

AN ADVISOR'S PERSPECTIVE: THE NEW STUDENT'S ONBOARDING EXPERIENCE
WHEN REGISTRATION OCCURS WITHIN TWO WEEKS
BEFORE THE START OF THE SEMESTER

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the new student onboarding experience when course registration occurs within the last two weeks before the start of the semester. This qualitative study explored this process from the perspective of the advising staff at an Ohio community college. An interpretative phenomenological analysis was selected to investigate the first-hand account of this occurrence, and participants were interviewed to determine the study's findings. Questions that guided the study were these: (a) What is the profile of the "Just in Time" college student when onboarding before their first semester? (b) How did the new student's enrollment timeline affect their advising experience? (c) What role does the advisor play in introducing resources and services designed to integrate and retain new students? This study also focused on Tinto's Integration Framework Theory.

New students' onboarding experience is impacted by their arrival to college inside two weeks before the semester based on the participants' feedback. Being ill-prepared academically and understanding onboarding nuances, such as financial aid, are considered barriers for some new students arriving just before the semester. Participants were consistent in their assertion that many new students registering for classes just before the start of the semester are challenged to obtain the appropriate resource and service details the college provides. Advising appointments are shortened during this timeframe and participants struggle to connect with new students and deliver content that would place students on a successful pathway.

The study's findings indicate participants believe new students would benefit from starting their onboarding and course registration at least one month prior to the start of the

semester. Community college administrators may benefit from this study's findings, and suggestions, as the institution attempts to strengthen student success rates and institutional integration techniques through their onboarding steps.

KEY WORDS: advising, attrition, registration (early and late)

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my fabulous and supportive family who encouraged me to pursue this doctorate when I doubted myself. I have to thank my wife, Laura Gordon, who was my original paper and class assignment editor and provided valuable feedback, even when she was unsure of the content. She made the long drive to my course residencies with me when possible, kept me company, and was a sense of calm when I questioned my decision to return to school. Laura: thank you for everything. I love you!

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

A variety of studies have been undertaken to examine the cause, effect, and results of students who register for college during various periods of enrollment stages. Comparison analyses of early and late enrollment of students have established that individuals who enroll early will have a better chance of academic success than those who enroll after the first day of class (Ford et al., 2008). Colleges have allowed students to enroll up to and beyond the first day of class as a way to make enrollment convenient for the consumer (Belcher & Patterson, 1990). Students who choose to enroll after the designated first day of class do so for multiple reasons, which include family responsibilities, financial concerns, and employment obligations (Nourie-Manuele, 2018.). Research into student registration and their suboptimal behavior and the impact on enrollment and retention is limited (Gurantz, 2015). Studies that investigated students who registered for courses early, in comparison to those who examined students who register after the start of the term, found early registrants were more successful in course and term completion, and had lower attrition rates. The analysis of the timeline of those who registered before the start of the term and comparing their success to when they enrolled is not well documented.

As retention and degree completion become more of a focus for institutions of higher education, exploring the enrollment experience of students who decide to begin their first collegiate endeavor days before the beginning of the term may provide a pathway to increasing student success. This study will examine the community college advisor's interactions when

onboarding new students who delay registration of classes within the last two weeks before the start of the semester. The initial steps taken to learn about college resources, as well as registering for courses, occurs during the onboarding of new students. This qualitative study, based on a specific enrollment period before the start of the semester, utilizes a phenomenological approach and can assist community college administrators in reviewing and adjusting enrollment policies and procedures, when necessary.

BACKGROUND

Understanding the enrollment process of community colleges requires a review of *why* these institutions of higher education were originally established and *how* they have evolved into the certificate and degree awarding organizations they are today. Community colleges were introduced to the academic landscape at the turn of the 20th century with the goal of increasing training opportunities for the growing industrial workforce and to provide access to higher education for a specific portion of the population that was excluded previously. Expanding education options for young people who were attached to the family farm and for African Americans hindered from traditional higher education institutions because of discriminative practices, was one of the objectives in creating community colleges through the Morrill Act of 1862 and the 1890 amendment (Mellow, 2000). The establishment of community colleges opened the door for a larger portion of the population to be trained and educated in a manner that benefitted the workforce and the local municipality.

The creation of community colleges provided low income, minorities, first-generation, and factions of citizens traditionally impeded from attending four-year universities or colleges access to a better future through job training and exposure to learning opportunities that did not exist previously. Community colleges were created to remove established obstacles of admission

and course enrollment through a mission of open access (Freer-Weiss, 2004). Kim Leeder (2013) explains the need for community colleges to offer open enrollment based not only on their focus to offer general education requirements, but training residents to be chefs, truck drivers, nurses, and other technical fields that benefit the student and local economy. Open enrollment typically is a financial driver as it increases revenue for colleges that convert a larger number of prospects to enrolled students (Smith et al., 2002). College procedures, such as the hiring of faculty and staff, admissions and enrollment processes, and curricular structures, are impacted by open access policies (Shannon & Smith, 2006).

Open access is the core of the community college mission and seen as a necessity to continue meeting local employment and educational needs, as well as providing access to higher education to those restricted by university requirements. There is a fear among community college traditionalists that the removal or adjusting the open access mission may inhibit the growth and existence of two-year institutions and regenerate the barriers of the past (Weiss, 1999).

Open access to higher education, along with the removal of traditional barriers, is at the heart of community colleges and their mission. The challenge facing leaders of these institutions in today's higher education model is maintaining this long-standing strategy while meeting the academic standards that lead to course and degree completion, which are now part of the funding landscape in many states. For community colleges to maintain their open enrollment practice, they will need to review their admissions policy as retention and degree completion are now a focus of state legislators looking for accountability for funding a community college education. (Gabbard & Mupinga, 2013).

OVERVIEW TO THE STUDY

Understanding the profile and the thought processes that led new students to begin the onboarding process just before beginning their first semester has intrigued this researcher for some time. Identifying the last two weeks before the start of the semester is also a dynamic of this study, as it appeared to the researcher that there was a high volume of new students attempting to start their college journey just before the start of the semester. Those who arrived within the last two weeks of registration presented challenges and uncertainties that students who came weeks before did not. Being part of the registration process but not classified as an advisor provided opportunities for the researcher to interact with students arriving at various times to begin their academic journey. Reviewing the onboarding process of new students within two weeks before the semester will capture the enrollment experience that advisors face as they onboard new students. Grasping a better understanding of the new student who registered “Just in Time” is the foundation of this research topic.

In researching this topic, it became immediately clear that exploration into new students who enroll just before the start of the term was not a subject studied at great length. Data for the study of early and late enrollment and the impact it has on student success are readily available, but researchers did not specifically designate a registration timeline. Typically, enrolling in classes before the start of the semester is identified as “early,” and on the first day of the term or thereafter is considered, “late.” Admitting and registering students for classes on the same day a term started, even in cases when the student is not academically and socially prepared for college life, was a regular and accepted policy (Freer-Weiss, 2004). Research concluded that student course offerings were impacted by the policy that allowed late registration. Students who are faced with the lack of course options based on availability can be attributed to their postponement to enroll, lack of knowledge of enrollment process, and their wavering motivation

to pursue a college degree (Gurantz, 2015). Late enrollment policies were a continued practice for some time at many post-secondary institutions.

Early and late registration research also focuses on attrition rates of new students entering college and the admission policies and practices of the institution. In one study, retention of students from one semester to the next was considered success, and students who registered late were less likely to be retained, while those who registered early were more likely to continue at the college (Street et al., 2001). College advisors have a unique vantage point and serve a vital role when onboarding new students who register late. Understanding their perspective and connection to new students is critical.

Student characteristics have also been examined for how they relate to retention and late registration. Multiple studies have reviewed student demographics, including family educational and financial background, age, race, and their enrollment status at the institution. Vincent Tinto (1993), considered one of the foremost theorists on student attrition, believes the pre-entry attributes students bring to the start of their academic career plays a role in their decision to pursue a degree, as well as their decision to remain or leave college. Students who enter college for the first time with no knowledge of how to manage registration processes may be deterred in pursuit of their academic goal before they actually begin. Students entering college at the last moment are not impacted by the late enrollment policy change, but they may be presented with similar barriers, such as depleted onboarding resources, which are meant to assist them in navigating the enrollment process.

A component of this study was to learn the profile of students who enroll into courses inside the last two weeks prior to the start of the semester. Advising staff can provide helpful details of the populations entering the college during this timeframe. Grasping an understanding

of the diverse background of students and exploring if there is a connection with their demographic makeup and their decision to enroll at a particular time may assist community colleges in constructing onboarding procedures that meet their specific needs. First-generation, gender, and social-economic backgrounds, among other characteristics, are areas that were explored during this study.

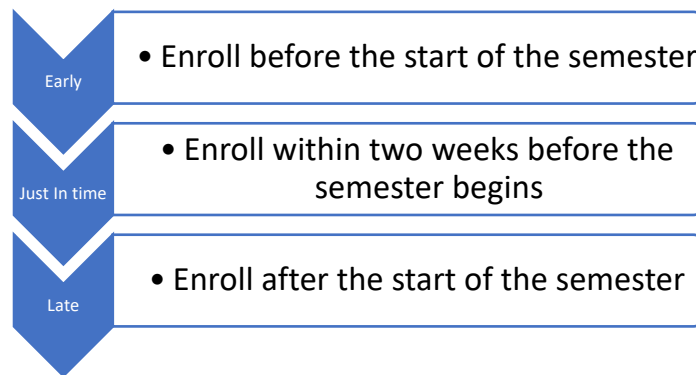
First-generation students differ from their peers whose parents attended college in a variety of ways, including their demographics, motivation for choosing and attending a particular college, their preparedness to navigate entrance into college and academic rigor, as well as their support from family members (Summers, 2003). Thayer (2000) describes first-generation students as more likely to attend a community college when pursuing a post-secondary degree and less likely to persist. Enrollment into college by first-generation students, especially minorities, has seen an increase in recent years (Hicks, 2002). First-generation students are attending community colleges at a growing rate and, based on their demographics and lack of knowledge in navigating the higher education process, they face challenges that lead to their lack of persistence. Learning the enrollment experience of this population as they begin their first semester at a community college could have a positive effect on the institution's onboarding process and help develop consistent messaging regarding resources, with the intent of improving student retention.

Previous studies similar to the topic of "Just in Time" enrolled students have focused on a timeline of early and late registration but did not center specifically on the last two weeks prior to the start of the first semester and the student experience related to attrition. Based on these results, some community colleges have established policies to end the practice of late registration

as the relationship between student success and enrolling after the start of the semester was determined to have a negative impact on student outcomes.

Studies that focused on students who registered late found that many students shared similar characteristics (Tompkins & Williams, 2015). Gender, social-economic background, and being first-generation students were comparable in their demographic makeup, which led to the findings that this population will struggle in navigating the enrollment process and lead to their attrition. Thus, this study will use findings from previous investigations and incorporate that information into how to address the population of first time to college student who chose to register within two weeks prior to their first semester and how their experiences were impacted by this decision. The table below demonstrates the enrollment stages of early, “Just in Time,” and late. Early and “Just in Time” are within the same enrollment timeframe and are not mutually exclusive, but this study will investigate the advisor’s interaction with students arriving within two weeks before the start of semester as this timeline has yet to be explored.

Figure 1: Description of Registration Timeline



Purpose and Significance of Study

Defining student success can be varied by the objective of the student, institutions of higher education, and stakeholders who have a set agenda. Creating an environment that prepares

students to enter their first term of college with the full complement of resources to support their academic pathway is a focus of most institutions. Researchers have concentrated on students whose early and late registration trends led to continuous academic matriculation, or attrition, at community colleges but have not considered what impact their experiences during the last two weeks prior to the start of a semester may have on student success. This researcher has been intrigued by the thought process of new students registering for classes during the enrollment period just before the term starts, and how this experience impacted their decision to remain in college or discontinue the pursuit of their academic and career dreams. Detailing what onboarding processes were possibly neglected, what was the student's motivation to not only decide to attend college, but how they came to the decision to register for classes within the last two weeks before the start of the term, will be examined from the advisors' perspective. Upon investigating this subject, this researcher is optimistic that this study will reveal what services and resources can be tailored to assist this population and guide future new students to successfully complete their first term, as well as examine potential alternatives colleges could offer to accommodate students who present themselves inside the last two weeks of the registration process.

Research has established the connection between a student's enrollment timeline — early and late registration — to successful course and semester completion (Smith et al., 2002). Students who register early, traditionally defined as before the first day of class, have a higher rate of academic success than those who register late, which is normally considered the first day or after classes begin (Shriner, 2014). Those who registered early had a higher average number of credit hours attempted and completed compared to the same students who registered late. A number of studies have been performed on early and late registration and its impact on attrition,

but research does not include the deeper qualitative data focusing on students connecting their registration experience to their reason for not persisting after the first semester. It is the intention of this study to explore the advising staff involvement when onboarding new students to college who register within the last two weeks of the semester. Their interaction and feedback with new students during this timeframe could provide an understanding of what led to the students' decision to arrive just prior to the start of the term.

New state funding models will have an impact on community college student enrollment trends as an emphasis on retention and completion becomes a priority for state and local government officials. Community colleges are typically funded through the collection of tuition and fees, a local tax levy, and/or state revenue based on enrolled students (Cohen et al., 2013). Institutions were driven to admit and enroll a high number of students to ensure fiscal security, but recently this has changed as stakeholders are demanding accountability for the funds being allocated to their local colleges. The state of Ohio instituted a 100% performance-based funding model for colleges and universities to align with their economic development plan, which is designed to increase its competitiveness on the world stage (Ohio Higher Education Funding Commission, 2012). Increasing college and university graduation rates and the number of workforce prepared graduates, while lowering the time to meet degree requirements are incentives which make up the performance-based funding model (Ohio Higher Education Funding Commission, 2012). Reviewing possible onboarding options to increase new student integration to the institution that may lead to an increase in retention and completion rates will be a focus during the research of this topic.

The community college mission of serving populations with limited prospects from seeking a collegiate degree or career training beyond high school will potentially remain a barrier

while attempting to address the last-minute student registration. Community colleges' open access charge is now complicated more than ever because consumers they serve are enrolling with a variety of goals and expectations in addition to academic and social preparedness. Students entering community college list personal interest and improving job skills as their motivation for attending college (Goldrick-Rab, 2010). Providing proper resources to new students, and with limited understanding of what to expect, is further complicated when registration occurs during the extreme traffic of students seeking advising before the start of the term. Community colleges serve 41% of all first-time college students (Gabbard & Mupinga, 2013) and ensuring they are introduced to academic and student services resources during the onboarding process is necessary to begin their pathway of success. Revising current registration policies of open access enrollment to address last minute enrollees potentially would address students coming to campus to register during the last two weeks prior to the semester starting and place a focus on student success.

Many institutions of higher education have moved to eliminate students registering for courses after the semester has started. For those who come to their institution just before the start of the semester, with intentions of beginning their academic program immediately, will not be affected by this strategy and potentially have academic or social barriers that prevent their possible success. Long lines and limited staffing availability to answer questions and provide appropriate guidance to students attempting to navigate the steps to register for class is a challenge at most institutions at the closing of an enrollment period (Walters, 2003). Options to address this staffing challenge in the various student services offices such as financial aid, advising, and registration, was a focus of this study. Also, examining the concept of offering additional term start dates that are outside of the traditional semester structure as another

alternative direction to meet the needs of the first time to college student who registers at the last minute was also a focus of this study.

Determining the best pathways that allow institutions to better serve the diverse populations that find their way to campus at the last minute will be of high importance at the conclusion of this study. Understanding the student experience through the last-minute enrollment process is necessary to better understand not only their motivation to attend college, but how they fared through the enrollment process and was there an impact, negative or positive, on their first semester, and ultimately, their academic persistence.

Theoretical Framework

This study uses Tinto's (1993) Student Integration theoretical framework to explore the advising staff's onboarding interaction with new students and how the student's individual characteristics may impact their rationale to remain or exit the institution. The student's initial commitment to attend college may be forged by their background, past educational experiences, as well as family characteristics (Maalouf, 2012.). Tinto's Student Integration theory traditionally focused on students attending four-year institutions and its association with social integration with campus resources, such as advising and tutoring services, and through campus-life activities, which is typically not seen as a priority by the community college student experience based on their commuter mentality (Karp et al., 2010). Community college students are characterized as completing their on-campus requirements, attending class, and departing to address daily life responsibilities, unlike the traditional four-year student. Students who feel a connection to their college and are integrated into various campus activities, as well as connecting with faculty and staff, will persist in obtaining their academic goal (Karp et al, 2010).

Integration Theory suggests that integration may occur through an academic or social dimension and the connection built with the institution will lead to the student remaining at the college. Connecting first generation students, those from socioeconomically challenged backgrounds, and individuals who enter college academically unprepared for the rigor of higher education work, are primary candidates to be integrated with other students and campus resources immediately (O'Banion, 2012). This study focused on social integration of students to the college through the onboarding process of new college students who register just before the start of the term from the perspective of advising staff.

Exploring this population's exposure, or lack thereof, to the diverse resources designed to encourage engagement to programs like TRIO, tutoring and career services, as well as offices such as advising and accessibility services that are intended to support student retention, was a key component of this study. TRIO programming was born out of the 1964 Economic Opportunity Act, and consists of Educational Talent Search, Upward Bound, and Student Support Services (Cowan Pitre & Pitre, 2009). The three programs are designed to provide educational opportunities for first-generation, low income, and minority populations through high school and into higher education. Student Support Services is housed within colleges and universities to deliver academic and personal support that leads to student retention (Quinn et al., 2019). Integrating students into programs such as this can provide validation for community college students (Deil-Amen, 2011). Previous studies have found a connection between campus resources meant to socially integrate community college students with internal college stakeholders as a way to increase student success (Fike & Fike, 2008).

A portion of this study investigated how resources and services are integrated by the advising staff while onboarding new students. Advising at community colleges is seen as a

critical structured service which is designed to directly interact with students and can be seen as the highest level of support (Hatch & Garcia, 2017). Academic and social integration has the potential to effect retention of community college students and advising can directly impact student success (Donaldson et al., 2016). Community college students may be challenged to connect with the institution, and the resources intended to assist in retention, as they face varying responsibilities outside of their academics that may take priority. Determining how the onboarding of new students based on their registration timeline and integrating services by the advising staff was a focus of this study.

Research Questions

Registration timelines and how it impacts student success, and in particular retention of students, is a common topic of study. Examinations of students who register early and late have established the fact that those who wait until after the term starts to enroll into classes are less successful in course completion and persistence to the next term. Community colleges were established to be accessible to populations that were precluded from attending four-year institutions as a means of bettering their life circumstances. This mission has continued to meet the needs of minority groups, those who come from low-income backgrounds, traditional high school students, and adult students seeking training for employment or to improve their standing with their current employer (Shannon & Smith, 2006). Community colleges are challenged with growing pressure from state legislators to increase student retention and degree completion, while maintaining their open enrollment practice.

Although there are multiple studies that address early and late registration and their relation to student success, researchers have not examined more deeply the student who registers for courses within two weeks before the term, and how that experience relates to their retention.

This qualitative research method will explore the new college student's onboarding experience when they enroll within the last two weeks before the start of the term. This study examined these topics from the perspective of the advising staff and collects their feedback on what students share with them and what options are available in meeting student needs based on their chosen enrollment time.

The Covid-19 pandemic impacted this research study as restrictions were placed on in-person meetings and interviews were conducted virtually. The research questions presented were designed to explore the participants' in-person interaction with new students onboarding during the designated timeline. This study explores the community college advisor's experience when onboarding new students who delay registration of classes until the last two weeks before the start of the semester and will be guided by the following primary question:

Is the onboarding experience for new to college students affected when registration for classes occurs within the last two weeks entering their first semester?

This study will also include the following sub-questions:

1. What is the profile of the "Just in Time" college students when onboarding before their first semester?
2. How did the new students' enrollment timeline affect their advising experience?
3. What role does the advisor play in introducing resources and services designed to integrate and retain new students?

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

The following are terms to be used throughout the study:

Advising– Student support designed to guide academic and career exploration which aligns with the academic plan (Donaldson et al., 2020).

Attrition– The departure from higher education prior to the completion of a degree or certificate (Johnson, 2012).

Early Registration– Students who register before the first official day of class.

