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DEFINING STUDENT SUCCESS AND IDENTIFYING THE RHETORICAL APPEALS
THAT COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES USE TO ENGAGE
STUDENTS IN THE PURSUIT OF HIGHER
EDUCATION DEGREES

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ABSTRACT

The purposes of the study included examining how four-year institutions of higher education define student success, measuring student success, and examining how words associated with student success were used to appeal to people interested in college degree attainment.

Information from the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education was used to obtain a sample of 30 academic institutions with similar attributes to Indiana State University.

Websites from Academic Affairs, Office of the President, and Student Affairs were examined for mentions of student success. Burke's work with rhetorical appeals and the dramatic pentad was used to analyze and interpret the mentions of student success. Student success was not clearly defined or measured at the institutions sampled for the study. Figures of speech were used on college and university websites that created the impression of a parental environment in relation to the lives of college students.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The study was built on three simple questions; (a) How is student success defined at colleges and universities? (b) How is student success measured? and (c) How are words associated with student success used to influence people interested in attending undergraduate institutions of higher learning? The method of this study was to examine the language used in the top three levels of university web pages for academic affairs, the institutional president, and student affairs. The underlying assumption was that web pages reflect the central information and assumptions about success held by administrators and those who control the public message of the campus community.

The range of answers will be quite large if faculty members or administrators involved in higher education leadership are asked what student success is or means. How faculty and administrators define student success may be different from the way undergraduate students perceive success in their educational journeys. A faculty member might respond to the success question by highlighting the importance of lessons learned in the classroom and the resulting application of knowledge. An administrator might say that a successful student is one who completes his or her degree in a timely manner. Students might respond to the question by talking about their participation in cocurricular activities or meeting their parents' expectations. The variety of answers serve to illustrate the variety of perspectives about how to define student

success in ways that are beneficial for all stakeholders involved in the higher education community. The information collected and analyzed in this study presents a picture of how colleges and universities define student success through the use of words that are employed to influence interest in higher education and to identify and explain current academic trends in relation to the pursuit of the undergraduate college experience.

Problem Statement

The challenge of understanding student success in higher education may be caused in part by the confusion over the definition of student success. Some authors discuss factors that influence student success at the college level but few offer a definitive set of criteria for assessing success. Factors previously identified in published studies include such things as the amount of time a student spends on academic pursuits, the use of technology, advising, and mentoring (Nwaokoro, 2010). According to Kim, Newton, Downey, and Benton (2010), “commonly held definitions include acceptable grade average, retention toward a degree, and attainment of productive life skills” (p. 112). The pursuit of “student success is also linked with a plethora of desired student and personal development outcomes that confer benefits on individuals and society” (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2007, p. 8).

The call for accountability in higher education may demand various actions be taken within the higher educational environment. Institutional responses may include academic program development, mentoring and tutoring support, and character building activities. Colleges and universities influence student success “by organizing curricula, programs, and institutional structures in a manner that fosters student engagement” (Whitt et al., 2008, p. 237). A better definition of student success is needed to justify continued support and development of programs that benefit undergraduate college students who are seeking degree attainment.

Purpose of Study

This study was designed to fulfill several purposes. The first purpose was to examine how academic affairs and student affairs leaders at institutions of higher learning define student success. The second purpose was to identify how student success was measured at colleges and universities. The third purpose was to identify how words were used to influence those who are interested in undergraduate education at four-year colleges and universities. The final purpose of this study was to fill in the gap in the literature about defining and measuring student success.

Theories

The mission, vision, and value statements of colleges and universities may lead some readers to the conclusion that college and university administrators are focused on student development beyond the classroom environment. Words and phrases such as community engagement, public service, creative activity, and cocurricular involvement found on various college and university websites have indicated an emphasis on experiential learning outside of the classroom. On the Community Engagement web page for Indiana State University the following passage was found: “ISU has made a commitment to an even higher level of engagement so that every student has at least one community engagement experience before graduation” (Community Engagement, 2014, para. 1, http://www.indstate.edu/collegeportrait/Community_engagement.htm). A search for the terms relating to student success might lead readers to believe such words are used with a specific purpose in mind. It is possible that select words and phrases about student success came from the applied use of student development theory. The words may imply that student engagement goes beyond the pursuit of an academic degree and is an important part of the process of obtaining a degree at four-year undergraduate institutions. Words related to the concepts of caring, learning, growth, and student development

are a part of this study about defining student success and may have relevance in defining student success.

Persistence and Student Development

It was deemed important to apply a theoretical perspective in order to enhance meaning and lend structure in the tasks of defining and measuring student success and identifying rhetorical appeals used to attract the attention of college bound students. Theories exist within higher education for the purpose of offering explanations as to how and why undergraduate students function at colleges and universities. Some of the theories relate to persistence and motivation while others are based on student development, specifically as they address the issues of departure, retention, or levels of academic engagement. The theory of self-determination has been reviewed to examine the motives of students in relation to the pursuit of higher education. Astin's (1999) developmental theory of student involvement was examined to add a student development perspective. His theory refers to the amount of time and effort that students put into the pursuit of a college degree (Astin, 1999).

Astin

Astin is a highly regarded researcher of the college experience. His main areas of interest within the setting of academia are how students develop and what education professionals can do to expedite the process (Bloland, 1993). He developed a theory of student involvement to explain the impact of the environment on the success of college students. "Student involvement refers to the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to academic experience" (Astin, 1999, p. 518). The more time and energy students put into their effort to obtain an undergraduate degree, the greater the chances are that students are successful (Astin, 1999).

Astin's theory of student involvement has five fundamental principles. The first principle relates to the investment of time and energy. Time invested can apply to both general and specific objects. General objects may apply to the entire student experience such as time conferring with professors. Specific objects may refer to an activity such as working on a group project.

The second principle involves the measuring of student involvement. Different students spend varying amounts of time on diverse tasks based on personal preferences. Some students may spend more time studying for quizzes while others devote more time to social activities promoted by their academic institution.

The third principle relates to how involvement can be measured. Measures of involvement include both quantitative and qualitative means. The number of hours a student dedicates to homework assignments is a quantitative measure. The level of comprehension a student possesses from studying a particular subject is a qualitative measurement.

The fourth principle states that the amount of personal growth obtained by students is directly proportional to the level of involvement in their chosen programs. Some students may choose to become involved in professional associations related to their academic majors as opposed to students who participate in other student activities. Other activities students participate in include intramural sports, community service, Greek life, and student government associations.

The fifth principle applies directly to educational policy and practice. Effective policy and practice should increase the level of student involvement in higher education endeavors (Astin, 1999). For example, administrators at Indiana State University have created the Office of Student Success as a means to serve undergraduate students by creating effective policies and

practices. Services provided by the office include math and writing guidance, support for student athletes and financial aid support. Students may also receive guidance in selecting a major course of study (Office of Student Success, 2014, <http://www.indstate.edu/studentsuccess/>).

The application of Astin's (1985) student involvement theory can assist in better defining and measuring student success as it pertains to undergraduate degree attainment. Greater understanding of the need for increased student engagement and involvement in various areas of campus life may guide administrators and faculty members in creating intentional policies and procedures. The use of Astin's theory may also play a key role in understanding the words and phrases primary decision makers use to define their level of commitment to student success.

Other researchers

Other researchers such as Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) and Kuh (2009) have addressed the topic of student engagement and involvement. Kuh asserted that "student engagement represents the time and effort students devote to activities that are empirically linked to desired outcomes of college and what institutions do to induce students to participate in these activities" (p. 683). Pascarella and Terenzini pointed to student engagement as the practice by which students learn, grow, and develop in college. A better understanding of student engagement and involvement in college or university environments can aid in the pursuit of defining student success.

Research Questions

The Carnegie Classification has been used by colleges and universities since its introduction in the 1970s. It was "designed for researchers who sought to compare similar institutions or foundations that wanted to support a particular sector" (Jaschik, 2006, p. 1). It has also been used for "peer comparison or even as an object of strategic action" (McCormick, Pike,

Kuh, & Chen, 2009, p. 145). This present study was designed to use information from a list of peer institutions obtained from the Carnegie Classification system about four-year public colleges and universities. Select college and university websites from the Carnegie Classification list were used to gather data in order to help answer the following research questions:

1. How do colleges and universities define student success?
2. How is student success measured?
3. Are there identifiable rhetorical appeals that undergraduate colleges and universities use on their websites to influence interest in undergraduate education?

The assessment of student outcomes, such as learning and success in the collegiate environment and beyond, remains imperative for institutions of higher learning. Accrediting bodies such as the Higher Learning Commission are committed to the outcome of “student learning and to assessing so as to improve that learning” (Priddy, 2007, p. 6). Answers to the research questions addressed in the study may lead to a better understanding of the institutional meaning of student success and the re-evaluation of programs that promote or inhibit student growth and development.

Importance of Study

The importance of the study relates to the increasing emphasis on assessment and accountability practices placed on colleges and universities by state governments and accrediting bodies. Approximately 85% of college students in the United States attend public institutions (Almanac of Higher Education, 2011). State governments are in the process of reducing funding to four-year public colleges and universities (Douglass, 2010) and funding decisions are often tied to a particular institution’s retention and graduation rates.

The argument for increased accountability with regard to retention, graduation, and the funding of higher education is “that reducing public funding will not only make public universities more efficient (almost by definition), but more accountable for delivering access and quality education” (Gumport, Iannozzi, Shaman, & Zemsky, 1997, p. 30). A lack of available resources makes it imperative that colleges and universities bolster assessment practices related to the topic of student success. More concise definitions and measurements of student success could facilitate assessment and demonstrate more clearly institutional effectiveness.

Definition of Terms Used for Data Analysis

Textual Analysis

Textual analysis is a method for researchers to gather information about how other human beings make sense of the world (Carley, 1993).

Rhetorical Analysis

Rhetorical analysis is a method of analysis used to understand the meaning behind words and the motives of the authors or communicators of those words (Burke, 1950).

Contextual Analysis

Contextual analysis is a method of rhetorical analysis used to better understand the meaning of words based on the context of the written communication surrounding those words (Carley, 1993).

Dramatistic Pentad

Dramatistic pentad is Burke’s (1945) method of explaining the motives of the authors of various written communications. The five terms that make up the pentad are act, scene, agency, agent, and purpose.

Act. What action took place (Burke, 1945).

Scene. Where the act took place (Burke, 1945).

Agent. Who performed the act (Burke, 1945).

Agency. The tools or means that agent used to perform the act (Burke, 1945).

Purpose. Why the act took place.

Rhetorical Appeal

A rhetorical appeal is a means of persuasion an author or authors use to create identification with the intended audience. For example, authors use phrases such as dedicated to, cares about, and helping others to mimic the relationship between a parent and his or her child (Burke, 1950).

Trope

A trope is a word or phrase in communication that is used as a figure of speech. Categories of figures of speech include metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony. For example, the phrase *I have butterflies in my stomach* is considered a figure of speech (Fairclough, 2003).

Metaphor

A metaphor is a type of trope that describes an intended object in comparison to an otherwise unrelated object. For example, the phrase *he is the black sheep* is a metaphor because the person in question is not actually a sheep (Fairclough, 2003).

Metonymy

A metonymy is a type of trope that uses the name of an object in place of the actual object. For example, the phrase *the suits were at a meeting* is considered a metonymy. The suits are representative of business people (Fairclough, 2003).

Synecdoche

A synecdoche is a trope in which a part of something is made to represent the entirety of something else. For example, the phrase *hired hand* is used to represent a group of workers (Fairclough, 2003).

Irony

Irony is a trope that expresses the opposite meaning of the intended subject, typically for humorous effect. For example, *a fire station burning down* would be considered ironic (Fairclough, 2003).

Delimitations and Limitations

The population for the study consisted of four-year colleges and universities primarily awarding undergraduate degrees. One of the traditional measures of success at four-year institutions of higher learning is retention rate. Some of these institutions measure retention in terms of persistence to the second semester of their students' freshman year. Institutions also measure retention by four-and-six year graduation rates.

The problem with traditional measures of retention is non-degree seeking students are left out of the equation. Some of these students enroll in select courses based on employment or certification needs. Other students may enroll at a certain college or university in an attempt to raise their grade point averages and have no intention of graduating from that particular institution. Once their grade point averages have been raised, the practice of transferring to other colleges or universities may occur. Transfer students may not be counted into the graduation rates of their native schools or for the institutions in which they are currently enrolled. The

primary limitation of the study has been the inability to include non-degree seeking and transfer students in the population used to discuss defining and measuring student success.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Several undergraduate academic administrators have defined student success as persistence to graduation. “Many consider degree attainment to be the definitive measure of student success” (Kuh et al., 2007, p. 7). Other college and university administrators believe “student success is defined as academic achievement: engagement in educationally purposeful activities; satisfaction; acquisition of desired knowledge, skills, and competencies; persistence; and attainment of educational objectives” (Kuh et al., 2007, p. 10). This interpretation of student success has been challenged by some authors. “Current definitions of retention and graduation rates distort the picture of student success by limiting it to completion of a degree at the institution of entry” (Jones-White, Radcliffe, Hussman & Kellogg, 2010, p. 154).

Other colleges and universities believe “student success is defined as academic achievement; engagement in educationally purposeful activities; satisfaction; acquisition of desired knowledge, skills, and competencies; persistence; and attainment of educational objectives” (Kuh et al., 2007, p. 10). Some, however, believe existing definitions of student success remain too limited in scope. “Current definitions of retention and graduation rates distort the picture of student success by limiting it to completion of a degree at the institution of entry” (Jones-White et al., 2010, p. 154).

Some educational leaders have sought to develop theories describing or explaining various collegiate phenomena. Some theories relate to the concepts of persistence and student development. Some of the concepts discussed in regard to student success include involvement, engagement, and integration. These concepts “provide a common language and a body of knowledge to inform understanding of challenges currently facing higher education in this era of increased scrutiny of student achievement” (Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Kinzie, 2009, p, 407). Following is a review of definitions, theories, and perceptions of various individuals along with the factors influencing the traditional perceptions of student success at undergraduate colleges and universities.

Defining Student Success

Defining student success can be a challenging undertaking. Stakeholders with an interest in higher education are among the group of people interested in student success. Several factors must be taken into consideration when exploring how to define student success. Some factors include the desired outcomes for students in relation to the perception of student success, the students themselves, grades, graduation, and integration rates within the college and or university setting.

A study by Jones-White et al. (2010) was designed to redefine student success across various academic institutions of higher learning. The authors used a model to identify the four outcomes that define traditional student success. Outcomes included in the study were “baccalaureate degree from the home institution, baccalaureate degree from another higher education institution, associate degree/certificate award from another institution, or student failed to obtain a degree in the six-year period examined” (Jones-White et al., 2010, p. 155). The study

was designed to highlight the implications of various methods used to determine the traditional definition and measurement of student success.

