

Andrews University
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COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION

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by
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Overview of the Higher Education Field

Question 1: Globalization and Internationalization

Among the most widely discussed factors influencing higher education lie globalization and internationalization (Lee & Stensaker, 2021; Tight, 2019), given their impact on rapid changes and emerging trends within higher education (Üstün, 2021). In practice, internationalization and globalization are used interchangeably (Tight, 2019) and can be characterized as phenomena that are difficult to trace back to their origin given their complexity (Lee & Stensaker, 2021). Although not mutually exclusive, distinctions can be made between the two terms. Lee and Stensaker (2021) describe globalization as “increasing relationships, interconnectedness, and interdependence between national, local and supra-national organizational factors, while internationalization often is interpreted as a more limited process of establishing specific relationships within this large web” (Fumasoli, 2019, as cited in Lee & Stensaker, 2021 p. 158). Researchers have identified the impact these phenomena have had on higher education, particularly their influence on intercultural competency, global citizenship, and economic development (Ilieva, Beck, & Waterstone, 2014). While beneficial in many ways, these trends have also posed challenges and threatened equitable education opportunities.

Within this realm, three ways in which the higher education landscape has been influenced by globalization and internationalization include (1) global access, (2) the exchange of knowledge and ideas on a global platform, and (3) economic implications of global mobility for students, academics, institutions of higher education, local and national economies, and the global economy. Furthermore, these trends can be largely attributed to massification (open access to higher education) and emerging technologies, which have provided institutions of higher education a critical vehicle by which to meet contemporary demands of global education

(Lee & Stensaker (2021). These have not only propelled the globalization and internationalization of higher education, they have also redefined curriculum design, institutional obligations, and the perceived purpose and value of higher education.

Emerging technologies, such as the internet and digital portals, have removed barriers associated with access, the timely exchange of knowledge and information, and the development of collaborative networks (Tan, Harland, & Daniel, 2020). More specifically, access to open educational resources, research networks, and the massification of higher education have paved the way for increased global access to higher education, which enables the cooperative partnerships necessary to enrich learning, teaching, and research (Altbach, 2016; Tan, Harland, & Daniel, 2020). Increased access through emerging technologies has also provided an opportunity to increase enrollment in online course options and reduce costs to both students and institutions of higher education, while transcending international lines (Üstün, 2021). Conversely, amongst the many benefits of these technology-driven phenomena, the globalization and internationalization of higher education has had its challenges.

While increased access has been perceived as an agent of equality in the exchange of knowledge and information, it has inadvertently contributed to inequity by creating unfavorable conditions for institutions and individuals that lack access to reliable Internet access and digital resources (Tan, Harland, & Daniel, 2020). These inequities can also be observed from a cultural perspective, with globalization also threatening to impose “language and culture of western moral codes that seem to dominate in most global transactions” (Tan, Harland, & Daniel, 2020). As noted by Altbach (2016), English is the most used medium of instruction and the most studied foreign language within many of the prominent academic systems. This creates an

advantage for English-speaking countries, which positions them to have great influence in global scholarship and research (Altbach, 2016).

Furthermore, the advantages of digital globalization may not be fully realized for academics and students who also lack the necessary digital skills and resources to benefit from increased access, nor do they possess the necessary tools to contribute their knowledge and ideas within the digital space that characterizes global education (Tan, Harland, & Daniel, 2020). More specifically, if students and scholars lack these skills, they are at a significant disadvantage compared to colleagues benefiting from these broader experiences; this disadvantage is further exacerbated by lack of the required resources to succeed in the global education arena. This uneven distribution of materials and resources has significant pedagogical implications as it relates to curriculum design and delivery, as digital platforms become the norm for learning interactions (Tan, Harland, & Daniel, 2020).

Similarly, massification has its benefits and challenges. Massification has expanded the global flow of students and increased international enrollment, thereby creating an economic-boosting industry of student mobility accounting for approximately \$100 billion in income globally (Altbach, 2016). Host countries benefit greatly from the economic boost in billions of dollars brought about by the spending of students and their families, while costing the sending countries the same amount in lost revenue (Altbach, 2016). Institutions also benefit economically from increased enrollment by hosting international students as well as attracting top academics to fill their workforce from nations around the world (Altbach, 2016). Conversely, this is beneficial to institutions within developed countries that have the possibility of offering higher salaries, better facilities, and better working conditions, but equally detrimental to less-developed countries that are unable to retain their talent due to less competitive offerings (Altbach, 2016).

Although not ill-intended, these globalization and internationalization trends have posed a broad threat to equity within global higher education (Üstün, 2021).

