

Retention and Completion of Underrepresented Students: A Look at the Seattle Colleges

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Abstract

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Education

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the need for further attention and action towards creating effective retention efforts among underrepresented students in higher education given their underrepresentation in college completion. First, I present the current state of underrepresented students in higher education, highlighting the Hispanic/Latino experience, as a subgroup of historically underrepresented students, and emphasizing the need to examine community colleges as they are the primary higher education destination for these students. Second, I present literature describing best practices in retention and completion for underrepresented students in higher education and, additionally, best practices in retention and completion in community colleges across the nation. Third, I explore an urban community college system in Seattle, WA, in its effort to increase the retention and completion rates of their students, of which will be evaluated against literature supporting best practices. Finally, recommendations for future programming to address both the needs of this population of students and/or other underrepresented students to create better systems towards increasing retention and completion will be offered to the community colleges explored.

Higher education attainment continues to play an essential role in the quest for social mobility and economic stability in the United States. By 2018, 62% of jobs will require postsecondary education or training, (Zumeta, W, Callan, & Finney, 2012) further underscoring the need for an educated and/or trained populace. As the need grows, so does demand for institutions of higher education to open their doors to accommodate the growing diversity of our nation's population and subsequent students. While institutions of higher education, most notably community colleges, have done just that, substantial opportunity gaps remain in who achieves higher education in the United States. The diversity of student populations has grown substantially over the past several decades as college enrollment has increased.

Yet, higher education attainment has not kept pace with the growing number of students accessing college at higher rates than ever before. College access is not directly translating to college completion, most prominently among historically underrepresented students in higher education. This substantiates an issue, particularly in light of the nation's push for a more educated population and education's role in improving one's social and economic conditions (Zumeta, W, Callan, & Finney, 2012). It is expected that the number of minority students in higher education will continue increasing significantly across all racial/ethnic populations (John & Stage, 2014), hence the need to examine trends in higher education retention and completion among underrepresented students as a whole.

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the need for further attention and action towards creating effective retention efforts among underrepresented students in higher education given their underrepresentation in college completion. First, I present the current state of underrepresented students in higher education, highlighting the Hispanic/Latino experience, as a subgroup of historically underrepresented students, and emphasizing the need to examine

community colleges as they are the primary higher education destination for these students. Second, I present literature describing best practices in retention and completion for underrepresented students in higher education and, additionally, best practices in retention and completion in community colleges across the nation. Third, I explore an urban community college system in Seattle, WA, in its effort to increase the retention and completion rates of their students, of which will be evaluated against literature supporting best practices. Finally, recommendations for future programming to address both the needs of this population of students and/or other underrepresented students to create better systems towards increasing retention and completion will be offered to the community colleges explored.

### **Historically Underrepresented Students in Higher Education**

Historically underrepresented students in higher education face many barriers in realizing their goal of earning a college degree. As a result of these barriers, college completion rates for these students continue to be low. From the years of 1990 to 2013, the percentage of White, Black and Hispanic students between the ages of 25-29 who earned a bachelor's degree rose from 26-40% for Whites, 13-20% for Blacks, and 8-16% for Hispanics (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). According to this data, while the number of students earning a bachelor's degree has increased across the noted race/ethnicities, the gap between Whites and Hispanics widened from 18-25% as has the gap for other racial/ethnic populations including Blacks (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Furthermore, college completion rates among low-income populations of which encompass disproportionately high levels of underrepresented racial/ethnic minorities has also shown alarmingly low completion rates. Underrepresented students in higher education have been described in many ways from racial/ethnic minorities, to low-income and first generation status groups. While barriers to college access, retention and completion affect

many underrepresented students in higher education described above, the highlighted obstacles will use the Hispanic/Latino racial/ethnic population as an example in exploring the barriers, being as how they have been identified as faring the worst in educational attainment among underrepresented students in higher education (Fry, 2004)

Underrepresented racial/ethnic minority students in the United States constitute very diverse groups of people within themselves whether it is coming from immigrant backgrounds, to variations in socioeconomic status. Within this diversity exists variable outcomes to college access and completion, which becomes critically important when discussing underrepresented students as a whole and integral to the further evaluation of Hispanic/Latinos and other underrepresented populations. When it comes to college completion among Hispanic/Latino students, only a quarter earn a bachelor's degree within 10 years after leaving high school, compared to almost half of white students (Swail, Cabrera, Lee, & Williams, 2005). White students are completing college degrees at rates twice those of Hispanic/Latino students. This warrants an investigation into reasons for the substantial gap in college completion for Hispanic/Latino students compared to those of Whites. Topics related to higher education retention and completion among underrepresented students are discussed below highlighting issues most prominent among Hispanic/Latino students.

College preparedness is echoed in much of the literature today explaining college completion trends. College preparedness can be defined by academic preparedness and preparedness by other non-academic means. In the academic sense, research has found a strong correlation between adequate high school academic preparedness and greater levels of accessibility and completion of higher education (Goldrick-Rab, Carter, & Wagner, 2007). In this research, completion of first year algebra by the ninth grade of high school set a promising

trajectory towards greater post-secondary academic preparedness (Goldrick-Rab, Carter, & Wagner, 2007). Consistent with this research are others that have identified the completion of specific coursework to be adequately prepared to enter specific colleges/universities. There have been several investigations into the disconnect between the level and type of coursework needed in high school to be considered for admission to four-year universities. For example, in the state of Washington several high schools do not require the completion of two years of a world language to graduate, but they are needed to be both admitted and graduate from the University of Washington (The Washington State Board of Education, 2015). We see students lacking the necessary coursework needed to access four-year universities and subsequently needing to find ways to become prepared or not attend at all. Additionally, we are seeing students finish high school at levels well below college level in areas like math which also adds to their under preparedness (Goldrick-Rab, Carter, & Wagner, 2007).

Academic under preparedness for post-secondary education is increasingly resulting in students having to enroll in pre-college/remedial coursework. This is the case for both Hispanics/Latinos and the greater college-going population as a whole (Levin & Calcagno, 2008). Remedial coursework is generally noncredit bearing and thus does not count towards completion of a degree. As a result of taking remedial coursework, the amount of time required to complete a degree may be prolonged, which may play a role in completion rates. It was found that students who take at least one remedial course in college are less likely to graduate with a bachelor's degree, than students who did not have to take any remedial coursework (Moore, Slate, Edmonson, Combs, & Bustamante, 2010). At the community college level, remedial education could result in delaying a student's transfer to a four year university to obtain a

Bachelor's degree. It is clear college completion is affected by a student's academic preparedness prior to even starting at a college and/or university.