Jones-White et al. (2010) concluded that all the literature reviewed for their study was based on a single institutionalized meaning of student success. They believe expanding the definition of student success would shift the focus of success from an institutional perspective to a student-centered perspective. The authors did suggest, however, that existing theory was sufficient to generate a clear understanding of student success.

Traditional Measures

Some of the studies written about student success in college focus solely on grades and graduation rates. “This conceptualization is limited because students might view becoming independent and developing social relationships as additional examples of being successful in college” (Yazedjian, Toews, Sevin, & Purswell, 2008, p. 141). Yazedjian et al. (2008) conducted a study with 22 undergraduates to determine how students define and measure student success. Focus groups were used to uncover definitions and strategies associated with college success.

The indicator of success most frequently identified by students included in the study was grades (Yazedjian et al., 2008). Students also referred to other factors contributing to overall grade point average and graduation rates. “Students reported that being successful in college meant being able to demonstrate responsibility and independence” (Yazedjian et al., p. 146). A sense of autonomy was apparently an important part of the college experience for the students who participated in the study.

Another factor frequently linked to undergraduate student success was previous high school experience. Experience refers to the variables of academic achievement and aptitude. These variables are often measured by grade point average, achievement tests, and aptitude tests.

Aptitude tests include both the Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT) and the American College Testing (ACT) exam (Kim et al., 2010). Aptitude tests have been characterized as barriers to achievement. “Student success depends on the salience of each individual barrier for a given student and that student’s ability to overcome a particular configuration of barriers on a given campus” (Padilla, 1999, p. 135). Other measures of student success for undergraduate students wanting to pursue graduate education opportunities include graduate school admission test scores, graduate and professional school enrollment and completion rates, and performance on discipline or field specific examinations such as the Praxis in education and CPA tests in accountancy (Kuh et al., 2007).

Common Attributes

The literature related to student success suggests that students deemed successful by academic institutions have certain common attributes. Successful students are identified by the following traits:

academically talented and supported in their quest for a college degree, and exhibit a high level of motivation and commitment to their education goals, exert a quality effort in their studies, and make themselves at home in the academic and social cultures of the campus, where their previous knowledge and experiences are valued and enlarged.

(Padilla, 1999, p. 133)

Some scholars believe the true measure of student success is what happens after graduation.

These scholars believe a successful student is one who obtains a decent salary and a professional position in their field of choice (Curtin & Gasman, 2003).

Theories

Student success theories offer varying perspectives as to why students may or may not persist in efforts to obtain an undergraduate degree. Some of the most widely read theories touch on factors associated with doing well in the collegiate environment. Astin (1999) and Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) have written about factors related to student success. Much of their work focuses on the concepts of involvement, engagement, and integration. Other academics believe it is necessary to clarify the distinction between the various concepts of persistence and student development. “These concepts each add something unique and important to understanding student development and success that can be lost among those who cite them without fully understanding their definition and use” (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009, p. 408). The following section is a review of theory and concepts related to persistence and student development.

Self-Determination Theory

An important question must be answered before beginning a review of the literature on self-determination theory: What are the factors behind the choice to go to college? Shultz and Higbee (2007) asserted the two predominate reasons for attending college are knowledge acquisition and preparing for work after college. In Shultz and Higbee’s study, college students perceived career preparation as the main reason for obtaining a higher education degree. Green and Hill (2003) listed the top five reasons for going to college as “a) to improve career opportunities, b) to increase knowledge, c) to make more money, d) to succeed like or unlike your parents, and e) to have a more balanced life” (p. 559). Another reason cited for why students go to college and persist in the attainment of an undergraduate degree was the opportunity to have a positive impact on communities. “The wider social benefits from higher education attainment (higher volunteering and civic participation, lower crimes, etc.) are not

quite as overwhelmingly demonstrated and known, but have become increasingly publicized in recent years” (Trostel, 2010, p. 221).

Factors relating to motivation are also key elements in educational attainment.

Motivation is defined as having both the energy and desire to complete an action. “The degree to which an individual’s psychological need of competence, autonomy, and relatedness are being met within any performance context will determine if that person is motivated or unmotivated to perform the task(s) at hand” (Ballmann & Mueller, 2008, p. 90). College students may be motivated based on feelings and whether or not actions lead to desired outcomes. An optimal environment for motivation to occur and for tasks to be completed is one that allows for “feelings of competency, autonomy, and relatedness” (Vallerand, Pelletier, & Koestner, 2008, p. 257).

Self-determination theory was founded on the premise of people seeking out situations in specific environments that are both challenging and rewarding at the same time (Ballman & Mueller, 2008). The theory suggests that a combination of skills, knowledge, and beliefs enables a person to engage in goal-centered, self-regulated, autonomous behavior. An understanding of one’s strengths and limitations together with a belief in oneself as capable and effective are essential to self-determination. “When acting on the basis of these skills and attitudes, individuals have greater ability to take control of their lives and assume the roles of successful adults” (Denney & Daviso, 2012, p. 44).

Based on lessons learned from the study of self-determination theory it can be inferred that college students who engage in behaviors leading to structure and organization are more likely to reach educational goals. Self-determination theory allows for a better understanding of

student behavior in the higher education setting and is useful as a guide to planning student interventions when necessary (Vallerand et al., 2008).

Three basic psychological needs are supported by self-determination theory: competence, autonomy, and relatedness. The need for competence refers to the human need to control outcomes and feel effective in bringing about desired outcomes. The need for autonomy refers to the human need to feel the origin of the individual's behavior exists within the individual's self. The need for relatedness refers to the human need to feel a sense of belonging to a social group (Darner, 2009). Students who perceive all three psychological needs are being met are more likely to participate in behaviors leading to attainment of educational goals. Behaviors leading to educational goal attainment include studying and participating in classroom discussions (Ballmann & Mueller, 2008).

Astin and Student Development

Student development in the higher education environment is a popular subject for higher education scholars. Astin is one of the most published authors on the topic of students in higher education. Much of his work appearing in academic journal articles and books focuses on the concept of student involvement and the input-environment-output (I-E-O) model (Astin, 1993).

Astin's work with issues related to student involvement began with a study of students who did not complete a bachelor's degree. He was able to identify factors in the collegiate environment affecting retention and persistence to graduation (Astin, 1985). Astin found factors such as time and effort played an important role in the pursuit of educational attainment by undergraduate college students. "According to the theory, the extent to which students can achieve particular development goals is a direct function of the time and effort they devote to activities designed to produce these gains" (Astin, 1999, p. 522). Astin's student involvement

theory does not put the burden of activity solely on the shoulders of students. It suggests more attention from faculty, student affairs professionals, and in some instances administrators is needed for students classified as the “passive, reticent, or underprepared students” (Astin, 1985, p. 150).

The task of clarifying the meaning of student involvement is considered a complex undertaking by members of the higher education system. A typical undergraduate student may participate in myriad activities including studying, community service projects, and social activities taking place both on and off campus with one’s collegiate peers. Astin defined student involvement as the “amount of physical and psychological energy a student devotes to his/her academic experience” (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009, p. 410). Astin asserted the energy students put forth in the pursuit of the academic experience is measurable.

Quite simply, student involvement refers to the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience. A highly involved student is one who, for example, devotes considerable energy to studying, spends a lot of time on campus, participates actively in student organizations, and interacts frequently with faculty members and other students. Conversely, an uninvolved student may neglect studies, spend little time on campus, abstain from extra-curricular activities, and have little contact with faculty members or other students. (Astin, 1985, p. 134)

Faculty, administrators, and students are just some of the people participating in student involvement activities on college and university campuses.

Five basic postulates. Astin’s (1985) student involvement theory includes the five basic postulates of involvement, continuum, qualitative and quantitative features, the amount of student learning, and the effectiveness of educational policy as it relates to increasing student

involvement. Astin (1984) detailed each of the five postulates elaborating on the various factors associated with student involvement. Involvement means the investment of both physical and psychological energy in different objects. In terms of measurable outcomes involvement occurs differently depending on the individual student. One student might invest more time and energy in a specific activity another student would. The amount of student learning, growth, and development was tied to the quantity and quality of commitment to task. “The effectiveness of any educational practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase involvement” (Astin, 1984, p. 298). Astin (1984) believed designing better educational programming for undergraduate students should be the outcome of policies related to student involvement.

Faculty and administrators. Astin’s (1984) theory of student involvement applies not only to students but also to faculty and administrators. Faculty and administrators are tasked with the responsibility of creating effective learning environments in which students are engaged in both knowledge acquisition and experiences that promote personal learning, growth and development (Astin, 1985). They must recognize that virtually every institutional policy and practice (such as class schedules, policies on office hours for faculty, student orientation, and advising, and regulations on class attendance, academic probation, and participation in honors courses) can affect the way students spend time and effort devoted to academic pursuits (Astin, 1999). Astin (1999) wrote that in addition to creating institutional policies and procedures related to student involvement, faculty and administrators must also be concerned with the amount of time devoted to students.

Astin (1985) wrote that satisfaction with college life was what will keep students engaged in the pursuit of knowledge and attaining an undergraduate degree. Faculty members need to

increase interactions with students to maintain a level of student satisfaction with academic programs. Frequent undergraduate student interactions with faculty members are more strongly associated with satisfaction with college than any other type of involvement or any other student or institutional characteristic. “Students who interact frequently with faculty members are more likely than other students to express satisfaction with all aspects of their institutional experiences, including student friendships, variety of courses, intellectual environment, and even the administration of the institution” (Astin, 1999, p. 525). More interactions between students and faculty members can also lead to positive outcomes for students such as learning, growth, and development.

Obstacles. Astin (1993) acknowledged obstacles in the pursuit of degree attainment by undergraduate students. Obstacles come in the form of distractions which kept students from fully investing time and energy in academic pursuits. Faculty members were competing with outside forces to gain the attention of undergraduate students. “The student’s investment in matters relating to family, friends, job, and other outside activities represents a reduction in the time and energy the student has to devote to his or her educational development” (Astin, 1985, p. 143).

Applications. Astin (1985) wrote that his theory of student involvement has important applications within the realm of higher education. Not all of the applications were directly focused on the time and energy students put into academic pursuits. Educators should use Astin’s theory as it applies to the better understanding of student behavior and as it relates to the practice of teaching and managing relationships with students.

Perhaps the most important application of the student involvement theory to teaching is that, as I mentioned earlier, the instructor focuses less on content and on teaching

techniques and more on what students are actually doing; how motivated they are and how much time and energy they devote to the learning process. (Astin, 1985, pp. 150-151)

Astin suggested student learning and development is greater if faculty members gain a better understanding of student behavior and motivation and if the focus of teaching is less on the technical aspects involved with the pursuit of knowledge acquisition.

Student affairs practitioners. Educators on campus are not limited to faculty members who teach in the classroom. Student affairs practitioners also play an important role in learning and involvement. Their efforts are focused on getting students actively engaged and involved in campus life outside of the traditional classroom environment. Student affairs practitioners are responsible for creating activities and programs to serve the purpose of bonding students to the institutional environment both inside and outside the classroom. “Three critical areas of campus life which are common on many campuses include Greek life, student government, and orientation programs” (Moore, Lovell, McGann, & Wyrick, 1998, p. 9).

I-E-O model. Astin (1993) developed a model to further illustrate how his theory of student involvement works within the collegiate academic setting. In the book, *What Matters in College?: Four Critical Years Revisited* (1993), Astin’s theory of student involvement and model were discussed in relation to the impact that college had on the life of students. Astin (1993) in his theory of student involvement wrote that the amount of time and effort students put into the pursuit of an undergraduate degree is important. “A highly involved student is one who, for example, devotes considerable energy to studying, spends much time on campus, participates actively in student organizations, and interacts frequently with faculty members or other students” (Astin, 1999, p. 518).

Astin (1993) used the I-E-O model in the study of college student involvement. Input refers to the characteristics that students bring with them to college. Input characteristics include personal traits, attitudes, and beliefs about life in general. Environment refers to the factors that students encounter on college campuses. Environment factors include programming, policies, faculty, peers, and experiences related to campus life. Outcome refers to “the student’s characteristics after exposure to the environment” (Astin, 1993, p. 7).

The basic premise of Astin’s (1993) I-E-O model is to examine the environmental factors influencing outcomes such as success or failure in the college undergraduate setting. “Studying student development with the I-E-O model provides educators, students, and policy makers with a better basis for knowing how to achieve desired educational outcomes” (Astin, 1993, p. 7). Specifying relevant outcomes, such as what leads to student success, are a challenge as they relate to the measuring and assessments of said outcomes (Astin, 1993).

Pursuit of excellence. Astin’s (1985) work in higher education does not relate solely to understanding the variables related to student involvement. Astin (1985) also wrote about the pursuit of excellence in higher education, studying traditional views and their counterproductive influences, and excellence in the quest for developing human talent. He suggested past attempts to define excellence in higher education revolved around a few factors valued by institutions and the people charged with the responsibility for operations. Factors included an institution’s perception of prestige, the elite nature of the admissions process, and the socioeconomic status of students who attended colleges and universities such as Harvard, Yale and Stanford (Astin, 1985). At these institutions, “the terms best and highest quality are synonymous with most prestigious” (Astin, 1985, p. 5). Astin’s (1985) research has led him to the conclusion that

perceptions of higher quality applied to prestigious higher learning institutions do not necessarily translate into more educational benefits for undergraduate students pursuing student success.

Wolf-Wendel, Ward, and Kinzie

Other higher education professionals have studied and written about concepts that relate to the development of undergraduate students. Wolf-Wendel et al. (2009) wrote that the concepts of involvement, engagement, and integration had a significant impact on the meaning and the understanding of college student goal achievement. Their work examined how involvement, engagement, and integration evolved over time and how the concepts contribute to student development. Wolf-Wendel et al., wrote that defining student success was imperative because “lack of common definitions and understanding can lead to unclear communication and worse, sloppy scholarship and ineffective practice” (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009, p. 407). Astin’s (2009) work was referenced throughout their study in an effort to define these concepts.

Involvement. “Involvement accounts for the time and energy that students spend but also acknowledges the contribution of the environment” (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009, p. 411). Involvement includes time students spend on classroom activities, social activities, and extracurricular activities. The focus of involvement is on the individual student. The student determines what level of involvement will be given to various classroom and campus activities. “Involvement has been linked via research to almost every positive outcome of college” (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009, p. 412). Campus constituents use the concept of involvement to develop programming designed to engage students and to promote the bonding process with the academic institution (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009).

Engagement. The concept of engagement as defined by Wolf-Wendel et al. (2009) identifies two basic elements: actions of students and actions of the institution. “Engagement is

about two parties who enter into an agreement about the educational experience” (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009, p. 413). The agreement includes expectations of students pursuing an academic degree and what types of services were provided by the institution in order to help students reach educational goals. Students are expected to put time and effort into studies and other activities leading to educational goals. Institutions are expected to set aside resources and establish learning opportunities to encourage student participation (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009). Engagement in academic and social activities has been shown to lead to positive outcomes for students. “High levels of student engagement are associated with a wide range of educational practices and conditions, including purposeful student-faculty contact, and active and collaborative learning” (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009, p. 413).

