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The Purpose and Practice of Academic Probation

A dissertation

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership And Policy Analysis

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

by

Charlotte Hoover

December 2014

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Keywords: Academic Probation, Academic Policy, Academic Underachievement, Persistence, Retention, Student Support Services

ABSTRACT

The Purpose and Practice of Academic Probation

by

Charlotte Hoover

Academic policies in higher education address institutional academic standards and student requirements including academic underachievement. Academic probation is one academic policy designed to alert students they are not meeting the minimum academic standards of the institution. Institutions offer a variety of student services to support institutional retention efforts and student persistence to graduation; however, there is little research that addresses academic policies and their role in the success of the college student (Brawner, Frillman, & Ohland, 2010). This qualitative case study was an exploration of the perceptions of undergraduate students and the administration by examining the policy of academic probation at one 4-year, private, small liberal arts college in southwest Virginia. The study explored what the institution intended the purpose of academic probation to serve and the perception of the policy by students who were placed on academic probation. Interviews were conducted with 1 undergraduate student who was currently on academic probation and 2 administrators of the institution who were familiar with the policy of academic probation. Survey questions were administered to 5 additional students on academic probation. A document review of the policy of academic probation was conducted. The findings of this study demonstrated that 3 students and both administrators viewed the policy as a way to alert students to refocusing their attention on academics in order to raise their GPA and meet the academic requirements needed for graduation. The study also revealed that students who were placed on academic probation did not feel they had sufficient knowledge of the policy before they were placed on probation.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Graduating from college requires effort on the part of the student to learn and on the part of the institution to offer significant learning opportunities (Tinto, 1993). Tinto (1993) in his seminal work on student departure from college noted that student success depends on institutions and students becoming involved and engaged with each other. This engagement may occur through student organizations and activities, through classroom teaching or special instruction, and through relationship-building and commitment. Though there are many forms of student engagement in higher education, the primary interaction between the institution and the student is academic in nature and revolves around the student's "intellectual life" (Tinto, 1993, p. 206). Some students struggle with the academic expectations placed upon them. In turn, institutions seek to help these students improve through programs, services, and policies. It is through these that the student and institutional relationship is forged and fostered.

There are many reasons students struggle academically in college. Some of the identified issues are: lack of academic preparedness (De Sousa, 2005; Miller, Smith, & Nichols, 2011) or weak academic skills (Brock, 2010; Cross, 1971), student adjustment to college (Tinto, 1993), dissatisfaction with instruction (Giaquinto, 2009), low motivation (Friedman & Mandel, 2009), personal issues (Miller et al., 2011), not using academic advising resources (Brock, 2010), or being a first generation college student and from a low-income family (Miller et al., 2011). When students do not meet the minimum academic requirements of the institution, they may be placed on academic probation, risk failing, or be dismissed from the institution (Kelley, 1996). Institutions offer services to students in an effort to retain them and help them improve their

skills. The policy of placing students on academic probation is meant to be an intervention. It is therefore important that institutions and students understand the intent and purpose of policies such as academic probation, that institutions understand the impact such policies have on student effort and motivation, and that institutions very deliberately craft policies that engage and support the student academic life.

The Importance of a College Education

In 1966 Dixon noted that attending college was a social expectation meant to help many students with career success. Forty-five years later studies still indicate that knowledge and experience gained through higher education are important for the jobs of the future (Russell, 2011). There is evidence that education raises earnings. In 2011 for full-time workers with a bachelor's degree, average weekly earnings were 64% higher than those of workers with only a high school diploma (U.S. Department of the Treasury & U.S. Department of Education, 2012). In 2012 the earnings for full-time adult workers aged 25 - 34 with a bachelor's degree was 57% more than graduates who had only high school diplomas (U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Educational Statistics, 2014). In the United States a national survey in 2012 revealed that 75% of Americans believed a college education is important for finding a good job, and 74% believed higher education can advance a person's career. Additionally, 88% of Americans believed college education is important for intellectual benefits such as critical thinking and new ways to analyze information, and 86% believed it is important for personal development (Northeastern University, FTI Consulting, & Brookings Institution).

The Presidential Request for Action

In 2009 in a joint session of the United States Congress, President Obama urged Congress and the American people to invest in higher education. President Obama cited the importance of increasing the number of higher education graduates in this country because many jobs of the future will require higher education. In 2010, in a speech at the University of Texas at Austin, President Obama said,

It's an economic issue when the unemployment rate for folks who've never gone to college is almost double what it is for those who have gone to college. Education is an economic issue when nearly eight in 10 new jobs will require workforce training or a higher education by the end of this decade. Education is an economic issue when we know beyond a shadow of a doubt that countries that out-educate us today, they will out-compete us tomorrow.

The single most important thing we can do is to make sure we've got a world-class education system for everybody. That is a prerequisite for prosperity.

It is an obligation that we have for the next generation. (para. 17)

President Obama's focus on college completion rates motivated organizations to work to increase the number of higher education graduates in the United States (Russell, 2011). Russell (2011) noted that there has been a shift in attention from educational access for students to educational attainment. In March 2011 the President's administration called on states to lead the effort, with federal government support, to "increase college success and improve productivity" (Russell, 2011, p. 2). In its 2012 budget the administration designated money to its "First in the World" incentive program to "support programs that accelerate learning, boost completion rates and hold down tuition" (Russell, 2011, p. 2). Moreover, the United States used to lead the

world in college degrees earned but no longer does so. Degree attainment for working adults is at 40% and the rate has remained the same for the last 40 years. Currently, other nations are reporting a degree attainment rate of 50% or higher (Lumina Foundation, 2011). Of those who do attend college, the Lumina Foundation (2011) reported that “fewer than 60% of first-time, full-time college students earn their bachelor’s degree in six years” (p. 7). Laitinen (2012) stated “the nation’s workforce and future prosperity are at risk. The percentage of adults with college degrees is growing at a snail’s pace even as other nations race ahead” (p. 3).

The Response

The President’s request for action was answered by both government and nongovernment bodies. Even prior to the President’s remarks in 2009, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation announced its initiative in 2008 to “double the number of low-income students who earn a postsecondary degree or certificate by age 26 by the year 2025” (Russell, 2011, p. 3). The Lumina Foundation also announced in 2008 its wish to “increase the percentage of Americans with high-quality degrees and credentials to 60 percent by the year 2025” (Russell, 2011, p. 3). According to the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) legislatures need to address education and focus on workforce concerns and economic factors (AASCU State Relations and Policy Analysis Team, 2013). Increasing postsecondary graduation rates will contribute to an educated workforce.

College Readiness

With the national focus turned to college degree completion, colleges and universities are working to create and implement strategies to help their students. Russell (2011) cited over 12

initiatives by major colleges to increase student completion rates in higher education.

Additionally school districts are focused on ensuring that high school students are ready to enter college. American College Testing (ACT), which establishes benchmarks to determine if high school students are ready for college, defined college and career readiness as “the acquisition of the knowledge and skills a student needs to enroll and succeed in credit-bearing first-year courses at a postsecondary institution...without the need for remediation” (ACT, 2011, para. 2). ACT explained its benchmarks as “the minimum scores needed on the ACT subject area tests to indicate a 50% chance of obtaining a B or higher or about a 75% chance of obtaining a C or higher in corresponding first-year credit-bearing college courses” (2011, para. 3). In 2011, of the graduating high school students who were tested by ACT,

- 66% met the English Benchmark;
- 52% met the Reading Benchmark;
- 45% met the Math Benchmark; and
- 30% met the Science Benchmark.

Though more than half of graduating students met the benchmarks for English and reading, less than half met those marks for math and science. Only 25% met all four of ACT’s College Readiness Benchmarks (ACT, 2011).

Students’ Diverse Undergraduate Experiences

While ACT provided benchmarks for college readiness, the organization also provided insight regarding the kind of student enrolling in higher education. The ACT noted in *The Reality of College Readiness 2013* national report that many students move through multiple postsecondary placements. The ACT stated:

- 11% of students simultaneously enrolled in more than one institution
- 41% of graduates attended more than one institution
- 38% enrolled part time
- More than 2 million students brought college credit with them at the time of first full-time enrollment (dual credit, aP, online, or CleP)
- 30% delayed enrollment a year or more
- 25% of undergraduates were over age 25
- 30% of undergraduates enrolled in an online course
- 29% of community college students transferred to four-year colleges
- 14% transferred from four-year to two-year colleges. (p. 2)

These statistics highlight the mobility and diverse college experience of students. Colleges and universities may find it challenging to assist them to college completion.

Academically Unprepared

In the early 1970s Cross (1971) declared that a new kind of student had entered higher education. These students had fewer academic skills and lower academic performance than previous students. Cross noted that these students were very likely to experience difficulty with traditional educational tests and classroom experiences. These differences, Cross noted, were cause for concern. Neither society nor higher education institutions were fully prepared to understand what this educational population shift would mean in the future. Institutions admitted

underachieving academic students into their colleges and universities as “high risks” (Cross, 1971, p. 26) and required them to participate in specific programs. These programs may have helped with retention but showed little evidence of helping students improve academically (Cross, 1971). De Sousa (2005) echoed Cross’s concerns by observing that many students today are not prepared for college-level work and have many different levels of abilities. Amelga (2012) and Brock (2010) also stated that entering college students are not ready for college level work. Institutions work hard to provide services to meet the varying degrees of abilities exhibited, and De Sousa noted that some institutions do a better job of this than others.

Student Adjustment

Cross (1971) noted that academically weak and underprepared students did not learn how to be academically successful in secondary education but instead learned to avoid failure. Such avoidance negatively impacted their educational experiences so that when they reached postsecondary institutions they needed assistance. Tinto (1993), one of the leading theorists on student retention and student departure in higher education, argued that most college students need assistance of some type. Tinto noted that many first semester college students begin their college careers in unfamiliar environments. Students attend college with a wide range of differing commitments, knowledge, skills, resources, and personal attributes. In order to persist in their higher educational endeavors, students need to adjust “socially and intellectually, to the new and sometimes quite strange world of the college” (Tinto, 1993, p. 45). Even those students who were responsible and capable needed help adjusting to college life. For students without the appropriate precollege academic experiences, the adjustment could be quite difficult. Whereas Tinto (1993) emphasized the adjustment students must make to the different environment, De

Sousa (2005) noted that institutions must also work hard to provide these students with the resources they need to be successful. Kuh (2009) observed that both the student and the institution must make the effort to create the environment and opportunities appropriate for engagement.

Student Expectations

In 1966 Dixon noted that attending college was a social expectation. Dixon also stated that most students, “do not aspire to become scholars” (1966, p. 165). Mismatches between students and the institution continue to be a concern. Giaquinto (2009) stated that there is concern regarding the mismatch between students and instructors in the area of teaching. Instructors must teach in a manner that is effective for students or students will not remain at the institution. Kuh (2009) addressed incongruence between student and faculty expectations. Kuh (2009) reported “nine of ten first-year students expected to earn grades of B or better,” (p. 692) but only spent about half the time on their assignments that faculty stated they needed to spend on them in order to do well. Kuh (2009) stated “three of ten first-year students reported working just hard enough to get by” (p. 692) and “between forty and fifty percent of first-year students never used career planning, financial advising, or academic tutoring services” (p. 692). Student expectations for their educational experience may differ significantly from the academic expectations faculty or other academic professionals have for student education, and therein may lie the rub. Student expectations regarding their higher educational experience may not align with the expectations of the institution regarding that same educational experience.

Students attend college for a variety of reasons, one of those being to facilitate a stable career that will support a family (Brock, 2010). Local communities, individual states, and the

nation have an economic need for an educated and skilled work force (AASCU State Relations and Policy Analysis Team, 2013; Russell, 2011). Colleges and universities focus on the student's quality of academic work. According to Cross (1971) higher education should adequately prepare students to tackle the issues and problems of their times. Education should also address societal needs and foster "personal development and self-fulfillment" (Cross, 1971, p. 84). De Sousa (2005) reiterated that students develop and grow during college. De Sousa (2005) stated that "schools recognize that in terms of learning and personal development, what students bring to college is less important than what they *do* when they get to college" (p. 1). Attending college creates growth and change as students face the challenges of the college environment.

Student Academic Identification

Many students experience a great deal of stress and anxiety during their college careers. As Tinto (1993) pointed out, adjusting to the college environment is important to student success, but so is meeting the "minimum standards regarding academic performance" (p. 48). Many students will find that they cannot meet the academic requirements of the institution and they will withdraw. Others will persist in the educational environment, all the while struggling, until they ultimately fail in their efforts (Tinto, 1993).

Some students identify with academics in such a way that they define themselves in terms of how well they perform in the role of student (Anderman & Anderman, 2009). For these students doing well in school motivates them to continue to do well. Other students don't feel this affinity for academics and are therefore less motivated to do school work. Those students who identify with academics will find that a good academic performance is rewarding, which

leads to increased satisfaction. Likewise, a poor academic performance will lead to a decrease in satisfaction and the feeling that they have been punished. Students who do not identify with academics will not have these same feelings of reward and punishment from their academic work. Anderman and Anderman (2009) noted in their explanation that if institutions can identify those students who do not identify with academics and do it early enough, then the institution can intervene.

Student Engagement

Acknowledging the importance of the student's first year in college, Tinto (1993) noted that more students withdraw during that first year than at any other time in their college career. Freidman and Mandel (2009) stated there is an "unacceptable rate of students that do not return to college after their first year" (p. 242). It is during this time that students are the "most susceptible to the pains and doubts which separation and transition evoke. Deficiencies in prior academic preparation are most noticeable and most acutely felt" (Tinto, 1993, p. 163). How the institution responds to student "deficiencies" (Tinto, 1993, p. 163) and transitional separation can brand the institution. The college may be perceived as responsive and welcoming or as cold and aloof. This perception can then be projected onto the administration, faculty, staff, and even other students, thereby affecting the entire campus environment. The relationship between the institution and the student has been examined for some time. Mayhew remarked in 1966 that students and institutions are each affected by the other, and Tinto (1993) agreed that the institution has a role to play in the success of the student. Tinto noted that within this pivotal stage of the student's first year, institutions have the opportunity to intervene with the student

and provide assistance to help the student transition. Such assistance then helps the student persist toward graduation.

Kuh (2009) identified engagement as still being considered important in terms of student success and student satisfaction. Kuh (2009) reported that several different instruments are used today to measure student engagement and satisfaction including the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE), the Law School Survey of Student Engagement (LSSSE), and many others. Kuh (2009) stated that these instruments have provided a “treasure trove of insights into how and why engagement is important to a high quality undergraduate experience in the first decade of the twenty-first century” (p. 686), and Kuh (2009) credited many of the researchers and authors who have contributed to this knowledge base. Kuh (2003) earlier identified five benchmarks that the NSSE strives to evaluate: academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, enriching educational experiences, and supportive campus environments.

The Transformative College Experience for Students

College is meant to be a transformative experience. Students are expected to acquire knowledge and skills that prepare them, not only for the workforce, but for life in general. It is an environment in which individuals can meet others with different viewpoints and beliefs, where students can explore their world in a different way, and where personal and intellectual growth occurs (Brock, 2010). The college experience changes students, especially in terms of self-esteem, self-concept, and personal identity (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Throughout their college careers, students generally become “more positive about their academic and social competencies and develop an enhanced sense of self-worth” (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p.

214). Students also develop morally, ethically, socially, culturally, and intellectually. These transitions place higher education among institutions offering intra- and inter-personal development and growth. The knowledge students learn through a college education goes far beyond the knowledge needed to obtain a job after graduation (Brock, 2010). The institution of higher education challenges students to find their personal values, understand cultural differences, and brave the social ills of society.

While the college offers itself as an opportunity for students, students may find these opportunities fraught with the danger of personal, social, and academic alienation, isolation, or distress. Tinto (1993) stated that for many students the change from one community to another can be very stressful. Student distress revealed academically through low student grades and subpar Grade Point Averages (GPAs) will likely cause the institution to let the student know the student is not meeting college expectations. Students who reach this point are at risk of being dismissed from the school (Kelley, 1996).

The Policy of Academic Probation

By offering appropriate services, institutions believe they are offering students the opportunity to persist toward graduation. Academic probation is seen as an opportunity by the institutions to assist students who are at risk of underachieving (Kelly, 1996). Those students who do not meet the minimum academic requirements of the institution will find themselves sporadically or continually on probation throughout their college careers, or they will be dismissed from the institution.

Several factors have been attributed to students reaching academic probation. Students who do not do well academically have been identified as having insufficient motivation, not

having the skills necessary to do well in college, and having negative personal belief systems (Balduff, 2009). Students on academic probation have been noted to have lower levels of hope than their peers (Seirup & Rose, 2011). Tinto (1993) remarked that some students are capable but also “intellectually lazy” (p. 52). Institutions work to help these students succeed and thereby offer, or mandate, services to the students.

Support Services for Students

A range of institutional help is offered to students. Interventions include workshops for students on academic probation (Boretz, 2012), academic credit classes focused on skills students need to succeed (Royal & Tabor, 2008), online and distance learning academic courses (Seirup & Tirotta, 2010), the use of advising services (De Sousa, 2005; Gehrke, 2006; Miller et al., 2011), developmental courses (Miller et al., 2011), early warning systems (Miller et al., 2011), career and job placement services (Miller et al., 2011), academic success centers (Miller et al., 2011), and Student Support Services, which encompass a range of services for students that can include mentoring, academic advising, tutoring, career counseling, financial aid counseling, and instruction in basic skills (Brock, 2010).

Bai and Pan (2009) demonstrated that advising and first year experience (FYE) programs helped certain student populations, and they advocated that different types of interventions be implemented to help different types of students. A review of the Canadian Student Achievement and Retention (STAR) project showed that the program’s combination of supplying students with scholarship money and enhanced counseling services produced a positive effect on student persistence and their grades (Brock, 2010). By helping students succeed, the institution keeps the student enrolled and persisting toward graduation.

The Role of Policy

Public policy involves public discourse. This discourse may take place at the state or national level, or it may occur when two individuals have a conversation about an issue bound by policy parameters such as financial aid. President Obama's call for increased college graduation rates has set the public policy wheels in motion to meet the President's request. Institutions will be affected by these policies and will have to create their own methods of increasing student completion rates.

Institutional policies have been clearly identified as part of the educational learning environment (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Not only are the individual and collective experiences of the classrooms, residence halls, or campus culture foundational for learning, but the procedures and policies of the institution also directly influence and impact the student experience. Policies, therefore, should be carefully designed and implemented in order to create the environment conducive to student growth, development, learning, and engagement. Policies not only cement the values and integrity of the institution, but they are instructive to students just as other aspects of the college environment are (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Statement of the Problem

While researchers examine factors affecting student success or under-achievement in college, there are relatively few studies that focus on the academic policies themselves. Brawner, Frillman, and Ohland (2010) noted little literature pertaining to institutional policies and student success. However, some qualitative studies have asked students for insight into their academic issues (Balduf, 2009; Bell & Short, 2003; Gehrke, 2006). Chambers (2010) reviewed student comments on the NSSE regarding student satisfaction, and Zost (2009) examined the

resiliency of students who are on academic probation. Little research studied the dynamics of the institutional administration in using an academic policy and the students' 'use' and understanding of that policy and associated services.

Institutional policies are integral to how well the institution meets the needs of its student population and how well it provides students with the learning experiences needed to create intrapersonal changes. According to Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), "institutional structures, policies, programs, and services, as well as the attitudes, values, and behaviors of others who occupy (and to some extent define) institutional environments, are all potential influences for change" (p. 58). The purpose of this research is to determine whether the policy of academic probation and its implementation at one particular institution meet the needs of both students and the institution and is a positive influence for change.

Research Questions

The research questions of this study are:

1. From the perspective of higher education administration, what function or purpose does the institution intend the policy of academic probation to serve?
2. From the perspective of the student, what does the student understand the purpose of academic probation to be?
3. What support services do students and administrators identify for students on academic probation?
4. Do students on academic probation use the services offered to them? Why or why not?

5. What services do students believe the institution should offer to help them succeed, and why?

Significance of this Study

The Study

I propose to examine the perceptions of students and administrators at one 4-year institution on the institutional policy of academic probation. Such an examination will allow the institution to consider carefully the intent and purpose of its policy and to determine whether the policy serves a specific purpose guided by the college mission that is important to providing quality education to its students. Such a study may also help institutions examine the services they provide to their students to assist them in their learning, to receive feedback regarding those services from the students who use them, and to potentially make changes to those services. The purpose of this research is to benefit the institutions that implement academic probation policies and the students for whom the policies are intended.

More information is needed to understand the unique and diverse experiences of students on academic probation. As noted by Brawner et al. (2010), little research examines policy and its impact on student success. By carefully considering the purpose of academic policies, institutions must accept responsibility for the impact the policy has on students and ensure the policy meets the needs of its students.

Definition of Terms

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

Academic jeopardy: The situation that occurs when students are at risk of being dismissed from the college or university because their overall grade point average (GPA) has fallen below the standards of the institution (Wlazelek & Coulter, 1999).

Academic probation: The policy of notifying students that they have not met the academic standards of the institution and are restricted in their academic or social activities for a specified period of time or until they raise their GPA to a specific level. Academic probation is most likely to occur if a student's overall grade point average falls below a 2.0 on a 4.0 scale (Gehrke, 2006).

Attrition: The student act of not re-enrolling in an institution of higher education in a consecutive semester (Berger & Lyon, 2005).

Dismissal: The institutional act of refusing to allow a student to continue enrollment (Berger & Lyon, 2005).

Grade Point Average (GPA): The computation of an average of all the grades a student has earned within a certain semester. Overall, or cumulative, GPA is the average computation of all student grades during the entire time the student is at a specific institution.

Persistence: The act of the student staying in higher education from entry into college until graduation (Berger & Lyon, 2005).

Retention: The institution's ability to keep a student enrolled from admission through graduation (Berger & Lyon, 2005).

Support services: A variety of interventions designed to help students raise their GPA and maintain the academic standards of the higher education institution.

Delimitations and Limitations

This study uses a qualitative approach in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the student experience of being on academic probation at one 4-year, small, private institution. Qualitative research allows for a holistic and flexible approach to studying a phenomenon in a real-world setting. It also allows for an in-depth and rich investigation into the understandings and perceptions of people involved in certain situations, events, or happenstances (Snape & Spencer, 2003). Through qualitative research *why* and *how* questions can be addressed such as: Why does the institution place students on probation? Why do students believe they are placed on probation? How are students removed from probation?

This study is limited to students who are currently on academic probation or have been on academic probation within the last 2 years at one particular institution. The results cannot necessarily be generalized to other institutions, to other students at the same institution who have not experienced academic probation, nor to other students on academic probation at the same institution.

Limitations of the study include unwillingness by students to participate in the study, or an unwillingness to share openly and honestly the experiences of being on academic probation by those who choose to participate. Students in the geographic region where this study took place tend to be predominantly White, so there may be limited racial diversity among participants.

Statement of Researcher Perspective

I have worked at a small, private institution of higher education. Within the scope of my duties, I regularly worked with students who were on academic probation. Therefore, my perspective may have potential biases. Many of the students I worked with struggled with their course work and wanted to do better so they could stay in college. Others did not attempt to use the resources available to them. I found that I often wanted to find a ‘magic key’ that would unlock each student’s potential and desire to succeed. My drive to help these students and my experiences in hearing their concerns and trying to understand what may be helpful to them, are potential biases that I have toward the concerns of the students in this study. While I understand that institutions must have expectations for their students and that a minimum standard of behavior and academic success is important, I personally question whether a policy that highlights a student’s academic failure rather than student success is the best way to help student motivation and achievement. I wonder if being on academic probation actually inspires positive change within the student.

Chapter Summary

Since the 1960s researchers have recognized that the skills, commitment, and motivation of students affect their academic efforts and achievement in college. It has also been established that there is a significant relationship between the institution and the student, a relationship whereby each affects the other. One of the factors affecting this relationship is the policies of the institution including the policy of academic probation for students who do not meet the minimum academic requirements of the institution. Traditionally these students have been viewed as lacking in academic skills or possessing certain individual characteristics that make them less successful than their peers. Other researchers ask us to consider that they are not lacking something but instead may not be in the best environment to meet their needs. Institutions provide services to these students intended to help them become successful and persist toward graduation. Currently there is also a national push for more students to complete higher education. This researcher seeks to investigate the relationship between the institution and the student through the policy of academic probation by speaking with the administration and students as to their perception of the policy, its purpose, and its actual use.

Overview of the Study

Chapter 1 of this study provides a brief introduction to and overview of the study, the research questions involved in the study, the statement of the problem, the significance of the study, delimitations and limitations, and a statement of the researcher's perspective.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the literature pertinent to the subject including retention and support efforts for students, reasons students are placed on academic probation, the role of the institution and policies in serving students, and the role of academic probation.

Chapter 3 is a discussion of the qualitative methodology of the study that includes a review of one institution's academic probation policy and an interview with administrators regarding the role of academic probation on that campus. Interviews with students who are on, or have been on, academic probation were also conducted.

Chapter 4 is a presentation and discussion of the results of the study.

Chapter 5 provides recommendations for further research and practice.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Institution and the Student

For more than 300 years institutions of higher education have been present in America, and they have experienced many changes (Berger & Lyon, 2005). For most of their history higher education institutions have been concerned with enrolling students in order to survive. It is only within the last 50 years or so that these institutions have shifted their focus from survival to keeping the college student enrolled (Berger & Lyon, 2005). Today there is an increased emphasis on college completion and degree attainment (AASCU State Relations and Policy Analysis Team, 2013; Fry & Parker, 2012; Lumina Foundation, 2011), and institutions continue to implement policies and services to assist student success. The research cited in this document widely spans the years beginning with retention efforts. These earlier citations help establish an historical foundation concerning the issue of student success in college.

The Early Years

The type of student attending college has changed over the years. Early students were White males who enrolled in small numbers at specific denominational institutions in order to meet the needs for pastors and ministers in specific Christian religions (Berger & Lyon, 2005). Berger and Lyon (2005) stated,

the earliest American colleges, Harvard (1636), William and Mary (1693), and Yale (1701), were established as extensions of their respective churches with the goal of educating young men to satisfy the local demand for pastors

and missionaries among various Christian religions. (p. 9)

Berger and Lyon (2005) noted that persistence toward graduation was not important to these early students and “college degrees had little or no importance” (p. 9). Institutions were “not very stable” (Berger & Lyon, 2005, p. 9) and many closed before a graduating class could be formed.

The Growth of Institutions

In the 1800s the number of higher education institutions grew as did the number of students enrolling; colleges battled to survive and to determine what kind of institutions they would become. In 1862 the Morrill Land Grant Act, which dictated that at least one college in each state offer programs in agriculture and engineering, caused the number of institutions to grow (Berger & Lyon, 2005). The Act also formed the basis for the belief that higher education was “for all at public expense” (Nuss, 2003, p. 67). After World War II over 1 million former veterans used the GI Bill to attend college (Berger & Lyon, 2005) thereby swelling the numbers of students enrolled.

In 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 483, 495, a decision of the United States Supreme Court, stated that separate but equal educational facilities for different races were unconstitutional (Arendale, 2004). Subsequently institutions began to open their doors to persons of color. According to Arendale (2004) the Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1965 promoted equal educational opportunities for students who had traditionally been “excluded from postsecondary education” (p. 7) and targeted first generation and “economically-disadvantaged” (p. 8) students. The Act also provided financial support to these students in a way that had not been available before. In the 1960s community colleges grew to include more

and more students who would previously have gone to work after high school. Just as community colleges began to admit these students, so too did some 4-year institutions. The push toward a more “open door” (Arendale, 2004, p. 11) educational policy allowed students who were not academically prepared for college to enter institutions. Arendale (2004) marked how the increase in the number of new students affected higher education: “While many new students entered postsecondary education, it also witnessed a mass exodus of students who were unable to persist at the institution due to their limited academic preparation and the nature of services then” (p. 10).

Students Today

Today’s college student is very different from the college student who enrolled in the first American institutions. Those students, though small in number, were White men enrolling in predominantly religiously affiliated institutions. In 2005 the American Council on Education reported that the higher education student population consisted of a “complex mosaic” (p. 2) that included a nonwhite population of more than 30%. This mosaic of student identifiers continued to change. In 2013 ACT reported that the nontraditional student age population (over 25 years old) was over 25%. Brock (2010) noted that not only was the nontraditional age population of students growing, but the traditional student age population of 24 or younger in college was declining. The National Center for Education Statistics reported in 2013 that these nontraditional age students are often enrolling in private, for profit institutions (Aud et al., 2013). The U. S. Department of Education through the Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics also reported in its 2013 report on enrollment in postsecondary institutions that between 2001 and 2011 more females than males enrolled in college. From 1976 to 2011

the percentage of White students declined while the percentage of minority students such as Asian Pacific, Black, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Hispanic increased (U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2013).