Richard Fry, in a 2004 report on *Latino Youth Finishing College* funded by the Pew Hispanic Institute, said "it is one thing to get into college, it quite another to complete," as he described the current situation Hispanic/Latino students face in their quest to earn a college degree. Fry's investigation into why we are observing college completion fail to keep pace with college access has become an important issue; one which is magnified within Hispanic/Latino students in higher education. Fry found 46% of Hispanic/Latino students left high school without completing Algebra 2, compared to 28% of white students. Given that Algebra 2 constitutes the preparatory course for college level math, the students who do persist to college are predictably left taking remedial math at rates higher than their white counterparts. Low levels of academic preparedness among Hispanic/Latino students exists at the high school level, prior to students even enrolling in college. 82% of white students graduate from high school on time compared to 67% of Hispanic/Latino students (Fry, 2004). Of those who do graduate high school, their academic preparedness appears to be a play a role in college completion. Swail, Cabrera, Lee, & Williams in 2005 found that academic preparedness played a vital role in post-secondary persistence for Latinos specifically, most notably by way of mathematics. In their study, 59% of Latino students were classified as being academically underprepared to enter post-secondary education just by their level of math completion alone (Swail, Cabrera, Lee, & Williams, 2005). Aside from being academically underprepared to enter college, Underrepresented students including Hispanic/Latino students have been shown to be underprepared in their understanding of what it takes to both access higher education as well as succeed it in.



The desire to complete is evident among college going students, yet completion is not realized for many, most notably historically underrepresented students. Hispanic/Latino students share similar aspirations for college degree completion as other underrepresented students in higher education. Studies have found the majority of Hispanics/Latinos who access and enter college have the intention of completing (Fry, 2004). Fry's research on Hispanic/Latino student's college perceptions has found disconnect between what students think is needed to attain a college education versus what really is (Fry, 2004). This disconnect could explain academic under preparedness as seen with math preparation and completion of language requirements to enter a four year university. Further, research has found underrepresented student's parent education level coupled with their parent's messages of encouragement towards completing a degree was associated positively with completion of a college degree (Arbona & Nora, 2007). Parents of Hispanic/Latino students have shown high levels of educational expectations for their children to achieve, but may not message it in a way that makes it easily relatable to a college going context (Padilla, 2007). According to Raymond Padilla's report on Hispanic/Latino student's quest to college, Hispanic/Latino students overwhelmingly indicated the important role their parent's support played in persisting in college.

Being a first generation college student is a barrier to college completion of which affects many underrepresented students in higher education. In Swail, Cabrera, Lee, & Williams (2005) research, only 14% of Hispanic/Latino student's parents held a Bachelors or higher degree. Hispanic/Latino student's high propensity towards being first-generation college students may potentially be contributing to their lack of academic preparedness and/or understanding of college systems once they do enroll. For Pierre Bourdieu, the ideas of social and cultural capital presented itself as a theoretical hypothesis making it possible to explain stratified educational

achievement related to being a first generation college student (Bourdieu, 2007). Social and Cultural Capital as described by Pierre Bourdieu provides us with a lens and foundation for further educational achievement analysis. Sociologist Grace Kao used the idea of Social Capital to designate its relevance to minority and immigrant student populations. In her research, Kao identifies social capital as a resource advantageous to educational outcomes for youth (Kao, 2004). Social capital as described by Bourdieu is the cumulative networks one has. It is through social networks and established ties which allows for greater access to resources which could prove to be beneficial in educational achievement (Kao, 2004). This transmission of social and cultural capital has been cited by many as playing an important role in understanding/making sense of Hispanic/Latino's low completion rates (Contreras, 2011). Additionally according to this research, having a parent who graduated college fosters college-going knowledge and networks which can be transmitted to children. Parents are able to more easily provide their children with the knowledge needed to access and navigate through the higher education system. Preparation for college both academically and socially as described above, play important roles in the evaluation of retention and completion for underrepresented students and Hispanic/Latinos. We are seeing high levels of Hispanic/Latinos who are first generation college students and who are entering college with low academic preparedness. Similar to college preparation, paying for college has been found as a resounding theme in college retention and completion investigations.

The cost of college continues to play a role in the retention and completion of all students in higher education. With the increasing cost of college, student are left making decisions on if they attend, where they attend, and what this enrollment in college looks like. In a 2003 study from the Pew Hispanic Research Center cited by Richard Fry, 77% of all students stated the cost

of tuition being a reason for not completing their degree or stopping their enrollment for a time (Fry, 2004). The cost of college plays a role in other decisions students make in both how they pay for college and support their families while going to college. While the cost of college appears to affect college retention among all students populations as a whole, low income students, of which encompass high levels of racial/ethnic minorities are further marginalized in college retention and completion by this barrier.

Contributing monetarily to the family is prevalent among the Hispanic/Latinos. This may play a role in the financial conditions lending itself to working while in school, of which may affect completion or a delay in college enrollment. Full time and continuous college enrollment have been cited as increasing the likelihood of persistence across all student populations (Swail, Cabrera, Lee, & Williams, 2005). This is an important topic when discussing Hispanic/Latino student retention, as their patterns of enrollment can be attributed to low persistence and completion rates (Arbona & Nora, 2007). Hispanics/Latino students have been found to be the race/ethnicity most inclined to work while in college and prior to college participation (Gandara & Contreras, 2009). Over half of Latinos students enrolled in higher education work more than part-time (Swail, Cabrera, Lee, & Williams, 2005). Working can many times translate to less than full time college enrollment and in other instances hinder the ability to successfully complete courses needed to complete a degree. This becomes harmful for completion rates when part-time enrollment is associated with lower completion rates (Gandara & Contreras, 2009). Research found college retention to be much higher for full time students versus part times ones; 60% to 41% (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2013). Continuous enrollment trends have also been found to affect college completion. Continuous college enrollment has been found to increase completion rates by 60% (Swail, Cabrera, Lee, & Williams, 2005). Propensity towards working

while going to school and attending part-time have been shown to affect Hispanic/Latino student trends in college completion and continuous enrollment.

Underrepresented students present a plethora of barriers to higher education retention and completion, some additional factors specific to Hispanic/Latino students involve family and citizenship status. Familial obligations and ties have been cited as integrally woven into a Hispanic/Latino student's experience, more so than other race/ethnicities. Hispanic/Latino students are more likely than other race/ethnicities to report dropping out of college for reasons related to familial obligations (Fry, 2004). They are also more likely to be the caretakers for their parents and more likely to have children while in college compared to white students (Fry, 2004). These various circumstances have been cited in creating conditions affecting overall retention and completion of Hispanic/Latino students.

Additionally, Hispanic/Latino students constitute a large portion of undocumented students in the United States. Depending on the state, undocumented students are generally allowed admission to college/universities but are left paying out of state and/or even international rates to attend college. This cost can end up being almost twice as much as what an in-state student would pay. Undocumented students are even more likely than other students to be working while attending college, and they have shown alarming trends in stopping out of college (Gandara & Contreras, 2009). Washington State is one of only a handful of states in the country that provide undocumented students both in-state tuition rates and state need grant funding. Still, community colleges enroll most of the nation's undocumented students, most likely because of their lower cost of attendance (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2013).

