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Molly Kerby, *Western Kentucky University*
Kristi Branham, *Western Kentucky University*
Gayle Mallinger, *Western Kentucky University*

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Consumer-Based Higher Education: The Uncaring of Learning

Molly B. Kerby
Western Kentucky University

Kristi R. Branham
Western Kentucky University

Gayle M. Mallinger
Western Kentucky University

The business model approach in higher education gained traction in the 1980s when federal and state funding for universities and colleges began to decrease. Critics of this model contend that current funding structures undermine the mission of the higher education and negatively impact retention (Rabovsky 2012). As Astin (1997) suggested, the structure of the American college and university system is more complex than the concept of customer satisfaction and efficiency. Past research indicates that we have created an institutionalized uncaring of learning. The business model is broken, lacks resilience, and is not sustainable.

INTRODUCTION

The business model approach in higher education gained traction in the 1980s when federal and state funding for universities and colleges began to decrease. Institutions, faced with capital short-falls, were forced to implement new strategies to sustain their missions. At the same time, the national climate experienced a push for performance-based accountability; thus, higher education funding became directly linked to academic performance. Critics of performance-based accountability in higher education contend that these funding structures undermine the mission of college and university systems and negatively impact the delivery of education. Financial motivations, not pedagogically sound practice, dominate higher education (Rabovsky 2012).

As demand for institutional accountability increased, retention and graduation statistics became the sole measure of institutional quality and status. While most college and university administrators believed retention programs were beneficial, particularly in terms of tuition and accountability, the goals and objectives of these efforts remained ambiguous and were viewed as unprofitable. Unfortunately, the central theme of most research treats retention as an outcome not a process, reinforcing the business model approach to higher education. Giroux (2011a) explains that "memories of the university as a citadel of democratic learning have been replaced by a university eager to define itself largely in economic terms" (n.p.). The consequences of the business model can be seen in the increasing reliance on corporate affiliation and monies, the monetization of students, the de-emphasis of the humanities, and the decrease in academic freedom as more faculty must rely on corporate or military research funding (Giroux, 2011a).

Interest in the complexity of factors contributing to student attrition has led to the development of countless retention models that incorporate approaches similar to those dealing with profit and loss and employee retention. For example, drawing on Price's (1977) model of employee turnover, Bean (1980) developed a causal model that synthesized research findings on turnover in work organizations and student attrition. The purposes of the study were (a) to apply a causal path model of employee turnover to student attrition in higher education, (b) to test the predictive power of this model on student attrition, and (c) to rank the variables by the extent to which they explain variations in student attrition. Bean's model indicated that the student's background characteristics must be taken into consideration in order to understand interaction within the college environment. Also included in the model were independent variables similar to those included in employee turnover research, which had been determined to affect satisfaction and expected to influence attrition. Grade point average, for example, was used as a surrogate variable for pay because they are both tangible measures of success.

Since it has been determined that the initial first-year experience affects students differently, depending upon their pre-college characteristics, level of maturity, or feelings of belonging in the institution, students who have a negative first-year experience may choose to leave the institution, at least temporarily, until the conflict can be resolved. Whether dropping out of college is beneficial to the student or not, it can have extremely negative impacts on the institution. An increasing number of states provide funding based on graduation rates, which can seriously affect the financial status of public institutions. This is of particular concern to those universities with open enrollment policies that admit at-risk students and/or experience high rates of transfer (Barefoot, 2004). In light of these concerns, retention research, data collection, and the expanding of causal models for predicting attrition have become a crucial part of administration in higher education.

Though retention, especially first- to second-year, is important in terms of measuring institutional success, the question as to what increases student satisfaction and creates a positive experience is inconclusive (Barefoot, 2000). Past research, however, indicates that developing an ethics of care model and student engagement through collaborative learning experiences provides a foundation for retention efforts in higher education (Tinto, 1975; Tinto,1981; Terenzini, 1980; Stassen, 2003; Mccarthy & Kuh, 2006). This model would encourage universities and colleges to see themselves not as sellers of a product but rather as entities of service to and stewardship of the public good. Giroux (2011b) defines higher education as "a democratic public sphere and a crucial site for learning how to think critically and act with civic courage" (n. p.). While from the narrow perspective of institutional survival it appears a business model is imperative, it is important to note that "public universities and colleges differ from businesses in that they are charged with broader public purposes. There is a public interest in educating citizens not just for careers but for civic and community leadership" (Breneman, n.d.). In this way, student retention quickly becomes an immediate concern for the survival of the democratic project and the public good.