Integration. The concept of integration is used to explain the bond between students and the academic institution. Integration includes the sharing of attitudes, the beliefs of peers and faculty, and “the extent to which students adhere to the structural rules and requirements of the institution” (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009, p. 413). Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) identified the five constructs as peer group interaction, faculty interaction, faculty concern for student development and teaching, academic and intellectual development, and goal and institutional commitment.

Social and academic integration. Integration in academics has been broken down into two basic categories: The categories are social integration and academic integration.

Social integration refers to students’ perceptions of interactions with their peer groups, faculty, and staff at the institution as well as involvement in extra- and cocurricular activities. Academic integration refers to perceptions of the experiences in formal and informal academic systems resulting from interactions with faculty, staff, and students

inside and outside the classroom setting that enhances the intellectual development of the student. (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009, p. 415)

Tinto (1975) observed that the outcome identified as graduation was predicted by both social and academic integration of students. Student narratives suggest social integration is an important part of the academic experience as it leads to a sense of connectivity to peers and the institution (Yazedjian et al., 2008).

Summary. Wolf-Wendel et al. (2009) provided a summary for integration as it relates to the pursuit of an undergraduate academic degree. Integration was defined as the perception of fit between the student and the academic institution. Integration was focused on specific outcomes like retention and persistence to graduation. The first year at college, according to Wolf-Wendel et al., is crucial in cementing the bond of integration between students and the academic institution. Integration in practice is a reciprocal commitment between students and academic institutions. “The student needs to be willing to become integrated into the college environment and the institution needs to create opportunities for the student to become integrated” (Wolf-Wendel et al., p. 416).

Wolf-Wendel et al. (2009) wrote that evidence exists to prove involvement, engagement, and integration are useful concepts in the effort to define student success at college and universities. Wolf-Wendel et al. also wrote that there is room for improvement in understanding concepts related to student success. “Given the prevalence of use in theory and practice of the terms involvement, engagement, and integration, it is particularly important to tease out nuances of these concepts in research related to student development and success” (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009, p. 426).

Differing Perceptions of Student Success

Scholars, educational practitioners, and students have written about concepts and perceptions related to student achievement. Some of the concepts have included involvement, engagement, and integration. Student success has also been written about and discussed in relation to occupational achievement, social status, and academic goal attainment. Factors tied to student success include “the instructional climate of classrooms, the learning styles of students, advisement, vocational/career services, and professional development of faculty and diversity issues” (Fontana et al., 2005, p. 202).

The perception of student success at four-year colleges and universities depends on the viewpoints of the stakeholders in question. Faculty members and college students are both considered stakeholder groups within the higher education academic environment. Each of the groups contributes to the cultures of the academic institutions. Perceptions of what it takes to achieve college student success and how that success is defined varies greatly due in part to the individual opinions expressed in the literature reviewed for the study.

Faculty Members

Faculty members at institutions of higher learning play an important role in the level of educational attainment achieved by undergraduate college students. Faculty members are tasked with the responsibility of sharing lessons and instilling knowledge about a wide range of undergraduate subject material and have opinions of what it takes to create the perception of a successful college student. Faculty members have also voiced opinions in academic literature pertaining to academic standards, expectations, and responsibilities and the roles of college students in general. Faculty members believe students are not ready to face the academic challenges of college. “Although the responding faculty feels that students are unprepared, and

are not working up to the requisite standard, they are satisfied that the grades they themselves assign reflect student learning” (Wyatt, Saunders, & Zelmer, 2005, p. 36).

Collier and Morgan (2007) wrote that faculty members are aware that surviving college at the undergraduate level is more complex than facing the academic challenges presented in the classroom. Students must learn to match academic skills to the various expectations of each faculty member. Faculty concerns regarding expectations for students fell into the broad categories of “workload and priorities, the explicitness of expectations and assignments, and issues related to communication and problem solving” (Collier & Morgan, 2007, p. 432). Faculty members, according to Collier and Morgan also believed education for students must come first. Other commitments such as outside jobs and family demands should take a secondary role to the pursuit of higher education (Collier & Morgan, 2007).

Students

Undergraduate students are influenced by several factors in regard to the perception of college life and academic success. “Many studies continue to conceptualize success in college purely in terms of grades and graduation rates” (Yazedjian et al., 2008, p. 141). Undergraduate student perceptions of college life appear to be multifaceted. Students seem to believe success in college goes beyond the classroom environment. For undergraduate students the perception of college success includes social integration and feelings of autonomy (Yazedjian et al., 2008).

Social integration is an important aspect of the collegiate experience for undergraduate students. The concept of social integration implies college students need to have a sense of connection with the undergraduate institution (Yazedjian et al., 2008). The concept of social integration includes interactions between students and faculty members. Part of the interactions between the two groups involves the demonstration of teaching skills. Students stated that it was

easier to relate to faculty members who were perceived as having credibility in the subjects being taught in the classroom. “Clearly, the more students perceived that their instructors demonstrated these teaching skills, the more likely these same students were to become socially integrated, to feel committed to the institution, and to intend to reenroll at their institution” (Braxton, Bray, & Burger, 2000, p. 222).

Student’s perceptions of faculty members’ behaviors had an influence on whether or not a certain level of achievement in college had been obtained. The behaviors students looked for in faculty members include:

(a) encouraging, supporting, and believing in them; (b) motivating them and wanting to see them learn; (c) taking time for them, expressing an interest in them, and communicating to them that they are important; (d) relating to them on their level; and (e) pushing them to excel while at the same time helping them to understand difficult concepts. (Schreiner, Noel, Anderson, & Cantwell, 2011, p. 328)

Behaviors on the part of faculty members, along with classroom environments including active learning, helped to shape student’s perceptions of finding “the collegiate experience as personally rewarding” (Braxton, Milem, & Shaw-Sullivan, 2000, p. 572).

Undergraduate college students also valued autonomy as a contributing factor to the perception of college success. “The word autonomy comes from ancient Greek, providing the overarching meaning of giving laws to oneself” (Swaine, 2012, p. 107). Students want to make individual choices while experiencing the collegiate environment. The academic and social components of success were reflected in the ability to “navigate the college environment on their own, a topic that is not frequently discussed as a component of college success. Students

reported that being successful in college meant being able to demonstrate responsibility and independence” (Yazedjian et al., 2008, p. 146).

Culture

Institutions of higher learning are organizations designed with the purpose of contributing to the learning, growth and development of undergraduate students. Faculty members and undergraduate students contribute to the overall culture of colleges and universities. Kuh (2001) defined university culture with the following attributes:

The collective, mutually shaping patterns of institutional history, mission, physical settings, norms, traditions, values, practices, beliefs, and assumptions that guide the behavior of individuals and groups in an institution of higher education and which provide a frame of reference for interpreting the meanings of events and actions on and off campus. (p. 25)

The culture of an undergraduate institution of higher learning is considered to be one of the contributing factors to the development of undergraduate students. Kuh (2001) wrote that colleges and universities having strict guidelines for learning and student performance “exert a stronger cultural pull by teaching students what is important and inducing them in ways that will help them to succeed academically and socially” (p. 27).

Bolman and Deal

Bolman and Deal offered a complementary and somewhat expanded definition of culture as a concept that includes both a product and a process. “As a product, it embodies wisdom accumulated from experience. As a process, it is renewed and re-created as newcomers learn the old ways and eventually become teachers themselves” (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 269).

Regarding culture, what remains to be seen is whether or not success leads to a cohesive culture or if culture leads to success (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

Kuh and Conflict

Kuh (2001) published a study about the effects of culture in relation to student persistence. He suggested an institution's culture sets it apart from other institutions. Each institution has its own "value structures, norms, and other cultural properties, such as symbols, traditions, language, and so forth" (Kuh, 2001, p. 25). Conflict appears to arise when the values, beliefs, and traditions of undergraduate students conflict with the chosen academic institution. Conflict between faculty expectations and the expectations of undergraduate students comes in the form of behavior control. Undergraduate students in general have a history of resisting attempts to change behavior. Faculty attempts to control student behavior lead to "forming of groups to circumvent or counteract institutional influence" (Kuh, 2001, p. 25).

Subcultures

Several subcultural students groups exist within the academic environment. Such groups include fraternities, sororities, and honors societies. The undergraduate student groups serve the purpose of enhancing the college experience.

One would expect that active members of enhancing student subcultures would be more likely to persist and members of counter-cultural groups less likely. However, members of certain counter-cultural groups such as fraternities and male athletic teams are usually more likely to report higher levels of satisfaction with college and are more likely to persist and graduate than non-members. (Kuh, 2001, p. 29)

Kuh believes for some of the members of fraternity, sorority, or honor society groups bonding with other members can lead to persistence to graduation. He also mentions members of groups stay together because there is no other preferable option for bonding (Kuh, 2001).

Culture and Persistence

Kuh (2001) wrote that the relationship between culture and persistence relies on the assumption that colleges and universities do indeed have some influence over the lives of undergraduate students. The influence or control may come in the form of selective admissions, financial aid, and scholarship awards. The question remains as to what extent it is likely student success is a product of the student's willingness to conform to institutional standards. There is also a question as to whether or not an institution should adapt to the changing cultural expectations of incoming students (Kuh, 2001). According to Kuh, "institutional cultures that value and celebrate community have higher student satisfaction and retention rates" (Kuh, 2001, p. 28).

Summary

This chapter contains a review of literature on factors influencing student success. The factors influencing student success include traditional measures such as grade point average, achievement test scores, and graduation rates. The issues of student involvement and engagement as they relate to student success were reviewed in regard to the work of Astin (1999). Theories about self-determination were also reviewed to ascertain what motivates students to go to college. Literature included in this chapter identified the differences in opinion between faculty and students as to what constitutes student success.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The overall purpose of the study was to bring a greater understanding of how colleges and universities have defined and measured student success through rhetorical analysis. Top-level web pages of Academic Affairs, Office of the President, and Student Affairs departments from similar institutions were studied to reveal whether or not student success was clearly defined and measured. Top-level pages are defined as the first three pages of department websites. Commonly used words and phrases were analyzed to determine how the concept of student success was utilized by institutions in appealing to prospective students.

A theoretical framework for the study was chosen to identify and bring meaning to rhetorical appeals collected from websites. Rhetorical analysis was employed to identify how words are used to motivate and cultivate interest in higher education as well as to illustrate how college and university stakeholders demonstrated interest regarding undergraduate student needs. The method of textual analysis can be used as a tool to bring greater understanding to the written word. Textual analysis can also help readers discover less obvious themes not apparent during an initial review of the materials published on various institutional websites.

Burke (1950) used rhetorical analysis as a way to offer greater meaning to the written word. His strategy was to identify how words were used to accomplish goals. Burke's approach assumes a text's structure is to be described most accurately by thinking always of the text's

function. “It assumes that the text is designed to ‘do something’ for the writer and his readers, and that we can make the most relevant observations about its design by considering the text as the embodiment of this act” (Lewis, 1984, p. 368). Although Selzer (2004) claimed there is no generally accepted definition of rhetorical analysis, he does state rhetorical analysis can be used as a tool in “an effort to understand how people within specific social situations attempt to influence others through language” (p. 281). Burke’s work is still in use today including the 2013 study “What Popular Films Teach Us about Values: Locked Inside with the Rage” by Brummett.

Research Question 1

Results from a sample of 30 undergraduate colleges and universities were collected and organized into meaningful groupings based on common attributes of level (four-year or above), control (public), and classification/category (professions plus arts and sciences, some graduate coexistence) with the guidance of Burke’s (1950) work in rhetorical analysis. The common attributes used in the selection of the sample institutions are similar to those of Indiana State University. Analysis of the data helped to determine whether or not the sample institutions have a definition for student success. The first research question under consideration for the study focused on how colleges and universities define student success. If a particular institution defined student success that factor was noted and further textual analysis based on Burke’s (1950) theoretical framework was conducted. If no definition for student success was found on particular institution’s website, the non-occurrence was noted.

Research Question 2

The second research question for the study dealt with how student success was measured. Traditional measures of college student success include retention, grade point average, and

graduation rates. In the course of collecting materials for the literature review it was determined the measures of retention, grade point average, and graduation rates are still the standards used to determine institutional effectiveness at undergraduate colleges and universities.

Research Question 3

The third research question for the study relates to whether or not undergraduate colleges and universities use identifiable rhetorical appeals on websites to influence interest in undergraduate education. Each research question was used to reveal the institutional motives behind publishing website material. The discovery allowed for a deeper understanding of the textual meaning of words and phrases analyzed for the study. Inferences were made based on the passages analyzed from college and university websites.

Population and Sample

It was my desire to study institutions that had a number of characteristics in common with Indiana State University. Colleges and universities were included in the study based on type of control (public), level of degree programs (four-year and above), and types of degree programs available (arts and sciences, some graduate coexistence, etc.). The demographic profile identified a population of 135 colleges or universities from which a random sample of 30 institutions was drawn for the study. A randomizer from random.org was then used to select a sample of 30 institutions from the larger population based on the saturation point of the data collected for analysis. It was determined that 30 institutions, each to be examined in the areas of Academic Affairs, Office of the President, and Student Affairs, would yield at least 30 data sources per department. Consequently, data from a tutoring office web page that is not directly linked to an Academic Affairs, Office of the President, or Student Affairs site was not be

considered for this study. The intent of this study was to focus on institutional-wide statements about student success.

Method

The literature review in this qualitative study was based on previous educational research in the area of student development, which included the issues of departure, retention, and academic engagement. Among the interests of student development researchers are the issues of departure, retention, and academic engagement. Academic journal articles have been reviewed for the perspectives of faculty members and students in regarding what student success means. Rhetorical analysis was used to broaden the understanding of texts written in reference to student success on undergraduate college and university websites.

Study Design

For this study, words and phrases from the three top-level pages of Academic Affairs, Office of the President, and Student Affairs websites were analyzed to determine possible underlying meanings through the use of rhetorical analysis. A text could have different forms. A text could be a form of communication such as a movie, television program, or a magazine. For this present study, a text has been defined as a word or phrase related to student success presented on a website.

Textual Analysis

Textual analysis is not an exact science. The meanings, values, and interpretations of the qualitative tool are left to individual researcher bias. Textual analysis is a way for researchers to gather information about how other human beings make sense of the world.

