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Examining Second-Year Retention: Student Perceptions of Campus Resources for Sophomores

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EXAMINING SECOND-YEAR RETENTION:

STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF CAMPUS RESOURCES FOR SOPHOMORES

by

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(Under the Direction of Daniel W. Calhoun)

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examined the perceptions sophomore students at one public, southeastern doctoral research university had regarding campus resources and the potential impact on their decision to remain enrolled. Using a transcendental phenomenological approach, the researcher conducted individual semi-structured interviews to identify resources four students perceived to have played a role in their retention choices. In addition to the data collected from the student experiences, a review of social media and the student newspaper was conducted. An analysis revealed two themes that impacted students' decisions: faculty and staff relationships and academic and co-curricular involvement. Findings align with the current literature, and recommendations to higher education leaders are provided to align resources to increase second-to-third-year retention.

INDEX WORDS: Sophomore, Second-year college students, Student experiences, Campus resources, Retention

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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my family: my parents who have supported me since the beginning; Benjamin, my husband and partner in crime; and to our children, Rosemary and Nathanael, who were wonderful little distractions to writing. The coursework, research, writing, and editing processes would not have been completed without your unending encouragement and support.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Academic quality and student success are often equated with student retention, making this concept particularly important to higher education leaders (Arnold, 1999; Silverman, 2016). Leaders of postsecondary institutions speak to the importance of increasing student retention (Soika, 2020; Tinto, 1999), design programs to achieve this goal (Complete College America, n.d.; Mayhew et al., 2016; National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, n.d.; National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2021; Pattengale, 2000; Reyes, 2011), and bring on consultants to review the retention issue (Ruffalo Noel Levitz, n.d.; Tinto, 1999). Tinto (1993) discussed that successful retention programs are integral to the institutional mission. Postsecondary education policy also incentivizes institutions with retention programs (Tinto, 1993). Furthermore, the U.S. Department of Education (n.d.) has posted retention strategies from multiple and varied organizations to increase postsecondary success and encourage replicability at other postsecondary institutions. Retention measures the number of students who re-enroll at the same institution from one academic year to the next (Arnold, 1999; Barefoot, 2004). Low student retention at postsecondary institutions in the United States has been an issue for higher education leaders since the 1960s (Barefoot, 2004; Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011). Since 2009, the retention of postsecondary education students in the United States has remained around 60% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022; National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2018). During the same period, this number is slightly higher for four-year public institutions at about 69% (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2018). As higher education leaders have worked to improve these rates, there has been a tremendous amount of research focused on retention topics, including national retention rates (Kena et al., 2015; National Center for Education Statistics, 2022; National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, n.d.; National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2018), theoretical perspectives (Astin, 1984/1999; Bean & Metzner, 1985; Tinto, 1975, 1993), and strategies to increase retention (Complete College America, n.d.; Mayhew et al., 2016; National Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, n.d.; National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2021; Pattengale, 2000; Reyes, 2011). For example, Complete College America's (2014) "Purpose First" initiative calls for higher education leaders to provide students exploring majors with degree maps that provide "critical path courses." The degree maps provide students with a "strong sense of purpose and increased motivation, enhanced confidence that a chosen program of study matches academic and personal strengths, and a clear understanding of future career opportunities" (Complete College America, 2014) to increase retention and graduation rates. Other interventions that promote retention include, but are not limited to, remediation, orientation, common reading programs, first-year seminars, supplemental instruction, and academic advising (Mayhew et al., 2016; Young & Schreiner, 2014).

Nationally, only 64% of students who begin postsecondary education graduate in six years (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). The official metric for retention considers student attrition from the first-to-second year, with the only other measure of student success occurring at graduation (Education Advisory Board, 2014). Of great concern is the fact that the Education Advisory Board (2014) found that over half of all retention goes unchecked between the two official metrics: first-to-second year retention and graduation.

The research on retention also includes information on student persistence. While these terms are sometimes used interchangeably, they have different definitions (Spear, n.d.). Roberts

(2016) defined persistence as students currently enrolled in postsecondary education who had yet to attain a credential. Arnold (1999) described persistence as “a student’s postsecondary education continuation behavior that leads to graduation” (p. 5). Spear (n.d.) defined retention in two ways: students returning for the next term and students who were present on the first and last day of a term. Retention of students is the focus of many higher education leaders as it is tied to the funding of postsecondary institutions (Spear, n.d.). Bean (as cited in Arnold, 1999) stated that using retention as a measurement can be misleading as it is important first to know students’ goals. There are many reasons students choose to enroll in higher education. For example, completing a specific sequence of courses can provide pay raises or expand a skill set. Gallup reported (2022) that most students are pursuing a college education “to increase their knowledge, purpose, and pay” (p. 5). Then, after meeting their goal, students leave. Results from the Gallup (2022) Student Survey indicated that 33% of bachelor’s degree seeking students were considering stopping out in 2020 and 32% in 2021. Additionally, students may transfer or move from one institution to another, which would not count in an institutional retention rate but does indicate student persistence. “Where persistence rates measure a student’s ability to continue on to the next term, retention rates are campus-wide and show an institution’s ability to retain students” (Spear, n.d.). The concept of student persistence is another way campus leaders examine the retention issue, as it addresses students’ processes related to goal achievement (Arnold, 1999).

Research regarding retention efforts has concentrated primarily on the successful transition from first to second year (Education Advisory Board, 2014; Coghlan et al., 2009; Complete College America, n.d.; Willcoxson et al., 2011). Attention at this point in a student’s academic career is primarily due to the work of Tinto (1993) and others (e.g., National Center for

Higher Education Management Systems, n.d.), who stated that first-year students are at the most significant risk of attrition. Furthermore, because the official metrics for student success in college are first-to-second year retention and graduation rates (Education Advisory Board, 2014), higher education leaders have little incentive to measure retention or progression in between. However, the research on first-to-second year retention is incomplete, as it only provides information on about half of all students (Pattengale, 2000). Gohn et al. (2000) stated that most postsecondary education institutions lose as many students after the first year as they do during the first year. Attrition beyond the first year “counts for approximately half of all attrition” (Willcoxson et al., 2011, p. 331).

Additionally, retention issues are typically addressed by higher education leaders with freshman-specific programming (Complete College America, 2014; Nora et al., 2005; Silverman, 2016; Young & Schreiner, 2014). The focus of national attention on providing targeted campus resources to first-year students dates to the 1970s with the University of South Carolina’s first-year seminar course and the first Annual Conference on The Freshman Year Experience (Gardner et al., 2010; University of South Carolina, n.d.). The first-year seminar course highlighted freshmen retention issues and strategies through conferences and increased literature on the first-year experience (Gardner et al., 2010). Students are often supported during freshman year through first-year experience programming, living-learning communities, or required coursework. Institutions also create their own at-risk models to predict first-year students’ likelihood of dropping out and use the data to intervene (Demski, 2011).

However, students’ academic and social development as they transition to college does not end in the first year (Silverman, 2016). According to Schaller (2010), “there is no reason to believe that students who survive the first year of college are suddenly successful in the second year” (p. 15). Second-year students still face the challenges of homesickness and learning effective study habits (Silverman, 2016). Willcoxson et al. (2011) found that retention factors vary by year of study; however, two similarities between first-year and second-year students’ intent to leave are significantly associated with having a clear reason for attending postsecondary education and students’ ability to select their intended major. Placing all the focus on retention during the first year neglects important student needs in subsequent years (Nora et al., 2005). More specifically, campus leaders would be wise to look beyond just the first year and focus more on second-year/sophomore student retention.

Kennedy and Upcraft (2010) stated that sophomores experience distinct challenges that could impede their intent to persist in college. These challenges differ from students at other classification levels and include declaring a major and developing purpose (Gardner et al., 2010). Students in high school are often pressured to declare a major at the time of college application (Marcus, 2021; Zelaya-Leon, 2020) or during their freshman year (Straumsheim, 2016). However, the Complete College America (2019) “Purpose First" initiative asks institutions to provide focused pathways during the first year to allow students time to make informed major choices. These perceived pressures and actual institutional practices work to defer the selection of an academic major to the second year. Intermingled with selecting an academic major is the more definitive determination of career choice, which forces students to examine their purpose more clearly (Gardner et al., 2010). This combination of major academic and developmental pressures, compounded by the lack or reduction of institutional resources and support, often comes to a head during a student's second year. Kennedy and Upcraft (2010) defined this “multidimensional phenomenon, which could begin as early as the second semester of college and includes one or more of the following: academic deficiencies, academic disengagement, dissatisfaction with the collegiate experience, major and career indecision, and developmental confusion" as the sophomore slump (p. 39).

Major and career indecision is an aspect of sophomore slump (Kennedy & Upcraft, 2010; Young & Schreiner, 2014) that may impact retention. Mayhew et al. (2016) found that academic major inconsistently impacts retention. Students who majored in business, engineering, and health sciences were retained at higher rates than other majors (Mayhew et al., 2016). However, retention was positively impacted when students' academic major matched their vocational interests (Mayhew et al., 2016). Gallup (2022) stated that 12% of bachelor's degree seeking students considered stopping out because they did not believe the degree would help them achieve their career goals. Additionally, 11% considered leaving because they did not believe the courses to be relevant to their future career (Gallup, 2022). This study explored resources that impact students' retention decisions. With more information areas such as career services, academic advising, academic affairs, and orientation can develop or adjust programming. To reduce the sophomore slump, some postsecondary institutions have started to not require students to enter as undeclared. For example, the University System of Georgia has adopted the "Momentum Year," which aims to have students make a "purposeful choice" regarding their program of study within the first year (Complete College Georgia, n.d.). Additionally, the "Purpose First" initiative from Complete College America (2019) provides guided pathways to allow students time to make informed decisions about their major by the end of their first year.

Indecision and intention to drop out are two signals of the sophomore slump phenomenon. Noel-Levitz (2013) found that 23% of sophomores communicated indecision about returning. Similarly, Xu (2017) indicated that 19.7% of sophomores at one institution indicated an intention to drop out of school. Intention to continue is a factor that influences persistence

(Bean & Metzner, 1985; Cabrera et al., 1993). Willcoxson et al. (2011) looked at factors that affected persistence in the second year and found the following reasons that influenced students' intention to drop out: student commitment, student expectations, teachers' support and feedback, personal well-being, and involvement. The Sophomore Experience Survey cited the following sophomore dissatisfaction facets as signs of slumping: grades, advising, living situation, health, interactions with faculty, peer relationships, holistic college experience, and amount of learning (Young & Schreiner, 2014). Other signs of "slumping" may include a downturn in the utilization of support services compared to the previous academic year, a decrease in grade point average, and undergoing focused exploration (Schaller, 2005). Furthermore, sophomores experiencing slump begin to experience a decrease in academic ability; academic disengagement and dissatisfaction; and developmental confusion (Kennedy & Upcraft, 2010). These factors of sophomore slump decrease students' intent to persist and can negatively impact retention.

A further issue sophomores face that is a component of the sophomore slump is that of academic disengagement (Kennedy and Upcraft, 2010). Academic disengagement can result in students' earning lower grade point averages (GPA). This disengagement and lower GPA work to decrease retention as academic achievement has the strongest impact on retention, progression, and graduation (Mayhew et al., 2016). With more information on sophomores' academic disengagement, areas such as academic advising, service-learning, supplemental instruction, tutoring, and academic affairs have increased data with which to advise or program for students in an effort to decrease the sophomore-slump phenomenon and increase retention.

Another aspect of the sophomore slump that impacts retention is student dissatisfaction. Sophomore students experience dissatisfaction differently than other classification levels (Juillerat, 2000). One area that students experience dissatisfaction is with their academic advising experiences (Juillerat, 2000; Schreiner et al., 2012; Young & Schreiner, 2014). Academic advisors, who could be faculty or staff, have many responsibilities, including helping students select a major and assisting students in creating a plan of study toward goal completion. Through a better understanding of students' lived experiences with academic advising, the major selection process, and academic, personal, and professional goal setting, academic advisors can assess how they can better meet the needs of students and work to increase retention.

One of the complications that sophomores face is that it is difficult to define when the sophomore year begins (Gardner et al., 2010) which makes it difficult for higher education leaders to target programming on the specific population. The term sophomore is defined differently within the research as students who have completed a requisite amount of credit hours and students who are entering their second year in postsecondary education. Noel-Levitz (2013) "explored the mindsets behind the sophomore slump" (p. 1) where sophomore students were classified as those returning for a second year of postsecondary education and could have completed anywhere from zero to more than sixty credit hours. The Sophomore Experience Survey collected data from students in the spring semester of their second year (Schreiner et al., 2012). The Education Advisory Board's (2014) research focused on the number of terms a student enrolled; yet other research did not define the terms sophomore or second-year student (Schaller, 2005; Xu, 2017). Without a standard definition of sophomores, higher education leaders may have a challenging time knowing where to allocate resources. In this study the terms sophomore or second-year student were self-identified by the participants. The research site defines sophomore students as those who have completed between 30 and 59.99 semester credit hours (Georgia Southern University, 2020). However, students may have completed postsecondary education coursework during high school and not perceive themselves to be sophomores, thus self-identification was used.

Background

Higher education leaders have a responsibility to investigate what retention and persistence issues students face beyond their first year. Tinto (1993) called for institutions to discover the goals and commitments of entering students when creating retention policies. It makes sense that this same call for research could be employed at all classification levels so institutional leaders can develop programming and other retention policies that accurately reflect student needs and thus have the most significant positive impact on student success throughout their time at the institution. Through the investigation of student retention, higher education leaders can work to develop programming targeted to the specific needs of students at each classification level. While the phenomenon of sophomore slump is recognized in higher education (McBurnie et al., 2012; Young & Schreiner, 2014) and persistence issues have been widely researched (Arnold, 1999; Spear, n.d.), there has been little focus in terms of resources or attention by most universities for students beyond the first year (Gardner et al., 2010; Hartman & Young, 2021; Isakovski et al., 2011; Willcoxson et al., 2011; Young & Schreiner, 2014). The 2012-2013 National Survey of First-Year Seminars found that 89.7% of institutions reported offering first-year seminars (Young & Hopp, 2014). Barefoot, et al., (2012) found that the most common type of seminar offered at postsecondary institutions is during the first year and that it is uncommon to find second-year seminars. Over 96% of institutions surveyed stated that a first-year seminar was offered and that the second most offered time of seminar/capstone courses was during the senior year at 92.6%. However, institutional support is lacking once students enter their second year (Graunke & Woosley, 2005; Pattengale & Schreiner, 2000). The Education

Advisory Board (2014) found that only 29% of private universities and 20% of public universities employ retention practices for students moving from second to third year and Barefoot, et al. (2012) found that 13.3% of institutions offered a sophomore seminar. Young and Schreiner (2014) reported that 45% of institutions had at least one initiative specifically geared toward sophomores and of those, 80% had been offered for five years or less. More recently, Hartman and Young (2021) found that 51% of institutions offered “at least one initiative specifically or intentionally geared toward sophomore students” (p. 17). Some of these initiatives were described as not reaching large populations of students as they are focused on specialized sophomore populations. However, the two initiatives cited as offered the most often at four-year institutions were career exploration and academic advising. This loss of support and factors of the sophomore slump work to decrease student retention and persistence rates.

Resources on campus have been used to increase student retention and persistence rates, especially within the first year. Tinto (1993) discussed retention initiatives that work to retain students including recruitment, orientation, pre-entry assessment and placement, first-year programs and other transition to college programs, early contact and community building, academic involvement and support, monitoring and early warning systems, counseling, and advising. These programs were used as stand-alone initiatives or in conjunction with other programs to create a “retention program.” Mayhew et al. (2016) found that comprehensive programs (programs that combine multiple initiatives and experiences) to improve student success and that were high quality effectively promoted retention, persistence, and graduation. Tinto (1993) also discussed the need for long-term actions for retention, since after the first year, the second year is when most students choose to withdraw from the institution or drop out of postsecondary education. Tinto’s (1993) notion of long-term programming centered on three areas: (1) academic difficulties, (2) resolution of students' academic and professional goals, and (3) academic and social engagement with the institution. Higher education leaders can use these three programmatic foci and research on sophomores' distinct needs to create campus resources and/or programs that work to retain students.

Sophomore students are facing distinct challenges, such as major and career indecision, which impede their intent to persist (Kennedy & Upcraft, 2010; Young & Schreiner, 2014). Juillerat (2000) found that sophomore students experience dissatisfaction differently than other classification levels. Graunke and Woosley (2005) identified that grade point average and commitment to majors were significant indicators of sophomore persistence. Young and Schreiner (2014) reported that a sense of community on campus and thriving were the two main predictors of sophomore's intent to graduate. Willcoxson et al. (2011) established that second-year students' intention to leave postsecondary education was more internally focused than first-year students. Schaller (2005, 2010) stated that sophomore students experience frustration and the pressure to make life choices during their second year of college and face challenges, such as self-efficacy and career development. Gardner et al. (2010) discussed how major selection is intertwined with career choice, which leads students to explore their purpose. The challenges sophomores face point to higher education leaders' need to develop student service resources and/or programming that addresses sophomore-specific needs.

Few studies have examined sophomore students' lived experiences. Exploring students' lived experiences provides additional information on students' motivations, feelings, and beliefs and how these personal elements affect students' decision-making processes. Additionally, the study of lived experiences provides attention to what is important to sophomores, and this information can be used to better direct academic and social programming and funding on campus. However, research on sophomores has primarily been quantitative or survey-based in nature. Schreiner et al. (2012) conducted a mixed-methods study that concentrated on experiences such as academic major, faculty, enjoyable classes, friends, and academic advising. The Sophomore Experience Survey evaluated students thriving, campus experiences, and academic experiences (Young & Schreiner, 2014). Schaller (2005) conducted focus groups and individual interviews with sophomores on “spirituality, campus involvement, and home life” (p. 18). Gohn et al. (2000) conducted a mixed-methods study with second-year returners on how they perceived themselves in relation to graduation. Tower et al. (2015) qualitatively evaluated Facebook postings to generate self-efficacy themes on sophomore nursing students. Research on how students experience the sophomore year and sophomore slump is necessary to better understand sophomore-specific needs.

Through a clearer understanding of how students perceive their second-year experiences, higher education leaders may be able to better orient themselves to the phenomenon and make recommendations for improved retention practices. Information on second-year students’ perceptions of academic and extracurricular resources will provide higher education leaders with information to have the most significant impact on retention practices. Changes made to postsecondary education practices may have different significance to different classification levels; therefore, it is important to look beyond the first-year experience. Higher education leaders can better understand the second-year experience and sophomore slump by studying second-year student perceptions.