While there has been a great deal of discussion about and scholarly references to the business model of higher education, the concept itself is vaguely understood (Harney, 2013). Universities across the United States, for example, have dropped programs with low enrollment, increased the use of adjuncts, raised the cap for ACT/SAT scores, and aggressively recruited honors students and out-of-state/international students to lower costs and maximize profits. In other words, to address the current financial crises in higher education, universities are, in effect, reducing the purpose of higher education to a model that focuses on generating revenue and profit. Katopas (2009) explains that the business model in higher education, therefore, supports the notion that *customer satisfaction* and *efficiency* are more valuable than quality. While there is growing support for this paradigm, Katopas believes that it creates an imbalance between faculty and students and creates an environment of instant gratification and a sense of entitlement.

Another concern with the application of the business model in higher education is that colleges and universities have become venues for solely teaching professional skills rather than spaces for learning critical inquiry and responsible citizenship. As early as 1997, Astin suggested the typical institution provided inadequate preparation of students in the role of responsible citizens. Like many people,

administrators in institutions of higher learning think of democracy primarily as an external process. Democratic behavior such as voting, campaigning, and political activism, however, is most likely to occur when individuals acquire knowledge, understanding, beliefs, and values. Astin regards these internal qualities as precisely the characteristics educational institutions should foster rather than merely training students for particular professions. The idea that every student, staff, and faculty can be a leader and an effective social change agent is, in theory, a fundamental goal of higher education (Astin, 1997).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Background: Student Engagement and Retention

The concept of student engagement has attracted increasing attention as a possible solution to (a) declining academic motivation, (b) institutional commitment, (c) student alienation, and (d) attrition in higher education (Fredricks, Blumenfeld & Paris, 2004). According to Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris, both popular and academic definitions of engagement encapsulate the qualities lacking in many college students today. While some definitions encompass (1) behavioral engagement using terms such as *active participation* and *involvement*, other definitions address (2) emotional and cognitive dimensions using terms such as *commitment* and *attraction.* Student engagement research, according to these authors, should describe engagement in terms of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions and thus recommend student engagement be studied as a multi-faceted construct. Although the concept of student engagement has been explored to great lengths, the potential impact of how students behave, feel, and think on retention has yet been realized (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004).

Behavioral engagement can be defined in a number of ways. Most commonly, behavioral engagement is viewed in terms of out-of-class, school-related activities such as athletics and membership in student organizations (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). Other definitions of behavioral engagement also include positive conduct such as attendance, contribution to class discussion, and persistence. In addition, Finn (1989) defined behavioral engagement in hierarchical levels ranging from simply responding to a teacher's question to involvement in extracurricular activities requiring student initiative. According to Finn, upper levels of engagement that require greater exertions of student initiative indicate qualitative differences from lower levels of basic classroom participation. In other words, students who engage in extra-curricular activities experience higher levels of institutional commitment and retention.

Emotional engagement, on the other hand, refers to students' affective connections in the classroom and with the institution (Finn, 1989; Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Some equate emotional engagement with the sense of belonging and commitment to institutional and personal goals (Bean, 1985; Finn, 1989; Tinto, 1985). In other words, researchers define emotional engagement in terms of positive and negative reactions toward the classroom environment, academics, and the institution which is presumed to promote commitment and a willingness to succeed. While similar to emotional engagement, cognitive engagement focuses on the idea of *investment*, defined as the thoughtful and intellectual willingness to exert the effort required to comprehend complex notions and master difficult skills (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris, 2004). According to Zimmerman (1990), cognitive engagement focuses on the psychological aspects of intrinsically motivated learning rather than simply performing a task. Thus, students who are cognitively engaged and intrinsically motivated perceive education as an investment, a worthy challenge, and a valuable experience.

An emerging problem in research dealing with student engagement is that most measures do not distinguish between the source and type of engagement. Also, problematic is the tendency of research to examine engagement in general terms making it difficult to determine the actual source of the engagement. Incorporating the multi-dimensional aspects of student engagement (behavioral, emotional, and cognitive) can be useful in determining which activities represent a general tendency toward engagement as well as those that are content specific in relation to persistence in higher education (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris, 2004).

