ACADEMIC ASSISTANCE CENTERS:
FOCUSING ON PSYCHOSOCIAL VARIABLES OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS FOR
MULTICULTURAL AND ACADEMIC PROBATION STUDENTS

by

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Abstract

Student affairs personnel in higher education have an extraordinary ability to affect positively the academic, personal, social, emotional, and vocational development of students, as well as to provide an understanding of the challenges that students experience. In addition, an increase in investigating student success, as well as how to quantify success has occurred. The purpose of this report is to reflect the areas of student development upon which student affairs personnel can have a profound impact—that being the psychosocial variables to student success.

In combination with exploring how Academic Assistance Centers (AAC's) focus on psychosocial factors that influence student success, this report looks at the similarities between theory and the pragmatic programming that one particular Midwestern university employs to help facilitate student awareness and practice of psychosocial factors. The overarching belief of the author is that students can and will find success through challenge and support.

This report will demonstrate, through a brief history of the challenges that higher education has faced, how student affairs personnel are often times the first and last line of defense in student support. Moreover, student affairs personnel have been charged with the task of providing support to an ever growing diverse student body in addition to providing the proper support needed to enhance the academic and personal success of such a diverse student body. Through a review of the literature investigating student attrition as well as retention, two subgroups of undergraduates were specifically identified as to how academic assistance centers can facilitate their success and, ultimately, their retention. The two subgroups are students who identify as multicultural and students who are on academic probation. Lastly, the author offers suggestions on what student affairs personnel, as well as higher education, can do to facilitate holistic student development and promote the awareness of psychosocial variables that will aid students in their academic development and success.

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Acknowledgements

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this report to all past, present, and future student affairs professionals in higher education. I hope this report serves as a reinforcement that the development of any individual student, whether personal, academic, or emotional, is a matter of great success, and that personal interaction and an altruistic philosophy are at the heart of facilitating development in students. Also, I hope this report serves as a reinforcement to the belief that the consequential perspective of judging student success solely on retention is short-sighted and irresponsible.

CHAPTER 1 - Introduction

A wealth of research exists concerning the challenges that higher education faces including: access, funding, student development, and retention. While there is plenty of research and knowledge in the realm of higher education, a great amount of effort has been spent looking into the current challenges that higher education faces. The issue that serves as the target of inquiry for this report is retention. Moreover, this report investigates the subpopulations of undergraduate students that have been identified in the literature as high-risk for attrition, which include: multicultural and academic-probation students (Miller, Tyree, Riegler, & Herreid, 2010).

In addition, research into predicting student success has highlighted key factors that can both positively and negatively affect the success of college students—psychosocial variables pertinent to student success. For instance, according to Carnevale and Fry (2000), enrollments at institutions of higher education have been growing exponentially for the past half century, allowing for an increased number of students who bring with them a greater degree of diversity. This influx in the diversity of college students brings with it innate challenges to the system of higher education, a system that primarily has been built around and has catered to white and middle/upper class students, to be multicultural inclusive. Higher education must recognize that the increase in diversity brings with it challenges, experiences, worldviews, and solutions to challenges previously unexplored—all of which warrant investigation because they have a direct effect on the culture and landscape of higher education, as well as on the success of individual students.

Similarly, Carnevale and Fry (2000) state that their "projections are that between 1995 and 2015, the number of undergraduates will grow by 19 percent—from 13.4 million to about 16 million" (p. 10). This influx in students attending institutions of higher education has highlighted the increased need to support students properly in their academic endeavors, which includes students on academic probation. Academic probation provides institutions a way to inform students of academic underachievement, which automatically brings into question the institutions' standard of achievement. Typically, students may "underachieve" for multiple reasons; however,

both the students and the institution share the responsibility to find ways to address this situation—many times as the last resort before the students' dismissal from the institution.

Academic Assistance Centers (AAC's) are perfect examples of how the continuous and evolving pursuit of higher education meets the needs and challenges of not only their students and local communities, but also the challenges of society at large. According to Evans, Forney and Guido-DiBrito (1998), AAC's are the product of evolving student development research and practice, and, as such, are the result of decades of research and theory into the "psychosocial, cognitive-structural, and typology perspectives" (p. 4) of student development. In addition, AAC's represent over three centuries of support to college students in one way or another. Beginning in the colonial colleges, student affairs personnel were authoritative with the intent to establish a strong Christian moral character in students. This purpose has evolved to the present-day, centrally-located offices referred to as AAC's that house specially-trained professionals charged with the privilege of facilitating student success.

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2010), only 57% of fulltime undergraduate students achieve their Bachelors degree within 6 years. Prior research into student success focused on attrition (Bean, 1980; Lenning, 1980; McMillan, 2005; Munro, 1981; Pascarella, 1977; Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1975, 1982, 1987) has culminated in a wealth of knowledge as to *why* students do not finish college; however, Tinto (1987, 2005) demonstrated the need to shift our focus of student success onto student retention, and, as a result of such alarming statistics pertaining to student retention, a considerable amount of effort in forms of research, programming, and staffing has been invested into increasing retention rates on behalf of higher education. As will be demonstrated in this report, higher education, particularly within academic assistance programs, has been addressing the challenges threatening student success throughout the history of higher education and now addresses the current challenge of retention.