The idea of the “traditional” student as someone just out of high school and attending college at 18 or 19 years old has changed drastically (Laitinen, 2012). Kuh (2009) highlighted the fact that many college students have jobs and work while trying to succeed in the classroom. In 2003 Thelin noted that the student composition on college campuses was changing for several reasons. Thelin (2003) stated

the traditional image of the student as ‘Joe College’ was supplemented by women, Native Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, and Hispanics. During the same years, new legislation prohibiting discrimination in educational programs (Title IX) allowed women to gradually gain access to extracurricular activities such as intercollegiate athletics and to academic fields such as business, law, medicine, and a host of Ph.D. programs. By 1990, Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act had further encouraged diversity and access by providing guidelines for educational institutions to serve students with disabilities. (p. 17)

There is indeed a “complex mosaic” of individuals attending institutions of higher education. In particular, some for-profit educational institutions have highly diverse student populations with respect to “age, gender, ethnicity, nationality, international and national culture, [and] first language” (Miller et al., 2011, p. 27). Even the terms used to describe diversity at institutions are varied.

College Attendance

Just as the student population changed over the years, so too did the reasons students entered college. According to Olszewski-Kubilius (1998) some who entered college early did so because they longed for the “intellectual challenge of college” (p. 1) or wanted to find a “community of support, acceptance” (p. 3). In 2003 the U. S. Department of Education reported students took a more practical approach and weighed the value of a college education against expected gains after graduation. Family encouragement, support, and the academic ability of the student, as well as institutional factors such as financial aid and tuition and the current state of unemployment also played a part in student decisions to enroll in higher education. According to Arthur Levine (2012) in an interview with Tamar Lewin, today’s college students are interested in attending college as a way to “get training and skills that will lead to a job, and let them make money. They’re willing to have a major they’re not really interested in if they think there will be job growth in that field” (para. 6).

Fry and Parker (2012) for the Pew Research Center documented a change in public opinion about college attendance over the last 3 decades. The authors affirmed that In 1978, the public was evenly divided over whether a college education was necessary to get ahead in life. Roughly 30 years later, a lopsided majority firmly endorsed the necessity of a college degree. In a 2009 Pew Research Center survey, 73% of American adults agreed that, in order to get ahead in life these days, it is necessary to get a college education. Similarly, when the Gallup Organization asked about the importance of college in 2010, 75% of Americans said a college education is ‘very important.’ In 1978, only 36% said the same. (p. 2)

In 2012 Northeastern University, FTI Consulting, and Brookings Institution stated that Americans still believed that higher education is valuable and many considered it “a part of the fabric of American life” (p. 3). Their survey revealed that 70% of Americans believed college is important to achieving the American Dream, and that “most Americans believe a college degree provides important intellectual and personal benefits, as well as job opportunities” (p. 6). It is not surprising then that 94% of parents believe it is likely their children will attend college. However, these parents are concerned about how students will complete their college education. Americans identified several obstacles to completing their college degree including paying for college; balancing family, college, and work; and having the time needed to complete the degree (Northeastern University, FTI Consulting, & Brookings Institution, 2012).

Interestingly enough, Fry and Parker reported in 2012 that “a record one-third of adults ages 25 to 29 have attained at least a bachelor’s degree. As recently as 2006 fewer than 30% of 25- to 29-year-olds had finished at least a bachelor’s degree” (p. 7). Despite, or perhaps in accordance with, the President’s call for more students to earn their college degrees, it appears that more traditional age college students are doing so. Of this age group Fry and Parker (2012) stated “young adults are better educated than they were in 2007” (p. 16). Despite the recent uptick in graduation rates among traditional age college students, institutions still find it important to retain those students who enter the college environment.

Retention

Historically as the student population at higher education institutions grew in number and diversity, the challenge for institutions became keeping those students who entered from leaving before graduation. Berger and Lyon (2005) noted that it was far more cost effective for

institutions to retain students than recruit new ones. With funding an issue for both public and private institutions, making economical sense also made educational sense. Additionally, retention rates have been linked to graduation rates, institutional rankings, and alumni giving. Berger and Lyon (2005) noted how publications such as *U.S. News and World Report* that rank educational institutions increase public awareness of retention rates and highlight institutional responses to retention rates. Retention rates can then be used as a “source of prestige” (Berger & Lyon, 2005, p. 5) for colleges “that can be converted into other kinds of symbolic, material, and human resources—particularly in the competition for more and better students” (Berger & Lyon, 2005, p. 5). Hagedorn (2005) reinforced this observation by stating that

retention is one of the most common ways students, parents and stakeholders evaluate the effectiveness of colleges. A positive reputation increases a college’s ability to attract the best students and faculty. Furthermore, when a student withdraws from college the invested institutional resources were not spent wisely, forcing the college to invest additional resources to recruit new students. (p. 103)

Studies on college retention have addressed a variety of possible issues affecting student persistence. Padgett, Johnson, and Pascarella (2012) found prompt engagement with first generation college students is significant for student development, and social and academic success. Grillo and Leist (2013) discovered a positive correlation between the amount of time students engaged with support services and persistence to graduation. Ackermann and Morrow (2007) determined that students’ use of coping strategies may affect their attitude toward the institution and their ability to persist toward graduation. Morrison (2012) stated certain aspects of the institution play a role in student graduation persistence: Morrison (2012) found

key institutional variables that appear to have the largest effect on

graduation outcomes include percent Pell recipients, private college status, and SAT scores. College size and expenditures per FTE student have a direct but more moderate relationship to graduation outcomes. (p. 171)

In relation to students who struggle academically, Ryan and Glenn (2002) found “intensive, competency-building interventions...are especially effective in increasing the retention rates for less academically able, poorly performing, and provisionally admitted students” (p. 318).

Studies indicate that various factors affect student performance, student retention, and persistence toward graduation. Institutions continue to work to find ways to address those issues.

The Growth of Retention Efforts

Efforts to keep students enrolled in college have become important to institutions in terms of prestige and rankings, which can then translate into increased funding through new enrollments or through gifts. Research into retention efforts is also a more recent phenomenon given the history of higher education. Historically there was little interest in keeping students enrolled because there were so few students “interested in graduating” (Berger & Lyon, 2005, p. 9). Berger and Lyon (2005) charged that

colleges in colonial America struggled to maintain even small enrollments and were primarily interested in attracting students with little or no concern about persistence toward graduation with a degree. College degrees had little or no importance in early American society, and higher education was such a small enterprise that there was no reason to consider persistence toward a degree as an issue. (p. 9)

Thelin also acknowledged that students in colonial America did not seem interested in graduating. Thelin stated that “enrollments were...seldom as much as a hundred students” (p. 6) and that many students “left college after a year or two, apparently with none of the stigma now associated with dropouts” (p. 6). Interestingly, Thelin (2003) asserted that “At William and Mary, so few undergraduates petitioned for graduation that the new governor of Virginia put up commencement prize money as an incentive for students to complete their degree requirements” (p. 6).

As the mid-19th century approached, higher education curricula changed to reflect changes in American society. No longer was the emphasis on religious study; instead curricula reflected the need for a wide range of professionals (Berger & Lyon, 2005). However, there was still no emphasis on graduating and obtaining a degree. According to Berger and Lyon (2005), students at these early colleges did not take their studies seriously and a majority did not graduate. There is no evidence that progress toward the attainment of a degree was even expected by the faculty at these colleges. The time spent at college was idiosyncratic, depending more on the wishes and needs of the students’ family than on the requirements of the institution. (p. 11)

The Rise of Selective Admissions

In the early 1900s “the number of institutions opened remained constant while enrollments increased” (Berger & Lyon, 2005, p. 12). With the increase in industrialization in the country there grew a need “for college education as a means of producing managers and professionals to run the increasingly organized and complex work of the nation” (Berger & Lyon, 2005, p. 13). College enrollments grew rapidly and this allowed institutions to begin to

choose their student body carefully. Berger and Lyon stated “for the first time in history, colleges had enough interest from prospective students that some campuses could afford to be more selective about the type and quality of students who attended their institutions” (p.13). Being able to choose who could attend the institution also worked well towards making sure that certain others could not: “The rise of selective admissions policies developed not only to ensure that students were academically qualified, but also to weed out ‘undesirables’” (Berger & Lyon, 2005, p. 13). With an increasing number of institutions and an increasing number of kinds of institutions, there arose an expectancy “that a college degree was a valuable asset in the competition for entry into higher paying professional positions over merely having a high school diploma along with some college education” (Berger & Lyon, 2005, p. 13).

Institutions of higher education were now in demand. This demand contributed to growth in the number of institutions and a variety in the kinds of institutions established. Students had choices. With the increase in student choice came the importance of crafting a desirable educational experience. To create that desirable environment, institutions became more selective; e.g., institutional admissions selectivity was born. So was the desirability of obtaining a college degree. Thelin (2003) found that “around 1890, popular national magazines started to run profiles of selected colleges and universities as a regular feature” (p. 10). Widespread unemployment during the Great Depression contributed to an increase in college enrollment. After World War II, use of the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act, also known as the GI Bill, by veterans also created a swell of college enrollments (Arendale, 2004; Berger & Lyon, 2005).

Increases in student population also increased the number of students who were not being successful in college. Higher education began to investigate why some students were not successfully obtaining their degrees; they began to look at “patterns of academic failure” (Berger

& Lyon, 2005, p. 15). Early discussions regarding higher education policy involved “teaching strategies” (Thelin, 2003, p. 15) and pitted the value of large lecture classes against small classes. Brock (2010) declared that the changes in who attended college reflected changes in economic and social forces as well as national policies that affected education. While some institutions became more selective in their recruiting efforts, other institutions such as community colleges became “nonselective” (Brock, p. 115). These institutions and a growth in online education have contributed to the growth of a student population that enters college less prepared.

Addressing a Diverse Student Population

Retaining students is now fundamentally important to institutions of higher education, and the amount of research in the area of higher education retention has grown over the last 35 years (Berger & Lyon, 2005). In 2010 American College Testing (ACT) reported that approximately 70% of both public and private 4-year institutions affirmed there is a person on campus responsible for the coordination of retention programs. Institutions have discovered that keeping students enrolled requires many services geared toward the diverse populations attending college. As Berger and Lyon (2005) stated,

as the concept of retention has evolved over time, so has the recognition that one size does not fit all in terms of retention rates and the types of policies and interventions needed to improve retention on any one campus. Hence, as the study of retention has developed, so too has awareness that each institution must tailor retention to fit the specific needs of its students and the context of that particular institutional environment. (p. 3)

Seidman (2005) acknowledged that institutions fund programs and services to help a variety of students “develop the skills necessary to graduate” (p. xii) and the list of potential services is long. Seidman noted that

colleges have provided programs for the economically-disadvantaged, programs for underrepresented students (minorities), programs and services for students with disabilities, women, and older adults reentering college or beginning college for the first time. Counseling programs have been strengthened to try to meet the needs of students. Job and career centers have been established to help students decide on career options and to provide a place for potential employers to meet students. The U.S. and state governments have made financial aid more readily available to a wider range of students, even though aid is now provided as loans rather than outright grants except to the neediest students.

(p. xii)

Additionally, Morgan and Hoshijima (2011) stated institutions are identifying the “changing characteristics of the modern student” (p. 16) and are offering programs designed to fit their needs. Vocational and online programs are increasingly popular. Bai and Pan (2009) acknowledged that certain student characteristics such as gender or classification affect the timing and type of intervention that should be offered to students.

College Completion Rates

Services and programs are designed to help students remain in college. Using the services offered should help students increase their competencies and skills and move toward graduation. However, Seidman (2005) found that this does not seem to happen. Seidman stated

that in spite of the many services and programs available to students, graduation rates “have not improved over time” (p. xii). ACT reinforced this statement in 2012 by reporting that “since the middle of the 20th century, attention has been focused on institutional retention and persistence-to-degree rates. Yet, in spite of significant institutional efforts, those rates remain disappointingly stagnant” (p. 2).

Brock (2010) observed that it is well known “that many students arrive on college campuses unprepared to do college-level work” (p. 116). He recognized that this deficit exists at both 2- and 4-year institutions. Amelga (2012) declared that “there is a gap between students’ aspirations to attend college and their preparedness for college-level work. As a result, many students who enroll in college do not graduate with a degree” (p. 1). Friedman and Mandel (2009) reported that there are a variety of reasons student may not succeed, academically or socially, in college and these are a result of their experiences prior to college. Some of these factors include their previous school systems, administrators, expenditures per student, educational models, teachers, and parental and community support.

College Readiness

The gap that exists between college enrollment and degree completion is “a problem that has not diminished over the years” (ACT, 2010, p. 3). To address this issue, and possibly in response to President’s Obama call for college completion rates to increase, there is a growing emphasis on making sure high school students are ready for college. The AASCU identified college completion as one of the top 10 state issues for higher education in 2012 (AASCU State Relations and Policy Team, 2012). In 2013 one of the top 10 state issues identified for higher education was college readiness (AASCU State Relations and Policy Team, 2013). The AASCU

identified two policies states are using to increase student college readiness: implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and addressing issues in remedial or developmental education. The Common Core State Standards are “uniform national standards for college and career readiness” (AASCU State Relations and Policy Team, 2012, p. 5) in core subjects such as English and math. Forty-five states and the District of Columbia have adopted these standards (Achieve, 2013; ACT, 2011). States are attempting to prepare students to enter college ready to be successful.

Student Success

Student success can be defined and measured in different ways. According to Ewell and Wellman (2007) the simplest definition of student success is “getting students into and through college to a degree or certificate” (p. 2). They acknowledged, however, that there are many dimensions to success. These dimensions range from

student flow across the entire educational pipeline (high school graduation, college enrollment, retention, and degree completion), to the *quality and content* of learning and skills achieved as a result of going to college, to positive *educational experiences* (such as student engagement or satisfaction).

(Ewell & Wellman, 2007, p. 2)

“Student success” they asserted, “is thus a generic label for a topic with many dimensions” (Ewell & Wellman, 2007, p. 2).

These different dimensions are evident by reviewing others’ analysis of student success. Friedman and Mandel (2009) used expectancy theory and goal setting theory as foundations to study predictors of student success in college. Their determination of success was the academic

performance of the first year student and that student's return to the institution for the second year. Giaquinto (2009) noted that students who are unhappy with their instruction are more likely to leave their institution. Giaquinto recommended instructors work with students to make them more engaged with their learning so they will stay at the institution, thus identifying retention as a measure of success. DeVry University, a for-profit institution, uses a "customer service orientation" (Miller et al., 2011, p. 28) for its students and determines student success by both retention and customer satisfaction (Miller et al., 2011).

Kuh (2009) stated that it is critical to use data to determine the success of students. Kuh advocated for data from a variety of sources including student engagement data and "course completion rates, success rates of developmental coursework and supplemental instruction, student retention and graduation rates, transfer student success, student satisfaction, student personal and professional development, and citizenship" (p. 697). One source of data is students themselves. Chambers (2010) reviewed the written comments of students on the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and observed that the students who responded to the survey identified needs in four primary areas: 1. academic needs, 2. student satisfaction (defined as overall student satisfaction), 3. non-academic needs such as "social experience, student services, campus environment, and financial issues" (p. 5), and 4. other concerns (such as racial issues).

Chambers (2010) noted in his review that "quality institutions can be viewed as those that fully engage their students in a variety of activities that contribute to valued and meaningful educational outcomes" (p. 1). The NSSE and other instruments like it are meant to measure student satisfaction in higher education.

Grades

Institutional success can be measured by graduation rates. Student success in higher education is often equated with good grades. After financial concerns, students are more likely to leave college because of poor grades or poor academic ability than for other reasons (Bean, 2005). Students who have a high GPA are generally considered to have met the expectations of faculty. Yet sometimes students use poor grades as a reason to leave, when, the grades themselves are not the reason for leaving. Bean (2005) stated “many students flunk themselves out of school, acting out because they do not know how else to get out of a situation they find uncomfortable” (p. 224). Bean stated, “A student might be classified as an academic failure when the student left for other reasons. Low grades were the mechanism for departure, not the cause” (p. 224). Bean cited the example of a woman who went to the same college the woman’s mother did, but in fact wanted to attend the same college the woman’s best friend was attending. Poor grades at the mother’s alma mater gave this student an excuse to leave that institution. For many students, however, it is more likely that the institution will ask the student to leave because of poor grades. Bean noted that asking students to leave because of a low GPA has a “negative effect on retention” (p. 226). However, Bean acknowledged “a high GPA does not assure continued enrollment. In statistical studies, GPA alone typically explains only a small percentage of the variance in retention” (p. 226).

Grades continue to be the predominant method for determining whether students are achieving or learning in higher education. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) stated that “in certain circumstances grades may well reflect learning” (p. 66). However, they also noted that research has determined there are many factors that influence student learning and grades. They found “that it is extremely hazardous to make comparisons of student learning based on cumulative

grades across different courses, different academic disciplines, or different institutions” (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 66). Grades, they stated, are not the measurement of how much is learned by students but are instead,

an indicator of the extent to which a student successfully complies with the academic norms or requirements of the institution. Thus, grades are viewed as one among a number of dimensions of the college experience (both academic and nonacademic) where the student may demonstrate different levels of involvement, competence, or achievement.

(Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 66)

How grades are calculated “can vary enormously both within and across academic departments and institutions” (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 396). This inconsistency affects the significance of the grade or grade point average. What one particular grade means at one institution may not be the same at another institution—or even across departments at the same institution. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) also noted the following about grades:

Grades are most likely confounded measures, reflecting a combination of a student’s previous academic achievement, general intellectual capacities and abilities, academic skills (such as computer literacy and study and time management skills), and personal traits (such as motivation, self-discipline, and perseverance). (p. 396)

Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) stated that attention to grades is “warranted” (p. 396) and noted that “college grades may well be the single best predictors of student persistence, degree completion, and graduate school enrollment” (p. 396). They acknowledged that “grades are one of the most consistent predictors of these outcomes in both large, nationally representative

studies and in the far more numerous single-institution studies” (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 396). They concluded: “Virtually without exception, students’ grades make statistically significant, frequently substantial, and indeed often the largest contribution to student persistence and attainment” (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 397).

More recently Laitinen (2012) argued that grades don’t measure learning. Laitinen asserted that degrees are awarded based on the amount of time students spend at the institution; that is, the number of credit hours earned, rather than on the learning achieved. The use of credit hours is supposed to measure how much time students spend being taught, and grades are supposed to measure how much students learn. However, Laitinen stated

Although grades are supposed to objectively reflect learning, it is hard to reconcile today’s grades with the research suggesting poor learning outcomes are widespread.....Either college graduates have become much, much smarter over time—a possibility contradicted by all available research—or the function of grades in meaningfully differentiating and rewarding student learning has badly eroded. (p. 6)

Chambers’ (2010) review of student comments on the NSSE found that students had opinions about the grading systems at their school. Chambers stated “Comments indicate a belief that the grading system is not fair and grades do not necessarily reflect students’ abilities” (p. 7). One student made this specific comment: “I learned a lot but my grades do not reflect my ability. This place is so oriented towards proper distribution of student grades that it can lead to a reduction in opportunities for post-graduate students” (Chambers, 2010, p. 7).

Student Involvement

Research indicated that student involvement was also very important to the engagement and success of the student (Astin, 1984/1999; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) stated that “other things being equal, the more the student is psychologically engaged in activities and tasks that reinforce and extend the formal academic experience, the more he or she will learn” (p. 119). Astin (1984/1999) noted that “involvement continues along a continuum” (p. 519). Astin affirmed the “amount of student learning and personal development associated with any educational program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program” (p. 519). Astin also stated that “the effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase student involvement” (p. 519). The more the student is involved with the institution, the more likely the student will learn, do well, and persist until graduation. Student involvement is beneficial to each individual student and to the entire institution and educational environment.

Students want an educational environment in which they can connect with others and with which they can be involved. Chambers (2010) found that social experiences were important to students at their particular universities. From student comments, Chambers surmised that students want to be engaged, and they expressed dissatisfaction when they felt unwelcome at the institution or found it difficult to meet people. Kuh (2009) found that students who participated in learning communities were more likely to be engaged “which, in turn, leads to a host of positive educational outcomes” (p. 689). Kuh observed that “engagement, achievement, satisfaction, and persistence are positively linked [though] the strength of these relationships varies” (p. 694).

Braxton and Hirschy (2005) similarly indicated that student involvement with the institution is important to student retention. They stated:

Student entry characteristics, such as past behavior, beliefs, and normative beliefs, shape how students perceive the college or university environment. Interactions with the institutional environment then result in psychological processes that affect a student's motivation. The psychological processes include positive self-efficacy, declining stress, increasing efficacy, and internal locus of control....The psychological processes lead to academic and social integration, institutional fit and loyalty, intent to persist, and persistence. (Braxton & Hirschy, 2005, p. 64)

Smart, Feldman, and Ethington (2006) echoed the importance of the academic environment to students, but they cautioned that student success is dependent on congruence between the capabilities, interests, and values of students when they enter the institution and the interests, abilities, and values the academic environment seeks to reinforce and reward.

Student Commitment

Braxton and Lee (2005) discussed student involvement in terms of student commitment. They noted that for students for whom graduation is the ultimate goal, the student's level of commitment will "influence his or her level of subsequent commitments" (Braxton & Lee, 2005, p. 109). The greater the commitment to graduation, the greater the likelihood the student will persist and achieve success.

Tinto (1993) also indicated that student commitment was a factor influencing student success. Tinto stated,

A person's willingness to work toward the attainment of his/her goals is an important component of the process of persistence in higher education. Conversely, the lack of willingness or commitment proves to be a critical part of the departure process. The unavoidable fact is that college completion requires some effort...it calls for a willingness to commit oneself to the investment of time, energy, and often scarce resources to meet the academic and social demands which institutions impose upon their students. (p. 41)

Tinto noted that not all students have the commitment college requires. Those students who leave the institution may simply not be willing to do the necessary work.

Student Interaction

For other students, persistence in college depends more on the support systems they have. Hand and Payne (2008) advocated that "relationships and emotional support play a major role" (p. 7) in student persistence. For others, it is not the relationship with other people that creates student success, but instead it is the way students interact with academic resources. According to Bean (2005) students interact with academic resources in four major ways. The first and most important means is through the courses students take. In addition to coursework, Bean noted that faculty teaching styles, faculty interactions with students, and academic advising are also important aspects of "academic integration" (p. 226) and affect retention. Bean summarized the many different aspects of student involvement this way:

A student enters college with a record of academic performance and cultural capital, interacts with faculty members, advisors, and other students in formal and informal academic settings, forms the attitudes that their education is of

practical value for getting work, develops a sense of academic self-efficacy, approaches academic work, develops an internal locus of control related to academic achievement, gets good grades, feels loyal to the school, and chooses to continue enrollment there. The importance of the effects of academic performance in college on retention should not be underestimated.

(p. 227)

Students, with their own personal histories, cultures, and measures of confidence, interact with the personal resources of the college and create relationships that affect their feelings toward the institution and, therefore, student success. It is also important to remember that students want to establish relationships with their institution albeit with faculty or other aspects of the campus environment. Chambers (2010) revealed that students' written comments on the NSSE reflect their desire for a welcoming campus environment. The NSSE is one instrument based on the belief "that there is value in asking students about their experience" (McCormick & McClenney, 2012, p. 329).

Fear of Failure

More than forty years ago Cross (1971) identified an influx of academically challenged students into the higher education system and determined that a lack of success might be attributed to a fear of failure by students who had grown too used to failing in their secondary school systems. Students who had historically not succeeded academically before going to college had developed certain patterns of interaction with academic resources such as instructors, assignments, and class activities. Cross stated,

the situation is analogous to that of a young student who tries hard in the

beginning, but who finds that he never gets rewarded by an A, the teacher's approval, or classmates' admiration. In other words, his efforts... are futile. After repeated experience, he does learn something—that the result of trying is failure. The resultant personality characteristic would appear to be passivity in learning. (p. 28)

Cross advocated that institutions find new ways to address this passivity in learning and noted that these students exhibit characteristic traits that are different than those of successful students. The difference is “successful students are motivated to try; unsuccessful students are motivated to protect themselves against the threat of failure by not trying. They seem to say, ‘If I don’t try very hard, I can’t fail very much’” (Cross, 1971, p. 30). Cross stated that students afraid of failure were “more fearful of putting their abilities to a test...less confident of their abilities...[and] avoid risk” (p. 30).

Glasser (2009) observed in her work with students on academic probation that some students express that same fear. Glasser (2009) noted one student as physically expressing “despair, shame, and apology” (para. 4) and stated that many of these students do not understand how to “build on failure” (para. 7). Instead, the students with whom Glasser (2009) worked, and similarly to Cross’s observation years earlier, resisted attempts to do better because they were afraid of failing. Glasser stated,

Unfortunately, more often than not, students placed on academic probation because of a poor performance in their first semester of college resisted turning in an imperfect paper, completing a flawed exam, or appearing in subsequent classes because they were too paralyzed by criticism to prepare or move forward. Their self-defeating actions stem from fear of

criticism. In short, they are bad at failing. (para. 8)

Levine (2012) also echoed the belief that students are afraid of failing. In the interview with Lewin, Levine stated that today's college students are "very optimistic about their personal futures but almost equally pessimistic about the future of the country. And they have a great fear of failure" (para. 6).

Chambers (2010) found that students reported using few student services. Some students were unaware as to what kind of help was available to them if they needed it and were unaware of how to ask for help. De Sousa (2005) asserted that institutions have the students they have and not the students they wish they had. De Sousa declared that institutions must look at the talent of the students who enter their doors and believe that "any student can learn anything we teach here, provided the right conditions are established for their learning, and [the institutions] enact this belief by meeting students where they are – academically, socially, and psychologically" (p. 2). For students who entered those doors only to struggle academically, academic probation is meant to help.

Support Services for Students

Since the 1600s there have been programs to assist students (Arendale, 2004). These services began with tutoring in the 1600s, incorporated remedial education classes in the 1800s, and developed into learning assistance centers in the 1980s. In order to retain students, to help those who struggle manage their academic loads and succeed in the college environment, institutions of higher education offer students a variety of services meant to help them get on their academic feet. Arendale (2004) referred to these services as "academic access" (p. 5) that

“describes the entire array of activities and services that a postsecondary institution provides to increase the academic success of its students” (p. 5).

The student population shift in higher education that began after World War II included a significant number of students who were considered academically weak. Brock (2010) noted that the advent of some less selective institutions and online education have made it even easier for unprepared students to enter higher education. McCormick and McClenney (2012) observed too many students enter college unprepared for college-level work, yet many developmental programs are little more than revolving doors; too many students who begin college never graduate, often accumulating considerable debt; the most rapid enrollment growth is among the groups that higher education has historically served least well—so institutions have to do more to ensure their students’ success; students’ development of generalized critical-thinking and problem-solving skills falls short of what we want and need; we are not producing enough graduates in science, technology, engineering, and math; cost escalation is unsustainable, with most of the growth occurring outside of core educational functions; and the United States is losing ground to other countries with regard to postsecondary degree attainment. (p. 1)

Even college presidents are “concerned about the quality, preparedness and study habits of today’s college students” (Fry & Parker, 2012, para. 9). Fry and Parker (2012) revealed that “52% of [college] presidents say college students today study less than their predecessors did a decade ago; just 7% say they study more” (para. 9). To serve those who enter college with weak skills or who do not perform well once they are in college, “higher education leaders must embrace lower-cost, high-quality academic delivery models” (Lumina Foundation, 2011, p. 17).

A Variety of Services

Institutions have implemented many services for students to help them develop their academic, social, and personal skills. These services include learning communities in which students live together and take classes together (Berger & Lyons, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), orientation programs for first year students (Braxton & Lee, 2005), academic classes for first year students (Royal & Tabor, 2008), advising services (Brawner et al., 2010; De Sousa, 2005; Hand & Payne, 2008, Preuss & Switalksi, 2008), counseling services (Brawner et al., 2010; Cross, 1971), mentoring (De Sousa, 2005) or coaching (Miller et al., 2011), intentional instruction (Giaquinto, 2009), online and distance learning academic programs (Seirup & Tirota, 2010), tutoring (Hand & Payne, 2008; Tinto, 2005), learning opportunities outside the classroom (De Sousa, 2005), financial aid (Miller et al., 2011), and supplemental instruction (Hand & Payne, 2008; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 2005).