Education Reform

Economics versus Citizenship

Before building effective retention programs that incorporate an ethics of care through an emphasis on behavioral, emotional and cognitive engagement, it is imperative to investigate *why* these programs, or higher education in general, are important in the first place. At first glance, it would seem educators and administrators are concerned with retention primarily for economic reasons, a significant factor of the business model. Simply put, increasing enrollment increases funding and financial stability for the institution. Though this conjecture is fundamentally correct, the structure of the U.S. college system is a great deal more complex than the elementary concept of neoliberal market fundamentalism that "attempts to normalize the irrational belief in the ability of markets to solve all social problems" (Giroux 2011b, p. 118).

The business model emphasizes economics not only in terms of an institution's gains but also in terms of the national economy and job training. In his analysis of liberal education, Astin (1997) looks at the relationship between liberal education and society. He posits educational policy makers have what he terms a "pegboard" view. Through this lens, society, or the outside world, is like a giant pegboard with a wide array of differently shaped job slots, and it is higher education's responsibility to produce the right shaped peg (people) to fit the slot (job). To Astin, this is the dominant belief not only of our industry leaders, but politicians, educators, policy makers, and parents as well. The pegboard view is what is responsible for driving the advocates of the competition argument that fuels higher education to deliver more people with expertise in science and technology.

A good example of the emphasis on job placement can be seen in the recent tensions between Florida's governor Rick Scott and the state college and university system. Scott challenged the efficacy of liberal arts fields, threatened the tenure system, and released salary information for all eleven state universities. In October 2011, Scott sent a letter to each of the state college and university presidents requesting responses to over seventeen items, including "what studies has your university done in the last three years to ensure your graduates are meeting the needs of employers? Do you have measureable goals to meet employers' current needs? How often are these goals updated?" And, "Do you have measureable goals for the number of graduates who remain in Florida post-graduation? If so, please send me the goals and results for the last five to ten years" (Crabbe, 2011).

The Florida example emphasizes Astin's primary problem with the pegboard view: it not only represents a narrow conception of the role of higher education, but also of society in general. The major problems plaguing society today cannot be simply summed up in the issue of the competitive market. Since the 2008 economic crisis, state funding to colleges and universities has decreased, endowments have shrunk, huge capital plans have been launched, and tuition and fees have increased. More need for federal loans translates to money lent directly to the individual rather than the institution, shifting the responsibility from the institution to the individual. Tuition has increased exponentially over the past three decades. As a result, students are taking out more student loans during their time in college, graduating with higher personal debt, and are unable to find employment that coincides with their degree. Student loan debt for 2010 reached an all-time high, the average being $25,250 per student (Institute for College Access & Success, 2014). In twenty years, between 1985 and 2005, state support per student decreased by 11%. Between 1982 and 2006, median family income increased by 147% while tuition and fees increased by 439%. In 2009, a residential student at a public four-year university was looking at a total cost of $80,000 (National Center on Public Policy and Higher Education, 2010).

One major concern is that the rising cost of a college degree will result in a decreased enrollment of low and middle income students thus lowering even more the national educational level, reducing economic growth, and undermining the basic right of equal educational opportunity. According to the National Center on Public Policy and Higher Education, for the lowest income quintile, the percentage of annual income required to pay for an undergraduate degree at a four-year public university was 55% in academic year 2007-2008. This is an increase of 16% since the turn into the twenty-first century. Over the same time period, the highest income quintile experienced an increase of income to college cost of only 3%. (Breneman, n. d.).

These dramatic changes in cost and access illustrate what Astin (1984) calls the *private economic benefit* viewpoint. This viewpoint simply means the role of higher education is to provide an opportunity for individuals to obtain higher-level and higher-paying jobs in order to live a more comfortable and affluent lifestyle, thus enforcing the move of public education from public good to the individual. The private economic benefit viewpoint is closely related to the pegboard viewpoint because it focuses on the importance of upward mobility and human capital. Tinto (1981) asserted past research on the relationship between education and occupational attainment has most often used the human capital theory view of the labor market. In this view, the labor market is seen as one process of social and occupational attainment essentially invariant across different segments of the labor market. All individuals, occupations, and industries are treated as if they operate solely on the premise of the laws of supply and demand.

Tinto iterated theories of bilateral or multiple labor markets and argued the labor market is non-homogeneous. The theory of bilateral markets views both sides of the labor market, supply and demand, as being segmented into largely discrete labor markets. Individuals (the supply side) are represented by the human capital factors of education, ability, and skill performance and by the social factors of race, gender, social origins, and knowledge of the labor market. Occupations (the demand side) are represented by organizational factors such as the occupation in which the individual is located and the type of work within which employment is experienced. According to Tinto, researchers in the area of educational and occupational stratification have begun to adopt this bilateral view of the labor market. It is important, however, to map the patterned variability of the effect of education on occupational attainment for varying groups of individuals in society and for the different types of occupations in which they will work.

