involvement, academic achievement, participant satisfaction, and retention, senior administrators will need to overcome the challenge of implementing effective academic support programs and services to meet the needs of their unique populations. This holds true in particular for technical colleges. McAdams (2000) found that the necessity of this type of research and its vital contribution to continued development of retention research. This research study contributes to this purpose as it lends information to program best practices. Technical college senior administrators and academic support program staff may use this information to assess the quality of student involvement in five categories: active and collaborative learning, student effort, academic challenge, student-faculty interaction, and support for learners. This may aid
them in evaluating curriculum, first-year seminars, and program outcomes. The assessment results may also serve as upstate technical college benchmarks to compile additional data reports.

If two-year technical colleges are to satisfy the challenge to provide quality academic support programs, administrators could expand existing programs or begin to implement services and activities geared toward meeting the needs of academically disadvantaged populations.

There is an essential need for additional research on students in the community and or technical college system. These two-year technical colleges serve a bulk of the academically disadvantaged students and offer a wide-ranging curriculum for their developmental and educational needs. If additional research is conducted, Student Support Services programs and those similar may position themselves to receive more funding, improve institutional retention rates, and identify best practices.

Also, implementation of Student Support Services practices may help students become resilient adults, self-reliant, vigorous, and academically productive. Student Support Services implements pre-emptive services providing a wide range of interventions. The program assists the 2-year college in retention efforts and reduces the barriers faced by academically disadvantaged students. This, in-turn, boosts their learning for healthy educational development.

Finally, the Student Support Services program contributes overall to the participant’s learning environment by providing various program inputs and maintaining quality services. In this research study, Student Support Services counselors, tutors, and
coordinators helped to create positive program outcomes for the 2008-2009 academic year. The Student Support Services program uses collaborative efforts to help program participants who need supplementary academic and personal support. The counselors and coordinators, in collaboration with other college staff, foster connections that advance student academic achievement.

The services provided by this valued program focus on intervention and edification activities that promote effective classroom learning. Student Support Services attends to the challenges and barriers of college life and assists academically disadvantaged students in being successful college students. Yet, there remains a need for additional research to elucidate whether Student Support Services programs can be connected to various desirable program outcomes. In addition, periodic research studies should be conducted to ensure that findings remain current as community and technical college environments and populations evolve. The Student Support Services program has played a pivotal role in student involvement, collegial experience, and overall academic achievement.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

1. Additional research of the educational gains that suggests that academic support programs have benefits for students, irrespective of differences in ethnicity, major, gender, and age is needed. This could include a longitudinal study to investigate the evidence for benefits. This study could also include research regarding general effectiveness of Student Support Services programs in the state of South Carolina, regardless of institutional type.

2. A study is needed to investigate the types of activities that promote involvement among the different sub-groups with-in the Student Support Services population. This may assist in increasing the awareness of what interests are most valued among different participants. The study may also
reveal how the various types of involvement initiatives might impact student development and persistence.

3. A longitudinal study may be needed to determine if research findings based on Student Support Services from 10 to 20 years ago are consistent with current research. Qualitative research may compliment this particular study as it could comprise of case studies of the academically challenged individuals participating in the Student Support Services program by permitting them to share their experiences and narratives of their accomplishments and challenges. This would give the program participants a lurid influence in Student Support Services research opposed to simply being a statistic or number.

4. A qualitative research study that focuses on the straightforward nature of Student Support Services advising practices could be done. The study should concentrate on the students’ satisfaction ratings of their advising experiences both group and individual. This specific research may provide an enhanced knowledge of academically disadvantages students and their needs during advising and counseling sessions.

5. A research study that compares participating Student Support Services academically disadvantage students to non-participating academically disadvantaged students within the institution. This study could examine the classroom, confidence levels, test grades, involvement levels, and grade point averages of the control group versus the non-control group. The study may reveal an even greater impact of the activities offered by Student Support Services with supporting evidence.
APPENDICES
Appendix A

Technical College Correspondence

February 23, 2009

Becky McIntosh-VP Student Development & Marketing
Piedmont Technical College
620 N. Emerald Road
Greenwood, SC 29646

Dear Dr. McIntosh:

I am writing to request your permission to conduct focus groups with the Student Support Services Program participants at Piedmont Technical College and use the data for my doctoral research. My dissertation topic is “Best Practices: The Relationship of Achievement and Student Support Services Program Participants in Community Colleges of The Upstate.” My topic has been approved by my dissertation committee.

I plan to use surveys, focus groups, and historical information to collect my data. The research will be presented in such a way that the data are in summary form and will not include information that may identify the individuals in the study. However, I will submit an IRB application, as required by my committee chair.

In order to complete my research, I will need some assistance from a few individuals on campus—i.e., several staff from Student Support Services, the Registrar (or designee), and possibly the Director of Institutional Research and Evaluation (or designee).

If my request is approved, I will meet with the coordinators and director there soon to discuss my research, as well as my support needs, and to seek their guidance regarding how best to inform others in their respective institutional divisions. I would like to begin the research process March 16th in order to complete the data collection by May 18th.

I believe my research will help illustrate the impact that Student Support Services has had on student achievement and help identify ways to strengthen that impact for the future.

Thank you for considering my request.