Theoretical Context

It is essential to understand the importance of theory for higher education leaders to develop the most effective support services for sophomores. With that in mind, several theories guided this study. Schaller's (2005) sophomore development model was used to target distinct challenges faced by sophomores. Specifically, the focused exploration stage of the sophomore development model will be used to identify participants and as an indicator of the sophomore slump phenomenon. Schaller stated that students begin to experience the sophomore slump within this stage of development.

In addition, Tinto's (1975) student integration theory provided another basis for determining if students are experiencing sophomore slump. Tinto discussed how positive interactions on campus work to increase students' integration with the college community and, therefore, retention. This study looked at how students are engaging with the college community, including faculty, students, and support services on campus. Determining students' level of engagement provides one data point on whether students are experiencing the sophomore slump phenomenon.

Finally, the findings of Astin's (1984/1999) student involvement theory encourages higher education leaders to advocate for sophomore-specific programming. Astin concentrated on students' time spent on task, whether that task was academic or social, and stated that more time on task led to increased learning and development. According to Astin, effective programming is focused on increasing students' time on task, or involvement with the activity. Higher education leaders can use this theory to advocate for quality programming versus quantity, thereby redirecting sophomore programming efforts to those that increase student involvement and thus retention.

Statement of the Problem

Evidence suggests that while college students face major academic and social obstacles that lead to retention issues throughout their college career, retention and persistence initiatives are primarily addressed only within the freshman year. Some sophomore-specific campus services (academic and social) do exist for higher education practitioners to examine and model; however, a gap exists in understanding if these services reflect students' needs, if these services are increasing retention, and in what ways services could be improved to better meet students' needs. Limited research examines student perceptions of their lived experiences during the sophomore year. A clearer understanding of this population's needs could allow for more impactful programming and resource efforts and in turn, could increase student progression beyond the sophomore year. Unfortunately, few studies have been conducted to evaluate the developmental needs that are distinct to sophomore students.

The phenomenon of sophomore slump suggests that higher education leaders should create sophomore-specific programming and intervene during the sophomore year. Research on the perceptions of this student population could help identify gaps of support for sophomores to better direct the implementation of sophomore-specific programming. This study examined students' experiences with campus resources that may impact their intent to re-enroll at one postsecondary institution.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the perceptions of postsecondary education sophomore students' experiences with campus resources that may have affected their intent to remain enrolled at one public, southeastern doctoral research university. This study sought to determine the social and academic student resources, if any, that may have influenced students' choices to remain enrolled from semester to semester and from their second year to graduation. As such, the primary question that guided this study was: What postsecondary education resources do sophomore students at a public, southeastern doctoral research university perceive as needed for retention? Secondary research questions include: (a) What academic and co-curricular activities do sophomore students utilize in the current academic year and in what ways? and (b) What academic and co-curricular services do sophomore students perceive affect their decision to continue through to graduation at their current institution?

Methodology

This study utilized a transcendental phenomenological approach. Qualitative research allows for exploration and a deeper understanding of how individuals or groups attribute meaning to a problem (Creswell, 2009). “Qualitative inquiry includes collecting quotes from people, verifying them, and contemplating what they mean” (Patton, 2015, p. 14). Phenomenology is a research design used in education (Creswell, 2013). “A phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (Creswell, 2013, p. 76). Phenomenology allows researchers to investigate how people experience the world and is reflective in nature (van Manen, 2016). Transcendental phenomenology evaluates the lived experiences of participants to make meaning of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). Learning about sophomore students’ lived experiences with campus resources can assist higher education leaders in developing programming specific to their student and institutional needs. Transcendental phenomenology as a methodology allows for a richer and deeper examination of students’ lived experiences. More information on the methodology of this study is provided in chapter three.

Participants

The participants for this study were four self-identified sophomore students enrolled at Georgia Southern University, a public doctoral research university, in spring 2021. This sample size met Creswell’s (2014) phenomenological participant definition of 3 to 15 participants and

Patton's (2015) and Mason's (as cited in Baker and Edwards, 2012) small sample size definition of n=1. Participation was voluntary. Participants were selected from one of two courses that targeted sophomores at the university. The researcher implemented a selection survey to choose students who could inform an understanding of the phenomenon. To qualify for the study, participants needed to attend the university for their first year of study, be enrolled in the semester of participation in the study, and self-identify as a sophomore student.

Procedures

The researcher contacted instructors teaching courses intended for sophomores in two departments, the Office of Student Leadership and Community Engagement and the Office of Career and Professional Development, at Georgia Southern University, a public, southeastern doctoral research university, to ask if their students could complete a brief survey during class (see Appendix A). The classes had a total of 141 undergraduate students comprised of all classifications of students enrolled in spring 2021 and were face-to-face, hybrid, or online. The purpose of the brief selection survey was to obtain information on potential study participants. The survey included an informed consent page and questions relevant to the study. The selection survey included questions on student demographics, including attendance at the research site, classification, current academic major, age, race, ethnicity, and gender (see Appendix B). After completion of the survey, data was compiled and analyzed to create a list of potential participants.

The researcher then contacted potential participants via telephone to see if they were interested in continuing the study. Participants who agreed to continue the study were invited to participate in a focus group or individual interview. As focus groups could not be scheduled, individual interviews were used in the study. The participants completed an informed consent prior to beginning the interview (see Appendix C). The researcher used a semi-structured interview protocol to conduct interviews (see Appendix D).

Data Analysis

Individual interview results were transcribed using Zoom's transcription service. Then, the researcher used a modified method of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of analysis (Moustakas, 1994) to develop themes. This method was used to find meaning in participant's statements, organize statements into themes, and combine descriptions of what and how participants experienced the phenomenon into one experience. Based on the themes that emerged from the data, the researcher collected additional data from social media and the student newspaper at the research site as a method of data triangulation. Including data from multiple sources is a method of data triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). If participants referred to any documents, policies, or websites during the interviews, the researcher read those materials as another avenue of triangulation. Additional information about procedures can be found in chapter three.

Significance of the Study

Sophomores face distinct challenges regarding their academic and social transition. While university programming and resources are often available during students' first year, research indicated that student services are lacking once they move into their sophomore year. The lack of support sophomore students experience may affect student retention and persistence and could be rectified by addressing the issue of the sophomore slump. To have the greatest effect on sophomore slump, retention, and persistence, identifying students' needs is necessary. There is a lack of empirical and theoretical knowledge of sophomore students in terms of retention. This research study sought to examine resources that students perceived as influencing their decision to return or depart at one postsecondary institution. The information gained from the study adds to the body of literature on sophomore-specific programming to decrease the sophomore slump phenomenon and increase student retention and persistence. Furthermore, information from the study may be used by higher education leaders to further develop targeted sophomore programming to decrease the sophomore slump and increase retention.

This study is significant because it provides higher education leaders with lived experience information on the sophomore student population, which is inherently different from most quantitative data that can be found on sophomore students. It is important for higher education leaders to have a clearer understanding of the challenges and issues sophomore students face. Through a better understanding of the issues and challenges, targeted programming and resources can be offered to sophomores and may work to increase retention.

This study concentrated on campus resources related to the sophomore slump phenomenon. Issues of major and career decision are common in the sophomore student population. Data gathered from the study included students' perceptions on academic disengagement, dissatisfaction, major and career indecision, and intention to drop out. This information can be used by higher education leaders in academic advising, career services, student affairs, academic affairs, supplemental instruction, service-learning, and other areas to create or refocus programming on sophomore students' needs. Through understanding and evaluating issues relevant to sophomores, higher education leaders can work to develop institutional support services or refocus support services currently on campus. With information on sophomore's perceptions of support services related to challenges within the sophomore slump, sophomore-specific programming can better align with the distinct challenges sophomore students face.

Definition of Key Terms

The following key terms are used throughout the study:

Dropout

"Students who leave school and do not return" (Arnold, 1999, p. 5).

Persistence

Postsecondary education students who continued enrollment or degree completion at any institution (Arnold, 1999; National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2018).

Retention

Higher education students who re-enrolled at a single postsecondary institution from one academic year to the next (Arnold, 1999; Barefoot, 2004; National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2018).

Sophomore and Second-Year Students

Georgia Southern University (2020) defined sophomore students as college students who had completed between 30 and 59.99 semester credit hours. In this study students self-selected their classification level. Self-selection was utilized as students may have completed postsecondary education coursework during their secondary education and may not have perceived themselves to be in their second-year or sophomore year of study. The terms sophomore and second-year student are used interchangeably throughout the study.

Sophomore Slump

A "multidimensional phenomenon, which could begin as early as the second semester of college and includes one or more of the following: academic deficiencies, academic disengagement, dissatisfaction with the collegiate experience, major and career indecision, and developmental confusion" (Kennedy & Upcraft, 2010, p. 39).

Chapter Summary and Organization of the Paper

Student retention and persistence remain a focus for higher education leaders. Research on and programming for retention and persistence has primarily concentrated on first-year students. This attention on the first year causes the persistence challenges faced by students to be experienced in the second year. Moreover, sophomore students face distinct challenges such as major and career indecision that work to impede retention and persistence.

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions postsecondary education sophomore students had of experiences with campus resources that may have impacted retention. This qualitative study included individual interviews to learn more about students' lived experiences during their sophomore year. The research site for this study was Georgia Southern University, a public doctoral research university in the southeastern United States. The results from this study can be used to better align support services to the needs of sophomore students to decrease the sophomore slump and work to increase student retention and persistence. Chapter two contains a literature review that discusses research on retention, sophomore-specific challenges, the sophomore slump, and sophomore-specific programming. Chapter two also includes the student development theories and sophomore development model used for this study. Chapter three describes the methodology, including information on the research design, population and selection, and procedures. Chapter four provides the findings from the study, which include verbatim participant responses. Chapter five discusses the findings and provides implications for higher education leaders to adjust campus resources to better align with the needs of sophomores.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Related Literature and Research

Efforts to improve student persistence are primarily focused on the first year (Willcoxson et al., 2011; Young & Schreiner, 2014). This attention is based upon prior research that has determined that first-year students are at the greatest risk of attrition (National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, n.d.; Tino, 1993). The effort to improve first-year retention is not only research-based but campus-resource-concentrated as well. The 1970s began the national attention to campus resources for freshmen with the University of South Carolina's first-year seminar course (Gardner et al., 2010). This first-year seminar course gave rise to conferences and increased literature on the first-year experience (Gardner et al., 2010). The University of South Carolina paved the way again for higher education leaders' retention efforts in 1998 when the National Resource Center, which focused on the freshman-year experience, at the University of South Carolina changed its name to the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition (University of South Carolina, n.d.). The new focus on students in transition included first-year students, sophomore students, transfer students, graduating students, and new graduate students (University of South Carolina, n.d.). However, it was not until 2000 that the center published the first book related to students in the second year of college (Gardner et al., 2010) and the center's website shows few additional publications after 2000 (University of South Carolina, n.d.).

While there is abundant research on first-year persistence, higher education leaders have a responsibility to investigate retention issues in subsequent years. Research on the second year indicated that sophomores are facing the sophomore slump (McBurnie et al., 2012; Noel-Levitz, 2013; Xu, 2017; Young & Schreiner, 2014). The sophomore slump "includes one or more of the following academic deficiencies, academic disengagement, dissatisfaction with the collegiate experience, major and career indecision, and developmental confusion" (Kennedy & Upcraft, 2010, p. 39). Additionally, sophomores face distinct challenges, such as major and career indecision (Kennedy & Upcraft, 2010; Young & Schreiner, 2014) and dissatisfaction (Juillerat, 2000; Young & Schreiner, 2014). Juillerat (2000) found that sophomores at public institutions were less satisfied with university services and the course content of their major. Young and Schreiner (2014) reported sophomore dissatisfaction with multiple areas which included grades, advising, living situations, health, faculty interactions, peer relationships, the entire college experience, and amount of learning. Furthermore, Schaller (2005) indicated that a decrease in the utilization of services and lower grade point average (GPA) were indicators of sophomore slump. The sophomore experience is described in the literature as a time of significant decrease in institutional support (Graunke & Woosley, 2005; Isakovski et al., 2011; Pattengale & Schreiner, 2000; Young & Schreiner, 2014) and lack of commitment to school (Wilder, 1993). Factors of the sophomore slump and the distinct challenges sophomores face work to impede students' intent to continue.

Given the retention challenges sophomores contend with, it is important to examine the issues and what support systems are currently offered to meet the needs of sophomores. The purpose of this literature review is to first discuss national information on postsecondary education retention and historical and current programmatic efforts that have worked to increase retention, progression, and graduation. Then, the theoretical context in which higher education leaders can identify sophomores experiencing the sophomore slump and the distinct challenges sophomores face is evaluated. Additionally, a more comprehensive understanding of the sophomore slump phenomenon and its impact on retention is identified. Finally, examples of sophomore-specific programming are provided to guide higher education leaders in creating programming.

Organization of the Literature

This chapter provides a review of recent literature related to sophomore retention. This chapter is divided into sections, including retention in postsecondary education, key theories, sophomore-specific challenges, sophomore slump, and sophomore-specific programming. Sophomore-specific challenges discussed in this chapter include major selection and career development. Sophomore-specific programming examples permeated the recent literature. Programming examples from different schools and various higher education areas are provided. Programming examples include career exploration, mentorship, course development, orientation, and social media initiatives.

Retention in Postsecondary Education

Retention measures the number of students who re-enroll at the same institution from one academic year to the next (Arnold, 1999; Barefoot, 2004). Student success and postsecondary education quality are viewed through the lens of retention, which makes this concept important to higher education leaders (Arnold, 1999; Silverman, 2016). However, retention in the United States has remained around 60% since the 1960s (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2018), and 64% of students who begin postsecondary education graduate in a six-year time span (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). Retention is traditionally measured at the first-to-second year transition and at the time of graduation (Education Advisory Board, 2014). However, Gohn et al. (2000) stated that institutions lose as many students from the second year to graduation as they do in first-to-second year transition. And Willcoxson et al. (2011) confirmed that half of all attrition happens after the first year. Furthermore, the Education

Advisory Board (2014) found that over half of all retention goes untracked between the two official metrics: first-to-second year and graduation. These retention issues call for higher education leaders to research and address other classification levels' challenges related to retention and progression.

The issue of low student retention has caused higher education leaders to discuss theoretical perspectives (Astin, 1984/1999; Bean & Metzner, 1985; Tinto, 1975, 1993), conduct research (Kena et al., 2015; National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, n.d.; National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2018), and implement strategies to work to improve retention (National Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, n.d.; Pattengale, 2000; Reyes, 2011). Theoretical perspectives on retention will be discussed later in this chapter. Research on retention has primarily been based on the first-to-second year (Coghlan et al., 2009; Education Advisory Board, 2014; Willcoxson et al., 2011). Additionally, retention initiatives have traditionally been created primarily for first-year students (Nora et al., 2005; Silverman, 2016; Young & Schreiner, 2014). This attention on research and programmatic strategies for freshmen makes logical sense since first-year students are at the greatest risk of attrition (National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, n.d.; Tinto, 1993). Furthermore, comprehensive programs (such as First-Year Experience programs) that are high quality and focus on student success were effective at promoting retention, progression, and graduation (Mayhew et al., 2016).

Retention Research and Programs

This research and programmatic attention can be tied to the University of South Carolina's first-year seminar course that began in the 1970s (Gardner et al., 2010). Other freshman-specific programs include living-learning communities, required coursework, and provisional admission programs. From the first class at the University of South Carolina emerged a National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition (Gardner et al., 2010). Since 1988, the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition has conducted national surveys of first-year seminars (Young, 2018). The survey from 2017 showed that 73.5% of four-year institutions offered a first-year seminar, and 56% of those institutions required students to participate (Young, 2018). That percentage does not include the other freshman-specific programmatic efforts and could include support efforts such as residential programs, early alert systems, pre-term orientation, first-year advising, and peer education. However, the number of second-year retention initiatives is drastically different, with offerings at 24.5% of institutions nationally (Education Advisory Board, 2014). Hartman and Young (2021) reported that 51% of respondents (N=308) to the 2019 National Survey of Sophomore-Year Initiatives provided at least one programmatic effort geared toward sophomores. Academic advising was the most frequent campus-wide initiative for sophomores at public institutions (Hartman & Young, 2021; Young & Schreiner, 2014).

Mayhew et al. (2016) reviewed research on retention interventions that promote retention, progression, and graduation. The interventions included remediation, first-year seminars, and student services. Student services included assorted services such as supplemental instruction, academic advising, tutoring, mentoring, and comprehensive programs. Since 2002, evidence has been weak linking non-comprehensive programs to retention promotion. Comprehensive programs use multiple resources and experiences focused on student success. These programs were “a particularly useful approach for promoting retention, persistence, and graduation” (Mayhew et al., 2016, p. 420). Other factors that were found to promote graduation included, but are not limited to, attending full-time or taking a larger number of course credits.

The evidence supporting comprehensive programs related to the promotion of retention can be used by higher education leaders when developing retention policies and practices.

The National Survey of First-Year Seminars (Young, 2018) also evaluated institutional objectives for the first year and found that most institutions address academic success strategies. Other frequent objectives included: academic planning or major exploration, knowledge of institution and resources, connecting with the institution, and academic expectations. These objectives are met through campus support service areas like academic advising, orientation, and first-year experience offices. The attention to freshman retention initiatives is well documented in the literature (Gardner et al., 2010). However, “academic deficiencies, academic disengagement, dissatisfaction with the collegiate experience, major and career indecision, and developmental confusion” (Kennedy and Upcraft, 2010, p. 39) or the sophomore slump is still experienced at the next transition period for students: sophomore year. Other sophomore slump indicators were a decrease in the utilization of campus support services from the previous year and lower GPA (Schaller, 2005). Academic and support service dissatisfaction is also experienced and experienced at an increased level by sophomores compared to other classification levels (Juillerat, 2000). Young and Schreiner (2014) reported that about one in five sophomores experienced a slump in motivation, grades, or satisfaction with the whole collegiate experience. The challenge of the sophomore slump phenomenon impedes students’ intent to persist and indicates that higher education leaders should learn more about sophomores’ needs, motivations, feelings, and beliefs to better implement strategies for sophomore success, retention, and progression.