Given this wide range of implications for nations, individuals, and institutions of higher education, globalization and internationalization trends deserve careful consideration through analyses and critique (Altbach, 2016). This is especially critical for higher education administrators and researchers who inform policy reform and enforce equitable institutional decision-making processes intended to meet the needs of its various stakeholders.

Senior higher education administrators can consider implementing strategies to ensure both their institutions and students benefit from the globalization and internationalization of higher education. A practical example is capitalizing on the emerging technologies presented- the use of the internet and digital portals- in order to expand access to resources and support the global exchange of ideas through research and scholarship (Tam, Harland, & Daniel, 2020). Institutions can accomplish this by formulating articulation of credit agreements with other international partners to provide increased enrollment in online course offerings and research opportunities, which would help ameliorate the potential negative impacts (lost revenue and academic contributions) a student exchange program might result in- especially for countries that have less competitive offerings to retain exchange students (Altbach 2016).

Furthermore, a clearly defined articulation agreement can provide guidance on shared credits and tuition and fees, while providing safeguards to ensure these offerings meet accreditation requirements that equitably benefit all stakeholders involved. This type of arrangement aligns with Üstün's (2021) observations on the benefits of offering online course options that are cost-friendly to both students and institutions of higher education.

As a senior administrator supporting the advancement of the internationalization and globalization of higher education, another practical solution would be designating and/or supporting a designated, centralized unit to oversee programs, courses, and activities that are aligned with measurable outcomes evaluated against institutional priorities and informed by global, international trends (Moshtari & Safarpour, 2023). This would also allow for the unit to implement internal policies and structures that clearly specify and detail short-term and long-term goals, how those goals align with global and international trends, as well clearly defined expectations for all stakeholders involved (Moshtari & Safarpour, 2023).

Question 3: Benefits of Higher Education for Individuals and Society

A variety of individual and societal benefits have been linked to higher education attainment, including (1) economic stability, (2) healthier lifestyles, (4) increased family involvement, (5) a greater sense of well-being, (6) improved civic engagement, (7) lower crime rates, and (8) improved voting rates (Carnevale et al., 2020; Ma et al., 2016). From an economic standpoint, individuals who obtain postsecondary degrees have higher salaries, pay more (local, state, and federal) taxes, have a higher employability rate, and require less spending on social support programs than those who only possess a high school diploma (Ma et al., 2016). In addition to these benefits, individuals with a postsecondary degree are more likely to experience upward socioeconomic mobility in comparison to their counterparts who do not possess a college degree. Furthermore, while it is critical not to view higher education as simply a financial return on investment, the economic impact of higher education not only benefits, but also transcends, the individuals benefitting from it (Ma et al., 2016).

While the value of higher education for every individual can be questioned and a variation of student outcomes is expected as this variance relates to reaping the economic and

societal benefits of postsecondary attainment, the neglect of it has far more negative implications for both individuals and society (Ma et al., 2016). Ma et al. (2016) note that individuals who are unable to attain a college degree are less likely to surpass the socioeconomic status of their parents, which can propagate generational economic stagnation. To further support this notion, Ma et al. (2016) note that children of college graduates are more likely to attend college than those whose parents did not.

Nevertheless, college preparation and access to higher education can be difficult to obtain for students from low socioeconomic status who would likely benefit from obtaining a college degree (Ma et al., 2016). As Carnevale et al. (2020) note, many students do not attempt college or do not complete it because they cannot afford the cost. Further, much of the financial responsibility has been placed on students, as state and federal funding have dwindled over the last four decades (Carvenale et al., 2020; Ma et al., 2016). Mintz (2021) proposes that much of the crisis associated with increased costs to higher education is centered on neoliberalism, which has led to the development of viewing students as consumers.

Relative to higher education, neoliberalism has promoted the idea that a college degree is a private good from which individuals can obtain an economic return on their investment (Mintz, 2021). More specifically, neoliberalism has promoted the notion of higher education as a “replacement of a public good with personal responsibility of one’s own welfare,” which solely places the onus on the individual (Mintz, 2021 p. 82). In this regard, higher education has shifted from a public good to a private one that increases the wealth of those who already possess financial means to reap its rewards (Al-Haija & Mahamid, 2021). In addition to this notion, the application of market principles to the public education sector has led to decreased funding, which disproportionately affects students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Mintz, 2021).