First Generation– Individuals whose parents have no college or university experience.

(Hicks, 2002).

Just in Time – Students who enroll within the last two weeks prior to the start of a semester.

Late Registration– Students who register on or after the first official day of class.

Open Access– Ensures access to all who are able to benefit and is the foundation which all community college operations rest (Shannon & Smith, 2006).

Retention– Community college students persistence rate (Wild & Ebbers, 2002).

SUMMARY

The research conducted for this study collected the findings of the community college advisors with new students onboarding within the last two weeks before the start of the semester. The first-time to college student experience may vary based on multiple factors. The student's demographic and economic background, as well as their educational history, may impact their initial decision-making to apply for admission and ultimately their entrance into higher education courses, as well as their continued enrollment. Relying on the community college advisors' feedback and exploring their connection to new students' onboarding experiences and how it is impacted by their chosen enrollment start time are areas of interest for this researcher. This study uses Tinto's Integration Theory to further examine social dimensions and students' connections to college resources at the onset of their first semester. Through research and interviewing advising staff at an Ohio Community College, this qualitative study will provide recommendations for possible enrollment policy changes and place a greater emphasis on the onboarding procedures for new students attending community colleges.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

Examining the research of first-time to college students who delay onboarding until the last two weeks prior to the start of the term required a review of previously researched material and what variables play a part in their enrollment timeline. The literature review also includes an investigation into the correlation to academic success, retention, and degree completion, along with the community college's choice to continue to allow this enrollment pattern. Research has primarily focused on students who register for classes before or after the start of the semester, their characteristics, and academic outcomes that were affected by the decision to begin their higher education career at such a late stage. Community college leadership may be faced with determining if there is a need for change at the policy and procedure level for "Just in Time" students as was done to the adjust late enrollment options. Institutions of higher learning are investigated to determine how their enrollment policies impact the institution's financial bottom line, staffing to meet student needs, and impeding student success.

Previous studies reviewed early and late registered students and the impact it had on attrition, but this study explores the advisors experience of onboarding new students when their enrollment is delayed just before the start of the semester. This literature review will begin identifying the gap in previous studies and the lack of specific enrollment timelines indicating early enrollment success. Enrollment policies for community colleges and the connection to

early and late enrollment studies are examined in this chapter. The literature review concludes with an examination of the evolution of research from access to retention.

GAPS IN THE LITERATURE

Research into attrition and how it correlates with the timeline a student registers for their first term at a community college is tied primarily to early and late enrollment. Late registration, which is defined as course enrollment after the official first day of classes (Tompkins & Williams, 2015), is related to student attrition based on multiple factors including economic challenges, gender, ethnicity, and their family's academic background. Eliminating late registration is trending among community colleges as many make adjustments to their enrollment policy but attempt to maintain the open-access mission on which two-year institutions were founded.

Students who enroll in classes early when attending community colleges are perceived to have a higher academic success rate and their attrition rate is lower than those who register late. Research is consistent with the definition of early registration as being enrolled in courses before the first day of class. This population has a higher rate of course credit hour enrollment, as well as a higher completion rate in their first semester in comparison to students who enroll after the start of the semester (Maalouf, 2012; Shriner, 2014). The lack of designating the timeframe of when the early registrants began their process is a gap in determining the success of the early enrolled student.

Finding research that details why students who register before the start of the term and are more successful than those who register late has been difficult. One study placed an emphasis on investigating early enrollment and factors that potentially led to their first term success, and it suggested the importance of delivering priority registration (Bahr et al., 2015). Researchers have

linked various onboarding services, such as new student orientation and academic advising, as a starting point for priority enrollment for new students. New students who complete specific steps of the enrollment process would be granted priority in registering for classes, which would be a benefit to those selecting courses for their degree. Priority registration is intended to promote early registration for new students but there are no significant findings in the research that dissects the timeline for when students enrolled during the early registration.

Reviewing the “Just in Time” students and how this enrollment practice has impacted their onboarding to college for the first-time, needs to be reviewed further. Researchers define early registration as beginning the enrollment process before the start of the term but dissecting the timeframe of the weeks and days leading up to the semester should also be considered. The support staff and college practices for onboarding students are stressed further during the last weeks, and days, prior to the start of the term and integrating students into institutional resources which may benefit those starting their first semester could miss out due to the volume of enrollment responsibilities. Research into this registration timeline is currently lacking based on this researcher’s review.

COMMUNITY COLLEGE OPEN ENROLLMENT

Understanding enrollment patterns of community college students and the policies in place that permit such actions begins with the creation and the purpose for these institutions. Community colleges evolved from junior colleges, which were founded in 1901, and began serving populations that traditionally were excluded from four-year institutions after World War II (Mellow, 2000). As the war ended and soldiers returned from service, many were left to find training for employment, which led to an increase in enrollment at community colleges. This upsurge was aided by the creation of the 1944 Serviceman’s Readjustment Act, also known as

the G.I. Bill (Geller, 2001). The ups and downs of enrollment at two-year institutions continued through the various economic shifts and world conflicts. Community colleges are now an integral part of the higher education landscape and based on their development of serving local populations throughout the years, the continued open-enrollment and providing open-access is an ongoing charge of the two-year college.

The evolution of the community college from the original junior college model, did not lose the initial intent of being available to all in their service area. Open access has been the longtime mantra of the two-year higher education model and serving a portion of the population left out of four-year degree institutions. Minorities; women, who encompass over 50% of the community college population; academically ill prepared; and low-income students benefit from two-year institutions availability that demonstrates their continued mission to provide educational options for these groups at a higher rate than traditional four-year institutions (Reitano, 1988). Leeder (2013) expands on underprepared populations who are perceived to be not ready to manage the traditional four-year institution's academic requirements. Underprepared populations and first-time to college students have benefited by the open access and enrollment mission of a community college (Gabbard & Mupinga, 2013). The intimidation factor of working through the enrollment process, cost of attendance, and lack of academic preparedness are obstacles they are not equipped to navigate, and the four-year system institutions are not currently constructed to address their needs. Community colleges open their doors for these populations and accept them with academic and personnel impediments, and in most cases, place no limitations on starting their academic career.

The open-door, or open-enrollment, practices were established by the creation of community colleges with the intent to provide training which would lead to employment

opportunities for populations that were commonly restricted by traditional higher education institutions. Community colleges' open access mission allowed the academically, socio-economic, and socially challenged populace entrance into college, but it may now be more of a hindrance to their success (Gabbard & Mupinga, 2013). Registration of new students at community colleges is ongoing during the enrollment process and previous studies have focused on early and late registration and how student success and retention are impacted based on their registration timeline. Student demographics, which includes parental previous college experience, along with academic preparedness, are areas that researchers explored while examining policies by community colleges which enabled students to enroll into courses at various times. The following sections will address research conducted on students who registered for courses early and late and how their academic success was impacted.

EARLY AND LATE REGISTRATION

Understanding the onboarding of new students based on a specific registration timeline is one of the principles for this topic. Community colleges describe their mission as open access which includes such practices as generous registration practices for incoming students (Summers, 2003). Open enrollment allows student entrance to the college during various registration periods, including late registration. Although a specific definition of registering late has not been agreed upon, generally late registration has been defined as registering for one or more classes after the first day of the start of the semester (Dunn & Mays, 2004; O'Banion, 2007; Shriner, 2014; Tomkins & Williams, 2015). Students who register during this timeframe have been studied for comparison to those who registered before the start of the term, also considered early registration. Weiss (1999) correlated the demographic of students enrolling late for courses, to their higher attrition rate compared to the students who enrolled early and drew

the conclusion that institutions are providing a disservice to this group who are entering college with a lack of preparedness.

Profile of Early and Late Enrolled Student

Researchers of student populations who enroll into courses early and late have examined their characteristics as part of the decision to enroll into college. Characteristics of community college students, such as ethnicity, learning styles, and social backgrounds, differ from their four-year counterparts, as they enter their academic career (Palma-Rivas, 2000; Spellman, 2007). Community college students are described as being older on average, financially responsible for their family, less academically prepared, commuting to campus, not involved in student life activities, are employed more hours, and are attending college at less than full-time status (Fike & Fike, 2008). When considering the type of student who enrolls early or late into a community college, researchers go further into connecting the identified student characteristics and their enrollment timeline.

Researchers who investigated early and late registration typically focused on student attrition and its association to student characteristics. Students who registered late were older and less motivated to register early and are exposed to multiple factors that led to their departure from the institution (Weiss, 1999). The Weiss study also indicates that students who register late are more than likely to withdraw or fail courses at a higher rate than those who register on time, but there is no indication if those who registered the last two weeks before the semester had a high retention rate. In one study comparing early and late registration, it was determined that early registration led to higher academic achievement, like most studies, but it also noted those students who registered at the last minute would miss out on courses that fit their academic program and personal schedule (Ford et al., 2008). Students who register late, or at the last

minute, may be forced to decide between their course preferences and their personal responsibilities.

INTEGRATION THEORY

Vincent Tinto's Integration Theory was chosen as the theoretical framework as it focuses on retention through integrating students, academically and socially, during the first year of transitioning to college (Tinto, 2006). Researchers have examined the importance of students entering their first year of college with proper onboarding, and introducing them to academic and social integration resources, which in turn leads to lower rates of student attrition. Jones's (1986) research on students who attend community colleges and their reasons for attrition discovered the correlation between connecting them to the institution at the academic and social level and why students leave. Jones (1986) found that students who created relationships with a staff or faculty member or were introduced to support services, such as advising and career and financial services, were more likely to remain with the institution.

Researchers also examined the practice of connecting new college students to college services in their first semester as a retention strategy for at-risk populations who feel separated from their community and may not receive support for their decision to attend college. Community colleges are accessible to those who are seen as academically unprepared to attend four-year institutions, and financially or socially supporting family members. Students from these particular backgrounds may be forced to make the difficult decision to separate from their community to pursue their academic and career goals (Tinto, 1987, 1993). With that separation comes a gap in support that could be filled by the community colleges' academic and social support services. Elkins et al.'s (1998) review of Tinto's Separation Stage and its influence on first-semester college student persistence found the importance of community colleges bridging

the separation gap students may feel from their community by implementing ongoing support services that connect them to the institution. New community college students have responsibilities that require their time and efforts to be focused outside of their academics, and based on this research, capturing their attention early potentially lowers their attrition rate (Stoval, 2000).

Tinto's Student Integration Theory was chosen as the Theoretical Framework for this study as it emphasizes lowering attrition rates through connecting students with academic and social support. Research supports Tinto's attrition theory at four-year residential institutions as academic and social integration has led to the retention of students (Webb, 1989). Community colleges traditionally serve a commuter population, which is in contrast to four-year students who typically seek out residential life and live on campus in dorms and are exposed to social interactions as they have access to residence halls and are on campus more than two-year institution students. Investigators maintain commuter students are less likely to be socially integrated based on their mobile designation (Napoli & Wortman, 1998). Bean and Metzner's (1985) model is more in line with investigating student attrition and social integration at two-year institutions, but their method relies on data collected after students have been at the college for a significant amount of time and the first-semester students have withdrawn and would be excluded from any study (Webb, 1989). Bringing social resources to community college students and integrating them during the onboarding process and continuously through their first semester, may potentially have a positive impact on lowering attrition rates.

Tinto's Social Integration framework is considered a central part in connecting students to services and resources which would lead to retaining students in college. Students who

develop connections outside of the classroom is a critical structure of the social integration framework (Karp et al., 2010).

Tinto's integration framework emphasizes the importance of college personnel building relationships with students as it will assimilate them to the institution and therefore increase the chances of them remaining and pursue their academic goal (Townsend & Wilson, 2009). Building relationships with staff, faculty, and college communities are seen as opportunities to engage students in more than academics. Tinto's framework does not focus on community college students as they are more transient by nature and spend less time on campus than their four-year peers, but his theory can be applied to two-year institutions as they deliver similar services like academic advising, which introduces students to various resources.

COMMUNITY COLLEGE ENROLLMENT PRACTICES

Community colleges have an established and ongoing open access mission to provide higher education and job training opportunities for populations that are considered at risk or underserved. The open-door policy, which was designed to ensure access, is considered the foundation on which community colleges exist (Shannon & Smith, 2006). A study conducted by O'Banion (2012) focused on late registration and its relationship to high rates of attrition and the conflicts that exist with the community college open access mission. His findings were described as a "tug of war" between keeping the long-standing practice of allowing late enrollment, which is linked to attrition, and maintaining the continuous practice of the open enrollment (Mancini, 2017). The long-term custom of open enrollment plays a role in the study of enrollment timelines as well as its impact on community college student attrition. The populations that this mission is meant to serve and provide access to academic and career gains results in challenges to its current effectiveness and future usefulness. In Keck's (2007) study on late registration at

community colleges, two-year institutions were encouraged to consider all students, their backgrounds, as well as their ultimate goals, when designing policies when attempting to remove barriers in support of retention. The open enrollment practice is under scrutiny in literature where attrition and retention and how the registration timeline are the study focus.

A study that concentrated on the impact student registration timelines had on attrition found that policies of community colleges that allowed late enrollment was an underlying issue and needed to be addressed (Weiss, 1999). No matter the student's demographic makeup, procrastination affects all types of students and changing policies that adjust when students were able to enroll were proposed (Gurantz, 2015). Investigating after the term enrollment, research recommended the need to adjust admission policies and remove late enrollment as an option. In a survey conducted by the League of Innovation in the Community College, 33% of the responders indicated their institution did not offer late enrollment and 36% stated they were considering eliminating this practice (Mancini, 2017). Acknowledging the research findings of late registration and its negative impact on student attrition led to an industry policy change with the intent of reducing student attrition.

Transition from Access to Retention

Researchers have chronicled the evolution of the open-enrollment practice of two-year institutions, which deliver degree and certificate options to a wide variety of populations locally and their success in creating access to their services (Goldrick-Rab, 2010). Recent research concentrated on student retention and completion as legislators and other stakeholders began requiring accountability for the funds being issued to community colleges (Roman, 2007). Besides being one of the local workforce training suppliers, community colleges are now focusing on graduating students with associate degrees and preparing their consumer to transfer

to four-year institutions. College resources and services are revered as building blocks leading to student success and retention.

Student Success Courses

Researchers suggest first-year student courses are not only a positive beginning to an academic career but assists this population in remaining in college. Research indicates the first-year success course should be developed and delivered to integrate students, especially those who have been challenged to enter and remain in college, to the institution's resources, future career options, as well as balancing life and academics (Stovall, 2000). The integration of the college's social and academic options for a new student is believed to benefit them in the short and long term.

Academic Advising

The model of academic advising varies from institution to institution, based on enrollment size and college structure, but research has suggested its importance to student success, especially for first-generation students. Hicks (2002) details the need for early academic guidance for first-generation students as their academic background is generally less than stellar, family support and financial backing is lacking, and their self-esteem to be successful is possibly deficient. Multiple studies highlighted the importance of advising students as a retention tool as they establish a connection with their advisor and are exposed to the institution's resources and learn the relationship between their course work and career goals (Metzner, 1989). Research correlates early and continuous advising and integration with students maintaining enrollment at the institution, which leads to student success.

The structure of an advising appointment and the time spent advising students were topics also explored in previous studies. Researchers investigated intrusive advising and how it impacts student retention and completion. Intrusive advising tasks advisors with providing career, academic, and sometimes general life directions for students, and to do so under 20 minutes, on average (Donaldson et al., 2016). This study focused on how intrusive advising would assist community college advisors connect with their advisees and how it may lead to higher persistence rates. The students who participated in the study expressed that the time spent with their advisor can be limited, and the researchers believe this would impact the effectiveness of the intrusive advising model.

Two additional models noted through this literature review included prescriptive and integrated advising. Heisserer & Parette (2002) conducted a study investigating at-risk students and the advising model that may help this population succeed. The researchers described prescriptive advising as the student relying on the advisor to make academic decisions for them and taking no ownership in the process. Integrated advising is explained as the advisor at the institution being the main connection between the student and the institution and the delivery vessel of curriculum requirements (Heisserer & Parette, 2002). As institutions of higher education emphasize the importance of student retention and completion, researching an appropriate advising model for their student populations will be on going.

Altering Enrollment Policy

Institutions of higher education have traditionally placed a high level of importance on recruiting students as a source of meeting enrollment goals. Community colleges design and execute recruitment plans and invest large amounts of funding in recruiting new students while placing less of an emphasis on student success and retention (Fike & Fike, 2008). The cost of

recruiting new students is higher than retaining and completing their current population. Even with the realization that they are spending more money to recruit students than retain them, there is still a fear by community colleges to change their enrollment policy that would benefit student retention (Tompkins & Williams, 2015). Street et al. (2001) encouraged community colleges to review and address their registration policies and place a higher emphasis on establishing early and regular admission paths. As institutions have implemented policies to eliminate late registration, research has indicated that it impedes student success (Safer, 2009), early and regular registration policies would embrace the research that associates lower attrition rates with enrolling prior to the start of the term. Community colleges continue to struggle with taking the next step of implementing admission application deadlines to encourage early and on-time enrollment. The fear that enrollment and funding from enrolling students will be impacted are primary reasons for not setting an application deadline (Wang & Pilarzyk, 2007). Implementation of student success initiatives at the onset of a new student's academic career is highly suggested by previous research.

Onboarding Steps

Researchers continue to accentuate the importance of early registration of new students entering community college, or any institution of higher education, as a way to improve retention and success rates (Shriner, 2014). The introduction of college resources, such as new student orientation, TRIO, and financial aid services, are a few that are promoted as assisting in integrating students into the college's social culture.

Research encourages institutions of higher learning to deliver a strong orientation program at the earliest stages of the onboarding process. New student orientation, which is offered in various forms at most institutions of higher learning, was implemented as a way to

improve retention and increase student success (M. Chan, 2017). Community colleges implement new student orientations as a manner of introducing services and resources for academic and personal needs and is seen as a bridge between the introduction and recruitment to the institution and the ability to retain the student (Shupp, 2009).

The TRIO program, which provides support services, is federally funded and designed to assist first-generation, academically unprepared, and those from a low-income background, as well as students with documented disabilities, in an attempt to increase the institution's retention rate (Fike & Fike, 2008). Many community college students traditionally meet the eligibility requirements to participate in the TRIO program. The introduction of this resource at the onset of a student's academic career has potential retention and completion elements.

Financial aid plays a large part in how students not only pay for their tuition, fees, and textbooks, but it also supplements their daily living expenses. Colleges are encouraged to direct students to complete their Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) as early as possible to increase enrollment and retention, as well as to assist students in maximizing the funding they will receive (College Board Advocacy and Policy Center, 2010; Novak & McKinney 2011, (McKinney & Novak, 2015). Navigating the financial aid process is considered one of the most difficult for students but is necessary and benefits them in achieving their long-term goals. Obtaining assistance through this process as early as possible provides funding for academic and personnel essentials.

Students beginning their academic career and are new to the collegiate onboarding process and have little or no support or references to fall back on is well studied. The introduction of college resources and services as early as possible for students is believed to be a factor in retaining students for their first term. This early engagement and integration of college

resources appears to impact the new students' attrition while attending their first semester of college.

Student Motivation

Motivating factors that drive students to make the decision to apply to college and the timeline they choose to begin that process is a common research topic (Weiss, 1999). Reviewing motivating factors for students begins with an assessment of the goal setting theory. Motivation is the primary focus of goal setting theory and studies have shown the correlation to setting goals and how it leads to being highly motivated (Savi, 2011). Community college students, in particular those who are first-time to college, face multiple responsibilities and determining their academic goals become difficult. In the Weiss study (1999), advisors who were interviewed found that students who procrastinated in their enrollment to an institution were not committed to attending college. In other findings, students were being encouraged, or pressured, to attend college by family members. Mercy College, a small private institution, has a similar student population as community colleges, as those who enroll are challenged academically and economically. A review of the institution's enrollment policies and what motivates students to enroll established a process to determine student motivation through collecting pre-enrollment data, such as social background, high school academic history, academic ability through assessment tools, student objective for attending college, and their career goals (Passaro et al., 2003). Mercy's adjustment in collecting early student data, as well as their modification to their financial aid packaging, was completed with the intent of increasing student success. Determining student motivation for attending college and its connection to retention is an ongoing investigation, but previous studies have established a link between the two within community colleges and four-year institutions.