The type of higher education institutions all underrepresented students are accessing plays an important role in evaluating retention and completion rates (Fry, 2004). For Hispanic/Latinos in particular, it was found in 2004 that 66% of students who accessed higher education enrolled in open-door institutions most commonly identified as community colleges, compared to fewer than 45% of White students with similar levels of academic preparation (Fry, 2004). Hispanic/Latinos are more likely than other race/ethnicities to attend institutions with lower tuition costs of which tend to be public two year community colleges (Swail, Cabrera, Lee, & Williams, 2005). This statistic becomes concerning when half of all community college students do not persist to a second year of college compared to one-fourth of students at a four year college/university (Kirst, 2004). Retention rates at four-year colleges/universities are greater than those of two-year community colleges which could potentially harm Hispanic/Latino and other underrepresented students who do go on to college (Arbona & Nora, 2007). Swail, Cabrera, Lee, & Williams (2005) research found that Latino students who started at a four-year college/university versus a two year community college increased their likelihood of completing a bachelor's degree by 29%. Other research, most notably by Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) as described in (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2013) found that enrolling in a two year college reduced the likelihood of completing a bachelor degree by 15-20%. Hispanic/Latino students are disproportionately enrolling in institutions found to have low completion rates which has a profound effect on their likelihood of completing a bachelor's degree overall (Fry, 2004). Fry found completion rates among Hispanic/Latino students to be lower than White students who had the same level of academic preparation for college and contributes this trend to Hispanic/Latino's propensity towards enrolling in colleges with overall lower retention rates like two-year community colleges. For community colleges specifically, 23% of white students who start at a

community college finish a bachelor's degree, compared to 13% of Hispanic/Latino students (Swail, Cabrera, Lee, & Williams, 2005)

While community colleges tend to be the destination for many Hispanic/Latinos for academic reasons, such as remediation, they also appeal to the Hispanic/Latino community and others for reasons outside of academics. One, community colleges tend to be physically located in closer proximity to student's homes versus four year universities. Given Hispanic/Latino's students propensity towards working while going to school, community colleges tend to provide students with more flexibility conducive to working, such as offering evening and online classes which may play a role in their appeal. Two, community colleges are characterized by their open access practices which provide access to any student interested in pursuing post-secondary education, making them attractive destinations for students with various needs not traditionally accessible at four-year colleges/universities (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2013). As noted earlier, they house over 60% of Hispanic/Latino students who pursue higher education (Kirst, 2004). Students attending community colleges represent increasing diversity on all fronts, from being racially/ethnically diverse, non-traditional in their age, working and going to school simultaneously, and many times needing remedial education. These factors have been highlighted as being major barriers to college completion (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2013). Given the role community colleges play in underrepresented student's college enrollment, including Hispanic/Latinos, an analysis of their programs and effectiveness are necessary. Current literature on best practices for retaining students in higher education has taken many forms in addressing retention of underrepresented students. The next section will explore the current literature of best practices addressing both the retention of underrepresented students in

higher education as a whole, as well as retention specifically at community colleges in an effort to set the stage for evaluating the efforts at community colleges in Seattle, WA.

### **Retention and Completion Best Practices**

Understanding the ways students engage with the college campus is a resounding theme in best practice literature involving the retention of underrepresented students in higher education. Many of the theories associated with engagement stem from Vincent Tinto's work in correlating a student's departure with a student's lack of connectedness to the institution (Braxton, Doyle, Hartley, Hirschy, & Jones, 2013). As a result of students feeling disconnected from an institution, they subsequently are not integrated into the college campus. Additionally, Tinto's later work describes a student's interaction with the college whereas students do not internalize a commitment to the institution resulting in students leaving (Braxton, Doyle, Hartley, Hirschy, & Jones, 2013). While many scholars criticize Tinto's theory's applicability to unique student populations, they agree with the overall premise of the importance of evaluating how students engage and connect with institutions of higher education. A national study on retention from first to second year of college found one of the strongest predictors of retention being engagement in academic activities outside of the classroom (DeAngelo, 2013). This concept is particularly critical for historically underrepresented students who have been found to be least likely to participate in learning opportunities outside of the classroom at predominantly white institutions (Kinzie, et al., 2008). Additionally, students of color have been found to be less likely to graduate if they perceived lack of support from their college environment (Rankin & Reason, 2005). Best practice literature emphasizes the need for institutions to provide culturally relevant events and spaces for students of color to be feel represented, involved and connected to the campus (Oseguera, Locks, & Vega, 2009). Institutions who have been

identified as enrolling a critical mass of students of color and subsequently qualifying as a Minority Serving Institutions have been found to provide services that engage students effectively by providing culturally relevant activities, learning experiences, and supporting the recruitment of faculty of color (Cunningham & Leegwater, 2010). Identifying a student's level of engagement is the function of a properly organized campus culture of which involves a committed faculty and staff invested in the greater goal of engaging students. This idea has been echoed time and again as a best practice among institutions with high completion rates.

It takes a village to raise a child. This notion imparts itself to institutions of higher education that are effective in retaining and completing students. In a Community College Research Center (CCRC) report on Redesigning Community Colleges for Completion, common themes found to be effective in an institution's practices for retaining students was; one, the implementation of initiatives done in concert with one another; two, a committed leadership of who impart a culture of commitment to faculty and staff and three, continuous evaluation and evidence based improvement (Jenkins, 2011). Others have echoed the need for college constituents to be connected in order to effectively address student's needs (Kinzie et., al. 2008). The Achieving the Dream model, aimed at improving the educational outcomes for low income and students of color by supporting the reform of 100 community colleges, also identified the need to involve faculty in the creation and maintenance of initiatives aimed at retention in its initial evaluation of implementing best practice initiatives (Jenkins, 2011).

Using an organizational theory as described by (Levin, Cox, Cerven, & Harberler, 2010), the community colleges can be characterized as an organizations comprised of departments and/or organizations within themselves that contribute to the main purpose of the greater comprehensive system. Given the tendency for community colleges to provide educational



pathways to growing diversity and large numbers of underrepresented students who possess a number of unique challenges in higher education attainment, organization theory suggests the need for organizations and/or departments to examine their roles and work functions in adapting to the needs of the populations they serve (Levin, Cox, Cerven, & Harberler, 2010). In Levin et. al's (2010) research in identifying characteristics of successful and adaptable programming in California's community colleges, the idea of "shared expectations" resonated as a common thread in the ability for organizations to refocus their practices towards greater student success and retention. As described above, the need to engage students while ensuring institutions have committed themselves to a common goal of retention, serve as a backbone for the implementation of specific practices found to highly impact a student's retention specifically at community colleges. Those practices are described below.