In addition, Robbins, Lauver, Le, Davis, Langley, and Carlstrom (2004) have shown that there are multiple reasons that can be investigated in order to understand the causes pertinent in facilitating retention. Three categories have been identified by Robbins et al. (2004) after reviewing college student outcomes in the literature associated with student retention: (1) traditional predictors, such as standardized test scores, high school rank, and GPA; (2) demographic predictors, such as socioeconomic status, race, and gender; and (3) psychosocial predictors, such as social involvement, motivation, self-management, and study habits. In

support of these findings, Lyubomirsky (2007) indicated that success can be attributed to a "set-point" of 50% that is genetics, 10% that is circumstantial—the "circumstances" of how one lives—and 40% that can be attributed to psychosocial variables. Of the three categories, the first two are widely believed and demonstrated to be relatively stable. In contrast, the latter category is widely believed to be affected by the individual, which can be argued as the most important finding affecting student development. Clearly, for higher education to focus on students' "set-point" or "circumstance" in order to improve the students' success in college will prove to be futile; college students are essentially out of the range of influence at this point. Therefore, the objective of AAC's must be to direct attention and effort to the psychosocial variables that attribute 40% of student success. Doing so will not only influence AAC's approach to helping students, but also will give students the best services based on the most relevant research, and, thereby, aid the students in learning and achieving success.

Further, it is understood that retention is a major concern for higher education, and there is an established knowledge base of the variables that influence student retention. Of these, the psychosocial variables appear to be the most salient influencing student retention because these factors can be affected positively by the individual student. It naturally follows then that AAC's are in a position, and at an opportune time, to affect the success of students by addressing the psychosocial variables while, simultaneously, implementing pragmatic applications recommended through scholarly research. By being intensely involved and in touch with campus culture and climate, AAC"s are instrumental in addressing the challenges and concerns of the students and the university alike.

This report will briefly reflect the consistent ability and willingness of academic affairs agencies and personnel to critically address and understand the challenges, needs, concerns, and wants of their universities and students. Moreover, student and institutional needs, concerns, and challenges reflect the cultural landscape in any particular time in history, and, as such, the causes, methods, and outcomes of student affairs efforts also directly relate to the socio-cultural underpinnings of our society. In order to address the current challenges that higher education institutions, their students, and society are experiencing and how student affairs personnel address these issues, it is important to demonstrate briefly the progression of student support personnel development throughout the course of American higher education. Some critics would argue that student affairs personnel have fallen short in their pursuit to meet the needs of higher

education, but the author argues that student affairs personnel have been the most active and willing to meet the needs of higher education, its students, and society at large. Therefore, the purpose of this report is to address the current challenge that student affairs faces – that of retention, as well as the factors that have the greatest influence on academic success, which are psychosocial factors. The researcher sought to investigate how AAC's facilitate student success as it relates to subgroups of the undergraduate population at a large Midwestern public institution, and, specifically, how AAC's build off the knowledge pertaining to psychosocial variables and their predictive ability to aid in the success of multicultural and academic probation students.

Scope of Report

This report intends to explore what AAC's do to facilitate and empower students through awareness of psychosocial factors influencing their academic success. There is a need to target certain populations that are at threat for attrition; to this end, the current study sought to explore the populations of students identifying as multicultural and being placed on academic probation. As will be demonstrated through this report, these subpopulations of the undergraduate student body are high-risk for dropping out. Foremost, this report is meant to show the AAC's ability to have a positive impact through the emphasis of psychosocial factors for change on the development and success of multicultural and academic probation students,.

In order to judge success, there must be a valid measure with which to measure success. This report challenges traditional standards of predicting college success; Mouw and Khanna (1993) argued that predicting college success based on high school GPA, ACT and SAT scores (Willingham, Lewis, Morgan, & Ramist, 1990), as well as students' demographic variables including socioeconomic status, gender, and race (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004; Richardson & Bender, 1987), is disappointingly low. Lastly, this report endorses the continued use of criterion outcome data for AAC's to utilize; however, more emphasis needs to be placed on the process of development and acquisition of positive psychosocial skills as an important outcome to measure and promote.

Significance of Report

The report is significant because of its inquiry into how affecting psychosocial variables pertaining to academics directly affects student retention and success, as well as addressing possible guidelines for academic institutions and student affairs professionals to formulate policies, develop practices, and enhance programs for a more succinct method of supporting student success in higher education. The American higher education system is not only a leader in all facets of academia, but also is the most accessible to prospective students. Despite the emphasis placed on higher education in the United States, according to Seidman (2005), "many students who start in a higher education program drop out prior to completing a degree or achieving their individual academic and social goals" (p. xi). This trend presents a major concern as more students begin college but are unable to finish, which adds to the pressure and demands of institutions facing increasingly shrinking budgets—especially those that are public universities depending on the local and federal government for certain percentages of their yearly operating budgets.

While emphasizing the development of psychosocial awareness, this report reinforces the role of AAC's as an instrumental contributor to student development and preparation for life after college. The author's overarching belief that through challenge and support students can excel and experience great success in pursuit of higher education is echoed by Seidman (2005): "no matter what economic stratum a person is born into, he or she can acquire the skills necessary to succeed through education" (p. xii). Similarly, "The higher education community must redouble its efforts to ensure that minority youth and adults are adequately prepared for college and are able to share in the bounty of higher education" (Carnevale & Fry, p. 8). Therefore, the goal of the Academic Transition Program (ATP) is to provide the necessary resources to each individual student in an attempt to assist his or her acquisition of those skills, ultimately resulting in the retention of the student.