SUMMARY

Previous studies have focused on students attending community colleges, and how their enrollment timeline impacts their ability to remain at the institution for the next term. Students who enrolled after the first day of the term — late registration — typically did not find academic success and left the institution earlier than those who registered early or before the semester started. The gap in the research of early and late registration falls into knowing the timeline for those who register before the start of the semester. Students who register “Just in Time,” or within two weeks before the start of the semester, are not designated in the studies researched. Knowing their experience through the enrollment process and how it relates to this group’s willingness to remain with their institution would be valuable in addressing attrition rates.

Community colleges have been diligent in meeting the mission of providing higher educational options and workforce training for those traditionally seen as not capable of attending a four-year institution. Changing the registration policy to eliminate late registration came about as a way to lower attrition rate and improve student success (Passaro et al., 2003). Colleges are now embracing the notion of concentrating on retaining students following changes in enrollment funding models and the requirement of improving student credential completion. College administrators may be forced to review enrollment policies further as stakeholders are increasingly requiring institutions to be more accountable for the funding provided.

The onboarding of students is another literature topic that connects the enrollment timeline of students and also impacts retention and student success. Studies demonstrate there is a need to integrate students early to institutional services that orient them to the college’s vast resources with the intent of improving retention and degree completion (Stovall, 2000). Using advising services, the TRIO program, and assisting students in navigating the ever-winding financial aid pathway are a few of the institutional options that can maintain students on their

academic and career journey. Determining the student's motivation is a factor in securing the proper resources for their success.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

INTRODUCTION

This study examines the onboarding experience of first-time to college students' when registering for classes occurs inside the last two weeks entering their first semester to college. Community college advising staff were interviewed to better understand this phenomenon. Based on this type of study, an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used to explore the student onboarding experience. This chapter describes the methodology of the research, the site chosen, the participants interviewed, and provides an explanation of how the study was conducted to maintain trustworthiness within its findings.

OVERVIEW TO THE METHODOLOGY

Research Questions

The central question of this study is: *Is the onboarding experience for first-time to college students affected when registering for classes occurs within the last two weeks entering their first semester?*

Sub-questions that further detail this study are as follows:

1. What is the profile of the "Just in Time" college students when onboarding before their first semester?
2. How did the new student's enrollment timeline affect their advising experience?
3. What role does the advisor play in introducing resources and services designed to integrate and retain new students?

To understand the onboarding of new students entering college inside two weeks prior to the start of the semester, advising staff at a community college were recruited to gain their perspective on this subject. Each sub-question was used to detail the onboarding experience as the advising staff works with this population. Sub-question one was designed to better understand the makeup of the student entering college “Just in Time.” The last two sub-questions addressed the impact the enrollment timeline has on advising students, and how the advising staff feels about their responsibility to integrate new students registering in the last two weeks. A qualitative research approach was selected based on the exploration of the participants’ experience.

Qualitative Research Approach

Based on the research of Merriam and Tisdell (2015), qualitative methods are best used when researchers are exploring and examining the meaning of an activity, experience, or phenomenon. Qualitative research focuses on the participants’ sense of the world and what meaning they place on the event being studied (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). This study is intended to investigate the onboarding experience from the perspective of the advising staff of first-time to college students and how their decision to register for courses during a specific timeline impacted that experience. Therefore, based on the researcher’s examination into a participant’s life event, a qualitative research method is appropriate. A key component of this study was to conduct one-on-one interviews of participants as a way to explore an advisor’s experience when onboarding new students, the issue of attrition through social integration, and the student registration timeline. The researcher and the participants being studied play a part in obtaining the findings as each interpretation of the event are integrated within the analysis.

Applying a qualitative approach will assist in obtaining results, leading to a holistic picture of the phenomenon (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Using a qualitative research approach, this researcher explored the services and resources each advisor was able to expose (or may have missed) to students that impacted the enrollment of new students. Examining participants' point of view of the onboarding process can create a clear picture of the student's experience entering college two weeks before the start of the term. Generating interview questions that probe the enrollment experience through the perspective of advisors resulted in an all-inclusive finding meant to reconstruct the student and institutional registration practice.

Research Paradigm

As the investigation of a participant's experience is the primary focus of this research, implementing a constructivism/interpretivism approach best aligns with this research project. Researchers following this approach are exploring the "world human experience" (Cohen & Manion, 1994, p. 36) with the suggestion that "reality is socially constructed" (Mertens, 2005, p. 12). Interviewing advising staff and exploring their view of the new students' onboarding procedure resulted in the interpretation of the enrollment experience, which is a disposition of the constructivist/interpretivist paradigm (Schwandt, 1994). The success of this research paradigm depends on the researcher's investigation into the participants' view of the matter being studied (Lewis, 2015).

Methodology

A qualitative investigation has a focus on a systematic phenomenon and the events and outcomes from the viewpoint of the individuals involved (Teherani et al., 2015). Obtaining such

information from the study's participants required extracting information from their various lived experiences. The Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach allows the researcher and the participants of the study to develop a bond, which allows for the expansion of opportunities to learn the fullest of the individuals' lived experience (Alase, 2017). Participants are permitted to express their experience to the researcher in narrative form and free from boundaries. As it is the goal of this researcher to learn how the participants perceive the onboarding of new students based on a specific timeline, phenomenological interviewing was the chosen method of inquiry. Phenomenology, hermeneutics, and ideography make up three key mechanisms of philosophy within the IPA approach. The following sections will detail the purpose for using the three components of IPA within this study.

Phenomenology

Providing a brief history of the phenomenology approach to research is necessary to better understand its connection with IPA theoretical approach. Phenomenology is defined by Moran (2000) as a form of philosophy, which "emphasizes the attempt to get to the truth of matters, to describe phenomena, in the broadest sense as whatever appears in the manner in which it appears, that is as it manifests itself to consciousness, to the experience" (p. 4). The philosophical inquiry method of phenomenology was founded by Edmund Husserl as a means of describing an individual's experience completely (Roberts, 2013). Husserl argued that "phenomenology did not deny the existence of the real world but sought instead to clarify the sense of this world (which everyone accepts) as actually existing" (Husserl, 1913, p.1). His usage of eidetic phenomenology reduction or bracketing away/suspending/disconnecting, as he calls it, is meant to temporarily reduce the subject's world of speculation by bringing them back to the primordial experience of the subject being studied (Husserl, 1913). The goal of the researcher

who follows the method of phenomenology is to discover the participants' lived experience as the investigator examines the phenomena in which the individuals were involved.

Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is connected with the phenomenology research method through their founders. Edmund Husserl, the German philosopher, is known as the father of phenomenology, while Hans-Georg Gadamer is considered the founder of hermeneutics, and the two methods are linked through Martin Heidegger (Kakkori, 2009). Heidegger, who studied under Husserl, was a mentor to Gadamer and brought the philosophies together. The focus of Hermeneutics Phenomenology is to explore the subjective experience of the research participants, which is counter to previous philosophical thinking that suggested it was best to suspend personal opinions (Kafle, 2011). Participants share their accounts of an event as a way for the researcher to understand their experience, and through the researcher's own "fore-conceptions" (Shinebourne, 2011, p. 20). The role of the researcher is also significant when attempting to understand the participants experience in an IPA approach. Smith (2004) states the researcher is working to make sense of the participant attempting to explain their experience.

Ideography

Ideography explores how participants makes sense of an event that they are part of during a given time (Cohen et al., 2007; Wagstaff et al., 2014). Researchers systematically detail the experiences of those being studied and are committed to specifying the investigation of the phenomenon being examined. The use of ideography within an IPA approach requires the researcher to explore the particulars of an occurrence versus its generalities (Miller et al., 2018;

Smith et al., 2009). IPA studies may have a focus on a single or group case as it searches for similarities and differences between those participating in the investigation (Shinebourne, 2011).

Justification for Using IPA

As this study will require interviewing participants to obtain their perspective with a college enrollment event, an interpretative phenomenological analysis was chosen to complete the investigation. IPA is designed to investigate the participants' view of an occurrence and explores their experience through a dynamic process (Smith et al., 1999). An IPA research method includes the researcher playing an active role in the dynamic process when investigating an event (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

IPA studies generally consist of small homogenous samples and are defined by the purpose of the study (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Examining the advisor's experience when onboarding new students when the registration timeline is delayed until the last two weeks before the start of the semester fits this analysis structure. This will be obtained through interviewing advising staff at a community college. Arranging one-on-one interviews for a sample between five to eight participants will be the goal of this study, which meets the guidelines of an IPA inquiry.

Site Selection

This section provides a description of the chosen site to conduct this study. The institution chosen meets the guidelines of the researcher's desire to learn the enrollment process of the identified students. Those chosen for the study and their demographics will be covered further later in this chapter.

For the purpose of this study, a community college was chosen as a means to investigate the enrollment of a specific student population during the last two weeks of the registration process. A community college in Ohio was the chosen site and data were collected from the college's website and are based on Fall 2019 enrollment statistics. This institution has multiple locations, and the average age of the student population is 24, with 21% of the student body listed as being enrolled full time and 79% as less than full time. This institution has a fairly diverse student population. African Americans represent 16% of its enrollment, and 10% are considered "other than Caucasian," which includes Hispanic, Asian, and Native American. Of the non-high school students who attend this community college, 75% receive some form of financial aid. Students can obtain professional certificates, associate degrees in business, health, and associate of arts and science degrees, and the college was recently approved to offer baccalaureate degrees. Community colleges provide access to academic possibilities for diverse populations, including first-generation students. First-generation students encompass 40% of the total enrollment at the institution being studied, which is consistent with other community colleges (Dougherty, 1994; Inman & Mayes, 1999; Willet, 1989).

The advising staff model is diverse in its makeup based on the college's four locations. On the main campus, students have the opportunity to meet with five professional advisors during the onboarding process. They also have the opportunity to meet with a TRIO representative, the director, and advisor, as they prepare to start their first term. The second most populated campus by enrollment has two professional advisors assigned to onboard and advise students and one TRIO advisor. The two smaller locations each have one individual with advising as one portion of their responsibility.

This institution offered registration opportunities in three terms — fall, spring, and summer during the 2019–20 academic year. During these terms, students can begin their academic career at the beginning of the semester or start during a shorter eight-week term within the semester. Courses that are available at the beginning of the term are not always offered during the shorter term, but enrollment requirements regarding course pre-requisites must match those of the 16-week semester.

Participant Selection

This study is using an IPA methodology and, based on the researcher's goal to capture the experience of an individual's particular phenomenon, the sample size is traditionally small. Establishing the sample under investigation will depend on the phenomena under study and choosing the population would share similar backgrounds (Noon, 2018). IPA researchers use a homogenous sampling practice as they are searching for participants who more closely align with the research questions under examination (Smith & Osborn, 2003). The sample of participants, typically ten or fewer, are interviewed in a semi-structured format and their responses are explored verbatim (Callary et al., 2015). The researcher intended to interview approximately five to eight study participants. Organizing the appropriate participant selection for the study created an opportunity to gather and analyze data that would lead to answering unanticipated questions.

Protecting the participants' identity for this research topic is a priority of the researcher. Although the topic under investigation is not considered sensitive or controversial, the importance of protecting the confidentiality of the participants remains essential (Baez, 2002; Bresler, 1995; Ebbs, 1996; Fontana & Frey, 1994; Linowes, 1979; Magolda & Robinson, 1993). In an effort to protect the participants' identity, each participant was assigned a pseudonym and

all demographic data are only mentioned in a comparison manner. Participants' information and data collected for the study were secured in the password-protected iCloud software system, Zotero (Zotero Your Assistant, n.d.). The online recorded interviews and the transcriptions of each participant also remained secure in the same manner. All data collected remain secured and in the position of the researcher for three years following collection, and at that time, all data will be meticulously destroyed.

Participant Description/Characteristics

Participants for this study consisted of staff at a community college who are designated to advise students during the onboarding process who register for courses during the last two weeks prior to the start of their semester at the chosen community college. Although the targeted population were not selected by gender, ethnicity, or age, these characteristics were documented during data analysis as a way to determine possible correlations in their experiences and to ensure a mixture of demographics for the study. Advising staff who are part of the student onboarding experience at each location were considered as possible participants.

STUDY PROCEDURES

A homogenous sample was obtained in an effort to achieve common themes as the researcher explored an event with participants that have shared characteristics (Quinn, 2008; Roberts, 2013; Smith et al., 2009). The purpose of this study was to examine the community college advisor's experience when onboarding new students who were enrolled in courses two weeks before the start of the semester. The following process was used to recruit and interview advising staff for this study.

First, a request to conduct a research study that includes interviewing advising staff was made to the president of the chosen community college (Appendix A). Once an affirmative response was received (Appendix B), an IRB submission was made to Ferris State University and the community college being studied. Following IRB approval from Ferris State University and the community college, the researcher requested a list of advising staff from the Institutional Research (IR) department of the local community college being studied. The request consisted of the advisors' college email address and office contact number.

Advisors received a notification email (Appendix C) informing them of the study underway and requesting their participation. The goal was to interview five to eight advisors from a mixed demographic background. Participants who agreed to and were chosen for the research project were contacted by phone to discuss the purpose of the study and their role, to allow them to ask questions regarding the process, and to schedule the one-on-interview. The researcher allotted 60 minutes for each phone communication.

The research goal was to include a variety of advising of staff, based on campus location, and majors assigned. The researcher ensured there was a mix of identifying qualifiers to guide the study. If there was a significant interest in participating in the study, the high number of potential participants allowed the investigator to be detailed in the selection process.

Interviews were scheduled following confirmation of the advisor's interest to participate in the study. Based on the current health restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic, interviews were conducted through the online communication service, GoToMeeting. Participants in the study received the Informed Consent form (Appendix D) via email and a designated phone discussion occurred to review and confirm their understanding of the process. This time was used to schedule the 60-minute interview. Upon the advisor consenting to participate in the study

by signing and returning the consent form, the interview proceeded on the agreed scheduled date and time. Using an interview guide (Appendix E), participants were asked a series of open-ended questions to obtain their experiences when onboarding new students based on the timeline of registering for courses just before the start of the semester. Following the participant's interview, participants were given the opportunity to review the interview transcript for accuracy and potential changes via email (Appendix F). Each interviewee had one week from the date the email was sent to reply. At that time, the researcher assumed no changes were necessary and proceeded with the data analysis.

DATA COLLECTION

The data collection for this study involved conducting personal, semi-structured interviews with participants as a way to obtain responses to the enrollment experience of new students. The purpose of using personal, in-depth interviews is to allow the participant of the study to share their emotions, feelings, and opinions (Langkos, 2014). IPA interview samples are typically small, ten or fewer (Callary et al., 2015; Larkin et al., 2006; Smith, 2004). Conducting such one-on-one interviews allows the researcher and the research participant to connect in a way that is flexible in structure and flow and in a manner that leaves room for unexpected findings to be discovered. Exploring this phenomenon and the resulting impact from the participant's enrollment perspective through personal interviews led to gaining knowledge of the registration steps into college for the first-time student during the last two weeks prior to the start of the semester.

In order to collect the necessary data for this research topic, using the IPA recommended process of interviewing individuals, required a questionnaire to properly explore the advisor's experience. The researcher created questions that were focused on the topic being studied but

were not leading in nature (Chan et al., 2013). The interview guide (Appendix E) was the data collection tool utilized to investigate the student's thinking, emotions, and feelings from the perspective of the of the college's advising staff leading to the student's decision to enroll into the college for the first time.

IPA interviews are conducted in a variety of manners and in person, face-to-face, is generally the most common. Based on current health guidelines due to the Covid-19 epidemic, interviews were conducted using the online electronic meeting software, GoToMeeting. As IPA interviews take about an hour (Noon, 2018), each interview was scheduled for 60 minutes, and time was allotted to allow respondents the opportunity to ask questions at the end. To obtain the participants' responses verbatim, the interviews were recorded and transcribed per IPA application (Fade, 2004). Participants of the study were notified of the interview process prior to the start of the online dialogue, and each participant was recorded to collect their responses accurately. The release form (Appendix D) signed by each participant included the statement that their identity would be protected throughout the research process.

DATA ANALYSIS

The purpose of analyzing the verbatim data collected from the research participants was to filter and interpret information (Chan et al., 2013). Smith and Osborne (2003) indicate that developing categories and themes and sub-themes as a way to compare data collected is best for this type of study. The collection of the data and displaying it in a manner that simplifies its comprehension provides readers a better understanding of the investigation. As the researcher analyzes the data of one study participant at a time, the focus begins with the description of what has been learned and moves to the interpretation stage. The next step is bringing the initial themes together and eventually refining the final themes identified (VanScoy & Evenstad, 2015).

This researcher obtained the participant findings through one-on-one interviews and created appropriate coding modules in an effort to locate and develop themes from the data collected.

The transcribed conversations between the researcher and the study participants were the initial phase of analyzing the data. Using the teleconference communication tool, GotoMeeting.com, each participant's interview was recorded, and the conversation was transcribed by GotoMeeting Smart Assistant (GoToMeeting, n.d.). Once each participant had been interviewed and their conversation had been transcribed, this researcher began the process of coding and connecting the themes found. Coding was used to configure and establish patterns from the participants' interview as a way to create meaningful categories from the research findings (Callary et al., 2015; Patton, 2002). The researcher then reviewed and analyzed the collected data to distinguish the participants' themes and patterns.

Navigating the coding process can be time consuming when painstakingly reviewing the transcribed video recorded interviews, as well as re-watching the participants' interview multiple times. The purpose of going through the transcripts and watching the videos multiple times is to condense common themes, phrases, and thoughts from the participants (Alase, 2017). Alase (2017) states there are three generic phases of data coding, which includes gradually breaking down the sometimes-lengthy statements of the participants. Researchers can be made aware of key words that are repeated by those in the study through the first generic phase of data coding. The second generic phase of data coding is to further condense the statements and key words presented by those in the study. Although the materials from the interviews are being condensed to connect themes, the lived experience is still accurately represented. The final generic phase of data coding brings the interviews to a few key words or phrases as the researcher examines the

interviewee's statements and captures the lived experience of the participants in just a few words.

This researcher used online resources to save transcribed interviews to color code and separate themes and key words during the coding process. Converting the transcribed interviews to PDF documents, key components were color coded, using highlighting tools, as well as identifying contextual information through the use of Microsoft Word's Macro to track similar thoughts and feelings of the participants. The transcribed interviews were securely stored in the password-protected organizer software, Zotero (Zotero, n.d.). Qualitative studies use color coding to identify key phrases, words, and themes to categorize and analyze the findings from transcript taken verbatim (Alase, 2017). Identifying selected items that are similar and of interest to the researcher, as well as pertinent to the study within the transcripts, were coded the same (Fade & Swift, 2011).

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This researcher followed all required steps to conduct this research study at the highest level of ethical responsibility. Submitting the required documentation for Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval to Ferris State University and the Community College occurred prior to requesting participant information or contacting any perspective participant.

Trustworthiness

The primary purpose of a qualitative research study is to find a better understanding of the topic at hand, which leads to a different level of trust from those that are designated to test a hypothesis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Trustworthiness is developed in a qualitative study from the development of the investigation, which is accepted by those reviewing the final product. In

addressing validation within an interpretative research project, Angen (2000, p. 387) and Lewis (2015) believe validation is “a judgement of trustworthiness or goodness of a piece of research.” This researcher validated the investigation’s findings through proper examination of similar topics following IRB data collection guidelines and following the criteria for credibility, dependability, and conformability of this study. Maintaining proper procedures throughout the research of this topic led to verification and trustworthiness in its conclusions.

Credibility

Qualitative researchers have a need to verify the credibility of their study and use a variety of methods such as triangulation and peer reviews to meet their goal of obtaining a credible research project (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Shenton (2004) asserts that the use of triangulation as a method of confirming credibility can be used through group or individual interviews as there is a comparison of multiple viewpoints on the same topic. This examination included detailed findings collected from the participants’ interviews, which includes the perspective of the participant and demographic data that assist in ensuring a balanced study. It is suggested that a qualitative study is considered credible when those who have experienced similar events recognize the experience through description immediately (Krefting, 1991; Sandelowski, 1986). Gathering this information from a homogenous cohort is designed to capture a significant solution.