Students who responded on the written comments section of the NSSE emphasized the importance of academic experiences including “academic support, class size, limited course offerings, teaching assistants, teacher quality, and program expectations” (Chambers, 2010, p.15). Chambers (2010) suggested

there is an apparent need for academic support focusing on the ways in which the institution could assist students with both common and unique learning experiences. The issue of providing academic support for students to facilitate the continuity of their studies was mentioned by many respondents. (p. 15)

Tinto (2005) pointed out that that research supports three types of support for students: “academic, social, and financial” (p. 322). In terms of academic support, Tinto (2005) noted that

“more than a few students enter the university insufficiently prepared for the rigors of university study” (p. 322). Hand and Payne (2008) suggested that for students, especially first generation students, institutions use teaching methods that “encourage student interaction and the development of relationships” (p. 9).

Financial Aid

One form of student support in college is financial assistance. Curs and Harper (2012) determined that financial aid positively affected student success at one institution, and they recommended that institutions consider using financial aid to increase students’ GPA and thus increase their chances of graduating. Scott-Clayton (2008) identified positive correlations between students who received scholarship money for a minimum GPA and course load and college completion rates at an institution in West Virginia. Hossler, Ziskin, Gross, Kim, and Cekic (2009) also found that financial assistance provided a moderate positive effect on student success. The researchers stated that grants have a more positive impact on student persistence than loans and that student work study programs deserve more policy attention. While financial aid has been determined to be a positive influence on college persistence and student success, financial aid is generally withheld when students fall below the threshold of satisfactory progress. According to the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Financial Aid, students are only eligible for federal financial aid if they “maintain satisfactory academic progress in college or career school” (under General Eligibility Requirements). “Satisfactory academic progress” is determined by the institution. The government’s website states

You need to make satisfactory academic progress in order to continue receiving federal student aid. In other words, you have to make good

enough grades, and complete enough classes (credits, hours, etc.), to keep moving toward successfully completing your degree or certificate in a time period that's acceptable to your school.

Each school has a satisfactory academic progress policy for financial aid purposes; to see your school's, you can check your school's website or ask someone at the *financial aid office*. Your school's policy will tell you

- what grade-point average (or equivalent standard) you need to maintain;
- how quickly you need to be moving toward graduation (for instance, how many credits you should have successfully completed by the end of each year). (n.d., para. 3-4)

Not only does placing a student on academic probation decrease the possibility that the student will continue at the institution, it also decreases the student's financial means of remaining at the institution.

Academic Probation

Academic probation as a policy is meant to encourage student performance and to identify the gravity of the student's academic situation and the student's risk of being dismissed from the college. Kelley (1996) identified academic probation as a way to encourage better student performance, to let students know they are underperforming academically, and to help identify those students who may be at risk of leaving the institution because of academics. Preuss and Switalski (2008) acknowledged that students have no "intention of failing" (para. 3) when they enroll in college and that failure can be attributed to a variety of factors. Finding out

how to intervene is important. The two researchers conducted a study in which students on academic probation were voluntarily enrolled in an academic advising program. However, they found that students who did not participate in the intervention also increased their GPA at the end of the semester. They postulated that “being placed on probation may act as an external motivator for improved academic performance” (Preuss & Switalski, 2008, para. 15).

The Timing of Probation

Brawner et al. (2010) found that “all higher education institutions have policies and guidelines that determine which students are in good academic standing” (p. 2). Seidman (2005) pointed out that academic probation can be used to “define a student at risk” (p. 307). However, Seidman also noted that identifying students at risk through the policy of academic probation usually takes place at the end of a term or semester and after the student has experienced difficulty. This intervention after the fact allows the student little immediate intervention or feedback from the institution regarding the student’s lack of progress and needed services. Seidman questioned the timing of placing a student on academic probation. By the time the student learns about being placed on academic probation, the student has most likely already left campus for that specific term and has likely already met with a student advisor and scheduled classes for the upcoming semester or term. Seidman noted that this arrangement allowed the problem to persist for a period of time (from acknowledging the academic risk to placing the student on probation to intervention status), which makes the process of remediation or intervention take longer.

Seidman (2005) also acknowledged that students on academic probation are less likely to ask for help and less “able to navigate the probationary process. Consequently, the student will

not follow through and probably not return” (p. 308). Seidman declared this situation a “waste of human capital, especially when the problem may not be very critical and may be remediated with a minimum of services” (p. 308).

Navigating the College Terrain

Seidman (2005) noted that students on academic probation may not have the skills necessary to deal with the processes the school has in place for them. Brawner et al. (2010) noticed that there is a similar general situation for students in terms of “academic literacy” (p. 3). They declared that “within the context of undergraduate education it [academic literacy] refers to the very basic skills and information that students need to navigate the system successfully” (Brawner et al., 2010, p. 3). Incoming undergraduate students do not know they lack the literacy skills they need for survival; universities expect them to come into the academic environment with this basic knowledge already in place. Once it becomes apparent the student does not have the basic knowledge and skills needed, the student may already be behind. This point, and Seidman’s point that student notification of academic probation may come too late, are significant. Students may not have the knowledge needed to succeed, and institutional issues or practices that make navigating the system difficult for these students is compounded by delayed intervention.

De Sousa (2005) observed that students face many challenges in the college environment. De Sousa suggested “finding one’s way through college requires something akin to a global positioning satellite (GPS) instrument, something that is more sensitive to complex features of the terrain and offers more options and directions for what students can do to survive and thrive” (p. 2). Taking into account the struggles students face, Heisserer and Parette (2002) stated that

college personnel “should make a concerted and coordinated effort to develop a comprehensive plan targeting at-risk students, specifically students on academic probation” (p. 4). They advocated that one component of such a plan would be to have the student sign a contract that clearly outlined what the student must do in order to be removed from academic probation.

Students at Risk

In the late 1960s Smith and Winterbottom (1970) characterized at-risk students on academic probation as students who generally had unrealistic expectations regarding their grades. The authors summarized the findings of their studies by attributing the “apathy” (Smith & Winterbottom, 1970, p. 390) of the students on probation to “a lack of positive motivation, disconfirmed expectations, discouragement, and possibly, guilt and/or shame, and that their apparent irresponsibility and self-defeating behavior may be due to defensiveness, dependency, and resentment toward authority” (Smith & Winterbottom, 1970, p. 390). These personality characteristics were hardly flattering to this population. Tinto (1993), speaking in terms of student retention, suggested professionals not stereotype the student who leaves college before graduation. Tinto (1993) warned that labeling students as “failures for not having completed their course of study” (p. 3) limits both the achievements of the student and the possibilities of the institution. Identifying students on academic probation in similar terms may also be limiting.

Chambers (2010) revealed that the majority of student comments on the NSSE at one particular institution were concerned with the academic experience. Students expressed concerns about academic support, class sizes, the number of course offerings, concerns with teaching assistants, the quality of teaching, and program expectations. Pruess and Switalski (2008) noted that students on probation expressed concerns about a variety of issues including problems with

instructors, prioritization, goal setting, balancing family and school, studying for tests, test anxiety, and learning styles.

Today students entering college are evaluated at most institutions, in part, by scores on standardized exams such as the ACT or the SAT. While the Education Commission of the States (ECS) (2012) recognized that achievement tests can serve an important function in evaluating students, the organization also asked us to remember how low scores may affect the student. Students may think a low score on the SAT is a reflection of their lack of ability, when instead factors such as not having access to good schools, good teachers, or good resources may be the issue. ECS also noted that the issue could well be the student's lack of effort, not ability. These comments reiterate Tinto's (1993) earlier words that it may be a lack of effort that contributes to a student's struggles, not a lack of ability.

Incongruence

Tinto (1993) recognized that students who do not do well in college, either academically or socially, may be experiencing "incongruence" (p. 51) and that a "mismatch" (p. 51) exists between the student and the institution. Tinto (1993) noted that this mismatch may be "between the abilities, skills, and interests of the student and the demands placed upon that person by the academic system of the institution. Academic and/or intellectual incongruence may be the result" (p. 51). This incongruence can also be with students "unable or unwilling to partake of the full range of academic resources available to them" (Tinto, 1993, p. 52). Chambers (2010) observed by students' own comments that some of them do demonstrate an inability or unwillingness to use college resources. Giaquinto (2009) remarked that some students departed from institutions because their learning style was incongruent with the instructor's teaching style.

Smart et al. (2006) highlighted the importance of Holland's person-environment theory of congruence in education. Congruence with the educational environment equaled student success. Finding methods by which students can fit into the environment will assist them toward persistence.

Academic Policy

Many higher education policies are initiated outside the institution in terms of public policy regarding education. In terms of college completion Brock (2010) advocated that educators and policy makers create and implement strategies that will lead to student success, and that they place a greater emphasis on program evaluation. Policymakers can do a great deal to help students be successful.

Policies are the foundation of an institution and govern the work of the institution. Institutions have policies governing the conduct of students as well as faculty and staff in their roles as employees and the relationships that students and faculty can have with each other in their respective roles. Policies govern the actions of groups on campus including faculty committees and student organizations. Policies direct hours of operation for offices on campus, residential hall operations, dining hall service, protocols for student services, marketing operations, fundraising drives, alumni relations, student government, and expectations regarding student success in the classroom.

In addition to the policies governing the work of the institution, those policies that govern student success include policies regarding curricula. Connelly and Connelly (2010) identified three types of curriculum policy: formal, implicit, and prudential. Formal policies encompass what is being taught to students. Implicit policies occur at the administrative or governmental

level and affect curriculum practices. Prudential policies are those practical aspects of policy implementation that officials put into practice. However these policies may be identified and used, Connelly and Connelly acknowledged that there is little analysis of the policies. Instead reviews of policy tend to be idealistic or philosophical. They also stated that policy development “appears to be academic and bureaucratic” (Connelly & Connelly, 2010, p. 225). Updates and revisions may be developed by a few chosen individuals, and they noted that “the process of writing curriculum policy is political” (Connelly & Connelly, 2010, p. 225).

Policy as Discipline

Whereas institutions may have begun relatively recently in their history to focus on retention efforts, there have generally been expectations regarding student success. The concept of disciplining “students for having low academic achievement” (J.M. Anderson, personal communication, October 2, 2012) has been around for “centuries” (J. M. Anderson, personal communication, October 2, 2012), though it has been called by different names (J.M. Anderson, personal communication, October 2, 2012). “Students used to be ‘sent-down’ or are given rustication from Oxford and Cambridge” (J.M. Anderson, personal communication, October 2, 2012) for underachievement in higher education. Students today who are in academic jeopardy and are placed on probation may have to meet with an advisor or other faculty or staff or may be placed in remedial programs or student success programs (Kelley, 1996).

Policy as Intervention

Astin (1984/1999) observed that administrators and faculty members must recognize that virtually every institutional

policy and practice (e.g. class schedules, regulations on class attendance, academic probation, and participation in honors courses; policies on office hours for faculty, student orientation, and advising) can affect the way students spend their time and the amount of effort they devote to academic pursuits. (p. 523)

Astin recommended giving greater attention to the “passive, reticent, or unprepared student” (p. 526) because “passivity is an important warning sign that may reflect a lack of involvement” (p. 526). Astin advocated knowing how students experiencing academic difficulties spend their time and whether or not “the academic difficulties stem from competing involvements, poor study habits, lack of motivation, or some combination of these factors” (p. 527). The myriad of support services offered to students in academic jeopardy reflects the attempts of institutions to address student needs.

Policy as Relationship

Bean (2005) affirmed that institutional policy can affect the student population. Bean commented:

the way in which bureaucratic activities are carried out can lead to greater social integration for students on the one hand and greater alienation on the other.

Students who feel helped and empowered by these exchanges are likely to feel loyal to the school and remain enrolled. Students who feel powerless in the face of this bureaucratic maze can become alienated. (p. 230)

Students and their relationship to the institution can be affected by how the institution carries out its business and day-to-day activities. For some students these exchanges enhance their connectedness to the school; for others, these exchanges are debilitating. These exchanges,

though dependent to an extent on the personality of the person with whom the student is engaged, are crafted through policies that emphasize actions and consequences.

Policy as Instruction

Including students in the creation or revision of policy is one way to help them become stewards of their own educational experiences. Morgan and Hoshijima (2011) advocated for avenues for students to have their voices heard and acknowledged that some methods are already in place. They also advocated that students be allowed to be a part of the conversations that take place regarding changes in policy. All too often students find out about policy changes after they have been made and the students were left out of the conversations (Morgan & Hoshijima, 2011). Not only should students be a part of the conversations regarding policy changes at their institutions, but Morgan and Hoshijima stated students should be engaged at the state and national levels. Institutions can include students in the policy-making process by holding “public forums to discuss important changes to tuition, fiscal policy, curriculum, or other major areas of the college’s function” (Morgan & Hoshijima, 2011, p. 22). Chambers (2010) recognized the importance of addressing student concerns as institutions look at crafting and implementing academic plans for students. The results of Chambers’s study could “provide a baseline for discussions about institutional and public policies or practices related to student engagement, learning, and success in postsecondary education” (Chambers, 2010, p. 17).

Policy Made

Tinto (1993) articulated institutional procedures as formal or informal, rigid or flexible, and involving various members of the institution. Student behavior is managed by “academic

requirements for given degree programs” (Tinto, 1993, p. 51) and such interactions reveal the “character of institutional life” (Tinto, 1993, p. 50). The institution has “an impact ...upon student behaviors” (Tinto, 1993, p. 85) and “academic difficulty...typically reflects a situation in which the demands of the academic system prove too great” (Tinto, 1993, p. 117). The institution bears the responsibility of defining appropriate and inappropriate social and academic behavior.

Morgan and Hoshijima (2011) recognized that those students most affected by certain policies are those least likely to advocate for needed change. They called it “disconcerting that most often our higher educational system fails the very students who are the least likely to speak up about it” (Morgan & Hoshijima, 2011, p. 14) and they advocated for student involvement in the policy-making process. They argued that

strong student voices in higher education policy could help to ensure that federal, state and institutional policy makers continue to direct their reforms toward the issues the matter most to students, including tuition prices, financial aid, and the quality of the courses they offer.

(Morgan & Hoshijima, 2011, p. 2)

They stated it only takes a small group of “committed students...who take on the responsibility of organizing their peers” (Morgan & Hoshijima, 2011, p. 14) to engage students in policy debates.

Student Input

In the United Kingdom, Peck, Chivers, and Lincoln (2010) conducted a study using focus groups in which students were asked what services they wanted the institution to offer and the

following needs were identified: “improved publicity for services...academic tutors to be ‘trained like teachers, [refreshers on] grammar and other skills...better relationships between student and tutor...tutors to understand typical student weaknesses, [and for the teaching of] academic argument [and] academic writing style” (p. 140, Table 1).

Hurtado (2003) noted that students enter college with a variety of skills and talents and therefore should be evaluated individually. Hurtado claimed that

greater variation in student preparation may suggest the need for innovative academic support strategies, as well as variety in student services (such as staff availability and delivery of programs) to achieve the educational goals of institutions that offer opportunities for students from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds. (p. 37)

Tinto (1993) emphasized that effective programs for students must be “proactive” (p. 182) and that modeling a commitment to learning and to students reinforces student involvement in the learning process.

Private Institutions

Students today have a wide variety of choices in terms of higher education. Two- and 4-year public institutions color the landscape as do 4-year private not-for-profit and for-profit institutions. Lines between public and private institutions are becoming more and more blurred as private institutions search for funding from some of the same sources that public institutions do. According to Brock (2010) one quarter of all undergraduates attended private institutions in 2005. In 2003 Hurtado stated “there may be less distinction today between some of the private

and elite public institutions than there were many years ago, as many launch major campaigns to build endowments, seek donors, and identify new streams of revenue” (p. 40).

However, private and public institutions are not the same (Barr, 2003). Some of the differences between public and private institutions have to do with “governing board structures, sources of funding, revenue management methods, and systems arrangements” (Hurtado, 2003, p. 39). Both public and private institutions have to abide by the laws of the state in which they are incorporated, follow noneducational state agency regulations and follow their own published rules while abiding by the “First, Fourth, Fifth, and Fourteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution [which] provide the basis for the application of constitutional law to higher education” (Barr, 2003, p. 129). An example of the difference is that “Private institutions may prevent, limit, or refuse to authorize the peaceful assembly of any group, including student organizations. Public institutions may not” (Barr, 2003, p. 135).

The first private institution of higher education established in the United States was Harvard in 1636 (National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities [NAICU], 2013). Today, there are approximately 1,600 private institutions of higher education in the United States with over 3 million students enrolled (NAICU, 2013). Institutions range from liberal arts colleges to major research universities, from faith-based institutions to single-sex and historically black colleges. According to NAICU (2013), “private four-year colleges enroll almost the same percentage of students from low- and middle-income families as state four-year institutions” (para 7). Historically these same institutions offered students choices to meet “their individual interests, needs, and aspirations” (Balz & Esten, 1998, p. 334) and offered learning environments that proved “successful, year after year” (Balz & Esten, 1998, p. 334). Balz and Esten (1998) noted that private institutions were able to provide for all students and grant them

opportunities for higher education “regardless of income or family background” (p. 344). These institutions had “rich and diverse missions” (Balz & Esten, 1998, p. 344) that allowed them to do so.

Morphew and Hartley (2006) reviewed the mission statements of over 300 four-year colleges and universities in the United States—both public and private. They found that even though there are similarities in mission statements across public and private institutions, there are also differences:

Public universities heavily emphasize service –both as institutions within a region and through instilling in students a sense of civic duty. Several other emphasized elements are largely descriptive in nature and rather pedestrian—‘we’re a public institution and we have undergraduate and graduate programs.’ Private universities, by contrast, focus more on the formative aspects of education—promoting ‘student development’ and helping prepare students for the ‘real world’ through programs that are academically rigorous. (Morphew & Hartley, 2006, p. 464)

The idea that private colleges are more academically rigorous is supported by the NAICU which stated “Seventy-nine percent of private four-year college graduates earned their degree in four years, compared to 49 percent at state four-year institutions” (2013, para. 8). Similar findings were revealed by Balz and Esten (1998) 15 years earlier when they stated that students attending 4-year private institutions were more likely to continue than students at 4-year public institutions. They identified 72% of students attending 4-year private institutions as having completed their degree within 5 years as compared to 55% of students at 4-year public institutions as doing so. They summed up their findings by saying, “Though it cannot be concluded from these

completion and degree-attainment rates that overall levels of persistence differed by type of institution, this finding clearly suggests that students at public four-year institutions are taking longer to finish their programs” (Balz & Esten, 1998, p. 336). These overall findings are still valid today. Private institutions have demonstrated their ability to provide an environment in which students succeed in persistence toward graduation and persist more quickly toward graduation than students in public institutions. Balz and Esten noted that private institutions “offer a learning environment that has been proven successful, year after year” (p. 334).

Research Approach and Reasoning

Paucity of Research

There is little research in the area of academic policies and on changes in academic policies related to “good standing, probation, suspension, and expulsion” (Brawner et al., 2010, p. 20). Brawner et al. (2010) noted that

perhaps it is because academic rules and regulations are so ubiquitous that they have relatively little recent attention in the literature as potential contributing factors in students’ ability to succeed. While there have been multitudes of studies concerning climate and teaching techniques during the past two decades, relatively few have investigated what impact, if any, can ultimately be the result of institutional policies. (p. 3)

Brawner et al. also found little published research about benchmarking or other methods used by colleges or universities to create changes in their policies. They commented “as we embarked on this study, we were surprised at the lack of published research on the changes in academic policies related to good standing, probation, suspension, and expulsion over the years” (Brawner

et al., 2010, p. 20). They continued: “we know that institutions such as these do not make changes to their policies without careful consideration and, one would assume, benchmarking with peer institutions. Such benchmarking may have been done, but as best we can tell, was unpublished” (Brawner et al., 2010, p. 20).

The study of Brawner et al. (2010) compared academic policies related to academic good standing, probation, suspension, and expulsion at nine universities over 17 years providing a benchmark to which others can compare. The print and on-line versions of the undergraduate catalogs from 1988-2005 for each of the nine public universities in the southeastern United States were examined regarding those policies.

(p. 1)

Over their study period, Brawner et al. (2010) found that “nearly 65,000 students were put on probation and 45,000 students were suspended” (p. 21). The focus of their research was whether the tightening of academic standards that we have observed has improved outcomes by discontinuing the stringing along of students who have no hope of graduating or whether the stricter standards separate students too abruptly who might be able to graduate. (Brawner et al., 2010, p. 21)

Brawner et al. observed that over the years some schools tightened their standards “by increasing GPA expected of all students...required for graduation” (p. 20) and that schools with grade forgiveness policies made them “less forgiving” (p. 20). Brawner et al.’s results indicated that “probation carries vastly different meanings at the institutions studied even as they remained relatively constant within institutions” (p. 20). The researchers stated that

institutional policy makers can use the current study to compare their own

institutions' policies to a sample of large public institutions, including two HBCUs [Historically Black College or University]. They will also be able to use our future research to help shed light on the need to balance academic standards with student success metrics such as retention to graduation.

(Brawner et al., 2010, p. 22)

With little research available regarding academic policies and their impact on the student, this study will fill a void in the area. In addition, the purpose of this study is to consider the academic probation from the point of intersection between the institution and the student. It asks the institution to speak to its intent in using the policy of academic probation and it asks students to speak to their actual experiences.

Case Study Method

This study uses the qualitative method of a case study. Qualitative research allows for a holistic and flexible approach to studying a phenomenon in a real-world setting. It also allows for an in-depth and rich investigation into the understandings and perceptions of people involved in certain situations (Snape & Spencer, 2003). The case study reinforces the qualitative purpose of research in that it also “allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events—such as individual life cycles, small group behavior, organizational and managerial processes, neighborhood change, school performance, international relations, and the maturation of industries” (Yin, 2009, p. 4). Case studies allow the researcher to investigate an array of resources, including “documents, artifacts, interviews, and observations” (Yin, 2009, p. 11). Balbach (1999) observed that “the purpose of a case study is to

study intensely one set (or unit) of something—programs, cities, counties, worksites—as a distinct whole” (p. 3).

The case study method can also be evaluative; that is, it can be used to determine the value of achieving institutional goals (Krathwohl & Smith, 2005). It is also meant to assess how effective a program is by being concerned with how well it works—“a question that is central to much policy related investigation” (Krathwohl & Smith, 2005, p. 29). This study is designed to investigate the realities of students who have experienced probation and the purpose of the policy from the administration’s point of view. A case study will assist with both. Ritchie (2003) stated when “information is needed about both processes and outcomes...qualitative research contributes to both. Because of its flexible methods of investigation, qualitative methods are particularly adept at looking at the dynamics of how things operate” (p. 29).

The Evaluation of Academic Probation

Understanding how things operate includes both the mechanics of the policy itself and the effects it has on those who use it. Ritchie (2003) identified this operation as contributing to an understanding of the “different types of effects or consequences that can arise from a policy” (p. 29). This identification can signify the success or failure of a program, the effects of the program on people, the requirements of different groups in the “target population” (Ritchie, 2003, p. 29), and explore the organization and contexts of intervention. Balbach (1999) stated research can demonstrate “1) what actually occurred, 2) whether it had an impact, expected or unexpected, and 3) what links exist between a program and its observed impacts” (p. 1).

The use of qualitative research allows the researcher to use a small study sample (Krathwohl & Smith, 2005) and amass “rich detail” (Balbach, 1999, p. 3). Qualitative research

also allows stakeholders of the institution to provide input (Groundwater-Smith, 2007) and allows for the researcher to develop rapport with the subjects who then have the “freedom to recall and expound on events from their perspective” (O’Donoghue, 2007, p. 166).

Criticisms of the Approach

There are criticisms as well to the case study and qualitative method of research. Krathwohl and Smith (2005) noted that qualitative research involves “intense labor” (p. 132) for the researcher and that there are two concerns regarding the quality of the study: one that “readers may consider your observations, interviews, analysis of documents, or whatever to be less than ‘objective,’” (p. 133) and second that “there are equally or more plausible alternative explanations than that which you advance” (p. 133). Krathwohl and Smith also argued that the researcher is challenged to remain objective by preventing “biases, attitudes, likes, and dislikes from affecting” (p. 133) the research. Yin (2009) acknowledged another concern: “perhaps the greatest concern has been over the lack of rigor of case study research” (p. 14). Yin stated “a second common concern about case studies is that they provide little basis for scientific generalization,” (p. 15) and “a third frequent complaint about case studies is that they take too long, and they result in massive, unreadable documents” (p. 15).

Yin (2009) noted the demands case study research takes on the researcher. Yin observed that “the demands of a case study on your intellect, ego, and emotions are far greater than those of any other research method” (p. 68). Yin determined that “a well-trained and experienced investigator is needed to conduct a high-quality case study because of the continuous interaction between the theoretical issues being studied and the data being collected” (p. 68). The case study requires the researcher to have “an inquiring mind during data collection, not just before or after

the activity” (Yin, 2009, p. 69). Yin also declared, “as you collect case study evidence, you must quickly review the evidence and continually ask yourself why events or facts appear as they do” (p. 69). Yin observed that case studies require the researcher to be a good listener, to ask good questions, to avoid bias and to protect human subjects, and yet, Yin pointed out, there is no way to really know if the researcher is good at conducting a case study.

Qualitative researchers must also work around the schedule of the interviewee, and research subjects may not cooperate. Yin (2009) advised using a protocol to help with reliability and pointed out some of the difficulties qualitative researchers face: researchers will need to gain access to resources, they will need resources while they are conducting their research, they will need to schedule the activities they use to collect data, try to anticipate the unexpected, and have in place a system for obtaining help or guidance if needed.

Chapter Summary

The literature reveals several different theories related to student success and the retention of students in higher education. Students are identified as having personal characteristics that either lead them to persist toward graduation or leave their institutions of higher education. They have been identified as being in an incongruent environment, one that does not meet their needs, or as lacking in the skills needed to be successful before they even enter college. As higher education has evolved over its history, the importance of keeping students enrolled has become important to colleges as students and families associate retention with quality education. As a part of retention efforts, colleges offer students who academically underachieve a wide array of services to help them become successful and persist toward graduation. One of the services that institutions have available to them is their use of academic

policies including the policy of academic probation. However, there is little literature to discuss the importance of policy as an instructional tool or a contributing factor to the learning environment of the student. The researcher seeks to fill that gap in the literature through a qualitative case study that will explore the experiences of the students on probation as well as the institution's intent in placing students on probation.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODS

This purpose of this study was to investigate, from the institution's point of view, how the policy of academic probation is intended to affect the student experience, and from the student's point of view, how the policy of academic probation affected the student experience. Academic probation is an intervention that could spur a student to work harder and raise the student's GPA, or it could potentially cause a student to become frustrated and prematurely leave the institution. Currently there are state and national initiatives in place to keep college students enrolled and persisting until graduation. Institutions of higher education are committed to maintaining enrollments and retaining students. Academic policies contribute to, and affect, the student educational experience. The researcher seeks to explore the effect of one institutional policy on a specific student population at one, private, 4-year, small liberal arts college in Southwest Virginia.

Qualitative Perspective Used

The Case Study

This research study uses a qualitative case study methodology. The case study allows researchers to gather data from a variety of sources and allows for the investigation of real life events (Yin, 2009). The case identified in this study is the policy of academic probation. The sources in this study were students placed on academic probation, the policy of academic probation, and administrators who worked with students placed on academic probation and have experience administering the policy. These sources allowed me to view the policy from different

perspectives. I wanted to understand the perceptions of the administrators who work with students placed on academic probation and who adhere to the rules and guidelines of the policy. I also wanted to investigate the perception of students placed on academic probation regarding their experiences. I reviewed the policy as it was written in the college's catalog at the time I conducted this research as that is the form in which the policy was made accessible to students. By reviewing the policy itself, the intent of the policy, and the effect of the policy on students, I sought to investigate the policy from several different angles and to understand it as holistically as possible.

The act of being placed on academic probation is a real-life event for those students. The administrators who work with them are likewise involved in a real-life event. Yin (2009) acknowledged that “the case study method allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events—such as...organizational and managerial processes...[and]...school performance” (p. 4). He stated that case studies can encompass a wide variety of sources in their design. Though case studies often involve individuals as ‘cases,’ Yin also declared that a case may be “some event or entity other than a single individual. Case studies have been done about decisions, programs, the implementation process, and organizational change” (p. 29).