Retention initiatives and first-year objectives are areas that higher education leaders can use to develop or refocus programming for sophomores. Gardner et al. (2010) stated that this work is already beginning and that, often, the leaders who work with first-year students and programming are the same ones who develop initiatives for second-year students. Higher education leaders can also utilize the strategies that work for first-year programs when developing sophomore initiatives. Young (2018) discussed how first-year programs are not singular. Instead, the programs are curricular and co-curricular in nature, they require collaboration across the institution, campus-wide cooperation and coordination, and are attached to the institutional mission. These curricular and co-curricular programs are comprehensive in nature and comprehensive programs have been shown to increase student retention, progression, and graduation (Mayhew et al., 2016). Co-curricular involvement includes campus activities such as student organizations and peer leadership roles (Vetter et al., 2019). Higher education leaders can work to duplicate these strategies when developing goals, initiatives, and programming for second-year students. In addition to using first-year experience initiatives, higher education leaders can look to theories of sophomore development and student development when creating comprehensive retention programming.

Key Theories

One sophomore-specific theory is the sophomore development model (Schaller, 2005). This model, along with student development theory, can assist higher education leaders in developing programs that address issues students experience during their sophomore year. In addition to using theory, higher education leaders should utilize campus-based and national data on sophomore-specific needs. It is essential to understand the importance of theory for higher education leaders to create the most effective support services for sophomores. In 1975, Tinto's landmark student integration model was published, and it is Tinto's (1975) theory on which national discussions are based (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011).

Student Development Theory

In this seminal theory, Tinto (1975) focused on the attrition process of college students. He theorized that students' academic and social experiences with postsecondary institutions impact retention. Positive interactions with peers, faculty, and staff increase students' integration with the college community and persistence. Continued positive interactions serve as a catalyst to strengthen students' personal goals and institutional commitment. However, negative interactions decrease students' integration and commitment to the institution, thereby increasing the chance of withdrawal. Essentially, Tinto's (1975) student integration model stated that students' academic and social integration into collegiate life is the primary indicator of students' intent to persist. Many higher education leaders have utilized the student integration model (Tinto, 1975) to develop first-year programming focused on increasing students' integration into campus. This attention to first-year programming delays the issue of student attrition to the second year (Nora et al., 2005), creating increased opportunities for students to drop out. Higher education leaders could utilize the student integration model to develop programming concentrated on distinct sophomore challenges. By concentrating on the issues sophomores face, higher education leaders may decrease the impact of sophomore slump. Furthermore, by reducing sophomore slump, higher education leaders could increase the retention rate of sophomore students.

In a theory regarding student involvement, Astin (1984/1999) described how increased student involvement led to increased student learning and development, a theory that higher education leaders can utilize to advocate for sophomore-specific programming. Involvement in Astin's (1984/1999) model is defined as a behavior, academic or social, that can be measured and requires students to invest time and energy. Hence, the more time and energy students spend focused on an activity, the more students learn and develop from the activity. Astin (1984/1999) stated that the effectiveness of higher education practices, both academic and non-academic, is based on how effective the practices are at increasing students' involvement. Both Tinto (1975) and Astin (1984/1999) addressed the impact of student involvement. These models have been utilized to better develop academic and co-curricular programs concentrated on student retention.

Sophomore Development Model

Schaller (2005) introduced a model directed specifically to sophomore development to learn more about sophomore experiences and to better aid sophomores. Schaller (2005) conducted focus groups and individual interviews with 19 traditional-age sophomores (under the age of 24 [Bean & Metzner, 1985]). No protocol was provided; however, Schaller (2005) indicated that students were questioned about "spirituality, campus involvement, and home life" (p. 18). The interactions were semi-structured, and Schaller (2005) let students lead the discussions. Students' discussions concentrated on self-view, relationships, academic experiences, and academic decisions. Through analysis of the transcripts, Schaller (2005) found that students' practices could be categorized into four stages: "random exploration, focused exploration, tentative choices, and commitment" (p. 18).

Schaller (2005) identified random exploration as the first stage in the sophomore development model. In this stage, students are not yet fully self-aware. Decisions are typically made excitedly and without much, if any, reflection. Schaller (2005) found that many students experienced and moved through this stage in their freshman year or by the summer before sophomore year. However, sophomores still in random exploration tended to have an awareness and understanding of decisions that need to be made but made a conscious decision to delay decision-making.

During focused exploration, the second stage in the sophomore development model (Schaller, 2005), sophomores experienced frustration. By the summer before or early into their sophomore year, students entered focused exploration; it was here that they began to experience the sophomore slump. Sophomores self-reflected and began to question or regret the choices they made. This self-reflection was not limited to academic choices; students experienced frustration with themselves, relationships, and personal experiences. Additionally, students began to feel pressure about their future, including the pressure to decide on a major and identify a career path. However, not all focused exploration is negative. Focused exploration involved self-exploration and becoming more self-directed. Time spent in focused exploration varied by student. Students who stayed longer in this stage experienced a deeper understanding of self and more comprehensive exploration. Students who did not stay long in this exploration phase had a greater risk of continual reliance on others to guide future decisions.

The next stage was tentative choices (Schaller, 2005). No timeline was associated with this stage; however, Schaller (2005) found that many students began tentative choices sometime during their sophomore year. During tentative choices, students made life decisions. This decision-making, even tentatively, moved students out of focused exploration and into tentative choices. Students began to see their future more clearly and found value in academic experiences.

The fourth and final sophomore development model (Schaller, 2005) stage was commitment. Few sophomores in Schaller's (2005) study experienced commitment. Commitment entailed students being more engaged and confident with the choices made. Active planning for the future occurred during this stage. Additionally, sophomores in commitment felt a deep sense of personal responsibility for their future.

In summary of these four phases, students who progressed through focused exploration or tentative choices too quickly were at risk of falling back into one or both stages. Decisions need to be rooted in self-awareness and be connected to students' values. Students who made choices in denial of other options were at risk of exploring those same options in the future.

Combining the sophomore development model (Schaller, 2005) with earlier student development models (Astin, 1984/1999; Tinto, 1975) provides higher education leaders the framework needed to develop sophomore-specific programming. However, any developed sophomore-specific programming should be targeted and specific to the distinct challenges that sophomores face.

Sophomore-Specific Challenges

Sophomore students experience frustration and pressure to make life choices during their second year of college (Schaller, 2005). Sophomores face challenges, such as self-efficacy and career development (Schaller, 2010). During the application process to college, prospective students feel pressured to declare a major (Marcus, 2021 Straumsheim, 2016). Completion agendas such as Complete College America (2019) and Complete College Georgia (n.d.) call for institutions to provide pathways for students to explore majors before declaring. These perceived pressures and institutional policies often move the decision-making process for majors to the sophomore year. Schaller (2010) stated that "most four-year institutions require that students select a major near or at the end of the second year" (p. 17). Timely graduation often requires that students choose a major before the second year ends (Schreiner et al., 2012).

The major selection process impacts the sophomore slump (Kennedy & Upcraft, 2010; Schaller, 2010; Young & Schreiner, 2014). Major choice decisions involve students' ability in major coursework, awareness and understanding of options, and decision-making skills

(Schaller, 2005). Sophomores with lower self-efficacy have a more challenging time in major selection and are possibly more likely to drop out (Schaller, 2005). Self-efficacy is defined as “a person’s belief that they can be successful when carrying out a particular task” (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). Willcoxson et al. (2011) stated that students’ likelihood of leaving was based on their “own perceived inadequacies” (p. 349). This struggle with self-efficacy may be explained by the Sophomore Development Model (Schaller, 2005). During the focused exploration stage, students experienced frustration and began self-reflection. These self-reflections revealed questions and regret with previous choices made. Furthermore, students who carried this decreased self-efficacy into junior year were more likely to leave (Willcoxson et al., 2011). Consequently, sophomores also face making decisions about academic majors with less support services than first year (Barefoot et al., 2012; Education Advisory Board, 2014; Graunke & Woosley, 2005; Pattengale & Schreiner, 2000; Young & Schreiner, 2014). Sophomores want a connection with their academic advisors that helps them plan (Schreiner et al., 2012). Therefore, providing support services for sophomores to confidently choose a major can work to decrease their slump.

Regarding the issue of career development, career decision and major decision are not necessarily linked. However, one aspect students consider when choosing a major is the career prospects related to a specific academic major (Beggs et al., 2008). Additionally, Mayhew et al. (2016) stated that the alignment of academic majors and career interests positively impacts sophomore retention, progression, and graduation. Sophomores experience a unique time academically. Sophomore students are stuck in the middle; not yet ready for a senior seminar and, for many, not yet transitioned into major related coursework. As discussed in the previous paragraph, not all sophomores have declared a major and may still be exploring their options.

This issue causes fewer interactions with faculty and peers in major related and/or career related coursework. Furthermore, institutional policies or course sequencing may prohibit students from enrolling in career-related coursework. Sophomores who have not selected a major or are not yet in major-focused coursework may experience frustration at not finding value in learning (Schaller, 2005). Sophomores who remain undecided in their career path at the end of the academic year may withdraw from school or choose a major that allows them to prolong the career decision-making process (Schaller, 2010). Helping students to relate material from all classes to future career goals may assist in decreasing the sophomore slump. Additionally, meeting with faculty, academic advisors, or career advisors may assist sophomores in clarifying major and career choices.

Overall, the distinct challenges sophomores face point to the need for higher education leaders to use current campus support services or develop initiatives to combat these challenges. Regarding academic major decisions, higher education administrators should develop programs that assist students in selecting a major. Additionally, initiatives focused on developing students' majors and academic self-efficacy are necessary. Higher education leaders can work to develop sophomore-specific programming through a greater understanding of how students experience the sophomore year and the sophomore-slump phenomenon.

Sophomore Slump

The sophomore slump is defined differently throughout the literature. Ennis-McMillan et al. (2011) and McBurnie et al. (2012) defined sophomore slump as a period of disengagement from postsecondary education academic and social activities. Other researchers have likened the sophomore slump to a time of transition in students' lives (Schreiner et al., 2012) and dissatisfaction (Juillerat, 2000; Young & Schreiner, 2014). Kennedy and Upcraft (2010) conducted a review of sophomore slump definitions and developed the definition that will be utilized in this study: a “multidimensional phenomenon, which could begin as early as the second semester of college and includes one or more of the following: academic deficiencies, academic disengagement, dissatisfaction with the collegiate experience, major and career indecision, and developmental confusion” (p. 39). Before discussing the sophomore slump, an understanding of how it is measured must first be addressed.

Measuring the Sophomore Slump Phenomenon

There were few studies found in the review of the literature that discussed how sophomore slump was measured or that conducted new research on how students experienced a sophomore slump. Grades (McBurnie et al., 2012) and attrition (Lee & Leonard, 2011) were the only two measures of sophomore slump found in the descriptions of programmatic efforts. Instead, sophomore-specific programming dominates the literature. However, Wang and Kennedy-Phillips (2013) researched sophomore involvement; Schreiner et al. (2012) discussed two studies on sophomore success; Young and Schreiner (2014) described the 2014 Sophomore Experience Survey; Coghlan et al., (2009) looked at second-year attrition; Willcoxson et al. (2011) researched factors affecting students’ intention to withdraw; Graunke and Woosley (2005) implemented a survey on sophomore success; Wilder (1993) examined variables that impact sophomores’ academic performance; and Gohn et al. (2000) explored how freshman who returned to the second year perceive themselves in relation to graduation.

Wang and Kennedy-Phillips (2013) measured sophomore students’ involvement to provide information to higher education leaders to better align sophomore-specific practices to reduce sophomore slump. An online survey instrument was developed to determine sophomore students’ involvement in both academic and social activities at a midwestern public university.

The survey was sent to 2,000 sophomores and had a response rate of 20.1%. The survey found that the largest predictors of student involvement are self-efficacy and institutional commitment. Additional findings indicated that transfer, older, and on-campus students were more involved than their peers. The largest recommendation from the study for future practice was for higher education leaders to develop sophomore-year experience programs to connect students to the institution. Additionally, the researchers recommended that co-curricular, intercultural, and off-campus sophomore-specific programming be developed.

Schreiner et al. (2012) conducted two studies on student success. Student success was defined as ‘thriving’ (Schreiner et al., 2012). Thriving was described as “optimal functioning in three key areas that contribute to student success and persistence: (a) academic engagement and performance, (b) interpersonal relationships, and (c) psychological well-being” (Schreiner et al., 2012, p. 114). Both studies utilized the Sophomore Experience Survey (SES). Schreiner et al. (2012) stated that the web-based instrument was designed to measure “student thriving, frequency, and satisfaction with faculty interaction and levels of student involvement” (p. 115).

The first study discussed by Schreiner et al. (2012) was a quantitative study conducted with 41 (13 public and 28 private) self-selected institutions. In spring 2010, students at participating institutions received the SES via email. Respondents totaled 4,845 traditional-age sophomores. Researchers found four significant indicators of student thriving: students’ certainty of major, spirituality, faculty interaction, and sense of community (Schreiner et al., 2012). Contrary to Astin’s (1984/1999) model, involvement was found not to be a factor in thriving. This contradiction could be explained by the limited ability to predict from the sample since 83% of participants indicated current campus participation, so involvement was not an issue faced by the sophomores surveyed.

Schreiner et al. (2012) discussed the second study was conducted at one private, faith-based institution. Twenty-three sophomores were interviewed during the spring of their sophomore year. Prior to being interviewed, the sophomores completed the SES. Ten students reported high levels of engagement, and 13 students reported low engagement on the survey. The interviewer did not know the students' survey scores prior to conducting the interviews. During the interviews, students were asked about their experiences, including their major, faculty, enjoyable classes, friends, and academic advising. One theme found that decreased students' thriving was students' perceptions of institutional support. Students felt the transition out of the first-year experience proved challenging and that the institution did not provide enough support during sophomore year. The primary theme found throughout the interviews that increased thriving was faculty interaction. A sub-theme that increased students' thriving included having friends in the same major. However, academic advisement was an issue. Students with higher engagement scores on the SES had good experiences with their academic advisors, whereas students who scored lower had frustrating experiences. Students with lower scores wanted an experience focusing more on goal and career development and less on registration and academic requirements. This discrepancy of sophomore needs is an excellent opportunity for higher education leaders to conduct further research on the needs of sophomore students.

Young and Schreiner (2014) presented information on the 2014 Sophomore Experience Survey. This quantitative survey focused on thriving, campus experiences, and academic experiences and was sent to students during the second semester of their sophomore year (N=4,472). Signs of the sophomore slump were identified where 27.3% implied that they were barely surviving, 21% of respondents indicated courses are worse/much worse than first year, 17.7% stated sophomore year is worse/much worse than first year, 16.4% were earning grades below a 3.0 GPA, and 9.9% commented that they were still unsure of their major. In addition to these factors, dissatisfaction with the holistic collegiate experience was tallied at 12.3%. Other dissatisfaction elements included grades, advising, living situations, health, interactions with faculty, peer relationships, and amount of learning. These results totaled to about one in five second-year students experiencing the sophomore slump. In students' words: "It's a lot lonelier – there's no effort on the part of the institution to involve us" (slide 24). And "I think a lot of people are hitting an 'oh crap moment' – there are a lot of forks in the road" (slide 24). The only campus experience that predicted every positive outcome was connection to faculty. These findings point to the fact that the sophomore slump is occurring. Moreover, higher education leaders should work to create institutional efforts that specifically focus on sophomores and their distinct experiences.

Coghlan et al. (2009) surveyed returning and not returning third-year students (N=71) about factors related to second-year attrition. Findings indicated that returning students had greater social integration to the university, served in leadership roles almost twice as often, and reported more time management issues than non-returners. Major choice, academic disengagement, and faculty-student relationships were not related to attrition or retention of sophomores in this study. The finding that social integration and leadership roles positively affected retention supports Tinto's (1975) theory of student integration and Astin's (1984/1999) model of student involvement furthering the discussion that higher education leaders should provide targeted programming for sophomores. Additionally, the finding on time management points to the need for further research on sophomore students' needs.

Willcoxson et al. (2011) surveyed 5,211 undergraduate business students in their first, second, or third year at six universities on factors associated with students' intention to withdraw from their postsecondary institutions. Findings indicated that factors associated with intention to leave are differentiated by classification and university. For second-year students (n=1,129), the intention to leave the university before graduation was similar to first-year students in that lack of helpful faculty feedback on assessments was an issue. Findings showed that lack of helpful feedback is an important factor of attrition. Furthermore, findings were institutionally focused on commitment issues and support issues. Commitment issues included having a clear reason to attend the university and student's ability to select and enroll in their intended major. Support issues comprised students identifying their emotional health and faculty support for learning. Second-year students were internally focused concerning expectations with confidence issues surrounding academic ability dominating the decision to leave or stay. The difference in findings between institutions presents a need for surveys that provide further information on students' unique retention and attrition characteristics at a specific institution.

Graunke and Woosley (2005) surveyed second-semester sophomore students (N=1,093) on issues that affect sophomore's academic success. Findings indicated that faculty-student interaction and certainty of major were strong predictors of sophomore success. However, students' institutional commitment did not significantly predict sophomore success. The researchers stated that institutional commitment as a non-predictor may have been because students with lower commitment had already dropped out and, therefore, were not included in the survey responses. However, findings indicated that higher education leaders who want to increase the sophomore-to-junior year retention rates should not focus solely on developing institutional commitment. Instead, higher education leaders should address issues pertinent to sophomore students when developing initiatives to increase retention.

Wilder (1993) surveyed 196 sophomore students who achieved a 2.75 – 4.0 grade point average (GPA) during their freshman year. Students were categorized into two groups: “decliners and maintainers.” Decliners were defined as students who exhibited a 20% decline in academic performance in the two semesters following freshman year. Maintainers were defined as students who sustained or improved their GPA in two semesters succeeding freshman year. Of the total population surveyed, 102 were decliners, and 96 were maintainers. Findings indicated that variables such as lack of commitment to school, class-absenteeism, extracurricular activities, and perceptions of faculty-staff interactions contributed most to differentiate between decliners and maintainers. These findings supported Tinto’s (1975) theory of student integration. Furthermore, regarding the variable of extracurricular activities, it was found that decliners were more involved with non-academic activities than maintainers. This finding supports Astin’s (1984/1999) theory on involvement; however, extracurricular activities need to be balanced between academic and non-academic to have a positive impact on sophomores’ academic performance. Wilder’s (1993) study recommends that higher education leaders develop a system to monitor the academic performance of students who have shown academic capability but exhibit academic decline in future semesters.

Gohn et al. (2000) looked at the entire second-year class (N=1,553) at one institution to explore why certain students persist beyond the second year. The model used the following data: American College Testing scores, high school GPA, and postsecondary education first-year cumulative GPA. After completing a second-year student institution profile, 20 students were selected from the second-year class to interview. The study found that previous semester GPAs were the best predictor of future success. Additionally, the qualitative data showed no signs of sophomore slump. Instead, students indicated they were comfortable in their major, career choice, group of friends, campus and community, and academic success. Additionally, students showed that they were more relaxed compared to freshman year. Students were committed to their future, which included college graduation. Seven recommendations came from the Gohn et al. (2000) study: (1) sophomore support systems are critical, (2) major decision and career choice workshops or seminars should be a focus, (3) all third-semester students should have the ability to schedule at least one major related class, (4) financial consulting should be provided, (5) courses in the second year should be more challenging, (6) academic scholarship policies should be reviewed, and (7) academic advising and degree check systems are essential for students to map goals to graduation.