Another tactic prescribed by Shenton (2004) to ensure credibility is embracing the review of the research project by peers, colleagues, or academics. Configuring a committee of professionals within higher education is a step in the research process this researcher has in place to ensure credibility. Consistent review and feedback from those within the study’s committee structure allowed for improvement and adjustments to content and structure of the study. The

committee was overseen by an experienced administrator in Student Affairs, who has a strong understanding of community college enrollment and the process prescribed for new students.

Dependability

The research design of a qualitative study is the primary piece that would lead to evidence that a research project is deemed dependable (Shenton, 2004). Enlisting the collection of interviews and institutional data and providing documentation that describes the process and findings were part of the research collection. As this study examined the experiences of college advisors responsible for enrolling new students, verifying their qualifications was important to determining dependability. Confirming the participants' professional credentials and experience through a personal interview also reflects what steps were made to ensure dependability.

Conformability

Ensuring the findings from those who shared their experiences of their life events is to be at the forefront, rather than the beliefs of the researcher, is necessary for conformability (Shenton, 2004). Krefting (1991) suggests that the researcher should spend time engrossed into the research material as well as significant time with the study participants as a way to identify recurrent themes that lead to confirmability. The researcher will profess any bias for this subject based on professional standing and an interest in the subject for an extended period of time. Doing so will allow for those reviewing the material to depict gaps in the process based on any potential bias by the researcher. The researcher also re-examined the data collected as a way to verify confirmability throughout the research process.

Potential Research Bias

Signs of bias within a research project is perceived as not only poor quality, but it can also be concluded that the study's credibility may be challenged (Roulston & Shelton, 2015). Acknowledging the researcher's bias is an indication that the study is on the right path and leads to credibility. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) stated the importance of recognizing and observing potential bias as a way to ensure the study is not being conformed based on the researcher's own preferences. Preserving the credibility of this study is at the forefront of this researcher's purpose and creating a dependable research project is of importance.

Acknowledging and monitoring potential bias has been established as a critical aspect of creating a credible research study. This researcher entered the field of higher education 15 years ago and has spent the last 13 years as a community college administrator. During the community college years, the researcher progressed to a position of enrollment leadership, a position that holds responsibilities for the onboarding and retention of students. Students who decide to enter their college career at the end of the enrollment cycle and their interaction with the advising staff has been an interest of the researcher for some time. Acknowledging a long-term interest in this topic and being up close to the onboarding process of those being studied could lead to bias. Implementing the steps previously mentioned to ensure credibility, dependability, and conformability reduced the possibility of potential bias within the study. In this researcher's opinion, the pursuit of this research topic should bear fruitful information in the attempt to improve attrition rates.

LIMITATIONS

This study's limitations include its sample size of participants, and its limit to one community college. The projected number of advisors who were expected to participate in the

study were five to eight, and although their experience of onboarding students may represent a significant quantity of the population, it is a limited sample. Another limitation to this study was its focus on one community college in Ohio. The state of Ohio has twenty-three community colleges of various enrollment sizes (Ohio Colleges & Universities, n.d.). Similar studies based in the other twenty-two community colleges might vary based on institutional design, resources, and its community population.

SUMMARY

This study examined several advisors' interactions with new students when registering for classes within the last two weeks before their first semester in college. Community college advisors were interviewed in an attempt to learn more about the onboarding of students during this timeframe. This chapter described the process the researcher followed in choosing the research approach to be used, in collecting and analyzing the data once approved by the Ferris State University and the Community College's IRB, and in ensuring the study results were trustworthy upon conclusion. The characteristics of the institution being studied is included within this chapter. Recognizing and monitoring the researcher's bias is critical to ensuring the study is trustworthy and dependable.

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS OF ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWS

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to examine the new student's onboarding experience who registered for classes within two weeks before the start of the semester from the community college's advising staff prospective. Following IPA research standards, one-on-one interviews were used to collect findings to better understand the advisors' interactions with new students during a particular registration timeline. This chapter describes the study participants, themes developed from the participants' findings experience when onboarding new students, and a summary of the interviews.

The primary question for this study was, *Is the onboarding experience for first-time college students affected when registering for classes occurs within the last two weeks entering their first semester?*

The study was further guided by the following sub-questions:

1. What is the profile of the "Just in Time" college students when onboarding before their first semester?
2. How did the new student's enrollment timeline affect their advising experience?
3. What role does the advisor play in introducing resources and services designed to integrate and retain new students?

This chapter presents the findings collected from the individual interviews and analyzed for interpretation. A description of the study's participants, themes that developed from the three sub-questions, and the outcomes from the qualitative interviews conducted to examine the

primary question are discussed as well. Themes were developed from the participants' responses following the sub-questions are also presented. The resulting themes originated from the new students' profile, the timeline chosen to register, and the integration of resources when onboarding during the last two weeks before the start of the semester. A summary of the research findings concludes this chapter.

STUDY RESULTS

This research study followed an interpretive phenomenological analysis format and explored the experience of onboarding new students at a particular time in the registration cycle from the advisors' perspective. IPA was chosen as the researcher investigated how participants understand a particular situation and how they make sense of the circumstances they face (Larkin et al., 2006). Conducting one-on-one interviews and using open-ended questions to collect the findings from the participant were used for this study. As recommended by IPA, a small sample size was selected in conducting this qualitative study (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Six participants were chosen from the college's advising staff from various campuses to provide their onboarding experience of new students. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and in-person meeting restrictions, the interviews were conducted virtually and recorded. Transcripts were analyzed as a way to interpret the participants' findings to the interview questions. Findings based on the participants' interviews and the themes from these findings are presented in the following section.

PARTICIPANTS

Interviewing advisors at an Ohio community college and learning their experience when onboarding new students were chosen to further explore the topic of registering for classes during a specific timeframe. The chosen community college has multiple locations with a variety

of advising staff models. To ensure there was a well-rounded representation of the advisor experience, three of the college's locations were chosen to examine the onboarding of new students. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, all interviews were conducted virtually to comply with health restrictions and recorded for accuracy. Six individuals participated in the study and shared their experience of advising new students during the last two weeks before the start of the semester. Table 1 (below) summarizes the participants' demographics.

Yvonne

Yvonne is a success coach at one of the college's satellite locations and began her career at the institution in 2017. She explained that the college changed the title from advisor to success coach a few years ago as there was an emphasis placed on providing a holistic advising experience for students. Yvonne has been with the college for nearly five years and began her advising position at what would be considered the main location. She does not feel the overall duties for her position have changed since the position name change. Yvonne is primarily responsible for advising health students but will advise all majors when required. She plays the primary role when onboarding students who come to this location. Yvonne has a doctorate in education.

Aaron

Aaron is a success coach at one of the college's satellite locations and began his career at the institution five years ago. Aaron started with the college at the main location and moved to the current site where he began advising students. He was employed at a four-year institution before working at this community college, where he worked in campus housing. Aaron advises students from multiple academic programs but has a high concentration of students participating

in the dual enrollment program, College Credit Plus (CCP) (n.d.). Aaron participates in the onboarding of new students when registering for their first semester. Aaron has a master's degree in Higher Education and Student Affairs.

Jean

Jean is a success coach at the main location and primarily advises students who are majoring in one of the health programs. Jean has been employed with the college for ten years and a success coach for nearly four years. Jean was a community college student and earned an associate degree before receiving bachelor's and master's degrees. Jean, like other success coaches at this location, plays a role in onboarding new students when registering for their first semester.

Kelly

Kelly, who was no longer with the college at the time of the interview, was the coordinator of Student Success at one of the college's satellite locations for two years. Kelly, who is a community college graduate, began her career with the college at one of the other satellite locations. She moved to the newest location and played a primary role in assisting with its opening. As the coordinator of Student Success, Kelly was the only full-time staff member at the location and was responsible for all student service-related activities. Being the only full-time staff member, Kelly was responsible for all onboarding steps. She departed the college a month before this research interview.

Sylvia

Sylvia has been with the college for nearly nine years and is currently a success coach at the college's main location. She started in a different position at the college and transitioned to

success coach three years ago. Sylvia advises students in the college’s business and applied programs and participates in the onboarding of students with the other success coaches. Sylvia earned a master’s degree during her time as a success coach.

Jazmine

Jazmine is a success coach at the college’s main location and has been in this role for nearly three years. She began her career with the college in a different capacity before transitioning to success coach. Students who are pursuing a degree or certificate in one of the college’s health programs are her primary advising responsibility. She participates in the onboarding steps with the other success coaches. Jazmine earned a bachelor’s degree before working at the college.

Table 1: Participant Professional Title and Location

PARTICIPANT NAME	TITLE	COLLEGE LOCATION
Yvonne	Success Coach	Satellite
Aaron	Success Coach	Satellite
Jean	Success Coach	Main
Kelly	Coordinator, Student Services	Satellite
Sylvia	Success Coach	Main
Jazmine	Success Coach	Main

RESEARCH THEMES

Five research themes were discovered and quantified through the participants’ interviews. When defining the profiles of onboarding new students, a lack of preparation and student emotions were consistently noted by the participants. All six participants stated that many of the

new students who started the registration steps just before the start of the semester exhibited a lack of planning to begin college successfully in two weeks. Each of the participants emphasized that the new student was driven by some type of emotion when onboarding during the timeframe under investigation. Participants described the new student as being anxious, nervous, scared, and excited as they started a journey in which many had no familiarity.

When participants were asked to discuss how the first advising appointment was impacted by the student's chosen time to register, participants consistently noted a compressed timeline. This compressed timeline was the third theme discovered when reviewing the new student's decision to onboard late in the process. The element of time affects the new student and the advising staff during those last two weeks. The fourth theme discovered from the participants' interviews was the impact the new student's life events had on their decision to begin the registration process when they did. New students shared with participants that their family and friends, as well as their employment status, play a part in their registration timeline.

Participants were asked to explain their role when introducing college resources and services, and institutional support was the reoccurring theme from the interviews. The participants suggested that new students need to be fully aware of the college's support services, but most fall short in accruing such knowledge when registering just before the start of the semester. Based on participant feedback, the college has improved in their internal resource and service offerings while creating pathways to external offerings that benefit students.

Table 2: Identified Themes from Participant Responses

THEMES	YVONNE	AARON	JEAN	KELLY	SYLVIA	JAZMINE
Research Question #1: What is the profile of the “Just in Time” college students when onboarding before their first semester?						
Lack of Preparation	X	X	X	X	X	X
Student Emotions	X	X	X	X	X	X
Research Question #2: How did the student’s enrollment timeline effect their advising experience?						
Time Crunch	X	X	X	X	X	X
Life Events	X	X		X	X	X
Research Question #3: What role does the advisor play in introducing resources and services designed to integrate and retain new students?						
Institutional Support	X	X	X	X	X	X

Research Question #1: What is the profile of the “Just in Time” college students when onboarding before their first semester?

The study’s first sub-question explored the participants’ view of the first time to college students’ profile when registering for classes just before the start of the semester. Participants were asked to share the new student makeup when onboarding during the last two weeks before the start of the semester. The participants were also asked to describe the new student’s mindset, provide a demographic description, and describe what challenges and solutions were presented by students when starting college during this timeframe. The researcher also explored the participants’ view of the new student’s academic preparedness and asked each to identify areas outside of academics the students might struggle with during this registration timeline. The lack of preparation and the student’s emotions were themes that rose from the participants’ feedback. The sub-themes of Academic preparedness, Non-Academic Preparedness, Challenges and Solutions were also discovered.

Lack of Preparation

Participants were consistent in their responses that many of the new students they advise just before the start of the semester are challenged to be prepared for their first time to college experience. Participants stated the level of academic and financial preparedness necessary to start college is a challenge for this population and many are presented with these requirements for the first time. Participants believe the lack of preparedness has an impact on their academic readiness, ability to pay, and long-term success while in college. Advisors shared the new student's lack of preparation may be tied to their last-minute decision to begin the registration process, as well as this being their first exposure to college enrollment requirements. Advising staff shared their eagerness to assist new students and direct them on the correct path but felt themselves challenged by the advising appointment time constraints.

Academic Preparedness

The researcher asked the participants to describe the new students' academic preparedness when onboarding during the last two weeks of the semester. Investigating the participants' observations of how the new students arrive prepared or not prepared academically would provide an understanding of how the last-minute registration could impact their first-semester class offerings. It could also assist in determining options for delivering needed support based on the student's readiness to start college.

The participants shared that the college evaluates academic preparedness for new students in a variety of ways, but placement tests are used as a standard practice. New students entering the college are evaluated on their reading, writing, and math skills and how each correlates with their chosen academic major. Jean shared that it can be difficult to gauge if a

student is academically prepared based on their placement scores when starting the semester. She stated:

When it comes to like placement testing and things of that nature, you can't really tell that they are prepared. I feel that they have gone through the process in such a rushed manner that they could potentially be prepared.

Jean regularly recommends to new students not to rush through placement tests, as there is still time to register for classes, which she believes is their ultimate goal.

Academic preparedness for the new student may also depend on where they are in their academic standing. Aaron advises a high number of high school dual enrollment students onboarding during the last two weeks before the start of the semester and believes this population must be prepared to begin their college courses based on state-mandated requirements. Aaron explained:

I do see students that are very academically prepared, especially our CCP students. They, even though they're coming in late, are usually very academically prepared, mainly based off the nature of the CCP program that they have to absolutely meet minimum college-level standards to enter college-level coursework. They are very prepared. I think, for our more traditional students coming in that last two weeks, they typically do have some remedial coursework.

He continued to share that it is typical for traditional students entering the last two weeks to test into remedial reading, writing, and math, which makes creating a schedule difficult because, by then, only a few remedial classes are still available.

The majority of the participants supported Jean and Aaron's description of the new student and their academic preparedness when onboarding at such a late time. The term "rushed" was consistent throughout each of the participants' interviews. Those in agreement with Aaron and Jean also felt the students are not able to re-test for a higher proficiency or take advantage of the pre-test resources developed for students to practice the three parts in the placement test because of the last-minute registration. Sylvia was the only participant who believed the students

she advises are prepared academically but at the same time they struggle with knowing the demands of course work and developing a job and life schedule that will allow them to be successful in college. All of the participants agreed that the new students entering at this time are ambitious and excited to get started but may fail to see the bigger academic demands because of the expedited process while onboarding just before the semester begins.

Non-Academic Challenges

The researcher asked the participants to identify any non-academic challenges new students face when onboarding just before the start of the semester. Each participant stated that knowledge of payment options and services provided by the college were at the top of non-academic challenges this population faces when onboarding late in the registration cycle. Completing the FAFSA and understanding the steps in accepting financial aid were mentioned throughout the interviews. The participants also noted the difficulties faced by students who were using alternative payment types.

Knowledge of financial aid was mentioned by all six of the participants as a non-academic challenge a new student may face when onboarding late. Participants shared that students are new to the enrollment process, and many of them are undertaking these steps for the first time and without assistance from a family member who has experience with this process. Aaron stated, “They’ve probably never filled out a FAFSA before, or they know somebody who has, but they themselves haven’t filled one out.” The student who has completed the FAFSA is still challenged to complete the final process when additional documentation is requested by the financial aid office, according to the participants. New students turn to their advisor requesting assistance in finalizing these steps to ensure their tuition, fees, textbooks, and supplies are paid from their aid package. Kelly explained the situation as:

They don't know what taxes (documents or records) to bring in, or that they even need them, potentially. So, that's something that sometimes they have to come back for, which delays their financial aid even more and prevents them from getting textbooks right away. Other things, like, if they get flagged for verification, that's another snag, you know. That holds up the students a little bit they're not prepared for, and they don't truly understand. Like, if they can't afford textbooks out of pocket, and they don't have the financial aid secured, we know we would have students sometimes starting without textbooks.

Kelly also shared that she looks for alternative funding options for the student, when possible, to ensure they can order their textbooks through the college's electronic bookstore.

Other participants pointed to the new students' lack of understanding of the particulars of the financial aid awards when their FAFSA is complete. Distinguishing between the Federal Pell Grants and subsidized and unsubsidized student loans is a conversation the participants typically hold with new students. Study participants were vocal in stating this is a detailed conversation that, not only prepares the student for paying for the upcoming semester, but also helps them understand the potential consequences of accepting funds if they are not needed. Yvonne stated, "They don't understand the Pell Grant versus a loan. They just know that their friend over here got a refund, but they don't know that the refund is to be paid back." Sylvia shared her approach when discussing the topic of financial aid with new students and explained:

Alright, so if they say that (using financial aid), I actually bring it up (in the student portal) and open up their package. And I'll look to see if they've done their entrance counseling, which covers a lot because I don't wanna be redundant. But I do explain to them what their Pell Grant means, what the differences between the subsidized and unsubsidized loans are to be used for. If I know a student that's really struggling financially, I will advise, you know, the subsidized loan may be a good option for you, because it does have the lowest interest rate possible, and it's something that can help them with their bills while they're in school, so they're not stressing about that.

Sylvia adds to this conversation with the new student by sharing her personal experience of using her financial aid to assist with her daily living expenses. She also detailed the fact that the loans must be repaid, and there is a danger of owing Pell Grant funds if the new student withdraws from classes at a particular time of the semester.

Participants shared that a consequence of the new student not having an understanding of the FAFSA steps and onboarding just before the start of the semester potentially may lead to not having their tuition paid or proper supplies to begin the semester. Kelly reflected on the new students she advised that were not prepared to start college with their financial aid in place. She stated:

There are times where students were coming in last minute and didn't have financial aid secured. So maybe they were starting, or potentially starting, without books, and they couldn't afford to pay for them out of pocket. So, I would see things like that all the time.

According to participants, understanding the financial aid process and the importance of having all documents submitted before the first day of class is not a priority for the new students entering just before the start of the semester. Jazmine discussed how the majority of their advising time is spent on the academic requirements, but the topic of financial aid and completing the FAFSA is close behind. She stated:

Admitting that they haven't filled out the FAFSA yet, so we have to get that together, and, or just like no idea, or no plan already set up, for like how they're gonna pay for school, they just aren't really sure.

The participants believe the new student's reluctance to tackle this important step in the registration process potentially could lead them to be ill-prepared to start their academic career on a positive note and could temper their excitement and raise the anxiety that already exists.

The participants were also asked to share their experience when onboarding new students who were not using another payment source outside of financial aid. Their account of advising students that were using alternative payment methods indicated this was a much smaller group of students compared to those using some form of federal financial assistance. Employer reimbursement, sponsorships by a third party, and self-pay were options students stated they could pursue if not using federal funding. The participants stated the new student is informed of

payment options offered by the college, including a four-installment payment plan and temporary loans. New students who declared they are not using or not eligible for federal funding are directed to the college's cashier's office for more direction.

Yvonne does not advise many students who are using non-financial aid payment options. She advises students on what options are available to the best of her knowledge, but when a more detailed discussion is required, she refers them to a staff member who can better assist them. She stated:

I know how that kind of works with the cashier's office, but if it is one that I don't know, I then direct them to the cashier's office just to get it, so there could be a clear understanding of what to expect of them and what they need.

Aaron explains the college has scholarships available but points out the new student onboarding this late has missed the deadline for applying. He explained the conversation as:

I talk to them about scholarships, but again, that's more of a proactive for next semester because, by the time they've come in, those scholarships are done. Like the scholarships closed. There's probably none left, and they can't access the application any way until the next application window goes live.

His advice to the new student coming in at this stage is to start the registration process earlier for future semesters as a way to have scholarships as a payment option.

Challenges and Solutions

Participants were asked to discuss the challenges and solutions new students described through their onboarding process the last two weeks of the registration process. Students professed to participants they were challenged with an understanding of the enrollment and financial aid process. The advisors reported those students coming just before the start of the semester may have made the decision to start college recently and may know only that classes are beginning on a certain date. The participants believed the lack of enrollment knowledge can

be attributed to not having someone close to them with an understanding of how to begin the steps to start college. Jazmine shared, “Challenges tend to just be like, new to higher education and don’t necessarily know all the steps themselves. Not necessarily having either had friends or family go through the process. So, it’s all just brand new.” Participants shared that the new student not having an understanding of the enrollment steps and arriving late in the registration process can also lead to missing out on the various course modalities. Times that would benefit the new student’s schedule may not be available during this late stage of registration. Aaron believes that the student coming in that late is faced with accepting courses that are available and not necessarily the preferred offering. He explained:

Whether they’re trying to schedule around work, whether they’re scheduling around extracurricular [activities], whether it’s scheduling around high school classes, whatever that it happens to be, you know, just by the nature of how the class schedule works, a lot of those class times are eaten up.