Students from low income households are more likely to be academically underprepared and lack the necessary financial resources to afford the cost of a college degree (Dahill-Brown et al., 2016). Dahill-Brown et al. (2016) further posit that higher education in the United States has become more stratified in favor of students who possess the financial means needed to attend top quality and selective institutions, in spite of the increase of student applicants from all backgrounds. These trends are especially problematic for students from low socioeconomic status and minority students who benefit most from attending four-year institutions of higher education as opposed to two-year colleges (Dahill-Brown et al., 2016). Further, Dahill-Brown et al. (2016) argue that even with increases in enrollment of students from low income backgrounds, a wide achievement gap still persists between these students and their peers from high income backgrounds.

In addition to the disparities and inequities that viewing higher education as a private good can produce, the perception of higher education as a means to a financial end also has adverse implications on intellectual development and the development of awareness (Al-Haija & Mahamid, 2021; Mintz, 2021). As noted by Mintz (2021), focusing on personal advantage for the purpose of occupational success produces students who only focus on learning what they deem valuable to reach this goal. Furthermore, Al-Haija and Mahamid (2021) support this notion and posit that “the capitalist ideology was able to justify what is known as the privatization of the educational institution instead of generalizing it... [it] imposed itself on educational institutions by moving towards serving the global market” (p.19). This has produced the distancing of the university from its core functions, which intended to develop critical thinkers, foster intellectual curiosity, and promote scientific research to support democracy, social change, a sense of social responsibility and justice, and the respect for the rights of others (Al-Haija & Mahamid, 2021).

These concepts put into question the purpose and value of higher education, as well as who should shoulder its cost. On one hand, one might argue that higher education is a public good that has great benefits for individuals and society and should be available to all. On the other hand, conservatives might argue it is still a personal choice that requires fiscal responsibility and preparation for those who want to partake in it (James, 2019). From a financial standpoint, many students are acquiring an exorbitant amount of debt to pay for college, but up to sixty percent fail to complete a bachelor's degree within six years (James, 2019). For taxpayers, these percentages do not translate to a good return on investment, but instead an undue financial burden- especially for citizens from lower and middle income strata (James, 2019). These observations call into question current proposed plans to offset and subsidize the cost of tuition for students and call for solutions that take into consideration implications for both beneficiaries and taxpayers.

As a senior administrator, an option to consider is the possibility of increasing employment opportunities for students to help offset the cost of their tuition. Offering job opportunities to students as part of a federal work-study arrangement, for instance, can assist students in covering part of the cost of their tuition, while potentially counteracting the need for increased student loans and relying on taxpayer contributions. Through this type of arrangement, students can also contribute to their local communities by working for off-campus, non-profit organizations, which also offer work-study opportunities such as tutoring at a local elementary school (Federal Student Aid, n.d.). In addition, federal work-study arrangements require that students maintain satisfactory academic progress (designated by their institution) to qualify (Federal Student Aid, n.d.). This helps students stay on track with progressing toward completing

their degree in a timely fashion, which will help mitigate concerns related to low completion rates (James, 2019).

From an institutional standpoint, another practical solution can entail an increase in grants and scholarships offered to students, which can help mitigate an increased need on taxpayer contributions, as tuition costs continue to rise. Nevertheless, this approach would require an institution to have a robust, designated unit dedicated to securing a reliable pipeline of donations and funding through alumni and external partners, while providing safeguards to ensure all students have equitable access to funds.

Administration, Planning, and Governance

Question 4: Trends/Changes Impacting Tuition and Fees

Higher education costs have increased significantly in the last two decades, rising faster than the inflation rate (Helmet & Marcotte, 2016; Archibald & Feldman, 2012). This is particularly challenging for state universities who have experienced nearly a 50 percent reduction in financial support offered by state legislatures in the same timeframe (Helmet & Marcotte, 2016). Furthermore, these financial pressures have translated to a spike in tuition costs, doubling from 15 percent to 30 percent in the last two decades as well (Helmet & Marcotte, 2016). Mitchell et al. (2019) note that these cuts in public support for education have contributed to an increased financial burden on students, proving to be an obstacle for enrollment, especially of low-income students and students of color, as well as a threat to degree completion. These rising costs are a concern for families, irrespective of socioeconomic status, as well as the federal government (Archibald & Feldman, 2012). However, in order to help mitigate the issues associated with rising costs, it is critical to understand the driving forces of increased tuition and fees (Archibald & Feldman, 2012).

Several trends and changes have affected higher education tuition and costs. In addition to aid cuts, increased costs of higher education can be attributed to auxiliary services, student support services such as academic advising and career services, information technology services, counseling services, room and board, cost of books and other academic resources, and meal plans among them (Archibald & Feldman, 2012; Mitchell et al., 2019). In addition to the increase to support services, competitive amenities have become commonplace on college campuses to attract students and increase enrollment (Archibald & Feldman, 2012).