Sophomore-Specific Programming

Many retention efforts of higher education institutions are concentrated on the freshmen year (Nora et al., 2005). These retention programs are geared to provide transitional support for students during the first year of college. This attention on the first year pushes the issue of attrition to the second year (Nora et al., 2005). However, there is little programming geared toward sophomores and their specific needs. The National Resource Center for First-Year Experience and Students in Transition (n.d.) database indicated that in 2015 only 38 institutions in the United States employed sophomore-specific seminars or programs. More recently, Hartman and Young (2021) published results from the fourth iteration of the National Survey of Sophomore Year Initiatives (NYSSI). The 2019 administration of the NYSSI showed that 51% of institutions (N=308) offered at least one programmatic effort for sophomores.

The most often cited efforts at four-year institutions were career exploration and academic advising (Hartman & Young, 2021). Public institutions listed academic advising as the initiative that was most frequently used to accomplish institutional goals focused on sophomore students. The 2019 NYSSI also queried respondents on the initiative that reached the highest number of sophomore students. Again, academic advising was cited as the predominant program. At four-year institutions the following objectives were reported to be frequent aspects of academic advising: academic planning, academic success strategies, and career exploration/preparation. It is important to note that the NYSSI did not capture information on the frequency and quality of advisement meetings. Institutions are also not working to evaluate and assess their academic advising practices. In fact, 51% of institutions reported not formally assessing their programs for the past three years. “An additional 20% of participants did not know if academic advising for sophomores had been assessed or evaluated” (Hartman & Young, 2021, p. 28). Georgia Southern University was listed as an institution that participated in the study; however, the institution’s responses to the 2019 NYSSI are not known. Implications from the study call for higher education administrators to integrate efforts for sophomores to support this population of students. Academic advising is strategically aligned to offer specific elements needed in the sophomore year. However, an increased understanding of how sophomore advising programs are organized is needed to ensure that high-impact practices for sophomores are included. Furthermore, programs need to be aligned three ways: vertically, horizontally, and cross-functionally to have the largest effect on campus objectives for sophomores. Specific second-year programmatic efforts offered are discussed below.

The University of Richmond created a sophomore-specific program called Destination Unknown: The Sophomore Experience program (Lee & Leonard, 2011). The program was developed to address sophomore slump and foster career exploration. Destination Unknown was based on research on the sophomore slump and a four-year study of retention on University of Richmond males conducted by Bisese and Fabian (2006). Attrition of male sophomore students was used to measure sophomore slump at the University of Richmond (Bisese & Fabian, 2006).

Bisese and Fabian (2006) found that personal interaction with students was needed to increase retention. The creators of Destination Unknown utilized Bisese and Fabian's (2006) work to create a mentoring program. Lee and Leonard (2011) stated that during the summer before their sophomore year, students are invited to participate and are accepted to Destination Unknown on a first-come, first-served basis at no cost to the students. All students who applied have been accepted into the program. Student participation ranged from 10 to 18 students per year. Destination Unknown began with an off-campus, overnight retreat during the first weekend of the fall semester. The retreat was facilitated by faculty, staff, and alumni of Destination Unknown and based on relationship building in both small groups and the larger community in attendance. A faculty or staff member and alumni led each small group. Small group discussions and activities were focused on exploring personal values and goal setting, especially career planning. Small groups continued to meet throughout the academic year to discuss sophomore-specific issues. Evaluation of the retreat was conducted at two points in time, immediately following the retreat and one year later. Evaluations were not mandatory. The evaluations utilized a four-point Likert scale and sought to measure students' anxiety levels, knowledge of campus resources, and intended use or actual use of campus resources. No data were tracked regarding students' persistence at the university following the completion of Destination Unknown. Destination Unknown successfully utilized institutional-specific challenges faced by sophomores, albeit limited to one gender, to create retention programming. However, to evaluate the effectiveness of Destination Unknown, data on the retention of participants is needed.

In another sophomore program on career exploration, Isakovski, et al. (2011) provided an overview of a program developed to aid sophomore business students in career mapping. The program, Career-scape, was developed collaboratively with Millikin University's Tabor School of Business and the University Career Center to combat the sophomore slump. Career-scape was a two-course sequence during students' sophomore year's first and second semesters. The courses were developed utilizing Fink’s (as cited in Isakovski et al., 2011) teaching and learning pedagogy. The courses spanned a full year to provide students the time needed in Schaller’s (2005) focused exploration stage (Isakovski et al., 2011). Instruction in the courses was concentrated on students’ self-reflection and assessment, career exploration, and creating action plans that allowed for further development of personal and professional goals during junior and senior years. The developers of Career-scape utilized sophomore development theory but neglected to research the needs of sophomores at the institution. Additionally, no program evaluation of Career-scape or retention rates of participants was discussed. To know the effectiveness of Career-scape information needs to be provided on the impact on the retention rates of participants.

The University of Texas Pan American created a sophomore-student mentorship program (Reyes, 2011). The University Retention Advisement Programs office initiated the program. No data were gathered on the specific needs of sophomores at the University of Texas Pan American; instead, a mentoring program was developed based on nationwide sophomore mentoring programs. The Sophomore Academic Mentoring program addressed “academic performance, social and physical wellness, and emotional growth to increase [sophomores’] retention and graduate rates” (Reyes, 2011, p. 378). Each junior student mentor worked with 17 sophomore students and maintained regular contact with each student. Mentors assisted sophomores in overcoming both social and academic challenges. At the end of each academic year, the Retention Programs office evaluated the mentorship relationship with mentors and mentees. Additionally, an increase in retention rates was documented. The University of Texas

Pan American had an overall sophomore-to-junior retention rate in fall 1998 of 46.1%, which increased to 62.6% in the fall of 2010 (as cited in Reyes, 2011). Of the students who continued enrollment, alumni of the mentorship program had a higher retention rate than non-alumni. The University of Texas Pan American mentoring program has positively impacted student retention rates. Furthermore, it focused on both the development of sophomore mentees and junior mentors. Each group of students was provided with the knowledge and opportunity for success through involvement with the program. The development of the program was top-down. When developing programs, higher education leaders need to be cognizant of the specific needs of students at their institution.

McBurnie et al. (2012) conducted a program evaluation on a Welcome to Second Year orientation conducted at Deakin University in Melbourne, Australia. The orientation was geared to returning and articulating second-year science students. It was found that science students at two campuses were experiencing a decline in weighted average marks (only the courses attempted at Deakin University are calculated by pre-defined weights for credit points attempted [Deakin University, 2017]). Weighted average marks of 179 full-time students were evaluated. Between the first year and the end of the second year, 54% of students showed a decrease in their weighted average marks. Students also experienced a decrease in their weighted average marks between trimester one and two of the second year; 64% had a decrease in weighted average marks during their second trimester. Grades measured the sophomore slump at Deakin University, Australia (McBurnie et al., 2012). To combat the sophomore slump, Deakin University created the Welcome to Second Year orientation, modeled after a similar program at Griffith University, Australia. The purpose of the Welcome to Second Year program was to reorient and re-engage students both socially and academically. The orientation included programs on time management, careers, challenges distinct to second-year students, and strategies for online coursework. Three years of students' survey responses evaluating the program were reviewed (N=103). The survey responses indicated positive reviews of the Welcome to Second Year orientation and that the program met its goals of reorientation and re-engagement. A limitation of the study was that it did not base sessions on the needs of students at Deakin, and there was no follow-up with the students to see if programmatic efforts affected retention or the sophomore slump.

In a programming effort conducted with social media, Tower et al. (2015) studied 198 second-year nursing students' self-efficacy development using a Facebook group. The Facebook forum was intended for students to interact with peers and program staff as an outlet to develop students' self-efficacy. The researchers qualitatively evaluated the Facebook postings for common themes and linked these themes to self-efficacy development practices. No measurement of self-efficacy was utilized, so an increase in self-efficacy could not be determined. Additionally, no data on the impact on retention were provided.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the literature relative to this study, including a theoretical framework to identify the sophomore slump and to develop programming that works to decrease signs of the sophomore slump phenomenon. Next, the sophomore-specific challenges of major decision and career exploration were discussed. Then, a comprehensive definition of the sophomore slump phenomenon was provided. Finally, sophomore-specific programming examples were stated. Limited research has examined the lived experiences of sophomore students. To close this gap in the literature, further research is needed. Chapter three will describe the research methods used in this study.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Even though postsecondary education persistence issues have been widely researched (Arnold, 1999), there has been little attention on students past the first year (McBurnie et al., 2012). Instead, research has focused primarily on the first-to-second year (Coghlan et al., 2009). Higher education leaders have a responsibility to investigate student issues, like retention and persistence, throughout all classification levels of postsecondary education to better develop programs and resources to meet students' needs. The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine postsecondary education sophomore student perceptions of experiences with campus resources that impacted retention. The primary question guiding this study was:

What postsecondary education resources do sophomore students at a public, southeastern doctoral research university perceive as needed for retention?

Secondary research questions included:

1) What academic and co-curricular activities do sophomore students utilize in the current academic year?
2) What academic and co-curricular services do sophomore students perceive impact their decision to continue through to graduation at their current institution?

The concepts of student involvement defined by Tinto (1975), and focused exploration as defined by Schaller (2005), were utilized to examine the sophomore slump phenomenon. Tinto's (1975) student integration theory discussed how positive interactions (academic and social) with campus work to increase students' integration with the college community and, therefore, persistence and retention. Evaluating students' level of campus engagement will provide one determination on experiences of sophomore slump. Additionally, during the focused exploration stage of Schaller's sophomore development model (2005), students experienced frustration and regret with life choices, pressure about their future, and self-exploration. Determining if students are experiencing these characteristics will reveal whether the sophomore slump is occurring.

From this study higher education leaders have information on which academic and co-curricular programs and resources sophomore students perceived as important to their retention decisions. Additionally, information from participants was provided on what campus services are utilized in the sophomore year. With a clearer understanding of the needs of second-year students, higher education leaders can develop support services that work to decrease sophomore slump and thereby increase student retention beyond the sophomore year.

Research Approach

The exploration of sophomore needs at the research site was conducted as a qualitative transcendental phenomenological study. Creswell (2013) discussed two types of phenomenology: hermeneutical and transcendental. van Manen (2016) described hermeneutical phenomenology "as a dynamic interplay among six research activities" (pg. 30): (1) choosing a phenomenon that seriously interests the researcher, (2) investigating experiences as lived rather than as conceptualized, (3) reflecting on the essential themes of the phenomenon, (4) describing the phenomenon via writing and rewriting, (5) maintaining a strong relation to the phenomenon, and (6) balancing the investigation by considering the parts and the whole. In hermeneutical phenomenology, researchers examine the lived-experience descriptions of a phenomenon (such as conversations, interviews, or written responses) and the researcher's interaction with that phenomenon to uncover themes (van Manen, 2016).

In contrast, transcendental phenomenology concentrates on the participants' descriptions of the experience and removes, as much as possible, the researchers' experience with the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Moustakas (1994) described transcendental phenomenology as a method that removes judgment and presuppositions. This approach allows the researcher to have a fresh perspective on the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). In transcendental phenomenology, the researcher uses the lived-experience descriptions to evaluate every significant statement relevant to the phenomenon to develop themes of the experience. These statements and themes are used to write textural, structural, and composite descriptions of the experience (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). Transcendental phenomenological research focuses on what the experience is like for participants and how individuals and groups experienced the phenomena. Transcendental phenomenology was used for this study to ensure that the essence of what students are experiencing is described in their words and as they experienced their sophomore year.

Phenomenological research “typically involves conducting interviews” (Creswell, 2014). The qualitative transcendental phenomenological design is an appropriate method for this study because it provides for postsecondary education sophomore students to describe their lived experiences with campus resources and how those resources impacted and will impact the decision to continue at the university. This study sought to examine resources that students perceived impacted their decision to stay or drop out, the qualitative transcendental phenomenological design was warranted. This phenomenological study allowed for an in-depth exploration of sophomore students’ experiences with campus resources to decrease the sophomore slump phenomenon and thereby work to increase student retention. The primary data source for this study was individual interviews.

Individual interviews were selected as the primary data source for this study because phenomenological studies rely primarily on interviews as data (Creswell, 2014). Focus groups, a form of interviewing, were intended to be the primary data source but were unable to be arranged given the participants' schedules. Through interviews with four second-year students, this study met Creswell's (2014) phenomenological study participant definition of 3 to 15 individuals and Patton's (2015) qualitative inquiry description of "small samples, even single cases (n = 1)" (p. 52). Small sample sizes of one were echoed in Baker and Edwards (2012) review paper which received responses from 19 qualitative researchers. Patton (2015) stated that "there are no rules for sample size in qualitative research" (p. 311). Instead, some of the characteristics sample size is based on included the availability of time and resources and the purpose of the research (Baker & Edwards, 2012; Patton, 2015). Due to the availability of students who met the criteria for the study along with time and resources of the researcher, four self-identified sophomores were selected to participate. "In-depth information from a small number of people can be very valuable, especially if the cases are information-rich" (Patton, 2015, p. 311). Mason stated that qualitative research creates credible analytical narratives that are not built on statistical logic (Baker & Edwards, 2012).

A survey (see Appendix B) and purposeful sampling were used to select participants who were willing to share their second-year experiences. The selection survey and sampling method helped to ensure the interviewees had information to share about campus resource usage during sophomore year. Furthermore, the researcher worked to create an open environment that encouraged conversation.

In addition to the data from individual interviews, the researcher also collected data from social media and the *George-Anne*, Georgia Southern's student newspaper. Comments from Facebook were gathered with screen capture and did not come from the interviewees. Archives of the *George-Anne* were searched via Digital Commons, Georgia Southern's open-access digital repository, to gather data from the time of the interviews related to the themes. Information from

Facebook and the student newspaper were used to triangulate the data. Triangulation calls for the researcher to bring more than one source of data to corroborate and elaborate on the themes that emerged from the study (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

Researcher's Role

My perceptions of sophomore students and progression in higher education have been shaped by my experiences as an alumna, a staff member, and an instructor at public, southeastern research universities. I have attended and worked at public southeastern research universities for 22 years. I am aware that my current professional role and past experiences shaped how I approached this study, Moustakas' (1994) view on phenomenology allows me to bracket out my experiences with the phenomenon to concentrate on participants' experiences with the phenomenon. Bracketing calls for me to set aside my preconceived notions (Moustakas, 1994) of postsecondary education's second year experience. To bracket my experiences, I started by writing this section title researcher's role. Then, during the transcription process I took notes about the developing codes and my feelings about what was said. This journaling allowed me to focus on how and what the participants were saying about their sophomore year experiences. Additionally, due to my experiences, it is necessary to discuss my epistemological assumption.

Professional Experience

My professional roles have all been student focused and I have had the opportunity to engage with students at all stages of their enrollment. During my first professional roles in postsecondary education, I worked in student activities and residence life. Programming for student events provided me with a perspective on what types of events are targeted toward sophomores (which were few). My goals as a programmer were to develop and refine orientation for new students, parent orientation for dual-enrollment students, and programming for night students or students who lived on campus. While sophomores could attend many of the events, no specific events were designed to address them or their needs.

Next, I served as an undergraduate academic advisor. As an academic advisor, I would cover specific academic and co-curricular factors with each student. This is where I started to feel like I had a positive impact on sophomore students because the items we discussed were relevant to them at that point in their academic careers. Additionally, the advisement center I worked in had a career development specialist from the Division of Student Affairs who held office hours in the center. This partnership with the career development specialist helped support sophomores because I could walk them to the office next door for a conversation on their career goals versus hoping the students would make an appointment on their own.

Then, I worked as a career development specialist, served in an instructional coordinator role in a career and professional development office, and as an assistant and associate director for career development and instruction. Programming for sophomores was based on a four-year career plan. This plan called for sophomores to develop their resumes, job shadow, practice interviewing skills, and attend networking events, among other things. At the beginning of this study, I was the instructional coordinator for the career course used in this study and served as the lead instructor of one of the classes.

Currently, I serve as assistant dean in an academic college. In this role, I am focused on recruiting incoming students to the college and retaining students currently enrolled. One of the new initiatives in the college is to teach a required course during the second semester of freshman year – a time when students may begin to experience sophomore slump (Schaller, 2005). Leadership in the college were building the course content at the time of this study, and there is a planned focus on students' major and career decisions.

Throughout my professional experiences, I also advised student organizations and taught first-year experience courses. During student organization meetings, I would hear from sophomores about their struggle to feel engaged with the campus community. One student told me that if they had not found a student group I worked with during their sophomore year, they did not know if they would be graduating. Through my personal conversations with and observations of sophomore students, I became intrigued with second-year students and began to have more targeted conversations about students' perceived resource needs.

Student Experience

My experience as a student was different from that of the participants of this study. I started my postsecondary education at a two-year college and transferred to a research university after completing my sophomore year. The population of students for this study excluded transfer students as the study sought to understand students' experiences with Georgia Southern's resources which may entail a comparison of second year to first year. Additionally, the research site for this study is a four-year university. However, one experience that may be the same as participants is major and career indecision. Around the time of my second year in college, I changed my major to one I thought would be fun. This decision was made without any substantive research or deep understanding of what I wanted to do after graduation. Furthermore, as a sophomore, I tried many different campus jobs to find where to best use my strengths. My experiences led me to believe that many sophomores could benefit from experiential learning.

Epistemological Perspective

My epistemological perspective is social constructivism. Epistemology addresses how reality is constructed. Qualitative research embraces multiple realities, and the intent of the research is to describe these realities. Likewise, reporting phenomenological data requires that researchers report the different experiences of participants (Moustakas, 1994). Social constructivists believe that meaning is developed based on individuals' lived experiences, which includes their interaction with others and social and cultural norms (Creswell, 2013). As a result, research involves open-ended questions, discussion, and interactions with others. The researcher then reviews the participants' descriptions to interpret meaning.

Social constructivism in this study allowed me to explore sophomore students' perspectives. Through a clearer understanding of sophomore student experiences, I began to create context and meaning for the second year and student decisions as they related to retention. I feel that the complexities of each student's experience warranted a thorough description and analysis. Verbatim responses to interview questions are provided in chapter four to provide a snapshot of participants' second year reality.