It is a methodology, a data gathering process, for those researchers who want to understand the ways in which members of various cultures and subcultures make sense of

who they are and of how they fit into the world in which they live. Textual analysis is useful for researchers working in cultural studies, media studies, in mass communication, and perhaps even in sociology and philosophy. (McKee, 2003, p. 1)

Researchers can employ different forms of textual analysis as methodologies for understanding and interpreting texts. Different methodologies will provide different interpretations and different results for textual communication (McKee, 2003). Contextual analysis has also been used for the study as a tool to describe a surface level reading of texts. Contextual analysis is a method of rhetorical analysis used to better understand the meanings of words based on the context of the written communication surrounding words and phrases. “To define, or determine a thing, is to mark its boundaries, hence to use terms that possess, implicitly at least, contextual reference” (Burke, 1945, p. 24). Both methods can be used together to give richer meaning to rhetorical appeals.

Rhetorical Analysis

Rhetorical analysis was the form of textual analysis chosen for the study. Burke (1950) defined rhetoric as “the use of words by human agents to form attitudes or to induce actions in other human agents” (p. 41). Rhetoric used as a form of communication to persuade others to believe in certain courses of action (Burke, 1950). Rhetorical analysis “can be understood as an effort to understand how people within specific social situations attempt to influence others through language” (Selzer, 2004, p. 281). People who use the method of rhetorical analysis are attempting to understand the meaning behind words and the motives of the communicators of words.

Rhetorical analysis can employ the method known as *dramatistic pentad* to explain the motives of the authors of various written communications. The five terms making up the pentad are act, scene, agency, agent, and purpose.

In a rounded statement about motives, you must have some word that names the act (names what took place, in thought or deed), and another that names the scene (the background of the act, the situation in which it occurred); also, you must indicate what person or kind of person (agent) performed the act, what means or instruments he used (agency), and the purpose (Burke, 1945).

Metaphorically speaking, dramatistic pentad allows for the rhetorical analysis of words to be compared to a drama presented on a theater stage anywhere in the world (Burke, 1945).

Procedures

Top-level pages of websites from the functional areas of Academic Affairs, Office of the President, and Student Affairs departments at selected institutions were searched for mentions of the phrase student success. Functional areas are referred to as departments for purposes of this research. Top-level pages were considered to be the first three pages of each department's website. The pages were accessed through direct links on the home page of the department's website. Alternate searches such as the Office of Chancellor in place of the Office of the President were taken into consideration to accommodate local terminology (see Table 1: Alternate Web Pages). Acceptable alternate departments share similar characteristics to the original departments of Academic Affairs, Office of the President, and Student Affairs. Only mentions representing university level statements were used. For example, the Provost Office at University of Southern Indiana is responsible for academic affairs functions. If a mention of

student success occurred from a link unrelated to the initial search it was not considered for the study. No direct contact with the institutions or travel was necessary.

Table 1

Alternate Web Pages

Sites		Alternate Sites	
Academic Affairs	Provost	Academic and	
		Student Affairs	
Student Affairs	Student Life	Dean of Students	Student Services
Office of the President	Chancellor's Office		

Data Tabulation

All research questions were considered for each of the sample's 30 institutions randomly chosen for the study. The practice of rhetorical analysis was used to analyze the stated, implied, and inferred meaning of the texts. Each mention or related mention of the phrase student success was used as a data point. The paragraph surrounding each instance was used to ascertain context from the phrases. The ideal was a website that provided a specific and measurable definition of student success. The lack of student success being mentioned was also noted as a data point.

A table for the first research question was created to determine whether or not an institution defines student success. The table lists the institution and indicates whether or not a definition for student success was provided on the website. Additional tables were created for the rhetorical analysis of research questions based on Burke's (1945) use of the dramatic pentadic. The tables were used to compile the data from each question. The first dramatic pentadic table created for Research Question 1 contains an analysis of the texts related to the act

and the agency. The table contains the data collected for textual analysis. The second table for the dramatic pentadic method of analysis pertains to Research Question 3 and contains answers to the question regarding actor, agent, and purpose. All of the tables created for the purpose of analyzing data are located in the appendixes of this document.

Gathering the Data

The process of collecting data was kept simple in order to ensure the feasibility of the study. Rules for collecting data were developed, a software program was used to organize the data for repeated review, and all information gathered was stored in a password secure Dropbox account. Consistency in how the data were collected from each site in the sample was considered important to enhancing the credibility of the study.

Rules

The rules for collecting data were kept simple. Data came from three different department websites within each college and/or university chosen at random for the study. The departments were Academic Affairs, Office of the President, and Student Affairs. Alternate sites are listed in Table 1. The first three pages of each department website were used to gather data. Any instance of the mention, definition, or measure of student success was recorded for further analysis. Each instance of a data point was coded into categories for further analysis. The categories were used to discover trends in the data such as the frequency of particular words and phrases. The data points are discussed in Chapter 5 of the study.

Data Collection

The process for gathering the data was aided by a qualitative software program. Nvivo 10 by QSR International was used to collect and store data from each college and university departmental website page. Three folders containing a group of 10 institutions were created

within Nvivo 10. The procedure was utilized to make the process of collecting data from each institution more manageable. Each institution's web pages were accessed through the Google search engine. A search was conducted for each of the chosen departments (Academic Affairs, Office of the President, and Student Affairs) once the institution's homepage was located. Several of the institutions selected for study did not have one or more of the departments listed on their home pages. In such cases, alternative department/unit titles, such as Student Life, the Chancellor's Office, and the Provost's Office, were sought. A list of alternative departments appears in Appendix A: Research Questions 1, 2, and 3.

The Nvivo 10 software allowed individual web pages to be imported as a portable document file. The pages were imported into the software program and analyzed for points of data. The data points were then grouped into categories for further analysis.

Seventeen out of 30 schools sampled for the study mentioned student success on Academic Affairs, Office of the President, and/or Student Affairs websites. The seventeen included were

- Bowling Green State University, Main Campus
- Central Michigan University
- East Tennessee State University
- Louisiana Tech University
- Missouri State University
- Morgan State University
- North Dakota State, Main Campus
- Northwest Missouri State University
- Sam Houston State University

- Southern University and A&M College
- Texas Southern University
- The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga
- The University of Texas at Tyler
- University of Louisiana Monroe
- University of Maryland Eastern Shore
- University of Southern Indiana
- Winston-Salem State University

Length and content. The length and content of the mentions of student success varied. Some of the mentions were short. On the Morgan State University Office of the Provost and the Office of Academic Affairs website the mention of student success is “Office of Student Success and Retention” (Where To?, 2014, para. 2, http://www.morgan.edu/administration/academic_affairs/mission_and_vision.html). Other mentions of student success are longer, such as the following paragraph from the Division of Student Affairs website at Bowling Green State University Main Campus:

The Division of Student Affairs advances the mission of Bowling Green State University by promoting student learning and personal growth, and developing communities that value all members. We collaborate across the university to implement innovative and student-centered programs, practices, and services to support student success. (Division of Student Affairs, 2012, para. 2, <http://www.bgsu.edu/offices/sa/vp/priorities/page68681.html>)

More time for data analysis was given to *mentions* not considered to be titles of college and university departments because those mentions had more context surrounding the words student success to analyze.

Rules and Explanations for Tabling and Analyzing the Data

Every effort was made to ensure consistency in the early stages of data collection including the use of tables to aid responses to each research question. Rules and explanations were established for each table. For example, a table was created to track the use of alternate websites selected for review before mentions, definitions and measures of student success were collected. The following list contains the rules and explanations for recording the data appearing in Appendix A: Research Questions 1, 2, and 3.

1. Each of the 30 websites randomly selected for the study is included on the table.
2. Columns for Academic Affairs, Office of the President, and Student Affairs are included on the table.
3. Columns for Alternate for Academic Affairs, Alternate for Student Affairs, and Alternate for Office of the President are included on the table.
4. The absence of a mark of x in Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, or Office of the President columns indicates an alternate website was used for data collection purposes. For example Florida State Agricultural and Mechanical University does not have a mark of x indicating no department named Student Affairs.
5. Each instance of an alternate department name used for data collection purposes is listed under either the Alternate for Academic Affairs, Alternate for Student Affairs, or Alternate for Office of President column. For example the alternate department Student

Life is listed under the Alternate for Student Affairs column for Florida State Agricultural and Mechanical University.

6. If academic offices were combined it was also indicated on the table. For example, it is noted that McNeese State University's Academic and Student Affairs departments are combined.

The following list contains the rules and explanations for recording the data appearing in Appendix B: Research Question 1. This table was created to aid in answering Research Question 1: How do colleges and universities define student success?

1. Each of the 30 randomly chosen colleges and universities must be listed on the table.
2. Columns for Mention of Student Success, No Mention of Student Success, Definition of Student Success, and No Definition of Student Success were created to aid in the data collection and analysis process.
3. A mark of x next to a college or university's name indicates a data point. For example a x in the No Mention of Student Success column for Bowling Green State University Main Campus indicates no mention of student success was made on the Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, or Office of the President web pages. A mark of x in the No Definition of Student Success column for Bowling Green State University Main Campus indicates no definition of student success was listed on any of the web pages reviewed for the study.
4. When a definition of student success was found on a college or universities website page it was included on the table.

The dramatic pentad table in Appendix C was created for Research Question 3: Are there identifiable rhetorical appeals that undergraduate colleges and universities use on their

websites to influence interest in undergraduate education? The table was used to aid in the analysis of the data as it applies to Burke's (1945) act (text) and agency (rhetorical method).

The following list contains the rules and explanations for recording the data appearing in Appendix C.

1. The three main columns of the table are School, Appeal, and Trope.
2. Each of the 30 schools mentioning student success on websites is listed under the School column.
3. The subcategories of Emotion, Intellect, Ethics, and Logic appear under the main column for Appeal.
4. Each mention of student success from the school websites was put under only one of the subcategory appeal columns.
5. If a mention of student success does not match one of the appeal subcategories the space in the column remained blank.
6. The Trope (figure of speech) column was divided into the subcategories of Metaphor, Metonymy, Synecdoche, and Irony.
7. Each mention of student success may include more than one trope (figure of speech). For example the data from the University of Louisiana Monroe has a mention recorded as a metaphor and one mention recorded as a metonymy within the same paragraph.
8. The columns with no tropes will have a mark of 0.
9. Some schools do not have a trope listed as indicated by a 0 in every space. For example Morgan State University's mention of student success, "Office of Student Success and Retention" (*Where To?*, 2014, para. 2, http://www.morgan.edu/administration/academic_affairs/mission_and_vision.html), did not make use of tropes.

The dramatic pentadic table in Appendix D was also created to aid in analyzing the data collected to answer Research Question 3. The table makes use of Burke's (1945) actor (author) and purpose to further analyze the data collected for the study. The following list contains the rules and explanations for recording the data appearing in Appendix D.

1. The main columns for the table are Actor/Author University, Implied Actor/Author Traits, and Author's Purposes.
2. The subcategories of Stated and Unstated appear under the Author's Purposes column.
3. The Stated subcategory is further divided into the subcategories of Action Induced and Attitude Induced.
4. The Unstated subcategory is also divided into the subcategories of Action Induced and Attitude Induced.
5. The Actor/Author University column includes the seventeen schools that mentioned student success. There are 36 mentions of student success among the 17 schools.
6. The Implied Actor/Author Traits column lists traits may not be mentioned as part of the data gathered from each school. The author traits are caring, objective, and intelligent.
7. Instances of actions mentioned within each school's text were recorded under the Stated column for Action Induced.
8. Subcategory instances of attitudes mentioned within each school's texts were recorded under the stated column for the Attitude Induced.
9. Actions induced recorded under the Unstated column include students enroll, stay, and prosper. The actions were not directly referred to in the website texts collected for the study.

10. Attitudes induced recorded under the Unstated column include commitment to others, valuable service, and value teamwork. The attitudes were not directly referred to in the website text collected for the study.

Data Analysis

Analysis of data in the study included several steps. First, simple counts were used to discover the extent to which mentions of student success appeared on university websites. Second, the context and use of the words and phrases were considered in order to develop a coding strategy. Based on the data points for example, if only two types of mentions of student emerged, usage was coded as one of either of two types. The coding typology has emerged based on the uses of key words and phrases. Third, once the data points were coded a larger scale analysis was conducted to determine the meaning of the texts and to allow for the identification of trends within the data itself.

A qualitative software package, Nvivo 10 from QSR International, was used to collect and analyze data gathered from the research sample of 30 colleges and universities. The qualitative software allowed me to collect data directly from web pages, organize the data, and analyze content to aid in analysis of the data.

The top three pages of every college or university website accessed for the study were reviewed for mentions of student success at a department level. The qualitative software allows the user to capture the individual websites within the program itself. Nodes (data file containers) were created to group similar data such as words and phrases pertaining to student success in one location. Once all the data had been gathered they were analyzed for similarities based on categories determined during the process of data collection. The qualitative software package allowed me to visualize data for comparison and analysis.

A part of the data analysis process in this research method is revisiting the data often. Persistent and thorough evaluation of all data collected is the key to identifying trends and patterns in the way student success is or is not defined and measured on undergraduate college or university websites. The collection and analysis of the data has illuminated the discussion of how student success is defined and measures and what rhetorical appeals are being employed on the websites of undergraduate colleges and universities.

Researcher Description

This section contains a description of my educational achievements. The purpose of this section is to examine my research bias toward the topic of student success. I took a non-traditional path to undergraduate degree attainment. My first experience with higher education was at a community college in Kalamazoo, Michigan. I completed my Bachelor of Science in Management Information Systems degree at Indiana State University in 2003. I worked as an academic assistant in the University Testing Office starting in 2005. I commenced graduate studies in Student Affairs and Higher Education in 2009. I was accepted into the doctoral program in Higher Education Leadership at Indiana State University for the fall 2010 cohort.

The topic of student success and the factors influencing undergraduate students to pursue higher education attainment has always held my interest. The education I pursued in the areas of student affairs and higher education leadership gave me the skills necessary to complete this study on defining and measuring student success. My education in the areas of student success and higher education leadership included studying student development theory, multicultural theory, organizational theory, and research methodology. I learned through these courses the importance of applying theory to the practice of higher education and designing qualitative research based projects, such as this study, based on the use of content analysis.

I made it a practice to seek out opportunities to become involved in the area of student success while pursuing both of my graduate degrees. All my practicum and internship experiences have been related to enhancing the educational experiences of undergraduate students. Some of the experiences included working closely with the Vice President of Student Affairs and shadowing various areas under the Student Academic Support Center (SASC) at Indiana State University. I worked with student athletes and helped with tutoring and supplemental instruction at the SASC. My future plans in higher education include writing, teaching, and continuing to work in the area of student success.

Summary

The purposes of this study were twofold. First, it was my intent to identify how a sample of undergraduate colleges and universities sharing similar characteristics defined and measured student success. A better understanding of how student success is defined and measured at colleges and universities is necessary for the continued development and support of programs that help students reach educational attainment.