Sincerely,

Caren Kelley-Hall

Caren Kelley-Hall
2009 Doctoral Candidate
Clemson University
February 23, 2009

Mr. Curtis Harkness

Greenville Technical College
Vice President for Administration and Diversity
506 South Pleasantburg Drive
Greenville, SC 29607

Dear Mr. Harkness:

I am writing to request your permission to conduct focus groups with the Student Support Services Program participants at Greenville Technical College and use the data for my doctoral research. My dissertation topic is “Best Practices: The Relationship of Achievement and Student Support Services Program Participants in Community Colleges of The Upstate.” My topic has been approved by my dissertation committee.

I plan to use surveys, focus groups, and historical information to collect my data. The research will be presented in such a way that the data are in summary form and will not include information that may identify the individuals in the study. However, I will submit an IRB application, as required by my committee chair.

In order to complete my research, I will need some assistance from a few individuals on campus—i.e., several staff from Student Support Services, the Registrar (or designee), and possibly the Director of Institutional Research and Evaluation (or designee).

If my request is approved, I will meet with the coordinators and director there soon to discuss my research, as well as my support needs, and to seek their guidance regarding how best to inform others in their respective institutional divisions. I would like to begin the research process March 16th in order to complete the data collection by May 18th.

I believe my research will help illustrate the impact that Student Support Services has had on student achievement and help identify ways to strengthen that impact for the future.

Thank you for considering my request.

Sincerely,

Caren Kelley-Hall

Caren Kelley-Hall
2009 Doctoral Candidate
Clemson University
February 23, 2009

Dr. Tawana Davidson
Tri-County Technical College
Director of Trio Programs

Dear Dr. Davidson:
I am writing to request your permission to conduct focus groups with the Student Support Services Program participants at Tri-County Technical College and use the data for my doctoral research. My dissertation topic is “Best Practices: The Relationship of Achievement and Student Support Services Program Participants in Community Colleges of The Upstate.” My topic has been approved by my dissertation committee.

I plan to use surveys, focus groups, and historical information to collect my data. The research will be presented in such a way that the data are in summary form and will not include information that may identify the individuals in the study. However, I will submit an IRB application, as required by my committee chair.

In order to complete my research, I will need some assistance from a few individuals on campus—i.e., several staff from Student Support Services, the Registrar (or designee), and possibly the Director of Institutional Research and Evaluation (or designee).

If my request is approved, I will meet with the coordinators and director there soon to discuss my research, as well as my support needs, and to seek their guidance regarding how best to inform others in their respective institutional divisions. I would like to begin the research process March 16th in order to complete the data collection by May 18th.

I believe my research will help illustrate the impact that Student Support Services has had on student achievement and help identify ways to strengthen that impact for the future.

Thank you for considering my request.

Sincerely,

Caren Kelley-Hall

Caren Kelley-Hall
2009 Doctoral Candidate
Clemson University
April 24, 2009

Mrs. Caren Kelley-Hall  
Associate Director, Diversity Education Programs  
GANTT INTERCULTURAL CENTER  
Division of Student Affairs  
Clemson University  
214 Hendrix Student Center, Box 344058  
Clemson, SC 29634

Mrs. Kelley-Hall:

This letter is provided to grant you permission to include Greenville Technical College in your doctoral dissertation research on Best Practices: Achievement and Effectiveness of Student Support Services Programs in Three Technical Colleges of the Upstate. You have permission to conduct focus groups with Student Support Services students at the college, utilize surveys, and interview appropriate college personnel such as the Student Support Services staff.

It is my understanding that all research will be conducted by you; and if data is readily available to assist with your data collection, it will be provided, but college staff will not develop any new reports specifically for this project. We will gladly provide space for the focus groups, but all plans and preparations for any meetings will be completed by you.

We would like to welcome you to our campus, wish you well in your research, and look forward to receiving a copy of your dissertation.

Sincerely,

Caroline W. Canty  
Tutor Coordinator  
Student Support Services

Post Office Box 5616 • Greenville, South Carolina 29603-5616 • (864) 250-8000 • http://www.greenvilletech.com
April 27, 2009

Ms. Caren Kelley-Hall
2009 Doctoral Candidate

Dear Ms. Kelley-Hall

This letter is provided to grant permission for Ms. Caren Kelley-Hall to include Piedmont Technical College in her doctoral dissertation research on The Relationship of Achievement and Student Support Services Program Participants in Community Colleges in the Upstate. Ms. Kelley-Hall is given permission to conduct focus groups with Student Support Services students at the college, utilize surveys, and interview appropriate college personnel such as the Student Support Services staff, Registrar, Director of Institutional Research, and others as approved by me. All research will be conducted by Ms. Kelley-Hall; if data is readily available to assist with her data collection, it will be provided, but college staff will not develop any new reports specifically for this project.

We will gladly provide space for the focus groups, but all plans and preparations for any meetings will be completed by Ms. Kelley-Hall, with the assistance of our Student Support Services Director, Ms. Pleshette Elmore.

We welcome Ms. Kelley-Hall to our campus, wish her well in her research, and look forward to receiving a copy of her dissertation.