Selection of Site

The site for this study was Georgia Southern University, a public doctoral research university in the southeastern United States. When interviews were conducted in spring 2021, there were 4,676 sophomore students enrolled (Institutional Research, 2021). The research site defines sophomores as college students who have completed between 30 and 59.99 credit hours (Georgia Southern University, 2020). For this study, students self-selected their classification level; however, Georgia Southern's definition of sophomore may have impacted their interpretation of the classification system. The institution was a convenience site for the researcher. The researcher was an employee at Georgia Southern and served in one of the departments from which participants were recruited.

Population and Sample

Although the university was a convenience site for the researcher, the study participants consisted of a percentage of the total population of sophomore students enrolled at Georgia Southern in spring 2021. After the Institutional Review Board granted approval, recruitment of participants began. Purposeful sampling was used to select participants for this study. Purposeful sampling calls for the researcher to select aspects such as the research site, individuals, and documents that best help the researcher understand the issue (Creswell, 2013). Purposeful sampling allowed the researcher to select participants who could inform an understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2013). To be included in the study, participants must have attended the research site for their first year of study, been enrolled at the research site during the semester they participated in the study, and self-identified as a sophomore. A selection survey was used to screen participants (see Appendix B). The survey was administered through Qualtrics in a classroom setting. The selection survey questioned students on their demographic information, including attendance at the research site, classification, academic major, age, race, ethnicity, and gender. This study evaluated data from respondents who self-identified as sophomores.

Two departments in student affairs at Georgia Southern offered courses targeted toward sophomores. These courses were selected as they aligned with the theoretical framework. The Office of Career and Professional Development offered a career exploration class that, on average, has 150 seats each fall and spring semester and 50 seats in the summer. The class is open to all levels of students. On average, about 33% of the total enrollment in the class consisted of sophomore students (J. Pollett, personal communication, June 21, 2017). The career exploration course was selected as activities completed in the class aligned with focused exploration (Schaller, 2010). Focus exploration involves self-exploration and students feeling pressure to decide on a major and career path. The career exploration course allowed students to conduct self-exploration and research majors and careers using a decision-making model. The second course is a 2000-level leadership class in the Office of Leadership and Community Engagement open to all levels of students. At four-year institutions, it is assumed that most enrolled students in 1000-level courses are freshmen, 2000-level courses are sophomores, 3000-level courses are juniors, and 4000-level courses are seniors. The leadership class was selected because it was a 2000-level course and a non-credit bearing course; therefore, students who chose to register in the class were inherently more likely to be sophomores and involved on campus, which aligned with Tinto's student integration theory (1975) and Astin's theory on student involvement (1984/1999). The two courses provided face-to-face, hybrid, and/or online options that enrolled 141 students in spring 2021, the semester interviews were completed.

Procedures

Permission for the study was provided in writing by the Institutional Review Board, the Office of Career and Professional Development, and the Office of Leadership and Community Engagement at Georgia Southern University. The Office of Leadership and Community Engagement managed the leadership courses at the research site. The leadership courses were selected as Tinto's (1975) definition of integration and Astin's (1984/1999) definition of involvement can be applied to the students who chose to enroll. The Office of Career and Professional Development managed the career exploration course at the research site. The career exploration class was chosen as activities in the class aligned with focused exploration (Schaller, 2010). As the researcher worked in the Office of Career and Professional Development, approval for the researcher to provide a selection survey in each section of the course came from the department and the lead instructor for each class. The researcher did not use supervisory authority to require that the lead instructors allow the selection survey to be completed in their classes. Additionally, the researcher remained as removed as possible when explaining the study, distributing the selection survey, inviting participants, and conducting interviews. No class credit (required or extra credit) was required by the researcher for students who completed the survey or who participated in interviews, and students could remove themselves from the study at any point in time.

Once approval was received from the Institutional Research Board and both departments, a list of career exploration and leadership courses offered and instructors were retrieved from the institution's online course search feature. Following the identification of instructors, the researcher contacted the instructors via email (see Appendix A) to request permission to attend each section of their class. As the procedures for this study were completed during Covid-19, all classroom visits were held virtually. During the class meeting, the researcher provided an overview of the study and students completed an informed consent form and a brief online survey. In the overview, the researcher described the study's premise, the type of student who would be invited to participate, the time involved for focus group or interview participation, and the incentive that study participants would be entered in a drawing to win one of four $50 Amazon gift cards.

The selection survey questions were focused on the participant screening criteria, which included demographic information and one question on student involvement to gauge the potential participants' ability to provide rich and meaningful data for the study. Additionally, the survey was reviewed by two sophomores who did not participate in the study to assess content and face validity. Face validity called for the survey to be evaluated to see if it was relevant to what is being measured and appropriate for the participants (Bhandari, 2023). Assessing for content validity required the survey to be reviewed to establish if it encapsulates the phenomenon it intended to measure (Creswell, 2013). These two sophomore students were engaged through the Office of Career and Professional Development and were not enrolled in the courses from which the participants for the study were recruited. The two students who examined the survey provided information on whether the survey aligned with the verbiage sophomores use to describe their experiences. Answers from the students vetting the survey indicated if the survey was capturing second-year students' experiences. Feedback from the pilot testing was used to refine the survey questions, and the survey was inspected by the same two sophomores again. This process continued until no edits were needed. Students who vetted the survey were excluded from participating in the study.

Before the survey was distributed, the researcher gave a brief description of the study and information on informed consent, where intended participants learned that no personally identifiable information would be used in the study. An informed consent form was provided prior to the administration of the online survey. It is estimated that students needed about 5 minutes to complete the survey. Survey participants were entered into a drawing to win one of four $50 Amazon gift cards. Upon completing the informed consent form and survey, the researcher compiled and analyzed the data in Microsoft Excel. The data analysis and compilation process included downloading the Qualtrics responses as a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, assigning numbers to non-narrative responses, and determining the frequency and percent information of non-narrative responses. Additionally, open-ended answers were coded using *in vivo* codes. *In vivo* codes are verbatim words provided by the respondents of the survey (Siegle, 2023). The codes were reduced by linking similar ideas into themes to begin to understand sophomores lived experiences. Lastly, the researcher selected potential participants who met the following criteria: currently enrolled student, student who enrolled in the previous academic year at the institution, student who self-identified as a sophomore, and communicating clearly and meaningfully on the open-ended question surrounding involvement required for the study. Potential participants answered the open-ended question with real-world experience focused on their second year at Georgia Southern. Due to the low completion rate of the selection survey, participants were not excluded based on the open-ended question. Once potential participants were identified, the researcher contacted them via telephone to verify their continued intention to participate in the study and to schedule the Zoom interview date and time.

Each interview began with a re-introduction to the study and completion of the informed consent form (see Appendix C) for a second time. Participants were informed that they could withdraw their consent at any time and that a pseudonym would be used. The researcher made participants aware that the pseudonym would protect their identity. Each interview was scheduled to last approximately 60 minutes and was recorded via the video conferencing tool Zoom. A semi-structured interview around the research questions was conducted. The researcher used an interview protocol (see Appendix D) to facilitate the conversation. Two sophomores who did not participate in the study also reviewed the protocol to assess content and face validity. These were the same two sophomores engaged through the Office of Career and Professional Development to vet the sampling survey. Feedback from the students was utilized to refine the interview questions. This process was repeated and refined until the interview protocol was completed.

Researcher as Instrument

Qualitative research views the researcher as an instrument in the data collection and analysis processes (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Guba and Lincoln (1981 as cited in Lincoln & Guba, 1985) discussed seven advantageous characteristics that qualify humans as instruments. These characteristics included the ideas of responsiveness, adaptability, holistic emphasis, knowledge base expansion, processual immediacy, opportunities for clarification and summarization, and exploration of atypical responses.

1) Responsiveness: The researcher as instrument responds to cues and interacts with the situation to create meaning.
2) Adaptability: The human instrument is adaptable unlike other types of instrumentation. The researcher can collect information about multiple factors at multiple levels, simultaneously without having to create another instrument to do so.
3) Holistic emphasis: The human-as-instrument is the only instrument that can grasp the phenomenon and its surrounding context in one view.
4) Knowledge base expansion: "Extending awareness of a situation beyond mere propositional knowledge to the realm of the felt, to the silent sympathies, to the unconscious wishes, and to the daily unexamined usages will lend depth and richness to our understanding of social and organizational settings" (Guba & Lincoln, 1981 as cited in Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 194)
5) Processual immediacy: Only the human instrument can process data in the moment, generate hypothesis immediately, and test those hypotheses with participants.
6) Opportunities for clarification and summarization: The researcher as instrument can summarize data when it becomes available and respond back to the participants for clarification, correction, and adding detail.
7) Exploring atypical responses: In quantitative data atypical responses may be discarded. Exploring these responses to gain clarity and build meaning is a unique

characteristic to humans as instruments.

The researcher as instrument is valuable in qualitative studies as additional pieces of data can be gathered and described. The researcher gathers information through their senses: "talking to people, observing their activities, reading their documents, assessing unobtrusive signs they leave behind, responding to their non-verbal cues, and the like" (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 176).

Even though researchers as instruments are fundamental to qualitative research they are not without issues (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). It is important for the researcher to be aware of their epistemological assumptions and how those assumptions impact their research. As stated previously in the role of researcher section, my epistemological assumption is social constructivism. Social constructivists view meaning as being developed on individuals' lived experiences which includes interactions with others and social and cultural norms (Creswell, 2013). Moustakas (1994) calls for the researcher to bracket out their experiences with the phenomenon by providing a description of the researcher's experience with the phenomenon. This description can be found in the researcher's role section in this chapter.

Written Instruments

Prior to data collection, intended participants were asked a series of screening questions (see Appendix B) via a survey administered through Qualtrics. The survey ensured that participants met the eligibility criteria for the study. After participants were selected, a semi-structured interview protocol was used (see Appendix D). Questions on the semi-structured interview protocol were developed from the literature and support the overarching research questions of this study. Table 1 aligns instrument questions with the relevant literature.

Table 1

Interview Questions' Connection to Literature

Question	Connection to Literature
Tell me about a time that you've faced an intellectual, personal, and/or professional challenge this year.	Schaller, 2010; Schreiner et al., 2012
What is it like being a sophomore at [RESEARCH SITE]?	Schaller, 2010; Schreiner et al., 2012; Tinto, 1975, 1993
What kind of resources, people, places, or things, do you or have you used on campus?	Graunke & Woosley, 2005; Schreiner et al., 2012; Tinto, 1975, 1993; Wilder, 1993; Willcoxson et al., 2011
What do you wish you knew at the start of this year that would have helped you academically and socially?	Schaller, 2005; Schreiner et al., 2012; Tinto, 1975, 1993
Have those people, offices, or resources who helped you changed from freshman to sophomore year? If so, how?	Schaller, 2005; Schreiner et al., 2012
Do you feel [RESEARCH SITE] has provided you with what you need to be successful academically and socially? If so, how? If not, how?	Tinto, 1975, 1993; Willcoxson et al., 2011
On a scale of 1-5, 1 being definitely not and 5 being definitely, how likely are you to continue next year at [RESEARCH SITE]? Through to graduation? What, if any, campus resources impacted these answers? What, if any, resources do you wish the [RESEARCH SITE] offered for sophomores?	Schaller, 2005; Schreiner et al., 2012; Tinto, 1975, 1993

Data Analysis

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions sophomore students had of experiences with campus resources that might have influenced their intent to continue at one public doctoral research university in the southeastern United States. In other words, this study sought to identify which student resources (social and academic), if any, might have influenced a student's choice to continue enrollment from semester to semester and from second year to graduation.

Data from the interviews were transcribed by Zoom. In addition to the transcripts, the researcher utilized a field journal to document any notes. After transcribing, the researcher watched the interview recordings and compared them to the transcripts for accuracy and data recovery. Then, Moustakas' (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of analysis of phenomenological data was used as follows:

1) A description of the researcher's experience with the phenomenon was provided.
2) From the transcripts, a list of significant statements on how participants experienced the phenomenon was created. Each statement was provided the same weight and all relevant statements were documented. Statements were then reduced to a list of nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping statements and grouped into themes.
3) Following the completion of theme development, a description of the textural (what participants experienced), structural (how participants experienced the phenomenon), and composite (combination of textural and structural) description of study were written.

Following Moustakas' (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of analysis allowed for the development of codes and then themes. After the completion of transcription, the data was reviewed and used to develop emerging codes from the text. These code labels that emerged started as *in vivo codes*, words and phrases used by participants (Siegle, 2023). Creswell (2013) encouraged the use of code labels that may represent information the researcher expected to find, information that was surprising to the researcher, and information that is interesting or unusual to the researcher, participants, and audiences. The codes were then reduced by linking codes with common ideas into themes that were used to present the data.

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed four qualitative constructs for trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These four constructs were equated to the ideas of internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity; however, Lincoln and Guba's (1985) analysis related how inappropriate these labels are to qualitative research. Furthermore, two written instruments were used in this study. To validate trustworthiness the researcher took steps to ensure face and content validity. The four qualitative constructs for trustworthiness along with face and content validity measures are discussed below.

The goal of credibility (parallel to internal validity) is for the researcher to provide "assurances of the fit between respondent's views of their life ways and in the inquirer's reconstruction of the representation of the same" (Patton, 2015, p. 685). Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Creswell (2009) discussed techniques to establish credibility: member checking and triangulation. These techniques toward credibility are described further in this section.

Transferability (parallel to external validity), as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985), is impossible in qualitative research as the data is embedded in the time and context from which it was gathered. Transferability, then, requires the researcher to provide enough thick description and data for others to make transferability judgements. Creswell (2009) recommended the use of multiple strategies to enhance the accuracy of findings. Two transferability strategies were completed in this study: clarifying the researcher's bias and providing rich, thick description.

Dependability (parallel to reliability) ensures that the researcher's methodology was "logical, traceable, and documented" (Patton, 2015, p. 685). Replicability was confirmed through the description of the purpose of the study, discussion of participant selection, and explanation of how the data was collected and analyzed. Additionally, Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued that the technique of triangulation could be used to establish both credibility and dependability.

Confirmability (parallel to objectivity) is linking the findings and interpretations to the data (Patton, 2015). “Data, interpretations, and outcomes of inquiries are rooted in contexts and persons apart from the evaluator and are not simply figments of the evaluator’s imagination” (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). Guba and Lincoln (1989) implied that confirmability is established when credibility, transferability, and dependability are achieved.

Face and content validity for the selection survey and interview protocol were confirmed by two reviewers who were sophomore students at the research site and did not participate in the study. Content validity confirmed that the items on the instruments measured what they intended to measure (Creswell, 2013). Face validity ensured that the items on the instruments were relevant to the phenomenon and appropriate for the participants (Bhandari, 2023). To confirm these validity measures, the researcher presented draft copies of the instruments to the reviewers. Reviewers provided feedback and the researcher made edits to the instruments until no additional comments were received.

Clarifying Researcher’s Bias

In qualitative research the researcher is the instrument (Creswell, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 1995). There are advantages to the researcher as instrument (Guba & Lincoln, 1981 as cited in Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and issues (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). One of the issues is that the researcher must be aware of their biases and work to bracket out preconceived notions. Bracketing calls for the researcher to set aside any preconceived notions and assumptions about the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher’s bias was identified in the section researcher’s role. Bracketing occurred through the transcription process by watching, rewatching, editing, and taking notes on the interviews. The editing process allowed the researcher to focus on the participants’ statements and how they were saying them. Furthermore, note taking during the process by journaling thoughts about coding and feelings about what was said allowed the researcher to engage with the recordings and transcripts more fully.

Additionally, to limit the researcher's bias, verbatim responses from participants were used and participants were invited to participate in member checking. Member checking is “the process of testing hypotheses, data, preliminary categories, and interpretations with members of the stakeholding groups from whom the original constructions were collected” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

Triangulation

Codes or themes that can be linked to different data sources allowed for triangulation and trustworthiness in the findings (Creswell, 2009). Triangulation validates the data against at least one other source (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Where possible, the researcher located and examined any documents, policies, or websites referred to by study participants. Themes were also cross-referenced against social media and the student newspaper at Georgia Southern to strengthen the accuracy of the data. These triangulation and data collection methods were unobtrusive as they did not require the involvement and cooperation of the participants (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

Patton (2015) noted that field notes serve as another form of data triangulation. Field notes contain the description of what was observed by the researcher and what people said (Patton, 2015). In the description of the interviews the researcher noted the non-verbal body language of participants and ideas on the feelings participants were describing about their sophomore experience. These observations served as a cross-check on the themes that emerged from the data.

Member Checking

Member checking was attempted; however, responses from participants were not received. Member checking allows the participants in the study the opportunity to verify what the evaluator saw and heard is what was intended to be communicated and correct interpretation errors (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). It also provides interviewees the chance to offer additional information to the researcher to increase understanding of the phenomenon being studied. (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). An initial analysis of the results was sent to participants via email to conduct member checking. The email asked that participants review the analysis for language alternatives, observations, and interpretations. This credibility and dependability technique would have allowed for participants to confirm data points and that the data is representative of participant's experiences if replies to the email requests had been received.

Rich, Thick Description

Creswell (2009) stated that an aspect of rich, thick description is to provide multiple perspectives for each theme. Qualitative data describes the experiences people have in their own words (Patton, 2015). Rich, thick description is provided though detailed quotations and allows the phenomenon to be understood in detail (Patton, 2015). Rich, thick description took place when participant responses, Facebook comments, and snippets from the student-led newspaper were included in chapter four.

Ethical Considerations

When developing the study, ethical considerations were considered in detail. First, the sample was selected from students currently enrolled at the institution. No self-identifying information was collected during the interviews, nor any longitudinal data collection that required student information. Next, the voluntary nature of participation was emphasized to students during the initial survey administration, when scheduling interviews, and during the interviews. Additionally, students could skip interview questions they chose not to answer. Institutional Review Board approval was obtained prior to conducting research in addition to approval from the Office of Career and Professional Development and Office of Leadership and Community Engagement, from which participants were solicited. A message regarding informed consent was distributed to participants prior to the selection survey administration and again at the individual interview. The informed consent form provided information to participants on their option to withdraw from the study. No deception was used in the study. Completion of the selection survey and interview was voluntary and caused no harm to participants.

All responses discussed in the study are anonymized and confidential. Interviews took place on Zoom and were recorded. Zoom's transcription service was used to transcribe the data. Zoom transcription service provided cloud recording storage that is password-protected and encrypted. The researcher ensured accuracy of the transcription by watching and rewatching the recordings and making edits to the transcription. Additionally, non-verbal responses and pauses were notated in the transcription by the researcher. Data are stored on a password-protected file on the researcher's computer. Data were analyzed on one computer in the researcher's locked office. The data will be destroyed three years after the completion of the study.

Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the methodology to explore factors students perceive as necessary for persistence. A qualitative phenomenological design was used for this study. A phenomenological design was selected as it allowed for an in-depth analysis of students' lived experiences. The research methods included a screening survey and individual interviews. The interviews were held via Zoom, recorded, and transcribed. Additional data collection methods included gathering comments from Facebook and articles from the student-led newspaper at Georgia Southern. Data were analyzed and coded to find common themes using Moustakas' (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of analysis of phenomenological data. In addition to research design, this chapter outlined (a) the population and selection, (b) procedures, (c) data collection and analysis, and (d) trustworthiness. Chapter four will discuss the findings.

CHAPTER 4

Findings

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to examine the perceptions of postsecondary sophomore students' lived experiences with campus resources that may affect retention at one public, southeastern doctoral research university in an effort to help discover how higher education leaders can support second-year students and work to increase retention rates. The overarching research question guiding this study was:

What postsecondary education resources do sophomore students at a public, southeastern doctoral research university perceive as needed for retention?

Secondary research questions included:

(1) What academic and co-curricular activities do sophomore students utilize in the current academic year?

(2) What academic and co-curricular services do sophomore students perceive impact their decision to continue through to graduation at their current institution?

The first three chapters of this dissertation discussed the problem surrounding retention in postsecondary education; a review of literature that focused on retention in postsecondary education and sophomore-specific challenges and programming; and the methodological design that was used for this study. This chapter will present the findings that emerged from four individual interviews. In addition, data that were analyzed from social media and the student newspaper at the research site will be provided as a method of triangulation.

Summary of Participants

The results of this transcendental phenomenological study were developed through data collected from four Zoom interviews with postsecondary education students at one public, southeastern university who completed a selection survey. The selection survey was used to develop a purposeful sample of participants who could provide lived experiences related to campus resources that impact retention from the second-to-third year and through to graduation. The sample only included students who (a) self-identified as sophomores, (b) attended the research site for their first year of postsecondary education, and (c) were currently enrolled at the research site at the time of the interview.

The sample included four females who were 19 or 20 years old. Two racial groups were represented: African American and White. The selected participant demographics are depicted in Table 2. All participants self-identified as sophomores.

Table 2

Sophomore Participant Demographics

Participant Name (pseudonym)	Age	Sex/Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Academic Major
Amaya	19	Female	Black or African American	Nursing (intended)
Blakely	19	Female	White	Education
Callie	20	Female	White	English
Dee	20	Female	White	Biochemistry

Following is a brief description of each participant. Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant to protect their identity.

Amaya is a 19-year-old sophomore who is applying to nursing programs. She serves as a diversity peer leader on campus and is a member of Southern Leaders. “Southern Leaders is a student leadership program that helps students develop their leadership abilities through interactive courses and community projects” (Southern Leaders, 2023). Amaya uses services provided by the Counseling Center and stated that the library is the academic support service she uses most often. Her retention at the research site depends on acceptance into the nursing program. The research site is her number one nursing school to attend.

Blakely is a 19-year-old sophomore who is an education major. She is a member of Southern Leaders and participated in intramural sports before the university closed on-campus housing during Covid-19. Blakely described the math lab as the academic support service that has most helped her success. She plans to continue at the research site for junior year but is considering other schools for senior year. Her consideration of other schools is due to her friends graduating and the fear of missing opportunities and experiences that could be different at other institutions.

Callie is a 20-year-old sophomore who is an English major. She is a member of Southern Leaders, two academic fraternities, and the Baptist Collegiate Ministries. Callie spoke of three professors she has connected with on campus and how they have helped her become more involved with her major and career goals. She stated that she would "definitely be coming back" for her junior year and staying through to graduation. Callie intends to pursue law school after graduation.

Dee is a 20-year-old sophomore biochemistry major. She is a member of Southern Leaders and participates in four other clubs on campus with a range of foci including academics, leadership, and religion. Dee's first choice of college was not Georgia Southern and when she started freshman year her intent was to earn thirty credit hours and transfer. However, Dee stated that the relationships she has developed with her professors are the reason she intends to return for her junior year and stay through to graduation. Dee hopes to be a physician assistant.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process began with the researcher rewatching the recorded Zoom interviews and creating additional notes on what was said. Next, the audio from each video was compared to its Zoom transcription. Edits were made to the transcription for accuracy. Watching, rewatching, and editing the transcripts helped the researcher to better understand the tone changes, silences, laughter, and body language of each participant which provided a deeper understanding of the phenomenon by adding additional context to the participants' statements. "Every interview is also an observation" (Patton, 2015, p. 417). Patton (2015) discussed how observation aids the researcher in developing an empathetic understanding of the phenomenon. Additionally, the rewatching of recordings and editing of the transcripts provided the researcher with a way to acknowledge and bracket out biases by intentionally focusing and refocusing on what the interviewees said and how they said it. Given the researcher's close relationship with the research topic, as described in the researcher's role section of chapter three, epoche or bracketing was needed to set aside preconceived notions and assumptions. Moustakas (1994) described the process of epoche as the researcher identifying and setting aside all preconceived notions of the phenomenon being studied. The epoche or bracketing processes allows the researcher to see the phenomenon anew and without bias. While watching, rewatching, reading, and rereading the videos and transcripts, the researcher wrote down thoughts about coding and feelings about what was said. This process bracketed those thoughts to engage more thoroughly with what and how the participants were describing their experiences. Following the completion of the transcripts, the researcher used Moustakas' (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of analysis which is described in detail in the data coding section of this chapter.

To address validity issues that may be present in qualitative data the following strategies, as discussed by Creswell (2013), were employed: clarifying the researcher's bias; providing rich, thick, description; and triangulation. The researcher's bias was identified in the section researcher's role in chapter three and is further discussed in the data coding section of this chapter. Verbatim responses that provide rich, thick descriptions of the phenomenon are included in chapter four. Social media and articles from the student newspaper at the research site were used to complete data triangulation and are discussed in the data triangulation section of this chapter. The researcher attempted to complete member checking as a method of validity as recommended by Creswell (2013). The researcher sent an initial analysis of the results via email to the participants and requested that they respond with any language alternatives, observations, or interpretations; however, no responses were received.

Data Coding

After the data were collected and transcribed, the researcher used Moustakas' (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of phenomenological data analysis. The first step recommended by Moustakas (1994) is to provide a description of the researcher's experience with the phenomenon. To do this, the section on the researcher's role in chapter three was reread and edited to be up to date. Additionally, the phenomenological process of epoche was employed. The epoche processes called for the researcher to set aside their preconceived notions, beliefs, and explanations about the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The epoche process began with the researcher rewatching interviews and rereading transcripts. During the process, the researcher focused on what the interviewees were saying and how they said it. Annotating the transcripts allowed the researcher to put emphasis on certain words, phrases, and pauses that the interviewees had to further focus on their lived experiences. Finally, providing equal weight to each interviewee's statements provided an epoche process for the researcher. Biases were bracketed out by focusing on what was said instead of what the researcher expected. Epoche allowed the researcher to be open to hear the participants' views on the phenomenon.

In the second step, Moustakas (1994) calls for horizontalization of the data where the researcher grants equal value to each participant statement. These horizon statements linked to the sophomore slump phenomenon, campus resources, and the lived experiences of the students were copied from the transcripts and recorded on a separate document. The process of isolating horizons resulted in 123 statements. These statements varied in length from one acronym to multiple sentences.

Next, the researcher reviewed the statements made by each participant and grouped the statements into *in vivo codes*, words and phrases used by participants (Siegle, 2023). The codes and statements were organized to better understand resources on campus that sophomores described in relation to retention. Then the researcher reviewed the horizons to remove any overlapping or repetitive statements. When reviewing the statements, the researcher asked the following two questions as recommended by Moustakas (1994): (1) “Does it contain a moment of the experience that is a necessary and sufficient constituent for understanding it?” and (2) “Is it possible to abstract and label it?” (p. 121). The participant statement that most clearly articulated each *in vivo code* was documented. After reduction and elimination, 83 *in vivo codes* emerged from the data related to campus resources.

Then, the researcher reduced the codes by linking common ideas into themes. Some themes identified were not resource-related and were eliminated as they did not apply to the research questions guiding the study. A frequency chart identifying the common themes after reduction and elimination was created. The researcher used this chart as a method of organizing the data and to aid the researcher in the writing process. The chart also assisted the researcher with epoche by reminding the researcher to focus on the important pieces of information on the phenomenon that each participant shared. The researcher organized the data in a chart that included each statement made by the interviewees to identify meaningful statements. For example, the researcher identified responses like this from Dee:

> I feel like this is my year, where I kind of got into the groove of things, and last year I kind of was stuck in, like, I don't have a lot of friends and then this year I started getting into my major courses and started meeting more people that were like-minded to me. So, I feel like that gave me, like, resources to have as, like, friends and study buddies,

as one to be coded into the “social camaraderie” theme. Resources discussed by participants and coded as “institutional support services” included: the library, tutoring, supplemental instruction, math lab, and the writing center. To fully organize the themes related to the research questions, the researcher further reviewed participant statements to identify those described as having a positive impact or being a hindrance to retention. The response frequency chart was then updated due to this final round of coding to help with the organization, analysis, and discussion of the data.

The last step of the data analysis process, as recommended by Moustakas (1994), was to write textural descriptions (what the participant experienced) and structural descriptions (how the participants experienced the phenomenon) for each participant. Textural descriptions provided each individual participant’s lived experience that included information on resources used during their sophomore year of college. Structural descriptions included information on how the resources discussed impacted their decision to stay. The researcher used individual textural descriptions to synthesize lived experiences into one composite description. This composite description was then reviewed and reread by the researcher to better understand what it is like to be a postsecondary education sophomore at the research site and how campus resources impacted students’ retention decisions.

Data Triangulation

Unobtrusive data collection methods were used for triangulation. Unobtrusive measures do not require the cooperation of participants and may be “invisible” to them (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). “Unobtrusive methods are particularly useful for triangulation [and as] a supplement to interviews” (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 95). Data triangulation is used to validate data collected against other sources (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Sources used included posts on Facebook and articles from the *George-Anne*, Georgia Southern’s student newspaper, and provided another perspective on the themes.

Data from Facebook was collected by directly gathering posts made by students, parents, and families connected to the research site via screen capture. Facebook was selected as the social media site to use for this study as it was the most popular in 2021 (Auxier & Anderson, 2021). The researcher used the search feature in Facebook to find public comments about Georgia Southern University. Data collected from Facebook did not come from the study participants. Directly collecting posts made on Facebook is described as an online collection technique by Ditchfield and Meredith (2018). Data were captured by posts that could be found publicly on Facebook connected to the research site and the themes that emerged from the individual interviews. Additionally, posts from a private families and parents' Facebook group attached to but not affiliated with the research site were gathered. The researcher was granted access to this private group by the group's administrators for the sole purpose of collecting data. After gaining access, the researcher searched the Facebook group multiple ways. First, the researcher scrolled and read comments to get an impression of the types of things discussed and note key terms to search. Then, the researcher used key terms such as sophomore, advisor, professor, tutoring, and math lab to narrow the comments to those more closely related to the study. Comments were read and saved via screen capture. Finally, the researcher culled the captured comments to those that were during the period of the interviews and related to the emergent themes of the study.

No interactions occurred between members of the group and the researcher. Facebook posts were collected to enhance understanding of the phenomenon and reiterate and enhance emerging themes. Due to the epistemological stance of the researcher, the posts from Facebook were treated as lived experiences. No participants were recruited through this approach. To maintain the confidentiality and anonymity of the Facebook posts, pseudonyms were used in the presentation of the data.

Additionally, the *George-Anne*, the student newspaper at Georgia Southern was used to provide supplemental data, where possible, on the themes. The researcher focused on the semester of the interviews when searching archived issues of the student-led newspaper so that the experiences students engaged in on campus were similar to those of the participants. Clips from the articles are provided in the emerging themes section and are considered by the researcher to be lived experiences of students at the research site.

Emerging Themes

The interview questions asked students to describe their lived experiences as a sophomore at the research site and had a specific focus on prompting dialogue about campus resources and the impacts those resources have on their decision-making process regarding continuing at the institution. After interviewing the participants and analyzing the transcripts, two themes emerged. These themes were then used to cull data from Facebook posts and the research site's student newspaper as a method of triangulation. The themes selected were not dependent on the frequency clusters developed. Instead, the researcher sought to capture the essence of second-year student experiences with campus resources and how those resources impacted retention decisions. Positive and negative impacts on students' retention decisions are also reviewed in the themes. Discussing the themes through this positive and negative lens connects to Tinto's (1975) student integration model which stated that negative experiences on campus lessen students' intent to continue. Participant responses from the interviews and statements from Facebook posts, along with articles authored by students in the campus newspaper, are given as examples for each theme.

The research question guiding this study was:

What postsecondary education resources do sophomore students at a public, southeastern doctoral research university perceive as needed for retention?

Sub-research questions included:

1) What academic and co-curricular activities do sophomore students utilize in the current academic year?
2) What academic and co-curricular services do sophomore students perceive impact their decision to continue through to graduation at their current institution?

Theme One: Faculty and Staff Relationships

Participants discussed relationships with the faculty and staff members on campus and how those positively and negatively impacted their decision to continue to their third year and through to graduation. Relationships with faculty dominated the conversation. However, staff on campus also impacted students' decisions. Relationships with staff in the Office of Leadership and Community Engagement and advisors were discussed by the participants.

Faculty Relationships. The resource that students continually described as positively impacting their decision to remain at the institution and through to graduation was the relationships they developed with professors. Participants cited specific faculty members, whose names have been altered for anonymity, and the idea of professors generally. When asked what, if any, campus resources impacted Amaya’s answers to Likert scale questions focused on retention and staying at the institution through to graduation, she stated:

> I just really like this school a lot, I like the professors, the campus, everything so I would love to continue going here.

When asked about campus resources used on campus, Dee commented:

> Um, definitely my professors I have used the most. Like, office hours are amazing and that's always, like, going to them always has helped me build relationships with professors and helped me, and helped me, um, do better in the class, because if I, like, go and talk to them, one on one I’m, like, a person.

Dee continued to talk about how her classes have increased in difficulty from freshman year, but that faculty are caring and helpful:

> I am building a relationship with all of my professors and, like, they actually, like, care about us here. And they don't, like, um… I mean they're kind of killing me now. I'm speaking highly of them in time of, um, sorrow (laughter), but I built, like, a relationship with them and that's, like, landed me my research position. And it’s, like, they actually care about us and they're not just, like, there for a paycheck. For sure.

Callie discussed three faculty members who have helped her grow in her major and develop a deeper connection to her after graduation plans:

> (1) So, Dr. Smith, she works in the English department. She's a wonderful professor and she's been there for me this entire year. She’s really helped me grow as an English major and as a writer. Um, she goes above and beyond, to make herself available to her students.

> (2) Dr. Rebecca Jones. She's also in the English department. She's been of a great help to me. She's connected me with some resources that have helped me grow within my major. (3) Dr. Thomas Jones has also done the same in that regard. He's connected me with some people... I'm wanting to go to law school and so he's connected me with some other students, former students that have, um, went on to pursue law and they've been able to share their experiences with me what worked, what didn't that type thing.

Blakely expressed that creating relationships with her professors was something she would have liked to start sooner in her sophomore year:

> Creating like a bond with professors so that, it, you don't wait till the end of the semester and have to panic about whether you're going to pass or not, and just being able to talk to them would create a bigger sense of comfort throughout the semester.

Facebook Parent 1 commented how excited she is for her daughter to connect with faculty members who provided information on research opportunities:

> My second (of 4) just started at GSU [Georgia Southern University]. She's a freshman, but sophomore standing thanks to dual enrollment credits. She's living in Centennial with Honors LLC [living learning community] – Biology major, Japanese minor, & Sustainability concentration. She's already met some great friends and even had professors offer to help get her into research, which she's really interested in. I'm thrilled she's adjusting well, excited about future opportunities and is happy.

Professors were lauded by participants and parents on Facebook as positively affecting their intention to stay, their grades, connecting them to experiences within their major, and providing a sense of comfort. Only one participant discussed "bad professors" but stated that she has experienced more good than bad. According to these participants, the genuine relationships that professors and students build have a strong influence on retention decisions.

Staff Relationships. Along with faculty members, the participants discussed the relationships they had formed with staff members on campus. These relationships both positively and negatively affected their decision-making processes regarding retention. Callie shared her experience with someone on the Office of Leadership and Community Engagement:

> Dr. Anthony Brown is also a tremendous resource for me. He's a person that I can email at any time, and he'll get me the information I need, even if it's not really (laughter) within, you know, his specialty. He'll find me someone that can help me.

Later in the interview, Callie restated the sentiment that people on campus want to help:

> There's so many people on campus that want to help you and there's so many people that can. If they can't help you, they'll find you the people who can.

The only negative element participants expressed was dissatisfaction with their experiences with their academic advisor(s). Additionally, parents on Facebook provided information on the frustrations they had with academic advisors on campus. Blakely stated:

> As far as people, I have my advisor. But I'm kind of indifferent about that situation. I just feel like she's not necessarily available. It's hard to reach her. I do question sometimes her judgment on courses to take. Because I do use my DegreeWorks to try to map out my schedule. So that can be kind of, like, contradicting sometimes with what she has to say.

Later in the interview, Blakely circled back to her academic advisor but stopped that line of conversation:

> Um. I don't really know I mean; I think advisors are a really good resource… I think maybe… better advisors in some situations, could help since we are getting more into stuff, at this, like, at this level of our education. Um…. I don't really know…. I'm trying

> to think about like other, other things. This is kind of hard, um, hmm…. (headshake "no")

Callie expressed:

> The only thing I wish there was a little bit more of, um, is advising for pre-med and pre-law students. Um. I'm pre-law, and I have, like, I've declared that, um, with my advisor. I've talked to her about that and, um, I've even picked up a concentration in law, and, um, there has not really been any resources given to me for, like, pre-law help.

Much of the family and parent Facebook group posts found were directed toward academic advising at all academic levels. The researcher pulled two comments that focused on students' experiences during their second year. Facebook Parent 2 commented:

> Advisors at Georgia Southern are a joke. My son is starting his 4th semester and has gone through three of them. They don't respond to emails when he has tried to contact them.

Facebook Parent 3 added:

> My daughter will be a junior and has had three or four advisors. Advisor last year had her take a class that was supposed to cover a health credit and found out later (with new advisor) it did not count for anything. Overall she took three classes this summer to play catch-up.