Second, examining the words and phrases used by institutions in discussing student success, I wished to make inference regarding the utilization of such language as an inducement for prospective customers (students) to enroll. Rhetorical analysis was used for the study to identify trends in rhetorical appeals. Data were collected in accordance with pre-established rules to aid consistency in the analyses.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This study was conducted to determine how four-year undergraduate institutions of higher learning define and measure student success and what rhetorical methods are used to persuade students to engage in the pursuit of higher education attainment. Initial research questions related to how student success was defined and measured on the websites of Academic Affairs, Office of the President, and Student Affairs at a randomly selected group of colleges and universities that share certain characteristics identified by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education. The particular institutional characteristics were those that enabled me to study institutions comparable to my current employer, Indiana State University. However, Indiana State University was not included in the research sample and its websites were not evaluated for purposes of the study. An additional research question focused on how mentions of student success on institutional webpages may have been intended as inducement to enroll at the particular institution.

The expectations for Research Question 1 (How do colleges and universities define student success?) and Research Question 2 (How is student success measured?) were not met. The assumption was made that more data would be collected for Research Question 3 (Are there identifiable rhetorical appeals that undergraduate colleges and universities use on their websites to influence interest in undergraduate education?). The discussion about how expectations were

not fully realized as a result of the data collection and analysis for the study appears in the first section of this chapter. Reported observations about the process of collecting data appear in the second section of this chapter. The third section lists the rules developed to ensure the consistency of the data collection process along with an explanation of the rules. The final section of this chapter will highlight the findings which were divided into further sections based on each individual research question.

Expectations Not Met

The design of the study was kept simple in order to ensure feasibility. It was assumed the undergraduate colleges and universities sampled would have published web-based definitions of student success and clearly defined procedures to measure student success. This assumption proved to be incorrect for the majority of institutions; that is, there were a very limited number of institutions defining student success. Only one of the 30 institutions sampled defined what student success means. The following definition of student success was found on the Missouri State University Student Affairs website:

The Division of Student Affairs is dedicated to helping students achieve success in their pursuit of academic and personal excellence. Departments and programs are designed and constantly evolving to complement our academic programs and the Public Affairs Mission of Missouri State University. Commitment to student success and excellence is provided by enhancing the total educational experience through engagement in student development opportunities and by providing exceptional service. (Student Affairs, 2014, para. 3, <http://studentaffairs.missouristate.edu>)

The statement implies success at Missouri State University is defined by both academic achievement and personal development of undergraduate students. It also implies both the students and the staff share a role in the pursuit of student success.

One of the research expectations was to find mentions of student success on websites even if definitions of student success were not apparent. A table was created to track mentions of student success and definitions of student success as a reference for Research Question 1: How do colleges and universities define student success? Seventeen out of 30 sites (57%) selected for data collection mentioned student success within the first three pages of Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, and/or Office of the President websites. Only one of the 30 websites in this study included a definition for student success.

Notations regarding Research Question 2 (How is student success measured?) were also recorded on the table. None of the colleges or universities made mention on their top web pages of how student success was measured.

It was anticipated that abundant data would be available on institutional websites for purposes of making inferences related to Research Question 3: Are there identifiable rhetorical appeals that undergraduate colleges and universities use on their websites to influence interest in undergraduate education? However, only seventeen of the 30 schools mentioned student success on their top web pages. Thirty-six specific mentions of student success were collected for the study. Mentions of student success appeared in short paragraphs, long paragraphs, office titles, paragraphs with bullet lists, and professional job titles.

Presentation of Findings

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 was: How do colleges and universities define student success? Within the group of 30 randomly sampled academic institutions 36 mentions of student success were found. Academic Affairs websites account for seven (19%) mentions of student success. The majority of student success mentions were on Student Affairs websites. Twenty-four mentions (67%) were observed on Student Affairs websites. Office of the President websites accounted for only five of the 36 mentions (14%) of student success. Only one of the 30 institutions in the sample population analyzed for the study had a definition of student success. Missouri State University's mention of student success found on its Division of Student Affairs website is listed on Table 1 for Research Question 1 in Appendix B. The university defined student success as the pursuit of both academic and personal excellence.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 addressed the issue of measuring student success. It was created to clarify the method or methods utilized in measuring student success at colleges or universities that mentioned student success on web pages. Although 17 institutions included in the sample mentioned student success on their top web pages (see Appendix B), none of the 30 institutions of higher education examined in the study identified within the first three web pages of selected departments how student success was measured. Therefore, no table was created to tabulate data relating to Research Question 2.

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 was: Are there identifiable rhetorical appeals undergraduate colleges and universities use on the websites to influence interest in undergraduate education? Burke's

(1945) dramatistic pentad was employed as a method to critique the written word. It is a tool used to discover the rhetorical appeals behind written communications. Burke used the metaphor of a stage play to uncover the meanings of texts that might not be apparent with just a cursory glance at the source material. The five parts of the dramatistic pentad are act, agency, agent, purpose, and scene (Burke, 1950). Each of the parts of the dramatistic pentad was used to analyze the data collected for Research Question 3. Scene was defined as the environment where the drama took place. The scene is college or university websites pages. The scenes included on the tables for research question number three have mentions of student success.

Act and agency. The first table created for research question number three located in Appendix C combines both the act and agency parts of Burke's (1945) dramatistic pentad. The act describes the action taking place. For the study the act is the text found on various college or university web pages for Academic Affairs, Office of the President, and Student Affairs. The agency refers to the tools or means used to create the act (Burke, 1950). Tropes, or figures of speech as they may be more commonly referred to, were the tools used to create the texts appearing on websites.

The data in the table were organized based on the type of appeal. Appeals were then broken down into the subcategories of emotion, intellect, ethics, and logic. Emotional appeals were used to win over an audience by manipulating how the audience might feel about the topic. An example of an emotional appeal related to higher education is the promise made by staff members who are dedicated to providing a nurturing environment for first generation undergraduate students. Intellectual appeals were based on the presumption of intelligence possessed by the desired audience. For example, a university department leader may engage students in the promise of a high quality education by mentioning diverse teaching methods.

Appeals to ethics involve engaging people in a course of action categorized as morally responsible. An example from an undergraduate student perspective would be a student group engaged in preservation of the environment because the students believe it is the right thing to do. Logical appeals were used to engage the audience member's ability to reason about the situation at hand. An example of a logical appeal from higher education would be the description of a department's reason for existence.

Only 17 of the 30 institutions included in the study mentioned student success within the first three web pages of the Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, or Office of the President web pages. Thirty-six mentions of student success were recorded on the Dramatistic Pentad table for Research Question 3 located in Appendix C. Fourteen of the appeals were classified as emotional, four were intellectual, and 18 were considered logical appeals. None of the mentions of student success were classified as ethical appeals.

Several key words and phrases were identified within the emotion, intellect, and logic appeal columns during the process of dividing the texts into the various subcategories of appeals. In the emotion appeal section, common words and phrases included dedicated, helping, student-centered, support, commitment, values, very interested, cares about, and emotionally. The following text is an example collected from The University of Texas at Tyler: "The University of Texas at Tyler cares about our students' success, not only academically but emotionally and physically" (Office of Student Affairs, 2013, para.1, <https://www.uttyler.edu/studentaffairs/>).

Four appeals to intellect were recorded within the intellect appeal column of the first table. Key words and phrases from the texts included teaching, learning, research environment, high quality programs and services, intellectual, and life-long learning. An example of a text placed in the intellect column from Louisiana Tech follows: "Louisiana Tech provides a

technology-rich, interdisciplinary teaching, learning, and research environment to ensure student and faculty success” (Office of the President, 2014, para. 6, <http://www.latech.edu/administration/>).

The key words and phrases from the 18 texts appearing in the logic appeals column include “that’s why”, “the mission is”, “to learn more about the functions of”, and “through our programs and services we provide”. Of the 18 texts included in the logic appeal columns the following text is from The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga: “That’s why the Center for Advisement and Student Success is here” (Center for Advisement, 2012-2013, para. 1, <http://ww.utc.edu/center-advisement-student-success/>).

The next major category included in the Dramatistic Pentad table for Research Question 3 located in Appendix C is trope. A trope is a figure of speech used as a tool to convey meaning within a text. An example of a trope taken from higher education is fostering student success. The trope column was further divided into the subcategories of metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony. No examples of synecdoche or irony were observed in relation to the texts evaluated for the study.

A metaphor serves its purpose by comparing itself to another object without using the words like or as. Thirty metaphors were discovered within the 36 mentions of student success collected for the study. Some of the metaphors included “dedicated to providing high quality service”, “helping students succeed”, and “we collaborate across the university”. Further analysis of the metaphors has been provided in Chapter 5 of the study.

Metonymy is defined as a thing not called by its own name but by the name of another object. An example of a metonymy from higher education is enrollment services. Enrollment services in the example represent the staff working in the department. Twenty-two examples of

metonymy were discovered within the 36 texts evaluated for the study. The following example of a metonymy is from The University of Texas at Tyler: “The Office of Academic Affairs is composed of...” (Office of Academic Affairs, 2014, para. 3, <http://uttyler.edu/academicaffairs/>). Further analysis of these tropes (figures of speech) was provided in Chapter 5 of the study.

Table 2

Totals for Dramatistic Pentad for Institutions Evaluated

<i>Institutions Evaluated</i>	30
Institutions mentioning student success	17
Mentions of student success	36

The data appearing in Appendix C is summarized in Table 3 below.

Table 3

Totals for Appeals and Tropes

	<i>Appeals</i>	<i>Tropes</i>
Emotion	14	
Intellect	4	
Ethics	0	
Logic	18	
Metaphor		30
Metonymy		22
Synecdoche		0
Irony		0

Agent and purpose. The second dramaticistic pentadic table was created to aid in the data analysis process for research question number three. The elements of Burke's Dramatistic Pentad contained in the table are the agent and the purpose. The agent is the person who performed the act. The agent is the actor on stage appearing in the play. For this study the institutions of higher education in this randomly selected sample are the actors. Purpose was defined as why the action took place (Burke, 1950).

The Implied Agent/Author Traits and Author's Purposes (Intended Effect of Wording on Audience) column was used to help identify and analyze the various characteristics of the data. Most of the implied agent/author traits were described as caring, objective, and intelligent. The traits were chosen based on the use of phrases found in the data such as we strive to promote, encourage self-directed learning, and teaching innovation. Five of the 36 mentions of student success in the sample did not have identifiable traits based on the data collected from college or university web pages.

The Author's Purposes column contained in the table were divided into the subcategories of Stated and Unstated wording. Each of these columns was further divided into Action Induced and Attitude Induced. The Stated column includes texts used on each website page evaluated for the study. One example of a text evaluated for the study comes from Bowling Green State University Main Campus. The stated action induced by the particular agent is providing high quality service (Division of Student Affairs, 2014, para. 1, <http://bgsu.edu/offices/sa.index.html>). Action words such as provide, helping, promotes, and cares appear as part of the data analyzed on the table. Eight out of 36 mentions of student success included in the study had no identifiable stated action.

The stated attitudes induced included mentions of student success, tradition, values, and dedication. One example of a stated attitude induced taken from Bowling Green State University Main Campus is “. . . staff in the Student Affairs office are dedicated” (Division of Student Affairs, 2014, para. 1, <http://bgsu.edu/offices/sa/index.html>). Eight out of 36 mentions of student success had no stated attitude.

The Unstated column under the heading of Author’s Purposes includes the subcategories of Action Induced and Attitude Induced. Unstated means what is listed in the columns does not appear in the texts of the 36 mentions of student success from the 17 institutions with mentions on the websites. Each of the institutions listed had an unstated action induced. Five of the mentions of student success listed in the unstated column did not have an attitude induced listed on the table.

Unstated actions induced by the various texts were for the most part similar. The majority of the actions were classified as students learn, grow, and develop. Other less frequently mentioned unstated actions include students enroll, stay, prosper, and succeed. Two mentions of student success classified as actions for faculty. Faculty learned and developed in the mentions. There is one mention of a provost whose action was to lead.

One of the most frequently occurring unstated attitudes was commitment to others. Other unstated attitudes induced include valuable service, community service, value teamwork, commitment to institutional goals, and values parental guidance. One of the less frequently unstated attitudes was related to openness. Central Michigan University’s mention of student success was classified in the unstated attitude induced section as openness. Winston-Salem University’s mention of student success was classified under the unstated attitude induced subcategory as open access.

Summary

The study was conducted for multiple purposes. The first purpose was to examine how four-year undergraduate colleges and universities defined and measured student success as it relates to the undergraduate student populations. I assumed an abundance of data would be collected for the first purpose. The expectation was not met. Just over half of the sample size was composed of institutions with mentions of student success on the web pages viewed for the study. None of the 30 institutions surveyed mentioned how student success was measured.

The second purpose of the study was to determine what types of rhetorical appeals were used to influence interest in higher education. Burke's dramatisic pentad (1950), which uses the elements of a stage drama (act, agent, agency, purpose, and scene), was employed to discover the possible meanings behind the texts collected to answer Research Question 3. Tables were created to analyze the data based on four types of appeals. The types of appeals were emotion, intellect, ethics, and logic. The tropes used to further analyze the meanings of various texts were metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony. Another table was created to determine both the stated and unstated actions and attitudes of the texts collected and analyzed for the study.

This chapter was prepared to present the results of the data collected and analyzed to answer each of the research question in the study. The results will be the foundation for the discussion presented in the Chapter 5. Chapter 5 will have more detail about the results along with a discussion of the possible implications of the study.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

There are severable variables to consider in the production of a stage drama. Some of the variables include what the story is about, where the action takes place, who the actors are, what tools the actors use in the performances to convey the stated or unstated message, and why the action or story has taken place. Several variables are also taken into consideration for the success of a stage drama. The producers of the show may consider monetary gain to be a measure of success. Success may also be measured in terms of the playwright's ability to share a message with the audience. The audience may see the perceptions of change in behavior or thought after the performance as a measure of success. The audience for messages presented on college and university websites are current and prospective undergraduate students. Members of the higher education community want to create identification with the pursuit of educational attainment for these undergraduate students. The producers of the higher education stage show want to sell tickets to undergraduate students.

This study was designed to (a) discover how undergraduate colleges and universities define student success, (b) how student success is measured, and how the rhetorical appeals are used to influence students in the pursuit of higher educational attainment. This chapter contains a discussion of the conclusions reached based on the data collected from each college and university randomly sampled for the study. The analysis of the data provides insight into the

meanings and measures of student success and what messages the texts convey to students. The discussion includes the different types of appeals, various figures of speech, and the actions and attitudes used to create the desired identification between undergraduate students and higher education institutions. The implications of the study, limitations, and opportunities for future research are discussed at the end of the chapter.

Discussion

Student success has been defined and measured as if it were a character in a play all about numbers. The numbers are the narrator of the show. Numbers tell the story of how well academic institutions are doing in grade point average, retention, and graduation rate. Both the institutions and the students are considered successful if the numbers are considered good. Numbers such as standardized test scores, grade point average, and retention percentages are part of the institution's report card to governmental agencies. Retention numbers are broken down by semester as retention from the first semester of college into the second. High retention numbers have often been used as an indication the schools are creating an environment conducive to defining student success.