### **Orientations**

Orientations sessions or programs have long been cited as integral to the retention of college students, most particularly, first generation college students of which are largely housed in community colleges (Boylan & Saxson, 2002). As described previously, first generation students tend to lack the capital gained from their parent's ability to help them navigate college attributed to their own higher educational attainment. Orientation sessions or programs create conditions allowing for students to becoming better acquainted with the college campus and culture. Additionally, orientations create an intentional space for student's needs to be highlighted and acted upon prior to starting college. Orientations have been used in this way to identify additional interventions needed for the students to succeed (Allen, Robbins, Casillas & Oh, 2008). Typical to the format of orientations is the introduction to the college campuses' organization such as providing a tour and explaining how to access particular resources such as

tutoring, advising, counseling and financial aid. Orientations can take various forms whether it is a single event lasting just a few hours, a summer bridge session, to a whole semester or quarter of orientation embedded in a student success course. Regardless of the format, orientations increase persistence rates for those who participate in them (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2015). Research by (Gardner, 1998), cited by Boylan & Saxon in 2002 found the ongoing use of components found in orientations as part of an ongoing student success course showed even higher levels of retention among underprepared students versus those who did not participate in such courses (Boylan & Saxon, 2002). Student success courses are also among best practices at community colleges (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2015).

### **Student Success Courses/First Year Experience**

Similar to orientations, student success courses can take many forms and have been cited as a best practice in retaining underrepresented students. They are also commonly referred to as first year college experience courses, college success courses, human development strategies, or housed under the umbrella term of a first year college experience. Regardless of their title, they are comprised of similar components. Common to them are the extension of general orientation components such as introducing campus resources and programs but are extended for a longer period of time versus a one-time orientation. Many times they in the form of a credit bearing course. Additionally, student success courses have introduced student success concepts such as improving ones time management, study skills and educational goal planning through the use of an advisor and/or counselor. Much of the literature describing student success courses has acknowledged their ability to connect students in a way that fosters both the integration of students academically and socially (Valentine, et al., 2011). Student success courses like

orientations have been found valuable for underrepresented students who may lack the cultural capital, academic preparedness and overall lack of information needed to succeed in college (O'Gara, Karp, & Hughes, Student Success Courses in Community College, 2009). Additionally, time management and study skill components of student success courses have been identified as crucial for retaining students who work while going to school (O'Gara, Karp, & Hughes, Student Success Courses in Community College, 2009). Finally, further research has found the significant role student success courses and/or first year experiences play in fostering the creation of learning communities and connecting students. While learning communities have been cited as a best practice in themselves, they have been included in the overall first year experience for the purpose of this paper. Connections made as a result of student success courses helped students make both connections with peers that transcended the courses itself, but also fostered a sense of integration with the college campus (O'Gara, Karp, & Hughes, Student Success Courses in Community College, 2009). For students in remedial coursework, student success courses paired with remedial classes have been shown to foster the formation of learning communities and play a positive role in the retention of students in those courses (Kinzie, et al., 2008). Both orientations and student success courses/first year experiences, provide college faculty, staff and students the opportunity and space to evaluate a student's need for further interventions. Early interventions by way of assessing one's academic preparedness and encouraging the completion of remedial coursework if applicable, has also been cited as a best practice in retaining underrepresented students in higher education and more explicitly, community colleges (Kinzie, et al., 2008).

### **Effective Remedial Programs**

With almost half of all students entering college require some degree of remedial education and most of them concentrated at community colleges (Parsad & Lewis, 2003), an evaluation of effective/best practices in both the assessment of student's academic preparedness and the execution of remedial programs has been discussed in many mediums describing best practices at community colleges. With very few students in remedial classes completing college (Braxton, Doyle, Hartley, Hirschy, & Jones, 2013), early interventions on all fronts are required to help identify early who requires interventions and what type. While there is ongoing debate on the validity and accuracy of placement tests, there is a general consensus on the need to assess a student's placement and assess it early (Kinzie, et al., 2008) as a means to begin a student on their educational path towards completion. Others have professed the need to align college assessment standards with those of high schools as a mean to better prepare students to college entrance (Braxton, Doyle, Hartley, Hirschy, & Jones, 2013), contributing to movements known as P-20 pipelines. Mandatory assessment and placement has been found to be a best practice in implementing effective remedial education programs (Fike & Fike, 2008). Research conducted by Fike & Fike (2008), found the completion of a reading remedial course in the first semester of student's enrollment was a significant indicator of overall completion. Successful completion of remedial coursework has been cited by many as a positive indicator of overall retention and completion. Structured remedial programs that are well coordinated and whose philosophy and execution is clearly communicated to students and faculty has been cited as a best practice in delivering remedial education (Boylan & Saxson 1999). Effective remedial education courses are key in the retaining underrepresented students in higher education and overall completion of students. Evaluation of their effectiveness is ongoing and evolving, yet a best practices of

community college retention and completion stress the importance of evaluating the success of remedial courses offered (Boylan & Saxson, 1999).

Literature describing best practices in helping retain and complete students has historically evaluated four year universities, whose environments and students are vastly different from community colleges. The need to examine various community college's methods towards implementing and evaluating best practices is critical. The next section will explore what the Seattle Colleges, an urban community college system in Seattle, Washington, are doing in an effort to retain underrepresented students in higher education highlighting and evaluating their alignment and implementation of various best practices described above.

### **The Community Colleges of Seattle, Washington**

The Seattle College's District, the largest community college district in the state of Washington, is comprised of North, Central, and South Seattle Colleges, educating nearly 50,000 students per year (Seattle Colleges, 2015). Each of the three colleges is located in different neighborhoods in the Seattle area. Like many two-year community colleges across the country, the Seattle Colleges are open access institutions providing a variety of educational pathways. These pathways include programs for basic education, English as a second language, continuing education, career training (also known as professional/technical training), and preparation for transferring to a four-year college/university (Seattle Colleges, 2015). Very recently the colleges created Bachelor's degrees, geared at providing a pathway for students who have obtained a profession/technical degree (Seattle Colleges, 2015). Given the diversity of the Seattle area, each College's design reflects its community and is uniquely designed to meet their community's needs.

The first of the three colleges established was Seattle Central College (Central). Central is located in the most urban part of Seattle offering a wide range of programs from transfer degrees, profession/technical training in areas such as culinary arts and apparel design, to offering their first Bachelor of Applied Science degree (BAS) in Behavioral Science (Seattle Colleges, 2015). Similar to the other two campuses, its courses tend to be offered during the day with many options for students to complete particular courses entirely online. Five miles north of Central resides North Seattle College (North). Like Central, North offers pathways to transfer, professional/technical programs in areas like Nanotechnology and Real Estate, and two BAS degrees in Application Development and International Business. North has a large online student population which has paved the way to offer a fully online Associate of Arts transfer degree. South Seattle College (South), approximately fifteen miles south of North Seattle College, is touted as the most diverse campus by way of racial composition. Again, offering pathways to transfer, profession/technical training and a BAS degree in Hospitality Business Management, South's relatively large enrollments in profession/technical training areas is noteworthy. A chart of their detailed demographics are in figure 1.1. Aside from providing a variety of educational pathways for students, the Seattle Colleges deliver specific programming given the indicated demographic information. These programs attempt to address the needs of underrepresented students in higher education present at each of the unique college campuses.