CHAPTER 2 - Role of Student Affairs

Historical Progression of Student Affairs Personnel

As higher education in the American colonies began to develop, its student body population was homogenous. According to John Thelin (2004), the majority of students during this time period came from families of either "a wealthy Virginia planter or a Boston merchant" (p. 26), and could afford not having an extra able body to help on the family farm. In addition, the Puritan emphasis on the development of Christian moral character in order to hold responsible, moral, and democratic positions in society as adults in combination with matriculation into college during the colonial era became an increasing reflection of social class as well as responsibility. Colonial leaders began to voice concern that parents were not instilling the characteristics that made a Christian leader. The response, with an abundance of male adults in the roles of "ministers, alumni, government officials, and tutors" (Thelin, 2004, p. 25) on college campuses, was to transfer the responsibility of instilling social values, which included the development of students in non-academic issues, onto the universities. However, assisting them generally meant that someone needed to be present to keep these young adults "in-line." It is no surprise then that the first student affairs personnel, located at Harvard University in the mid-seventeenth century, were authoritative figures challenged with keeping the students "in-line." These paternal figures were meant to provide a strict and structured pursuit of academia and to emphasize the development of Christian moral character, which would remain the dominant characteristic of student personnel for the better half of three centuries.

Not until the beginning of the twentieth century did student affairs agencies accelerate their evolution to a system more closely resembling modern day student affairs organizations. However, that is not to say that the three hundred years that passed with a theological perspective of development did not face challenges. In contrast, they worked to address and adapt to several challenges including the American Revolution, the Industrial Revolution, the War of 1812, and the Civil War to name a few. Still, the perspective and direction that student affairs programs held was a consistent perspective and often times with the same attitude and methodology that left little room for adequately addressing the problems of the culture. As mentioned, it was not until the turn of the century when, as Evans, Forney and Guido-DiBrito (1998), described, that

the "newly organized disciplines of psychology and sociology were applied to the collegiate environment" (p. 5) and served as a critical turning point in how institutions viewed the work of student personnel and the impact that student support services could have on college students' lives during their college years.

At this point in time, student affairs organizations started to address the societal, cultural, and economic challenges of our country and to shift into a new service paradigm—one that emphasized vocational guidance and preparation of students to enter the workforce. Vocational guidance gained momentum with the help of Frank Parson (1909), who is credited with emphasizing a "match" between student personality and chosen career in order to determine "best fit." This approach proved to be a very beneficial response to the growing number of students of the 1920's who had become focused on entering the world of work and only wanted the tools and training to accomplish that goal. Vocational guidance continued to prove useful in meeting the needs of our society when it faced America's greatest economic challenge ever—the Great Depression. At this time, it was important for student affairs organizations to emphasize the need to prepare students for work, as there was little of it, and to help students realize that those who were educated stood the best chance of attaining employment.

As the Great Depression loosened its grip on America, major developments in education were also in the making. In 1937, the American Council on Education published the Student Personnel Point of View (SPPV), which introduced a novel direction for student personnel emphasizing the development of the "whole student," who, in turn, could contribute to the well being of society. This publication demonstrated a fundamental shift in thought and philosophy of student development and the role of student personnel. Similarly, the SPPV still serves as a cornerstone to the school of thought of contemporary student affairs. The SPPV served as a response to the challenge presented by the dependency that higher education and industry had formed, as well as built on student personnel perspective during that time period that emphasized vocational guidance. It is important to note that the SPPV was not a response against vocational guidance, but rather, a compliment to it. Vocational guidance is still vital in preparing students for the world of work, and this approach constitutes a great amount of effort put forth by student development agencies.

In just over a decade from the publication of the original SPPV, the American Council on Education formally revised the document in response to the national cultural ideology that had

formed as a product of World War II. At the end of the war, America emerged from defeating tyrannical communists that held a polar opposite ideology from how we, as the most powerful country in the world, viewed human dignity and led to an increased belief in the democratic process as the morally right and valued system of government. In turn, the revision of the SPPV reflected that sentiment with language that highlighted the need to pay attention to and promote the development of the whole student, resulting in students who are socially responsible.

Next, the challenge of addressing the social unrest of the 1960's became the focus of student personnel. Issues, concerns, and challenges surrounding the events of the highly controversial and tumultuous Vietnam War, Women's Rights movement, and Civil Rights fostered in-depth critical inquiry by psychologists and sociologists alike. During this era, student affairs and student development transformed into what it is today. Building off the earlier psychological works of Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, and B. F. Skinner, researchers investigated how students interact during their college years (Feldman, 1969; Heath, 1964, 1968, 1973, 1977; Newcomb, 1969; Sanford, 1962, 1966, 1967) and became grounded in theories of student development that emphasized student affairs personnel commitment to the development of the "whole person," resonating intensely still today and taking precedent for student affairs personnel interaction with students.

Current Challenges for Student Affairs Personnel

Similarly, an increase has occurred in research focused on understanding what leads to retention of not only subpopulations of the undergraduate student body, but also students in general. In addition, a variety of reasons and general ideas have been postulated as to why some students succeed in college. Three groups of variables have been outlined as being influential in the success of college students by Kim, Newton, Downey, and Benton (in press). Those variables are: (1) *Academic Achievement and Aptitude,* (2) *Circumstance Variables,* and (3) *Personal Variables.* Further research has shown that the latter of the influential variables can pose the greatest influence, as they are within the students' ability to control.

Fortunately for higher education, particularly students, the area of human development as a scientific study experienced significant growth and contributed exponentially to the continuing formation of academic assistance programs. Trailblazing theorists, including Freud and Jung, in the beginning of the twentieth century provided critical insight into the psychological and

sociological aspects and influences of human development throughout the life span. There had finally been scientific inquiry with substantial implications that higher education could viably and reliably use as they applied this information to the college environment by training individuals who Barr and Upcraft (1990) described as "human development specialists" (p. 14). This time period, the hiring of student affairs personnel, developing practices, and operating out of a theoretical framework, serves as the precursor to contemporary student development and AAC's.