Moreover, as cited by Archibald and Feldman (2012), “according to the Center for College Affordability and Productivity, the past 20 years have seen a doubling of support staff while student enrollment has grown by only 40 percent” (p. 9). Private institutions can offset these costs through large endowments and donations to help subsidize operational costs, while public colleges and universities rely heavily on state and local tax aid and grants for financial support (Archibald & Feldman, 2012; Mitchell et al., 2019). As states have reduced their support of higher education, the financial burden has fallen significantly on those who attend public institutions of higher education (Archibald & Feldman, 2012).

In addition to increased costs and cuts to state funding, public (2-year and 4-year) institutions have been subjected to performance-based funding metrics based on degree completion, student retention rates, and job placement (Mitchell et al., 2019). While intended to improve these outcomes with fewer resources, these metrics have not yielded the expected positive outcomes proposed (Mitchell et al., 2019). Moreover, Mitchell et al. (2019) posit that these schemes are counterproductive and ineffective due to lack of basic resources needed to meet the metrics set forth by performance-based funding- especially for two-year colleges and institutions with lower enrollment numbers and small endowments. Furthermore, performance-

based metrics tend to overlook institutions of higher education that produce better outcomes for their students, particularly those with student populations consisting of minority students, students from low socioeconomic status, and those classified as non-traditional students (Mitchell et al., 2019).

As noted by Mitchell et al. (2019), these trends are especially challenging for students of color who primarily attend in-state public institutions, as well as their households' difficulties with accessing better-paying employment opportunities. Mitchell et al. (2019) note that the average net price of in-state tuition and fees accounted for at least 40 percent of the median household income of (a) Black households in 17 states and (b) Hispanic households in 7 states in 2017. Eligibility for financial and state aid still fail to make up the difference of increased tuition and costs for students, especially those from low-income backgrounds, which results in increased reliance on student loans to pay for their degrees (Mitchell et al., 2019). Loan debts are also higher for students attending community colleges and for-profit private institutions of higher education when compared to public four-year institutions (Mitchell et al., 2019).

Nevertheless, irrespective of the type of institution, student loan debt is resulting in high default repayment rates and interfering with individual's economic stability (Mitchell et al., 2019). To counteract some of these challenges, federal aid based on student need can help increase college retention and graduation rates, particularly for low-income students (Mitchell et al., 2019). This approach, however, is still in its developing stages considering nuanced implications that vary widely depending on type of institution, the students they serve, and the resources institutions already have at their disposal. As noted by Carnevale et al. (2020) the national debate on this topic continues as policy makers and political influences place in balance which costs should be covered, while substantiating the return on investment.

As a senior administrator, one of the recommendations I would posit to mitigate rising costs is to offer dual-enrollment opportunities for in-state students to complete more affordable courses at local community colleges that are applicable to four-year college curricula. An example of this type of arrangement can be observed within the North Carolina State School system. The North Carolina Comprehensive Articulation Agreement (CAA) is a statewide agreement of transfer credits between NC community colleges and NC public universities (North Carolina Community Colleges Creating Success (2015) that allows students to complete a two-year Associate's Degree and enables them to transfer into a four-year state institution to complete their Bachelor's degree. As noted by College Raptor Staff (2022), completing courses in a community college for the first two years can significantly reduce the cost of tuition for students.

Another recommendation could entail offering more online degree programs, which would help mitigate the rising costs of auxiliary services such as housing, dining, and other fees associated with on-campus living, which have been identified as key contributors to rising costs of higher education (Archibald & Feldman, 2012; Mitchell et al., 2019). Online degree program costs would be primarily focused on tuition, lowering the overall cost to students.

Question 5: Institutional Policies Regarding Faculty

Higher education administrators represent a wide variety of sectors within an institution of higher education. Each administrator is tasked with understanding their individual role and collective contribution within the larger scope of what makes up a diverse institution of higher education. Within this context, administrators are agents of institutional policies within a wide range- including teaching, learning, and research. As noted by Center for Community College Engagement (2014) "research indicates that many colleges do not develop a plan for achieving

student success goals and then hire strategically to accomplish those goals” (p. 13). To this end, institutional policies regarding faculty hiring, firing, evaluation, promotion, and rewards should not be left to HRM departments alone, but ought to be approached through a shared governance that intentionally involves administrators and faculty representatives. When these processes are not intentionally considered, they lack accountability measures that help ensure an academy based on integrity, which may threaten the mission and goals of an institution of higher education (Kezar & Gehke, 2014).