Aaron stated that it is a challenge to build a schedule that best meets the students’ needs, while also ensuring their classes match their academic plan. According to the participants, students have expressed their displeasure with online courses but, because of their late registration time, online sections may be all that are available.

Understanding the enrollment and financial aid process was most frequent topic participants mentioned when discussing challenges new students face. A few also noted new students shared that finding reliable childcare and dependable transportation were additional challenges that could impact their registration timeline and academic goals. Only one of the college’s locations offers childcare for students through a third-party agreement. While each of the locations represented in the study has public transportation available, hours of availability are not the same. Public transportation is not available on weekends and for evening courses but

students at the two regional locations have access to bus services during both evening and weekends.

The researcher also asked participants to share what solutions the new students identified that they used to address those challenges. All six participants stated that the new students depend on their advisor at the college to resolve their challenges. As mentioned, enrollment and financial aid were the new students' most discussed challenges. According to the participants, new students rely on them to form plans to resolve their issues. Jean states, "They're pretty much looking for us to come up with those solutions for them." Addressing the enrollment challenges is in the hands of the advisor when students are entering at the last moment. As courses reach capacity and the student is searching for a schedule that meets their personal responsibilities, participants stated they rely on their advisor to make a schedule that fits. Aaron explains his way of resolving this situation is to express to the new student the importance of being proactive and registering for future classes earlier. He states:

I talk to them about being more proactive for the future. I usually let them know, you know, the sooner that you register, the student schedule opens up. What I'll do with students, and I'll show them all the sections that are also closed, and I let them know that the sooner you come in and see me or whenever you want to self-register yourself, which again, we walk them through.

He explained that the ability to get the schedule they want, to fit with work or family obligations, can happen when they meet with him early. He walks the student through the open and closed course sections that would have been better for them, with the idea they will recognize the mistake of entering the registration late. Jazmine believes the new students who rely on the advising staff for problem solving are not sure about the service, but when they find them, they rely on them from that point forward.

The challenge of understanding and completing the financial aid process is also an area the new students depend on their advising staff member to help with when looking for ways to resolve the problem. Participants shared that their advising appointments with new students become a breakdown of the FAFSA and options to cover tuition, fees, and textbooks. Because of the lateness of the registration process and the high volume of other students waiting to see the advisor, being as detailed as possible may be an issue. Sylvia describes her view of this topic:

I normally come up with a solution. So, if they're telling me, "I don't know what I'm doing with this FAFSA, it's confusing," I either, depending on how much time we have, can walk them through it, or I also advise them to see a financial aid specialist, which is located, you know, upstairs in our building, and they can speak with a specialist who can make sure that they're putting in the correct information.

Other participants supported Sylvia's comment that time is constrained when advising new students at the end of the registration process and clarifying financial aid steps with them can be difficult.

Student Emotions

The second theme discovered when interviewing participants and discussing the new students' profile was the students' mindset. The participants shared that the range of emotions new students exhibit when entering the final weeks of the onboarding process can be both positive and negative. Participants described the new students as being excited, rushed, anxious, scared, nervous, and hesitant as they begin their academic pathway. They suggested that these highs and lows are based on their lack of knowledge of the process and are compounded by the timeframe they chose to register for courses.

Yvonne associated the new students' anxiety to their excitement of getting their college career started. She stated, "So, they need a very linear list of things that they need to do to accomplish to get started." She believes that the student has one goal, and it is to get to the first

day of class. Kelly believes the emotional state of new students has an impact on their decision to register for classes just before the start of the semester. She stated the rushed environment the student encounters when registering for classes at that time is “frustrating” to them. Sylvia also believes the student’s emotions have an impact on their onboarding steps. When discussing the students’ mentality, she explained:

The mindset that I’ve noticed would be one of excitement, nervous, scared, but determined, in most cases. We get a variety, especially being a community college. So, you’ll have that first-time student, who comes in, and they just don’t know what they want to do, but they do know they want to go to school.

Sylvia also stated that the students’ hesitancy to register earlier could be in part due to family pressure to start college. She believes that, in some cases, a new student’s parent may be more determined to see the student attend college than the student, which may lead to the student’s reluctance to be interested in starting the registration process sooner.

Participants believe a student’s indecisiveness affects their academic decisions when beginning the onboarding process. Determining their academic career path is a challenge based on the new students’ emotions. Aaron noted how the students he advises have a feeling of uncertainty when discussing their academic path. He explained it as:

I think they’re coming in, sometimes a little bit unsure of themselves. Unsure if they can do the academic work. Unsure if they’ve chosen the right degree program. So, I think we get a lot of students that come in just kind of questioning, knowing that college, in general, is something they’ve wanted for some time, but maybe just unsure about a couple of those things.

Jean explained that the new student may have these feelings of unsureness because they are “discombobulated.” She says, “Kinda makes them a little, um, all over the place, because there’s so much that they have to do in order to start within those two weeks.”

According to the participants, new students are entering the process with excitement but are facing uncertainty when registering two weeks before the semester. Participants believe the

new student overcoming their emotions is half the battle when attempting to navigate the onboarding process successfully. Based on participant interviews, the new students' academic pathway may be impacted as they have doubts about their choice of a degree program and available time to contemplate their decision is short because of the pending start of the semester. Participants recognized that the student may be out of sorts emotionally when onboarding just before the start of the semester, but as advisors, they do all they can as time allows to work with the new students to provide direction.

Mindset

The participants were asked to share the new students' mindset when registering during the last two weeks before the start of the semester. Participants described it in a variety of ways but were consistent in acknowledging a level of anxiousness, excitement, fear, and a lack of understanding of what awaited them. New students came to their advisor determined to begin classes and have a single focus of getting to the first day of classes when onboarding just before the start of the semester. Yvonne described the new student's conversation when meeting with her as:

It's a very "what do I need to do" initial discussion: "This is what I want to do. What do I need to do to obtain this or what do I need to do this?" They are not thinking about down the road; they just need to know "what do I need to do" to get to the first step. I think they probably have a sense that they will get help after that.

Jazmine described the new student entering at the last minute as being "all over the place," but their decision to start college has been made, and that is the first hurdle they had to overcome. Participants agreed that the new students' excitement and anxiety are tied to a new journey that they decided to pursue recently and is filled with questions they may not know to ask.

Research Question #1: Summary

This section described themes revealed during the participants' interviews when asked to describe the profile of new students entering community college just before the start of the semester. Each of the participants shared the lack of preparedness and the student emotions were prevalent during their onboarding experience. Participants believe the new students' lack of understanding the college registration steps has an impact on their ability to successfully begin their first semester. According to participants, the last-minute decision to register for classes may hinder the new student from testing into proper courses or re-testing for possible reevaluation. The participants also agreed that those students who register just before the start of the semester are also hindered by their inability to understand the financial aid process. Those who are planning to request federal financial aid to pay tuition and fees and buy textbooks may not know the application process or what final steps are required to start their semester with academic supplies secured. According to participants, completing the FAFSA and providing any accompanying documents is a challenge for students and they rely on the advising staff for helping them understand and finalize the process. Participants acknowledged that they are seen as the resolution to these and other challenges the new student faces when registering for classes two weeks before the start of the semester. Participants also stressed that the new students' emotions have an impact on their drive to begin classes at this last stage. Their excitement to begin a new journey is also met with fear and insecurity as they are introduced to a pathway many have no previous knowledge of or support systems that are experienced handling these steps.

Research Question #2: How did the student's enrollment timeline affect their advising experience?

The second research sub-question explored the effect the late registration timeline had on the participants when advising new students to college just before the start of the semester. Participants were asked a series of questions with the intent of learning what led the new student to register for classes two weeks before the semester and how that decision impacted the advising experience. Exploring the participants' mindset as advisors and any adjustments they made based on this enrollment timeline was also a topic the researcher was investigating. The researcher discovered two major themes from the participants' interviews. Participants shared the new students' decision to register for classes two weeks before the semester compresses many variables in the enrollment process. Participants discussed the adjustments to their appointments, their advising mindset, the time they have to advise, and the solutions they are able to offer because of the last-minute time crunch. Advisors were also consistent in their comments about how the new students' life events impact their decision to register for classes just before the start of the semester. The interviewees also noted that the new students' family and employment status impacts their decision to register for classes just before the start of the semester. The following section further expands on the themes discovered from the interviews.

Time Crunch

The theme of having limited time to properly advise a new student during the last two weeks was identified by all of the participants. Each participant noted the importance of communicating with new students during the onboarding process and how the limited advising time impacts what information can be covered. They also stressed that the new student is limited in sharing information or asking additional questions because of the condensed meeting time.

Communicating vital information to new students can be limited based on the rush to enroll new and current students during this timeframe.

Entering the onboarding process at the last minute can limit what information advisors can share with new students because of their non-stop appointment schedule, according to the participants. When registering late, students who plan to major in programs with specific entrance requirements may also be challenged to receive thorough information from their advisor. Jazmine discussed how she attempts to be proactive as she informs the new student of critical college and degree information. She explains:

If there's time, I try to go as in-depth as they are asking questions. But if they're not asking all the right questions, I try to answer the questions they don't have. So just kind of like, um, proactively thinking ahead for them and letting them know things that will come across down the line.

Jazmine said it is difficult to delve into details about health programs that have application and entrance requirements because of her limited time, but she also follows up with the student early in the semester. She will send documents that will help the student via email later in the semester.

Based on the interview information, advising new and current students during this registration timeline plays a role in the limited time advisors may spend with new students. According to participants, new and current students have different needs when registering during the last two weeks, and the advising staff makes the adjustments based on the time available. Aaron believes it is important to deliver services that meet the students' academic and personal needs. He explained how this is impacted due to the institution's enrollment target:

That last two weeks before the semester begins, there is a big push from the college to make sure those enrollment numbers are as high as possible and is as plentiful as possible, which does preclude, I think, offering a lot of the services I would like to give to those students. Especially because they're coming in with so many questions and because they are coming in needing a lot of remedial help.

Aaron and other participants said the new student onboarding two weeks before the semester requires more “handholding,” but because of the volume of students waiting to be advised, the initial conversation is often limited.

Participants described the differences between these rushed advising sessions and the “normal” advising experience as being less rushed and compressed if the new students started the onboarding process one month earlier. Those new students avoid the waiting periods to meet with their advisor and the advisors can extend the advising appointment beyond the 30- to 60-minute session typical of those in the last two weeks of registration. Kelly believes the new student is carrying a lot of emotions as they decided to start college just before the start of college late. She explains how this would change if they were to register sooner:

I feel that if students register earlier, it takes a lot of that stress off a student. I feel that you know, they don't have that rush feeling if they are missing documents for financial aid. We have more time to get them in and also that way students can truly utilize all of their financial aid.

Other participants repeated the term “overwhelming” when describing the new student onboarding during those last two weeks before the start of the semester. The time crunch theme was expressed repeatedly when participants discussed the reason for condensing communication with students when onboarding new students in the late registration process. Advisors believe that students may be missing information or receiving limited information that would benefit their short- and long-term success. The condensed time available during the last-minute registration impacts their ability to deliver adequate degree program requirements to the new student according to the participants.

Advising Adjustments

The researcher asked what adjustments the participants must make when advising new students just before the start of the semester. Participants shared that the needs of the students may be compromised, and the information may be condensed because of the quick appointment. Students requesting a specific course schedule may be met with disappointment and participants must have difficult conversations explaining their options. Adjustments to the advising appointments are based on enrollment goals set by the college, and because of the high number of students registering during the final weeks, new students may suffer, according to participants.

Participants were convinced they had to adjust the advising discussion with the new student based on their onboarding just before the start of the semester. The participants confirmed they are responsible for not only onboarding the new student entering college during the last two weeks before the semester, but they meet with current and returning students as well. Jazmine discussed how the volume of students they advise during this time impacts their ability to deliver academic program content that other students receive as well when registering during less busy times. She explains how meeting with a high number of students during this time affects her advising style:

So, it's not necessarily tough in the case of me talking to one student, it's the fact that there are hundreds of students. So, the thing is more of like making sure I have enough time to get to as many people as possible, rather than it being like the student's fault or something like that.

Jazmine and other participants discussed the need to “pare” down information during their advising appointment to meet all the students who are waiting. Kelly states, “So, I think that, when I know students are coming in last-minute, I really think about the conversations I want to have with them.” She places a priority on the resources a new student may need to ensure they stay motivated and get off on a positive start. Aaron explained the needs of the new

student and states, “Typically they do need a little bit more handholding and, unfortunately, I don’t necessarily have the time in that last two weeks to give them that kind of attention that they probably need and honestly deserve.” The advisors shared their frustration with the rush of students and their inability to focus on the new student who needs a high level of attention.

Advisors stated that the time crunch for advising during the last two weeks before the semester also has an impact on the new students’ ability to schedule courses. Those entering at such a late stage may have to settle for course offerings that they are not comfortable with, as well as some courses that are required based on their placement test results. Advising staff believe students who are pursuing a certain class time or modality to ensure they can navigate around family or work priorities are disappointed when they learn the class has reached capacity.

Jean stated,

Course limitations, for sure, are a big impact. So, you may not be able to get all of your classes online like you wanted, or you may not be able to get all your classes at a certain time like you had wanted to originally.

With the inability to find the ideal schedule, the participants discussed how they must maneuver the class schedule and have a difficult conversation with the student regarding what classes and times are available. Yvonne conveyed they make adjustments to the student’s schedule due to the time available they have with the student and course availability. She stated, “I only start them with a couple of classes because it already seems very rushed.” She did say when a student requests 12 or more credit hours to reach full-time status, she will work with them to meet their needs when possible.

The high volume of students—new, current, and returning—make up the last-minute rush of individuals attempting to start the upcoming semester. Advising staff make adjustments to the advising session to serve the new students’ best interest when at all possible, while continuing to

meet with other students registering for the next semester. Participants believe the rush to advise as many students as possible to meet enrollment goals is one reason that the time spent on advising new students must be cut short. The concise advising appointment lowers the opportunity to deliver materials that would broaden the new students' academic degree knowledge.

Advisors' Mindset

The researcher asked the advisors to describe their mindset when advising new students onboarding just before the start of the semester. The participants shared that their focus is to have students prepared for the start of the semester as best as possible and emphasized that they want to ensure the lines of communication remain open with the new student and themselves. As the new student is moving through the onboarding steps just before the start of the semester, participants described how their time to provide detailed information may be shortened.

Understanding the onboarding process is an apparent barrier for new students to overcome and fully introducing college resources and academic planning may be a challenge, based on the interviews. Providing the new student with a complete overview of their academic requirements can be difficult to convey during those last two weeks before the semester. Aaron makes it a point to deliver a comprehensive overview of the entire college experience. He stated,

My philosophy to advising in general is, I, and I know its cliché because everybody says it in higher ed, but it's a holistic approach. I just want to make sure they are ready academically, emotionally, mentally, and that they are ready for the rigor of college.

Aaron emphasizes the importance that the new student remains focused in the classroom and completes all course work, but he also stresses the need to monitor and take care of home commitments as well. He ensures the student is provided the proper resources as well when concluding the advising session. Jean has a specific objective when advising students during this

timeframe. She stated, “My initial mindset, like, I have the goal that I want every student to walk out of my office and get what they want.” Jean discussed what barriers and challenges the student faces and how the timeframe they arrived to start college will only exacerbate the situation. The other participants shared similar viewpoints when meeting with new students during the last stages of registration. They expressed the importance of having a focus on explaining the terminology used at the college and that the faculty and staff are available to ensure the new student is successful when beginning their first semester.

Maintaining the lines of communication with this population during this hurried period and afterward is a motivation of the participants. Although this is a time for advising a high volume of students, Jazmine described the importance of remaining patient while meeting with the new student. She stated:

I try to be patient with all students for sure, but, like, especially patient with, like, brand-new, especially, like, if, again, there’s no one in their families who’ve ever been in college, and it’s just like, completely everything is new, don’t know anything, or don’t know what, they don’t know.

She went on to explain the importance of delivering essential information to avoid overwhelming them and follow up with additional documents, when possible, through the student’s email. Sylvia explained she emphasizes the importance of keeping the lines of communication open between the new student, the advisor, and the instructor. She stated:

I also let them know the importance of communication. If you feel like you’re going to fall behind, if you feel like you’re not gonna make class, you know, make sure you’re reaching out to your instructor. Make sure you’re reaching out to myself. You know, I’m a support system for you; I’m an advocate for you.

Advisors believe they are part of the new student’s support system. Relating to the new student’s experience by reflecting on their own time in college allows for an opportunity to be open and lower the student’s anxiety. Kelly, who had started her educational journey as a

community college student, recalled the hectic times of onboarding new students those last couple of weeks and their feeling of being overwhelmed. Her goal is to ensure they have a good experience and keep them motivated to be successful and to communicate with her when there is a need. Study participants explained the difficulties of fully communicating the details of the new students' major when they arrive late in the registration process.

Time to Advise

To learn how much time the participants can devote to the new student onboarding just before the start of the semester, the researcher asked each to detail the typical time spent with this population. Participants shared the time they spend onboarding a new student to the college may vary based on the excess number of other students seeking advising during this timeframe. Their responses ranged from 30 minutes to an hour, based on the number of students waiting to be advised. Getting crucial information to new students as soon as possible is their goal, according to a participant. Sylvia attempts to cover as much as possible within the hour that she typically spends with new students onboarding at the last minute. She stated, "I just make sure that they understand where to go for the information. The how to do it kind of comes in a later appointment if they want to." She reiterates that her responsibility is to prepare the student to be ready for classes and best options when attempting to navigate their academic, employment, and family responsibilities.

Participants believe that some new students will need more assistance than others during this onboarding timeline, but others are convinced that some are prepared and ready right away. Aaron confirms the time he spends with new students during the last two weeks is based on his availability when advising other students. He typically spends approximately 30 minutes with new students, but that also depends on their preparation when starting. He explained:

I mean, some students know exactly what they want, and they don't need a lot of help, and we get them in and out. I think most students do need a little bit more help, especially if it's their first time in college, but roughly about probably 30 minutes is as much as typically we can give to that.

He does not believe the 30 minutes spent with a student is ample time, but he works with the new student to the best of his ability based on the time available. Jean stated that the 30 minutes she typically spends with a student includes directing them to other locations on campus when a service is needed. She said,

Some students require a little more handholding where you need to take them to financial aid, get the forms, have them fill that out or take them to financial aid, have them complete the FAFSA, and come back or they haven't completed a placement test at all.

Jean further explained the new student may have to make these stops and return to their advisor and begin some portion of the advising session again. All but one participant was clear with their feelings that the approximate 30-minute advising session is not long enough for a new student entering the college just before the start of the term.

The second portion of this topic presented to participants revolved around their ability to navigate the conversation with new students with the time they have available during the onboarding process. Many of them noted the need to adjust their conversation and cut the details of the advising session because of the other students waiting to be seen. Jean is upfront with the new student about how she may need to alter their meeting based on appointment waiting. She said, "I usually tell them that, you know, we're a little pressed for time, but we'll try to do as much as we can while you're here." According to Jean, she is meeting with new, current, and returning students during the last two weeks, which makes a 30-minute appointment very quick. Aaron echoed Jean's assessment, noting that he finds it difficult to explain the resources the college offers that could benefit students due to the compact timeframe. He stated, "There's a lot to offer them, and again, I just cannot go through all that information in 30 minutes, but I always

try to leave time to let them know that it's wraparound services here." Students and the advising staff are rushed to complete the onboarding steps during the last two weeks before the term and new students are missing support resources and the conversation from advisors that may put them on a positive track.

Register Earlier

For the interview participants, a clear solution that would allow them to provide detailed advising sessions for new students was having them register for classes earlier. The study participants believe the onboarding experience would be "drastically" different if new students came in a month earlier. They emphasized that the meeting time with the students could be tailored to meet the individual needs of the student. Yvonne believes new students would have time to think over the material shared with them during the onboarding process and follow up with their advisor to clear up any uncertainties. She stated,

I think the difference is, what I see is students can realize that they actually have questions about some of that. They didn't quite grasp the question when it happened. Even, you know, the answers have been already given to them or provided on the website, but they have the opportunity to sit and ponder.