Figure 1.1: Numbers based on most current year data was available. Blank spaces indicate no data readily available

### Seattle Colleges Demographic Information

	South	Central	North
Total Student Population*	14,800	16,680	15,457
Average Age	29.3	27	30.8
% Fulltime Enrollment	43%	46%	30%
Online (e-learning) Students	3,313	3,134	6,609
<b>Student Ethnicity</b>			
African American	21%	18%	
Asian Pacific Islander	26%	21%	
Caucasian	37%	44%	
Hispanic	12%	11%	
Native American	2%	2%	
Other/Multiracial	2%	3%	
Not Reported		1%	
<b>Faculty/Staff</b>			
% Full Time Faculty		27%	29%
Faculty of Color			

(Seattle Colleges, 2015)

South's diverse racial/ethnic landscape, along with its physical location is underscored by their extensive targeted programming aimed at retaining underrepresented students, in comparison to its sister colleges. In 2008, South implemented the 13th Year Promise Scholarship, a part of a national community college programming initiatives known as Institutional Postsecondary Opportunity Programs (POPs). The intention of the program is to increase the number of underrepresented students who access and complete higher education from their local community, by proving local high school students free tuition for their first year at South (South Seattle College, 2015). South's physical location encompasses a large percentage of students of color who were found to be accessing and completing college at lower rates than other parts of Seattle (The Road Map Project, 2015), hence the impetus for creating the program at South (South Seattle College, 2015). In order to receive the scholarship, students

must remain full time and be continuously enrolled throughout the year, which is consistent with Swail, Cabrera, Lee, & Williams's (2005) research on the increased persistence rates among those who are full time and continuously enrolled. Students are able to use the scholarship for any educational program at South, but it covers only tuition and not any other additional costs such as books, living expenses and other fees. The program has produced promising results in both widening access and increasing completion rates of students when compared to the general South student population (South Seattle College, 2015). The program's structure attempts to address barriers underrepresented students face in completing college by encouraging students to stay enrolled full time, be continuously enrolled in their time at South, and helping students finance their education through a tuition free scholarship.

As an extension to the 13<sup>th</sup> Year Scholarship program, South designed the Readiness Academy Program in an effort to increase the preparedness of their potential 13<sup>th</sup> Year Scholars. The Readiness Academy was recently implemented at North and is not currently present at Central. This is probably because of the difference in leadership priorities at the different colleges. The Readiness Academy, like the 13<sup>th</sup> Year Scholarship Program, was created in partnership with the Seattle College's catchment area high schools. South and North Readiness Academy Advisors provide their catchment area high school students the tools to enroll in the Seattle Colleges by helping them apply for college, apply for financial aid and prepare academically for the college's placement test through a preparatory boot camp. Additionally, students who choose to attend South are required to attend a summer bridge orientation aimed at acclimating students to the campus culture. The Readiness Academy exemplifies an initiative strategically designed to increase both the academic preparedness of students entering college, but also providing students with an opportunity to become better integrated and familiar with the



college campus. Both of these practices speak to barriers seen in college retention and completion for underrepresented students as described by Goldrick-Rab, Carter, & Wagner (2007). By integrating an orientation component to the program, the 13<sup>th</sup> Year Scholarship program and the Readiness Academy are exemplifying a best practices on a small scale as supported by (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2015) being as how they only serve a small number of students.

Another potential key component to the program's success is its emphasis on early intervention. Supported by findings by Kinzie, et al., (2008), the program assesses a student's academic preparedness early in an effort to provide adequate support for starting college. Additionally, by applying the Readiness Academy while students are in high school, students are able to be identified early as being at-risk or needing further interventions for future success. While on a small scale, the 13<sup>th</sup> Year Scholarship Program and the Readiness Academy demonstrate a variety of best practices being implemented at South Seattle College.

South is also home to three federally funded TRIO programs which are designed to provide college access and success support to first generation students, low income students and students with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). These competitive federal grants are awarded to colleges that have documented need for program services which include but are not limited to providing qualifying students with wrap around assistance in the completing their education programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). TRIO counselors work intensively with students in the program to ensure they have the resources they need to be successful, whether it is financial literacy workshops, one on one tutoring, mental health counseling, academic advising, or mentoring. Several studies conducted on the effectiveness of TRIO programs have found positive effects on student persistence, retention and overall student

success for students in the programs (The Pell Institute, 2009). The TRIO-Student Success Services program which serves currently enrolled students at South embeds various best practices components into its' model. Like the 13<sup>th</sup> Year Program, TRIO programs mandate orientation as a part of their model. Additionally, TRIO students are required to meet with their advisor/counselor every quarter to ensure they are track and to assess challenges and barriers to college completion. While again, students in TRIO programs constitute a small number of students at South like the 13<sup>th</sup> Year Program, these small scale programs showcase a number of best practices in retaining underrepresented students in higher education and have shown to be effective models.

Given South's large percentage of Asian and Pacific Islander (AAPI) students (26%), South was awarded an AANAPISI (Asian American Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institution) Grant, a five-year two million dollar federal grant to support student retention and success of underserved Asian American and Pacific Islander students and designated as a Minority Serving Institution (South Seattle College, 2015). Following suit with many of the best practice components highlighted in the 13<sup>th</sup> Year Program and TRIO, AAPI students are provided targeted programming aimed at meeting students' specific needs. What sets South's college-wide AANAPISIS designations services apart from other targeted programming, is South's ability to provide extensive culturally relevant programming specific to AAPI students. Cited as a best practice in student engagement, as described by Oseguera, Locks, & Vega (2009), Rankin & Reason (2005), and others who have described the success of Minority Serving Institutions, the AANAPISI designation at South embeds culturally relevant activities into their general practices such as advising, orientation and students and staff professional development. Additionally, South actively recruits faculty of color who are able to relate culturally with their

student population, supporting research showing student's of color's propensity towards being retained if they have role models, faculty and staff who are like them (Cunningham & Leegwater, 2010). South Seattle College's programming for retaining underrepresented students is reflected in their student population's high propensity towards being of color and first generation compared to its sister colleges. Consequently, South provides programming that is more robust than the other two colleges. For example, their MSI designation allows for funds to be specifically utilized for retaining underrepresented AAPI students. Also, federally funded TRIO programs of which are only awarded to institutions with high percentages of first generation and low income students, provides South students additional staff and resources for retention.