Sincerely,

Becky McIntosh

Becky McIntosh
Vice President for Student Development and Marketing

Cc: Pleshette Elmore
Tanisha Latimer
Zeoclean Kinard
Ms. Caren Kelley-Hall

This letter is provided to grant permission for Ms. Caren Kelley-Hall to include Tri-County Technical College in her doctoral dissertation research on The Best Practices and Effectiveness of Student Support Services Programs in three of the Technical Colleges in the Upstate. Ms. Kelley-Hall is given permission to conduct focus groups with Student Support Services students at the college, utilize surveys, and interview appropriate college personnel such as the Student Support Services staff and Student Support Services Tutorial Staff. All research will be conducted by Ms. Kelley-Hall; if data is readily available to assist with her data collection, it will be provided, but college staff will not develop any new reports specifically for this project.

We will gladly provide space for the focus groups, but all plans and preparations for any meetings will be completed by Ms. Kelley-Hall, with the assistance of our Student Support Services Coordinator Cindy Trimmier-Lee.

We welcome Ms. Kelley-Hall to our campus, wish her well in her research, and look forward to receiving a copy of her dissertation.

Sincerely,

Cindy Trimmier-Lee
Coordinator/Counselor
Student Support Services
July 15, 2008

Dr. Ronnie L. Booth
President
Tri-County Technical College
P.O. Box 587
Pendleton, SC 29670

Dear Dr. Booth:

I am writing to request your permission to use Tri-County Technical College student data for my doctoral research. My dissertation topic (which has been approved by my committee at Clemson University) is “The Relationship of Achievement and Academic Support Programs Among African Americans at Tri-County Technical College.”

I plan to use historical data that currently exists in Banner. The research will be presented in such a way that the data are in summary form and will not include social security numbers, T numbers, or anything else that would allow individual students to be identified. However, I will submit an IRB application, as required by my committee chair.

In order to complete my research, I will need some assistance from a few individuals on campus — i.e., several staff from Student Support Services, the Registrar (or his designee), and the Director of Institutional Research and Evaluation (or his designee).

If you approve my request, I plan to meet with Mr. Holland and Dr. Buckhiester soon to discuss my research, as well as my support needs, and to seek their guidance regarding how best to notify others in their respective institutional divisions. I would like to begin the research process right away so that I can complete it within the next four months.

This September, Student Support Services will celebrate 30 years of service to the students of Tri-County Technical College. I believe my research will help illustrate the impact that Student Support Services has had and help identify ways to strengthen that impact for the future.

Thank you for considering my request.

Sincerely,

Caren Kelley-Hall
Coordinator of Multicultural Services and Counselor

[Handwritten note: “This is fine with me. I look forward to reading your results in the future.”]
Appendix B

Consent to Participate in Focus Group Form

You are invited to participate in a research study to determine what contributes to the best practices and achievement of participants in the Student Support Services Program in three technical colleges in the upstate of South Carolina. You were selected as a possible participant because the program that you are currently associated with is identified as commendable. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be a participant. This research study is conducted by Caren Kelley-Hall, with the support of Clemson University and her dissertation committee in the Career and Technology Education Program.

Background Information The purpose of this study is to determine what contributes to the best practices and achievement of participants in the Student Support Services (SSS) Program in three technical colleges in the upstate of South Carolina. Specifically, I want to ask you about your SSS program experience as it relates to your academic preparation, and interpersonal skills. I would also like to try to determine your opinion of how effective the programming practices are in helping you navigate your academic journey and overall achievement.

Procedures If you agree to participate in this study, I would like to set up a mutually agreeable time for your involvement in no more than (3) focus group sessions. We will discuss different aspects of your Student Support Program experience. Each focus group session will last for approximately one hour. The interviewer will note your answers on paper and, with your permission, record the interview so that it may be revisited again at a later time.

Risks and Benefits of Participation in the Research Study

Risks: You may feel uncomfortable talking about the successes and/or difficulties of your learning experiences and academic journey. You may wonder if anything that you say in the interviews may be reported back to the institution you attend. However, because no names will appear on the interviewer's notes, and because the interviewer will respect your privacy and the confidentiality of your interview responses, there is little risk in your participation. Your name will be kept confidential.

Benefits: Your institution is part of a larger study comprised of three technical colleges in the upstate of South Carolina and the Student Support Services program housed in each. Your participation will help this researcher understand the academic support programming and educational practices that benefit students in the classroom. This understanding will be used to define the best practices for Student Support Services and provide content for requesting additional programmatic funding.

Costs: There are no monetary costs to you except for your time for the completion of the survey and participation in no more than (3) focus groups.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept confidential. In any sort of report I publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify an individual participant. Research records will be kept in a locked file; only the researcher will have access to the records. Information from your survey or focus group will not be shared with other teachers or students.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with your institution or Student Support Services. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting these relationships.

Contacts and Questions: You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, contact Caren Kelley-Hall at (864) 202-5972, (864) 656-2736 or caren@clemson.edu.

Statement of Consent: You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records. I have read the above information. I have asked questions and received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature__________________________________________       Date_____________
Dear Cheryl and Caren,

The Clemson University Institutional Review Board (IRB)/Office of Research Compliance (ORC) reviewed your proposed amendment submitted on April 21, 2009, to the protocol identified above using Exempt review procedures. A determination was made on April 30, 2009, that the proposed activities involving human participants qualify as Exempt under Category B2 based on the Federal Regulations (45 CFR 46). You may begin to implement this amendment.