Having a sound and reliable theoretical perspective from which to work, student development professionals and services have now been able to serve students better through a developmental lens. From this point on, student development professionals have been armed with knowledge and research based tools with which to address the issues facing students during their college career as well as in life beyond college. These tools foster adaptability, which enables student personnel to address issues unforeseen and many times manifesting themselves as effects of the cultural, sociological, and historical influences of the passing time. Likewise, we have seen that the evolution of student development and the professionals that commit their academic and professional lives to this issue have consistently risen to address the ongoing needs of both students and higher education.

A review of the literature covering the issues facing higher education, including multiculturalism and at-risk students, has revealed a substantial amount of research regarding these populations and their needs and experiences while on campuses of higher education institutions. The development of student services in higher education has been a necessity in the success and, ultimately, graduation from higher education of many students. As the enrollment into institutions of higher education has increased, the need to accommodate the students in more ways than just in the classroom has also increased. A bit of a mantra exists amongst student affairs professionals, which is that they should think of themselves as social scientists with an understanding that students come from diverse backgrounds, all with different experiences and worldviews, and all with capabilities to learn, construct knowledge, and be successful students. This understanding has prompted the creation of programs and student service offices whose goals and missions are to serve some defined sub-population of the student body. The remaining literature review section of this report will target defining concepts, such as AAC's, Kansas State University's Academic Transition Program (ATP), multiculturalism, academic-probation,

second-generation students, predictors of academic success, psychosocial factors, and student success.

Academic Assistance Centers (AAC's)

Many people may be unaware of what AAC's actually are, why higher education has them, and what they do. AAC is a term used to encompass the many programs, services, offices, departments, and personnel committed to assisting college students navigate their way through higher education. However, they are also much more. AAC's might be the most abstract concept to define in this report because they can constitute many people, services, philosophies, or methodologies, as well as the variety of students whom they support. AAC's can be interchangeably used with terms, such as *student support services*, *student academic success centers*, and *student affairs*. These terms are synonymous in describing the roles that the professionals working within these centers have on campus. They are professionals referred to as *academic advisors*, *academic counselors*, *student affairs professionals*, and, most commonly, *student personnel*.

Kansas State University, Academic Transition Program (ATP)

Institutions continually must address and be on the forefront of research affecting this complex situation of retention (Braxton, Bray, & Berger, 2000). According to Archer and Cooper (1999), "counseling can play an important role in this process; but because of heavy case loads, college student counselors need efficient ways to identify students at-risk" (p. 25). To this end, Kansas State University has developed a program called the *Academic Transition Program* (ATP).

The following is the ATP's mission statement:

> Our Academic Transition Program (ATP) is designed for domestic multicultural students to connect them with resources on campus and provide them with the academic and emotional support they might want during college.
>
> Our goal is to help domestic multicultural students create a supportive network that promotes their academic success at K-State. We welcome any students who are interested in our services and will be glad to help them connect with campus resources the best we can.

Each student must meet three outside criteria in order to participate in the program: (1) the student must identify as multicultural, (2) the student must be on academic warning, and (3) the student is a second generation college student. Each of these three populations have been identified individually to some varying degree in prior research: students who identify as multicultural (Banks, 2001; Tierney, 1994; Wallace, 2000), students who are on academic warning (Lau, 2003), and students who are second generation college students (Kuh & Pike, 2005). The ATP was created as a service in response to the evidence that multicultural students, along with students who are on academic probation, are continuously a threat for attrition. The ATP is a directed, intentional, intervention service that focuses on assisting multicultural and academic probation students to succeed. A varying degree of research exists on all three of these populations, and, as the beneficiaries of intentionally focused psychosocial factors that can influence success, a dearth of research has been conducted among this group.

The terms of the ATP require that each student meet with his or her academic counselor at a minimum of once per month for the current semester. In addition, the academic counselor follows a pre-made plan of topics and issues for discussion at each meeting. Through these meetings, the academic counselor gains a better understanding of each individual's circumstance including experiences as a multicultural student at a predominantly white institution (PWI), reasons that led him or her to being placed on academic warning, reasons that he or she are currently pursuing a particular degree, varying from cultural pressures as well as familial expectations, and how those extra pressures have impacted the student's academic success. As a product of thorough discussions between the counselor and each student, and self-disclosure on the part of each student, the academic counselor reaches an understanding of how each student identifies as being multicultural; for instance, race, cultural identification, sexual orientation, gender identification, and/or parents' ethnicity have all been reasons cited as identifying as multicultural. The counselor also instigates discussion that leads to understanding the level of awareness that each student holds regarding his or her ability to affect the psychosocial factors leading to academic success and personal success outside of academics.

Multiculturalism

Multicultural is an umbrella term intended to be inclusive, as well as ambiguous. *Culture* is a term that even anthropologists have not yet been able to define, though insist that such a phenomenon exists. For the purpose of the ATP, as well as this report, the definition of *multicultural* is a framework which, as Tierney (1994) describes, "participants in a multicultural organization employ" (p. 6), In other words, multiculturalism is a self concept with which to identify. Once that identification has taken place within an individual, the individual can view him or herself as a multicultural person. Moreover, "multiculturalism relates to the construction of ideas pertaining to issues such as race, class, gender, and sexual orientation" (p. 6). This definition has been adopted by the ATP because it encompasses the overarching theme that multicultural identification is not just a part of one's race, ethnicity, social surroundings, gender, or sexual orientation. While *multicultural* has the ability to include those characteristics, it also can be a manifestation of how individuals perceive the world around them.