Participants believe new students onboarding at least a month earlier would lose the feeling of being hurried and have more time to spend with their advisor. Sylvia said there is a difference when starting a month earlier and states, "As it's not as rushed. They have more time to explore what all the college has to offer them. It's not as overwhelming if they have that time." Sylvia reaffirmed Yvonne's earlier comment that the new student entering at the last minute may have questions they did not get answered because of the hurried advising appointment. Coming in a month earlier would allow them to not only ask questions but address material that was presented earlier, but they may have forgotten before the start of the semester.

The participants agreed that there is an advantage for new students to register for classes a month earlier as it removed stressors and opened the lines of communication. The new students, especially those with no familiarity with the onboarding process, are attempting to manage financial aid, placement testing, and other steps within two weeks. Jazmine is convinced the information needed to successfully navigate the start of the semester is found in their initial meeting. She stated:

Whereas, if it's a month in advance, that might give us enough time to like, have a fuller conversation of what the next few semesters will look like. So that can be kind of helpful, especially for health programs. Like, making them aware of, like, when there'll be applying to the program, or petitioning, or what admissions criteria looks like. Whereas, I guess, again, if it's in that shorter timeframe right before the class starts, not as much time to go in-depth. But I try to let them know, like, "Hey, you need to be passing these classes, because it's going to be important later."

Jazmine believes the conversation with new students just before the start of the semester is reactive, where the month's prior discussion is proactive. She feels there is an opportunity to break down and discuss degree programs and resources to a level where they are prepared to start their academic journey.

Life Event

When exploring the registration timeline, the participant interviews led to the discovery of a second theme, the new student's life events. The participants' interviews revealed the new student's life circumstances impacted their chosen time to register for classes. Participants shared with the researcher that the new students' home life played a part in their decision to move forward with coming to college right before the start of the semester. Whether it was their family or friends, the new students explained to their advisor that their decision came after evaluating their home life or consulting with people close to them. The new students' employment outlook was also a factor in their decision to come to college during those final weeks before the start of

the semester. Change in their employment was a catalyst for them to come to college just before the start of the semester.

Family and Friends

Participants were nearly unanimous when identifying the family influence as an impact on the new students' decision to return to college. Five out of the six participants stated the new students' children going back to school affected their decision to register for classes at such a late stage. Yvonne stated students discussed that children returning to school impacted their education pathway. She explained the new student states, "My kids are getting bigger and going back to school. I'm about to start school too, you know." She went on to say, "Like they just know it's time, but they don't actually know school is starting in two weeks." Sylvia has had similar conversations with new students during her advising appointment. She stated, "Some are 'My children are now in school,' so they wait for their children to be in school or have daycare in place before they begin." Other participants mentioned that the new student has a friend who is attending college and the friend persuaded them to start the registration process.

Employment

Another element of the life event theme driving the new students' late registration decision discovered during the participants' interviews was the new students' employment status. Each advisor discussed the impact the new students' employment status had on their decision to start college when they did. Some new students explained to the participants that they were recently laid off or were searching for a promotion opportunity at their current job, and college was an option to address the situation. Some new students were given the choice of finding employment or seeking educational opportunities by their parent or a regulatory agency, and the student chose the latter. Balancing their work schedule and their life responsibilities was also a

discussion point new students had with participants. New students also explained to participants that they were transitioning to a new job and needed to ensure their work and school schedule would be in sync. Multiple participants detailed the new students' need to match their job schedule and school as a reason for starting the onboarding steps when they did. Sylvia explained that students often tell her, "I started a new job, and I wanted to wait and see, you know, how my schedule will work out before I begin classes." Kelly mentioned a similar finding when advising new students starting just before the start of the semester. She stated, "Like their work schedule, they couldn't figure out how to balance school, work, and life." New students confess to their advisor they are starting the onboarding process at that time as the last option. Jean explained:

Some of them are laid off from their job, and like the next best thing that they felt that would be able to do would be to come to college. Others are, as I mentioned before, like, they are in, the court system, and they need to fulfill some type of probationary period. So, instead of like going out to get a job, they'll go to college instead.

The participants constantly reaffirmed that the new students' registration timeline was connected to their varying employment status.

Research Question #2: Summary

This researcher presented a series of questions to participants to gain their experience when advising the new student registering the last two weeks before the semester. Participant interviews revealed the constricted time for advising and the new student's life event as the predominant themes. The participants detailed the need to adjust their advising process with new students entering college just before the start of the semester due to the lack of time available. Participants are meeting with new and current students registering just before the start of the semester and the new student, typically first time to college, are condensing the delivery of degree program details. The new student may have to make concessions to their schedule based

on course, and time, availability which may further delay their academic progress. Participants are convinced new students would receive a comprehensive description of academic pathways and available college resources if they began the registration steps before the last two weeks before the start of the semester. Advisors at the college were consistent in detailing the new students' family and employment status also impacts this population decision to start college. Children starting school, or daycare becoming available, as well as family and friends encouraging new students to start college, influences their decision to register for courses late in the process. Employment status also drives the new student to enter the registration process late as finding a job or improving their current standing brings them to the college just before the start of the semester in hopes of finding a different pathway.

Research Question #3: What role does the advisor play in introducing resources and services designed to integrate and retain new students?

The final set of questions focused on how the participants introduce resources and services designed to integrate and retain new students through advising. Participant interviews disclosed the importance of institutional support when the focus is integration and retention of new students just before the start of the semester. Inquiring into the impact new student orientation plays on the onboarding process allowed the participants to share their view of the college's first introduction to resources and practices to new students. Participants also shared their advising appointment conversations regarding support services and student life activities the college offers. The last question examined what non-academic services could be offered to support new students entering the college at the last minute. There was no consensus with their responses, but all were consistent in their overview of what are the best options for integrating

and retaining new students. Institutional support of new students is the theme identified and will be further discussed throughout this section.

Institutional Support

The participant interviews discussing integration and retention opportunities offered at the college reflected the theme of institutional support. Participants were clear in their feedback of how important introducing support services and resources and continuously supporting new students can be to a successful academic experience. The absence of mandatory new student orientation and the lack of consistency of information with the in-person and online options have the potential to leave gaps in delivering resources to students. According to the participants' feedback, the support offered by the college can be different based on the location where the new student begins their onboarding experience. Kelly explained her experience of introducing college services and resources to new students at a satellite location, where she is the only full-time staff member, as:

In the beginning, when the location first opened, we would have staff come out. So, we had somebody come out for like the Office of Accessibility Services. And then later, kind of move to like, a virtual form, even before, like, the coronavirus happened. They were connecting with students virtually, just because they couldn't always get out to my location, but they were still making sure they got those services.

Sylvia discussed how the information provided in new student orientation does not meet all of her expectations of what a new student would need to start college. She states, "There are, you know, some gaps in, in the orientation. But I think the expectation is for those gaps to be covered by meeting with an advisor, with the success coach, and putting that together." The participants were clear that they are considered the new student's support as they begin their onboarding steps.

The participants were also consistent in their discussions of how new students lack understanding of the resources and services available at the college and how they rely on the advisor for support. For students entering the onboarding process late in the registration period, participants described how they attempt to discuss support services designed to connect students to the college. Aaron explained the new students lack knowledge of the college's student life activities unless they were recruited by one of the athletic programs and he noted that the college does not have a commitment to student activities at all locations. Aaron, who was at the main location but moved to a satellite location, explained, "I don't think there is a great commitment to doing activities as strongly as maybe other colleges do, and I do think that is to the detriment of the student." The advising staff supports the new student during orientation and in the advising appointment, and the new students lean on them for guidance.

Institutional support has grown through recent years based on the participant interviews. The college offers resources and services to assist students in overcoming academic and non-academic barriers that may preclude them from staying in college. The participants believe new students struggle with knowing about these offerings, even with new student orientation, but rely on their advisor to inform them of available support options. Connecting the student to all institutional support is also a challenge due to the staffing at the regional locations and delivery methods of new student orientation.

New Student Orientation (NSO)

Participants were asked how new student orientation prepared new students entering the college for the first time. The responses were mixed, at best, as some believe the information provided in the orientations was "phenomenal" in preparing the student, while others thought it was overwhelming in its content. The college offered an in-person orientation, which was placed

on pause due to the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions, and an online orientation. The makeup of the online orientation is a point of discontent with how students are introduced to college information. Resources and services are covered in both, but participants were not convinced that all students were able to grasp what they needed through either orientation option.

Participants stated that new student orientation is a presentation offered by the college with the intent of familiarizing new students beginning their college career with the institution's academic and social infrastructure, according to the advising staff. Kelly had favorable feedback on the college's NSO and wanted to share how new students benefit from its content. She stated:

I think new student orientation is a great resource for students. I think it gives them a quick overview of all the things that they need to know as a new student. So, you know, it hits on like things about the college, what to expect, other organizations they can get involved in, besides just their academics. I think that when students get involved in the locations that they feel like they're part of the family, and I think it helps them.

Kelly believes the resources found in NSO integrates the student to her location and makes them feel like they are part of the institution. Sylvia's view supports Kelly's assessment that NSO brings the college's resources and services to the student at one time. She stated, "It (NSO) prepares them by giving them what is expected or what you will have access to in becoming a (name of the college) student." She also details how NSO explains services like financial aid and other offices at the college as well as the importance of communicating with their advisor. Jean agreed with NSO delivering important information at the start of the onboarding process. She said, "It gives them an overview of what they have to have done prior to starting their first semester. And it also gives them the resources that they need if they come into an issue within that first semester." Those who were in support of the college's orientation found it to be beneficial and provides students direction on what resources and services are at their disposal as they begin college.

The other participants were not as supportive of the institution's NSO. They had concerns with the difference in the online versus the in-person NSO as well as the lack of conformity across the college's locations. Aaron believes the in-person NSO allows the student to be face-to-face with the advising staff, who conduct the orientation and introduce them to the campus location. He explained:

I prefer an in-person orientation. I do think that's more beneficial. I think it's beneficial for a couple of reasons. One is, the student can ask questions in real-time, and they don't have to wait for somebody to contact them. Especially if that question is a very simple question. I can answer it now, you know. I'm right there in the room, they can raise their hand. If they have their question answered, we're moving on. I also think, just from a standpoint of students, do need to have that interaction with other students. You're not gonna get that an online orientation.

Yvonne and Jazmine took the stance that students see NSO only as a step to registering, it is often overwhelming to new students, and it contains too much material. Yvonne stated, "They just think, I gotta do this before I'm able to sign up for class, so, I'm not really paying attention. I just want to check it off that I did it." Jazmine believes the material in NSO could be compacted to assist the new student's comprehension of the college's resources. She explained:

Yeah, for that brand, brand, new student who's never been to college, it's probably super overwhelming to do new student orientation, just because there's so much, and I think they've (college staff) pared it down a little bit. A lot of people aren't really listening to it until it happens to them. So, new student orientation isn't doing a whole lot for them, unfortunately.

Jazmine believes NSO should be more specialized which will allow the new student to relate to the material and grasp their attention. NSO, online or in person, has the participants divided on its effectiveness when onboarding new students.

Introduction to Resources

To further investigate the participants' onboarding of new students, the researcher inquired into how the new student is introduced to resources and services. Participants were

asked to discuss how the college integrates tutoring, academic advising, and Student Support Services (TRIO) as a way to retain students. Each of the participants agreed that these services are first introduced to new students in NSO in one form or another. How the services are delivered at the various locations may differ and the advising staff is the last opportunity for the new student to be introduced to resources before the start of the semester.

Participants shared that one of the purposes of NSO is to introduce new students to resources and services. Some participants stated they will discuss tutoring services during the initial advising appointment following the in-person NSO. For students who do not attend NSO, it is the responsibility of the advisor to convey what service options are available. Kelly explained how she addresses tutoring services with new students at her location:

So, that's introduced during the new student orientation. I always talk about it in advising, as well, but it's also in new student orientation. That way they get that, whether it's virtual or in person, and they get that piece of information right from the beginning, and then I always work it into when I do advising.

Participants explained TRIO services are also introduced during the online and in-person NSO but at the locations where staffing for TRIO is available, advisors for the program will visit with students. Jean stated, "TRIO advisors are being invited to the traditional orientations. They'll give them their information about their program and what they do. And then if the student wants to sign up, they're given an application at that time." The online NSO addresses what TRIO offers to students. In the locations where a staff member from Student Support Services is not housed, advising staff are responsible for discussing this offering to new students, according to the participants. Two of the four college locations have at least one full-time TRIO staff member.

Participants explained that academic advising is also covered in the NSO offerings, but the participants emphasized new students are aware of advising services even before going to

NSO as it is referred to in multiple forms. Sylvia explained how students are mindful of academic advising outside of NSO:

They also hear about that over the phone when they first call. It's on the hold message, and when they come into the Student Success Center for the first time, not knowing where to go or what to do, they are told that at the front desk, you will be connected with an advisor. It's in the welcome letter, and e-mail that the students are provided, that you will be assigned a success coach (advisor) to help you along the way.

Sylvia addressed the issue of advisors being assigned to new students upon their onboarding. She stated, "There is a gap in that, though, a serious gap as to when they're assigned someone." The in-person orientation is conducted by the advising staff and the particulars of advising are discussed during this session.

The introduction to student life by the participants was also part of the integration discussion. Participants shared their insights as to when and how the student reacts to the knowledge that the institution offers student life activities. New students learn about student life during NSO and the initial advising meeting with the participants. When the in-person NSO was in place, advising staff walked the students in attendance through the college's website and indicated the availability of student life activities. Jazmine stated, "I guess it's the student life tab. Also going through groups, clubs, career planning, and even, just all that kind of stuff." Students who are attending a regional location learn about the student life possibilities from the advising staff but due to their limited size and offerings, student life is not heavily emphasized, based on participant feedback. Kelly explained how she describes student life to the students that come to her location as:

It is a little different because there wasn't a whole lot of student life there because it's a satellite location that was very small. But we still try to brush over it when we would do like general advising. Like if you want to get them involved.

Aaron, who is also at a regional location that is larger in building and enrollment size than Kelly's, is not pleased with how student life is introduced to students at his location. Student life is mentioned during the online and in-person NSO but only in a general manner, according to Aaron. Aaron, who has a background in working at a four-year institution in the housing department, believes student life will assist in providing academic and professional growth for the student. He stated:

A vital part of a student's experiences is what they are doing on campus, not just what they're doing in the classroom, but the interactions they are having with students. The discussions and the base that they're having and the activities that they're a part of. It's not only this arbitrary "they're building friendships" piece. I think they're building connections. They're building a lot of the soft skills that I know employers are looking for.

Participants stated that the introduction of student life is presented to new students through multiple methods, but the student's interest is limited due to outside of academic responsibilities. Students are surprised to learn the college offers athletics and indicate their age and outside obligations would prohibit them from participating.

The final discussion point posed to participants revolving around integration and retention was the need for the institution to provide additional services not currently offered. The responses from the participants were consistent in that the college has addressed this subject by providing an office and staff that refer students to the outside of academic resources and services. Students are now able to obtain employment information, resources to health and mental facilities, and emergency funding for unexpected financial challenges. With the services that are now offered, Kelly believes the college could increase the emergency funding to students facing various barriers. She explained how the college could address a student's immediate need:

So, if it was like a transportation issue, maybe we can get them bus passes or, you know, money you know for the bus to get there. If they ran into like a food insecurity or

something that would prevent them from coming. We're able to help them, you know, with funds up to \$500 if they qualified.

The current services mentioned previously are found in the Office of Student Support, which is housed at the college's main location. Students have access to the support office by contacting the staff responsible for these services or reaching out to their advisor who will assist in addressing their needs.

Only two participants mentioned childcare as a service that could be added, and which is not available at all college locations. Childcare is an option at Kelly's regional location when classes are in-person. Due to the pandemic, she noted that the childcare option has been suspended. Yvonne and Sylvia referred to this service as a missing piece for students needing to ensure their children were taken care of while they attended class. Yvonne stated it is difficult for a student who is majoring in practical nursing, working evenings, and finding childcare to meet their schedule. She stated, "There's a gap. They're struggling to be full-time, just so they can get full-time care, but they struggle with their academics, because they really can't handle it all. I've seen that a couple times." Yvonne is at the largest regional location, and Sylvia advises students at the main location.

Research Question #3: Summary

Participants shared their experience of integrating new students into college support systems and the theme of institutional support was revealed from their feedback. Participants shared that NSO is the primary vehicle for delivering the college's resources and services that may assist in retaining students during the onboarding process. New students have the option of an in-person NSO, before the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions, and an online version that details tutoring, academic advising, and TRIO services. Students who miss one of the NSO options

learn about these resources through their advising session with their appointed advisor. Those who participate in one of the options have an opportunity to follow up on what support is offered during their advising appointment. Participants also revealed new students are introduced to student life activities through NSO and the initial advising meeting, but express new students have little interest in what is offered due to their non-academic responsibilities. One participant was adamant in his belief that the college should be more committed to student life activities at all locations as it will develop the whole student experience and prepare them for the workforce. Participants believe their interaction with new students and explaining the resources, internal and external, is challenged by the amount of information that needs to be shared and the student's uncertainty of what is needed to be successful.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter was devoted to the collection of data through the interviews of participants and investigating their experience of onboarding new students within the last two weeks before the start of the semester. The researcher met with each of the participants virtually due to the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions. Six participants were separately interviewed and asked a series of questions that explored the profile of new students registering just before the start of the semester, the participants' experience when advising these students, and how services are integrated during this timeframe. The participants provided their experience as it pertained to the onboarding of new students just before the start of the semester.

While analyzing the feedback provided by the participants, the researcher discovered five themes. When describing the new student's profile, the participants shared how the lack of preparation and student emotions impacted their decision to register just before the semester started. Academic and non-academic preparation is not typically an asset of the new student

entering college in the last stages of registration, according to participants. The excitement of beginning college and the fear of the unknown journey in front of the new student also makes up the profile of the new student, based on the participants' replies.

Participants shared how advising new students during the final weeks before the semester requires adjustments by advisors because of the limited time available and the life event of this population impacts the timing of their registration. Degree and college details that would benefit the student's success are potentially missed due to the time crunch during this registration timeline. New students confess to participants the impact their life events have on their decision to begin the registration process so close to the start of the semester. New students seeing their children going to school and the influence of family or friends also impact the decision to enter the registration late in the process, according to the participants.

Finally, participants discussed the importance of institutional support when integrating and retaining the new students. New Student Orientation (NSO) is used to deliver the college's resources and services when onboarding new students, but participants are mixed on its effectiveness. They were supportive of the importance of offering new student orientation, but some felt it was not capturing the new student and missing the mark on specific services. NSO was offered in-person before the pandemic and online, and the advising staff was delivering the details to new students when in-person. A few participants felt the material in the online NSO was overwhelming and not specific enough to the new student. Introduction of services like tutoring, advising, and TRIO was available in NSO but depending on the location, and staffing, all resources discussed may not be available. Participants stated they are the connection between the support services and the new student. As the college has added additional support services,

the participants believe the new student is missing out on learning of these offerings due to the lateness of their registration process and the current staffing models at each location.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, FINDINGS, AND FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the first-time-to-community-college student who registers for classes just before the start of the semester from the perspective of the advising staff who onboard this population. Examining the connection between Tinto's Social Integration Framework and the advising staff's onboarding practice with new students was also a focus of this study. Community colleges were founded to extend higher education and job training opportunities traditionally not accessible to numerous of Americans. Qualitative studies have formerly explored the enrollment timeline of new students with the concentration of early and late registration and how that timeframe impacts student attrition. Findings from studies conducted on early and late registration determined that the students who registered before the semester were more successful academically than those who registered after the start of the semester (Shriner, 2014). Students were interviewed in previous studies to gain an understanding of how the onboarding process impacted their decision to remain at the college and their immediate academic performance in many cases. This study placed a focus on the timing of the registration process and how it impacts the onboarding of new students at an Ohio community college from the advisors' perception.

This study's primary question was, Is the onboarding experience for first-time to college students affected when registering for classes occurs within the last two weeks entering their first semester? As described in Chapter Three, the study followed IPA research guidelines, which

included conducting one-on-one interviews to obtain findings from subjects. Six participants, who were identified as college advisors, were selected to explore their experience when onboarding new students who registered for classes two weeks before the start of the semester. Each were presented with multiple open-ended questions with the intent to answer the overall study topic and sub-questions. The three sub-questions, which guided the interviews for this subject, were: (1) What is the profile of the “Just in Time” first-time to college students display during the onboarding process? (2) How did the new student’s enrollment timeline affect their advising experience? (3) What role does the advisor play in introducing resources and services meant to integrate and retain new students?