Only 17 of the 30 higher education institutions studied had mentions of student success on their web pages surveyed in this study. None of the 17 institutions' mentions of student success contained references to the traditional measures of grade point average, retention, or graduation rates. If traditional measures are not actively being used to define or measure student success reliance on such data for purposes of accountability is without meaning.

Only one institution randomly sampled in the study had a definition of student success. The definition was not concise based on an initial reading of the text published on Missouri State University's web pages. Missouri State University stated on the Division of Student Affairs

website page student success is indicated by the “pursuit of academic and personal excellence” (Student Affairs, 2014, para. 3, <http://studentaffairs.missouristate.edu/137057.htm>). Although the intent is admirable, the definition of student success presented here remains vague. Student success was not measured on the Missouri State University website or any of the other websites sampled for this study. If student success is not defined or measured by colleges and universities it should not be used as a credible indicator of meaningful student experiences or institution quality.

Students and parents turn to new media, such as websites, to access information about higher education. Undergraduate students wishing to maintain a sense of autonomy are not going to rely solely on traditional ways of communication such as face-to-face conversations or the use of telephone conversations to gather information. Undergraduate students want to gather accessible information without the support of parents, faculty, staff, and peers. If websites are going to be used as the public faces of institutions of higher learning, the information on websites must be based in fact. Mentions of student success must be concisely defined and measured in order to contribute to the positive public perception of undergraduate academic institutions.

Some of the texts gathered for this study were published more than two years prior to data collection. Website authors rely on constant updating of information in order to attract the attention of consumers such as undergraduate students and their parents. Websites in use by the institutions included in the study may be characterized as static. The information was not updated regularly enough to keep up with the interests of undergraduate students. Websites must be updated regularly to become an effective marketing tool. Website information should be more than just the perception of what colleges and universities think undergraduate students

want to read. Academic institutions need to give undergraduate students and parents information on websites as a starting point to making informed decisions on higher education attainment. If the phrase *student success* is going to be used to attract the attention of undergraduate students its meaning should be reflected in concise definitions and measurements.

Rhetorical Appeals

Rhetoric in written communication is the art of argumentation. Playwrights are tasked with the challenge of communicating a message to the audience. Playwrights want audiences to identify with the intended messages of the play. When identification between playwright and audience members has been reached, a desired outcome may be achieved. Rhetorical appeals are strategies such as written texts, used by colleges and universities to persuade students to enroll in school and persist until degree completion. Instances of act and agency from Burke's (1945) dramatic pentad were recorded in table one for Research Question 3, which is located in Appendix C. The act is the text itself and the agency is the means or tools the agent uses such as the appeals and tropes identified in the table. The four types of appeals used to analyze the data in the study are emotion, intellect, logic, and ethics. None of the 36 mentions of student success included in the study made use of ethical appeals. Therefore ethical appeals are not discussed in detail.

Emotion

The appeal of emotion can be thought of in terms of what matters to the heart of the audience member. The movie *Steel Magnolias* (Stark & Ross, 1989) is a story about how the emotional bonds of a group of women are tested through life's comedic and sometimes tragic circumstances. The women bond and become a strong family support unit while experiencing hardships. Appeals to emotion have been used as tools to persuade undergraduate students to

participate in higher education attainment in the same way appeals to emotion are used in stage dramas.

The 14 appeals to emotion, as identified from the mentions of student success analyzed for this study, have various words and phrases in common. The words and phrases included dedicated, helping, support, cares about, and nurturing. “The University of Texas at Tyler cares about our students’ success, not only academically but emotionally and physically” (Office of Student Affairs, 2013, para. 1, <https://www.uttyler.edu/studentaffairs/>). The preceding statement indicates the authors of texts on college and university web pages are trying to create a sense of belonging to the campus environment. The authors of the texts are suggesting undergraduate students will be treated like family. The strategy being used here by colleges and universities suggests treating undergraduate students like family will get the students to stay and persist to graduation.

Intellect

An intellectual appeal is the type of persuasion designed to grab the attention of a person’s cognitive capacity. Writers of intellectual appeals are looking to invite the attentions of intelligent audiences. Only four intellectual appeals were identified in the study. Keywords and phrases from the intellectual appeals include teaching, learning, research environment, and high quality programs. The text gathered from Central Michigan University is an example of an intellectual appeal. “His focus on student success is reflected in Dr. Ross’ continued engagement in both traditional and nontraditional student teaching and learning” (Office of the President, 2014, para. 5, https://www.cmich.edu/office_president/Pages/default.aspx). The text here is an appeal to intellect and it represents the beliefs of the president at Central Michigan University.

Most other mentions of student success were anonymous in nature and represented the university as a group instead of an individual.

The University of Louisiana at Monroe also has an example of an intellectual appeal. “This initiative seeks to challenge and maximize opportunities for student engagement, learning, leadership, and success through high quality programs and services that foster the intellectual, social, physical, emotional, cultural, multicultural, and personal growth of all students” (Student Affairs, 2013, para. 6, <http://www.ulm.edu/studentaffairs/index.html>). The text here does not identify an individual as a representative of the university. Key words and phrases such as learning, leadership, and high quality programs are an indication the intended audience for the text is an intellectual undergraduate student group charged with the task of raising the academic profile of the university.

Logic

A logical appeal is the use of strategic evidence to convince an audience to come to a definitive conclusion. Logical appeals follow a story from beginning, to the middle, and finally the end. An effective logical appeal is designed to have persuasive power over its audience. Eighteen logical appeals were identified and analyzed for the study. Key words and phrases from logical appeals were that’s why, the mission is, and through student success the university succeeds.

Some of the logical appeals were brief. The mention of student success on the Morgan State University website was “Office of Student Success and Retention” (*Where To?*, 2014, para. 2, http://www.morgan.edu/administration/academic_affairs/mission_and_vision.html). It is left to the audience to decide what the logical appeal represents. The University of Tennessee at

Chattanooga had a similar logical appeal with its mention simply put as student success (Academic Support Areas, 2012-2013, para. 1, <http://www.utc.edu/academic-affairs/>).

Other logic appeals were a bit more elaborate such as another example from The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. “The mission of the Center for Advisement and Student Success is to promote academic excellence and encourage self-directed learning” (Our Mission, 2012-2013, para. 1, <http://www.utc.edu/center-advisement-student-success/our-mission.php>). The purpose of the statement is obvious despite the lack of definition or measurement of student success in the statement. This department exists to support the educational efforts of undergraduate students.

Tropes

Tropes are figures of speech and are used to convey messages to an audience. It is left to the audience to interpret what the author is thinking by using tropes. For example, the metaphor of “all the world's a stage and all the men and women merely players” (Shakespeare, 1890, p. 122) could be interpreted as meaning in society that no one person is more important than the next person. The four categories of tropes used to analyze and interpret the texts gathered for the study were metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony. None of the texts in the study were classified as synecdoche or irony.

Metaphor

A metaphor is a word or phrase used in place of another thing to show similarity in meaning. Texts used as metaphors are employed to create mental pictures for the audience members. Writers use metaphors to achieve identification with the audience. The use of metaphors as it applies to the texts on the websites was frequent. Thirty metaphors were identified from the 36 mentions of student success included in the study. Key phrases in the

metaphors included dedicated to, helping students succeed, commitment to transparency, we strive, high quality academic programs, through student success, and we collaborate.

Several examples of the use of metaphors pointed to the institution in question as servant to its undergraduate student community. A dedication to the undergraduate student population was observed in the use of metaphors. One example found on the pages of Bowling Green State University Main Campus website included the phrase “dedicated to providing high quality service” (Division of Student Affairs, 2014, para. 1, <http://bgsu.edu/offices/sa/index.html>). The text here demonstrates the school is playing the role of servant leader to the undergraduate student population. The text “his focus on student success. . .” (Office of the President, 2014, para. 5, https://cmich.edu/office_president/Pages/default.aspx) from the Central Michigan University website suggests an individual staff member is taking on the role of servant leader.

Metaphors were also used to suggest the similarities between university personnel and parents. The text “The University of Texas at Tyler cares about our students. . .” (Office of Student Affairs, 2013, para.1, <https://www.uttyler.edu/studentaffairs/>) suggests the institution is casting itself in the role of a parental authority figure in the lives of students. The university is attempting to bond with undergraduate students who are leaving the familiarity of the home environment for the campus environment. The following example showing university personnel serving as parental authority figures comes from the University of Louisiana at Monroe. The phrase “support by nurturing” (Student Affairs, 2013, para. 2, <http://www.ulm.edu/studentaffairs/index.html>) was used to suggest students who enroll in the institution will get emotional needs met while pursuing educational attainment.

Another example of a metaphor comes from the Division of Student Affairs website at East Tennessee State University. “We strive to promote student success by working daily to

realize the Division's values: Advocacy, Diversity, Engagement, Learning, Stewardship, and Student Development" (Division of Student Affairs, 2014, para. 1, <http://www.etsu/students/default.aspx>). The use of the phrase "division's values" within the context of the mention of student success is considered an intangible asset as a tangible asset connotated. The word value is being used as a physical asset to represent an abstract concept. The text in question was the only example in the study of an intangible asset representing a physical asset.

Metonymy

Metonymy is defined as a figure of speech used to represent a thing or a concept closely associated to the original concept. An example from the play *Richelieu: Or, The Conspiracy* by Edward Bulwer Lytton is "The pen is mightier than the sword" (Lytton, 1901, p. 89). The pen is a representation of the written word and the sword represents military aggression. The use of metonymy was found throughout the texts of the websites included in the study. Twenty-two examples of metonymy were found in the mentions of student success gathered and analyzed for this study.

The use of metonymy was frequently found in titles of departments. The titles are used to represent staff members working together as teams. The department title, Center for Advisement and Student Success, was found on The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga's website (Center for Advisement, 2012-2013, para. 1, <http://www.utc.edu/center-advisement-student-success/>). Another example of metonymy comes from The University of Texas at Tyler. The Office of Academic Affairs is a title representing the staff tasked with carrying out the operations of the department (Academic Affairs Staff, 2014, para. 1, <http://uttyler.edu/academicaffairs/colleges.php>). Ten mentions representing the concept of departments as staff were found in the texts gathered and analyzed for the study.

Other examples of metonymy represent academic institutions as an entity. “The University of Texas at Tyler cares about our students’ success, not only academically but emotionally and physically” (Office of Student Affairs, 2013, para.1, <https://www.uttyler.edu/studentaffairs/>). The metonymy used here represents the entire university staff. The implication from the university perspective is that employees are caring individuals representing a community devoted to undergraduate students.

Missouri State University also used metonymy in the texts published on web pages. “Through student success the University succeeds in its mission of developing educated persons” (Division of Student Affairs, 2013, para. 4, <http://studentaffairs.missouristate.edu>). Missouri State University is using metonymy to represent the entire faculty and staff as a caring group of individuals supporting undergraduate student. Five examples of metonymy exist among the texts gathered and analyzed for this study.

The uses of metonymy in some of the texts applied to general concepts as opposed to department names. The University of Louisiana at Monroe has two recorded instances of metonymy for the same mention of student success collected and analyzed for the study. “This initiative seeks to challenge and maximize opportunities for student engagement, learning, leadership, and success through high quality programs and services that foster the intellectual, social, physical, emotional, cultural, multicultural, and personal growth of all students” (Student Affairs, 2013, para. 6, <http://www.ulm.edu/studentaffairs/index.html>). The phrase this initiative seeks represents a program designed by the university to promote student success. The phrase programs and services that foster was interpreted to mean in place of parental guidance.

Agent and Purpose

The agent is the person or persons who performed the specific act being evaluated according to Burke's (1950) use of the dramatic pentad. Agents are the playwrights who craft the story being told by the actors on stage. Playwrights want to persuade the audience to engage with the action being presented on stage. The audience needs to believe the action is reality based. The following section is about agents and the motives behind the use of rhetorical appeals to persuade an audience. The agents are the individuals or groups who composed the texts found on college and university websites. The purposes refer to stated and unstated meanings behind each text.

Implied Agent/Author Traits

The agents creating the texts found on college and university websites shared similar traits. The most commonly occurring traits identified among the texts were caring, objective, and intelligent. Commonly used words and phrases associated with the trait of caring included dedicated to, helping students succeed, fostering, and promoting. The decision to include objective as an agent trait was made by identifying the use of words and phrases such as focus, working daily and continued engagement. The trait of intelligence was characterized by the use of key words and phrases such as teaching and learning, encourage self-directed learning, and teaching innovation.

Agents did not use the traits of caring, objective, and intelligent equally among the mentions of student success. Twenty-three of the texts shared all three traits. Five institutions shared none of these traits. Morgan State University's mention of student success was recorded as Office of Student Success and Retention (*Where To?*, 2014, para. 2, <http://www.morgan.edu>

/administration/academic_affairs/mission_and_vison.html). This example does not give enough evidence to specifically identify the agents' traits. Five of the mentions of student success share only the traits of objective and intelligent agents. Only three mentions of student success share the singular trait of intelligence.

Agents' Purposes Stated

Agents at colleges and universities have published texts on websites to persuade undergraduate students to obtain a higher education degree. The agents included in the study have created mentions of student success with both action and attitude-induced purposes. The following text is an example of both a stated and attitude-induced message created by an agent at Bowling Green State University Main Campus.

The Senior Associate Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students, Jill Carr, and the staff in the Student Affairs office are dedicated to providing high quality service and to helping BGSU students succeed both inside and outside the classroom. (Division of Student Affairs, 2012, para. 1, <http://www.bgsu.edu/offices/sa/vp/priorities/page68681.html>)

The phrases providing high quality service and helping BGSU students succeed identify the purpose Bowling Green State University, Main Campus has in mind. The university wants to appeal to perspective undergraduate students by suggesting a supportive environment can be found on campus. The attitudes in question here are identified by the phrases staff in the Student Affairs Office and dedicated and high quality. The attitudes identified here are shared by caring, objective, and intelligent people.

The following example is from the University of Louisiana at Monroe Student Affairs website. "Student Affairs vigorously supports recruitment of new students and aids their success

through retention initiatives designed to enhance and provide support by nurturing their living and learning experience through high quality engagement programs” (Student Affairs, 2013, para. 2, <http://www.ulm.edu/studentaffairs/index.html>). The agents at the Student Affairs department used the words *recruitment* and *aids* to demonstrate student success as a stated action. The use of the words recruitment and aids suggests the Student Affairs department at the University of Louisiana Monroe takes an active role in new student activities. The evidence of stated attitude induced in the text is the use of the phrases vigorous support and high quality. These phrases suggest attitudes shared by agents exhibiting the trait of caring.