Relevant research has also shown that *multiculturalism* has been defined in many ways other than the definition adopted by ATP, which is Tierney's (1994) concept of *multiculturalism* as a framework in which "participants in a multicultural organization employ" (p. 6). Wallace (2000) adds that multiculturalism needs to revise and "refine multicultural training in order to better address linguistic and diversity to be found in immigrants, as well as issues around sexual orientation, disability, and spirituality" (p. 1086). Multicultural definitions are also offered through the perspective of multicultural education, as defined by James Bank (2001), who proposes multicultural education as "an idea, an educational reform movement, and a process" (p. 2). Defining *multiculturalism* is an ambiguous and evolving pursuit, but the point is made through all the definitions that *multicultural* can be an umbrella term encompassing a myriad of differences, processes, and characteristics utilized by a wide and diverse population. In essence, *multicultural* is the emphasis on social justice and equality for all. For the discussions of this paper, the view of multiculturalism will be adopted from the way that the AAC for KSU has defined it: *Multicultural* refers to any individual student who identifies as being an underrepresented student, which includes race, ethnicity, class, language, gender, and sexual orientation.

The research examining the experiences of multicultural students in higher education is a relatively young field of inquiry; it has only been in the past thirty years that this field of research has made considerable progress (Allen 1984; Bush-Sampson 2007; Gasker, & LaBarre, 2010; London 1978, 1989; Nora & Cabrera 1994; Nora & Rendon 1988, 1990; Ogbu 1978, 1987; Tierney 1992, 1993; Wright 1988). As such, higher education has identified the need to provide assistance and support to the ever-growing diversity of the higher education population. According to Banks and Banks (1999), "[b]y the year 2010, 46% of the nation's school age youth will be students of color" (p.19). The table below, provided by the National Center for Education Statistics (2004), illustrates the increase in enrollment of five distinct races in the United States over a 26 year time span and highlights the need for multicultural awareness.

Table 1 Fall Student Enrollment by Race in All Postsecondary Institutions, 1976 and 2002.

	White	**Black**	**Hispanic**	**Asian/Pacific Islander**	**Native American**
1976	9,076,100	1,033.025	383,800	197,878	76,110
2002	11,140,200	1,978,746	1,661,726	1,074,162	165,914
Change	+23%	+92%	+333%	+443%	+118%

SOURCE: NCES, Digest of Education Statistics, 2004.

Astin (1982, 1993) and Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) go on to state that even though the ethnic minority populations have grown over the past 40 years to constitute almost half of the student population, they continue to be undereducated. Clearly, an immediate need exists to address the "impending cultural revolution, as well as institutional survival, [and] calls for a pluralistic perspective in higher education to enlarge the support system for ethnic minority students in terms of access, quality, and persistence" (Castellanos & Cole, 2002, p. 20). Moreover, the theme that "the development and success of all students should be of primary concern for institutions of higher education" (Castellanos & Cole, 2002, p.19), has been the guiding light for many higher education institutions' student affairs personnel as well as administration. As the aforementioned research has elevated foundational principles of multicultural student experiences and challenges, it also has illuminated the knowledge base of

student retention. Student affairs administrators have relied on this knowledge base to reform policy, hire and train student affairs professionals, and funnel further research that can supplement and advance the knowledge and practice of the success of multicultural students. In addition, Tinto (1993) stresses that the development of student communities for multicultural students who will likely experience difficulties is of high importance during their transition from high school to college. Gaining a sense of belonging to the educational community will aid in multicultural student persistence and matriculation to graduation (Astin, 1984; Cabrera & Mallette, 1991; Nora, 1987; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980).

Academic Warning

Academic Warning refers to the students' status as it relates to their academic standing within the University. According to a study conducted by Coleman and Freedman (1996), a considerable number of students who either voluntarily or involuntarily leave a 4-year college before graduating have, at some point, been on academic probation. Moreover, the researcher found that being placed on academic probation will likely negatively affect the students' sense-of-self.

Kansas State University students are placed on academic warning if their semester and/or cumulative GPA fall below a 2.0. For purposes of the ATP, *at-risk* is defined as any student who currently has a 2.0 Grade Point Average (GPA) or less, or who had a 2.0 or below in the semester directly preceding their current semester. At-risk students have also been the target of much research and are also a worthy population for higher education to focus some of its resources towards. At-risk students present an immediate concern for higher education as their attrition is foreseeable and continuous matriculation is bleak. Recently, attrition has become a topic of extreme interest across institutions of higher education because it is a direct threat to decreased enrollment, student academic failure, institution reliability, institution cohesiveness, academic prestige, and community perception of the institution. As such, Seidman (2005) outlines why and how higher education has placed a great amount of emphasis on retention (p. 2). Part of that effort is geared toward providing assistance to those who struggle to stay in school, as well as identifying the reasons that students drop-out. Lau (2003) presents five reasons why students may leave their institutions, pointing out that "some students leave for reasons beyond the institution's control, such as lack of financial resources, poor student-

institution fit, changing academic or career goals, or unrelated personal circumstances" (p. 126).

Lau continues by stating that "[m]any more students leave because the institution has failed to create an environment, inside or outside the classroom, that is conducive to their learning and educational needs" (p. 127). Another reason that Lau points out for the attrition of some students is that some students, especially those "who lack the basic and fundamental skills, especially in mathematics and writing" (p. 127), find it increasingly difficult to manage a normal coursework load with all the other aspects that are inherently part of college life. Lau also speaks to the lack of motivation that many students, especially freshman, portray because of the lack of importance they place on the meaning of education as well as the difficulty of the transition from high school to college. It can then be logically assumed that the aforementioned reasons for the attrition of students can also lead to the decline in students' grades, which subsequently places them in the realm of at-risk.