Taking this notion one step further, Newmann (1989) suggested students cannot meet the cognitive demands of secondary and postsecondary education simply through passive learning even if they participate in courses designed to prepare them for college. Newmann goes on to say *engagement*, or the participation, connection, attachment, and integration of students, is critical to the idea of academic achievement. Only when students perceive that there are significant rewards (a good job, more income, or a college degree) for academic achievement will their engagement levels increase. The primary problem of engaging students and bridging the gap between high school and college is a function of incompatible goals. The goal of high school education for college-bound students is to satisfy college curricular goals insuring students completed the required courses necessary for admission to college. Unfortunately, simply having the basic academic skills needed to survive in college are not enough to guarantee student success. In order to meet the demands of an increasingly complex and interdependent world, secondary education must shift its focus from preparing students for college (or even the workforce) to preparing them to be engaged members of society who are capable of living and prospering in a global network (Conley, 2001).

Nurturing Student Learners

The purpose of higher education, hypothetically, is to produce an educated person who will become a responsible citizen. It is indeed hard to consider our citizens *educated* if they know nothing of the country's history. As noted by Reid-Wallace (1992), the 1986 National Assessment of Educational Progress indicated the majority of postsecondary-aged students did not know when the civil war occurred or the names of literary giants such as Chaucer, Melville, and Austen. Reid-Wallace (1992) further explains the social role of education within a democratic society is to ensure equal opportunity (access) to diverse individuals and groups. Higher education should be charged with varying its role, means, and methods to fit the diversity of its constituency. Institutions will fare better in achieving this end if programs and policies grow out of and are relevant to the characteristics and needs of contemporary society.

The characteristics of contemporary society are more racially and ethnically diverse than ever before in United States history. One of the greatest needs of contemporary society is to improve the education of its citizens so that they possess the knowledge and skills necessary to function successfully in the global economy (Astin, 1997). Though the information cited from Reid-Wallace (1992) is somewhat dated,

previous research has also indicated that reform in higher education has made little progress in terms of retention of students deemed at risk due to social factors. These studies suggest factors associated with ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status contributed to high attrition rates, particularly at regional universities. Ensuring equal access to higher education is only the first step in providing education for a diverse contemporary society.

Moller-Wong, Shelley, and Ebbers (1999) reported contemporary educational policy evaluation has incrementally focused its attention on retaining students over the prior decade. Institutional success is credited with enhancing individual careers, contributing to economic vitality, and providing for a more efficient educational process. With the mounting financial pressure, political demands for greater accountability, enhanced diversity of the student population, and declining cohorts of traditional age, focus on student retention is more necessary than ever before.

In addition to job placement, college and university retention rates have increasingly become a critical measure of institutional effectiveness as taxpayers, legislators, and parents have assumed great authority and demanded more accountability from public institutions. Increased enrollment translates into tuition dollars paying for salaries, supplies, and operating expenses. Estimating student retention rates, therefore, is crucial in the planning process. Moller-Wong, Shelley, and Ebbers (1999) noted, as reflected in past research, attrition most often occurs during the first-year of study and decreases by almost 50% with each passing year of study. In addition, most first-year attrition occurs during the first six weeks of the first year of college. Though enrollment in colleges and universities has steadily increased over the last 60 years, the attrition rate has remained static.

The undergraduate enrollment at an institution is a function both of recruitment and retention. Recruitment refers to the number of direct high school and transfer students who choose to begin study at a college or university. Retention is the number of current students who choose to persist toward a degree. In addressing financial concerns of the institution, it should be noted it is far more expensive to recruit students than it is to retain them. It should also be taken into consideration that students who do not succeed create serious institutional implications because student attrition rates raise questions about institutional priorities regarding teaching and student development.

Many educators view lower retention rates as an indicator of high quality standards within the institution. Mclaughlin, Brozovsky, and Mclaughlin (1998) pointed out demonstrating to administrators and faculty lower retention rates are actually a problem can impede efforts in postsecondary reform. When a large percentage of students fail to complete their programs of study, some believe the remaining students were more intelligent and performed well above the level expected for the average student. In addition, the idea that increasing retention negatively impacts educational standards is a common argument among those who do not see attrition as a problem. Moller-Wong, Shelley, and Ebbers (1999) proposed creating legitimacy and demonstrating student retention as a problem can be accomplished by understanding the decision processes and political nature of the institution. It is important to identify key stakeholders, understand their concerns, and assist them in dealing with these anxieties.