Texas Southern University’s mention of student success was categorized as a logical appeal in the dramatistic pentad table used to gather and analyze the text. The table is located in Appendix C. “The Provost also has administrative oversight for research/scholarly activities, Libraries/Museums, Student Success Services and Institutional Assessment, Planning and Effectiveness on campus” (Office of the Provost, 2011, para. 2, http://www.tus.edu/About/Admistration/Division_of_Academic_Affairs_and_Research). The stated action induced by the Provost is “administrative oversight.” The action stated in the text suggests the Provost has a strong sense of leadership. The style of leadership identified here is authoritarian. The authoritarian approach to leadership appeals to undergraduate students who desire strong guidance. The phrase pointing to a stated attitude induced by the text is “scholarly activities.” The Provost’s attitude is one of commitment to higher educational ideals established in the early days of the higher education system.

Agents’ Purposes Unstated

Unstated actions and attitudes induced in the texts took more time to uncover. Discovery of unstated actions and attitudes required a deeper analysis of the texts to find the hidden

meanings behind mentions of student success found on college and university websites. The next section includes a discussion of the intentions of the agents. The intentions in question were directed toward undergraduate students.

Some common unstated actions were identified among the 36 mentions of student success gathered for this study. The unstated actions applied to the intentional outcome of student success desired by the agents. The goals agents desired for students were to enroll, stay, prosper, learn, grow, and develop into world citizens. One mention of student success containing unstated actions comes from The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. “UTC is very interested in the success of students, particularly freshmen, who are transitioning from high school to college” (First Year Experience, 2012-2013, para. 1, <http://www.utc.edu/admissions/parents.php>). The unstated actions of the university are to have students enroll and engage in campus life.

“Louisiana Tech provides a technology-rich, interdisciplinary teaching, learning, and research environment to ensure student and faculty success” (Office of the President, 2013, para. 6, <http://www.latech.edu/administration>). The unstated actions induced in the text are the university helps undergraduate students learn, grow, and develop. The expectations for student success are based on the support system built for students by the university community.

Thirty-one of the 36 mentions of student success had unstated attitudes induced in the texts collected for this study. The following example from Morgan State University has no unstated attitude induced by the text. “Office of Student Success and Retention” (*Where To?*, 2014, para. 2, http://www.morgan.edu/administration/academic_affairs/mission_and_vision

/html). The text does not mention traits of people suggesting an unstated attitude about services produced by the office. Other universities without unstated attitudes induced by website texts include The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga and The University of Texas at Tyler.

The unstated attitudes of the texts collected for the study have similar attributes. The unstated attitudes suggest commitment to others, valuable service, community service, valuing teamwork, valuing parental guidance, commitment to students and community service, and commitment to institutional goals. The following text is from The University of Texas at Tyler:

The Office of Academic Affairs is composed of : the provost and senior vice president for academic affairs, vice provost and dean of the Graduate School, associate vice president of research and director of federal relations, assistant vice president for teaching innovation and student success. (Office of Academic Affairs, 2014, para. 3,

<http://www.uttyler.edu/academicaffairs/>)

The implication of the text is the community of The University of Texas at Tyler has come together for a common purpose. The purpose is to promote a vision of student success for undergraduate students. The university is demonstrating the unstated attitude of commitment to teamwork.

The following text is from the University of Louisiana at Monroe's Student Affairs Division. "Student Affairs vigorously supports recruitment of new students and aids their success through retention initiatives designed to enhance and provide support by nurturing their living and learning experience through high quality engagement programs" (Student Affairs, 2013, para. 2, <http://www.ulm.edu/studentaffairs/index.html>). The passage has two unstated attitudes. The first unstated attitude induced is commitment to institutional goals. The unstated attitude is implied by the use of the phrase success through retention initiatives. The second

unstated attitude induced is values parental guidance. The phrase provides support by nurturing their living and learning experience suggests the attitude of in loco parentis toward undergraduate students. The university is functioning as surrogate or substitute parents for undergraduate students. The use of both unstated attitudes in the text from the University of Louisiana at Monroe suggests the dual audiences of a strategic planning committee, such as a board of trustees, and undergraduate students targeted for enrollment and retention purposes.

The following example taken from the North Dakota State-Main Campus suggests the unstated attitudes induced of values teamwork and community service. “The Office of Orientation and Student Success works in collaboration with the campus community to provide programs and services aimed at enhancing retention and fostering student success” (Vice President for Student Affairs, 2013, para. 11, http://www.ndsu.edu/vpas/about_student_affairs_mission_statements/vpsa). The authors of the statement demonstrate an unstated attitude of commitment to community service through the use of teamwork. The programming and services provided to undergraduate students are attributed to the efforts of the Office of Orientation and Student Success.

Study Implications

Colleges and universities have used websites as tools for communicating thoughts, feelings, emotions, and knowledge. The academic institutions randomly sampled for this study used texts on websites to appeal to a diverse audience of undergraduate students who share various background experiences including completing high school degrees, taking the general educational development test to prove the possession of high school academic skills, or transferring from other academic institutions. The commonality all the websites randomly sampled for this study have is the use of rhetorical appeals to persuade students to become

interested in higher education and to encourage students to become engaged in both academic and social pursuits.

College and university websites need to have a deeper purpose beyond appealing to undergraduate students interested in educational attainment and social status. The websites serve as both recruitment tools and cultural windows for higher academic institutions. The message implied by the use of texts on college and university websites is one of inclusion. The majority of texts surrounding the 36 mentions of student success imply a caring attitude toward the audience of undergraduate students. The implied mission of colleges and universities, based on the texts collected from websites, is to guide students along the path of self-fulfillment.

Most of the institutions randomly sampled for the study failed to define student success. Only Missouri State University has a vague definition of student success. None of the texts measured student success. Evidence exists to support colleges and universities using traditional measures of student success, such as grade point average and retention rates, but it was not found in the texts gathered for this study. The problem with using traditional means of defining and measuring student success is the practice is not student-centered. The use of traditional measures and definitions of student success might be effective in recruitment and enrollment, but the measures have not proven over time to keep students engaged in the pursuit of higher education attainment, social integration, and professional status.

Colleges and universities should take a more student-centered approach to the practice of higher education. Higher education faculty and staff need to learn new ways of managing relationships with students. Authors of higher education websites care about the interests and needs of undergraduate students based on texts gathered for this study. A focus on emotional needs of the student population is suggested by words and phrases surrounding mentions of

student success such as support, student-centered, and cares. But, without programs, policies, and procedures in place to manage student relationships with campus constituents, the words are meaningless rhetorical appeals used to obtain interest in only the beginning phases of higher education attainment.

The effort to engage students in higher education attainment must go beyond the use of rhetorical appeals on college and university websites. More attention needs to be given to the environmental factors influencing student development and the effort to define and measure student success. The factors include time and effort on the part of undergraduate students in academic and social pursuits, and the attention given to undergraduate students by faculty members. According to Astin (1999) satisfaction with college life is what will keep students engaged in the pursuit of educational, social, and professional goals.

Campus faculty and staff members must also be mindful of the undergraduate student perspective regarding learning, growth, and development. Some students believe traditional methods for measuring student success, such as grades, are the most important indicator of accomplishment in higher education. Other students raise concerns over the issues of social integration and autonomy. In the minds of undergraduate students, success means having acquired the ability to co-exist with a wide range of community members while at the same time feeling confident about mastering the skills needed to make decisions. University faculty and staff members must continue with efforts to manage relationships with students in order to ensure continued learning, growth, and development.

Multiple implications for practice and research exist because of this study. Practitioners of higher education can view the results of the study as a wake-up call. University faculty and staff must concentrate efforts on maintaining the balance between traditional methods of defining

and measuring student success with the practice of using websites as a recruiting tool to appeal to undergraduate students. Authors of college and university website texts must think carefully about how to communicate goals to undergraduate students. The best approach is to use current information about the practice of higher education to design persuasive appeals based on fact and not just emotion. Additional research related to student success as it is defined, measured and used to appeal to undergraduate students should include the individual perspectives of the diverse undergraduate student population.

Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to examine how undergraduate colleges and universities define and measure student success, and how such information is represented on websites. Texts were examined to determine the rhetorical appeals used to engage students in the pursuit of higher education attainment. A population of 135 institutions with similar attributes to Indiana State University was sampled for this study. Thirty institutions from the population were randomly selected for examination relative to their website mentions of student success. Literature was included in the study to illustrate the role of student development theory in higher education. Self-determination theory was reviewed in the study because it gives insight into what motivates undergraduate students to persist with higher education degree attainment. Burke's work in the subject area of rhetorical appeals was used to analyze mentions of student success in order to gain an understanding of the texts beyond a quick reading.

The first goal of the study was to uncover the definitions and measures of student success used by colleges and universities to engage an undergraduate student population in the pursuit of education attainment. Missouri State University was the only institution with a definition for

student success. None of the other sample institutions showed evidence to suggest definition or measurement of student success.

The next goal was to examine the methods of persuasion used by institutions to engage perspective students in the pursuit of higher education attainment. Burke's (1945) dramatic pentad method was used to explore the figures of speech surrounding mentions of student success from the randomly sampled population. Data collected show the institutions use a variety of appeals to persuade undergraduate students to persist in the pursuit of educational goals. The appeals include the use of emotion, intellect and logic to convey messages helping to create identification between the undergraduate students and the various academic institutions included in this study.

Burke's (1945) method of dramatic pentad helped to identify the traits of the authors of website texts and the intentions of the messages used to appeal to undergraduate students. The implied traits of the authors include caring, objectiveness, and intelligence. The purposes of the texts include getting students to enroll, stay, and prosper in colleges and universities.

The assumptions of student success being defined and measured on college and university websites were not supported by the data collected for this study. Defining and measuring student success, along with uncovering the rhetorical appeals used by colleges and universities to engage the interests of undergraduate students, was a challenge. The definition of student success appears to depend on the intended audience. The words surrounding mentions of student success on college and university websites were ambiguous. Faculty, staff, and students all shared various perspectives on what makes a successful undergraduate student. A better understanding of student success is needed to improve practices, policies, and procedures related to the well-being of undergraduate students.

With the exception of a vague definition of student success from Missouri State University, the 30 academic institutions randomly sampled for this study failed to provide a definition for student success on any of the top level webpages where texts were collected. There was no way to measure student success without concise definitions of student success. The only way to interpret the motives behind the texts gathered for this study was to analyze the words surrounding mentions of student success. The 30 institutions in this study used texts to create the illusion of a supportive family environment. The message being conveyed to students is college is your home away from home.

Higher academic institutions lead the charge in creating learning opportunities and ways of thinking about world issues. Academic leaders rely on facts, definitions, and measurements to enhance the credibility of the concepts being taught to undergraduate students. The 30 colleges and universities randomly sampled for this study should better define and measure student success to augment the undergraduate student college experience. Without proper definition and measurement of student success, claims of helping students to succeed in educational attainment lack credibility.

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APPENDIX A

Research Questions 1, 2, & 3

Sites	Academic Affairs	Student Affairs	Office of the President	Alternate for Academic Affairs	Alternate for Student Affairs	Alternate for Office of the President
1. Bowling Green State University Main Campus	x	x	x			
2. Central Michigan University	x	x	x			
3. East Tennessee State University	x	x	x			
4. Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University	x		x		Student Life	
5. Lincoln University	x	x	x			
6. Mississippi University for Women	x	x	x			
7. Morgan State University	x	x	x			
8. New Mexico Highlands	x		x		Office of Dean of Students	
9. The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga	x				Center for Advisement and Student Success	Chancellor's Office
10. The University of Texas at Tyler	x	x	x			
11. Concord University	x	x	x			
12. Henderson State University			x	The Office of the Vice President and Provost	The Dean of Student Services	
13. Louisiana Tech University	x	x	x			
14. McNeese State University	x	x	x	*Offices of Academic and Student Affairs Combined		
15. Missouri State University		x	x	The Office of the Provost		
16. Pennsylvania State University		x	x	The Office of Vice Provost		
17. Texas Southern University	x		x		The Dean of Students	
18. University of Louisiana at Monroe	x	x	x			
19. University of Quam	x	x	x	*Academic and Student Affairs are Combined		

Sites	Academic Affairs	Student Affairs	Office of the President	Alternate for Academic Affairs	Alternate for Student Affairs	Alternate for Office of the President
20. Winston-Salem University				The Office of the Provost	The Dean of Students	The Chancellor's Office
21. Delta State University	x	x	x			
22. North Dakota State-Main Campus	x	x	x			
23. Northwest Missouri State University		x	x	The Provost Office		
24. Sam Houston State University	x		x		Dean of Students	
25. Southern University and A&M College	x	x	x			
26. Texas A&M University at Galveston	x		x		Dean of Students	
27. Troy University				None	Student Services	The Chancellor's Office
28. University of Maryland Eastern Shore	x	x	x			
29. University of Southern Indiana		x	x	The Provost Office		
30. Western New Mexico University	x	x	x			

APPENDIX B

Research Question 1

How do colleges and universities define student success?