A case study allowed me to understand, from the students themselves, what their experiences were in this real-life situation. I also wanted to understand how the students' relationship with the institution was affected, if at all, by the experience of being on probation. A case study afforded me the ability to explore the situation from several perspectives.

Symbolic Interactionism

This study is used to investigate the perspectives of the participants as they were expressed at the time of this study, a characteristic of the symbolic interactionism perspective. Student participants were on academic probation. Administrators involved were actively working with students on academic probation and implementing the policy as described in the college catalog. One aspect of the symbolic interactionist view of qualitative research is that it focuses on the participant's perspective about an event or situation at one particular point in time (O'Donoghue, 2007).

Research Questions

The research questions of this study were written with the assumption that students placed on academic probation may have a different understanding of the policy's intent than the institution. Students at this institution are placed on probation; they are not allowed the opportunity to refuse the status of 'probation.' Students are also offered or mandated services, which they may or may not use. Academic probation is a top-down policy in that the administration creates the criteria for the policy and decides who is placed on probation, while students generally do not have the opportunity to appeal the decision of probation. Students who are most affected by the policy are not given any input into its formulation, parameters, jurisdiction, or implementation. Therefore this study is guided by the premise that students on academic probation, a particular group of stakeholders, should be allowed the opportunity to describe their experiences with the policy.

The research questions of this study are:

1. From the perspective of higher education administration, what function or purpose

- does the institution intend the policy of academic probation to serve?
2. From the perspective of the student, what does the student understand the purpose of academic probation to be?
 3. What support services do students and administrators identify for students on academic probation?
 4. Do students on academic probation use the services offered to them? Why or why not?
 5. What services do students believe the institution should offer to help them succeed, and why?

The Role of the Researcher

In this study the primary roles of the researcher were that of interviewer and reporter. The researcher also analyzed the written policy of academic probation as it was written in the college catalog. The researcher listened, as objectively as possible, to the stories of the individuals and allowed them the space to express their thoughts and feelings about their particular experience of being on probation, on the services they were offered or mandated, on their perception of the institution that placed them on probation, and the effect probation had on their academic progress. Student and administrator responses were recorded exactly. I explained the institution's policy of academic probation. I asked questions of one of the administrators regarding how the policy was created, reviewed, and maintained. The researcher in a qualitative study is to "describe the meaning that people attach to an experience, event, circumstance or other phenomenon" (Ritchie, 2003, p. 27).

Population and Sample

Population

The population for this study was those students (or recent alumni) at the institution of focus who had been on academic probation within the last 2 years or who were currently on academic probation at the time of the study. From such a population can be drawn a “non-probability” (Ritchie, Lewis, & Elam, 2003, p. 78) sample that allows the researcher to select participants:

to reflect particular features of or groups within the sampled population.

The sample is not intended to be statistically representative: the chances of selection for each element are unknown, but, instead, the characteristics of the population are used as the basis of selection. It is this feature that makes them well suited to small-scale, in-depth studies. (p. 78)

In this study the particular feature of the group members was their association with the policy of academic probation. The population was not intended to statistically represent a group on campus, but was instead a group of individuals who shared a specific educational experience. I expected this population to consist of both males and females who were at least 18 years old. The population for administrators consisted of those who worked with, or oversaw, students on academic probation at the institution. The administrators were those who implemented the policy of academic probation.

Sample

This study used a purposive sample of eight individuals who had experience with the policy of academic probation. “Purposive sampling” is defined as “precisely what the name

suggests. Members of a sample are chosen with a ‘purpose’ to represent a location or type in relation to a key criterion” (Ritchie et al., 2003, p. 79). The goal was to elicit rich detail from the students about their experiences. However, I was concerned that it may be difficult to find students willing to participate. Some students may not want to be identified as a student on academic probation and so would not volunteer to participate. Other students may have decided they did not have the time. Still others may have assumed that speaking about this topic may have influenced the administration to observe them negatively or to act negatively toward them. If students felt some reprisal from the institution was possible, they may have chosen not to participate. It may have been necessary to provide an incentive for students to participate. The sample in this study was also a sample of convenience in that students volunteered as participants. The institution is geographically located in an area that has little racial diversity throughout the general population; therefore, the possibility of a racially diverse population sample was low.

Ultimately, the sample for both interviews and surveys was students currently on academic probation. Only one student volunteered to be interviewed for the study so a 13-question survey was administered to students in a required class for students on academic probation. Participation in the survey was voluntary. I also interviewed two administrators who had knowledge of the policy and worked with students on academic probation. Table 1 represents the interview and survey sources of data for this study that includes the student and administrator sample. All students were on academic probation at the time of data collection. The administrators both worked with the student population on academic probation at the time of data collection.

Table 1

Interview and Survey Sources of Data --Sample

| Source of Data | Interview | Survey | Status |
|-----------------|-----------|--------|---|
| Student 1 | | X | On academic probation |
| Student 2 | | X | On academic probation |
| Student 3 | | X | On academic probation |
| Student 4 | | X | On academic probation |
| Student 5 | | X | On academic probation |
| Student 6 | X | | On academic probation |
| Administrator 1 | X | | Knowledge of, and working with policy of academic probation |
| Administrator 2 | X | | Knowledge of, and working with policy of academic probation |

Data Collection

Data collection for this study occurred during the 2013 academic fall semester at a small, private, liberal arts college in Southwest Virginia. Data were collected through interviews with one student on academic probation and two administrators who worked closely with the policy of academic probation, through a survey administered to students who were enrolled in a class for students on academic probation, and through a review of the policy of academic probation as it was written in the college catalog.

Interviews

In this study I conducted an individual interview with one student who had the experience of being on academic probation and who could provide insight into the meaning of those experiences, a student perspective of the policy and its benefits or advantages, and negative aspects of the policy. After the student initiated contact to acknowledge interest in being interviewed, we arranged to meet in a location of the student's choosing at a time that was convenient for both of us. Before the interview I provided an informed consent form to the

student and reviewed it with the student and requested permission to continue the interview. I also provided the student with a form requesting permission to record the interview and reviewed it with the student. The student signed both forms and the interview began. At the end of the interview I asked the student to provide a pseudonym for the report and the student did not choose one.

I also conducted interviews with two administrators of the institution to understand the perspective of the institution in having an academic probation policy and the intent of policy implementation. I knew each administrator in a professional capacity as I worked with students on academic probation at another institution. I met with each administrator at a location of each's choice. We spoke generally for a few minutes after meeting, and I presented each with the informed consent form and the request to record the interview. Each administrator agreed to both and signed each form before the interviews began.

I prepared a list of questions to ask the student and administrators for this study in order to seek similarities or differences in their experiences, but I also wanted to be able to follow the conversation into unexpected territory if the participant offered me the opportunity. I attempted to ask follow-up questions as appropriate during the course of the conversation. The interview questions were primarily open-ended to allow participants to reveal as much as they wanted. I attempted to establish rapport early in the interview process in order to make participants feel comfortable enough to share their thoughts and feelings. Each interview lasted for approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour.

I wanted to ensure privacy for each individual and yet allow the participant to choose a location in which the participant felt safe and secure. Interviews were recorded with the participant's permission, transcribed word for word, and participants were allowed to review the

transcript to verify accuracy of the content and to request changes if they desired. No interviewee requested changes to the transcripts. A copy of the interview questions used with the student is located in Appendix A. Copies of interview questions used with administrators are located in Appendix B.

Conducting interviews with participants is one of the most widely used methods of data collection in qualitative research (Ritchie, 2003) and one of the best ways to question an event, policy, program, or situation. Interviews allow the researcher to focus exclusively on the individual and provide the “opportunity for detailed investigation of people’s personal perspectives, for in-depth understanding of the personal context within which the research phenomena are located, and for very detailed subject coverage” (Ritchie, 2003, p. 36). In order to understand the personal experiences of each participant, I wanted the flexibility of allowing the conversation to go where it may. Yin (2009) allowed for this flexibility in the interview process by stating “interviews will be guided conversations rather than structured queries” (p. 106). O’Donoghue (2007) noted that interviewees need “the freedom to recall and expound on events from their perspectives” (p.166) during the interview process.

Soliciting Participants

Prior to conducting any research at this institution, I obtained permission from its Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct research there. To solicit participants for this study, I contacted the Chair of the IRB of the participating institution and asked whom I should contact to solicit student participation. The Chair of the IRB directed me toward the administrator of the department on campus that works with students on academic probation. I asked the administrator if his office would be willing to send an email notification about the

study to students who are currently on probation, or who have been on probation within the last 2 years (see Appendix C). The administrator agreed to send the email to prospective students. The email explained the purpose of the research study and the characteristics of the participants being sought. I explained that the study was completely confidential and asked for students who were interested to please contact me. I left an email address and phone number for potential participants to contact me. I also explained how the information gathered would be used and that students would remain anonymous in the final report. Volunteers had the right to withdraw from the study at any time, and participants had the opportunity to review the information gathered for accuracy. Three email requests for student participants were sent.

If the administrator had been unwilling to have the department on campus that works with this population contact these students, then I would have asked the institution to allow me to send an explanatory email to the entire undergraduate student population. I had created a flier that solicited volunteers for the study and I asked if I could post fliers around campus. The administrator with whom I had spoken agreed to post fliers around campus. Fliers asking for volunteers were also posted in the campus office that assists students on academic probation (Appendix D). Interview questions, the solicitation email, and the flier were approved by the East Tennessee State University IRB before dissemination.

If no volunteers came forward for interviewing, I was prepared to change the format of the interview from an individual, personal, one-on-one meeting, to an open-ended survey questionnaire to be sent by email that would allow students to express themselves fully and allow them to remain completely anonymous if they so desired (Appendix E). All interviewees were given a copy of the Informed Consent form that clearly explained the parameters of the study and

their participation. In order to protect participant privacy, pseudonyms were assigned to each participant.

The institution's IRB also identified the administrator on campus who was the most familiar with the policy of academic probation. This administrator was the person in charge of the office that works with students on academic probation. The administrator agreed to be interviewed for the study. The second administrator for the study was chosen because this administrator worked directly, and extensively, with students who were placed on academic probation at the institution. This administrator also agreed to be interviewed for the study.

Document Review

I reviewed the policy of academic probation as it was written and disseminated to students through the college catalog. This policy is one that was written at one specific point in time with revisions possible throughout the written life of the policy. The policy was written to address all students. It defined what constituted good academic standing at this institution and defined what was not considered good academic standing. These terms were defined in the catalog in relation to student GPAs. The policy also delineated the consequences for students who did not achieve, or remain, in good standing.

Yin (2009) highlighted the fact that document reviews are an important part of a case study and “play an explicit role in any data collection” (p. 103). He also noted that documents can be used to “corroborate and augment evidence from other sources” (Yin, 2009, p. 103).

Documents can also help illuminate the relationship between parties:

Important in reviewing any document is to understand that it was written for some specific purpose and some specific audience *other than* those of the

case study being done. In this sense, the case study investigator is a vicarious observer, and the documentary evidence reflects a communication among other parties attempting to achieve some other objectives. (Yin, 2009, p. 105)

Data Analysis Methods

Coding Interviews

Grounded theory and the use of coding of the data are the frameworks for data analysis in this study. After the interview process, all interviews were transcribed exactly. Participants were allowed to review the transcripts for accuracy and then the interviews were coded to identify themes in the interviews and among the participants. Interviews were coded through four different methods: Exploratory methods, Affective methods, Values coding, and *In Vivo* coding. These methods were used in an attempt to process the information gained from several different perspectives. I wanted as rich of an investigation as possible of the material.

Exploratory coding is defined by Saldana (2013) as a preliminary method of coding that allows the researcher to review the data in an open-ended manner. I reviewed the transcripts for words or phrases that repeated or were emphasized by the speaker within an interview. This initial coding allowed me to explore the content of the interviews with an open mind. As I coded, I became aware of words, phrases, or concepts that repeated within interviews and those that presented in more than one interview. Exploratory coding of the student interview revealed the repetition of words or phrases such as “hard worker” or “work,” “disappointment,” “motivation,” and “helpful.” Exploratory coding of administrator interviews revealed the repetition of words or phrases such as “policy,” “proactive,” “concern,” “relationships,” “mentor” or “mentoring,” and “achievement.”

After coding the data through exploratory coding, I chose to code the interviews again with affective coding and values coding because I noticed references to values and emotions by the participants and I felt the data lent toward more investigation. Affective coding is used to investigate the “subjective qualities of human experience” (Saldana, 2013, p. 105) and allows for an investigation into the emotions of the participants as well as other emotional values such as judgment or conflict (Saldana, 2013). I chose to concentrate on the emotions revealed during the affective coding process. Affective coding of the student interview revealed references to such words or concepts as “sadness,” “enjoyment” and “regret.” Affective coding of the administrator interviews revealed references to words such as “satisfaction” or “dissatisfaction,” “pride,” “concern,” and “fear.” To take the coding one step further, I coded the data through values coding in order to also understand the values of the participants. Values coding elicited concepts from the student interview such as: *the student believes hard work is necessary, the student believes finding motivation will help other students, the student expected to do better academically and values doing well.* From the administrators’ interviews, I coded such concepts as: *it is important that we work together to help students, we want to be proactive, we believe in equal treatment of all students, and we have standards students must meet.*

Finally I coded the data through *In Vivo* Coding because I thought it important to understand the participants’ experiences as revealed through their own words. *In Vivo* coding of the student interview produced such phrases as: “I’ve gotten to know some really good people” and “I was just really disappointed in myself because I know I can do better.” *In Vivo* coding of the administrators’ interviews revealed statements such as: “We try to be proactive” (Administrator 1) and “I think their [students] levels of knowing what to do about it [probation] are so different” (Administrator 2).

Coding the data through these different lenses allowed me to gain as much information as I could from the data gathered. After I analyzed the data gathered through each interview, I noted similarities among all interviews and noted any stark differences. I reviewed the data for patterns. I compared coded data from students and coded data from administrators for similarities and differences. These results are discussed in depth in Chapter 4. The survey data did not elicit as an extensive pool of information. Though the information was not as extensive, I coded the surveys the same way I did the interviews. One coder ensured the data was coded in a consistent manner.

Document Review

I also reviewed the policy of academic probation as it was found in the college catalog using the same coding methods. The language of the document did not lend itself to Affective or *In Vivo* coding, yet I was able to note through Exploratory and Values coding the standards of the institution. The language used in the policy lent itself toward certain inferences. While my coding of the policy did not glean the same amount of information obtained from the interviews, my review of the document through the same lenses as the interviews revealed differences that were pertinent to the results of the study. Reviewing the policy in addition to speaking with individuals affected by the policy and individuals who implement the policy provided another layer of data from a different perspective.

Validity and Reliability

Validity

Lewis and Ritchie (2003) stated that validity is “traditionally understood to refer to the correctness or precision of a research reading” (p. 285) and the “extent to which the phenomena under study is [sic] being accurately reflected” (p. 285). In order to ensure that the information collected was accurate, I asked participants in the study to allow me to tape record our interviews. I obtained informed consent from all participants who were interviewed. Each interviewee was asked to review the transcript of the interview to confirm if the information contained in the transcript was accurate in what they said and in intent. I allowed participants to make changes to their comments if they desired.

I collected several sources of data during this study as well. Triangulation of the data surrounding the policy of academic probation came from the interviews with participants, both student and administrators, and a review of the written policy regarding academic probation for students. I coded interviews coded directly onto the transcripts, and I collected and organized the coded information. I coded survey information in the same manner as the interviews and coded directly onto the student responses. Students who responded to the survey, however, did not have the opportunity to review their responses.

Reliability

The case study protocol in this study included an interview guide of questions for the students and administrators in order to provide a basis for the interview questions (see Appendices A and B). I used open-ended questions in the interviews to allow for a variety of responses from the participants. The guide also allowed me to follow lines of inquiry that

deviated from the set questionnaire but that provided a rich narrative. The protocol also included the methods of soliciting participants, the communication methods used to contact and discuss the study with the potential participants, and the methods of revealing the data and the implications drawn from it. I shared with each interviewee that, at the time of the interviews, I worked at another institution with students on academic probation and that I provided assistance to help them increase their GPA and be removed from probation. My work could potentially create a bias toward the perspective of the student in this study.

A peer reviewed my research methods, data collection, and coding methods to ensure that data collected was coded and processed appropriately. The peer reviewer concurred with the data collected and the coding methods.

According to Lewis and Ritchie (2003) reliability refers to the “soundness” (p. 271) of the study. The use of a case study protocol “is a major way of increasing the *reliability* of case study research and is intended to guide the investigator in carrying out the data collection from a single case” (Lewis & Ritchie, 2003, p. 79).

After I gathered the data, I wanted to maintain the integrity of the information. Yin (2009) noted the importance of maintaining “raw data” (p. 119) so that it can be viewed independently of the case study report. “A case study database markedly increases the *reliability* of the entire case study” (p. 119) Yin (2009) stated. This “database” (Yin, 2009, p. 119) is very likely to be the notes of the interviewer and may appear in many forms. Having such an independent database of the raw data makes cataloging the information systematically so that it can be retrieved “efficiently” (Yin, 2009, p. 120) very important to the case study protocol. Yin (2009) stated “the only essential characteristics of the notes are that they be organized, categorized, complete, and available for later access” (p. 120). I have compiled the raw data

from this study and stored it in a secure and locked location. The data can be readily retrieved for review as needed.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are vital to research, particularly in research involving human subjects. Yin (2009) acknowledged that researchers must work toward the protection of human subjects by avoiding bias, being a good listener, and asking good questions. Having a peer review my interview protocol and questions and disclosing my biases to participants were important aspects of establishing reliability, validity, and ethical guidelines for the study. Krathwohl and Smith (2005) advised that researchers watch for the effects of the researcher on the participants. I allowed the interviewees to choose the venue for the interviews. I worked to establish rapport throughout the interview process, and I allowed the participants to speak as they wanted. Silence was allowed during the interview process so that participants could gather their thoughts or reflect on their answers as they gave them. I worked to remain as neutral as possible during the interview process.

Gorman (2007) stipulated that there are “common ethical principles” (p. 18) that “apply equally to all types of research” (p.18). Those include “autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, justice” (Gorman, 2007, p.18). Gorman described each one of those principles as follows:

The principle of *autonomy* and the notion of *respect for persons* would make us ask questions relating to consent. Have people consented? Have they fully understood what they are consenting to? Can they withdraw at any time?

In considering *beneficence* (meaning to do good) and *non-maleficence*

(meaning not to do harm) we would question the balance of potential benefit with that of potential harm and risk, and ask how that potential harm is minimised. What are the interests of the parties involved? Who could be harmed and how? Who could benefit, and how might they?

In looking at the principle of *justice*, we would look at how risk and benefit are shared and the possible impact of the research across a wider spectrum. (p.18)

I intended this study to benefit both the students who are on, or have been on, academic probation, and the institution by gathering student evaluations and input into the experiences of being on academic probation. Students would potentially benefit by having the opportunity to share their experiences, positive and negative, with a neutral third party. The institution would benefit by receiving the feedback of the students who were on academic probation and obtaining their feedback about the policy and the processes involved.

The potential for minimal harm existed for students who participated in the study and for the institution. Students may have found relating their experiences to be painful or embarrassing. Students may also have feared reprisal from the administration, faculty, staff, or their fellow students if their privacy was not adequately protected. If experiences were overwhelmingly negative toward the institution, the reputation of the institution may have been negatively affected if its privacy was not adequately protected. The name of the institution is not being shared so that the privacy of the students is protected. I also gave students pseudonyms to protect their identities. The student interviewed did not express fear of reprisal by the institution and willingly consented to the interview. Safeguards protected the students' identities from the institution, and safeguards protected the institution from public identification. Therefore, the

information gleaned could be very helpful to the institution. I informed all parties of the risks and benefits of the study, and participants were not pressured to participate from the researcher or other sources. Participants were allowed to withdraw from the study at any time.

I conducted this research at an institution with which I have no relationship. I have had previous professional contact with the administrators who participated in this study. The administrators who were interviewed for this study were chosen after I obtained consent to conduct the research; there was no prior intent to include these administrators in the research. I have had no contact with the students who participated in the study. However, I have worked with this student population and may have had a bias or expectation of outcomes. I informed participants of my potential bias before interviews and worked to not asking leading questions during the interview process.

Participants in the research provided informed consent, were willing to participate, gave an hour of their time for the interview, and reviewed a transcript of the interview to ensure accuracy. The student interviewed took the initiative to contact the researcher for participation in the study. Interviewees gave informed consent and were made aware of the risks and benefits of the study. The institution involved will receive a summary of the results of the study with no identifying information of participants in the report.

Chapter Summary

A qualitative case study allows the researcher to investigate in real-time and in context the perspective of individuals who are involved in the subject matter of the study. It allows participants to share, in rich detail, their experiences. This study allowed students who have experienced academic probation as well as administrators of the institution to be interviewed,

surveyed, and share their experiences. They were also allowed to express their perspectives on the policy of academic probation. I recorded and transcribed interviews in order to ensure accuracy and I asked all participants to review the transcriptions. I conducted a review of the policy itself. I used Exploratory, Affective, Values, and *In Vivo* coding to analyze interview and document content. The main ethical concern was to ensure that the privacy and confidentiality of the students and the institution were protected. I fully informed all individuals of the purpose of the study and the use of data collected so they could make a fully informed decision as to whether or not to participate in the study.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine how undergraduate students on academic probation perceived the policy of academic probation and how the institution intended the policy of academic probation to be viewed. In this chapter I describe the policy itself, general information about students on academic probation at this institution, and student and administrator responses to interview questions.

Demographics

The institution involved in this study is a small, private, 4-year liberal arts college (referred to as Small Liberal Arts College) that serves both undergraduate and graduate students. According to its website, the college boasted a general undergraduate population of more than 930 students in 2014. The institution defines students on academic probation as students who have not earned the minimum required GPA for the number of credit hours earned (Small Liberal Arts College). For this study I sought to interview students, or alumni, who had been placed on academic probation within the past 2 years; that is, in any of these semesters: Spring 2012, Summer 2012, or Fall 2012; Spring 2013, Summer 2013, or Fall 2013. According to Small Liberal Arts College, in Spring 2012, the institution had 28 undergraduate students on probation, a percentage of 3.24% of its undergraduate population. That number fell in Fall 2012 to 18 students on academic probation, just under 2% of the student population. In Spring 2013 the number of students on probation rose to 35, which amounted to slightly more than 4% of the

undergraduate student population, but by Fall 2013, the number of undergraduate students on probation had fallen to 11, a percentage of 1.23 (Administrator 1, personal communication, March 26, 2014). Table 2 provides the number of undergraduate students on probation during these fall and spring semesters.

Table 2

Number and Percentage of Undergraduate Students on Academic Probation--Population

| Semester and Year | Spring 2012 | Fall 2012 | Spring 2013 | Fall 2013 |
|--|-------------|-----------|-------------|-----------|
| Number of students on academic probation | 28 | 18 | 35 | 11 |
| Percentage of students on academic probation | 3.24% | 1.98% | 4.23% | 1.23% |

Small Liberal Arts College identifies students with “academic deficiencies” (Administrator 1, personal communication, March 26, 2014) as those students who are on academic probation, those students who have been identified as being “at risk [or] on warning” (Administrator 1, personal communication, March 26, 2014), and those students who have been academically dismissed from the institution. According to **Administrator 1** the percentage of students with “academic deficiencies” was 7.76% in Spring 2012, 9.01% in Fall 2012, 8.59% in Spring 2013, and 9.16% in Fall 2013, relatively stable percentages. The percentage of students at the institution experiencing some kind of academic deficiency hovered between 7% and 9% for those four semesters (Administrator 1, personal communication, March 26, 2014). Table 3 provides the number and percentage of students with academic deficiencies.

Table 3*Number and Percentage of Undergraduate Students with Academic Deficiencies*

| Semester and Year | Spring 2012 | Fall 2012 | Spring 2013 | Fall 2013 |
|---|-------------|-----------|-------------|-----------|
| Number of students with academic deficiencies | 67 | 82 | 71 | 82 |
| Percentage of students with academic deficiencies | 7.76% | 9.01% | 8.59% | 9.16% |

This study only addresses students being on academic probation, though some of these students may have also been identified as being ‘at risk’ or ‘on warning’ before their placement on probation. Just as students were being placed on probation, some students were being removed. The number of students removed from academic probation in each of these semesters is as follows: No students were removed from probation in Spring 2012. Five students were removed from probation in Fall 2012; four students were removed from probation in Spring 2013 and 12 students were removed from probation in Fall 2013 (Administrator 1, personal communication, March 26, 2014).

Sample Drawn from Population

Data collection for this study was a review of the policy of academic probation as it is written in the college catalog and disseminated to students. Originally, I had planned to interview one administrator of the college who was knowledgeable of, or associated with, the implementation of the policy of academic probation, and I planned to interview four to eight students who were currently on academic probation, or who had been on academic probation within the past 2 years to share their experiences about being on probation. Requests for participants on campus yielded only one student willing to be interviewed for the study. I asked

the alumni department on campus for the opportunity to request participation from alumni who might fit the participant parameters for this study. I asked the alumni department to include a notification of the study through an outgoing email or publication and the request was declined.

In an attempt to gather more data from students, a set of 13 survey questions was administered to a class of students who were currently on academic probation. Eight surveys were delivered; five surveys were returned. Of those five surveys, four had been mostly completed. One survey had a handwritten note at the top that addressed at least one of the questions, but the remaining questions were not answered.

In an attempt to discover more information about the policy, its implementation, and its impact on students, I interviewed a second administrator who has extensive contact with students on academic probation. I asked both administrators the same questions regarding the purpose or role of academic probation as the institution intended it for students. I asked the first administrator questions about the policy of academic probation and its history at the institution in addition to questions concerning student experience. I asked the second administrator questions about the student experience and the administrator's experiences with students on academic probation rather than questions about the history of the policy at this institution. The difference in questions was a result of adding the second administrator interview later in the research process and the difference in the two administrators' positions at the institution.

All interviews were tape recorded, transcribed exactly, and reviewed by the interviewee for accuracy. Individuals were given alternate identities to protect their privacy and confidentiality of responses. These interviews were then analyzed for themes through Exploratory, Affective, Values, and *In Vivo* coding. General demographic information was collected on the student who was interviewed. This student was a white, 19-year old sophomore,

male, single, who lived in campus housing. The administrators were both individuals who were familiar with the policy of academic probation, its implementation, and who had contact with students who were placed on academic probation or who experienced academic difficulties even if they were not placed on academic probation. Administrator 1 was male; Administrator 2 was female. Both administrators were White. Table 4 provides information concerning the interviews obtained.

Table 4

Interview Data

| Interview Participant | Length of Interview (Minutes:Seconds) | How Data was Collected | Coding Methods Employed |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------|--|
| Student 6 | 43:37 | Audio Recording, Transcription | Exploratory, line-by-line Affective, line-by-line Values, line-by-line <i>In Vivo</i> |
| Administrator 1 | 44:004 | Audio Recording, Transcription | Exploratory, line-by-line Affective, line-by-line Values, line-by-line <i>In Vivo</i> |
| Administrator 2 | 49:11 | Audio Recording, Transcription | Exploratory, line-by-line Affective, line-by-line Values, line-by-line <i>In Vivo</i> |

Of those students who completed the surveys, no demographic information was obtained. The only known facts about these students are that they were all enrolled in a class for students who were on academic probation and all of them were 18 years old or older. Surveys were anonymous. Three students indicated Fall 2013 was the first semester they were placed on academic probation. Of those three students, one student indicated the student had been placed on ‘warning’ in Spring 2013. Another student indicated that Fall 2013 was the first time the

student was placed on probation, yet the student also indicated probationary status in Summer 2013. The fifth student indicated the student was on academic probation Spring 2013, but the student did not indicate the student was currently on probation though the student was enrolled in a required course for students on probation. Probationary status of the student sample is demonstrated in Table 5. Copies of the survey and interview questions for students and administrators can be found in Appendices A and B.