It is important to note the complexity of hiring, firing, and evaluating faculty and the implications of these decisions and processes. According to the American Federation of Teachers (n.d.), over the last forty years, institutions of higher education have experienced reduced state funding for public colleges and universities, which has directly impacted the faculty workforce. Higher education administrators have relied heavily on hiring part-time, non-tenure track faculty at a lower wage cost and now account for approximately 70% of the faculty workforce teaching over half of all undergraduate courses at public colleges and universities (American Federation of Teachers, n.d.; Center for Community College Engagement, 2014; Kezar & Gehke, 2014). This has led to the exploitation of non-tenure track faculty, as well as a faculty workforce that is devoid of effective policies and practices supporting quality teaching and thereby compromising the quality of teaching and learning (Center for Community College Engagement, 2014; Kezar & Gehke, 2014).

As a result of this shift to a contingent faculty workforce, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) proposes that institutions of higher education operate as a “command-and-control business” (n.d.), which has threatened the role of faculty within shared governance founded on academic freedom and academic decision-making. Shared governance is comprised

of a variety of processes that incorporates perspectives of faculty, staff, and administration in decision-making processes that impact the institution (Eisenstein, 2021). Within shared governance, academic freedom plays a significant role. Academic freedom is the concept of intellectual discovery through the free exchange of ideas, which is fundamental to quality education (American Federation of Teachers, n.d.; Organization of American Historians, n.d). Academic freedom offers faculty members' rights related to their pedagogical practices, research, publication, and service (Organization of American Historians, n.d). These rights, however, are threatened for the vast majority of today's faculty workforce, given their temporary teaching assignments do not provide the same protections to the educational process (American Federation of Teachers, n.d.).

More specifically, adjunct/part-time faculty are not protected under the due process of tenure, which promotes accountability and has other intangible benefits such as a higher sense of job security, therefore producing a stronger commitment to their respective institutions of higher education (American Federation of Teachers, n.d.). Furthermore, the American Federation of Teachers (n.d.) proposes that tenure affords faculty an opportunity to challenge the administration on issues of curriculum and quality educational practices without the threat of job loss. Without it, temporary faculty may feel compelled to withhold their freedom of expression as it relates to these crucial matters, due to the threat of job loss.

Higher education administrators should be directly involved with this process for a myriad of reasons. It is important to recognize there are consistent pressures that impact faculty hiring across institutions of higher education, including surges in enrollment, sabbaticals, and meeting institutional goals; however, these are challenges that can be mitigated through intentional planning and the implementation of systematic organizational processes (Kezar &

Gheke, 2014). In addition, through shared governance, higher education administrators can contribute their invaluable expertise as it relates to the protection of academic freedom and advocating for an increase of tenure-track positions for faculty. When this is not possible due to financial or time constraints, at the very least, higher education administrators can work closely with faculty and HRM departments to promote practices that offer similar protections and benefits to the temporary faculty workforce (Center for Community College Engagement, 2014). The American Federation of Teachers (n.d.), for instance, proposes guaranteeing academic freedom for temporary faculty through contract language, as well as placing special emphasis on job security, shared governance, and the protection of the free exchange of ideas.

These systematic organizational processes should also incorporate hiring and evaluation practices founded on equity and inclusion measures that safeguard hiring, evaluation, training, and compensation practices of faculty. This can be achieved through a partnership with HRM departments who may be better equipped to ensure these processes have been vetted for their incorporation of an equitable and inclusive approach. From an organizational standpoint, this protects the institution from costly issues related to reputation, litigation, and employee retention matters. From an academic standpoint, this helps promote academic freedom through a diverse, well-rounded faculty workforce. As such, the role of administrators within the hiring, firing, evaluation, and promotion process is one that has a significant impact concerning the quality of education and academic freedoms on campuses, but a role that cannot be executed independently. It requires partnerships with stakeholders such as HRM, and faculty and staff, founded on intentionality and data-informed decision-making processes that consider the myriad of factors discussed.

The impact of faculty research on teaching and student learning has been at the forefront of higher education discourse for decades (Bragg et al., 2022). Bragg et al. (2022) note two schools of thought concerning the impact of research on teaching and student learning. On one hand, it can be argued that research can have a positive impact on teaching by providing students with current, relevant information and knowledge. On the other hand, it can be argued that research can have a negative impact on teaching quality and student learning given the time and engagement it requires of faculty, potentially compromising the quality of their engagement with students in the classroom (Bragg et al., 2022). In addition, the researchers posit that monetary incentives and prestige are traditionally correlated with research as opposed to teaching, which could lead faculty to place more significance on research. Furthermore, the researchers note that a conscious effort must be made by institutions of higher education to prioritize teaching in an environment that rewards research. Bragg et al. (2022) note that the debate is ongoing considering there is limited evidence-based empirical data that supports one priority over the other.