These participants and parents described their negative views of academic advisors on campus and the avenues used to stay on track with degree requirements. Blakely discussed using DegreeWorks, "a web-based program that provides easy access for advisors and students to track courses completed and plan for those still needed in preparation for registration and graduation" (Office of the Registrar, 2022). Parents on Facebook also mentioned using DegreeWorks, asserting:

> DegreeWorks in the student portal is very helpful to stay on track. It shows what course

have been taken, what courses are in progress, and what courses are still needed.

Additionally, Callie discussed how she relies on individuals who do not work for the institution:

> I've really just been relying on peers and people that know people. (laughter) My boss, I'm in an internship. He helps with that as well.

Finally, Facebook Parent 4 described transferring or taking a year off as a solution:

> With one year of courses left if they can be accessed, she might have to look at transferring or taking a gap year just to graduate without incurring more debt. Emailed the department head with no response and advisors have not responded to my daughters email in over 3 weeks.

It is evident from these participant statements and posts from Facebook that students are looking for a stronger connection to their academic advisors with a clear path provided for registration and graduation requirements. The multiple changes in advisors assigned to students work to discourage connection and trust that is needed in advising relationships. These transactional types of relationships do not work to increase students' intent to remain at the institution. Creating genuine bonds with faculty and staff on campus are important to students and to their retention decisions.

Theme Two: Academic and Co-curricular Involvement

Participants expressed the importance of being involved on campus both inside and outside the classroom. These activities increased their connection to campus and want to stay. Within the academic experience, participants were pleased to have connections to their career within the classroom, peers who increased their competitive spirit, peer instructors, and peer tutors. Within co-curricular involvement, participants found organizations to engage with and friends through campus activities. Campus activities and peer leadership roles defined co-curricular involvement in this study and in the literature (Vetter et al., 2019). One participant talked about her older friends graduating as something that may cause her to leave the university.

Academic Involvement. A positive aspect of academic involvement that each participant shared is that of a major and/or career connection that is present during the sophomore year. Blakely's statements are related to how courses had to make changes due to Covid-19 restrictions but still had a positive impact on her second-year experience:

> I really do think that it's cool how we do get into our majors as sophomores. Because I know from my mom's experience, like, they didn't really start major classes until towards the end and so, like, being an education major and, like, this year I would have been able to go to the field, but, like, we did a simu, simulation instead. Like, that was just really cool that the school didn't necessarily cancel that class completely, but they did find ways to basically mimic what we would be doing in that class.

Dee compared the people she used as resources during freshman year to sophomore year:

> During my freshman year I was taking, like, core classes and I wasn't really around people that had the same interests as me. And, so, now that I'm in my upper divisions, I am around people that are, like, goal oriented, and most of them are, like, on a pre-health track like me. And… I think being around students like that, like, motivates me because I'm, like, dang, I have competition. (laughter)

Callie commented on what it is like during sophomore year with:

> I just think that it's more of you finally getting to take classes you want and getting to get your feet in your major.

Amaya added:

> Um... It's nice, you know this year has definitely been different than what I was expecting

> but… I'm still enjoying it. Being in that space where I'm starting to take classes that are more focused to my major while still knocking out some of those classes that, um, are just required courses that don't necessarily, um, have anything to do with my major. Talking to different people starting to make those connections that will help me in the future, once I get heavily into my major.

Desirea, a sophomore political science major, was quoted in the student newspaper about her change of major:

> I changed it because I took chemistry, and I did not like it. Then, I got looking more into what the job would entail, and I realized that the job was not what I wanted to do. I had an American government class, and I loved it, like, I loved it so much. I decided to change my major to political science, and I like that a whole lot more. I'm doing better in classes, and it's just so much more fun.

Students expressed that taking courses in their major, meeting with upper-division professors, working with students in their area of study, and having experiences related to what they want to do after graduation served as motivation and were "cool" experiences to have. The connection to what students intended to do after graduation assisted students in goal orientation and solidifying major choices. For example, Blakely stated,

> I just think sophomore year's very beneficial for deciding whether or not you want to stick with your major.

Academic support services take place outside the classroom and are provided by peers or professional staff. Participants attributed the use of these services to their success and progress at the institution. Dee talked about how supplemental instruction positively impacted her decision to stay. Supplemental Instruction (SI) is an opportunity for students to receive free, out-of-class help from a peer instructor. The help is focused on reviewing class materials along with study sessions and strategies. Dee stated:

> Oh, SI, I completely forgot about SI. That's, that has been really good for chemistry. It's supplemental instruction. Um, and it's, like, student-led and it's, like really, like, relax. That's helped a lot.

Blakely mentioned the Math Lab. The Math Lab provides free tutoring to students both virtually and in person by a MASTER Tutor or a peer tutor. (Department of Mathematical Sciences, 2022).

> I have been to the, the math lab in the math and physics building. And that's actually really cool that they do that because you can go there and there's always people in there that can help with whatever subject you're struggling in. I've never used the Testing Center or anything like that, so I don't really know about that kind of stuff. But I do know that the math lab works or like helps out a lot.

Dee mentioned tutoring as an academic support service that she would like to see more of:

> Maybe more like Tutoring sessions, possibly? Like um. I don't know. Like maybe some extra tutors for, for classes… that a lot of people take, I guess, like, Organic Chem. That would probably help.

A review of the Georgia Southern parent and family Facebook page showed a discussion of the Math Lab benefits and questions on how their students can receive help in certain subject areas. Additionally, during the time of the interviews, the student newspaper had an article that focused on reduced hours of the library due to Covid-19 being a "hindrance" to students which may imply that library usage benefits students.

Co-curricular Involvement. Participants also talked about experiences outside the classroom that provided them the opportunity to meet other students and make friends as important to their decision to remain at the institution. The participants in this study were all involved in clubs and organizations at the research site. In addition to this involvement, they discussed the importance of their peer networks. When asked about resources provided by the university that assist Dee in being successful, she commented:

> I don't know… I can be shy, and so, I, like, have been, like, taking it upon myself, like, to go and, like, make friends, you know. Like, they gave us the resources like SOAR [new student orientation] and stuff, and… um. They're like my clubs and stuff. I think they all have like numerous clubs I'm in that's like gave me a lot of my friends. But I think definitely the club's help.

Later, Dee affirmed that campus organizations impacted her decision to stay:

> I think the organizations. Because I really enjoy the organization environment…yeah.

Callie added:

> I've used the Office of Leadership and Community Engagement. I'm involved with the Southern Leaders Program. And, um, they've helped me get connected with some resources for volunteering and stuff like that, but because a lot of the volunteering opportunities that I normally engaged in were limited because of Covid, so they've helped me in that regard.

Discussing campus choice, Blakely stated:

> I personally just enjoy the campus. Because I, really that's why I picked the school because I love the campus and I enjoy, um, all of the activities that are provided through the school. And being a part of different organizations is really cool too.

Blakely also shared:

> I'm in Southern Leaders, for example. So that's a good way to meet other people that aren't even necessarily just sophomores but it's also giving me the chance to help out in the community and, um, take on, like, leadership roles within that because I can apply for those positions.

Connecting with peers through co-curricular means was important to the participants of this study. Peer groups were referred to by participants as “friends,” “study buddies,” and “people that I know who have taken the classes that I'm in before” by participants, and each in a context that helped the student succeed or feel comfortable at the institution.

Chapter Summary

Four postsecondary education students who self-identified as sophomores were individually interviewed for this study. The interview data were analyzed using Moustakas' (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of analysis of phenomenological data. Two themes emerged from this data that were relevant to the overarching research question: What postsecondary education resources do sophomore students at a public, southeastern doctoral research university perceive as needed for retention? Both themes worked to positively impact students' retention. The emergent themes were (1) faculty and staff relationships and (2) academic and co-curricular involvement. The positive impacts students perceived these resources to have on their retention decisions were provided within the themes. However, the dissatisfaction with academic advising experiences within theme one was a negative impact.

The lived experiences of the participants were provided to support the formation of the two themes. Additionally, where possible, data were supplied from alternate sources for data triangulation. Facebook posts and articles from the student newspaper were provided to support the themes that emerged from the data. Each theme will be analyzed and discussed in chapter five.

CHAPTER 5

Summary, Conclusions, and Implications

The previous chapters of this study have introduced the research topic, provided a literature review, specified the methodology used to conduct the study, and discussed findings from the data analysis. This chapter summarizes the research study, discusses the findings, and provides implications for higher education leaders in academic advising, student affairs, academic affairs, and other areas to create, refocus, or reinforce student success resources on sophomore students' needs.

Student perceptions were gathered through four individual interviews and data collected from social media and the student newspaper at the research site to answer the primary research question:

What postsecondary education resources do sophomore students at a public, southeastern doctoral research university perceive as needed for retention?

Secondary research questions included:

1) What academic and co-curricular activities do sophomore students utilize in the current academic year and in what ways?
2) What academic and co-curricular services do sophomore students perceive affect their decision to continue through to graduation at their current institution?

The examination of sophomore needs was conducted as a qualitative transcendental phenomenological study as this phenomenology allows for the essence of student experiences to be described in their own words. By examining students' experiences in their sophomore year and evaluating the resources they feel impacted their retention decisions, this research study aims to help fill the gap in higher education literature about sophomore student retention efforts. This chapter connects the literature review and findings, discusses implications for higher education leaders, and provides ideas for further research.

Summary of the Study

Higher education research on retention efforts focuses primarily on first-to-second year (Coghlan et al., 2009; Complete College America, n.d.; Education Advisory Board, 2014; Willcoxson et al., 2011). Additionally, research on student success efforts to retain students past the first-to-second year time period (i.e., freshmen to sophomore year) is lacking. This study reviewed the literature on second-year research and student success models through three theoretical frameworks: Schaller's (2005) sophomore development model, Tinto's (1975) student integration theory, and Astin's (1984/1999) theory on student involvement.

Few previous studies have investigated the lived experiences of sophomore students. Tinto (1993) asked institutions to discover the goals of incoming students when creating retention policies. This same call for research should be employed with sophomore students to develop programming that reflects their needs regarding retention. To address this gap, the researcher examined sophomore student experiences to discover the resources that impact students' decisions to stay or drop out.

The intent of this study was to present the lived experiences of sophomores in postsecondary education regarding the resources they perceive to impact their decision to stay or drop out. The data collected from this study included four individual interviews with students who self-identified as sophomores at one public, southeastern doctoral research university. In addition to an analysis of the interviews, data were analyzed from Facebook posts and articles in the student newspaper at the research site. Each participant in the study was asked the same set of interview questions. The interview questions were developed from the literature and support the overarching research question of this study: What postsecondary education resources do sophomore students at a public, southeastern doctoral research university perceive as needed for retention?

From the data analysis of the interviews, two themes were found to impact students' decisions to stay (i.e., to be retained at the university) or drop out. Both themes, (1) faculty and staff relationships and (2) academic and co-curricular involvement, contributed positively to participant decisions to stay at Georgia Southern. Data analysis revealed one resource within the faculty and staff relationships theme that negatively impacted students' retention decisions: academic advisors. Participants expressed dissatisfaction with their academic advising experience. The next section of this chapter will discuss the findings. The verbatim participant responses and data analysis process are provided in chapter four.

Discussion of Findings

The discussion of findings connects the literature reviewed in chapter two with the study's findings in chapter four. The findings are aligned with the theoretical framework higher education leaders use when discussing and creating programming related to retention: Tinto's (1975) theory on attrition, Astin's (1984/1999) theory on student involvement, and Schaller's (2005) sophomore development model. In addition to theories, the findings are also connected to the sophomore slump phenomenon.

Student Integration Model

Tinto's (1975) model suggests that students are more likely to drop out if they are not academically and socially integrated into the college community. Tinto measured academic integration with grade point average and intellectual development of students. Social integration is measured through students' involvement in extracurricular activities and positive relationships with peers, faculty, and administrators. Negative experiences weaken students' resolve to continue. Experiences in academic and social systems influence students' decisions to stay or drop out.

The academic integration of Tinto's (1975) model is not discussed in this study as grade performance and intellectual development data were not collected and participants did not discuss these impacts in their decision-making processes. However, the social integration of the model is represented. Participants indicated that relationships with faculty and staff along with academic and co-curricular involvement were important and positively impacted their decisions to continue at the institution. Furthermore, all participants participated in two or more campus organizations.

Additionally, the researcher divided the themes into positive and negative impacts due to the student integration model. Both themes relate to how Tinto (1975) discussed positive peer group and faculty interactions as avenues to increase students' goal commitment and institutional commitment. Each participant discussed these themes as positively impacting their decision to remain and continue through to graduation at the institution.

Academic advising, within theme one: faculty and staff relationships, was the only negative experience that participants discussed. This negative experience undermines students' positive interactions with the institution. Some students question their commitment to the university, while others participate in different avenues to circumvent and find solutions to the negative academic advising experience.

Student Involvement Theory

Astin's (1984/1999) theory explained how students' co-curricular activity on campus impacts outcomes for higher education institutions. Essentially, the more involved students are, the more they will have increased learning and development. Every participant in this study engaged in co-curricular activities along with their academic studies. Participants' activities ranged from two to five officially recognized campus organizations. Additionally, each participant identified that they intended to stay through to graduation at their current institution. Due to all students being involved and students' intent to persist, Astin's theory is corroborated by the data.

Sophomore Development Model

Schaller's (2005) sophomore development model helped define the second-year experience. The model described four stages in which students progress: random exploration, focused exploration, tentative choices, and commitment. These stages can begin as early as their freshman year. The stages are not necessarily linear in nature. Students who progress too quickly may fall back into one or more of the previous stages.

The first stage, random exploration, is typically experienced by students in freshman year or the summer before sophomore year. This stage is exemplified by students making decisions with little or no reflection or making conscious decisions to delay decision-making.

As students move from random to focused exploration, more time is spent on self-reflection. This stage typically occurs during the summer before or early in sophomore year. During this second stage, students begin to experience the sophomore slump as they begin to question their choices and experience frustration. Students also begin to see a disconnect between themselves and others and search for new relationships or ways to be in a relationship.

Sometime during their sophomore year, students move into tentative choices. During this stage, students make independent decisions about their future. Students begin, even tentatively, to use the self-reflection skills gained in focused exploration to make life decisions.

The final stage in the sophomore development model is commitment. Few second-year students, as described by Schaller (2005), can be found in this stage. Commitment is defined by students being actively involved with and confident about their choices regarding future plans.

The findings did not show any participants were in random or focused exploration. Instead, the students had made decisions regarding their future and were in tentative choices or commitments. Participants defined their after-graduation plans when discussing the connection of their majors to their future careers, described the importance of faculty connections to their future goals, and expressed their appreciation of peer competition as motivation to accomplish postgraduate goals.

Findings also revealed that participants had moved through focused exploration. Each participant was asked, "What do you wish you knew at the start of this year that would have helped you academically and socially?" All participants discussed their personal view that co-curricular involvement (i.e., social integration) was important. Other findings from this question showed that students were more academically immersed through their discussion of time management and utilization of professors as resources.

Sophomore Slump

Sophomore slump has many definitions in the literature (Ennis-McMillan et al., 2011; McBurnie et al., 2012; Schreiner et al., 2012). The researcher used Kennedy and Upcraft's (2010) definition of sophomore slump: a "multidimensional phenomenon, which could begin as early as the second semester of college and includes one or more of the following: academic deficiencies, academic disengagement, dissatisfaction with the collegiate experience, major and career indecision, and developmental confusion" (p. 39). The interviews in this study were conducted during students' second semester in their self-identified sophomore year. No indicators of the sophomore slump phenomenon were in the findings. Participants described themselves as satisfied and engaged with their academic and co-curricular experiences and identified future career goals corresponding to their academic majors.

Thriving is a measure counter to sophomore slump. Schreiner et al. (2012) defined four indicators of thriving: students' certainty of major, spirituality, faculty interaction, and sense of community. The positive themes that emerged from the findings correspond to not experiencing the sophomore slump. Schreiner et al. also discussed academic advisement as an issue to thriving. This measure of sophomore slump was also supported in the findings as participants expressed dissatisfaction with their academic advising experiences. However, participants thrived regardless of their negative academic advising experiences. This success can be attributed to the overwhelmingly positive experiences with the other markers of thriving such as faculty interaction and certainty of major.

Limitations, Delimitations, and Assumptions

Data collection was the most difficult aspect of the study for the researcher. One aspect of the study the challenge of data collection can be attributed to is the sophomore slump. Students during the second year are facing a unique time in their college career, which could be attributed to their non-participatory nature. After presenting the overview of the study to thirty-five classes across seven semesters, there were very few students who agreed to participate in the study and met the selection criteria. Nineteen students completed the survey and identified themselves as sophomores and sixteen agreed to participate in the survey, agreed to be contacted by phone, and attended the research site the previous year. Compounded with the limited number of students were even fewer who returned phone calls to the researcher to schedule a time for an individual interview. Lastly, students who agreed to participate and scheduled a time did not show up.

Enveloped in the challenge of data collection is the diversity of the participants. The four participants were similar. They are all female, all involved in Southern Leaders at Georgia Southern, and each possessed certainty in their academic major. Had data collection gone as planned, the diversity of subjects should have been greater. Diversity in gender, race/ethnicity, socio-economic status, level of student involvement, and degree of certainty in major choice would have provided additional lived experiences to add to the description of the phenomenon.

Another limitation of this study is that it can be described as “backyard” research (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992 as cited in Creswell, 2009). “Backyard” research is defined as a researcher using their own work setting to collect data. The positions the researcher has held and currently hold at the institution contributed to the interest of studying second-year students. Rich, thick description is used in chapter four to describe results using participants’ voices. Additionally, the phenomenological process of epoche was employed by the researcher. This process works to ensure the researcher’s biases were set aside (Moustakas, 1994). Finally, purposeful sampling was used to select participants who could provide details about the phenomenon studied (Creswell, 2013).

A delimitation of the study is when the interviews were conducted. The researcher received Institutional Research Board and departmental approval during the Covid-19 pandemic when the research site was not hosting classes on campus. Interviews were completed shortly after returning to campus with decided social distancing policies in place for the researcher. The unforeseen circumstance of Covid-19 required the researcher to conduct interviews through video conferencing software. Students may have been experiencing “Zoom fatigue,” which led them not to participate, as discussed above, or could have caused them to be less descriptive in their answers to finish the task on Zoom quicker.

An assumption made by the researcher is that students understood the interview questions and provided honest responses regarding their experiences. Students were reminded at the beginning of the interviews that they could decline to answer a question or remove themselves from the study at any time. Additionally, students were made aware that a pseudonym will be used when data is presented to maintain their privacy. These reminders were intended to work to provide a trusting environment where students could speak their minds. Students should have had no ulterior motives for participating in the study as no compensation was provided. These practices should have ensured that participants answered questions honestly.