Please remember that no change in this research protocol can be initiated without prior review by the IRB. Any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects, complications, and/or any adverse events must be reported to the ORC immediately. Please notify the ORC when your study is completed or terminated.

Good luck with your study and please feel free to contact us if you have any questions. Please use the IRB number and title in all communications regarding this study.

Sincerely,

Becca

Rebecca L. Alley, J.D.

IRB Coordinator
Office of Research Compliance
Clemson University
223 Brackett Hall
Clemson, SC 29634-5704
ralley@clemson.edu
Office Phone: 864-656-0636
Fax: 864-656-4475
## Appendix D

### Focus Group Questions

**Best Practices: Achievement and Effectiveness of the Student Support Services Programs in Three Technical Colleges of Upstate South Carolina**

**Focus Group Questions:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>How often do you meet with your SSS counselor? If you met more do you think this would impact your academics positively? How so?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Did you participate in phone advising, web advising, group advising? If so, what was this experience like?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Describe how this program has helped you to assess individual strengths and opportunities for improvement with respect to future and career success.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Have you participated/completed <strong>all the activities</strong> that the SSS program recommended or expected? If not, why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>What has been the most useful workshop/activity that you have attended provided by SSS and why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Has the SSS program equipped you with the skills and tools necessary to enhance your academic performance?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>What role has peer to peer mentoring or peer to peer leadership played in your SSS experience if at all?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Are you a first-college generational student? If so, in what ways has the SSS program helped you to transition into college life?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Are you planning to transfer to a 4-year institution? If so, how has the SSS program prepared you for this transition?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Do you enjoy being a participant of the SSS program? What has been your experience?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>What are the program’s strengths?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Are there any program barriers that you encountered? Program weaknesses?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
13. Do you participate in SSS program evaluations? What motivates you to do this?

14. What changes could be made to technology in the SSS program which would allow you to benefit more from the program’s services?

15. How do you typically use the computers in the SSS lab? Tutoring sessions, papers, math assignments, groups, check email and or face book communication, work in pairs, etc.?

16. What kinds of software are available for you to use in the SSS lab, i.e. word processors, graphics packages, databases, spreadsheets, simulations, e-mail, reference (CD-ROMs, dictionaries), Internet/WWW, science probes, drill & practice, electronic books, presentation tools (timeline maker, multimedia-maker), Other?

17. Do you have access to a computer at home?

18. I am interested in your impressions of how the information technology you have just described has impacted your learning. Are you more motivated, engaged, and/or better cooperative learners?

19. How could the SSS programs in South Carolina’s upstate gain more funding and recognition based on its performance, outputs, and success of its students?

20. Are you familiar with the SSS program goals and objectives? Do you feel that these have been met?

21. Do you feel that all of your academics needs have been met through the services of the SSS program? Why?

22. What changes would you like to see made in regards to program effectiveness?

23. Is there anything else you would like to share?
# Appendix E

## Student Support Services Program Evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>NA</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>D</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. I am aware of the services offered through Student Support Services.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. SSS counselors have helped me with academic issues.</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td></td>
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<td>(circle NA if you have not sought help)</td>
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<td>3. SSS counselors have helped me with personal issues.</td>
<td>NA</td>
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<td>4. SSS counselors have helped me explore career options.</td>
<td>NA</td>
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<td>5. The seminars and workshops were informative.</td>
<td>NA</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Being in Student Support Services has helped me remain in school.</td>
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<td>7. Cultural events were informative.</td>
<td>NA</td>
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<tr>
<td>(circle NA if you did not attend)</td>
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<td>8. I would recommend Student Support Services to other students.</td>
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<td>9. Supplemental instruction was helpful.</td>
<td>NA</td>
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<tr>
<td>(circle NA if you did not attend SII classes)</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. SSS Counselor is available.</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td></td>
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### Additional Comments:

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

Please return this form in the enclosed envelope. We need all surveys returned. Thank you!
Appendix F

Student Support Services Program Participant Contract

STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

Student Contract to Receive Tutoring

As a participant in the Student Support Services Program, I understand I have the following responsibilities:

1. To attend all scheduled tutoring sessions. If I am unable to attend a particular session, I will notify the Tutor Coordinator (646-1591) and/or my tutor.

2. To be prepared at each tutoring session to let my tutor know the area(s) in which I most need help.

3. To tell the tutor if he/she is not meeting my learning needs.

4. To take responsibility for my own learning.

5. To complete any class assignment (including homework) myself.

IMPORTANT: I am aware that I will be dropped from TUTORING if I miss more than two (2) unexcused sessions with my tutor.

PLEASE NOTE: There will be a maximum of TWO (2) hours allowed each week for tutorial assistance. If you request tutoring in more than one course, the time will be divided accordingly.

Participant’s Signature    Tutor’s Signature    Tutor Coordinator’s Signature
Date                      Date                      Date

INSTRUCTORS

Verification of Student’s Need for a Tutor

_____________________________ (Student) - ____________________ (SS#) is a Student Support Services participant who is requesting a tutor for ____________________________ (course).