Sites	Mention of Student Success	No Mention of Student Success	Definition of Student Success	No Definition of Student Success
1. Bowling Green State University Main Campus	x			x
2. Central Michigan University	x			x
3. East Tennessee State University	x			x
4. Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University		x		x
5. Lincoln University		x		x
6. Mississippi University for Woman		x		x
7. Morgan State University	x			x
8. New Mexico Highlands		x		x
9. The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga	x			x
10. The University of Texas at Tyler	x			x
11. Concord University		x		x
12. Henderson State University		x		x
13. Louisiana Tech University	x			x
14. McNeese State University		x		x
15. Missouri State University	x		The Division of Student Affairs is dedicated to helping students achieve success in their pursuit of academic and personal excellence.	
16. Pennsylvania State University		x		x
17. Texas Southern University	x			x
18. University of Louisiana at Monroe	x			x
19. University of Quam				x
20. Winston-Salem University	x			x
21. Delta State University		x		x
22. North Dakota State- Main Campus	x			x
23. Northwest Missouri State University	x			x
24. Sam Houston State University	x			x
25. Southern University and A&M College	x			x
26. Texas A&M University at Galveston		x		x
27. Troy University		x		x
28. University of Maryland Eastern Shore	x			x

Sites	Mention of Student Success	No Mention of Student Success	Definition of Student Success	No Definition of Student Success
29. University of Southern Indiana	x			x
30. Western New Mexico University		x		x
Totals	17	12	1	29

APPENDIX C

Dramatistic Pentad for Research Question 3

Act (Text) and Agency (Rhetorical Method)

Institution	Appeal				Trope			
	Emotion	Intellect	Ethics	Logic	Metaphor	Metonymy	Synecdoche	Irony
1. Bowling Green State University- Main Campus	The Senior Associate Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students, Jill Carr, and the staff in the Student Affairs office are dedicated to providing high quality service and to helping BGSU students succeed both inside and outside the classroom.				dedicated to providing high quality service – Student Affairs staff as servant helping BGSU students succeed – Student Affairs staff as servant	0	0	0
2. Bowling Green State University- Main Campus	We collaborate across the university to implement innovative and student-centered programs, practices, and services to support student success.				We collaborate across the university – staff as servant	0	0	0
3. Central Michigan University	Dedicated to student success and academic excellence with a				Dedicated to student success – staff as a servant	0	0	0

Institution	Appeal				Trope			
	<u>Emotion</u>	<u>Intellect</u>	<u>Ethics</u>	<u>Logic</u>	<u>Metaphor</u>	<u>Metonymy</u>	<u>Synecdoche</u>	<u>Irony</u>
	commitment to transparency .				Commitment to transparency – staff as servant			
4. Central Michigan University		His focus on student success is reflected in Dr. Ross' continued engagement in both traditional and nontraditional student teaching and learning.			His focus on student success - individual staff member as servant	0	0	0
5. East Tennessee State University	We strive to promote student success by working daily to realize the Division's values.				We strive – staff as servant	0	0	0
6. Morgan State University				Office of Student Success and Retention	Division's values – intangible asset as tangible asset connotated	0	0	0
7. Morgan State University				Office of Student Success and Retention		0	0	0
8. The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga				Student Success		0	0	0
9. The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga				That's why the Center for Advisement and Student Success is here.		Center for Advisement and Student Success – represents staff	0	0
10. The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga	UTC is very interested in the success of students,				UTC is very interested in the success of students –	0	0	0

Institution	Appeal				Trope			
	<u>Emotion</u>	<u>Intellect</u>	<u>Ethics</u>	<u>Logic</u>	<u>Metaphor</u>	<u>Metonymy</u>	<u>Synecdoche</u>	<u>Irony</u>
11. The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga	particularly freshmen, who are transitioning from high school to college.			The mission of the Center for Advisement and Student Success is to promote academic excellence and encourage self-directed learning.	staff as parent	Center for Advisement and Student Success – represents staff	0	0
12. The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga				Center for Advisement and Student Success	0	Center for Advisement and Student Success – represents staff	0	0
13. The University of Texas at Tyler				Dr. Scott Marzilli Assistant Vice President for Teaching Innovation & Student Success	0	0	0	0
14. The University of Texas at Tyler				The Office of Academic Affairs is composed of : the provost and senior vice president for academic affairs, vice provost and dean of the Graduate School, associate vice president of research and director of federal relations, assistant vice president for teaching	0	The Office of Academic Affairs is composed of – represents staff	0	0

Institution	Appeal				Trope			
	<u>Emotion</u>	<u>Intellect</u>	<u>Ethics</u>	<u>Logic</u>	<u>Metaphor</u>	<u>Metonymy</u>	<u>Synecdoche</u>	<u>Irony</u>
15. The University of Texas at Tyler	The University of Texas at Tyler cares about our students' success, not only academically but emotionally and physically.			innovation and student success.	The University of Texas at Tyler cares about our students – staff as parent	The University of Texas at Tyler – represents staff	0	0
16. Louisiana Tech University		Louisiana Tech provides a technology-rich, interdisciplinary teaching, learning, and research environment to ensure student and faculty success.			Louisiana Tech provides – staff as servant	Louisiana Tech – represents staff	0	0
17. Missouri State University	The Division of Student Affairs is dedicated to helping students achieve success in their pursuit of academic and personal excellence.				The Division of Student Affairs is dedicated to helping – staff as servant	The Division of Student Affairs – represents staff	0	0
18. Missouri State University				Student success – Expand high-quality academic programs to increase opportunities for students.	Student success – Expand high-quality academic programs to increase opportunities for students. – Student Success		0	0

Institution	Appeal				Trope			
	<u>Emotion</u>	<u>Intellect</u>	<u>Ethics</u>	<u>Logic</u>	<u>Metaphor</u>	<u>Metonymy</u>	<u>Synecdoche</u>	<u>Irony</u>
19. Missouri State University	The Division of Student Affairs is dedicated to helping students achieve success in their pursuit of academic and personal excellence.				programs used as tools for positive change The Division of Student Affairs is dedicated to helping – staff as servant	The Division of Student Affairs – represents staff	0	0
20. Missouri State University				Through student success the University succeeds in its mission of developing educated persons.	Through student success – student success used as a tool	the University – represents team	0	0
21. Texas Southern University				The Provost also has administrative oversight for research/scholarly activities, Libraries/Museums, Student Success Services and Institutional Assessment, Planning and Effectiveness on campus.	The Provost has administrative oversight – as individual staff member responsible for leadership		0	0
22. University of Louisiana Monroe	Student Affairs vigorously supports recruitment of new students and aids their success through retention initiatives designed to enhance and provide				Student Affairs vigorously supports – staff as servant support by nurturing - staff as parents	Student Affairs – represents staff	0	0

Institution	Appeal					Trope		
	<u>Emotion</u>	<u>Intellect</u>	<u>Ethics</u>	<u>Logic</u>	<u>Metaphor</u>	<u>Metonymy</u>	<u>Synecdoche</u>	<u>Irony</u>
23. University of Louisiana Monroe	support by nurturing their living and learning experience through high quality engagement programs.	This initiative seeks to challenge and maximize opportunities for student engagement, learning, leadership, and success through high quality programs and services that foster the intellectual, social, physical, emotional, cultural, multicultural, and personal growth of all students.				This initiative seeks – represents a program Programs and services that foster – programs and services as parents	0	0
24. Winston-Salem University				To learn more about the functions of the Office of the Dean of Students please visit our webpage Building Community for Student Success!	To learn more about the functions of – represents programing	0	0	0
25. North Dakota	Each day,				Student	0	0	0

Institution	Appeal				Trope			
	<u>Emotion</u>	<u>Intellect</u>	<u>Ethics</u>	<u>Logic</u>	<u>Metaphor</u>	<u>Metonymy</u>	<u>Synecdoche</u>	<u>Irony</u>
State-Main Campus	our Student Affairs staff forms important connections with students to provide critical services they need for success.				Affairs staff forms important connections – staff a family			
26. North Dakota State-Main Campus				The division helps add to the student experience by providing the tools and programs for overall student success.	The division helps – staff as parents	The division – staff members	0	0
27. North Dakota State-Main Campus				The enrollment management unit at NDSU is comprised of Admission, Bison Connection, Career Center, Student Financial Services, Orientation & Student Success, Registration & Records, and Technology Services.	0	The enrollment management unit – represents staff	0	0
28. North Dakota State-Main Campus				The Memorial Union advances student success.	0	The Memorial Union advances – represents staff	0	0
29. North Dakota State-Main Campus				The Office of Orientation and Student Success works in collaboration with the campus	fostering student success – staff as parents	The Office of Orientation and Student – represents staff	0	0

Institution	Appeal				Trope			
	<u>Emotion</u>	<u>Intellect</u>	<u>Ethics</u>	<u>Logic</u>	<u>Metaphor</u>	<u>Metonymy</u>	<u>Synecdoche</u>	<u>Irony</u>
				community to provide programs and services aimed at enhancing retention and fostering student success.				
30. Northwest Missouri State University	Northwest Missouri State University focuses on student success – every student, every day.				Northwest Missouri State University focuses on student success – staff as team	Northwest Missouri State University – represents staff	0	0
31. Northwest Missouri State University		Values Student success Scholar ship and life-long learning Intercultural competence Collaboration Respect and integrity Strategic thinking Excellence.			Values Student success – intangible asset as tangible asset connotated		0	0
32. Sam Houston State University	The Office of Academic Affairs is dedicated to carrying out the academic mission of the university by administering an outstanding array of undergraduate and graduate programs and fostering the success				The Office of Academic Affairs is dedicated – staff as servant fostering the success of our faculty and students – staff a parents	The Office of Academic Affairs – represents staff	0	0

Institution	Appeal				Trope			
	<u>Emotion</u>	<u>Intellect</u>	<u>Ethics</u>	<u>Logic</u>	<u>Metaphor</u>	<u>Metonymy</u>	<u>Synecdoche</u>	<u>Irony</u>
33. Southern University and A&M College	of our faculty and students. We understand that providing a safe, positive environment for all students is paramount to their success inside the classroom and beyond.				..providing a safe, positive environment .. – staff as parent	We – represents staff	0	0
34. University of Maryland Eastern Shore				Our comprehensive strategies will strengthen the academic profile of the University and improve student success, retention and graduation rates.	Our comprehensive strategies will strengthen... – staff as servant	Our – represents staff	0	0
35. University of Southern Indiana	The University of Southern Indiana is a dynamic campus where we are dedicated to the success of our students.				we are dedicated to the success of our students – staff as servant	The University of Southern Indiana – represents staff	0	0
36. University of Southern Indiana				Through our programs and services, we provide opportunities for students to learn to live wisely, attain success, and contribute to their university community.	we provide opportunities for students to learn - staff as mentors	Our we – represents staff	0	0

APPENDIX D

Dramatistic Pentadic for Research Question 3

Agent (Author) and Purpose

Actor/Author University	Implied Agent /Author Traits	Agent's Purposes (Intended Effect of Wording on Audience)			
		Stated		Unstated	
		Action Induced	Attitude Induced	Action Induced	Attitude Induced
1. Bowling Green State University- Main Campus	Caring, Objective, Intelligent	providing high quality service helping BGSU students succeed	staff in the Student Affairs office are dedicated high quality	Students enroll, stay, prosper	Commitment to others Valuable service Community service
2. Bowling Green State University- Main Campus	Caring, Objective, Intelligent	We collaborate across the university	student centered student success	Students enroll, stay, prosper	Commitment to others Value teamwork
3. Central Michigan University	Caring, Objective, Intelligent	Dedicated to	student success academic excellence commitment	Students enroll, stay, prosper	Openness
4. Central Michigan University	Caring, Objective, Intelligent	His focus continued engagement teaching and learning	traditional and non-traditional	Students learn, grow, develop	Commitment to others
5. East Tennessee State University	Caring, Objective, Intelligent	We strive to promote... working daily	student success Division's values	Students learn, grow, develop	Value team work Commitment to others
6. Morgan State University	0	None	None	Students enroll, stay, prosper	None
7. Morgan State University	0	None	None	Students enroll, stay, prosper	None
8. The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga	0	None	None	Students enroll, stay, prosper	None
9. The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga	Objective, Intelligent	the Center for Advisement and Student Success is here	None	Students learn, grow develop	Commitment to others
10. The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga	Caring, Objective, Intelligent	None	None	Students learn, grow, develop	Commitment to others
11. The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga	Objective, Intelligent	to promote encourage self-directed learning	academic excellence	Students learn, grow, develop	Commitment to others Values individual focus

Actor/Author University	Implied Agent /Author Traits	Agent's Purposes (Intended Effect of Wording on Audience)			
		Stated		Unstated	
		Action Induced	Attitude Induced	Action Induced	Attitude Induced
12. The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga	0	None	None	Students learn, grow, develop	None
13. The University of Texas at Tyler	0	None	None	Students learn, grow, develop	None
14. The University of Texas at Tyler	Objective, Intelligent	teaching innovation	student success	Students learn, grow, develop	Commitment to teamwork
15. The University of Texas at Tyler	Caring, Objective, Intelligent	cares about	None	Students enroll, stay, prosper	Commitment to others Values parental guidance
16. Louisiana Tech University	Caring, Objective, Intelligent	Louisiana Tech provides ensure	student and faculty success	Students and faculty, learn, grow, develop	Commitment to others Values teamwork
17. Missouri State University	Caring, Objective, Intelligent	helping students achieve	dedicated to academic and personal excellence	Students learn, grow, and develop	Commitment to others Values teamwork
18. Missouri State University	Objective, Intelligent	Expand increase	Student success high quality	Students enroll, stay, prosper	Commitment to others
19. Missouri State University	Caring, Objective, Intelligent	helping	dedicated	Students learn, grow, and develop	Commitment to others Values teamwork
20. Missouri State University	Caring, Objective, Intelligent	developing educated persons	student success succeeds	Students learn, grow, and develop	Commitment students and community
21. Texas Southern University	Objective, Intelligent	administrative oversight	scholarly activities	The Provost leads	Commitment to institutional goals
22. University of Louisiana Monroe	Caring, Objective, Intelligent	recruitment aids	vigorously supports high quality	Students enroll, stay, and prosper	Commitment to institutional goals Values parental guidance
23. University of Louisiana Monroe	Caring, Objective, Intelligent	seeks to challenge and maximize	high quality	Students learn, grow, and develop	Commitment to students and their well-being
24. Winston-Salem University	Intelligent	functions	Building Community for Student Success!	Students succeed	Open access
25. North Dakota State-Main Campus	Caring, Objective, Intelligent	forms important connections provide	critical success	Students learn, grow, and develop	Values teamwork Commitment to students
26. North Dakota State-Main Campus	Caring, Objective, Intelligent	The division helps providing the tools and programs'	student success	Students learn, grow, and develop	Values teamwork Commitment to students
27. North Dakota State-Main Campus	Intelligent	None	Student Success	Students succeed	Values teamwork
28. North Dakota State-Main Campus	Caring, Objective, Intelligent	advances	student success	Student learn, grow, and develop	Values teamwork Commitment to students
29. North Dakota State-Main Campus	Caring, Objective, Intelligent	works in collaboration provide programs and services	fostering student success	Students stay and prosper	Values teamwork and community service Commitment to students

Actor/Author University	Implied Agent /Author Traits	Agent's Purposes (Intended Effect of Wording on Audience)			
		Stated		Unstated	
		Action Induced focuses'	Attitude Induced student success	Action Induced Students learn, grow, and develop	Attitude Induced Values teamwork Commitment to students
30. Northwest Missouri State University	Caring, Objective, Intelligent			Students learn, grow, and develop	Values teamwork Commitment to students
31. Northwest Missouri State University	Caring, Objective, Intelligent	None	Values Excellence	Students learn, grow, and develop	Values teamwork Commitment to students
32. Sam Houston State University	Caring, Objective, Intelligent	carrying out the academic mission administering fostering	dedicated to outstanding array success of our	Students learn and develop Faculty develop	Commitment to the mission Commitment to students and faculty
33. Southern University and A&M College	Caring, Objective, Intelligent	providing	a safe, positive environment paramount success	Students enroll, stay, and prosper	Values teamwork and parental guidance
34. University of Maryland Eastern Shore	Caring, Objective, Intelligent	strategies will strengthen improve	student success	Students stay and graduate	Values teamwork Commitment to students
35. University of Southern Indiana	Caring, Objective, Intelligent	None	dedicated to the success of our students	Students learn, grow, and develop	Values teamwork Commitment to students
36. University of Southern Indiana	Caring, Objective, Intelligent	we provide opportunities	live wisely attain success	Students learn, grow, and develop	Commitment to students
TOTALS		Provide, helping, promote, cares = x4	None = 8		
30 institutions evaluated					
x7 institutions mention student success		None = 8			
36 total mentions of student success					
*Some institutions with multiple mentions					