As a senior administrator within my institution, there are several factors I would consider when advising a faculty promotion, rank, and tenure committee regarding faculty advancement. My recommendation is to establish a set of advancement criteria and requirements that is grounded in the mission, vision, and strategic priorities of the institution. To ensure an equitable advancement process for all incumbents, this set of criteria and requirements would need to be well-documented, published, and easily accessible information that is available to all University stakeholders. The latter could be achieved by creating a designated website and/or portal that

includes all pertinent information related to faculty advancement, thus establishing a transparent and clearly defined process that promotes equitable opportunities for all with a vested interest.

I would recommend the set of criteria be centered on three key areas- (1) institutional alignment with teaching and/or research priorities, (2) established, measurable outcomes related to teaching and/or research priorities, and (3) length of service relative to accomplished outcomes. Institutional alignment with teaching and/or research is important so that faculty understand how their efforts specifically contribute to their professional advancement. This is also helpful in attracting and recruiting faculty who may have an interest in one of these two areas over the other, potentially decreasing faculty attrition attributed to lack of clarity related to institutional alignment. In addition, having established, measurable outcomes further supports this notion by ensuring incumbents have a clear understanding of how they will be assessed, further minimizing the ambiguity that often characterizes faculty promotion and advancement decisions. Length of service relative to outcomes is also critical to this process, which helps promote longevity and results-driven commitment to the institution. Lastly, my recommendation would also include having clearly documented resources that have been strategically designed and offered to faculty by the institution to support the measurable outcomes established for their advancement. This demonstrates reciprocity as it relates to the institution's commitment and value placed on its faculty and their efforts.

Research Agenda and Design

Question 8: Student Development Theory- Arthur Chickering

Chickering's Theory of Seven Vectors (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) is grounded on seven psychological development tasks related to identity development. Chickering (2007)

produced an overview of the seven vectors, which described the specific contributions of each to the development of students. The following descriptions and definitions of the seven vectors are based on Chickering's (2007) overview of his revised theory (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

The first of the seven vectors is defined as developing competence in three areas- intellectual competence, manual and physical skills, and interpersonal competence. Intellectual competence is the ability to comprehend, examine, and synthesize information, as well as mastering content. This skill leads to developing an integration of various perspectives to apply meaning to observations and experiences; it challenges and broadens an individual's way of thinking. Manual and physical competence can be achieved through the use of one's body through fitness, creating and designing products, and self-discipline. Interpersonal competence is based on working cooperatively with others and developing relationships based on effective communication and intentional consideration of others' goals.

The second vector is related to emotional intelligence- particularly managing emotions. Chickering (2007) notes that students can face a wide range of emotions throughout their college experience, including anxiety, depression, guilt, and shame, all of which can have long-term negative impacts if they go unchecked. Chickering and Reisser (1993) proposed that these emotions are not to be ignored; rather it is critical to acknowledge them as part of one's development of self-awareness, and equally important to manage them through active engagement in self-control.

The third vector is moving through autonomy toward interdependence. Self-sufficiency lies at the center of this vector, which entails holding oneself accountable and being less concerned with the opinions of others. This requires emotional and instrumental independence first, then interdependence. More specifically, emotional independence frees a person from

relying on others' approval or reassurance and results in an increased willingness to risk close relationships in exchange for the pursuit of individuality. Instrumental independence is the ability to seek out resources and take the necessary steps to solve one's problems independently. Lastly, the development of autonomy is realized once individuals engage in interdependence that includes relationships that might have previously been deemed useless. This process involves seeking reciprocity in new relationships and incorporates respecting others.

The fourth vector is the development of mature interpersonal relationships, which requires the ability to be intimate and tolerate and appreciate unique differences. This is especially helpful in respecting and accepting individuals for who they are as opposed to conforming to stereotypes and biases that threaten the development of meaningful, healthy relationships. This process also strengthens the quality of relationships based on acceptance, trust, and mutual respect, in spite of obstacles and hardships experienced.

The fifth vector is establishing identity, which partly depends on the first four vectors (Chickering, 2007). Identity development is a complex process that involves appearance, gender and sexual orientation, a sense of self (within a social, historical, and cultural context), clarification of self-concept through lifestyle, sense of self in response to constructive criticism, self-acceptance and self-esteem, and personal stability and integration. This process allows students to develop a sense of who they are and where they come from, but not necessarily how those align with long-term aspirations and goals.