Table 5

Probationary Status of Student Sample (Based on Student Responses)

| Student | Source of Data | Semesters on Probation | Semesters with Academic Deficiencies |
|-----------|----------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Student 1 | Survey | Fall 2013 | None indicated |
| Student 2 | Survey | Summer 2013, Fall 2013* | Not indicated |
| Student 3 | Survey | Fall 2013 | Spring 2013 ‘on warning’ |
| Student 4 | Survey | Fall 2013 | None indicated |
| Student 5 | Survey | Spring 2013 | None indicated |
| Student 6 | Interview | Fall 2013 | Spring 2013 ‘at risk’ |

*Stated Summer 2013 and Fall 2013; later on survey stated Fall 2013 is “my first time” on probation.

Table 6 outlines the sources of data used. Identities of participants for the purposes of this report are also listed.

Table 6*Sources of Data*

| Source of Data | Document Review | Interviews | Surveys |
|-------------------|---|---|--|
| Number of Sources | 1 | 3 | 5 |
| Name of Source | Policy of Academic Probation in College Catalog | 1 student *Student 6 2 administrators *Administrator 1 *Administrator 2 | 5 students *Student 1 *Student 2 *Student 3 *Student 4 *Student 5 |

*The Policy: A Document Review***The Grading Scale.**

Information regarding the policy of academic probation was reviewed in Small Liberal Arts College's College catalog that is located on the college's website and is accessible to students and the general public. The college uses the number of credit hours earned by students to determine their classification. The system is delineated as shown in Appendix F. The Catalog states that a full course load per semester is 12 to 18 credit hours (Small Liberal Arts College).

The institution uses a 4.0 grading scale to determine the GPA for students. Student letter grades from A+ to F are equivalent to specific numbers on a scale from 4.0 to 0, respectively. Students receive the letter grade as the final grade in their courses (Small Liberal Arts College). The grading scale is outlined in Appendix G.

Calculating the GPA.

The GPA for a student is determined by adding all the points earned and then dividing by the number of credit hours attempted in a semester (Small Liberal Arts College). For example, a student who earns a B in a three-credit hour course earns 3 points for the course, which is then

multiplied by 3 for the number of credit hours earned. This student has earned 9 points for that course. These points are then added in with the other points earned for other courses taken. So a student who earns a B, C-, A, and A+ in four classes, all of which are three credit hours, will respectively earn 3.00 points (x 3 credit hours) + 1.67 points (x 3 credit hours) + 4.00 points (x 3 credit hours) + 4.00 points (x 3 credit hours) = 9 + 5.01 + 12 + 12 = 38.01 points ÷ number of credit hours attempted (12) = 3.16 GPA for the semester. In an equation, that is: $(3 \times 3) + (1.67 \times 3) + (4 \times 3) + (4 \times 3) = 9 + 5.01 + 12 + 12 = 38.01 \div 12 = 3.16$ GPA for this semester. The student's cumulative GPA and individual semester GPA are determined at the end of each semester. Grades earned at the institution are the only grades used to determine GPA (Small Liberal Arts College).

Academic Standing.

The institution has a graduated GPA system in that students who are freshmen must earn a minimum cumulative GPA of 1.800 to remain in good academic standing with the institution; sophomores must earn a minimum cumulative GPA of 1.90, and juniors and seniors must earn a minimum cumulative GPA of 2.00. If these minimum GPAs are not achieved, academic penalties are incurred. Table 7 illustrates the minimum GPA required for students.

Table 7*Minimum GPA Requirements Per Student Classification*

| Classification | Minimum Required GPA (Cumulative) |
|----------------|-----------------------------------|
| Freshman | 1.80 |
| Sophomore | 1.90 |
| Junior | 2.00 |
| Senior | 2.00 |

If students do not achieve the minimum cumulative GPA for their classification, they are placed on academic warning. If students do not achieve the minimum GPA the following semester, they are placed on academic probation. If students on academic probation earn a 2.30 in any semester, but do not earn the minimum cumulative GPA, they are placed on automatic extended probation and may remain on automatic extended probation for no more than three semesters. If students are removed from probation but then fall below the minimum GPA in any other semester, they are again placed on academic probation. Students who do not achieve the 2.30 GPA in a semester will face academic dismissal from the institution. Students may appeal the dismissal status. If students fail all of their classes or earn a WF (withdrawn failing) in all classes, they will be dismissed from the college (Small Liberal Arts College).

First year students and sophomores who earn the minimum GPA for their classification (1.80 and 1.90 respectively) and yet do not earn a 2.00 are considered at academic risk and are required to take a class that focuses on strengthening academic study skills (referred to in this report as Study Skills 1 (SS1)). Students who end up on academic warning or on academic probation who have not previously taken and passed the course are also required to take it (Small

Liberal Arts College). According to **Administrator 1**, there is a second course, Study Skills 2 (SS2), required for students if they are on academic probation for a second or third semester.

In Spring 2012 the college had 32 students identified as “at risk” or placed on academic warning. This constituted 3.70% of the overall student body. In Fall 2012 the number of students at risk or on warning was 57 (6.26% of the student population). In Spring 2013 the number was 23 (2.78% of the student population) and in Fall 2013, the number of students at risk or on warning was 66 (7.37% of the student population) (Administrator 1, personal communication, March 26, 2014). These numbers are presented in Table 8.

Table 8

Number and Percentage of Students At Risk or On Warning

| Semester and Year | Spring 2012 | Fall 2012 | Spring 2013 | Fall 2013 |
|--|-------------|-----------|-------------|-----------|
| Number of students at risk and warning | 32 | 57 | 23 | 66 |
| Percentage of students at risk and warning | 3.70% | 6.26% | 2.78% | 7.37% |

Restricted Activities.

According to the College Catalog, students on academic probation are restricted from participating in certain extra-curricular activities including “debates, dramatic or musical performances, or other similar public appearances; intercollegiate athletics, student publications, elected or appointed positions in campus government, or other leadership positions on campus; managing athletic teams, cheerleading, or similar activities” (2013-2014, p. 36).

Students dismissed from the institution for academic reasons must sit out for one spring or fall semester and then may seek readmission to the college. Students who apply for

readmission after sitting out one semester, and are readmitted to the college, are automatically placed on academic probation on their return. Students on academic probation are also not allowed to apply for a Leave of Absence from the institution. A Leave of Absence is a written request from a student to take one or two semesters off from academic studies at this institution (Small Liberal Arts College).

Table 9 is a visual representation of the academic probation policies of the institution.

Table 9*Academic Probation Policies*

| Student Classification | Freshman | Sophomore | Junior | Senior | Applicable Intervention or Restrictions |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| Minimum Cumulative GPA required | 1.80 | 1.90 | 2.00 | 2.00 | |
| If student reaches minimum cumulative GPA but does not reach 2.0 | Academic risk | Academic risk | NA: student minimum cumulative is 2.0 | NA: student minimum cumulative is 2.0 | Study Skills Class 1 (SS1) |
| 1 st semester GPA falls below minimum | Academic warning (only 1 semester) | SS1 |
| 2 nd semester GPA falls below minimum | Academic probation | Academic probation | Academic probation | Academic probation | SSI if not previously taken and passed; SS2 if SS1 previously taken and passed; student may not participate in extra-curricular activities |
| 3 rd semester GPA falls below minimum (2.3 semester GPA not earned) | Possible academic dismissal | Possible academic dismissal | Possible academic dismissal | Possible academic dismissal | if not dismissed, SS2 by choice; activity restrictions |
| If 2.3 earned in a semester, but minimum cumulative GPA not met | Automatic extended probation (max 3 semesters) | SS1 Or SS2; activity restrictions |

*Analysis of Research Questions**Research Question 1*

From the perspective of higher education administration, what function or purpose does the institution intend the policy of academic probation to serve?

Fair Warning.

Administrators of the college were asked to discuss the intent of the policy of academic probation from their perspectives. Both administrators agreed that the policy of academic probation is not meant to be a punishment or a disciplinary act toward students. Instead they saw the policy as a warning to students; according to **Administrator 1**, “fair warning” that the student was not doing as well academically as the institution would like. **Administrator 1** stated that the purpose of the policy was

Twofold...to put students on warning...when their academic...performance is... faltering [because] they have to be in good academic standing to graduate.

Administrator 1 also stated that academic probation

serves as a warning that we’re concerned... [and allows the administration] to keep track of who those students are so that we can be more proactive in providing them services.

Administrator 1 stated the policy is intended to give students

fair warning for what they’re facing...It’s certainly not designed to weed people out.

Providing Services.

According to **Administrator 1**, in addition to keeping track of students who are not doing well, the college wants to be able to proactively offer students “the services they need.” The college’s use of a graduated GPA system for good standing is designed to allow students time to adjust to the college environment. **Administrator 2** stated that the college uses this system in conjunction with the policy of academic probation to

give those students an opportunity to rise to the standards
of the college without lowering the standards of the college.

This administrator stated that some students need “the extra support, the extra help” to adjust to college and that this support

jive[s] with the college’s mission and...goals and perspective.

In this spirit of providing support, **Administrator 1** noted that the college keeps track of students who are

on warning, probation, continued probation, as well as at risk,
or dismissed.

Administrator 1 said the college also tracks those students who are in good standing, but

whose semester GPA has deviated from their cumulative GPA by
at least .5....if they have a cumulative of 3.0, but their semester all of
a sudden is a 2.4, we just send them kind of a ‘we are concerned’ letter.

Administrator 1 stated that there are no sanctions, such as academic probation, for these students; however, the administration is letting the student know:

we’re concerned about whatever happened last semester.

We want to be able to help you, so here’s our services.

The college’s policy regarding academic probation and services are meant to be proactive and to intervene with the student before it is too late. **Administrator 1** stated,

let’s see if we can’t turn things around while they’re still in good standing.

Students need to be in good standing in order to graduate and **Administrator 1** noted,

by the end of the second year, they gotta be...in good standing.

They gotta be there or ...they’re not going to make it.

An Ethical Practice.

Administrator 2 stated that the policy of academic probation is an ethical stance the institution has taken on behalf of the students. **Administrator 2** stated

It's very important that students understand the policy of academic probation is actually an ethical one. And I don't want them to think it's a disciplinary one or...a punishment in any way.

Students must achieve a 2.0 GPA in order to graduate and this administrator felt students needed to know "that's pretty standard across the nation." **Administrator 2** stated that ethically the college must let students know when they are falling behind and are not on track to make that 2.0. If students cannot meet the minimum requirements, students need to know before they reach the point that they expect to graduate. They need to be told early that they may not make it to graduation if they don't improve. **Administrator 2** wanted these students to know that the financial investment in their college education is at stake. Students should not expect to graduate just because they have been paying money to the institution. **Administrator 2** stated

I think the policy is put in place to prevent that from happening and to create awareness of it and to provide support to be able to reach good academic standing so that you can graduate.

In addition, **Administrator 2** said that letting students know they risk not graduating should be a motivator to students to "want to make the most of their money." **Administrator 2** also stated that academic probation "is a learning experience" and hopes that at the end of the semester students are on probation, these students:

have learned enough about probation and enough about themselves to understand that this has been a support put in place by the college to help them and not to punish them.

In the Policy

The policy as written in the college catalog outlines the fact that if students do not meet the minimum academic standard GPA, then the “student will be placed on academic probation” (Small Liberal Arts College Catalog, 2013-2014, p. 36). The intent of the policy is not stated. By implication, the institution has standards that it expects students to meet. If students do not meet those standards, they will be placed on academic probation.

Research Question #2

From the perspective of the student, what does the student understand the purpose of academic probation to be?

Preparation for the Real World.

While administrators stated the policy was to give students fair warning that they were in trouble academically and provided information about services for students, the student interviewed for this study stated that the purpose of the policy was to prepare students for the real world. When asked why the school placed students on academic probation, **Student 6** replied

I think a lot of it has to do with preparing them [students] for the real world because, you know, you're not going to be able to just sit back and sort of cruise through life...and not have to work hard or do anything.

In reference to the student's personal situation, **Student 6** stated that the college placed the student on academic probation because

I had really bad grades...but I think also...maybe...partly because they know I can do well and they were trying to...get me to work harder....

I've always known I've been a hard worker....I had to relearn that about myself.

The student felt prepared academically for college but that college was harder than expected.

It's a lot harder than I thought it would be....I got prepared really well in high school for stuff like, you know, college essays and that kind of thing, but they just grade it a lot harder.

Student 6 stated low motivation was the reason the student did not feel committed the first semester. **Student 6** described his academic performance as "very poor" and said,

I don't think I was committed, and I don't think...I was ready....

I probably should have taken a year off maybe.

Student 6 stated the college placed him on probation because he "had really bad grades."

He had been determined to be "at risk" the semester before he was placed on probation, but stated that being placed at risk didn't really hit home for him. He said that he "didn't take it as hard" and "it didn't sink in" that being at risk could affect his future opportunities. Part of his motivation to do well was to be able to return to college. If he could not return to college, he stated he would be

really disappointed in myself if that happened...and...that's basically been my motivation.

Receiving a letter from the administration that he had been placed on probation had an impact on him. He said that the semester before he was placed on probation,

I wasn't thinking, and I wasn't paying attention.

When he got the letter over the summer stating that he had been placed on academic probation for the next term, he stated that "it really sort of sunk in finally."

Getting in touch with his commitment, motivation, and ability to do the work helped the student understand what he wanted from his college experience. This student said that being placed on academic probation was “really eye opening” and he felt the college placed him on probation as a way to help him do better.

We Have a Choice.

From the surveys administered, **Student 1** attributed “poor grades” as the reason for being placed on academic probation. **Student 4** likewise recognized “low grades” as the reason for being placed on probation. **Student 2** indicated, however, that academic probation was to let us make a choice, dont [sic] do work and fail, or do something and graduate.

Student 3 said that being placed on probation was because

I stopped going to class and didn’t complete most work or never even started it because so much was going on I no longer had motivation.

While the administration identified a philosophy behind the reasons for probation (as fair warning and to fulfill ethical purposes) and practical reasons (to learn about opportunities for help) for academic probation, students understood the policy to relate more particularly to their personal situations. They had bad grades or they did poorly. **Student 6** did state he felt the institution thought he could do better and **Student 2** stated that probation gave students a choice.

Research Question #3

What services does the institution offer students on academic probation?

Student Identification.

Students did not identify as many services offered by the institution as the administration did, and students tended to identify services that they used, whether the use was by choice or not. **Student 6** recognized the class “that they put me in” as a service and defined the class as

basically a resource class...it also is a study hall.

He stated that taking the class “really helped me.” The student also identified the resource center, the writing center and the career center as services offered by the college. After identifying these services, **Student 6** stated “I can’t think of anything else,” but during the course of our conversation, identified counseling services as a service sought that was helpful. He also identified

two ladies in the resource center I meet with almost weekly...

one is for help with school work and another one is...for...counseling.

From the surveys, **Student 2** identified services as tutoring, supplemental instruction, or anything to help us get out of probation.

This student acknowledged using “student mentor” services, and stated the services were helpful, that “my grades are doing better.” The required class was acknowledged as a service by only two of the five students, **Student 1** and **Student 4**, even though the survey was administered to students taking the class. **Student 1** stated the classes were helpful in that

they gave me some good study strategies.

Student 4 stated the class was helpful “in a sense.” **Student 4** stated

I already knew what I had to do so I’m doing it. Class just gave me extra [sic] study time.

Student 3 identified the resource center and the academic and emotional support that was available there as services as well as tutoring, mentors, and the writing center. When asked “were those services helpful to you?” **Student 3** replied

yes, allows extra time for tests, notetakers, advice.

Student 5 expressed bitterness about the required class and the restriction of activities.

The student stated

I am very bitter when it comes to the class as I had to drop my position as the news anchor for the school’s tv station. Something I worked very hard for.

This bitterness about having to take the required class and having to give up an extra-curricular activity emphasizes the emotional impact these services can have on students. This student felt deprived of something worked hard for and expressed resentment. This student did, however, acknowledge 1 on 1 services. The student stated

I believe that meeting one on one benefitted myself more than the class did.

Administrator Identification.

As one would expect from the administrators of the programs for students on probation, administrators were able to list a multitude of services available to students including tutoring, Supplemental Instruction (SI), disability services, career services, academic support services, personal counseling, math tutoring, services through the college's quantitative learning center, and freshmen advising and orientation services. Most of these services are housed in one location on campus that the administration feels offers students more opportunities to participate in services without any stigma. Additionally, the administration tracks student progress and notifies students if it sees a deviation occurring in grades. The administration also offers a summer program for entering at-risk freshmen.

Administrator 1 also identified a software program that the institution purchased that provide[s] easy communication between faculty and staff regarding student issues.

Administrator 1 explained that the system afforded institutional members a way to provide input on students and

replaced a whole scatter shot approach to monitoring student progress....

We decided we wanted one uniform system on campus.

The administrator described the system as

an early intervention system....where we can get the people involved who need to...be there...to address student problems.

Administrator 1 stated student confidentiality is protected with this system and the administration thinks it is a proactive way of being ready and able to help students.

Administrator 2 noted that only two services, a required class on study strategies for students on academic warning or academic probation and peer mentoring were unique to students on academic probation. All other services the college offers are available to all other students regardless of their academic status. The number of students taking the classes varies from semester to semester depending on how many students are on probation, warning, or at risk in a given semester. In Spring 2012, 26 students were enrolled in Study Skills 1 and three students were in Study Skills 2. In Fall 2012 the number of students in Study Skills 1 fell to 18 and the number of students in Study Skills 2 rose to 10. In Spring 2013 the number of students in Study Skills 1 was 51 and the number in Study Skills 2 was two. In Fall 2013 the number of students in Study Skills 1 was 10 and the number in Study Skills 2 was nine (Administrator 1, personal communication, March 26, 2014). Table 10 below displays these numbers.

Table 10

Number of Students in Study Skills Classes Per Semester

| Semester and Year | Spring 2012 | Fall 2012 | Spring 2013 | Fall 2013 |
|--------------------------------------|-------------|-----------|-------------|-----------|
| Number of students in Study Skills 1 | 26 | 18 | 51 | 10 |
| Number of students in Study Skills 2 | 3 | 10 | 2 | 9 |

Peer Mentoring.

Both administrators considered the peer mentoring program to be an important and successful program. **Administrator 1** stated that the administration would like to expand the mentor program to include more students, especially incoming first year students. Currently the institution offers a program to at-risk incoming freshmen during the summer and these students

are offered a mentor. **Administrator 1** noted that these relationships often continue unofficially beyond the summer and these relationships help students transition to college. This administrator noted that the mentors serve as “role models” and the school tries to pair students with someone with whom they will have a “common interest and they can communicate with.”

Administrator 2 defined peer mentors as “successful college students” who are hired by the school to mentor other students. Currently, only students eligible for peer mentoring services are those taking one of the required Study Skills courses. Students who use the services of the peer mentor earn extra credit in their courses. **Administrator 2** explained that the administration made the service voluntary because

we wanted them to choose to do it, and so we needed to motivate them to do that.

Extra credit is an incentive to help motivate students to use the service. **Administrator 2** sees peer mentoring as an important service to students. The administrator stated that students will

learn something from a successful student that they cannot learn from an employee of the college. I mean it’s just that peer aspect to it. It might be that the peer mentor simply gets them used to meeting with them to study, and they sit and study together even though they’re studying different subjects. They get used to going to the library to study or going to a classroom to study, into the habit of studying so many hours per week, and that’s something I as an instructor cannot role model for them.

Administrator 2 identified mentors as role models as had Administrator 1 and hoped the mentor’s positive actions would impact the students:

Sometimes they find out that it’s...pretty cool to be a peer mentor, to be successful and to get to do that things you want to do, as well as study and do some things you don’t want to do. And so we [are] hoping that sort of communication will make a difference for them.

When asked if student input had been sought in the services offered to students, **Administrator 1** stated that the college

regularly...survey[s] our students who come in for services.

However, **Administrator 1** said students are not asked about services before they are implemented and “probably” don’t have input on the implementation of services.

The College Catalog

The college catalog labels the section of the catalog that addresses what happens to students who do not meet minimum academic requirements as “Academic Standing and Academic Penalties” (Small Liberal Arts College Catalog, 2013-2014, p. 36). Both classes that students are enrolled in by the administration if they do not meet the required GPA are listed in this section. The administrators with whom I spoke both considered the class and the time of the instructors of the class as a service or intervention rather than a “penalty.” Other penalties listed in the catalog are academic warning, academic probation, automatic extended probation, academic dismissal, and restriction of extra-curricular activities. If, by implication, we are to consider then these other “penalties” are also services, the college catalog services include the class that students are automatically enrolled in, the threat of dismissal from the school if students cannot meet the minimum academic requirements of the school after a specified period of time, and the restriction of certain activities. The catalog states the restricted activities are those that

represent the student body or the college in public or official capacities, including debates, dramatic or musical performances, or other similar public appearances; intercollegiate athletics; student publications, elected or appoint positions in campus government, or other leadership positions on campus; managing athletic teams, cheerleading, or similar activities. (Small Liberal Arts College catalog, 2013-2014, p. 36)

Academic probation itself is listed as a penalty and not as a service though the administrators who implement services to students clearly identify probation as an intervention, not meant to be a punishment. The language of the catalog is more punitive than that of the administration and of some of the students.

Research Question #4

Do students on academic probation use the services offered to them? Why or why not?

To Get Better.

When asked to talk about the services used, **Student 6** stated, I use a lot of them. There's a lady in the resource, two ladies in the resource center I meet with almost weekly...one is for help with school work and another one is...for...counseling.

Student 6 stated that counseling services have been the one thing that has helped me a lot.... 'cause I want to get better...and if I use them that just gives me a better shot...helps me out better in the long run.

Student 6 has been the kind of person who uses "resources like that in my life" and the student acknowledges that he is

just now starting to learn to use them....and how to engage with them...which has been really helpful.

For this student, asking for help and using resources available was not a difficult task. Even though required to take the study skills course, **Student 6** stated

Honestly I wish I'd a known about the class before.... 'cause I woulda... just taken it.

This student wished he had known about the opportunity to better himself earlier in his situation and says he would have taken advantage of the opportunity. **Student 6** stated that he did not

know about the class before he was put into it. I asked him how he felt about being placed in the class, and **Student 6** said

I guess I feel good about it in a way...just to know that they're trying to help me.

The Personal Touch.

Student 6 also acknowledged that his motivation and commitment were not where he wanted them to be before he was put on academic probation. Having the one on one attention from a staff member made a difference to this student. He stated that

one of the ladies that I see in the resource center teaches the class... so it's been good to be able to sort of have the class environment and then have the one on one environment.... That's been really helpful for... being able to understand stuff.

Having academic services and personal counseling services were both helpful to **Student 6**.

The one on one environment afforded him in the center was helpful, and in particular, he found counseling services to be helpful. When asked what services were being helpful to him, he said

I mean pretty much everybody in the resource center I would say.

For this student, the personal connection made a difference.

From the student surveys, **Student 1** identified the "classes" as a service used and stated that those classes were helpful. The student said

They gave me some good study strategies.

Student 2 stated that the student had

been using a student mentor [and]my grades are doing better.

Student 3 acknowledged using the resource center for "academic [and] emotional" support and said the services were helpful. Responding to the question that asked if the services were helpful, **Student 3** stated

yes, allows extra time for tests, notetakers, advice.

Student 4 stated the class was a service being used by the student and stated that it was helpful “in a sense.” The student stated,

I already knew what I had to do, so I’m doing it.

Class just gave me exta [sic] study time.

Student 5 said

I believe that these services were unhelpful and a waste of time.

The student did continue by saying

I believe that meeting one on one benefitted myself more than the class did.

Increase in Usage.

Administrator 1 noted that in the services offered to students there was an increase in usage across all programs. The biggest increase in recent years has come in the use of personal counseling services. **Administrator 1** said

across the board we’re seeing increases, and I think probably,

if I’m looking at an area that has had the greatest increase,

it’s personal counseling.

The administrator noted that there seems to be a flux to how services are used on campus depending on the time of the semester. **Administrator 1** stated that with personal counseling, we tend to see a spike around midterm and then towards the end of the semester.

For academic support, the administrator said

often times the biggest crunch time is...at the beginning where

we’re trying to get everybody’s accommodation plans and services coordinated.

Administrator 1 stated that currently students

may be bringing more needs with them, but they’re also self-identifying more than they have in the past.

The college takes several opportunities to let students know about the services that are available to them. According to **Administrator 1**, 3 years ago the college completed a full program review and the administration found that its programs were

very well recognized on campus by both students and faculty...

that students know where to come and feel comfortable coming to us....

so I feel pretty good about getting the word out about what we have available and that students do make use of it.

Those Using Services.

According to **Administrator 2**, peer mentoring is used by a majority of students in the Study Skills 1 required class and this administrator stated

most of them will choose a peer mentor, and...the majority of them use them a lot.

In the Study Skills 2 class, Fall 2013 was the first semester students in that class had access to mentoring services. According to **Administrator 2**,

very few students chose to have one, but those who did, used them a lot.

Administrator 2 explained the lack of usage as

I think...probably most of the students felt that they maybe were beyond that, or they had done that, been there, kind of thing. But those who did do it, I think, probably had had a good experience with it the first time and realized it would help them and wanted the opportunity again.

According to information given by **Administrator 1**, in Spring 2012, 18 students were paired with a mentor. In Fall 2012 the number of students with mentors was 16 and in Spring 2013 the number more than doubled--to 35. In Fall 2013 the number of students with mentors was 45 (personal communication, March 26, 2014).

Administrator 2 noted that tutoring and Supplemental Instruction services are available to all students. Anecdotally, this administrator noted that those students who are “not doing so well” typically don’t use those services. The administrator stated

the tutoring and the SI sessions are offered to all students, so it’s my experience that a lot of the students who are not doing so well don’t use that service, and that’s sort of a blanket stereotypical comment, and you can find examples that would prove that wrong, but in general, students who are making C’s and want the B’s, and students who are making B’s and want the A’s because of....maybe their need to go to med school or grad school or...they seem to take advantage of the tutoring and the SI program more so than the students who are really struggling.

This administrator acknowledged that the administration

would love to change that, not to knock out the higher level students, but just add the others...so far we haven’t figured out how to do that.

This administrator also noted that those students who do not use the services may be wary of using them because of issues concerning personal pride. The administrator stated,

I wonder if the students who are struggling are so concerned with face and pride that they might be afraid of being asked something, even by another student, but in a session with other students there, that could be embarrassing to them. And while the tutors and SI’s try very hard not to put anyone on the spot, you have to go to those sessions to realize that.

Research Question #5

What services do students believe the institution should offer to help them succeed, and why?

A Safe Person, A Safe Place.

Student 6 stated that if he created his own program for students who had a low GPA, he would include

a lot of the same things they have here.

He especially felt it was important for students to have

something you can do or somewhere you can go where...you can get help

or...whether it be...anything with school work, with...home life, with ...

drama, or you know anything like that.

The student wanted someone to talk to about what was going on in his life. **Student 6** stated earlier that personal counseling services and one on one time with someone from the resource center were helpful to him.

Information Please.

When asked what he would like to share with the administration, **Student 6** wanted the administration to make it clear

what can happen, or what...you can do when this happens.

He wanted students to be able to learn more about academic probation before a student was placed on probation. **Student 6** realized that students come to college excited and that they may overlook information that is given to them. The student said,

you're a freshman at college, you're all excited. You know part of you is nervous, but most of you is excited and...you really sort of don't know what to think...it's a life changing experience, and it...doesn't get...as much attention as it should.

The student also thought that making high school students more ready for college may be a part of the solution. He said,

I guess maybe even in high school prepare kids...for...what they could face... I mean they already sort of do that...when you talk to your college counselor and stuff like that, but ...maybe...make it more available to them.

Students were also asked what they learned about academic probation after being placed on probation. **Student 6** stated that he learned

a little bit about...what your grades have to be and ...how you can improve.

From the surveys, **Student 1** did not answer that question. **Student 2** learned that work was important stating,

I cant [sic] be fooling around.

Student 3 stated,

College is hard and you have to fight for it if you really want it.

Student 4 stated,

You are pressured to succeed or you'll be dismissed.

Student 5 also did not answer the question.

Get to Know Us.

Student 6 also stated that colleges should look at more than SAT scores when they consider admitting students to college. He stated

I think on an application...maybe scores and things like that don't, don't really matter a whole lot, or as much...I mean good grades are good...but I think if you put the right person in the right situation to succeed...you know grades...nothing like that I don't think matters.

He suggested colleges learn

a little bit about...the individual as a person.

Student 6 stated that he thought some deserving students may not do well with the application process. This student also acknowledged that some students should consider more carefully whether college is right for them—or right for them at the time. The student stated,

that decision to go to college is...one that...you should really think about.