Please verify the student’s need for a tutor by indicating the following:

• Current numerical or letter grade in the course (if available):

• Student’s weakness in the course (must complete this section):

• Instructor’s Signature and Date:

Tutoring will not be scheduled until this form has been returned.

Thank you for your cooperation and assistance. If you have any questions, please feel free to give me a call at ext. 1591.

Tutor Coordinator/Counselor, Student Support Services 3/03
Appendix G

Greenville Technical College’s Student Support Services Tutorial Agreement

Student Support Services
Tutorial Program Agreement

For Scheduled Individual Appointments

I understand that acceptance into Student Support Services does not automatically guarantee that I will receive a tutor. I understand that tutor’s schedules are limited and are on first come first served basis. I also understand that Student Support Services will make every attempt to accommodate my schedule but there is still the possibility that I may not receive an individual scheduled appointment with a tutor.

As a participant of the Tutorial Program of Student Support Services at Greenville Technical College, I understand that:

✓ I am ultimately responsible for my success or failure in classes.
✓ I must come prepared for my tutoring session by identifying areas of focus, and bring relevant textbooks, syllabi, material and assignments to each tutoring session.
✓ I must read the textbook assignments required by the class prior to coming to each tutoring session.
✓ I must pay attention in class, ask questions, and participate in class discussions.
✓ I am responsible for reporting to my tutoring session promptly.
✓ I am to be courteous during my tutoring session. Failure to behave in a courteous manner, may forfeit the opportunity to be tutored for the rest of the semester.
✓ If I am unable to attend, I will notify the Student Support Services office to cancel my session at least two (2) hours prior to my scheduled appointment.
✓ Tutoring is a semester-long commitment requiring good attendance.
✓ If I miss two or more sessions without prior cancellation; if I frequently cancel appointments; if I drop the class in which I am being tutored or am no longer enrolled at Greenville Technical College, I forfeit the opportunity to be tutored for the remainder of the semester.
✓ In the event that my enrollment status changes, I must inform the Student Support Services staff of this change.
✓ If I am dropped, I can file an appeal with the Tutor Coordinator to be considered for reinstatement. Further, I understand that depending on availability, my original scheduled appointment may not be available to me, if I am allowed to return after being dropped.

By signing below, I acknowledge that I have read, understand, and will abide by the rules and regulations of the Tutorial Program as specified by the statements above.

________________________________________
Student Name (Please print)

________________________________________
Student Signature

______
Date

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Appendix H

Student Support Services Tutoring Contract

STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

Student Contract to Receive Tutoring

As a participant in the Student Support Services Program, I understand I have the following responsibilities:

1. To attend all scheduled tutoring sessions. If I am unable to attend a particular session, I will notify the Tutor Coordinator (646-1591) and/or my tutor.

2. To be prepared at each tutoring session to let my tutor know the area(s) in which I most need help.

3. To tell the tutor if he/she is not meeting my learning needs.

4. To take responsibility for my own learning.

5. To complete any class assignment (including homework) myself.

IMPORTANT: I am aware that I will be dropped from TUTORING if I miss more than two (2) unexcused sessions with my tutor.

PLEASE NOTE: There will be a maximum of TWO (2) hours allowed each week for tutorial assistance. If you request tutoring in more than one course, the time will be divided accordingly.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant’s Signature</th>
<th>Tutor’s Signature</th>
<th>Tutor Coordinator’s Signature</th>
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</tbody>
</table>

INSTRUCTORS Verification of Student’s Need for a Tutor

______________________(Student) - ________________________(SS#) is a Student Support Services participant who is requesting a tutor for ______________________ (course).

Please verify the student’s need for a tutor by indicating the following:

- Current numerical or letter grade in the course (if available): ______________________
- Student’s weakness in the course (must complete this section): ______________________

Instructor’s Signature and Date: ____________________________________________

Tutoring will not be scheduled until this form has been returned.

Thank you for your cooperation and assistance. If you have any questions, please feel free to give me a call at ext. 1591.

Tutor Coordinator/Counselor, Student Support Services

3.03
Appendix I

Code of Federal Regulations

[Code of Federal Regulations]

TITLE 34--EDUCATION
CHAPTER VI--OFFICE OF POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION,
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES PROGRAM

Subpart A--General

Sec. 646.1 What is the Student Support Services Program?

The Student Support Services Program provides grants for projects designed to--

(a) Increase the retention and graduation rates of eligible students;

(b) Increase the transfer rate of eligible students from two-year to four-year institutions;

and

(c) Foster an institutional climate supportive of the success of low-income and first generation college students and individuals with disabilities through services such as those described in Sec. 646.4.

Sec. 646.2 Who is eligible to receive a grant?

An institution of higher education or a combination of institutions of higher education is eligible to receive a grant to carry out a Student Support Services project.

Sec. 646.3 Who is eligible to participate in a Student Support Services project?

A student is eligible to participate in a Student Support Services project if the student meets all of the following requirements:
(a) Is a citizen or national of the United States or meets the residency requirements for Federal student financial assistance.

(b) Is enrolled at the grantee institution or accepted for enrollment in the next academic term at that institution.