Seattle Central College's student demographics are similar to those at South with both colleges housing over 50% students of color, but surprisingly does not offer as robust programming as South. This may be because of its' lack of MSI designation coupled with leadership priorities. Similar to South however, Central houses a number of state and federally funded programs aimed at increasing college access and retention rates for specific populations. Central houses the oldest TRIO-Student Support Services program in the state of Washington given the college was established earlier than South. This specific type of TRIO program, similar to South, aims to serve low income, first generation or disabled student populations of which are largely students of color. Central's TRIO program reports high levels of retention among those in the program, most likely due to its' structure which applies similar best practices as South's TRIO programs described above. While not specifically targeting any one underrepresented student population, Central's multicultural services office supports students of color, by being receptive to their needs through promoting culturally diverse programming on

campus (Seattle Central College, 2015). Supporting work by Oseguera, Locks, & Vega (2009) on student engagement, Central's multicultural programming exhibits best practice by being a culturally responsive environment.

Finally, North, the least diverse in its racial/ethnic composition, provides the least amount of programming. Aside from the Readiness Academy described previously, North provides targeted programming for working students. Given that 70% of students at North attend part time (see figure 1.1) and a large percentage of those do so in the evening (22%), North provides more evening and online classes, compared to South and Central. North's robust evening and online degree offerings serve students that are unable to take classes during the traditional daytime scheduling of classes. Research has shown higher level of success when they are fully versus part-time enrolled, therefore North's alternative form of offering courses counters best practices for that group of students.

All three of the Seattle Colleges serve underrepresented students in higher education. However, given the variations in demographics, we see programming present more so at one college over another. For example, South's comparatively more diverse campus has brought about an MSI designation along with other state and federally funded programs such as TRIO. While Central has TRIO, Central has had to target other groups of underrepresented students via their multicultural office. The present programming demonstrates various best practices in retention, however the colleges have lacked the ability to bring these practices to a larger scale. With the continuously changing landscapes of student enrollment in higher education such as the increasing diversity, and the high propensity of students needing remedial education of which are housed at community colleges, the Seattle Colleges District alongside North, South, and Central have taken new approaches in student success of which incorporate best practices already seen in

the targeted programming above while attempting to create institutionalized and district-wide practices found to be effective in retention and completion. An intensified focus on retaining students in the quest to improve college completion rates has manifested itself in a variety of ways recently supported by the nation's momentum towards greater completion and the state of Washington's momentum towards appropriating state funding on completion. The next section introduces the Seattle College's current statistics in retention and completion, followed by an investigation into the ways the Seattle Colleges as a district have come together to address retention and completion in the most current contexts.

In 2013, North Seattle College, as part of a strategic plan to address the institution's core themes of Advancing Student Success, Excelling in Teaching and Learning, and Building Community, established standard data on a variety of institutional trends. Among a variety of data points, North found 22% of their degree seeking students earned a degree/certification within three years; 15% of students completed their college level math course required for program completion within eight quarters; and 6% of students who started three levels below the college-level math needed to complete their program progressed through the pre-college math sequence within six quarters (North Seattle College, 2015). North's degree completion rates fall 10% below the state average of 32.9% (The National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, 2015). As noted in North's data, students who started in pre-college math, three levels below college level have dismally low rates of completion of which parallels national trends in academically underprepared students in higher education. South and Central colleges report similar rates of persistence and completion (Seattle Colleges, 2015).

Seattle Colleges District data, which pulls data from all three colleges, found students of color represented 93% of students enrolled in the college's pre-college/basic skills classes

(Seattle Colleges, 2015). This alarming statistic illustrates how concentrated the pre-college/remedial education courses at the Seattle Colleges are with students of color across all three colleges. As a result of this data and both the state and nation's momentum towards increasing college completion, the Seattle Colleges have attempted to address the low completion rates of students, with a highlighted focus on students who have placed into or are currently taking pre-college level courses of which disproportionately affect students of color (Seattle Colleges, 2015). Until this point, the Seattle College's methods for retaining underrepresented students comprised of piecemeal programming present at one college and not another of which was largely dependent on the leadership priorities at the colleges. While these programs addressed various needs of students in their programs and supported best practices in retention, they did not have a strategic focus on remedial education or have a district leadership backing.

Most recently, with the help of a three million dollar Bill and Melinda Gates Grant called *Pathways to Completion*, has the district developed strategies to improve completion rates of the colleges overall, by specially targeting students in pre-college/remedial coursework. As a result of the grant and supported by best practice literature, the Seattle Colleges were charged with requiring all students in pre-college/remedial course to participate in mandatory orientation, offer accelerated pre-college math sequences, provide students intensive/intrusive advising and student success courses and finally, implement an academic early alert system which identifies students who were at risk of not persisting. Given the unique characteristics of each college, the implementation of the *Pathways to Completion* initiatives have manifested themselves differently at each campus. The following section illustrates how those initiatives have been implemented. Additionally, the district's ability to aid the institutionalization of some of the

initiatives, but fail to implement others sets the stage to make recommendations to the Seattle College's retention and completion efforts in the future.

### **Mandatory Orientations**

Requiring students participate in an orientation is key to increasing persistence rates of students (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2015). The Pathways to Completion's mandate of requiring orientation for students made some important strides in institutionalizing orientation practices across the district. Prior to instituting this initiative, Central was the only campus of the three colleges that required orientation. Additionally, as described earlier, various programs targeting retention of underrepresented students also incorporated orientation as a part of their programs. Currently, all Seattle College's students who state they have never attended college in their application for admission are required to complete either an online or on campus orientation prior to enrollment with 80% of students who complete the mandated orientation doing so online (North Seattle College, 2015). The influence the grant has had on changing college priorities around completion shows how influential a district level decision had on institutionalizing a best practices not previously set before. Jenkin's review of successful retention and completion programming at community colleges echoes this sentiment (Jenkins, 2011). While data has not yet been collected on whether mandatory orientation has played a role in increasing retention rates at the Seattle Colleges, preliminary anecdotal accounts with students who have completed orientation are positive. Students report greater understanding of college systems and feelings of connectedness to the college. Sentiments found to increase propensity towards completion and supporting orientation's effectiveness.

**Intensive/Intrusive Advising**

Supported by literature emphasizing the need to engage students as well as providing students with continuous resources and support, the implementation of an intensive/intrusive advising model exemplifies this well. As a part of the grant's emphasis on pre-college/remedial education, the Seattle Colleges implemented intensive/intrusive advising services to pre-college/remedial classes. Similar to programming present at South and Central which targets specific groups of underrepresented students, the grant targeted specific classrooms of pre-college/remedial math students. Advisors were assigned to a specific classes where they providing outreach and targeted advising to students in the classroom. Similar to components found in student success courses, the goal of the model was to ensure students in pre-college/remedial courses were connected with a specific person on campus who can provide them with information about the college and help them navigate college systems. Additionally, advisors would aid students in the creation of their educational plan, helping students maintain a focused educational pathway which is a significant practice in retention efforts (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2015). Advising services have always been available at the Seattle Colleges and were mandatory via specialized programs like TRIO and the 13<sup>th</sup> Year Scholars. The grant broadened the scope in mandating advising as a part of the pre-college/remedial math experience.