And you know, even if it...if it be right away or if it be in a year or two years or whatever you want to do...it's something you should really think about more...not just if you want to go to college, but whether you're ready or not.

Encouragement and Support.

Students were asked “What would you like to share with other students who may be placed on academic probation?”; “If you could create your own program for students with a low GPA, what would it be like?” and “If you could talk to the administration about the policy of placing students on academic probation, what would you like to tell them?” These questions

were designed to find out what students felt were important services and important information that they should have as students who are placed on academic probation. Students who responded to the survey questions stated that there were several aspects of current services that they found helpful and would continue using. Mentoring services, one-on-one time with staff or instructors, academic and emotional support were all previously discussed as helpful services. Most students surveyed provided encouragement to their fellow students. In terms of “what would they like to share with other students placed on academic probation,” students wanted to let their fellow students know that it was okay—that they could do it. **Student 1** offered the encouragement of

if you give your all you can make it!

Student 2 offered,

dont [sic] give up, take your chance and make it happen.

Student 3 bluntly said,

you don't want that pressure just get your shit done and go to class
even if sick or unprepared.

Student 4 suggested that students not

think about it too much.

Student 5 did not answer the question.

In terms of creating their own program or talking to the administration about academic probation, students who responded to the surveys had suggestions. **Student 2** noted that a positive relationship with other students would be helpful. This particular student suggested students

pick a friend, [sic] that has classes you are in... [and] study with that friend.

This student also suggested that grades be reported every three weeks to students. **Student 2** also recognized academic probation as a “second chance” and wanted to thank the administration for that opportunity:

I would tell them, thanks 4 the 2nd chance.

Student 3 suggested allowing students to have lighter class loads:

lighten the class load so you could easily break down what you’re doing wrong and be able to apply that to future classes.

This student wanted the administration to give them two semesters “to get back on track.”

Student 4 wanted to encourage a classroom atmosphere that “was full of success” and would “boost courage” for students. From overall comments, **Student 2** stated,

You have to want it, it dosent [sic] just happen.

Student 3 stated that academic probation

sucks but it gives you your motivation back for sure.

Student 4 wanted to clarify that academic probation is

just a label not a definition. It doesn’t mean anything. Just a nudge to tell you do better. Don’t feed into it. Take it for what it is and don’t make it something it ain’t!!!

Other Themes

From the data, several other themes emerged. These are discussed below.

Emotions are Involved

Student 6 identified several different emotions that students can experience during their college careers. The student admitted he was missing his family at the time of the interview and said

I especially miss my dad.

He admitted that personal issues were one of the reasons he did not do well his first semesters stating that he was

really not in a good place.

He appreciated counseling services, a situation in which he could discuss his personal feelings freely. He noted that students come to college nervous and excited, that college is a life changing experience and one that students should deliberate on very seriously. He said,

you're a freshman at college, you're all excited. You know part of you is nervous, but most of you is excited and ...you really sort of don't know what to think...it's a life changing experience.

The prevalent emotion students associated with being placed on academic probation was disappointment, as expressed by him and at least two of the students surveyed. The administration also identified emotions that they observed in students who are on probation.

Administrator 2 acknowledged that student reactions are very individual, yet students can appear fearful, worried, indifferent, anxious, or embarrassed by it.

Disappointment.

Three students expressed disappointment to describe their feelings about being placed on academic probation. When asked how he felt about being placed on academic probation,

Student 6 stated

really disappointed in myself...I was just really disappointed in myself
because I know I can do better.

Students surveyed also used “disappointment,” or “disappointed” to describe their feelings about being placed on academic probation. **Student 1** expressed being

disappointed in myself.

Student 2 stated

I felt disapointed, [sic] but I also knew i [sic] would be placed in it
because I did not do my work.

Student 3 used the word defeated stating,

[I] felt very defeated.

Student 4 said academic probation didn't “affect me.”

Student 5 expressed disappointment that something the student had worked hard for was denied because of being placed on academic probation by saying,

I am very bitter when it comes to the class.

We Understand Students Will Have Feelings.

Administrator 2 acknowledged that academic probation arouses student feelings about themselves and the institution. This administrator stated that students who are required to take the course may feel

that they don't need to be in there, that this is all a big mistake....

I think it's a learning experience and since I'm trying to teach that in the course, other than some initial complaints about being there... and then usually more positive evaluations of the course at the end, it makes me feel they've learned and changed their opinion about it.

Whether that's really true or not, I don't know.

Some of the other feelings this administrator attributed to students were fear, embarrassment, and pride. **Administrator 2** stated in reference to the use of Supplemental Instruction and tutoring services,

I wonder if the students who are struggling are so concerned with face and pride that they might be afraid of being asked something, even by another student, but in a session with other students there, that could be embarrassing to them.

This administrator also acknowledged that being put on academic probation may cause some students worry and concern. **Administrator 2** stated that student reactions to being on probation

really varies....some students are absolutely horrified that they have that label, and they're really scared and working as hard as they can.

Even though student reactions are varied this administrator stated that students are certainly not proud of it, and I think...they're aware that it's there and... pretty embarrassed by it.

Administrator 2 wants students to know that academic probation should be a positive motivating force for them, that they should not allow it to negatively affect them. She said,

I'm trying ...try to tell them that...this is something you can do something about, and you don't need to let this news paralyze you.... Or make you...feel that...don't let it lower your self-esteem. It should be a motivator. Realistically you need to acknowledge that it has happened and let it be a motivator, but don't make...don't let yourself feel like it's defining you.

Uncertainty.

Student 6 expressed uncertainty several times when asked about different issues. Several of his responses involved using the phrase "I guess" and he said at different junctures "I'm not real sure" or "I think" or "I don't remember." He stated "I'm sorry" after asking for clarification about a question. At one point during the interview, he stated

What do you mean by that? Sorry.

He expressed uncertainty about the academics stating,

You know, coming in I wasn't real sure...what the academics would just be like in general.

Though he still has time to decide, **Student 6** does not yet know what he plans to do after he graduates. He said,

there's some alleys I could explore, but I'm not real sure yet.

He stated he played intramural sports on campus but wasn't sure if sports were restricted activities for students on probation:

You know I'm not real su...I know about the...drama and the no plays things...I'm not real sure about other sports or anything like that.

The student also stated that, for new students, college can be a great unknown. He stated you're a freshman at college, you're all excited. You know part of you is nervous, but most of you is excited and ...you really sort of don't know what to think.

As a way of addressing the uncertainty, **Student 6** suggested that high school students have the opportunity to talk to someone about whether or not college is the right choice for them. He stated,

I think...that decision to go to college is...one that...you should really think about. And, you know, even if it...be right away or if it be in a year or two years or whatever you want to do...it's something you should really think about more....not just if you want to go to college, but whether you're ready or not I think.

Encouragement.

To each other, students wanted to express encouragement, perhaps a part of helping each other become, or stay motivated. To other students, **Student 6** stated, find something to motivate yourself.

Student 1 stated,

If you give your all you can make it!

Student 2 advised others to

dont [sic] give up, take your chance and make it happen.

Student 3 advised other students that they “don’t want that pressure” of being on academic probation.

Student 4 suggested

don’t think about it too much....[and] it doesn’t mean anything.

Just a nudge to tell you to do better. Don’t feed into it.

Student Issues

Family Concerns.

Student 6 attributed his being placed on probation to poor grades and acknowledged that he didn’t have the motivation or the commitment to succeed in the previous year. He stated that between high school and college

I had a lot of stuff happen...and I probably should have taken a year off.

He expressed appreciation toward the institution stating that the administration placed him on probation

because they know I can do well and they were trying to...get me to work harder.

He acknowledged that during the time the interview occurred he was missing his family and especially his father. He said

I miss it [home] a lot...so that's been kind of hard...the family and ...

I especially miss my dad....I've been missing him a lot.

He was looking forward to the upcoming holiday to see them. When asked "If you could create your own program for students who had a low GPA, what would your program be like? What would be in it? What would be helpful do you think?" the student's first reaction was "a bus ride home." He then recommended having a place to go where "you can get help." The student expressed loneliness and sadness though he enjoyed his program in school and enjoyed outside opportunities going to this particular college afforded him.

Student 3 stated that in the previous semester, so much was going on medically and [with] family situations that the student felt these were reasons for being placed on academic probation. The student stated

Now I feel much more on top of things....I hope to be at a good standing at the end of the semester.

Motivation and Commitment.

Motivation and commitment were also important to **Student 6**. He stated that the previous academic year he wasn't as committed as he should be but that currently he was more committed. He stated,

I just wasn't committed, so when I was here it's just like I wasn't doing anything.... I have...more motivation this year, and I'm doing more

stuff and just happier overall.

He also recommended that other students on academic probation find what would help them be, and stay, motivated to do well. When asked if it is hard or easy to find that motivation to do well, the student replied,

everybody is different. I think....depending on how...they're shaped as a person...can really have a big effect on whether you are motivated or not.

For this student, being able to stay at this institution served as motivation to do better once he was placed on academic probation. When asked “do you consider being on probation ruining your opportunity?” he replied,

only for the threat that I couldn't come back....I would be really disappointed in myself if that happened and....that's basically been my motivation.

He also admitted that he can do the work and that he is a hard worker; however, he had to relearn that about himself. He said,

I've always known I've been a hard worker, but....I had to relearn that about myself...so that was really good.

Initially, **Student 6** was identified as being “at risk” by the institution, but he acknowledged that this identification didn't mean as much as being placed on academic probation did. He said,

I didn't really take it as hard, I guess. Being placed on probation was really sort of a wake up call....I guess just all of last year I just wasn't thinking, and I wasn't paying attention, and then, you know, when I got that letter over the summer after I'd sort of...sort of done a lot of thinking about it, it really sort of sunk in finally that....I was on probation.

For students who may lose their motivation and commitment after they get to college, **Student 6** suggested that the institution provide counseling services to help them “figure it out.”

He said,

I would say definitely provide the counseling service. That’s been a big... the main...way that I’ve really been able to think about it and talk to somebody about it.

Student 3 also thought that losing motivation was one reason the student ended up being placed on probation. In regards to the previous semester’s work, the student said,

I stopped going to class and didn’t complete most work or never even started it because so much was going on I no longer had motivation.

This student also acknowledged that academic probation can be a motivator. The student stated, it [academic probation] sucks but it gives you your motivation back for sure.

Student Thoughts About the College

College is Hard.

Student 6 acknowledged that college is harder than high school.

It’s a lot harder than I thought it would be....I think the grading is more, more tough...I got prepared really well in high school for stuff like, you know, college essays and that kind of thing, but they just grade it a lot harder.

He thought the college in part placed him on academic probation because

they were trying to get me to work harder

and he stated that he felt he was a hard worker, but that he had lost touch with that. He said,

I've always known I've been a hard worker, but...sort of over the summer especially...I had to relearn that about myself...so that was really good.

When asked if the academic work was something he had to work at, he replied,

yeah...I'd much rather be doing something else like what I was doing this summer...just 'cause I'm an outdoor...I'm a hands on person...but, yeah...I find it...enjoyable and I can ...be interested in it.

Student 6 also understood academic probation to be a tool used by the institution to help students. He thought students were placed on academic probation as a way of preparing them for the real world because, you know, you're not going to be able to just sit back and sort of cruise through life...and not have to work hard or do anything...so I think it's...at least for me, it's been really eye opening...in that respect.

He also stated that learning to engage with the services offered by the institution was hard though he does not find it hard to ask for help from others. When asked if the learning curve in using services was a hard or easy transition to make, he stated, "it was hard."

Student 2 implied that college is something that must be worked at by stating that academic probation is there to remind students they have choices:

dont [sic] do work and fail, or do something and graduate.

This student also acknowledged that

I can't be fooling around....you have to want it [to do well in school],
it dosent [sic] just happen.

Student 3 also stated that college is difficult saying

College is hard and you have to fight for it if you really want it.

They're Trying to Help.

Student 6 stated that he believed the institution placed students on academic probation to prepar[e] them for the real world.

When referring to the required class and working with staff in the resource center, he expressed appreciation for the services stating that the class "really helped me" and counseling services were

the one thing that has helped me a lot.

The fact that the course was required and he did not have the ability to opt out of it did not make the student feel negatively toward the institution. He said that if he had known about the class earlier he would have signed up for it himself, and he stated that he felt good about being placed in the class:

I guess I feel good about it in a way...just to know that they're trying to help me.

Mixed Feelings.

Student 6 stated that he liked the college he is attending and the area in which the college is located. He said

I'm a real outdoors person...so there's a lot of opportunity around here.

He said that his major

is really fun and I've gotten to know some really good people.

He agreed with the statement that the college had a rigorous academic climate and acknowledged that he may not have been as ready for college as he thought he was. He stated

last year I just wasn't...I don't think I was committed, and I don't think ...

I was ready....I guess I had sort of what I said before. I had a lot of stuff happen...to happen and going on and I probably should have taken a year off maybe....so when I was here it's just like I wasn't doing anything, you know...really not in a good place.

For **Student 6**, being placed on academic probation was "a wake up call" and he understood that the institution placed him on probation

partly because they know I can do well and they were trying to ...get me to work harder.

Part of his motivation to do well was to be able to stay at the institution. **Student 6** responded said that he wanted to return to the college and the threat of not being able to come back was motivation for him. He said,

Only for the threat that I couldn't come back...I would be really disappointed in myself if that happened and....that's really... been my motivation.

When I responded, "So you're motivated because you want to stay," **Student 6** replied, "Yeah."

Students who responded to the surveys had mixed feelings toward the institution.

Student 1 stated the services used were helpful but did feel

students with a 1.9 GPA should be given different options.

Student 2 stated

I knew it [academic probation] was a 2nd chance the school let someone have.
She wanted to tell the administration,
thanks 4 the 2nd chance.

Student 5 stated the services were

unhelpful and a waste of time.... I am very bitter when it comes to the class.

Get to Know Me.

Student 6 also suggested that the institution get to know its prospective students in a way that goes beyond high school GPA and SAT scores. He said

I think on an application...maybe scores and things like that don't,
don't really matter a whole lot, or as much....but I think if you put
the right person in the right situation to succeed...you know grades...
nothing like that I don't think matters....learn...a little bit more about the
...individual as a person.

Student 6 stated that learning more about the person is an important step in the application process, and in the process of helping students who have “lost” their motivation and commitment. The fact that **Student 6** found counseling services helpful and recommended them to others suggests that a personal connection is important to him. Through counseling services, individuals are encouraged to understand themselves better as well as others around them. The idea of having a relationship with the institution seems very important to this student.

Administrator Thoughts about Students

We Care.

Administrator 2 stated

Our administration is extremely caring and kind...they always have time for students; they listen to students, and I feel...part of my responsibility is to advocate for these students....our administrators...try to bring students along very kindly and compassionately

She discussed the belief that the institution has structured services so that students can seek help without feeling stigmatized. The offices that provide assistance to students on campus are embedded in offices that also serve other students. **Administrator 2** stated,

There's a lot of people there and they're all in helpful roles, and so when students come to the ...resource center, I think they know they're coming for help, and it's a very welcoming place, but it's not a stigmatized place...because they may be coming in to see me to be a tutor, they may be coming to see me to get a tutor. They may be coming to see me to be hired as a Supplemental Instructor, or they may be coming because they need coordination for accommodations, so everyone we have is that way.....So you could be coming in ...a leadership position, or you could be coming for counseling. ...I'm fortunate in that I do think students know they can come there for help, but they're not stigmatized as someone coming for help...students can come to me and feel comfortable I think....It's a place advocating for students.

Administrator 2 acknowledged that if the administration had not structured the provision of services this way, students

might fear me more....or fear being seen coming in there...by other students more.

Concern for Students.

One of the words used in reference to students by administrators was “concern.”

Administrator 1 noted that the policy of academic probation

serves as a warning that we’re concerned.

Placing students on probation serves as notice to students that the administration is concerned about their academic performance. For students who are in good standing, and yet have deviated from their cumulative GPA by .5 during a semester, the administration will send a “we are concerned” letter to those students. **Administrator 1** explained that for students who receive this letter, they

are not on probation, you are not on ...status. There are no sanctions, but...we’re concerned about whatever happened last semester. We want to be able to help you, so here’s our services.

The institution has purchased a software system that allows faculty or staff to alert specific personnel if they are concerned. **Administrator 1** stated

on a daily basis a professor might say that so and so has missed two straight classes; I’m concerned about him, and so we have that network... which includes the RA’s and student life people or anything like that... so it’s an early intervention system....where we can get the people involved who need to [be].

Faculty or staff who are concerned about a particular student can let others know about their concern via this software system and each day, those concerns are read by three administrators who then work to help find services for the students. **Administrator 1** stated

we kind of triage them as to where they need to go and...we can follow them through. If...if a case is closed, it gets marked closed...but we can... follow those through and everybody who intervenes...will enter in something into the system and then we have a way of tracking.

Administrator 1 also expressed concern that some students do not realize the situation they are in academically. The administrator stated that sometimes students will

sit down at your desk and you'll say, you know, your midterm grades...

I've got some concerns. And they say, oh, everything is going fine.

I fixed that. Everything's...back on track....And that's often not the case....

Either they don't want to admit it or ...they've fooled themselves.

Doing Well is Important

Student-sought success.

The fact that students were disappointed in themselves about being placed on academic probation suggests that they wanted, or expected, to do well in their classes. **Student 6** stated that he was disappointed

because I know I can do better.

He also said that he believed the administration thought he could do better as well. He said,

they know I can do well and they were trying to ...get me to work harder.

He went on to state that he had

always known I've been a hard worker...[and I had] to relearn that about myself.

Doing well in his academic work was important to him, even if he preferred to be doing something else. Regarding his academic work, he said,

I'd much rather be doing something else...I find it enjoyable and ... I can be interested in it.

He also stated that he would have taken the SS1 class earlier if he had known that it was an option. **Student 6** also acknowledged that using the services available to him could help him. He said,

I want to get better.

He also wanted that success for other students suggesting that it would be helpful to them to have somewhere you can go where...you can get help.

He wanted the institution to find "other ways" of assessing prospective students so that the institution could put

the right person in the right situation to succeed.

Student 1 acknowledged being "disappointed in myself" about being placed on academic probation but also suggested that

students with a 1.9 GPA should be given different options.

This student also said the classes were helpful and

gave me some good study strategies.

An appreciation of the services suggests the student is happy to be doing better academically though the student demonstrated some ambivalence about the services stating that students who

are close to the minimum requirement deserve alternatives. **Student 2** also expressed appreciation of the services and encouragement to fellow students saying

thanks 4 the 2nd chance....[and] you have to want it, it dosent [sic] just happen.

Student 3 felt much better about the current semester than the previous one and said

I hope to be at a good standing at the end of this semester.

Student 4 stated that students are “pressured to succeed.” **Student 5** wanted to find success through the achievement of personal goals rather than academic success as defined by a minimum GPA.

Standards of the Institution.

While recognizing that students enter college with varying levels of knowledge and skills, the administration has standards in place that students must meet. **Administrator 1** stated that “the GPA is the GPA,” and students must meet the requirements in order to be removed from probation. The administrator stated, for example,

if they get a 2.25, that’s not good enough...I think that’s the policy here so that we don’t have those gray areas...everybody’s treated equally, everybody’s treated the same.

Administrator 1 acknowledged that the policy is strict:

I like the fact that it’s fairly strict because...while...part of our mission is to offer access to students who are under-represented... and at the same time, we want to make sure that students know we have standards and that... they are what they are, and we’re going to help you get there...what I always tell my first year students and my parents when I have them together for

orientation is that...we're going to bend over backwards to help you stay here, but you've got to do your part...so it's a partnership. And...we publicize our standards and...we're going to help you reach them, but you've got to understand what the standards are...it's a system where the students have to be accountable, and they know where they stand.

Administrator 1 explained the fact that certain activities are restricted for students on academic probation as

we make it known to students that whether you're here for football or theater or whatever, your primary role here is to be a student and if you...find difficulty doing that, we're going to make sure ...your time is not torn.

Administrator 2 also noted the standards of the college and how students are required to meet those standards. The administrator stated

they [administration] want to give those students an opportunity to rise to the standards of the college without lowering the standards of the college...so some students can do that pretty much with time and self-discipline and just learning, transitioning, but others can't...And they need the extra support, the extra help, so I think it does jive with the college's mission and...goals and perspective.

Administrator 2 also stated that the administration believes that

it's up to them to hold the line, to help students reach the standards that they establish, but hold the line so that they take pride in achievement and in graduation, and their diploma means something to them....they try to bring students along very kindly and compassionately, but it doesn't mean they will change the rules or the policies or lower the standards.

The administrators interviewed believe they are there to provide students with opportunity. **Administrator 2** considers herself a helper and an advocate. **Administrator 1** wants to make students are aware of their situation so they can work to correct it. He wants to provide support to students. Though there are some forced requirements, both administrators generally believe in student choice for use of services. They believe in being proactive to help students and they want students to succeed. Administrators also strongly value the standards of the college and will work to maintain their standards and help students maintain the standards.

Recognizing Adjustment Issues.

The administration recognizes that new students will have an adjustment period to college and it recognizes that some students will need time to adjust. **Administrator 1** stated students sometimes have an adjustment issue coming to college.....
it's just a recognition that it's a new experience and they may need...
some students may need time to kinda get it right.

The minimum GPA standards for freshmen and sophomores as outlined in the college catalog allows these students to have an acceptable GPA that is lower than 2.0. **Administrator 1** stated

Our rationale for it is that...students sometimes have an adjustment issue coming to college and particularly...one of our missions is to provide access to students...who might be described as in under-represented groups...first generational, regional, that sort of thing. And so we understand there can be an adjustment issue and ..so...first year we have a little bit lower threshold and the second year...by the end of the second year, they gotta be in...good standing. They gotta be there or...they're not going to make it.

By allowing this initial period of adjustment, the administration can create policies that make sure students later in their college career meet the academic standards as they are set forth.

Administrator 1 said,

Here...the GPA is the GPA and if you had to get a 2.33 to stay in... to stay off probation and you got a 2.31, that's not a 2.33, so here there's... much less...gray area. There's much less...discretionary decision making unless a student appeals for a given reason.

Administrator 2 noted that this system is

a little different. I think it's probably unique to [Small Liberal Arts College] that they do that.

We Want to be Proactive.

According to **Administrator 1**, the college works very hard to be proactive and try to help students before they get into difficulty. He stated that the faculty and staff try to intervene early. Let's see if we can't turn things around while they're still in good standing.

In regards to sending students who are doing well, a "we are concerned letter" if their GPA begins to deviate significantly, this administrator stated

We try to be proactive ...in tracking students, we at some point notice, you know, here is a student who started off well and every semester they've gotten closer and closer to 2.0, so let's see if we can't find a way to head that off before they get into probation.

The administration also wants to make sure students are aware of the services available to them to help them before they get into difficulty. **Administrator 1** stated,

For instance that letter that says...you're in good standing, but your GPA was a half point lower this semester in your cumulative. Even in that letter we say you're required to make an appointment with Dr. [**] or with one of the other members of the [***] to...talk about what happened....

Is there an issue that we can address through one of our services?

The administration also uses the software package it has bought to help track students as a way to reach out to faculty to find out how students are doing in classes. **Administrator 1** explained that

it's an early intervention system....where we can get the people involved who need to...be there...to address student problems,

maybe they're not even problems yet, but we can be proactive in addressing them....We survey faculty three times a semester....and we ask the professor is the student succeeding, surviving, or struggling.... What we found last year during the pilot test year is that there was a tremendous correlation between students who had the surviving or struggling in any one of their classes and students who either fell into academic difficulty or didn't return....We're trying to use this as a proactive way to address students before, again, they fall into difficulty.

Administrator 1 also discussed the fact that the reason the two required classes were created was

to offer a proactive resource for the students...to improve their academic standing of course and then to improve their GPA....so rather than just leaving them on their own, these were both designed specifically to...and sometimes we have to convince the students of that...they get placed into the [Study Skills 1 class] and they say...I don't want to take it; I don't think I need it...and we say, well, give it a shot because we think it will help you.

Administrator 1 stated that the policy of academic probation itself is a warning...and it's a way for us to tell them...to make sure that they're aware of the resources and ...to try and encourage them to use the resources that we have.

The college also offers a summer program for entering students who the college may identify at risk because of certain factors identified by **Administrator 1** as low SAT scores, low...high school GPA...first generation....

Administrator 1 said these students

get an introduction to what college expectations are going to be.

It's pretty intensive...but we also pair them with a mentor during the summer

and that mentor relationship continues into the academic year.

This program is also a way of proactively trying to address the needs of students.

The services that **Administrator 2** offers to students are available to all students; there are only two services that are only for academic probation students: the required classes and the offer of peer mentoring services. **Administrator 2** stated,

I can work with anyone....who is considered a student on campus
if they voluntarily walk in and ask for help.

The wide availability of a range of services to the general student population is a proactive action on the part of the institution. **Administrator 2** said

I know that a lot of students struggle in college and often, I think,
it isn't aptitude. I think it is not having skills that we just simply expect
them to pick up along the way. And that's fine...for the students who do
pick it up, but sometimes I think they learn those skills from one another,
and if a student has been in a learning environment and perhaps has not had
the opportunity to pick that up from others in his or her environment or at home,
like a first generation college student....then it seems like part of the college
experience should be to provide that opportunity.

We Change Lives.

Both administrators expressed positive feelings toward the institution and its mission and goals in working with students. The institution itself has an identity that they are aware of and support. According to **Administrator 1**,

we're included in the ...list of colleges that change lives...
and that's part of our...who we are.

Administrator 2 said,

[Our institution] for years has received ranking in a book called *Colleges that Change Lives*, and they consider that quite an honor to be in that book....But I think whether we get placed into the book or not, the college has that...goal. It's what they want for their students. They want to feel that they have impacted their lives and had a...positive influence of...and change...being able to change lives for the better. So I think the academic probation policy jives with that in that they realize not all students arrive at the college in the same place, and that's okay.

Common Ground

Recognizing Individual Differences.

Both administrators and the student interviewed acknowledged that each student is individual and unique. **Student 6** stated "everybody is different." When he spoke about student motivation, he said,

It depends on the situation you're in, I think.

Student 6 also acknowledged that students have different levels of skill and knowledge when they come to college. He stated that he felt colleges should take these differences into account when considering students for acceptance. He said,

some kids are really smart and really thoughtful, but maybe they're not great writers, so on an application they might not...get it across very well.... I think...the whole college search process and...applying...I think there needs to be some other ways.

Administrators also acknowledged individual differences and stated that the administration has allowed for that. The structure of being placed on academic probation allows students to enter the college and have time to adjust. **Administrator 2** stated,

they realize not all students arrive at the college in the same place, and that's okay....They want to give those students an opportunity to rise to the standards of the college without lowering the standards of the college....so some students can do that pretty much with time and self-discipline and just learning, transitioning, but others can't.... and they need the extra support, the extra help.

This administrator noted that just as students come into the college at different levels of functioning, so do students who have been in the college environment function differently. Student reactions to being on academic probation vary greatly, behaviorally and emotionally.

Administrator 2 stated:

I think it's just so individual and varied because I think, not only are students' personalities so different, but I think their levels of knowing what to do about it are so different....so a student who doesn't know a lot

about what to do about it, but is very worried about it, may read every chapter three times, and as a result I think that's a very poor strategy, and so they spend their time doing that, and their grades may not improve even though they're really working hard to get into good academic standing. And some other student is so anxious by the whole thing that they're almost paralyzed and they don't know what to do, and they do nothing, but they might escape into gaming and other activities...and it appears that they're not impacted at all, and they don't even care, and I don't think that's the case.... I think it's just so individualized.

Emotional reactions differ as well. **Administrator 2** stated that students find out about being on probation when she is not around and she sees their reactions when the academic semester begins again:

Usually they find about it either between semesters or over the summer, so I'm not right there. ...and then when they come back and find out that they're in this class...many of them are very thankful and appreciative, and many of them are like, oh, this is a mistake. I shouldn't be here.

The Importance of Connections.

Students and administrators acknowledged that relationships are important. **Student 6** discussed his family and his home and talked about how much he missed them. The time of our interview was near a holiday and he looked forward to spending time with them. Other relationships served other purposes. Friends were a method of communication for Student 6 who said he knew little about academic probation before being placed on it:

I knew it existed... 'cause I've heard... I've heard about it through the grapevine... from friends and stuff.

Student 6 stated that one of the most helpful services for him was the use of counseling services, a service in which he could talk one on one with someone about personal or academic issues. He said,

I went to the counselor before I was on probation.