(c) Has a need for academic support, as determined by the grantee, in order to pursue successfully a postsecondary educational program.

(d) Is--

(1) A low-income individual;

(2) A first generation college student; or

(3) An individual with disabilities.

Sec. 646.4 What activities and services may a project provide?

A Student Support Services project may provide services such as:

(a) Instruction in reading, writing, study skills, mathematics, and other subjects necessary for success beyond secondary school.

(b) Personal counseling.

(c) Academic advice and assistance in course selection.

(d) Tutorial services and counseling and peer counseling.

(e) Exposure to cultural events and academic programs not usually available to disadvantaged students.

(f) Activities designed to acquaint students participating in the project with the range of career options available.
(g) Activities designed to secure admission and financial assistance for enrollment in graduate and professional programs.

(h) Activities designed to assist students currently enrolled in two-year institutions in securing admission and financial assistance for enrollment in a four-year program of postsecondary education.

(i) Mentoring programs involving faculty or upper class students, or any combination of faculty members and upper class students.

(j) Programs and activities as described in paragraphs (a) through (i) of this section that are specifically designed for students of limited English proficiency.

(k) Other activities designed to meet the purposes of the Student Support Services Program stated in Sec. 646.1.

Sec. 646.5 How long is a project period?

(a) Except as provided in paragraph (b) of this section, a project period under the Student Support Services Program is four years.

(b) The Secretary approves a project period of five years for applicants that score in the highest ten percent of all applicants approved for new grants under the criteria in Sec. 646.21.

Sec. 646.6 What regulations apply?
The following regulations apply to the Student Support Services Program:

(a) The Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR) in 34 CFR parts 74, 75, 77, 79, 82, 85 and 86.

(b) The regulations in this part 646.

Sec. 646.7 What definitions apply?

(a) Definitions in the Act. The following terms used in this part are defined in sections 402(A)(g), 481, or 1201(a) of the Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1965, as amended:

First generation college student

Institution of higher education

Low-income individual

(b) Definitions in EDGAR. The following terms used in this part are defined in 34 CFR 77.1:

Applicant

Application

Award

Budget

Budget Period

Department

EDGAR

Equipment

Facilities

Fiscal year
Grant
Grant Period
Grantee
Project
Project period
Public
Secretary
Supplies

(c) Other definitions. The following definitions also apply to this part:

Academic need with reference to a student means a student whom the grantee determines needs one or more of the services stated under Sec. 646.4 to succeed in a postsecondary educational program. Combination of institutions of higher education means two or more institutions of higher education that have entered into a cooperative agreement for the purpose of carrying out a common objective, or an entity designated or created by a group of institutions of higher education for the purpose of carrying out a common objective on their behalf. Different Campus means an institutional site that is geographically apart from and independent of the main campus of the institution. The Secretary considers a location of an institution to be independent of the main campus if the location--

(1) Is permanent in nature;

(2) Offers courses in educational programs leading to a degree, certificate, or other recognized educational credential;
(3) Has its own faculty and administrative or supervisory organization; and

(4) Has its own budgetary and hiring authority.

Different population of participants means a group of--

(1) Low-income, first-generation college students; or

(2) Disabled students.

Individual with disabilities means a person who has a diagnosed physical or mental impairment that substantially limits that person's ability to participate in the educational experiences and opportunities offered by the grantee institution. Limited English proficiency with reference to an individual, means a person whose native language is other than English and who has sufficient difficulty speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language to deny that individual the opportunity to learn successfully in classrooms in which English is the language of instruction. Participant means an individual who-

(1) Is determined to be eligible to participate in the project under Sec. 646.3; and

(2) Receives project services that the grantee has determined to be sufficient to increase the individual's chances for success in a postsecondary educational program. Sufficient financial assistance means the amount of financial aid offered a Student Support Services student, inclusive of Federal, State, local, private, and institutional aid which, together with parent or student contributions, is equal to the cost of attendance as determined by a financial aid officer at the institution.

Subpart B--How Does One Apply for an Award?
Sec. 646.10 How many applications for a Student Support Services award may an eligible applicant submit?

The Secretary accepts more than one application from an eligible applicant so long as each additional application describes a project that serves a different campus, or a different population of participants who cannot readily be served by a single project.

Sec. 646.11 What assurances must an applicant include in an application?

An applicant shall assure in its application that--

(a) At least two-thirds of the students it will serve in its Student Support Services project will be-

(1) Low-income individuals who are first generation college students; or

(2) Individuals with disabilities; (b) The remaining students it will serve will be low-income individuals, first generation college students, or individuals with disabilities; (c) Not less than one-third of the individuals with disabilities will be low-income individuals; and (d) Each student participating in the project will be offered sufficient financial assistance to meet that student's full financial need.

(Approved by the Office of Management and Budget under control number 1840-0017)

Subpart C--How Does the Secretary Make a Grant?

Sec. 646.20 How does the Secretary decide which new grants to make?

(a) The Secretary evaluates an application for a new grant as follows:
(1)(i) The Secretary evaluates the application on the basis of the selection criteria in Sec. 646.21.

(ii) The maximum score for all the criteria in Sec. 646.21 is 100 points. The maximum score for each criterion is indicated in parentheses with the criterion.