Second Generation Student

Second Generation is the last defining characteristic of the students eligible to be in the ATP program, and Kuh and Pike (2005) describe *second generation students* as "students whose parents or guardians earned at least one baccalaureate degree" (p. 277). *Second generation student* is a fairly straightforward characteristic leaving little ambiguity to its meaning. However, according to Bugarin, Nunez, and Warburton (2001), "there is a 15% gap between the 3-year persistence rates of first and second-generation students (73% and 88% respectively, p. 6)." This statistic clearly shows that first generation students lag behind second generation students in their progression through higher education and is used to promote resources and programming that will emphasize first generation support systems in higher education institutions. However, the same statistic also shows that even having a parent or guardian who has earned a college degree does not automatically translate into the success of his or her child attaining a college degree. It would be unwise to assume that because their parents received a college education that second-generation students have the adequate resources to and prior knowledge of higher education that will enable them to succeed at this level of education.

Predictors of Academic Success

Robbins et al. (2004) provided a framework that encompasses three types of categories that have received attention in the professional literature regarding predicting the academic success of college students: (a) traditional factors (standardized test scores, high school rank, GPA); (b) demographic factors (race, socioeconomic status, and gender); and (c) psychosocial factors (social involvement, motivation, self-management, and study habits). According to Lounsbury, Fisher, Levy, and Welsh (2009), grades have historically been the most used criteria to predict academic success. However, Mouw and Khanna (1993) concluded that traditional and demographic factors have yielded little evidence as useful predictors of college success. In contrast, the ability of psychosocial factors to influence academic success has led to further research into the effects, interventions, and outcomes of emphasizing psychosocial factors for students to concentrate on as they interact with academic assistance programs. Russell and Petrie (1992) support this notion as they assert that student success is directly affected by psychological traits—perceived support, motivation, emotional impact, and self-confidence—in addition to external behaviors—study behaviors and campus involvement.

Psychosocial Factors

According to Kim et al. (in press), "psychosocial factors have been shown to predict college retention and GPA even when controlling traditional predictors of college success" (p. 6). Kim et al. (in press) go on to site Robbins and colleagues' (2004) study that employed a meta-analysis, revealing "that a number of psychosocial factors contributed incrementally to predicting college retention when controlling for socioeconomic status, standardized achievement (ACT/SAT) scores, and high school GPA" (p. 6-7). In other words, if a student were from a stereotypically low socioeconomic class, had sub-par scores on standardized tests of aptitude, and had performed poorly in high school, as is reflected in their high school GPA, he or she could still experience academic success by employing positive characteristics that are categorized as being psychosocial factors. Kim et al (in press) concluded that "psychosocial factors seem to be powerful indicators of college success" (p. 7). This report further builds off the work done by Kim et al (2009) as they describe the six psychosocial factors that "(a) have been related to indices of college success in the research literature, and (b) are within the power of the individual to influence, direct, or enhance in some way" (p. 7). The psychosocial factors

are: "academic self efficacy, organization and attention to study, stress and time management, involvement with college activity, emotional satisfaction with academics, and class communication" (p. 7).

Student Success

Student success is another ambiguous term that requires some clarification because the success of students is higher education's ultimate objective. However, the reason that success needs to be defined is because it is a subjective term that can encompass many levels of success in many areas of the students' life. *Success* can be defined through semester grades, cumulative GPA, skill acquisition, an accurate self-concept, as well as enhancement of psychosocial skills. However, defining *success* varies as is demonstrated by Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), as they distinguish success between cognitive criterion (GPA, standardized tests, etc) and affective criterion outcomes (life satisfaction). *Success* can also be defined by academic probation students as achieving the required GPA set by the institution in order to be considered in good standing. In many cases, as is the case with the ATP, acquiring a 2.0 GPA is the institution's standard for success.

In being consistent with recent research (e.g., Beltyukova, Stone, & Fox, 2004; DeWitz, & Walsh, 2002; Panori, Wong, Kennedy, & King, 1995), life satisfaction as an outcome of student success is intricately tied to academic success. This connection is also consistent with the contemporary student affairs philosophy of student support because it includes the many dynamics that make up student development and focuses on the whole student as it pertains to holistic student development.

In the absence of relevant research on this multifaceted population as a single entity, the prior literature review incorporated the relevant research from each of the individual populations of multicultural students, academic warning students, and second-generation college students as a framework when conducting informal discussions with the individual students of the ATP.

As the focus of this report was to investigate how AAC's are facilitating student success through emphasizing psychosocial factors that the student can develop, an outcome or measure of success as it pertains to student development is whether or not students are truly learning the skills that influence their psychosocial ability as well as putting them to use. In addition,

institutions of higher education first need to attract qualified students and then the task of retaining them through graduation follows.