**Accelerated Pre-College/Remedial Math Sequences**

As a result of the grant, Central has been active in revamping their pre-college/remedial math sequencing of which South and North have emulated to a degree. Following best practices stating the importance of offering effective remedial programming for students in community



colleges (Braxton, Doyle, Hartley, Hirschy, & Jones, 2013) the college have been active in experimenting with a variety of pre-college/remedial math sequencing in an effort to increase completion rates for these students. For example, Central has implemented the STATWAY math sequencing in an effort to progress students more quickly through the pre-college traditional math sequences with funding from the grant. The STATWAY model is a series of three courses offered in sequential order. The model requires students stay continuously enrolled in the series of courses until completion of their college level math which is the third class of the three class sequence. This cohort style course provides not only a pathway to complete college level math sooner, but does so in a format that allows students to make connections with their peers, both being best practices for retention and completion (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2015). Additionally, the course's requirement of staying continuously enrolled exemplifies a best practice in retention and completion as students who are continuously enrolled have higher completion rates (Swail, Cabrera, Lee, & Williams, 2005). South and North have opted to offering a different mode of pre-college/remedial math course which involves a self-paced computerized modular application. The course, called Preparatory Math, assesses a student's math level at the beginning of the course and allows for students to progress through their pre-college/remedial math series at their own pace through the quarter.

The three initiatives implemented as a result of the grant/district's mandate of focusing efforts on pre-college/remedial students demonstrate both the district's movements towards institutionalizing best practices in retention and completion of students at community colleges across the nation, but also validate the need for initiatives to come from a greater district level push. The Gate's Pathways to Completion grant provided monetary sustenance and documented best practices for the colleges to embark in strategic initiatives to improve retention rates of

students in pre-college/remedial courses. These initiatives have been shown to help in retention and completion for underrepresented students in higher education based on literature on best practices among community college retention and completion and are anticipated to show increases in retention and completion rates at the Seattle Colleges. However, there are a number of retention initiatives proposed by the Pathways to Completion grant such as the use of student success courses and the academic early warning system that were not implemented. Additionally, some of the initiatives that were implemented were done in a way to accommodate the college's current policies. This discussion helps lay the foundation for evaluating the Seattle College's practices and making recommendations for further programming and/or efforts. Those initiatives not implemented are explored below.

### **Pathways to Completion/District Initiative Failures**

While the grant/district has had success implemented various practices, they have failed to implement others. For example, mandating the use of orientations at each of the colleges. While the grant/district now mandates orientation for all new students, the grant/district has failed to mandate orientation for **all students** and most importantly, for students in **pre-college/remedial coursework**. With the focus of the grant being on students in pre-college/remedial math who are documented as faring worst in completion rates, one would think the mandated orientations would target those students. A potential reason for the failure of orientation being required of students in pre-college/remedial math, is the college's difficulty in identifying who these students are. As open access institutions the Seattle College's current policies do not require students placement test before enrolling. As a result, identifying what students are in most need of services becomes difficult. Additionally, the Seattle Colleges are currently funded by way of the number of students who enroll in their institutions, versus

retention and completions rates, (The Washington State Board of Education, 2015) further complicating the college's priorities around institutionalizing practices such as orientation and testing. Kinzie, et al., and Fike & Fike (2008) emphasize the importance of early intervention and the increased completion rates among students who complete their pre-college/remedial courses at the front end of their educational trajectory. While smaller programs at the Seattle Colleges such as the 13<sup>th</sup> Year Scholarship program through the Readiness Academy have incorporated mandatory placement testing as a part of their models, the Seattle College's as a whole have not addressed this issue. Another component to the Pathways to Completion initiatives that were implemented, but did not fully realized was the development of a sustained cohorts of students resulting from the intensive/intrusive advising practices.

As a component of intensive/intrusive advising model, the Seattle Colleges hoped cohorts of students and academic advisors would develop. Academic advisors would be paired with the students they advised from the beginning of the pre-college math sequences to completion. Through this model, academic advisors would have the opportunity to develop relationships with students in an effort to increase their persistence, creating models similar in structure to those of the 13<sup>th</sup> Year Scholarship and TRIO. Given the vast attrition documented at the Seattle Colleges among those in pre-college/remedial courses, coupled with academic advisors needing to maintain their caseloads of students not enrolled in pre-college/remedial courses, it became difficult to sustain the model.

An additional barrier to sustaining the intensive advising model was faculty/instructor involvement in allowing academic advisors and students to interact as a part of the classroom experience. Creating relationships with pre-college/remedial faculty/instructors was an important competent to the success of the model. Faculty/instructors worked with academic

advisors to provide classroom time for advisors to provide information to students as well as encouraged students, and in some instances mandated students, meet with an academic advisor during the quarter. As faculty turnover increased, support for intensive advising services decreased. A key player in the development and sustainability of initiatives, as seen in the sustainability of the intensive/intrusive advising model, as well as being documented as a best practice among institutions that have been successful in implementing high impact initiatives is the inclusion of faculty/instructors (Jenkins, 2011). Until this point, faculty/instructors have not been part of the discussion around the implementation of district-wide initiatives around completion and retention at the Seattle Colleges. Understanding how their involvement affects retention and completion are integral in further exploring the reasons various initiatives failed at the Seattle Colleges.

Further expanding on faculty/instructor driven initiatives, the use of new pre-college/remedial math course sequencing such as STATWAY and the Preparatory Math courses are present at Central and South, but not at North. Additionally, initiatives such as offering student success courses and executing an academic early warning system in the classroom were not offered at all. Each of these initiatives which have been found to be best practices are also initiatives that are largely dependent on faculty implementation. When it comes to the implementation of initiatives that are faculty driven versus student services driven, implementation of initiatives varies by college or have been found not to be implemented at all. While it could be debated as to why this is the case at the Seattle Colleges, it is a clear that faculty buy-in is integral to the success of initiatives at institutions found to be effective in retention and completion (Jenkins, 2011). While the Seattle Colleges/District have may failed to implement various best practices encouraged by the grant as described above, they have made

considerable gains in institutionalizing others. The next section will explore ways the Seattle Colleges/District can continue making strides towards addressing how we can increase the number of underrepresented students at the Seattle Colleges/District are retained and seen through completion.