Following the participant interviews and examining their feedback, three major findings were revealed. Students have resolve and determination to start their college journey no matter the barriers or challenges confronting them was the first major finding. The participants’ struggle to deliver resources and services offered by the college to the last-minute new students was the second major finding. The final major finding was the participants’ statement of the importance of supporting new students registering just before the start of the semester. Five major themes, Lack of Preparation, Student Emotions, Life Events, Time Crunch, and Institutional Support were revealed from the questions presented to the participants. The six study participants chronicled their experience and shared detailed consultations they had with the new students who onboard just before the start of the semester.

This chapter will review the findings and themes mentioned earlier, as well as discuss how this research may impact community college administrator’s registration decision-making and future implementation of policies and practices. Recommendations will be made to propose changes to the onboarding of new students based on the feedback from the study participants.

Finally, this chapter will suggest opportunities for future studies to advance the conversation of registering new students just before the start of the semester.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

Following the investigation into this topic, three major findings were developed from the themes discovered when interviewing the study participants. The first major finding is that new students have a resolve to begin their college journey at the last moment, although many are facing challenges that may prohibit them from being successful. Their determination to start college at the last minute is seen as courageous by some participants but may also be a barrier when appropriate onboarding actions are not complete. Many new students who enter the registration process at the last minute find themselves ill-prepared to meet the academic and a non-academic requirement to begin the semester equipped properly, based on the participants' feedback. Many new students who arrive to the college at the last-minute are excited about this long-awaited opportunity, but they are also struggling with self-doubt and uneasiness entering an unknown process. The new student's lack of preparation and emotions were themes consistent with the study participants.

The second major finding was that participants have a strong desire to onboard new students to the fullest extent and are constrained because students register at the last minute. As the start of a new semester approaches, participants expressed the importance of detailing degree specific information and resources and services that will benefit new students. Many new students onboarding late in the process have their registration priorities, and the participants shared that the time they have with new students registering just before the semester can be limited. Participants explained they are challenged to properly integrate a new student to the college's resources and services when waiting lines of current and returning students exist for

those seeking to register for classes inside two-weeks before the semester. The restricted time advisors and new students face just before the semester was a related theme developed from the participant interviews. Life events, which included the new student's employment status and the influence their family and friends have on their enrollment timeline, was the second theme developed from the participants interviewed.

The final major finding was the college needs to ensure the institution's resources and services are available and carefully explained to new students during the onboarding process. Guaranteeing the new student is informed of college resources and services to support their time at the institution and afterward is a necessity based on participant interviews. Connecting new students to internal and external options designed to remove potential barriers leading to attrition was a focus of the participants. The last two weeks before the start of the semester is frenetic, according to the participants, and informing new students of all available support services is traditionally sacrificed due to the inadequate time. Integrating resources and services such as TRIO, advising, and internal offerings designed to create personal assistance to retain students was a theme developed from participant interviews.

Student Resolve and Determination

The lack of academic and emotional preparedness may lead students to apply to open-access institutions, such as a community college, which accepts registration up to the first day of classes (Freer-Weiss, 2004). Community colleges serve diverse populations who enter the registration process with a variety of goals and levels of preparation. Being prepared for what is expected of them may be a challenge as students decide to begin their college journey. Beginning the onboarding process and navigating the initial steps to start college may be the new student's first encounter with the formal process of postsecondary procedures. Many community colleges

require an entrance exam to evaluate the academic skills of incoming students, and the results are used to determine first-semester course offerings for the new student (Perin, 2005; Shults, 2000; & Department of Education, 2003). The new student's lack of knowledge of what is expected, combined with the lateness of their onboarding and registration for first semester classes, is not a deterrent to many first-time to college students based on this study's findings.

The six study participants described the importance of the new student's determination to begin college when onboarding just before the start of the semesters. According to participants, advising staff are generally the first point of contact the new student will have at the institution when discussing their degree and career pathway. Participants were clear that many new students have made a last-minute decision to start their academic journey and the student felt this may be their only opportunity to start college. Their determination to start college was unwavering and any barrier obstructing that goal, no matter the required enrollment procedure not met, typically does not stop many new students registering just before the semester. Deterring a student from starting just before the start of the semester, based on their lack of preparedness, potentially would lead to the new student giving up and leaving the registration steps, according to the advising staff interviewed.

Lack of Preparation

Participants were unanimous in their feedback of how many first-time to college students onboarding just before the start of the semester come to them lacking a proper understanding of the registration steps. Advising staff participating in the study believe new students who lack academic preparation and facing non-academic challenges, such as not knowing the financial steps, have been negatively impacted when starting the onboarding process just before the start of the semester. New students are challenged with completing academic placement as well as

selecting and understanding a degree program that best fits their skills. The participants shared the new student is focused on starting their first semester and the timing of their decision to begin the onboarding process may limit course availability and modality choices. Some new students registering just before the semester are not deterred when their first course choice is not available and chooses to continue their academic pathway, sometimes against the advice of their advisor, according to the participants.

The subject of non-academic challenges mainly focused on the new student's lack of understanding of the financial aid process. Participants shared the importance of understanding the financial aid procedure for those using federal aid and how this lack of knowledge could be a barrier for new students registering before the start of the semester. New students may start their courses without the appropriate supplies and tuition, and when funding is not secured, their enrollment and early academic success may be at risk, according to participants. Challenged with navigating the financial aid steps and the subsequent additional documents which may be required, potentially prohibits the new student from entering their first semester with positive momentum. Participants shared that the new student relies on their advisor to solve the financial aid barrier for them.

Participants shared that some new students are not deterred from beginning classes even when their financial aid or academic preparedness is not at the prescribed level. Beginning their first semester without securing tuition, fees, textbooks, and supplies do not discourage many new students registering before the start of the semester. Advisors were consistently stating that the new student coming to them just before the start of the semester wants to be in class on that first day. Yvonne best describes the participants' view of the new student's mindset to start their academic journey. She stated, "It's a very, 'What do I need to do? This is what I want to do.

What do I need to do to obtain that? What do I need to do to get started?” Their determination is admired by some participants, but others see this mindset as a potential detriment as many new students are starting without proper preparation and are not completing all portions of the registration process that leads to their success.

Student Emotions

The study participants expressed their view of how the new student onboarding two weeks before the start of the semester is driven by emotion. New students have a determination to begin classes as soon as possible and are not deterred by their lack of preparation. The excitement of starting the academic journey and the spontaneous decision to begin college by many new students is matched by the anxiety of an unfamiliar system they are entering. Participants discussed how the range of emotions exhibited by new students during this last-minute registration process affects their decision-making. Just before the semester onboarding steps such as placement testing, scheduling classes, ensuring payment is secured, and purchasing proper supplies and textbooks are overwhelming for many new students, based on participant feedback. Some participants described the new student’s mindset as indecisive, and this further negatively affects the registration process when onboarding just before the start of the semester.

Participant Enrollment Goals

Interviews conducted with the six participants revealed how their enrollment goals of connecting with new students is restricted due to the last-minute rush of other groups of students, during the last two weeks before the semester. Hatch & Garcia (2017) discuss how the intentions of new students vary when coming to college and the uncertainty of navigating their objectives may be a challenge for them. The diverse student populations who enter the onboarding process,

which is new to many, seek the advising staff for guidance in finding their way, according to participant feedback. Starting the registration process at the last minute may reinforce the uncertainty of the new student's decisions to attend college due to the rushed environment but participants believe new students remain focused on starting classes. According to the participants, the advising staff are meeting with numerous students with various needs and goals during the last two weeks of onboarding and are pulled in multiple ways when attempting to guide those needing assistance. The college has enrollment targets that require the advising staff to move students through registration process to meet those objectives. Participants stated their dedication to advise new students of available services is compromised due to the last-minute enrollment rush. Their inability to detail academic obligations to new students is compromised as continuous advising appointments limit meeting times. Participants shared how the vast student traffic the two weeks before the semester removes the option of focusing on the new student and their onboarding needs.

Time Crunch

When discussing the new students' decision to register for classes within two weeks before the start of the semester impacted the first time to college student, participants expressed the condensed timeframe affects all involved. The time crunch theme developed when interviewing the participants and they shared how new students attempt to complete multiple levels of onboarding procedures at the last minute. Those students who are not academically prepared for college-level courses are limited to remedial offerings in most cases. Onboarding just before the start of the semester limits opportunities to prepare for placement testing or retesting to improve scores and move to college-level courses. Students are potentially restricted to courses offered at times that conflict with their non-academic obligations. Participants shared

that the new student registering during this timeline is typically working or are responsible for family members and have to schedule classes that meet these obligations. Advising staff also acknowledged the limited time they may have with new students constricts their ability to initially discuss degree program requirements thoroughly, which may impact the students' understanding of critical information.

Participants, as well as new students, are affected by the condensed timeframe of registering students during the last two weeks before the start of the semester. Many of the study participants discussed the high volume of students waiting to be advised just before the start of the semester. New, current, and returning students have varying needs and the advising staff are adjusting their mindset and conversations to meet those needs when meeting with them just before the start of the semester. They believe that new students would benefit from onboarding earlier and receive dedicated time to cover multiple levels of academic and general college offerings. The additional time the advising staff would have with new students could be used to outline college and enrollment steps and increase the opportunity for the new students to follow up with questions. Entering the college two weeks before the start of the semester hinders the advising staff from completing a holistic conversation with the onboarding of new students, according to participant feedback.

Life Events

Participants revealed during their interviews the importance family, friends, and employment status have on new students' decision to start the onboarding steps just before the beginning of the semester. New students who are parents expressed that their desire to start college depended on finding childcare for their children or seeing the child return to school themselves. Having their parental obligations addressed allowed the new student to proceed with

their academic and career goals. The participants explained that new students' decision to register just before the start of the semester is generally at the last-minute and is often based on their family obligations being met.

The participants also emphasized the role of new students' friends when they onboard the last two weeks before the semester. Advisors explained that some new students may rely on friends, who may be unfamiliar with higher education onboarding requirements, to counsel them on higher education onboarding requirements. Their guidance is coming from individuals who may be new to post-secondary onboarding procedures themselves and the information they provide may not be beneficial.

New students' decision to enter the registration process two weeks before the start of the semester is also affected by their employment status, according to participants. The loss of employment drives this group of students to pursue academic credentials that will change their current job opportunities. Participants also shared how the new students' desire to advance in their present field or make a career change led to their choice to onboard weeks before the start of the semester. Finding a balance between employment, college, and family obligations was an important aspect new students consider when making the final decision to register for classes just before the start of the semester.

Importance of Supporting the Student

The final major finding is the need to ensure the institution's resources and services are available and carefully explained to new students during the onboarding process. This study followed the Tinto Integrational Framework Theory, which analyzes academic and social institutional engagement which leads to student success (Tinto, 2009). Student engagement through programing and college services that target at-risk student populations have positive

outcomes when focusing on student success (Baston, 2018). The number of first-time to college students and their lack of knowledge of what resources may be needed to complete their academic goals were consistent findings from the participant interviews. Participants discussed how the last-minute registration timeline impacts the support services conversation. Each also revealed the institution's most recent updated support services offerings are a welcome addition to assist students but communicating what is available can be a challenge as staffing at the regional locations is limited. Participants were asked a series of questions regarding resources and services which are introduced to new students during the onboarding process. The responses from all six participants emphasized the significance of the support services conversation and its tie to integrating new students to the institution when onboarding new students.

Supporting Students

Participants discussed the college's ability to present support services during the onboarding steps and the challenges they face when discussing resources designed to benefit new students. Participants conveyed that new student orientation [NSO], online and in-person, was the delivery system to present many of the institution's support services such as TRIO, advising, and tutoring. Due to Covid-19 pandemic restrictions, in-person orientation was not an option at the time of the study, and new students were directed to the online offering. Participant support of the NSO was mixed as some believed the content was overwhelming and the online option did not properly connect students with college services. Others felt NSO met the essential delivery of information it was designed for, and the advising staff were available to fill in the gaps during the advising session. When in-person orientation was available, it was the advising staff who presented to the new student and guided them through the content of the resources found on the

college's website. The lack of support services staffing at the regional locations made it difficult to deliver the full complement of resources, such as TRIO and tutoring.

When discussing the importance of support services and the connection they have in retaining and completing new students, participants believed those registering at the last minute were most in need of the services and resources available. Their interviews revealed new students' dependence on the advising staff from first contact. Making a connection with students who are first in the family to attend college was also emphasized by the participants. New students entering just before the start of the semester face a strict timeline to complete all registration steps, and advisors are typically short on time to spend with them. Participants discussed how their advising appointment has to be "pared down" because of the number of students waiting to meet with an advisor. Participants believe the concise advising conversations may negatively impact new students who are entering college with minimal or no knowledge of what is needed to be successful. The advising staff provides academic and non-academic direction to resources and services to students enrolled at the college. Participants attempt to connect with students from the beginning, which may allow for the development of a trusted relationship and lead to the student sharing potential obstacles that would impede their success. According to the study participants, it is difficult to make that connection during the last two weeks before the semester when the advisor is forced to cut the conversation due to the line of students waiting to be seen.

The participants were asked to discuss tutoring, Student Support Services (TRIO), and advising as an integration strategy for retaining and supporting degree completion of new students. All of these resources are introduced to new students during NSO — online and in-person when it was offered — and during advising appointments. Participants discussed how the

introduction may vary by location because of staffing models. TRIO advisors present their services during the in-person NSO at the main location and the largest regional location. The newest college regional location saw TRIO and other staff from other college services come to the location when it first opened, but that offering transitioned to virtual meetings and on an as-needed basis. While advising services are offered at all locations, connecting students to their advisor is described as a “gap” by one participant. According to this study’s participants, students are aware of advising services from the first time they register for classes. The initial advising appointment with new students is another opportunity for participants to discuss college resources.

According to participants, the college has progressed with services dedicated to assisting student retention. An office dedicated specifically to assist students with issues that occur unexpectedly was created to direct students to internal and external resources meant to eliminate barriers that may lead to the new student’s early exit from the college. Resources to employment, mental, and health facilities are key components to this newer college service offering—additions that study participants praised. This new resource is centrally housed at the main location of the college and when new students require its services, they are referred by advising staff.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Studies investigating the student registration timelines have typically focused on retention and completion of new students who registered for a semester early or late and the findings favored those who registered early (Shriner, 2014; Smith et al., 2002). Recommendations were made to adjust enrollment policies to eliminate late registration as a means to increase student retention and degree completion (O’Banion, 2012). As mentioned in the literature review, a gap

exists when detailing early registration and student retention and how it relates to student success when registration is delayed until within two weeks of the start of the semester. Understanding the new student experience and how the onboarding of this population is impacted when registration is delayed until immediately before the start of the semester would provide community colleges a potential roadmap for what is needed for a successful onboarding practice. College administrators may learn from the participants' findings in this study and adjust enrollment policies and practices to better serve the new student registering just before the start of the semester.

The topic of community colleges transitioning from access to retention was discussed in depth in Chapter Two. As legislators are requiring a higher level of accountability for funding two-year institutions, addressing policies and practices designed to increase retention and completion should be a priority for community college administrators (Roman, 2007). This section will discuss implications from the participant interviews and covers altering enrollment policies, addressing academic advising, and onboarding processes. All three sections will also include recommendations for institutional leadership.

Alter Enrollment Policies

Some community colleges have changed their enrollment policy of allowing students to register late for classes based on the negative impact this practice has on student retention (Freer-Weiss, 2004; Moxley et al., 2001). As some colleges make adjustments to their enrollment policy to lower student attrition rates and increase completion, a review and change to current onboarding practices should also be addressed. As mentioned previously, early enrollment is defined as registering for classes before the start of the semester, but based on findings in this study, a stricter definition should be considered. Beginning the onboarding process two weeks

before the start of the semester falls in the timeline defined as early registration, but according to the participants in this study, some new students are challenged to start on a successful note and the onboarding experience is impacted.

Adjusting the registration timelines that keep the open access practice in place is a possibility for this community college. The Ohio community college in this study offers multiple terms within the semester, allowing new students the opportunity to begin the registration process without the sense of being rushed through what is typically an unfamiliar process. Establishing an official policy that requires a new student to apply and register for classes at least a month before the start of the upcoming term would create a safeguard for new students. Participants in this study were unanimous in their belief that new students would benefit from a less rushed onboarding experience and find higher rates of academic success if they started the process a month earlier. This policy adjustment would assist new students in completing the necessary steps to begin their academic career without the frantic timeline, while addressing many of the barriers and challenges discussed previously. Based on the multiple terms available and the findings from this study that depict the challenges associated with students registering two weeks before the start of the semester, implementing registration deadlines may benefit students, advising staff, and the institution.

Support for Advising

Community colleges serve diverse populations of students, and many come to the institution with a lack of understanding of key components to begin college and question their reasons for attending (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Hatch & Garcia, 2017). Students with various motives for coming to college may have barriers and challenges that deter them from following through on the full process of registering for classes or starting their journey on a positive path

(Hatch & Garcia, 2017). Academic advising is considered a key component when community colleges are focusing on student integration to retain new students (Donaldson et al., 2016). Based on the findings from this study, the advising staff typically are part of the onboarding process, as they introduce the new student to resources and services before and during the advising appointment. Feedback from the participants described new students' ability to identify advising as a support service before being formally introduced. Advisors at the Ohio community college being studied detailed their challenges in meeting new students' needs because of the high demand placed on them by a variety of students entering the registration process the last two weeks before the semester.

The previously mentioned recommendation to implement registration cutoff dates would benefit the advising staff as well as new students entering just before the start of the semester. Lowering the enrollment traffic may allow advisors the opportunity to adjust their advising style from processing the high volume of student registrations to a holistic conversation. This potentially would allow advisors to integrate new students to the institution based on their desired outcomes and develop a relationship between the advising staff and new students registering just before the start of the semester. While the concept of a "real administrative" deadline for registering new students may be new to this college, it has been implemented successfully at Valencia Community College with the backing of the administration (O'Banion, 2012, p. 30). O'Banion further described that the fear of decreasing enrollment because of the strict registration timeframe was not seen at Valencia, and the institution realized an increase in student success.

It is also a recommendation that the institution include staff from the financial aid office in the advising and onboarding process. The steps for completing the Free Application for

Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and additional documents required by the college were repeatedly mentioned by participants as challenges for the new student and potential barriers for starting the semester successfully. Including staff from the financial aid office who have knowledge of financial aid procedures and documents required to award students would create a proactive action for enrollment and will also assist the advising staff. New students entering two weeks before the semester require more academic advising and connection to resources, according to participants, and these conversations are shortened when the focus is on how to resolve financial aid options. Staff from the financial aid office can direct new students to various payment options as they navigate completing their FAFSA or documents needed to secure payment for tuition, fees, textbooks, and supplies.

Another practice the institution should take in supporting the advising staff is to develop and implement a new student survey upon being admitted to the college. A short questionnaire that collects holistic data including the students' academic major, employment status, and known barriers such as food or housing insecurity would assist advising staff in directing resources and services immediately. Those students who are willing to share this information immediately would receive specific conversations with their advisor at the time of onboarding. An early understanding of new students' needs would make the advising appointments more direct and allow the advisor to follow up on issues identified for further discussion.

The last recommendation to support the advising staff is to incorporate other college staff in the onboarding process of new students. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, new student orientation was held in person and online, but because of health restrictions, students received their onboarding information strictly through online orientation. At the time of the completion of this study, Ohio was removing the restrictions previously in place for well over a year, which

will allow the college to offer both in-person and online orientation (Ohio's COVID-19 Health Orders End, 2021.). Bringing in staff from the various college resources, in-person or virtually, to inform students of available services and associate a name with the office can lead to improved integration as discussed throughout this study. Increasing staff across the college may not be a viable option due to budgetary restrictions, but incorporating those in TRIO, tutoring, and the newly created support office into the onboarding of new students may be possible.

The immense takeaway from the participants' discussions was that the frantic actions that occur during the last two weeks before the start of the semester are detrimental to students. The advisors' focus is on the number of students waiting to be advised and this may include new, current, and returning students. To allow advising staff the time to best serve new students, who typically are also new to the post-secondary enrollment requirements, adjustments should be made to ease the frantic rush placed on staff and students, while preparing new students for initial and long-term success.