CHAPTER 3 - Methods

This report relied heavily on past and contemporary literature from a dynamic array of academic disciplines including: psychology, social psychology, sociology, student development, leadership, counseling, multicultural counseling, and student affairs. Additionally, this report referenced the interaction between Kansas State University's Academic Assistance Center's cohort of multicultural and academic probation students from the spring 2010 semester at KSU, through written accounts of the students' experience being part of the Academic Transition Program. The ATP keeps written documentation of every individual meeting with each student, as well as an exit survey that is anonymously completed by the students at the end of each semester. Having access to the ATP enabled the principle investigator to draw similarities and distinguish discrepancies between what the literature says regarding student development in terms of facilitating retention and the practices being exercised at a large Midwestern university. The AAC at Kansas State University employs a systematic and consistent use of semi-structured informal discussions with the students whom they serve as an assessment tool to track the progression of development of each student. The assessments are evaluations constructed mutually by the academic counselor and each student based on semester long participation in the program, as well as exit surveys conducted at the end of the semester. The conversations contained structured items regarding demographic information and school related questions including year in school, number of hours completed, GPA, major and others. The conversations also consisted of unstructured questions asking the students about their difficulties (if any) of the previous semester, and what their goals were for the current semester. These two questions were purposely presented in an unstructured form as to evoke a more in-depth response and leave the interviewer with flexibility to enter into a conversation with the student in order to get a more rich understanding of that individual's experiences and challenges, as well as to provide enough substance to modify and formulate more succinct questions for future discussions in subsequent semesters.

An informal, qualitative approach was employed as the basis for inquiry for the present report. According to Rudmann, Tucker, and Gonzalez, (2008), "Qualitative research approaches might be much more informative for understanding the positive impact that services have on

academic self-efficacy, goal clarity, self-regulation and hope" (p. 138). As the study and the ATP are concerned with identifying the degree to which students are aware of psychosocial factors affecting their success, it is best demonstrated through personal communication and a healthy rapport with the students. According to Gonzalez and Stallone, (2008), "Qualitative research stresses a model of investigation that provides an in-depth understanding of intricate issues and focuses on an understanding of the narratives and observations obtained" (p. 3).

As the AAC obviously will be working with multicultural students, it is important to have a framework that is open and flexible to the individual students. As such, the AAC has adopted the model of multicultural counseling posited by D. W. Sue (1998), which suggests that multicultural counseling constitutes three separate parts: awareness, knowledge, and skills. Mainly, *awareness* refers to a counselor's' self-understanding in regard to values, cultures, and biases. *Knowledge* is the understanding of culturally diverse students' worldviews, which include the role that racism and oppressions play in their daily lives. Lastly, possessing the adequate skills necessary to apply the knowledge in a culturally sensitive fashion will be of value when working with the students.

ATP Student Responses

Through thorough and systematic review of the ATP Student Log Record as well as the Exit Surveys from the 2010 Spring Semester ATP cohort of students, the following three themes emerged as being common amongst the students of the ATP as reasons for struggling both academically and emotionally: (1) lack of psychosocial skills, (2) non-curricular issues, and (3) being academically underprepared. Specific psychosocial skills that were referenced by the students in their meetings with a counselor, such as motivation, study skills, note making skills, test taking strategies, and time management, are consistent with the literature as being the factors that most influence student success. Non-curricular issues that had an impact on the students' well being, whether academically or emotionally, included: family issues, work related issues, financial issues, and health related issues. Lastly, the ATP students reflected a theme of being academically underprepared. Many of the students admitted to having received a high GPA in high school; however, they were unable to receive the same high grades in college as they did in high school.

Many students have cited motivation, or lack thereof, as a factor contributing to their placement on academic warning, as well as their motivation to seek out their academic counselor when they become aware that they need assistance. In response to that phenomenon, the ATP seeks to understand where their lack of motivation comes from and, in collaboration with the students, identify personal motivators for the students. In order to do that, Patrick, Gentry, and Owens (2006) suggested looking for five indicators including: activity choices, activity level, engagement behaviors, persistence, and continuing motivation. A large contingent of the ATP students disclosed that they were more externally motivated. Many of the students did express disappointment in their low grades and being placed on academic warning, which was the first sign of intrinsic motivation. An example of a student who was experiencing a considerable amount of challenges, due to her lack of motivation, disclosed in her individual meetings with a counselor that she "felt little or no satisfaction with attaining high grades" (personal communication, May 6, 2010). She went on to explain that her parents had been providing financial rewards for her academic success, also commenting that she was subsequently broke.

In addition to lack of motivation as a reason for receiving poor grades and subsequently being placed on academic warning, common denominators included a lack of adequate study skills, time management, note making skills, and test taking strategies. The individual student logs reflected a commonality in student knowledge of what constitutes good study habits. Many of them held an inaccurate belief that "studying hard" is the same as "studying smart," which is evidenced by a student reflection taken from his exit survey: "I have always crammed for tests or papers that are due. I figured if I just study hard, meaning all night before the test, I will do ok. I was definitely wrong when I could not cover all the material that was going to be on the test in one night" (personal statement, May 4, 2010). Many other students echoed this same belief.

Another common theme that resonated with many of the students was that much of their difficulties from the previous semester leading them into academic warning stemmed from non-curricular issues, such as family issues, work related issues, financial obligations, health and well being issues, and personal circumstances. A large proportion of the ATP students routinely admitted that they have been dealing with a wide array of issues, including, as many students indicated, that one or both of their parents had lost their job. Many other students reported having experienced emotional pressure from family members to come home to help their family financially and provide an extra income. Lastly, a unique finding revealed that the ATP had

served three individual women, all of whom were pregnant and working fulltime in addition to being students. In these reported instances, non-curricular issues played a major part in the students being placed on academic warning.