He thought counseling services would be helpful to others. He said,

I would definitely provide the counseling service.

He stated that he believed having someone to talk to about different issues would be helpful to others as well. He said,

having someone to talk to... throughout the whole process...

whether it be about the probation specifically or not... has helped,

and I think that... having maybe someone who maybe specializes in...

probation and maybe... like careers or something like that... and being

able to talk to them could be helpful.

Getting to know people, in general, seemed to be important to **Student 6**. When he spoke about how he liked the college he was attending he said,

I've gotten to know some good people.

He thought it was important that during its admissions processes, the college learn:

a little bit more about the ... individual as a person maybe.

He also seemed to feel the administration was working on his behalf and he appreciated the efforts. He said

I guess I feel good about it [being placed in the class] in a way...
just to know that they're trying to help me.

About being placed on academic probation, he stated

they were trying to...get me to work.

He acknowledged that having a place to go to where he could talk to someone or work with them, was helpful to him. He said,

one of the ladies that I see in the resource center teaches the class...
so it's been good to be able to sort of have the class environment and
then have the one on one environment.

For **Student 2**, having a friend in class was something the student suggested would be helpful. **Student 2** stated

pick a friend, that has classes you are in [and]...study with that friend.

Student 3 identified "family situations" as one reason for being placed on academic probation.

That and medical issues affected the student's motivation so that

I stopped going to class and didn't complete most work or never even
started it because so much was going on I no longer had motivation.

The next semester, presumably without the same issues affecting the student, **Student 3** said,

Now I feel much more on top of things being forced to not focus on
anything else and I hope to be at a good standing at the end of this semester.

For administrators, building relationships with students, and especially building relationships between students, was an effective way to help students do better in their academic

work and in transitioning to college. Both administrators felt peer mentoring services were helpful to students who were struggling or at risk. **Administrator 1** referred to mentors as “role models” and wanted to expand mentoring services to more students. He noted that the administration had seen improvements in students who were using mentoring services. He said,

for a couple of years we were tracking a pretty strong correlation between students who accepted the mentor and improved academic performance. In the last two years we’ve seen that level off a little bit.

However, the merits of mentoring services are still viable. **Administrator 1** also said,

I’d like to see us expand our mentor program....to not only offer when students get into academic difficulty, but really to offer it to all incoming first year students who want it.

For incoming students who qualify for the summer introduction to college program,

Administrator 1 stated these students also receive mentoring services and

we try to pair them with someone who’s going to be...kind of have common interest, and they can communicate with...and so the older student serves as a role model...and...we find that the mentor relationship tends to continue even beyond the formal sense.

Administrator 2 agreed that mentoring and other relationships were helpful to students.

Administrator 2 discussed the fact that students may not have role models at home or have not been in an environment where they have been exposed to the skills needed to succeed in college.

She said,

I know that a lot of students struggle in college and often, I think, it isn’t aptitude.

I think it is not having skills that we simply expect them to pick up along the way.

Mentoring is one way to address those differences. **Administrator 2** also noted that for students who are struggling, it is important to help them create relationships with students who are doing well. She stated that students who have mentors

also get to talk to the peer mentors and sometimes they find out that it's... pretty cool to be a peer mentor, to be successful and get to do that things you want to do, as well as study and do some things you don't want to do. And so we [are] hoping that sort of communication will make a difference for them.

The administration makes the effort to invite and encourage students to use services available to them. **Administrator 2** noted that the place where services are offered "it's a very welcoming place" and students don't feel stigmatized coming in for services.

Policy and Communication

Students did not refer specifically to the policy of academic probation. **Student 6** spoke in terms of grades and a lack of motivation and commitment on his part as to why he had not done well the preceding semester. When asked "what did you know about academic probation before they put you on probation?," he replied "not much." I asked if he had read about it in the college catalog and he said

I knew it existed... 'cause I've heard... about it through the grapevine... from friends and stuff.

When asked what he had learned about it after being placed on probation, he stated

I learned a little bit about... what your grades have to be, and... how you can improve.

Student 6 did say he knew that certain activities were restricted for students on academic probation. He said

I know about the ...drama and the no plays things...I'm not really sure about other sports or anything like that.

Even though he may not have been very aware of the policy as written in the college catalog, **Student 6** was clear that he thought more information should be forthcoming to students about academic probation from the administration. Receiving a letter that he was on probation was an official communication that hit home for him. He said getting the letter stating he was on probation

was really sort of a wake up call.

It made him pay attention to his situation and he spent some time thinking about it. He stated that

having someone to talk to...throughout the whole process...has helped.

However, he also stated that perhaps during orientation, the administration should talk to students about academic probation. He said

You come in freshman year, and you have orientation, and ...you talk about all the...things to do and you learn about...the college and everything like that, and I think maybe having...maybe somewhere in there being able to sort of find a little bit...find out a little bit more about how about...like what can happen, or what...you can do when this happens or how...just be able to learn more about it.

He also stated,

I think it's something it gets neglected a lot because...you're a freshman at college, you're all excited. You know part of you is nervous, but most of you is excited and ...you really sort of don't know what to think...it's a life changing experience, and it...doesn't get...as much attention as it should.

He suggested that

maybe even in high school prepare kids...for...what they could face.

Students who responded to survey questions were also asked what they knew about academic probation before they were placed on it. **Student 1** responded “nothing” while **Student 2** stated

I knew it was a 2nd chance the school let someone have.

Student 3 responded

I didn't know there was one. I thought it was just if you had F's for two semesters you got asked to leave.

Student 4 likewise responded “nothing” and Student 5 did not answer the question. On the other hand, both administrators referred to the policy several times throughout the interviews.

Administrator 1 discussed how the graduated GPA system as outlined in the college catalog is used as a tool to help students transition to college. He stated that the graduated system is just a recognition that it's a new experience and...some students may need time to kinda get it right.

Students receive a formal letter that they are on probation. The administration regularly reviews its programs and polls students regarding their satisfaction with services. The academic

probation policy is located in the college catalog and the student handbook. This policy,

Administrator 1 noted, is reviewed in the freshman seminar. He stated,

the freshman seminar is really tied to our retention and advising efforts....
it's taught by faculty all over campus. ...the content is served...designed
to serve as a launch page for introducing the core proficiencies for the core
curriculum, which are in the catalog....so we spend a lot of...time talking
about how you register for classes, how you plan your college career...and...
academic standing as well.

Administrator 1 noted that the “catalog explains the process” for moving through probation and for appealing any administrative decisions that are made. He again stated the “catalog explains the policy” in regards to students being readmitted to the college after a suspension or dismissal.

Administrator 2 noted that the policy in the college catalog spells out what will happen to students on academic probation. She noted that some students did not feel they belonged in the required class but that requirement is stated in the college catalog. She said,

they'll come to me and say oh, it was a mistake. I shouldn't have been
placed in this course, and I'll say I didn't place you in this course; you need
to see the registrar....and they begin to learn that I'm not the one who's forcing
them to do anything.

When students then go to see the registrar regarding the class, they quickly find out that the registrar is following the rules as outlined in the college catalog. **Administrator 2** stated

all of this [required class for academic probation] is outlined in the
college catalog, so...I think sometimes they feel like that person,
meaning the registrar, put me in here, and I shouldn't be in here;

it was a mistake. The registrar can say I put you in here because of this ruling, and then if they want to go to an administrator...and argue the case, then the Dean can...again refer to the catalog and say this is why.

Summary

This chapter presented the experiences of six students on academic probation and two administrators who work with, and are knowledgeable about, the policy of academic probation. One of the students was interviewed as well as both administrators. Four of the students completed a 13- question survey regarding their experiences of academic probation. One student did not answer the questions of the survey but did write a note on the survey expressing thoughts and feelings about being on academic probation. The academic probation policy of this one particular institution as it is published in the college catalog was reviewed. Exploratory, Affective, Values, and *In Vivo* coding of the data were employed. The coding data was reviewed by a peer to ensure that the data was being appropriately delineated and that an appropriate amount of data was included. The peer reviewer expressed satisfaction with coding methods employed.

CHAPTER 5
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine how students on academic probation perceived the policy of academic probation and how well that perception fit with the intent of the administration's policy on academic probation. In this chapter I discuss the findings of the study, conclusions based on these findings, recommendations for practice, and recommendations for further research.

As addressed in Chapter 1, doing well in college requires effort on the part of the student and the institution (Tinto, 1993). Students may struggle academically for many different reasons including a lack of academic preparation (De Sousa, 2005; Miller et al., 2011), needing to adjust to the college environment (Tinto, 1993), having low motivation (Friedman & Mandel, 2009), or being affected by personal issues (Miller et al., 2011). Academic probation is one of the policies put in place by institutions to assist students who are struggling (Kelley, 1996). At Small Liberal Arts College, the policy of academic probation is written in the college catalog and accessible to students via the college website. Students also have access to the policy through the student handbook. Faculty members discuss the policy in a required course for freshmen at the institution. In this chapter I discuss the perceptions of students on academic probation and the administration regarding the policy of academic probation at Small Liberal Arts College.

Summary of Results

Research Question 1

From the perspective of higher education administration, what function or purpose does the institution intend the policy of academic probation to serve?

Administrators viewed the policy of academic probation as an opportunity to give students fair warning that they were in danger of violating the academic standards necessary for graduation and to notify students of the services available to help them improve their academic standing. The institution viewed the notification of students that they were in danger of violating the standards necessary for graduation as an ethical responsibility. **Administrator 2** stated that the policy is in place to prevent the ethical dilemma for students that the institution is taking their money when they are not doing well academically. **Administrator 2** said,

So I think the policy is put in place to prevent that from happening and to create awareness of it and to provide support to be able to reach good academic standing so that you can graduate.

In 2009 President Obama called for institutions to find ways to increase graduation rates. The Lumina Foundation (2011) and Laitinen (2012) acknowledged that increasing postsecondary graduation rates is necessary for the United States to grow and remain viable on the future world stage. The American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) (2013) called for legislatures to address educational needs contributing to economic and workforce disparities. Administrators at this institution discussed their desire to have students graduate. All students regardless of academic standing have access to services to help them graduate from the institution. The policy of academic probation is considered a tool to help those students who are

struggling. According to **Administrator 1** academic probation is meant to be ‘a wake up call’ for students.

In addition to helping students recognize the precarious situation they are in, **Administrator 1** also noted that academic probation gives the administration an opportunity to introduce students to services that will help them toward graduation and is an opportunity for students to use the services that are available to them. It is also an opportunity for administrators to let students know that they are concerned about them and want to help. Both administrators made it clear that academic probation is not meant to be punitive for students.

In a joint report in 2012 the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Treasury Department stated that students with a bachelor’s degree in 2011 earned 64% more per week than students with a high school diploma. At Small Liberal Arts College the administrators wanted students to get the most out of their education, including their financial investment. They saw this as an ethical responsibility of theirs, to help students graduate and to help them do it efficiently. Administrators proactively offered services to all students to help them achieve their goal of graduation—not just those students on academic probation.

Seidman (2005) stated that academic probation could be used to determine which students were at risk. Kelley (1996) identified academic probation as serving several purposes: as an intervention to students, a way of helping them understand their academic performance is insufficient, of helping to identify students who may be at risk of leaving the institution, and of encouraging better performance by these students. **Administrator 1** at Small Liberal Arts College sees the purpose of academic probation similarly. He stated that academic probation is an intervention for students, a way to help them realize where they stand in terms of their

academic performance, a way to notify and offer services to students, and as a way to track students.

Northeastern University, FTI Consulting, and Brookings Institution (2012) noted that 86% of Americans believe college is important for personal development. Brock (2010), De Sousa (2005), and Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) all stated that the college experience changes students. **Student 6** agreed stating that college is

a life changing experience.

For years Small Liberal Arts College has been included in a publication in which the college is recognized as an institution that changes lives. Administrators are aware that this declaration is one that the institution is proud of and that fosters a certain identify for the institution.

Administrator 1 said

we're included in the ...list of colleges that change lives...and that's part of...who we are.

Administrator 2 stated

they consider that quite an honor to be in that book.

This identification also extends to the expectations of students. The institution has standards it wants students to meet. Both administrators agreed that implementing services for students, even required services, is not meant to be a punishment for students. **Administrator 1** stated the SS1 class

is designed...it's not a punishment; it's designed to help you...reach your goals.

Students and parents are seen as partners in the educational experience and the administration wants students to know what the standards for success are at this institution and expect students to work with them to achieve that success. As **Administrator 1** said, we publicize our standards and...we're going to help you reach them, but you've got to understand what the standards are.... It's a system where the students have to be accountable, and they know where they stand....They're not going to be able to pursue their passion if they don't do the whole picture.

Administrator 2 stated

it's up to them [the administrators] to hold the line, to help students reach the standards that they establish, but hold the line so that they [students] take pride in achievement and in graduation, and their diploma means something to them. The degree itself may or may not mean anything, but the amount of work that goes into that, and the achievement that they feel means a lot. And with that sense of accomplishment, they can then go into job interviews and go into job training with the sense of hey, I can do this.

Administrators firmly believe that having standards expresses the expectations of the institution for its students, expresses an identity of the institution as a college that changes student lives and works to help students feel a sense of achievement when they complete their degree requirements and graduate.

This institution is proud of the fact that it has a reputation for positively impacting its students. Small Liberal Arts College's mission statement includes its desire to be "a learning community that moves toward fulfilling every student's potential" (Small Liberal Arts College, para. 1). Administrators stated that academic probation fits in with the college's mission and

goals. In addition to being recognized as a college that positively impacts students, **Administrator 1** stated the institution also reaches out to under-represented populations, to students in the region, and to students who are first generation—all populations that were historically considered at risk. These are also the populations designed to benefit from The Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1965 that promoted equal educational opportunities for students including first generation and lower income students. The policy of academic probation helps the institution serve its students.

Research Question 2

From the perspective of the student, what does the student understand the purpose of academic probation to be?

Students saw the policy of academic probation as a second chance, an opportunity to make a different decision regarding their academic work. **Student 6** also saw it as a way for the administration to prepare them for the “real world.” The student interviewed acknowledged that hard work is needed to achieve success and he saw that academic probation was meant to be an opportunity to help students learn to work hard to get what they want, to achieve their goals. **Student 6** saw being placed on academic probation as a chance to do a better job. The student noted that in general, people have to work for what they want, they don’t just “cruise through life.” Both **Student 6** and **Administrator 1** called academic probation a “wake up call” and both individuals saw being placed on academic probation as impactful. For **Student 6**, receiving a formal letter stating that he had been placed on academic probation got him thinking about his situation realistically, and he made the conscious decision to seek services to help him do better.

Academic probation was a reminder that he had to work for what he wanted. Knowing that the institution wanted him to succeed made him feel appreciative toward the school. He said,

I guess I feel good about it in a way...um...just to know that they're trying to help me.

Administrator 1 stated that the formal letter from the Dean has an impact:

You know the fact that they get a formal letter from the Dean

at the end of the semester which explains exactly where they stand,

again whether they're at risk, or warning, or probation or extended probation...

I mean it...it serves as a wake up call....We want the students to realize

here's exactly where you stand and here's what you've got to do and here's

who you need to see.

For **Student 6** the intent of the policy served him exactly as the institution desired. The student realized he needed to do something different to improve his academic standing and he sought help in doing so. **Student 2** also recognized that the policy of academic probation gives students a choice to decide to do better or not. This student referred to academic probation as a second chance to do well.

To an extent, then, some students did see the policy of academic probation the same way the institution does. For both administrators and two students being on academic probation was viewed as an intervention, a second chance, and an opportunity to do better academically. As the administration wanted academic probation to serve as fair warning to students that they needed to do better academically or their chances of graduating were in danger, some students also saw that academic probation allowed them an opportunity to do better in their studies. One student did not see benefits of being placed on academic probation and felt that it derailed the student's opportunity to achieve in other areas. Another student felt that academic probation placed

pressure on the student to succeed. This particular student also stated that being on academic probation did not affect the student.

There are many reasons students may not do well in college and be placed on academic probation: lack of academic preparedness (De Sousa, 2005; Miller et al., 2011), not having the motivation, confidence, or the skills to do well (Balduff, 2009), having weak academic skills (Brock, 2010), and needing to adjust to the college environment (Tinto, 1993). **Administrators** and **Student 6** agreed that coming to college is an adjustment. **Student 6** stated that he felt academically prepared for college, but that college was harder than he expected. He advocated that high school students be more prepared for what may happen to them when they come to college. Having high school students ready for college was a top 10 issue identified by the AASCU State Relations and Policy Team in 2013. Amelga (2012), Brock (2010), and McCormick and McClenney (2012) also noted that many unprepared students will arrive on college campuses. It is a concern echoed by **Student 6** at this institution. He stated he felt ready for college and yet it was harder than he expected. He also felt high school students should be informed about academic standards and the role of academic probation if they do not meet those standards.

Research Question 3

What support services do students and administrators identify for students on academic probation?

Hurtado (2003) stated that institutions should offer innovative and varied ways of providing services in order to meet the varied needs of their students, and there are a wide range of services that colleges can offer students to help them with academic difficulties.

Boretz (2012) identified workshops for students on academic probation; Royal and Tabor (2008) noted classes for academic credit that are offered to students on academic probation. Several sources acknowledged advising services for students was helpful (Astin, 1984/1999; Brawner et al., 2010; De Sousa, 2005; Gehrke, 2006; Hand & Payne, 2008; Miller et al., 2011; Preuss & Switalksi, 2008). Miller et al. (2011) also recognized academic success centers and career services as helpful, and Brock (2010) recognized additional services that fall under the umbrella of Student Support Services, such as services for students with disabilities, tutoring, mentoring, and instruction in basic skills. Advising and first year experience programs were recognized by Bai and Pan (2009). Brawner et al. (2010) recognized counseling services and there are still other services: coaching (Miller et al., 2011), intentional instruction (Giaquinto, 2009), mentoring (De Sousa, 2005), tutoring (Tinto, 2005; Hand & Payne, 2008), and supplemental instruction (Tinto, 2005; Hand & Payne, 2008; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Administrators at Small Liberal Arts College identified a comprehensive range of services it offers students including Supplemental Instruction (SI), tutoring, a required academic class for students on academic probation, mentoring services, a writing center, career services, the staff and resources of the resource center on campus, a qualitative learning center, math tutoring, counseling services, services for students with disabilities, orientation and advising services, even a software program that streamlines communication regarding students about whom faculty and staff have concerns. Administrators viewed the services and programs the institution offers as a comprehensive attempt to reach students through various methods. Mentoring services is one that both administrators would like to see expanded and the importance of students building relationships with other students, as well as faculty and staff, was emphasized.

Collectively, **students** identified a fair number of services available to them including the required class, tutors, supplemental instructors, the resource center and the emotional and academic support that could be found there, the writing center, mentor services, counseling services, career services, and one on one time with a staff member. Individually, however, most students identified only a few of the services. **Student 6** identified the most services offered including the class, the resource center and one on one time with staff, counseling services, career services, and the writing center. **Student 2** identified tutors, supplemental instructors, and mentors, and **Student 3** identified tutoring, the writing center, mentors, and academic and emotional support from the resource center. **Students 1** and **4** only noted the required class as a service. **Student 5** recognized the class and one on one time with others though the student did not specify who that time was spent with. Generally, students seemed more likely to identify the services they used rather than give a descriptive list of all services available to them.

The institution has a graduated GPA system for being in good standing so that incoming students are given the time to adjust to the college environment without being penalized for it. They are given the time to find their own way, to find what works best for them in terms of managing their time and study habits. Tinto (1993) has extensively studied student departure from college and he has delved into student adjustment as one of the reasons students leave college early. Students who do not adjust to the college environment are more likely to leave college early and he has noted that the first year is critical. Small Liberal Arts College has created a policy and a system that allows students time to adjust to its academic demands. Even with that allowance in place, some students still struggle.

The college also takes great pains to make sure that students who do use services do not feel stigmatized. Services for students are all included in one location, the campus resource

center, and in addition to services provided, students who act as mentors or tutors also use this facility and interact with the staff who work there. Staff in these offices sponsor student groups and are involved in other aspects of campus life so a variety of students come and go.

Administrator 2 felt this destigmatized the experience for students coming in and asking for help. Bean (2005) noted that how policy is implemented will affect how students react to the institution. This administrator felt that this programmatic set up was better for students. Three students mentioned using one on one time with staff or the resources located in the center and stated those were helpful.

Recognizing the reasons for being placed on academic probation helped these students identify the resources that would be helpful to them. **Student 6** acknowledged that low grades were the reason he was placed on probation, but he felt those low grades were a result of a lack of motivation and commitment and because of some personal issues. He stated,

last year...I don't think I was committed, and I don't think...I was ready....
I had a lot of stuff happen...and going on and I probably should have taken
a year off.

Student 2 acknowledged that

I did not do my work.

Student 3 recognized personal medical issues and “family situations” that impacted the student’s academic performance.

Student 4 stated low grades were the reason the student was placed on academic probation but did not admit to any other impacting factors. The only service this student acknowledged was the required class the student was placed in. **Student 1** described the same situation as **Student 4**. **Student 3**, who acknowledged family and medical issues as factors

impacting academic performance, recognized academic and emotional supports provided by the resource center as services. **Student 2** stated that not doing the work required the previous semester negatively impacted grades and recognized tutors, supplemental instructors, and mentors as available services. This student used mentoring services.

Research Question 4

Do students on academic probation use the services offered to them? Why or why not?

Tinto (1993) acknowledged that most students need some kind of assistance during their college careers. Students on academic probation at Small Liberal Arts College did use some of the resources available to them, though how they used services was very individual. While some students could identify services used and stated that they were helpful, others didn't acknowledge any services beyond the class they were placed in. All of the students in this study were enrolled in a required academic study skills class. While some students appreciated what they got out of the class, at least one student resented the class and was unhappy with having to take it. Three students acknowledged that the class was helpful.

Students who identified using services other than the class said that their reason was to improve. They wanted to do better in their school work and they used at least one service in order to do that. In addition to the class, **Student 6** used the services of staff available in the resource center, one for counseling services, one for academic services. He stated that he used services because

I want to get better...and if I use them that just gives me a better shot...
helps me out better in the long run.

He also identified the one on one time he spent with staff in the resource center as helpful to him. He appreciated having someone to go to if he needed it. **Student 5** stated that these services were unhelpful and a waste of time...[but] meeting one on one benefitted myself more than the class.

Of the other students, two students used peer mentoring services and one of these students also used the resource center for emotional and academic support. Although all students were enrolled in the class designated for academic probation, only three of the students acknowledged it as a resource. (One student did not answer the question.) **Student 6** acknowledged that he would have taken the class earlier if he had known about it. The other two students may have also felt this way. It is interesting that two students did not acknowledge the class as a resource even though they were enrolled. These two students did not list any other services available to them. It is possible that these students would not have used any resources other than ones they were required to use.

Most students then seemed to use the probationary period as an opportunity to focus on academic skills, though for some the focus was initiated and/or maintained by institutional structure. **Administrator 1** stated that the administration wanted to make sure that students' time was not "torn" between academics and nonacademic interests. **Student 3** acknowledged that the forced focus was helpful. The student said

[I] felt very defeated because so much was going on medically and family situations and I did improve slightly but not enough to make any difference. Now I feel much more on top of things

being forced to not focus on anything else and I hope to be at a good standing at the end of this semester.

One student saw academic probation as an impediment to being successful in another realm. The student had worked hard for a nonacademic goal, had achieved that goal, and then had to give up that achievement because the student was placed on academic probation and activities were restricted. However, for the most part, students found some aspect of the services offered helpful.

Small Liberal Arts College provides a wide array of services for students. Student use of those services, and their feelings toward them, appear to be based on individual goals, personal circumstance, and desire for improvement. **Administrator 2** recognized that students have different levels of knowledge and skills when they enter college, and the institutional policy surrounding academic probation allows for incoming students to adjust to the expectations of the college. De Sousa (2005), Hurtado (2003), and Tinto (1993) recognized that students have many levels of abilities, and at Small Liberal Arts College, both administrators and students also recognized this. **Student 6** wanted the administration to recognize the individuality of students who apply to the institution saying that he felt there “needs to be some other ways” of evaluating those students rather than relying on SAT scores or grades only. The Education Commission of the States (ECS) (2012) agreed. While recognizing that achievement tests are an important part of the evaluation process, the ECS also recommended that schools remember those scores can be affected by factors other than knowledge or intelligence. **Student 6** stated that the institution could

put the right person in the right situation to succeed.

Administrator 2 noted that students have different levels of abilities but also different levels of knowledge. The administrator stated

not only are students' personalities so different, but I think their levels of knowing what to do about it are so different.

While Tinto (1993) acknowledged that students will need to adjust to the college environment and DeSousa (2005) stated that institutions should work toward assisting students, Kuh (2009) wanted both students and institutions to work together to create an environment that would be beneficial for both parties. The ideal partnership would be one in which students and administration work together to create opportunities for engagement. Hand and Payne (2008) suggested that institutions "encourage student interaction and...relationships" (p. 9). The peer mentoring program at Small Liberal Arts College is a program in which students and staff work together. Student mentors work with other students by engaging them and role modelling appropriate academic behaviors. A successful mentoring program would depend on the ability of both students to build a relationship. **Student 6** acknowledged that, in general, relationships were important to him. **Student 2** stated that using a mentor was helpful to the student. Small Liberal Arts College uses peer mentors for students who struggle academically and for entering students at risk, and the administration would like to see these services expanded.

Glasser (2009) noted that some students do not seek opportunities because of a fear of failure. **Administrator 2** wondered if students who would benefit from services such as tutoring or Supplemental Instruction did not use those services because of pride and a fear of asking for help. **Administrator 2** stated

I wonder if the students who are struggling are so concerned with face and pride that they might be afraid of being asked something, even by another student, but in a session with other students there,

that could be embarrassing to them. And while the tutors and SI's try very hard not to put anyone on the spot, you have to go to those sessions to realize that.

Administrator 2 also stated that student reactions to academic probation were so varied that it would be difficult to know their true perceptions. Some students become very worried and adopt study strategies that don't really serve them in an attempt to do well. Other students were so anxious and didn't know what to do that they became paralyzed and did nothing academically. Instead they escaped into other activities and it appeared as if they didn't care. **Administrator 2** believes these students care but they don't outwardly demonstrate their feelings.

Student emotions do seem to play a role in how they react to the news that they have been placed on academic probation. **Administrator 2** stated,

some students are absolutely horrified that they have that label, and they're really scared and working as hard as they can...to get back into good academic standing. Others seem not to be impacted at much.

And I think it's just so individual and varied because I think, not only are students' personalities so different, but I think their levels of knowing what to do about it are so different.

Administrator 2's advice for students on academic probation is

don't ... let this news paralyze you.....don't let it lower your self-esteem.

Administrator 2 noted that academic probation "should be a motivator" and students should not feel "like it's defining you."

Student 4 echoed this sentiment. This student stated that academic probation was just a label not a definition. It doesn't mean anything. Just a nudge to tell you do better. Don't feed into it. Take it for what it is and don't make it something it ain't!!!

Chambers (2010) stated that students reported being unaware of what help was available to them and were unaware of how to ask for it. Despite the efforts of administrators, students in this study stated they did not know much about academic probation before they were placed on it. Perhaps not knowing about the policy affected their ability to recognize, and ask for, services.

Student 6 stated that he didn't know much about academic probation before he was placed on it. He noted that he had heard about it through the grapevine so he knew it existed, but he didn't know much more. He advocated that administrators try to inform students early about academic probation and how it can affect them. **Students 1** and **4** stated they knew "nothing" about academic probation before being placed on it. **Student 2** stated that academic probation was a "2nd chance" for students. **Student 3** said the student didn't know there was academic probation. This student understood that if students had F's for two semesters, they were asked to leave the institution. This lack of knowledge about the policy and the consequences of being placed on probation may have affected student abilities in asking for assistance from the college.

While students stated they were unaware of the policy of academic probation and what it would mean for them, three of the students did express disappointment in themselves for being placed on probation. **Student 6** stated that he was disappointed in himself, that he knew he could do better and he believed the administration thought he could do better as well. **Student 3** stated that the student felt "defeated" by the circumstances surrounding being placed on probation and **Students 1** and **2**, like **Student 6**, expressed disappointment about their

probationary status. Anderman and Anderman (2009) stated that some students define themselves in terms of how well they perform academically. They identify with the role of student and are motivated to do well as students. Other students don't identify with the role of student in the same way and are, therefore, not motivated to do well. **Student 6** stated during the interview that he could do well with his academic work but that he actually preferred to be doing other things. He did identify himself as a hard worker and saw the role of student as one that required work. When asked if he considered his academic work as something he had to work at, he stated,

yeah...I'd much rather be doing something else... 'cause I'm an outdoor...