The sixth vector is developing purpose. As summarized by Chickering (2007), Chickering and Reisser (1993) note that for many college students the end goal is career-focused, with an emphasis on a good job that ensures a comfortable lifestyle, but many fail to incorporate how their newly acquired skills can help them broaden their knowledge base and become

lifelong learners. Moreover, the theorists describe the act of developing purpose as synonymous with resiliency- an approach to persist in spite of obstacles. It also entails intentionality in creating a clear vision that incorporates one's own vocational goals and interests, as well as interpersonal and family commitments.

Lastly, the seventh vector is developing integrity, which is linked to the sixth vector. It requires for individuals to inspect their own behavior by a process of humanizing values that may have once been characterized by uncompromising beliefs and understanding the implications of this for other human beings. It also entails balancing one's core values with respecting different viewpoints, as well as engaging in socially responsible behavior. During this stage, students may begin a process of personalizing or discarding values they may have adapted from familial relationships and authority figures, which may lead to a process of internal turmoil. Once this process is realized, however, students are better equipped to engage in decision-making processes that are clear and concrete, based on thoroughly examined personal values.

Related to the experiences of a first-year student, the second and third vectors can be clearly observed. Managing emotions (vector 2) can be especially difficult as first-year students grapple with transitioning into college life. This transition can bring about new experiences that students may be ill-prepared for, including balancing academics and a social life, homesickness, and peer pressure. At the same time, first-year students are expected to possess a certain set of skills (such as time-management and conflict management) that can aid in their successful transition, many learning these skills for the first time. These expectations can prove to be a highly emotionally taxing time, which can lead to one of two outcomes. The ideal outcome is for students to persist through these obstacles by acknowledging and managing the emotions associated with these first-year hurdles. Conversely, the less ideal outcome is that a student can

be so overcome by unmanaged emotions that they are ultimately unable to successfully navigate their first year, leading to poor academic and personal outcomes, including dropping out of college altogether.

The third vector (movement through autonomy toward interdependence) is also evident within the first year. Students are faced with having to break familial ties and past friendships that may no longer align with their personal interests and newfound convictions. This process can take place within the first year as students are exposed to new ways of thinking both inside and outside of the classroom through faculty and peer interactions. In addition, as students develop the ability to solve their own problems, they are forced to seek out resources and assistance, as well as advocate for themselves as issues arise. These processes strengthen their instrumental independence. Through this process they become more autonomous as they re-attribute value to past relationships within the boundaries of their redefined personal beliefs. This can look like a reconciliation with parents, or other strained past relationships, that are based on new boundaries that respect their individuality and decision-making processes.

Theoretical Strengths and Critiques

Chickering's Theory of Seven Vectors (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) is one of most widely cited student development theories. Its initial version (Chickering, 1969) was limited to traditionally-aged white male students who were in small liberal arts colleges and implied a sequential completion order of the seven vectors (Foubert et al., 2005). It was later revised (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) to clarify how students can experience several vectors simultaneously, rather than in sequential order. Chickering and Reisser (1993) also identified how educational environment factors influence a student's development, including institutional

objectives, institutional size, student-faculty interactions, curriculum, teaching, and student programs and services (Gatten, 2004).

This theory, however, has been criticized due to the assumption that students will form a foundation by moving through the first four vectors that will then lead to the progression of the final three vectors (Gatten, 2004). In addition, the theory has been criticized for assuming that “individuals will experience similar developmental processes” (Gatten, 2004, p. 162), which does not consider the unique needs of diverse student populations (including members of the LGBTQ+ community, racially and ethnically diverse students, gender differences, and neurodivergence). This calls for the incorporation of diverse student populations in revised student development theories as institutions of higher education seek to better understand their students and provide equitable opportunities for all to succeed.

A possible, relevant research investigation related to Chickering’s theory at my institution of employment- North Carolina A&T State University- would be helpful in providing insight on the collective experiences of African American students specifically, given it is the largest HBCU in the United States. An investigation could be conducted that focuses on the fifth vector of the theory- establishing identity and identity development- within the context of a racially homogenous campus environment. The study could seek to understand if a relationship exists between the perceived safety of being an African American student at an African American student-serving institution (HBCU), and how students’ experiences within this environment impact their identity development. Another component of the study that would provide additional insight is conducting a similar investigation on African American students attending a local Predominantly White Institution (PWI) and examining if a relationship can be observed between African American students’ experiences at a PWI and their identity development. A

comparison of students' reported experiences on either campus and their perceptions of how those experiences have shaped their identity development would provide insight to help inform student development theories and practice.