Lastly, being academically underprepared for college was a common theme reflected in the ATP student documents as well. Being academically underprepared for college does not automatically mean that students did not receive high standardized test scores or even a high GPA in high school. Instead, it means that they lacked the abilities and wherewithal to accomplish academic tasks. Having low standardized test scores or a low high school GPA may indicate being academically underprepared; however, these indicators are not sufficient in themselves. A finding by Haycock and Huang (2001), which is consistent with the personal statements of the ATP students, reported that nearly 50% of college students are not academically prepared. However, an exception found on a couple of instances indicated that these particular students reported having earned high standardized test scores as well as having earned a high GPA in high school. This exception may be, as Balduf (2009) points out, that "[e]arning high grades without having to work hard never provided students with a sense of internal motivation" (p.8). She continues to say that "They did not see grades as something to work toward for themselves" (p.8). Consequently, these student reports show that a lack in the development of intrinsic motivation may result in being underprepared.

Moreover, many students portrayed a reluctant attitude toward being part of the program and meeting with a "counselor" to discuss their difficulties despite the fact that engaging in individual conversations with students is the most effective way to determine specifics of the students' challenges. Consequently, the students generally are unable to facilitate success. Many students did not meet with the ATP until a month before the semester was over, reflecting feelings that they didn't perceive the services of the ATP to be beneficial even though they had not been adequately informed of the services offered.

CHAPTER 4 - Conclusion

Student success depends on the student; however, Academic Assistance Programs, similar to Kansas State University's Academic Transition Program, have an extraordinary opportunity to influence student success—and have the responsibility to do so.

Implications

Institutional Level

As this report has demonstrated, student success is a subjective idea that has been objectively quantified by higher education for various reasons—including measurement and accountability, and higher education has used retention statistics to achieve this means of assessment. However important retention might be, it is not the *Golden Egg* that it has been made out to be. A complete rethinking of student success needs to be formulated with retention being only one measure of assessment, as well as carrying less weight on student development. Retention is only a measure that demonstrates whether or not a student left the institution, and, subsequently, is more of an assessment of the institution's success at keeping students enrolled than that of the students' success.

A more "compassionate" and "willingness to help" mentality needs to be perpetuated on campuses of higher education as evidenced by a number of student reflections from the ATP, as well as Balduf's (2009) study of undergraduate underachievement at Queen Mary's College: many students reflected that a change in their own attitudes towards academic achievement as well as personal life satisfaction has made a significant effect on their success as college students. Similar to changing the attitudes of struggling students, affecting the overarching attitude of the campus culture toward facilitating student success could also be an important worthwhile task—regardless of the difficulty and bureaucracy that one will likely meet in opposition. One avenue for accomplishing a change in campus attitude is for the leadership of an institution to make it a point of emphasis that student learning and success comes first because the leadership's first and foremost responsibility is to its students. With this attitude resonating from the top down, academic assistance centers will be able to focus on the best predictors of student success—the psychosocial variables. Such a change in attitude will also allow AAC's

and professionals the freedom and drive to develop and initiate exercises, methodologies, and outcomes that are more consistent with what the literature points out as important to evaluate and foster, as well as give AAC's the ability to develop a reliable measure of success.

Programming Level

Student affairs personnel, especially those charged with assisting the successful progression of student development, have a need to develop assessments that measure the psychosocial learning factors that can be used to customize interventions to students' characteristics. The term *need* is emphasized because this is a moral obligation that is owed by the institution to the student. When an institution admits a student, the relationship between the institution and the student shifts from a relationship where the institution is putting its best foot forward to a relationship where the institution now has the responsibility to ensure assistance to each and every student allowed to study at the institution. The development of valid assessments that measure the effects of psychosocial factors on student success is a dire need because measuring student success is an ambiguous pursuit as there are many definitions of success. Measuring student success will continue to be based on retention measures until student affairs personnel can accurately measure and reflect student success that is more succinctly tied with actual student development.

Mutually constructing an accurate picture of the challenges that lead an individual student to need academic assistance is the first step to identifying which psychosocial variables need intervention exercises. Therefore, it would behoove counselors to listen intently to everything that a student is not verbally expressing, including paying attention to body language and promptness, as well as how attentive the student is in his or her interaction with academic counselors and programs. In spite of the contemporary literature focusing on psychosocial variables that affect student success, many students are completely oblivious to the relationship. Therefore, the major responsibilities of AAC's are to promote awareness and help students uncover the psychosocial factors that have affected their development in various areas of their lives.

Motivation continues to be a major issue and concern with multicultural, academic probation, and general undergraduates alike, as is evidenced by the wealth of psychological and

leadership research. As demonstrated in this report, intrinsic motivation serves as the preferred type of motivation in correlation with success, as opposed to extrinsic motivation. Understanding which of the two a particular student holds is pertinent to instilling an awareness and ethic that will perpetuate across all domains of the student's life and serve as a reference point for the counselor to provide intervention strategies.

In regards to students being underprepared, AAC's are relatively limited in their function. An outreach program or something similar could serve as an influential proactive intervention program. In using the term *outreach*, what is meant is intentionally targeting local high schools and working with their counseling staff to provide a consistent and holistic approach to prepare high school students for the challenges that are frequently experienced by college students, and, again, mainly focusing on the psychosocial variables that predict success in college. Moreover, these outreach programs should not be exclusive to high school seniors; they should encompass all high school grade levels because it is never too early to prepare for college.

The idea behind a heavy emphasis of awareness of psychosocial variables is not centralized to academic success. In addition, these psychosocial factors, identified earlier in the report, are also predictors of life satisfaction (Kim et al. In press).   Psychosocial variables can be learned as well as affected by the individual, and, therefore, are incredibly powerful tools for people to have as they experience difficulties and foster success in academics and in their lives.

Academic assistance programs should intentionally design and implement culturally sensitive programs and services because empowering all students should be a central philosophy to every student affairs office and department.

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