I'm a hands on person...but...I find it...enjoyable and I can...be interested in it.

Student disappointment with being placed on academic probation could stem from student identification as a "good" or hardworking student. Though students responding to the survey questions did not explain their disappointment, the fact that they were disappointed implies these students wanted to do well.

Students identified poor grades as a reason for being on academic probation, but they also identified low motivation or commitment, and family or medical issues. **Students** also stated they did not know much about academic probation before being placed on it, and **Student 6**, though aware that academic probation existed, did not seem to understand fully the impact it would have on him. He recommended students be told early in their college careers, or even as high school students, about what being on academic probation would mean for them.

Research Question 5

What services do students believe the institution should offer to help them succeed, and why?

Student suggestions for the institution varied. Some students had no information they wanted to share with the institution and no suggestions for services. Some suggestions were practical in nature such as reporting grades more often to students. Other suggestions focused more on changing the classroom atmosphere to one that was more encouraging. **Student 6** stated he would offer other students a lot of what the institution already offered. It seemed especially important to him to have a safe place to go to or a safe person to talk with about different issues, whether they be academic or personal. Kuh (2009) noted that engagement was important to student success, and Chambers (2010) noted that students wanted engagement. For **Student 6**, having that personal connection was important to him. One of the reasons he stated he liked the college he was attending was because he had met “some really good people.” He also acknowledged that he missed his family, a situation that may have negatively impacted him though he didn’t say so. He did, however, state several times that counseling services were helpful to him at the college. In counseling services, clients are asked to discuss personal issues including relationships with others, with their environment, and themselves. **Administrator 1** noted that the greatest increase in student usage of services was in counseling services.

Student 2 suggested having a buddy system for students on academic probation. This student suggested

pick a friend, [sic] that has classes you are in...[and] study with that friend.

This student is one who used the peer mentoring services and stated that the service was helpful; the student’s grades had improved. For this student, the peer relationship helped; therefore, the student felt studying with a friend, a similar relationship, would be helpful to other students. The

administration also felt the personal connection was important; hence their advocating for peer mentoring and providing role models for other students. Kuh (2009) noted that engagement, satisfaction and achievement were all positively linked together in student success. Braxton and Hirschy (2005) noted that student involvement with the institution was also important. The students who stated they were doing better in their work also stated they felt more positive about this semester than another, or more confident. **Student 6** stated that he had to relearn that he was a hard worker; **Student 3** stated the student now felt “more on top of things.”

As students felt better about the work they were doing, they felt better about themselves. These good feelings about the self should translate into good feelings about the institution. Braxton and Hirschy (2005) identified that student interaction with the environment would lead to feelings that affect the student’s interest or motivation in their work. Hand and Payne (2008) discussed the importance of relationships in student success. Bean (2005) noted that student interaction with academic resources, including the courses they take, impacts student success. In this study, **Student 5** expressed resentment and bitterness about having to take the required class because it interfered with another goal important to the student. These negative feelings about the class could translate into negative feelings toward the institution and toward remaining there until graduation.

To his fellow students, **Student 6** suggested they find “something to motivate” themselves. To the administration, he advised sharing information with students as soon as possible about academic probation. He stated that students are excited during orientation and nervous and unsure about what’s going on. Maybe sharing information at another time would be better. He suggested maybe information such as this should be shared with students in high school.

Student 1 stated that students who obtained a 1.9 GPA be given different options than other students. The implication is that the student who is very close to the required GPA may deserve some leeway. **Administrator 1** stated that the college's policy regarding the GPA was strict but that it was concrete. The administrator stated that student's had to earn the correct GPA in order to be removed from probation. **Administator 1** said,

Here...the GPA is the GPA, and if you had to get a 2.33 to stay...
of probation and you got a 2.31, that's not a 2.33, so...there's much less...
gray area.

Student 2 suggested the college report grades more frequently. The student said,

Report grades every 3 weeks.

Presumably this would help students remain aware of their academic situation and help them stay on top of their grades. **Student 3** wanted the institution to lighten the class load to give students the opportunity to understand where they went wrong and how to rectify that for the future. This student also advised the administration to give students two semesters to get back on track.

According to the academic probation policy in the college catalog, a student would be placed on warning before being placed on probation. This action alone gives students a minimum of two semesters to raise their GPA. Some students can remain on extended academic probation for up to three semesters. This suggests that **Student 3** may be unaware of just how much time the student has to raise the GPA. **Student 4** wanted a classroom environment that was

full of success and [would] boost courage for them.

Student suggestions involved having a safe place to go to and someone to talk to about issues. Their suggestions also reinforced the idea that relationships are important to success. Whether the relationship was with other students, administrators, or the life of the institution,

that connection was important to them in terms of services they received and services suggested for others. **Student 6** especially discussed the importance of relationships in the services he used (counseling and one on one meetings with staff) but also in his suggestion that the college get to know its applicants in a more personal way than through SAT scores and grades. The student wanted more information for others regarding academic probation, and in general, these students wanted to offer encouragement and support to others.

The Institution's Academic Probation Policy

As a part of this study I also wanted to look at the policy itself. **Administrator 1** answered questions about the creation, review, and implementation of the policy of academic probation at this institution. **Administrator 1** had been in his position for 7 years and could speak about recent changes but could not give more historical information regarding the policy. Brawner et al. (2010) stated that there was little research published about methods academic institutions used to create changes in policy. Regarding the policy of academic probation at this institution, **Administrator 1** stated that the institution does not have a systematic way of reviewing policies on an...annual basis.

This administrator stated that he, or others on campus, could bring a policy that needed reviewing to the academic policies committee for consideration.

Policies are written through the same formal review process. The academic policies committee consists of faculty representation, the registrar, and the Academic Dean. This committee reviews policies, new and established, as those policies are brought to their attention. After the committee approves any changes, the full faculty votes to approve the policy or not. Therefore reviews of policy exist on an ongoing basis, though those reviews are as needed rather

than through a formal review process. **Administrator 1** stated the policy of academic probation at this institution had not been revised in the last 7 years though the Studies Skills classes students are now required to take was added to the policy “to supplement it.” Changes were made so that the administration remained proactive in providing resources to students.

While the institution may not have a formal review process for its policies, it does have regular and consistent program evaluations. According to **Administrator 1**, every 7 years, every program on campus completes a full self-study review. Students do not have input into the creation of policies or their implementation, though they do have the opportunity to provide their responses to programs and services offered. Through this mechanism the college can determine whether programs need to be modified in some way. Kuh (2009) stated that it was important for institutions to use data to determine how well students are doing. Brock (2010) advocated for the use of program evaluation in helping students be successful. This institution has program evaluations, satisfaction surveys for students, and keeps track of the number of students using its services. **Administrator 1** also said the institution implemented the use of its new software program through a “pilot test year.” The institution is working to collect data to determine the effectiveness of its programs.

Morgan and Hoshijima (2011) stated that students affected by policies are not likely to have input into the creation of the policy. Students at this institution have not had input into the policy of academic probation. They do have the ability to discuss their levels of satisfaction with current policy. Connelly and Connelly (2010) stated that policy revisions tend to be handled by select groups. At this institution that group is the academic policies committee that does not have student representation.

Seidman (2005) discussed the fact that many students on academic probation do not find out they have been placed on academic probation until after a term is over. **Administrator 2** discussed how she is not present when students find out about being placed on probation and so she is not truly aware of their response to being placed on probation. **Administrator 2** only knows what students tell her when they return after break, often when they are placed in one of the Study Skills classes in which some feel they do not belong. They will tell her that they don't belong in the class and **Administrator 2** will tell them that she did not place them in the class; the registrar did that. When students go to the registrar to complain, the registrar can refer them to the policy of academic probation in the college catalog and state that is why they have been placed in the course. If students wish to appeal that decision, they can do so through the college's appeals process. The policy in this case clearly states what the consequences are for students who have not earned the minimum required GPA.

However, as Seidman (2005) noted, for these students, the intervention meant to help them comes after a period of inactivity. Not only do students not receive intervention quickly, but the notice that they have been placed on academic probation likely comes during a Christmas break or over the summer. In these scenarios it is likely that the student have not engaged in any academic activities during that period of time. Upon return to the institution, students at Small Liberal Arts College may find that they are enrolled in a class they did not plan on taking, and depending on their academic load, they may have been dropped from other courses they had already scheduled. As we saw from **Student 5**, these unexpected changes can cause students stress and frustration.

As mentioned in Chapter 4, the language of the policy as it is written in the college catalog is different than how the policy was discussed by administrators of the policy. The

policy is seen as a service, an intervention, and yet it is referred to as a penalty in the college catalog. The intent of the policy is not stated in the same terms that administrators use to discuss it. In the college catalog it states that “each student’s academic performance must meet certain minimum requirements for the student to continue at [Small Liberal Arts College]” (p. 36). Failure to meet this requirement results in academic penalties. Students who do not improve are faced with dismissal. It is stated that seniors need a minimum 2.0 cumulative GPA, but this section of the policy does not state that the 2.0 is needed for graduation. That information is implied. Information regarding the criteria for graduation is detailed in another section of the catalog.

Students in this study stated they were unaware of the policy of academic probation before they were placed on probation or their knowledge was cursory. Having the intent of the policy more explicitly stated in the catalog and couching the policy in terms that are more understandable to students may help in increasing their knowledge about the policy. Another issue is whether or not students read or refer to the college catalog to gain information. Today’s students have so much information available to them, often immediately available to them on their phones or other devices, that documents such as the college catalog may lose significance. If instructors discuss academic standing in the required freshmen course, then a review of the policy as it is written in the catalog at that time would be warranted.

Some Personal Thoughts

When I began this study I worked at a small liberal arts institution with students who were placed on academic probation. In my experience some students worked hard to raise their GPA, though others did not appear to be working toward improving their grades at all and

instead seemed more interested in doing other things. I appreciate the perspective offered by **Administrator 2** that students may not seem to care, but that perception may be false and there may be reasons for it. Many of the students I worked with also did not seem to know what services were available to them. Those who said they knew what services were available didn't necessarily use them. Students at my institution were required to meet with me periodically throughout the semester. Some students did that and seemed to use the time we were together wisely. Others never graced my door. I've often wanted to find just the right approach, the right thing to say, the right thing to do, to help these students want to do well and use the services available to them. I thought that if I just did the 'right thing,' I had the ability to impact whether or not students used services or improved by using them.

What I have learned through this study is that there may not be a 'right' approach. For these students, their experiences are so individual and so personal to them, that no matter what is offered, the student will use the service or not, seek the service or not, depending on personal values and beliefs. It is important for administrators to keep the doors open, be available and build relationships with students. I was concerned that the policy of academic probation emphasized student "failure" rather than student success, and I worried that students on academic probation would feel negatively toward the institution for doing so. However, after speaking with both **administrators** and **Student 6** at this institution, I see that the policy of academic probation can be a declaration of care and concern for students and be the 'wake up' call that some students need. I am curious to see how the policy of academic probation is instituted at other colleges and how students at those institutions feel about it. Is this particular institution doing something different than others? Looking at academic probation this way allows the institution to concentrate on the strengths of its students. It allows students to see the institution

as a helper and should allow both parties to come together to work toward the common goal of success for the students.

Recommendations for Practice

This study was limited in the amount of information gathered and therefore has limited recommendations for practice. This study cannot be generalized to students on other campuses, to the general student population of Small Liberal Arts College, or even to other students there on academic probation. The main participants in the study were two administrators and one student who agreed to be interviewed. Four other students responded to survey questions, but those answers were not very detailed. One student wrote a note at the top of the survey stating some feelings about being placed on academic probation. I also conducted a document review of the policy of academic probation as it is written in the college catalog.

The analysis of information gathered demonstrated that some students at this institution viewed the policy of academic probation as in intervention as the administration did. However, each student had a very individualized experience. The administrators at this college were already aware that students have different levels of abilities, knowledge, and reactions to their academic work and being placed on academic probation. The institution actually acknowledges these differences through its graduated system of good standing and the institution offers many services to help students succeed academically.

One of the main issues for the institution is that students stated they were not aware of the policy before being placed on it. While the administration felt it took every opportunity to disseminate information to students about academic standing and academic probation, students in this study stated they did not know about academic probation, or they did not know much about

it, before they were placed on probation. Ensuring that students are aware of the policy is of utmost importance to having an informed student body. Traditional age students are still learning and growing, emotionally and intellectually. Though we live in a world where access to information is constant through electronic media, having access does not ensure that students will access the information, understand it, or use it if they do. This institution should re-examine how it provides policy information to students and expectations regarding how and when students should access that information. Policies should be written with the student in mind. It is recommended that the policy of academic probation, and other policies, be reviewed on a regular basis and that the language of the policy fully explain its intent and purpose. It is recommended that there be input into policy revisions by those who implement it and those who are affected by it. Student representation on committees that review policies may be appropriate.

It is also important that the institution review the avenues it uses for disseminating information. Freshmen orientations can very easily be high energy events in which institutions try to disseminate as much information as possible to students as they orient them to the environment, help them register for classes, and try to help students build relationships. Many students are excited and nervous as Student 6 stated. They can easily become overwhelmed and will be less likely to hear and understand what is being shared. Students need to hear the information in different and varied ways.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study was very small and limited to students' recounting their experiences at one point in time. A longitudinal study that looks at students' perceptions about being on academic

probation is recommended for future research. A larger study that incorporates more student input and one that gathers information over a longer period of time would increase data gathered. Having more data would allow researchers to investigate variant patterns and search for stronger connections within the data. Data collected over time would allow for changes to the students' perceptions during different stages of the probationary period. Allowing the researcher to gather information over various points in time would also allow students the opportunity for personal reflection on their experiences. Students who have been on probation for more than one semester would be expected to have different feelings than students who have been placed on academic probation for the first time.

This study also focused on the experiences of one traditional student. Conducting a study that includes nontraditional students, or adult students who may have different experiences than traditional students would also be beneficial.

Policies guide administrative and student actions in higher education including operating hours on campus to employee compensation to student organizations and activities. They also contribute to student success. To further investigate the effects of policies on students, other research questions can be proposed. Questions may be geared toward a specific policy of interest to the researcher or include more generalized questions regarding policy. Some questions for further research include:

- What input do students have into the creation of policy at their institutions?
- What impact does policy have on the student experience?
- Do students believe the policies of the institution meet the needs of the students?
- How does policy affect student-student or student-faculty interaction?

- Are there differences in how academic policies and nonacademic policies at one particular institution are drafted and implemented? If so, how and why?
- What dynamics are involved in the drafting of policy?
- How do the same policies across institutions differ in intent? In practice?
- How do institutions view policy?
- How do students view policy?

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to understand the perception of undergraduate students placed on academic probation at one 4-year institution and to compare that perception with the intent of the policy by administrators at this college. Calls to increase graduation rates for college students make it important that higher education institutions create policies that meet the needs of their students. Students must also understand the policies that are in place to guide them through their academic work.

Administrators at Small Liberal Arts College defined probation as an intervention, a wake up call for students and an opportunity for administrators at this small college to intervene with students. Some students in this study acknowledged that academic probation for them was a second chance and an opportunity for them to work harder and make different decisions about their academic work. The college strives to be proactive in providing assistance to its students and it offers a wide array of services available to all students. Additionally it mandates or offers specific services for students placed on academic probation. However, student identification of those services seemed to depend on the services the student actually used. The use of services also seemed to be tied to the reasons students felt caused them to struggle so that their GPA fell below the minimum required. Motivation, commitment, hard work, feeling engaged with other

students and with the institution all impacted the academic experience of the students as did personal and family issues. Some students did use the services provided to them; others only took the class that was required of them and about which they had no choice. All of these students acknowledged that some service was helpful to them, even the one student who expressed bitterness and resentment toward the institution regarding the required class. Students felt the institution should continue to use the services it was offering and had some suggestions for providing more services to students such as having an encouraging classroom environment, providing more information about academic probation provided earlier to students, and reporting grades to students more frequently.

While the administration stated that policy was accessible through the college catalog, in the student handbook, and through discussions in a required freshmen course, students in this study stated they had no knowledge of the policy or only a cursory knowledge of it before being placed on probation. It appears then that students are not accessing the policy or fully understanding it. Administrators should find other ways of introducing policy to students. By allowing students to participate in policy discussions, student leaders can help shape how information on the campus is disseminated.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Interview Questions for Students

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my graduate research project. You have agreed to be interviewed for the purpose of a research study being conducted by me, a doctoral graduate student at East Tennessee State University. I am going to ask you some questions regarding your experiences being on academic probation. Please answer freely and honestly. With your written permission, I will tape record this interview for accuracy. You are free to stop the interview at any time. You may also decline to answer any question you feel uncomfortable answering.

Demographic Information:

Name of the participant _____

Male _____ Female _____ Age _____

Marital Status _____

Please take a few moments to tell me about yourself. Where are you from?

How long have you been a student at _____?

Why did you choose to come to school here?

What is your major?

What are your plans after you graduate?

Are you working? If so, what kind of work do you do?

Describe for me your overall college experience so far.

How would you describe the academic climate of the campus?

How would you describe your academic performance up to this time?

Please describe for me what your academic performance was before you came to college.

Since you began studying at this college, have you ever been placed on academic probation?

If so, when was that?

Describe how you felt about being placed on academic probation.

Why do you think the college placed you on academic probation?

What did you know about academic probation before you were placed on it?

What have you learned about academic probation after having been placed on it?

Are you currently on academic probation?

If you have been placed on academic probation more than once, how has that affected you?

What do you believe is the purpose of the institution placing students on academic probation?

What services does the institution offer to students on academic probation?

What services did you use? Why?

What services did you not use? Why?

What services were helpful to you? Why?

Which services were not? Why?

What would you like to share with other students who may be placed on academic probation?

If you could create your own program for students with a low GPA, what would it be like?

How do you feel about the institution now that you have had the experience of being on academic probation?

If you could talk to the administration about the policy of placing students on academic probation, what would you like to tell them?

Is there anything else about your academic performance that you would like to share?

Appendix B

Interview Questions for Administrators

Administrator 1

How long has the current academic probation policy been in place?

Who was involved in the writing of the policy?

Who is involved in the implementation of the policy?

Can you describe the history of the policy of academic probation; that is, what changes have been/were made to the policy over the years?

Would you describe why those changes were made?

What is the purpose of the policy of academic probation for the institution?

What is the purpose of the policy of academic probation for the student?

What services does the institution offer students who are on academic probation?

Of those services, which services are most used? Why?

Which services are not used as much as the institution would like them to be?

Do you know why those services are not being used?

What other services has the institution considered offering to students? Why?

Has student input been sought in the services offered to students on academic probation?

Has student input been sought in the implementation of the academic probation policy?

What is the impact of academic probation on students as observed by the administration?

How does the administration inform students about the policy of academic probation?

Of being placed on academic probation?

Of being removed from academic probation?

Administrator 2

Please describe your position at the institution and your duties.

What student population(s) do you work with?

Why did you choose to be in the position you are in?

How do you in your position work with students who are placed on academic probation?

From your perspective, what is the role or purpose of the policy of academic probation?

How does academic probation fit into the larger educational perspective of the institution?

In your experience, how do students view the policy of academic probation?

What services do you provide students on academic probation?

What services do students on academic probation use?

Why do they use these services?

What services do they not use?

Why are these services not being used?

From your perspective, are these services helpful to students?

What other services do you think would be helpful to students?

From your perspective, what is the impact of academic probation on students?

From your perspective, how do students feel about being placed on academic probation?

What do students say to you about the institution after being placed on academic probation?

From your perspective, how do students perceive being placed on academic probation?

After having worked with students on academic probation, what would you like to say to students who have been placed on academic probation?

After having worked with students on academic probation, what would you like to say to the administration that places students on academic probation?

You are the “face” of the institution, the personal connection to the student, and you work with the institution and with students. What is that experience like?

Appendix C

Letter to Personnel Asking Them to Send Email Requests

Dear _____,

I am a graduate student at East Tennessee State University conducting research for my dissertation on the policy of academic probation and its effects on students at your institution. I am requesting that you send the enclosed email to students, or alumni, who have been on academic probation within the last two years (since January 2011) or students who are currently on academic probation.

The purpose of the email is to ask students to volunteer to be participants in my study by allowing me to interview them regarding their experiences of being a student on academic probation.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at hooverc@goldmail.etsu.edu or 276-***-****. If you would like to further discuss other options

I may pursue to advertise my study and request participants, please let me know.

I appreciate your willingness to help me find participants for my study.

Thank you for your time and effort.

Sincerely,

Charlotte Hoover

ETSU doctoral graduate student

Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis (ELPA)

Email to Students Requesting Participation

Dear Student,

I am a graduate student at East Tennessee State University working on my doctorate in Education. As a part of my dissertation, I am conducting research regarding the policy of academic probation. The intent of the study is to understand the purpose of the administration in using the policy of academic probation and how being on academic probation affects students. As a part of the research, I am interesting in speaking with students about their experiences of being on academic probation. If you are a student who is currently on academic probation, or who has been on academic probation at this institution within the last two calendar years, you are a potential participant in this study.

As a participant in this study, I would ask you to allow me to interview you to discuss your experiences as a student who is, or has been, on academic probation. The interview would last approximately an hour to an hour and a half. Your identity will be protected and you would have the ability to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

If you are interested in participating, or finding out more information about the study, please contact me at hooverc@goldmail.etsu.edu with the subject line research study, and include the following information in the body of the email.

Your name _____

The best way to contact you: email address: _____,

Phone number: _____ or other _____.

Your classification: freshman sophomore junior senior

Are you currently on academic probation? Yes No

Have you been on academic probation at this institution within the last 2 years? Yes
No

If so, during which terms? Summer 2013 Spring 2013 Fall 2012 Summer 2012

Spring 2012 Fall 2011 Summer 2011 Spring 2011

Once I receive your information, you will be contacted within 7 days with further
correspondence. If you have any questions, please contact me at hooverc@goldmail.etsu.edu or
[276-***-****](tel:276-***-****).

Thank you for your willingness to consider participating in this research study.

Sincerely,

Charlotte Hoover,

Graduate Student at East Tennessee State University,

Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

Appendix D

Flier to Request Participation

Are you currently on academic probation?

Have you been on academic probation within the last 2 years?

If so, I would be interested in talking to you about your experiences.

I am looking for individuals to participate in a doctoral research study that explores the policy of academic probation and the effects being on probation has on the student.

What you would be asked to do:

- Meet with the researcher for an interview (1 to 1 ½ hours)
- Review a transcription of the interview for accuracy

Information obtained during the interview is **confidential** and **your privacy will be protected**.

If you are interested, please contact Charlotte Hoover at hooverc@goldmail.etsu.edu or 276-614-6292 for more information.

Please consider sharing your experiences. Your participation can help your school and other students in the future.

Participation is voluntary and there is no compensation.

Thank you!

Appendix E

Survey Questions for Students

Dear Student,

My name is Charlotte Hoover and I am a graduate student at ETSU. For a required project, I am asking students who have been placed on academic probation within the past two years at your institution to answer some questions. The purpose of the survey is to find out how students who have been placed on academic probation feel about being on probation.

If you are 18 years of age or older and if you have been on probation in any of these semesters, you qualify to participate:

Spring 2012, Summer 2012, Fall 2012, Spring 2013, Summer 2013, Fall 2013.

Please answer the following questions as completely as possible. This survey is completely anonymous. Your identity will not be revealed.

1. In which semester(s) were you placed on academic probation?
2. Describe your thoughts and feelings about being placed on academic probation at the time it happened and now.
3. Why do you think the college placed you and other students on academic probation?
4. What did you know about academic probation before you were placed on it?
5. What have you learned about academic probation after having been placed on it?
6. If you have been placed on academic probation more than once, how has that affected your perspective of the college and learning in general?
7. What services does your college offer to students on academic probation?
8. Which services did you use?
9. Were those services helpful to you? Why or why not?
10. What would you like to share with other students who may be placed on academic probation?

11. If you could create your own program for students with a low GPA, what would it be like?
12. If you could talk to the administration about the policy of placing students on academic probation, what would you like to tell them?
13. What other information about your experience of being on academic probation would you like to share?

Appendix F

Student Classification Based on Credit Hours Earned

Freshmen are identified as students who have earned less than 26 credit hours. Sophomore students are those who have earned more than 26 credit hours and fewer than 57. Juniors are those students who have earned more than 56 credit hours and fewer than 87. Seniors are identified as those students who have earned more than 86 credit hours (Small Liberal Arts College).

Student Classification Based on Credit Hours Earned

| Classification | Number of Credit Hours |
|----------------|-----------------------------------|
| Freshman | fewer than 26 credit hours earned |
| Sophomore | between 26 and 56 hours earned |
| Junior | between 57 and 86 hours earned |
| Senior | 87 earned credit hours or more |

Appendix G

Grading Scale at Small Liberal Arts College

| Letter Grade | Number Equivalent |
|--------------|-------------------|
| A+ | 4.00 |
| A | 4.00 |
| A- | 3.67 |
| B+ | 3.33 |
| B | 3.00 |
| B- | 2.67C+ |
| C+ | 2.33 |
| C | 2.00 |
| C- | 1.67 |
| D+ | 1.33 |
| D | 1.00 |
| D- | 0.67 |
| F | 0 (failure) |

Appendix H

Sample Letter to Participants Who Agree to Be Interviewed

Dear Name of Student,

Thank you for your willingness to participate in my dissertation research on the subject of academic probation. The intent of this study is to explore the student's experience of being on academic probation and the intent of the institution in having the policy of academic probation. Students who participate in this study will be asked to share their experiences with me in an interview that may last an hour to an hour and a half. During the interview, I will ask you questions about your experiences of being on academic probation. You will be asked to choose an alternate name so that your identity will remain private and the information you share will be confidential. You have the option to discontinue as a participant in this study at any time you choose.

I appreciate your willingness to discuss your experiences of being on academic probation with me. Sharing your experiences can be helpful in determining what services and policies work best for students in higher education. I believe it is best to have the input of students in creating the best educational environments.

With your permission, I will ask that I be allowed to tape record our interview for the sake of accuracy. A copy of the permission form is included with this letter. Please review the form and let me know if you have any questions or concerns.

This letter is also to confirm our meeting at (place) on (date) at (time). I look forward to meeting with you then.

Sincerely,

Charlotte Hoover,

Graduate Student at East Tennessee State University

Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

Appendix I

Permission to Tape Record the Interview

(Name of Interviewee)

Date _____

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this doctoral study regarding the experience of being on academic probation. I appreciate your willingness to contribute your time and energy to this project and your willingness to share your experiences, which is invaluable to the research.

By placing your signature below, you are granting me permission to tape record our interview and transcribe its contents exactly. Your signature also indicates that you fully understand the purpose of this research, your role in the research, your right as a participant in the research, and that the confidentiality of your identity will be maintained.

Thank you for your assistance.

(Signature)

(Date)

VITA

CHARLOTTE V. HOOVER

- Education: B.A. English, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana
1984
M.A. English, McNeese State University, Lake Charles, Louisiana
1987
M.S.W. Social Work, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge,
Louisiana 1997
Ed. D. Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis, East
Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee 2014
- Professional Experience: Graduate Teaching Assistant; McNeese State University, English
Department, Lake Charles, Louisiana, 1985-1988
- Instructor; Phillips Junior College, Metairie, Louisiana, 1988-1989
- Editor; Office of Independent Study, Louisiana State University,
Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 1989-1994
- Peace Corps Volunteer; Bulgaria, Eastern Europe, 1997-1998
- Foster/Adoptive Care Training System, Western Region Training
Coordinator for Virginia; DePaul Community Resources,
Abingdon, Virginia, 2000-2002
- Social Work Supervisor; DePaul Community Resources,
Abingdon, Virginia, 2002- 2007
- Director of Student Support Services; Virginia Intermont College,
Bristol, Virginia, 2007-2014
- Instructor; Virginia Intermont College, Bristol, Virginia,
2008-2014
- Director of Comprehensive Studies; Virginia Intermont College,
Bristol, Virginia, 2013-2014
- Assistant Professor of Social Work/Field Placement Instructor;
Virginia Intermont College, Bristol, Virginia, 2013-2014
- Adjunct Instructor, English Composition; King University, Bristol,
Tennessee, August 2014-present