Question 9: Improving Retention & Graduation Rates

Retention and graduation rates are commonly viewed as indicators of institutional effectiveness by students, parents, policy makers, and administrators (Dahlvig et al., 2020). This can have direct implications on enrollment, allocation of funds, and student outcomes (Talbert, 2012). The pressure for institutions of higher education to improve on these retention and graduation rates will continue to rise as the cost of attendance increases and accountability measures are brought to the forefront of higher education discourse (Dahlvig et al., 2020). As such, it is critical for higher education administrators to develop effective strategies directed toward improving these outcomes.

As an educational leader seeking to improve retention and graduate rates on my campus, I would seek to adapt a strategic approach that factors a variety of influences that could impact the success of any efforts geared toward this goal. This approach would require an in-depth understanding of (1) institutional structure, (2) the university's mission and vision, (3) the university's strategic plan, (4) student population and their needs, (5) teaching and learning practices and outcomes, (6) curriculum design, and (7) current resources and services aimed at supporting students. While not comprehensive or exhaustive, understanding these areas will be instrumental in making data-informed decisions tailored to the specific needs of my campus.

In my current role as an educational leader at a four-year public state school, and the largest historically Black university in the country, I have been part of several conversations with administrators revolving around improving retention and graduation rates. Prior to being a

contributor to these discussions, and in line with the aforementioned approach, I tasked myself with understanding some of the historical trends associated with these outcomes. Looking at the institutional structure (departments, roles), the university's mission and vision, and the university's strategic plan provided insight as to how retention and graduation rates form part of the collective goals of the institution. This then allowed me to have a better understanding of how those collective goals translate to departmental goals for the different colleges, academic support services offices, and student affairs departments. These departmental goals capture teaching and learning practices and outcomes, curriculum design, support services, and student life on campus- all of which contribute to student engagement and persistence (Talbert, 2012; Tinto, 2016).

As an educational leader currently overseeing the Center for Academic Excellence (CAE) for my campus, this approach helped me understand how my department directly aligns with student retention and graduation outcomes. The CAE offers a variety of academic resources and services ranging from summer bridge programs, mentoring programs, teaching college success courses, supplemental instruction for mathematics, tutoring services, skills enhancement workshops, academic monitoring, academic recovery services, and professional academic advisement. This wide range of services has been established in the literature as key strategies of student retention and degree completion (Talbert, 2012). On a macro-level, the CAE also forms partnerships with other departments- career services, counseling services, residential learning communities, that help us engage with the student in various aspects and at various points throughout their academic career. These student-institution interactions further contribute to student engagement, which is also proven to positively impact student outcomes (Talbert, 2012). These partnerships and joint ventures have also proven to be instrumental in supporting the

strategic, collective retention and graduation goals of the university by promoting institution-wide commitment and buy-in.

Furthermore, on a micro-level, improved retention and graduation rates are of particular concern to my department and myself, given our focus on equipping students with the tools necessary to integrate into and move through their academic career. As such, it is critical to understand the student population we serve so that we can take advantage of the resources at our disposal, while taking a customized approach with each student to address their unique needs. In line with this approach, identifying obstacles early has proven to be instrumental in mitigating some of the at-risk factors associated with student attrition. This approach allows the department to have direct access to students and gather information on common challenges, while connecting them to resources within the department and extended campus to address their needs in real-time.

Concentrating our individual and collective efforts on mitigating at-risk behaviors and obstacles are of significant importance for my institution due to the student population we serve, which is primarily comprised of African American students. African American students are more likely to be academically under resourced and underprepared (Dahill-Brown, 2016), as well as lag behind their peers in degree completion rates (Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2022; Talbert, 2012). Given the benefits of degree attainment related to improved socioeconomic status, employability, health benefits, and long-term economic stability, among others (Carnevale et al., 2020; Ma et al., 2020), the implications are vast for those who fail to persist and graduate.

As an educational leader that understands these long-term implications, I feel it my responsibility to ensure we keep our efforts aligned with improving retention and graduation outcomes for our students that position them for best possible opportunities to succeed. These

efforts will continuously require careful assessment and realignment as our student population continues to evolve. My dissertation research aligns closely with the proposed assessment and realignment of current efforts designed to improve student outcomes- particularly academic performance and retention rates. My proposed study consists of examining the relationship between students on academic probation who complete a student success course (offered through the CAE) and their academic performance and retention. While the course is a requirement for students on academic probation, currently no assessment of the course has been done to examine this relationship. My study will aim to provide insight on the course components and their perceived impact, from students' perspective, on their retention and academic performance after having completed the course. Additionally, the study aims to provide insight on what students deem effective as it relates to these outcomes, as well as will help us (the institution) identify areas that could be restructured to better suit their needs with the intent of contributing to improved academic performance and retention outcome through strategic efforts.

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