Onboard Practice Review

Introducing new students to college resources and services as early in the onboarding process as possible was also discussed during the literature review. Post-secondary institutions that have a focus on improving the student experience and increasing retention should concentrate on the onboarding process (Shriner, 2014). Informing new students of institutional and external resources and services that may assist in removing barriers that lead to attrition was discussed with participants in-depth. Participant feedback varied on the best way resource information is delivered to new students onboarding just before the semester, but all were supportive in the direction the college was going in increasing offerings. Participants revealed

the new and traditional services offered are not equal at all college locations due to staffing and students rely on advising to assist them in connecting to resources.

Participants conduct the institution's new student orientation [NSO] when in-person is offered and are responsible for introducing the new student to services and sources offered at the college and externally. Because of the pandemic health restrictions at the time of this study, in-person NSO was not allowed, but participants reflected on how the material was delivered to this typically at-risk group entering late in the registration process. Although the college offers an online option, the majority of the participants believed the in-person NSO was more efficient as it allowed students to ask questions, and staff from other service offices could participate as well. It is recommended that the college continue offering the online NSO as an option but also consider a review of the current material in both in-person and online choices. Participants believe the students entering this close to the start of the semester miss valuable information meant to benefit them academically and socially. Conducting an audit of the NSO material presented, potentially by a third party, may lead to an improved onboarding experience for new students. This social integration strategy allows new students to build relationships outside of the classroom (Karp et al., 2010), a strategy which could lead to increased retention of new students.

Connecting students to resources and services during the onboarding process is an opportunity to create an environment of acceptance. The advising staff can expound on what assistance is available to meet the student's needs and how it is possible to complete their educational and career goals despite potential barriers. These deeper conversations will take time and will require the institution to make adjustments to its current practices to improve the staff and student onboarding experience.

Summary of Policy, Practices, and Recommendations

College and universities are facing a new funding standard of accountability by state legislators who have shifted the financial support from being based on students enrolled into the institution to retention and completion requirements. The state of Ohio implemented the 100% performance-based funding model in 2016 (Performance-Based Funding Model, n.d.), and for community colleges to find financial stability through student success, making adjustments to onboarding new students should be considered by institutional administrators. College administration should consider a review of implementing registration deadlines and contemplate limiting students from registering for courses two weeks before the semester. Multiple terms within a semester allow a new student to register at multiple points and the staff serving them could deliver a much more deliberate experience to a population that needs their attention.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Three areas from the study findings have been identified for future research. First, an in-depth qualitative study of the onboarding experience just before the start of the semester from new students' perspective is suggested. Understanding new students' decision-making process to begin the registration steps right before the start of the semester can provide college administrators with the knowledge that prepares them for handling this population at the last minute. Although the advising staff provided a strong view of the new student onboarding process during this specific timeframe, gathering additional personal data such as demographic and economic background from new students would be beneficial in developing a profile for assisting this population.

Secondly, expanding the sample size of institutions would increase the collection of data as well as expand the viewpoints of the participants based on geography. The institution chosen

for this investigation is one of 23 community colleges in Ohio. Researching multiple colleges that have a mix of enrollment sizes compared to the college in this study can benefit all institutions in the state. Understanding how the onboarding experience during the last two weeks before the start of the semester impacts staff and students could be a catalyst in addressing the student success initiatives within the state. The Performance-Based Funding model, which requires Ohio institutions to meet certain benchmarks like course completion rates, success points, and overall degree/certificate completion to receive max funding (Performance-Based Funding Model, n.d.), has each of the institutions searching for student success solutions. Expanding the research to other community colleges in Ohio may generate onboarding discussions and solutions to challenges facing the staff and new students coming in during the last two weeks before the start of the semester.

Lastly, it is suggested that further investigation is needed to compare retention and academic success rates of traditional students with this population of new students registering two weeks before the. Academic success rates are often connected to those who registered early in the process (Street, 2000). As stated in the literature review, there is a gap in distinguishing timeframes within the early registration, which is traditionally considered the any time before the start of the semester (Shriner, 2014). Comparing specific student registration timelines during the early registration period may provide a better understanding if there is a correlation between a timeline cutoff and improved retention and academic success. Institutions may need to adjust their onboarding offerings as the early registration period moves along. They may also have to consider implementing registration cutoff dates if the data indicates that success rates dip after a certain time when students choose to register.

CONCLUSION

The state of Ohio made a significant funding model shift from awarding institutions for the number of students enrolled to a completion standard built around the governor's competitive economic plan (Ohio Higher Education Funding Commission, n.d.). The state's initiative to incentivize degree completion is also meant to address at-risk student populations by encouraging colleges to enroll and complete low-income, academically challenged, and others who traditionally face greater barriers in achieving degrees (Miao, 2012). Post-secondary institutions are under a new level of accountability to retain and complete students. The shift from funding Ohio community colleges strictly by the number of students enrolled into courses to documenting successful stages of completion compels a new mindset for administrators and the staff who work directly with students. This new outlook of creating a student experience that focuses on success should begin with the onboarding of new students.

Understanding the new student entering community colleges just before the start of the semester is a way to assist the institution with creating and keeping students on a successful path from the onset. The initial study concept was driven by comprehending how new students' onboarding experience is impacted by their decision to register for classes two weeks before the start of the semester and collect feedback from students. Because of the Covid-19 pandemic and restrictions placed on in-person activities at the time of the study, interviewing and collecting the new student feedback was not possible. Interviewing the advising staff to capture their perspective of the onboarding experience based on the designated timeframe was the alternative path for the study. The findings presented in this study intended to address the question, *Is the onboarding experience for first-time to college students affected when registering for classes occurs the last two weeks entering their first semester?* The lived experience of the advising staff while describing onboarding new students during a specific registration timeframe led to the

study's findings. Three segments of the onboarding process were analyzed to better understand the participant experience. The profile of new students, their choice of the timeline to register for classes, and the introduction of resources and services were specifically examined with the advising staff. Areas to be addressed were presented based on the participants' feedback and policy implications were discussed specifically for the administration for this particular Ohio community college.

Participant feedback led to a better understanding of the challenges the staff and the new student encounter when registration for courses is delayed until the last two weeks before the start of the semester. The participants discussed how the last-minute registration impacts new students being prepared to start the semester and the various personal relations that also influence their decision to begin the registration process. Advisors are dedicated to assisting the new student during this timeframe, but because of current and returning students also needing their attention, participants are challenged to spend quality time with new students. New students would benefit from beginning the registration process earlier, based on participant feedback, as the additional time could be used to explore the many support resources in place designed to assist in the student succeeding. Although the researcher recommends the implementation of registration deadlines, participants were mixed in their support of this option as it may lead to an increase in the number of students not continuing with the enrollment process.

The study participants from this Ohio community college are dedicated and passionate about the work they do for all students. The study findings will be used to inform the college administrators of the barriers and challenges that their staff and new students face when onboarding students occurs the last two weeks before the start of the semester. Ohio is dedicated to increasing student success and increasing educated and trained employees directly affects how

community colleges interact with their students. Finding ways to support their advising staff and creating supportive pathways for new students should be part of the new accountability standard.

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APPENDIX A: IRB REQUEST LETTER

Consent Letter to Conduct Research
Ferris State University, Doctorate of Community College Leadership

Clark State Community College
Dr. Jo Alice Blondin, President
570 E Leffel Lane
Springfield Oh 45505

Dear Dr. Blondin,

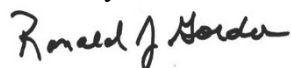
I am in the writing of the dissertation and research stages in completing the Doctorate of Community College Leadership program with Ferris State University. The reason for this letter is to formally request your permission to conduct my research of Clark State Community College students.

The purpose of the study is to examine the advisor's experience during the onboarding of new students who register for classes two weeks prior to the start of the semester. Learning how advisors interact with students during this enrollment timeframe may create opportunities to address student success initiatives. Addressing the delivery of resources and setting enrollment deadlines, may be findings that will be of interest to college administrators. Understanding the student characteristics, the advising opportunities missed or not missed, as well what services and resources are integrated may drive attrition rates down. As the Dean of Enrollment Services, student attrition, and the correlation to their registration timeline, has been an interest of mine for some time. The results of this qualitative study, with an emphasis on Integrative Theory, may discover findings that lead to recommended changes in enrollment policies and onboarding processes.

If approval of my request is granted, I plan to conduct 5-8 interviews of the college's advisors. All participants will be informed that their participation is voluntary, and their identification and data collected will be anonymous. Following your approval, a request will be made to Ferris State University's Institutional Review Board for permission to conduct the research with human subjects.

Once approval is granted, permission to move forward with the research will be presented to the local University's Institutional Review Board to elicit interviews from Clark State students. Feel free to contact me at, 937.901.3340, or my Chairperson, Dr. Theresa Felder, 937.545.5841, if you have questions concerning this request, the research topic, or the process indicated. I appreciate your consideration of my request.

Sincerely,



Ronald J Gordon
Doctoral Candidate 2020, Doctoral Community College Leadership
Ferris State University

APPENDIX B: IRB APPROVAL LETTERS

February 2, 2021

Mr. Ronald J. Gordon
1879 Winding Trail
Springfield, OH 45505

Dear Ron:

Please accept this letter as my strong and unwavering support for your thesis work to study our advisors' experiences as they onboard new students who register two weeks before the start of the term in pursuit of your EdD.

I hereby grant you permission to conduct research at Clark State Community College as detailed in your request. As you know, I am deeply committed to the success of every student, and I look forward to receiving a copy of your research findings as they will undoubtedly provide key insights that will aid in advancement of the student success agenda at Clark State.

Thank you for your willingness to take on this important endeavor.

Sincerely,



Jo Alice Blondin, Ph.D.
President



FERRIS STATE UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR HUMAN SUBJECT RESEARCH

1010 Campus Drive FLITE 410 Big Rapids, MI 49307 | (231) 591-2553 | www.ferris.edu/irb

Date: September 8, 2020

To: Susan DeCamillis, Ronald Gordon

From: Gregory Wellman, R.Ph, Ph.D. IRB Chair

Re: IRB Application *IRB-FY20-21-11 How is the First-Generation, First-Time to College Student Enrollment Experience Impacted When Registration is Delayed Until the Final Two Weeks Prior to the Start of Their First Term?*

The Ferris State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application for using human subjects in the study, "*How is the First-Generation, First-Time to College Student Enrollment Experience Impacted When Registration is Delayed Until the Final Two Weeks Prior to the Start of Their First Term?*" (IRB-FY20-21-11) and Approved this project under Federal Regulations Expedited Review 6.

Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Your protocol has been assigned project number IRB-FY20-21-11. Approval mandates that you follow all University policy and procedures, in addition to applicable governmental regulations. Approval applies only to the activities described in the protocol submission; should revisions need to be made, all materials must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to initiation. In addition, the IRB must be made aware of any serious and unexpected and/or unanticipated adverse events as well as complaints and non-compliance issues.

Understand that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the study and participant rights with assurance of participant understanding, followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the study via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the signed consent document and investigators maintain consent records for a minimum of three years.

As mandated by Title 45 Code of Federal Regulations, Part 46 (45 CFR 46) the IRB requires submission of annual status reports during the life of the research project and a Final Report Form upon study completion. Thank you for your compliance with these guidelines and best wishes for a successful research endeavor. Please let us know if the IRB can be of any future assistance.

Regards,

Gregory Wellman, R.Ph, Ph.D. IRB Chair

Ferris State University Institutional Review Board

FERRIS STATE UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

1010 Campus Drive FLITE 410 Big Rapids, MI 49307

www.ferris.edu/irb

Date: February 23, 2021

To: Susan DeCamillis and Ronald Gordon

From: Gregory Wellman, R.Ph, Ph.D, IRB Chair

Re: IRB Application *IRB-FY20-21-11 How is the First-Generation, First-Time to College Student Enrollment Experience Impacted When Registration is Delayed Until the Final Two Weeks Prior to the Start of Their First Term?*

The Ferris State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed and approved your request for revisions to the study, *How is the First-Generation, First-Time to College Student Enrollment Experience Impacted When Registration is Delayed Until the Final Two Weeks Prior to the Start of Their First Term?*(IRB-FY20-21-11).

Your project will continue to be subject to the research protocols as mandated by Title 45 Code of Federal Regulations, Part 46 (45 CFR 46) for using human subjects in research. It is your obligation to inform the IRB of any changes in your research protocol that would substantially alter the methods and procedures reviewed and approved by the IRB in your application. Thank you for your compliance with these guidelines and best wishes for a successful research endeavor. Please let us know if the IRB can be of any future assistance.

Regards,



Gregory Wellman, R.Ph, Ph.D, IRB Chair

Ferris State University Institutional Review Board

APPENDIX C: RESEARCH STUDY RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Subject Line: Request for Participation

Dear (Advisor Name),

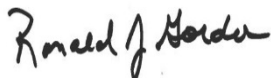
My name is Ronald Gordon and I am an administrator with Clark State. I am also a student in the Doctorate of Community College Leadership Program with Ferris State University. I am currently conducting a study for my doctoral thesis and I am requesting your participation in this study.

My research is investigating the advisor's experience when onboarding new to college students, who register for their first college courses two weeks before the start of their first semester. My goal is to learn how the student's registration experience is impacted by their choice to register for courses just before the start of their first semester. Upon the study's findings, suggestions will be made to raise awareness of the student's enrollment experience for those who register for classes "Just in Time" before the start of the semester.

If you choose to participate in this study, I will be interviewing you to gain your perspective on the enrollment experience of new students registering two weeks before the start of the semester. The expected time commitment is less than two hours over the course of two interactions. Our first meeting will be to discuss the details of the study, along with allowing you to ask questions regarding your participation. The second meeting will be a virtual one-on-one recorded interview. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic health guidelines, interviews will be done via GotoMeeting.com. A follow up email, which will provide the interview transcript and a summary of the interview, will be sent following our discussion. You will be given an opportunity to confirm or correct my interpretations by responding in writing or by requesting a meeting to discuss the transcript and summary. Your participation is entirely voluntary.

If you are interested in volunteering to participate in the study, please email me back at gordonr9@ferris.edu or call me at 937-901-3340 with a phone number and a good time to reach you. I would like to answer any questions you may have and set up our initial meeting time. Thank you for considering participation in this study.

Sincerely



Ronald J Gordon
Doctoral Candidate, Doctorate of Community College Leadership
Ferris State University

APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT WAIVER



FERRIS STATE UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR HUMAN SUBJECT RESEARCH

1010 Campus Drive FLITE 410 Big Rapids, MI 49307 | (231) 591-2553 | www.ferris.edu/irb

NOTE: As of 1/21/19, Federal Regulations governing human subject research (45 CFR 46) now require that consent documents contain a concise and focused presentation of key information that is most likely to help potential subjects understand why they might or might not want to participate in the study. This brief consent document meets this new requirement.

Project Title:

IRB Approved Project #:

Principal Investigator: Susan DeCamillis, Ed.D., DCCL Research Coordinator, Ferris State University

Email: xxxxx@ferris.edu Phone: xxx-xxx-xxxx

Co-Investigator(s): Ronald J Gordon, Student, Ferris State University,

Email: gordonr9@ferris.edu Phone: xxx-xxx-xxxx

You are invited to participate in a voluntary survey about the advisor's experience when onboarding new students. You are being asked to participate because you are a professional advisor at a community college and responsible for onboarding new students. The researcher is interested in exploring the advisor's experience when enrolling new students who enter the process two weeks before the start of the semester. Information will be collected by conducting one-on-one interviews. Interviews will be conducted via gotomeeting.com due to current Covid-19 restrictions. We estimate that it will take approximately 60 minutes [estimated time] to answer interview questions and your participation will be complete following the review and approval of the transcribed interview. This study will not have direct benefits to those participating in the subject but may change the institutions enrollment policies and procedures based on the study's findings. Risks or discomforts from this research include Risks or discomforts from this research is minimal as your name and information, as well as Clark State Community College, will be concealed using a pseudonym. *NOTE: Psychological risks (e.g., those associated with the completion of a particularly sensitive survey or interview) could be mitigated by providing subjects with contact information for counseling resources; state on consent as applicable.*

The interview data will be collected anonymously. Information will be collected through an interview using gotomeeting.com. The interview will be transcribed using GotoMeeting Smart Assistant and presented to the advisor for accuracy and final approval. Information you provide in this study will be maintained and secured by the study team for such as 3 years and secured in password protected Cloud location. You may refuse to answer any question you do not wish to answer, or you may end the interview at any time. Participation or nonparticipation in this study will not impact your employment at Clark State in any way.

If you have questions about this study, please contact the Principal Investigator, Susan DeCamillis, Ed.D listed above. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant, contact the Ferris State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Human Participants at: 1010 Campus Drive, FLITE 410G, Big Rapids, MI 49307 (231) 591-2553 or IRB@ferris.edu.

APPENDIX E: QUESTION GUIDE

Date:
Time:
Interviewee:

As we discussed in our first meeting, I will be asking a series of questions designed to allow you to share your perspective of the enrollment experience of first-time to college students, who registered for classes two weeks before the start of the semester. There are no right or wrong answers, just share your thoughts, emotions and feelings with me. If I ask you a question that you do not want to answer, you do not have to do so. You simply have to say you prefer to skip the question. The interview will take up to 60 minutes.

Our interview will be video recorded and transcribed into writing. I will provide you a copy of the transcription and you will have an opportunity to clarify any statements made or add additional information. Any questions? OK, let's get started.

Participants' background at the college years in position, duties and responsibilities and education attainment

"Just In Time" Student Profile

1. How would you describe the mindset of the students registering during the last two weeks before the start of their first semester?
2. Describe the new student who registers for classes during the last two weeks before the start of the term. What is the typical age, ethnicity, or gender?
3. What challenges do new students entering college during this timeframe confess to you? What solutions, if any, do they profess will help them overcome these barriers when starting college?
4. Describe the academic preparedness you see for the first time to college students entering at this time.
5. Describe what areas outside of academics you see first time to college students struggle with during the onboarding process when enrolling the last two weeks before the semester?
6.
 - a. What conversation do you and the student have, if any, about how they will pay for their tuition, fees, and textbooks?
 - i. If financial aid, what discussion is had regarding their award status?
 - ii. If not financial aid, what direction do you give the student on how to pay for tuition and textbooks at the time of registration?

Advising during Enrollment Timeline

1. What are some reasons students give for starting the enrollment process when they did?
2. What adjustments do you have to make when advising students beginning their academic career during the last two weeks of enrollment before the start of the semester?
3. Explain your mindset during this timeframe when advising this population.
4. How much time do you typically spend with a student during this enrollment timeframe and how do you manage the advising conversation based on the time available?
5. How do you feel the enrollment experience would have been different if the student registered for classes a month earlier?

Integration and Retention

1. How does New Student Orientation prepare students for their first semester?
2. How and when are the following college resources introduced to students?
 - a. Tutoring Services
 - b. Academic Advising
 - c. Student Support Services (TRIO)
3. When is the student made aware of the student life activities the college offers? What is the response from students when informed about these activities?
4. What program or resources that are not currently offered that you believe would assist the student in meeting non-academic needs to be successful in college?

Final discussion points

1. Do you feel first time to college students would be more proactive with their enrollment if the institution instituted registration deadlines? Explain your response.
2. What final thoughts would you like to share regarding the enrollment experience of first time to college students entering the last two weeks before the start of the semester?
3. Is there anything I did not ask that I should have?

APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW FOLLOW-UP EMAIL

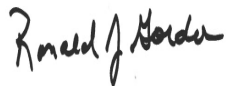
Subject Line: Interview Transcript and Summary
Dear (Advisor Name),

Thank you for sharing your experiences with me during the interview on (date). Please review the attached transcript and my summary of the interview. If you feel there are any inaccuracies or you would like to discuss the information, please respond to this email. I would be happy to talk further by phone or to meet in person. Any additional information will be recorded and added to the original transcript and/or summary.

If I do not receive a response from you by (date one week from email), the attached transcript and summary will be considered final. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at gordonr9@ferris.edu or call me at 937-901-3340 with a phone number and a good time to reach you.

Thank you for again for participating in this study.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ronald J. Gordon". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Ronald J Gordon
Doctoral Candidate, Doctorate of Community College Leadership
Ferris State University