### **Recommendations for the Future**

Education reform is on the horizon, especially for community colleges since they play an integral role in providing access and opportunity. By providing educational pathways not found at traditional four year universities, such as pre-college courses and basic studies, students deficient in those academic areas are able to achieve their desired level. Additionally, community colleges offer technical training for students to acquire specific skills for employment that does not require a bachelor's degree. In this respect, community colleges are of value in providing higher education training and opportunities. Also, community colleges continue to be a destination for an increasing number of underrepresented students in higher education, a fact that heightens their importance in creating broad opportunities and access. The challenge is how to continue to make strides towards increasing retention and completion rates among these students as the completion gap continues to grow. While the Seattle Colleges/District have implemented various strategies to improve retention and completion rates of their students, the need to expand on these initiatives and reprioritize operations is essential to the future success of the colleges/district and subsequently the educational advancement of underrepresented students.

As open access institutions, North, South and Central allow for any student over eighteen years of age to enroll in classes upon completion of an application for admission. This practice

provides educational opportunities for students who may not have accessed higher education, but at the same time may create conditions which hinder completion by not properly addressing student's needs from the onset of their enrollment. The District's emphasis and priority on offering a plethora of programs with no strategic focus on retaining and completing is a problem needing attention.

For instance, the Seattle Colleges/District was founded on the basis of providing open access colleges where students of all levels can pursue their education, and to this day maintains its founding mission of providing quality educational opportunities to the Seattle Community (Seattle Colleges, 2015). As such, the District's 2015-2020 Educational Master Plan, which provides a broad framework for directing the District's priorities reflects this mission. The District's Educational Master Plan outlines ten strategic points to drive future action. Of these ten points, only one explicitly refers to completion (Seattle Colleges, 2015). Since current institutionalized practices regarding retention and completion have been driven by district-wide endorsement, as with the Pathways to Completion Grant, the need for the district to explicitly prioritize retention and completion in its master plan is essential.

It is not until retention and completion are at the forefront of district strategic planning that North, South and Central will adopt its significance and make decisions based on this priority. Prioritizing retention and completion as a part of the District's strategic plan could be the first step in promoting the development and sustainment of retention and completion practices at the Seattle Colleges. As a result of this reprioritization, the following recommendations are offered to the Seattle Colleges/District as a starting point to future programming.

1. Clearly identify students' educational intentions and needs.
2. Track all students' educational progress.
3. Identify the role faculty play in retention and completion.

The Seattle Colleges/District have made considerable strides in requiring new students attend an orientation prior to starting their college experience. As a part of this best practice, students who do participate have been found to increase their persistence rates (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2015). A potential reason for orientation's success is the array of services student receive and connections students make. Additionally, orientations create a space for student's additional needs to be addressed such as testing, tutoring, counseling, etc. While the current model of requiring new students attend orientation exemplifies a best practice, it is recommended the Seattle Colleges/District require all students attend an orientation. A possible barrier to implementing this practice is the Colleges/District employee capacity to realize it. It is recommended the colleges/district look at the current orientation model and find ways to bring it to scale whether scaling down the current model to allow for more students to partake, or implementing a new model which encompasses orientation components more easily accessible to students. Currently at North, 80% of students who complete an orientation do so online. Evaluating the online orientation's effectiveness is also necessary in future development for all three colleges/district. In line with the Grant's recommendation to implement student success courses, the District needs to find ways to institutionalize this best practice. Student success courses will provide additional means for students to engage with the colleges. Whether it is through orientations, student success courses, or another means for orientating students to the colleges, identifying early on what a student's educational intentions are is critical to the retention and completion conversation.

The Seattle Colleges offer a surplus of educational pathways from training students for a career, providing students a stepping stone to transfer to a four year university, to taking just a single course to improve a particular skill. As a result of the excess of educational pathways and the large number of students accessing the Seattle Colleges for their educational goals, the need to track students' educational intentions is integral to tracking progress and completion. For example, North campus currently serves the largest number of part-time and online student populations and has the lowest completion rates compared to the other two colleges. While North can certainly improve their efforts to retain students, North's low completion rates could be the result of inaccurate student intention information. For instance, students may not have the intention of completing a degree program, but they may be coded as such. North, South and Central may be negatively impacted now and in the future for not accurately identifying and tracking students' educational intentions which could be reconciled by early intervention such as required orientations or student success courses. Equally important to understanding students' educational goals is the ability to track a student's progress towards completing that goal.

It is possible that programs like the 13<sup>th</sup> Year Scholarship, TRIO and the Readiness Academy show success as a result of their model's small numbers. These small student caseloads allow for academic advisors to be intimately involved in a student's educational progress and as a result intervene when necessary. Supporting literature from the Center for Community College Student Engagement (2015), states that identifying students whose academic progress is in question is essential. While the colleges have implemented various practices to help in this area such as the Grant's intensive/intrusive advising model, the need to bring these practices to scale is recommended. As we saw with institutionalizing the intensive/intrusive advising model, academic advisors are unable to continue working with students after they have moved on to



their next quarter thereby not fully engaging with a student's educational goals thereafter. This could be a result of the high volume of students at the Seattle Colleges. As such, the need to create a system which can identify all student's educational progress needs to be addressed and prioritized. Finally, a critical examination into the role faculty play in retention and completion is the final recommendation.

College Faculty, also known as Instructors at the Seattle Colleges play a major role in students' educational experience and subsequently their retention and completion. The primary finding of a study examining the impact of institutional practices towards student's aspirations and perceptions of college, highlighted the role faculty/instructors played in the how students experienced college both inside and outside of the classroom. In this study, faculty/instructors communicated the challenges they faced in educating students of such diverse backgrounds, whether it be academic, social or cultural in their community college setting. The study highlights the need to further examine how faculty – student relationship at community college manifest themselves and how they may play a role in retention. South's MSI designation has led efforts to increase the number of faculty of color on campus, supporting best practices in student/faculty engagement. It is recommended the Seattle Colleges/District expand on this area.

Similarly, literature on best practices for retention at community colleges has done well in identifying the specific interventions/practices that have been successful, but fails to describe how faculty/instructors play a role in these practices. As was seen with the Pathways to Completion grant, various initiatives like the implementation of student success courses and an early academic intervention, of were identified as being faculty/instructor driven, were not realized. Additionally, the intensive/intrusive advising model has had difficulty being sustained. Various initiatives at the Seattle Colleges/District that involve the direct participation of faculty

continue to have difficulty institutionalizing. This may be the result of a lack of faculty engagement in the development and implementation of initiatives as described and supported by Jenkins (2011). The Seattle Colleges/Districts' low percentage of full time faculty and high percentage of part time faculty could play a role in this issue. It is recommended the Seattle Colleges/District make more of an effort in evaluating part-time faculty engagement. Changes in faculty/instructors's scope of work and engagement with future retention and completion initiatives may prove to help the retention and completion agenda for the Seattle Colleges/District in the future.

If community colleges are to continue to provide educational avenues for the most underrepresented and disadvantaged subsets of our populations, more effort needs to be made to ensure these colleges have both the resources and support to institute programming found to be effective in their retention. Only then will the community college serve their cited purpose of proving a pathways for underrepresented students and begin breaking down the walls of oppression and provide for greater egalitarianism.

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