(2)(i) If an application for a new grant proposes to continue to serve substantially the same population or campus that the applicant is serving under an expiring grant, the Secretary evaluates the applicant's prior experience in delivering services under the expiring grant on the basis of the criteria in Sec. 646.22.

(ii) The maximum score for all the criteria in Sec. 646.22 is 15 points. The maximum score for each criterion is indicated in parentheses with the criterion.

(b) The Secretary makes new grants in rank order on the basis of the applications' total scores under paragraphs (a)(1) and (a)(2) of this section.

(c) If the total scores of two or more applications are the same and there is insufficient money available to fully fund them both after funding the higher-ranked applications, the Secretary chooses among the tied applications so as to serve geographic areas that have been underserved by the Student Support Services Program.

(d) The Secretary does not make grants to applicants that carried out a Federal TRIO program project that involved the fraudulent use of funds.

Sec. 646.21 What selection criteria does the Secretary use to evaluate an application?

The Secretary uses the following criteria to evaluate an application for a new grant:

(a) Need for the project (24 points). The Secretary evaluates the need for a Student Support Services project proposed at the applicant institution on the basis of the extent to
which the application contains clear evidence of—(1) (8 points) A high number or percentage, or both, of students enrolled or accepted for enrollment at the applicant institution who meet the eligibility requirements of Sec. 646.3; (2) (8 points) The academic and other problems that eligible students encounter at the applicant institution; and (3) (8 points) The differences between eligible Student Support Services students compared to an appropriate group, based on the following indicators:

(i) Retention and graduation rates.

(ii) Grade point averages.

(iii) Graduate and professional school enrollment rates (four-year colleges only).

(iv) Transfer rates from two-year to four-year institutions (two-year colleges only).

(b) Objectives (8 points). The Secretary evaluates the quality of the applicant's proposed project objectives on the basis of the extent to which they—

(1) (2 points) Include performance, process and outcome objectives relating to each of the purposes of the Student Support Services Program stated in Sec. 646.1;

(2) (2 points) Address the identified needs of the proposed participants;

(3) (2 points) Are clearly described, specific, and measurable; and

(4) (2 points) Are ambitious but attainable within each budget period and the project period given the project budget and other resources.

(c) Plan of operation (30 points). The Secretary evaluates the quality of the applicant's plan of operation on the basis of the following:
(1) (3 points) The plan to inform the institutional community (students, faculty, and staff) of the goals, objectives, and services of the project and the eligibility requirements for participation in the project.

(2) (3 points) The plan to identify, select, and retain project participants with academic need.

(3) (4 points) The plan for assessing each individual participant's need for specific services and monitoring his or her academic progress at the institution to ensure satisfactory academic progress. (4) (10 points) The plan to provide services that address the goals and objectives of the project. (5) (10 points) The applicant's plan to ensure proper and efficient administration of the project, including the organizational placement of the project; the time commitment of key project staff; the specific plans for financial management, student records management, and personnel management; and, where appropriate, its plan for coordination with other programs for disadvantaged students.

(d) Institutional commitment (16 points). The Secretary evaluates the institutional commitment to the proposed project on the basis of the extent to which the applicant has-
- (1) (6 points) Committed facilities, equipment, supplies, personnel, and other resources to supplement the grant and enhance project services;(2) (6 points) Established administrative and academic policies that enhance participants' retention at the institution and improve their chances of graduating from the institution; (3) (2 points) Demonstrated a commitment to minimize the dependence on student loans in developing financial aid packages for project participants by committing institutional resources to the extent
possible; and (4) (2 points) Assured the full cooperation and support of the Admissions, Student Aid, Registrar and data collection and analysis components of the institution.

(e) Quality of personnel (9 points). To determine the quality of personnel the applicant plans to use, the Secretary looks for information that shows--(1) (3 points) The qualifications required of the project director, including formal education and training in fields related to the objectives of the project, and experience in designing, managing, or implementing Student Support Services or similar projects;(2) (3 points) The qualifications required of other personnel to be used in the project, including formal education, training, and work experience in fields related to the objectives of the project; and(3) (3 points) The quality of the applicant's plan for employing personnel who have succeeded in overcoming barriers similar to those confronting the project's target population.  

(f) Budget (5 points). The Secretary evaluates the extent to which the project budget is reasonable, cost-effective, and adequate to support the project.  

(g) Evaluation plan (8 points). The Secretary evaluates the quality of the evaluation plan for the project on the basis of the extent to which--

(1) The applicant's methods for evaluation--

(i) (2 points) Are appropriate to the project and include both quantitative and qualitative evaluation measures; and

(ii) (2 points) Examine in specific and measurable ways, using appropriate baseline data, the success of the project in improving academic achievement, retention and graduation of project participants; and (2) (4 points) The applicant intends to use the results of an
evaluation to make programmatic changes based upon the results of project evaluation

Sec. 646.22 How does the Secretary evaluate prior experience?

(a) In the case of an application described in Sec. 646.20(a)(2)(i), the Secretary reviews information relating to an applicant's performance under its expiring Student Support Services project. This information may come from performance reports, site visit reports, project evaluation reports, and any other verifiable information submitted by the applicant.