Implications for Practice

Tinto (1975) and Astin (1984/1999) describe how increased involvement led to increased student retention via student learning, development, and commitment. However, negative interactions work to decrease student retention (Tinto, 1975). The participants of this study are active in co-curricular activities; encounter elements of their major that connect them to their career goals; and rate genuine relationships with faculty and staff, along with other academic and co-curricular support services as important to their decisions to stay. However, one campus experience was negative: academic advising. Continuing with the policies and practices that are positive in nature is necessary for student retention. Considering the negative interaction solutions are also needed by higher education leaders. This consideration can work to increase second-to-third-year retention.

Negative Impacts

Participants of this study are included in the 2020 entering cohort fall term retention rates at Georgia Southern University. Second-year retention for the fall 2020 cohort is 57% (Office of Institutional Research, 2022). This is a 15% decrease from the first-year retention rate for the same cohort. And a 7% decrease compared to the fall 2019 cohort's second-year retention rate. Retention information for the third year of the fall 2020 cohort was not available at the time of this study; however, the research site's retention third-year rate has been between 55-58% for the past three cohorts. While there are many factors that influence students' decisions to drop out, academic advising was the only negative implication in the findings.

First, academic advising accessibility should be evaluated. One participant described her academic advisor as not available. Solutions to this could be to evaluate student to academic advisor ratios, how academic advisors set their appointment times, and ease of making appointments. Another avenue that can be pursued is to host drop-in hours for advising so students can stop by or log on to have a question answered. Waiting for an appointment time may not be the best solution to a student's problem thus driving them to other avenues for answers.

Second, training provided to academic advisors should be assessed. What is the on-boarding experience for academic advisors? Is enough time provided shadowing expert academic advisors before new staff meet with students? Furthermore, training and development focused on the needs of second-year students is warranted. Training that includes sophomore development theory could be helpful to advisors to better understand this population of students. This study has shown the importance sophomore students have placed on the major and career connection. Training should be provided on career development theories. Integrating academic and career advising is not a new concept to the National Academic Advising Association (McCalla-Wriggins, 2009). O'Banion's (1972, as cited in McCalla-Wriggins, 2009) description of academic advising included an exploration of life and vocational goals. Academic advisors can talk about information on the major related courses students will take each year. Additionally, discussions on core requirements and prerequisites should include how these types of courses align with students' majors and careers. These types of conversations would also work to decrease the transactional nature of advising and begin to build the meaningful relationships students want.

Third, academic advisors and administrators should ensure all the resources and information that pertain to programs of study are aligned. The research site uses three student-facing software systems to show degree requirements and progress to completion along with the academic catalog, program maps, and advising and academic department websites. If what the advisor is presenting does not match the resource that the student is using, data from this study show trust from the student falters. One participant discussed her DegreeWorks, a degree auditing system, contradicting the information provided by the academic advisor. Ensuring alignment of all the resources students use to make academic plans is vital.

Fourth, communication efforts are geared toward other campus service resources. Undergraduate students receive information on all the resources available to them during orientation and first-year experience courses. This information may not have been relevant to the student at the time, be forgotten, or have changed by the second year. Two students in the study were pursuing pre-professional tracks. One declared her pre-professional track on her student record but did not receive the resources expected. The communication effort should be two-fold: advisors sharing resources during one-on-one meetings with students and awareness campaigns to notify students about campus services. In the example of a pre-professional student at the research site, when this information is added to the student record an email should be sent expressing the next steps and a reminder of what resources are available to the student for support. This email should be one in the same with the notification that the addition of the pre-professional track was completed. Combining these two pieces of information could work to increase the likelihood of the student opening and reading the email. Additionally, awareness campaigns can include information in the student newspaper and on social media. Finally, at the next one-on-one meeting the academic advisor should inquire if the student used the additional resources and provide the information again.

Lastly, advising turnover was discussed as an issue by parents on Facebook. Two parents' comments represented in this study described their second-year students as having at least three advisors during their time at the institution. Higher education leaders in human resources and the office of academic advising should conduct an analysis of advising turnover and employee engagement. Employee engagement surveys are conducted at the research site, but it is unknown how the results from the surveys are used to decrease academic advisor turnover.

Positive Impacts

Resources that negatively impacted students' decisions should not be the only implication higher education leaders consider when looking to increase retention rates. Campus resources that positively engage students on campus are important to continue and to assess. The assessment process should be applied to all campus resources so that information is gathered and used to determine if the resources are still accomplishing goals or if they need to be improved.

Relationships with faculty and staff on campus contributed positively to students' retention decisions in this study. Higher education leaders should recognize, prioritize, and reward the importance faculty and staff have on retention. Understanding how faculty and staff contribute to successful student retention helps higher education leaders to determine what steps can be taken to provide support to continue and improve engagement with students. Sharing data is vital. Surveys and interviews, such as in this study, should be shared with faculty and staff to recognize success and show appreciation. Communication is key. Providing positive feedback along with areas of improvement can work to continue and increase relationship building with students. Targeted engagement opportunities for faculty and staff with sophomores should be developed. Given sophomore students' focus on major and career connections these opportunities could arise via formalized mentorship programs with faculty and staff. The flaw with mentorship programs is that they may only reach a small population of students and those that are already involved and have a major/career decided. Instead, the creation of new mentorship programs that use at-risk models to target students likely to drop-out could be used. Then, meaningful conversations with students based on their specific needs could ensue.

Co-curricular involvement was also important to participants in this study. Co-curricular involvement includes student activities and peer leadership roles (Vetter et al., 2019). Individuals across the institution can work to connect students to student groups and student activities. When making these co-curricular recommendations for students it is important to keep student success research in mind. Vetter et al. (2019) found student success to be linked with participating in at least one student organization or leadership role. One recommendation from the study conducted by Vetter et al. (2019) was to provide early and consistent messaging about co-curricular experiences. Knowledge of Georgia Southern's Eagle Engage system and actively showing students how to access and use the system can work to increase students' involvement with campus. Eagle Engage is a student portal used by Georgia Southern to feature events, organizations, and other involvement activities (Office of Student Activities, 2023). Anyone at Georgia Southern can access Eagle Engage through the university's portal for students, faculty, and staff. Interfacing with the software and learning more about the campus activities and student organizations available can help those who work at Georgia Southern make meaningful connections with and for students.

Furthermore, a stronger link between faculty and student affairs should be developed. In creating this link, education on how non-academic entities impact student learning should occur. Georgia Southern University's Division of Student Affairs publicized two comprehensive documents focused on the division's impact on students: Impact Report and Student Learning Outcomes (Division of Student Affairs, 2023). An enhanced understanding about the work everyone at the institution completes regarding student learning and retention may provide the impetus needed to collaborate and develop impactful programming. Including all parties in discussions on the development of retention strategies can work to increase buy-in and support. Hartman and Young (2021) discussed how cross-functional alignment assists institutions to create equitable scales and consistent messaging for sophomore initiatives. Furthermore, cross-functional collaboration positions institutions "to help sophomores engage in critical developmental tasks" (Hartman & Young, 2021, p. 42) associated with the second year. A faculty survey could be employed to determine faculty level of involvement with current retention practices and interest in creating strategies. Providing additional support and resources for those that work to develop and engage retention strategies could also increase buy-in. Support in the form of course releases, monetary rewards, or incorporation into evaluation processes. This collaboration of faculty and staff could work to increase the effectiveness of retention strategies by taking multiple perspectives into account. Increasing the effectiveness of retention strategies leads to increased retention rates.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study allowed the researcher the opportunity to reflect on the current body of literature on second-year retention, the importance of retention to higher education leaders, and future ideas for research. Information on the lived experiences of sophomore students is missing from research, especially research about what resources help students' retention. During the study, the researcher worked to create a larger sample and a larger diversity of students to provide a deeper description of the needs of sophomore students in postsecondary education. To achieve a larger sample and participant diversity, the courses targeted for participants could be expanded to all 2000-level courses at the university. An evaluation of academic program maps, documents that show when students should complete certain courses, could also be undertaken. The completion of this evaluation would provide information on what courses are advised to take in the sophomore year and these courses could be used to recruit participants. Replicating this study with a larger sample and diversity represented will bring additional information.

Conducting a longitudinal study could be the next step to extend this research. Using focus groups and interviews with students during their sophomore year, junior year, and senior year could provide a fuller and richer description of what students perceive as needed during the second year. Another line of research could be to interview students who dropped out during the second year or before the third year. Understanding the reasons why students choose to leave an institution can provide a wealth of knowledge on the needs and experiences of students currently enrolled. This study provided information on why students remained at Georgia Southern but no information on why students left.

Lastly, the researcher felt that conducting a quantitative or mixed-methods study could bring valuable information to higher education leaders on students' decisions to stay or drop out. One example of a survey that could be used is the Sophomore Experiences Survey (SES) discussed in Schreiner et al.'s (2012) research. The SES included questions related to students' intent to persist, thriving, and their satisfaction and involvement with campus in the second year

(Schreiner et al., 2012). This change in methodology would allow participants to complete information on their own time which could work to provide more information from an increased and diverse sample size.

As the researcher was completing the study, different avenues to increase the size and diversity of the participants were sought. At the outset of participant recruitment, the two courses targeted were only in-person or hybrid. With the implications of Covid-19, the researcher also included online courses as these types of courses increased in size from before Covid-19 levels. Additionally, at the beginning of the study, the researcher contacted an individual at the Thriving Project to inquire about the policies, procedures, and deadlines surrounding the SES (Thriving Project, 2023). At that time, the project collected data on the institution's behalf during the spring semester and provided institutional data and national norms the following summer (E. McIntosh, personal communication, January 6, 2017). However, due to Georgia Southern University's policy at that time survey distribution via email was discouraged so the SES was not utilized. Furthermore, as the researcher contacted students to schedule interviews their schedules did not overlap to conduct focus groups. Given the issue with scheduling, the qualitative interviewing strategy for this study was changed from focus groups to in-depth individual interviews. The hope was that individual interviewing would allow for an increased level of participants. Lastly, the length of the study was extended to provide an opportunity for the researcher to recruit participants during multiple academic years.

Conclusion

Resources sophomore students see as needed for persistence were described through their lived experiences. A clearer description of how second-year students perceive campus resources in their decisions to stay or drop out assists higher education leaders in refocusing or realigning programs before students leave. This research study expands the literature on second-year student retention and the findings align with previous literature. Positive resources discussed in the findings include professor interactions, the major and career connection, social camaraderie, and other institutional support services. One negative impact on retention decisions was academic advising. The researcher encourages higher education leaders to use the rich, thick descriptions of the participants as a guide to further improve campus resources related to advising and continue assessment efforts on all campus resources.

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APPENDIX A

EMAIL TO INSTRUCTORS

Dear [Instructor Name]:

My name is Theresa Duggar. I am a doctoral student at Georgia Southern University pursuing a degree in Educational Leadership. I am researching how students experience campus resources during their sophomore year and how that impacts their decision to progress or not. The title of my study is “Examining Second-Year Retention: Student Perceptions of Campus Resources for Sophomores.” I am looking for instructors that will allow a brief, 5-minute survey to be completed during class time.

I am requesting that I visit your class via Zoom and provide an overview of the study to your students and time in class for the students to complete and turn-in the survey. I expect to take no more than 10-minutes of class time for these activities.

I have copied your assistant director on this email. Please let me know by [Date] of your willingness to have your class participate. Additionally, let me know if you have any questions or concerns.

Best,

Theresa Duggar

tduggar@georgiasouthern.edu

[Phone]

APPENDIX B

SELECTION SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Please enter the following information.

* Required

1. First Name *
2. Middle Initial *
3. Last Name *
4. Telephone Number *
5. Date of Birth (mm/dd/yyyy)
6. Gender
    a. Female
    b. Male
    c. Other:
7. Race
    a. American Indian or Alaska Native
    b. Asian
    c. Black or African American
    d. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
    e. White
8. Ethnicity
    a. Hispanic or Latino or Spanish Origin
    b. Not Hispanic or Latino or Spanish Origin
9. I am a *

a. Freshman
b. Sophomore
c. Junior
d. Senior
e. Graduate Student

10. Did you attend Georgia Southern University in fall 2020? *
    a. Yes
    b. No
11. Did you attend Georgia Southern University in spring 2021? *
    a. Yes
    b. No
12. In what ways have you practiced academic or social involvement on campus? *

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF LEADERSHIP, TECHNOLOGY, & HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Informed Consent
Examining How Second-Year Persistence Impacts Retention:
Student Perceptions of Campus Resources for Sophomores
Individual Interview

1. Theresa Duggar is conducting research on sophomore students' experiences with campus resources. The purpose of your participation in this research is to help the researcher evaluate what campus resources impact students' intention to stay or leave the University. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because the class you are registered in has historically enrolled a large number of sophomores.

2. Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to explore postsecondary education sophomore students' perceptions of their experiences with campus resources that may impact student progression and retention at Georgia Southern University.

3. Participation in this research will include completion of an online Qualtrics survey. The survey will be used to select students who will be asked to participate in a virtual focus group interview using Zoom. If you are interested in participating in the focus group, your telephone number will be collected on the survey and used to contact you to schedule the focus group date and time. Additionally, if further information is needed after the focus group, participants may be asked to complete an individual, virtual interview with the researcher.

4. Discomforts and Risks:
    a. If you were selected to participate in the focus group, a pseudonym will be used in the research findings to protect your identity. However, the researcher can only encourage other participants to not discuss the focus group and what was said. Due to this there potential psychological (mental stress and/or emotional distress) discomfort and risk may occur. The Georgia Southern Counseling Center provides assistance to students coping with psychological wellness concerns. You

may contact the Counseling Center for more information on the Statesboro campus at 912-478-5541 or on the Armstrong campus at 912-344-2529.

b. We are careful to ensure that the information you voluntarily provide to us is as secure as possible; however, you must be aware that transmissions over the Internet cannot be guaranteed to be completely secure. Your confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology being used. You will be subject to the privacy policy of Zoom.

5. Benefits:
   a. The benefits to society include having more information on the sophomore student population and their experiences with campus resources in reference to college completion.

6. Duration/Time required from the participant: If you decide to continue to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete an hour long, virtual, individual interview with the researcher.

7. Only the Primary Investigator, Faculty Advisor, and Zoom's audio transcription service will have access to the data collected for this study. Data from this study will be stored in the researcher's locked office on a password protected computer. Data from this study will be destroyed three years after the completion of the study.

8. Right to Ask Questions: Participants have the right to ask questions and have those questions answered. If you have questions about this study, please contact the researcher named above or the researcher's faculty advisor, whose contact information is located at the end of the informed consent. For questions concerning your rights as a research participant, contact Georgia Southern University Institutional Review Board at 912-478-5465.

9. Compensation: No compensation is provided for participation in the individual interview.

10. Voluntary Participation: You are not required to participate in this research; you may end your participation at any time by telling the primary investigator; you do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to answer.

11. Penalty: There is no penalty for deciding not to participate in the study; you may decide at any time to not participate further and may withdraw without penalty or retribution.

13. FERPA: Only the Primary Investigator, Faculty Advisor, and transcription service will have access to the data collected for this study. You will not be identified by name in any reports using information obtained from this study.

14. All information will be treated confidentially. There is one exception to confidentiality that we need to make you aware of. In certain research studies, it is our ethical responsibility to report situations of child or elder abuse, child or elder neglect, or any

life-threatening situation to appropriate authorities. However, we are not seeking this type of information in our study, nor will you be asked questions about these issues.

15. You must be 18 years of age or older to consent to participate in this research study. If you consent to participate in this research study and to the terms above, please sign your name and indicate the date below.

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records. This project has been reviewed and approved by the GSU Institutional Review Board under tracking number H21260.

Title of Project: Examining How Second-Year Persistence Impacts Retention: Student Perceptions of
Campus Resources for Sophomores

Principal Investigator: Theresa Duggar; PO Box 8069 Statesboro, GA 30460; [Phone]; tduggar@georgiasouthern.edu

Research Advisor: Daniel Calhoun; PO Box 8131 Statesboro, GA 30460; 912-478-1428; dwcalhoun@georgiasouthern.edu

<u>This consent is being provided electronically. The research will ask you to consent via the chat feature in Zoom before completing the interview. Participating in the interview indicates your willingness to participate in this research.</u>

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Step 1: Welcome and informed consent

Script: "Hi, I'm Theresa Duggar and I'll be asking you some questions, taking notes, and recording our meeting. Thank you much for meeting with me today. Before we get started with our conversation, I want to take some time to review the informed consent you previously saw in class and have you acknowledge the form. [Upload form to Zoom chat.]

Now, I'm going to read the informed consent to you. This document tells us a little more about why we're here and the process. Stop me at any time if you have questions.

[Read informed consent.] That was a lot, I know. What questions do you have? [Allow time for response.]

Perfect. If you agree with what the informed consent stated, please reply yes in the chat."

Step 2: Procedures

Script: "In a minute, I'm going to ask you some open-ended questions and I'd like you to share your responses. Please only share information that you are comfortable sharing. Everything you say is confidential – your real name will not be used at any time during this study. Please remember that you can leave any anytime.

Now that we know why and what we're about to do today, are there any questions or concerns before we begin?" [Provide time for questions and concerns.]

Step 4: Start recording

Script: "We will now begin after I begin recording in Zoom. [Turn on recording.] Again, I appreciate the time you're providing me for my study. My first question is…" [Ask questions one at a time. Allow time for responses. Watch time.]

Questions:

1. Tell me about a time that you've faced an intellectual, personal, and/or professional challenge this year.
2. What is it like being a sophomore at the [RESEARCH SITE]?
3. What kind of resources, people, places, or things, do you or have you used on campus?
4. Have those people, offices, or resources who helped you changed from freshman to sophomore year? If so, how?
5. What do you wish you knew at the start of this year that would have helped you academically and socially?
6. Do you feel [RESEARCH SITE] has provided you with what you need to be successful academically and socially? If so, how? If not, how?
7. On a scale of 1-5, 1 being definitely not and 5 being definitely, how likely are you to continue next year at [RESEARCH SITE]?
    a. Through to graduation?
    b. What, if any, campus resources impacted these answers?
    c. What, if any, resources do you wish the [RESEARCH SITE] offered for sophomores?

That was my final question. Is there anything else anyone would like to add to what we discussed today?" [Allow time for comments.]

Step 5: Wrap up the interview

Script: “This ends our interview. Thank you for coming and participating. If you have any questions after this meeting, please let me know. You have my contact information on the informed consent.”