(b) The Secretary evaluates the applicant's prior experience in achieving the goals of the Student Support Services Program on the basis of the following criteria:

(1) (4 points) The extent to which project participants persisted toward completion of the academic programs in which they were enrolled.

(2) (4 points) The extent to which project participants met academic performance levels required to stay in good academic standing at the grantee institution.[[Page 320]]

(3) (4 points) (i) For four-year institutions, the extent to which project participants graduated; and (ii) For two-year institutions, the extent to which project participants either graduated or transferred to four-year institutions.

(4) (3 points) The extent to which the applicant has met the administrative requirements—including recordkeeping, reporting, and b. financial accountability—under the terms of the previously funded award.

(Approved by the Office of Management and Budget under control number 1840-0017)

Sec. 646.23 How does the Secretary set the amount of a grant?

(a) The Secretary sets the amount of a grant on the basis of--
(1) 34 CFR 75.232 and 75.233, for new grants; and (2) 34 CFR 75.253, for the second and subsequent years of a project period. (b) If the circumstances described in section 402A(b)(3) of the HEA exist, the Secretary uses the available funds to set the amount of the grant at the lesser of-- (1) $170,000; or

(2) The amount requested by the applicant.

Subpart D--What Conditions Must Be Met by a Grantee?

Sec. 646.30 What are allowable costs?

The cost principles that apply to the Student Support Services Program are in 34 CFR part 74, subpart Q. Allowable costs include then following if they are reasonably related to the objectives of the project:

(a) Cost of remedial and special classes if--

(1) These classes are not otherwise available at the grantee institution;

(2) Are limited to eligible project participants; and

(3) Project participants are not charged tuition for classes paid for by the project.

(b) Courses in English language instruction for students of limited English proficiency if these classes are limited to eligible project participants and not otherwise available at the grantee institution.

(c) In-service training of project staff.

(d) Activities of an academic or cultural nature, such as field trips, special lectures, and symposiums, that have as their purpose the improvement of the participants' academic progress and personal development.
(e) Transportation of participants and staff to and from approved educational and cultural activities sponsored by the project.

(f) Purchase of computer hardware, computer software, or other equipment to be used for student development, student records and project administration if the applicant demonstrates to the Secretary's satisfaction that the equipment is required to meet the objectives of the project more economically or efficiently.

(g) Professional development travel for staff if directly related to the project's overall purpose and activities, except that these costs may not exceed four percent of total project salaries. The Secretary may adjust this percentage if the applicant demonstrates to the Secretary's satisfaction that a higher percentage is necessary and reasonable.

(h) Project evaluation that is directly related to assessing the project's impact on student achievement and improving the delivery of services. Sec. 646.31 What are unallowable costs?

Costs that may not be charged against a grant under the Student Support Services Program include, but are not limited to, the following:

(a) Costs involved in recruiting students for enrollment at the institution.

(b) Tuition, fees, stipends, and other forms of direct financial support for staff or participants.

(c) Research not directly related to the evaluation or improvement of the project.

(d) Construction, renovation, or remodeling of any facilities. Sec. 646.32 What other requirements must a grantee meet?
(a) Eligibility of participants. (1) A grantee shall determine the eligibility of each participant in the project when the individual is selected to participate. The grantee does not have to revalidate a participant's eligibility after the participant's initial selection.

(2) A grantee shall determine the low-income status of an individual on the basis of the documentation described in section 402A(e) of the Higher Education Act.

(3) A grantee may not serve any individual who is receiving the same services from another Federal TRIO program.

(b) Recordkeeping. A grantee shall maintain participant records that show--

(1) The basis for the grantee's determination that each participant is eligible to participate in the project under Sec. 646.3;

(2) The grantee's basis for determining the academic need for each participant;

(3) The services that are provided to each participant; and

(4) The performance and progress of each participant by cohort for the duration of the participant's attendance at the grantee institution.

(c) Project director. (1) A grantee shall employ a full-time project director unless paragraph (c)(3) of this section applies.

(2) The grantee shall give the project director sufficient authority to administer the project effectively.

(3) The Secretary waives the requirement in paragraph (c)(1) of this section if the applicant demonstrates that the requirement will hinder coordination--

(i) Among the Federal TRIO programs; or
(ii) Between the programs funded under sections 404A through 410 of the Higher Education Act and similar programs funded through other sources.

(d) Project coordination. (1) The Secretary encourages grantees to coordinate project services with other programs for disadvantaged students operated by the grantee institution provided the Student Support Services grant funds are not used to support activities reasonably available to the general student population. (2) To the extent practical, the grantee may share staff with programs serving similar populations provided the grantee maintains appropriate records of staff time and effort and does not commingle grant funds. (3) Costs for special classes and events that would benefit Student Support Services students and participants in other programs for disadvantaged students must be proportionately divided among the benefiting projects.
REFERENCES


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Soares, L. and C. Mazzeo. (2008). *College-Ready Students, Student-Ready Colleges: An Agenda for Improving Degree Completion in Postsecondary Education*


Svanum, S. and S. Bigatti. (2009). Academic Course Engagement During One Semester Forecasts College Success: Engaged students are more likely to earn a degree, do it faster, and do it Better. *Journal of College Student Development, 50*(1).


Trimmier-Lee, Cindy: Author