As indicated by past research (Bean, 1979; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1978; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1980), there are many factors such as the type of institution students attend (e.g., residential versus nonresidential), sex, and individual characteristics (e.g., age, sex, race, and intellectual aptitude) that influence the direct and indirect effects of endogenous variables on student persistence. As early as 1958, Iffert found attrition was highest among students who attended state-supported institutions rather than at private and technical colleges. Iffert's research also indicated there were differences in male and female attrition rates in relation to career choices and type of institution. For example, persistence was higher among women than men at teachers' colleges.

Retention issues in higher education logically lead researchers to examine first-year programs designed to increase academic and social integration, faculty-student relationships, and goal and institutional commitment. Chickering and Hannah (1969) concluded the majority of students drop out at the end of the first term, so intervention programs should start early, especially during the first-year of college. In addition, institutions should provide venues for students to talk with college personnel about issues or concerns they may have in order to resolve their problems without dropping out. According to

Barefoot (2000), the goal of the institution should be to (a) increase student-to-student interaction, (b) increase faculty-student interaction, (c) increase student involvement and time on campus, (d) link the curriculum and the co-curriculum (school sponsored and directed activities), (e) increase academic expectations and levels of academic engagement, and (f) assist students who have insufficient academic preparation for college.

RESISTANCE, RESILIENCE, AND RECIPROCITY

The Need for a Theoretical Framework

Ecological theory, risk and resilience, and ethics of care theories allow for the examination of the reciprocal interactions between student and environment. Thus, these three paradigms together form the foundation for the conceptual models described in this paper. These perspectives, in combination, inform the examination of risk and protective factors in the student's immediate and remote environments, the effects of risk and context, and serve as a roadmap for potential pedagogical interventions to promote student success.

Bronfenbrenner's theory of human ecology (1979) highlighted the interactive influence of social context on individuals. He theorized that systems were nested: a) microsystems, which encompass students and the surrounding environments with which they have immediate contact (parents/family and peers); b) mesosystems, which include connections between microsystems, such as the relationship (faculty and administration); c) exosystems, where students are not directly involved but decisions are made that affect them (educational administrative processes); d) macrosystems, which include cultural values and laws; and e) chronosystems, including socio-historical conditions (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

The shift from a liberal arts model of education to that of career preparation serves as an example of a socio-historical circumstance. For example, Turner and Bowen (1990) suggest that feminism increased career choices for women, thus resulting in more women opting for professional degrees. Recent technological advances impact students, faculty, and administrators as well. Universities have developed new models in response to these innovations (Hanna, 1998). The decline of traditionally aged students following baby boom generation combined with economic difficulties beginning in the mid-1970's can also be considered a chronosystem context impacting a shift towards a business model of higher education (Mayhew 1979).

Federal policies serve as examples of macro-level influences that affect college students. For example, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 tethered federal education funding to states' development of an accountability structure and attaching punishments and rewards for performance. Consequently, this test-based policy compelled educators to reallocate resources from non-tested studies to those that were represented on the exams (Rothstein, Jacobsen, Wilder, 2008). The culture of high stakes testing may have led to the unintended consequence of students' diminished abilities in critical thought (Goodwin, 2013). Performance-based funding also may be considered a macro influence that impacts higher education. This model has not focused on teaching students holistically. Instead, this paradigm reinforces graduation rates and employment outcomes (Sharma, 2004).

One of the central ideas of the ecological perspective is that the individuals are heavily influenced by the interrelationships among their families of origin, neighborhoods, and other social networks. (Garbarino & Abromowitz, 1992; Germain & Gitterman, 1980). These networks, which may be defined as interrelationships among others that hold importance, can serve as supports or barriers (Germain & Gitterman, 1980). Students who have consistent encouragement and support from peers and family with regard to higher education are more likely to be successful than their counterparts who receive equivocal or negative messages.

The theory of risk and resilience has been widely used as a conceptual framework to explain variation in outcomes for people in jeopardy of developing problems due to difficult life experiences. Risk refers to contextual factors and/or individual stressors which place college students in danger of adverse results or attrition (Fraser, Richman, & Galinsky, 1999). The stressors may occur on a micro (for example, poor coping skills; developmental stage), mezzo (for instance, an unsupportive family) or macro level (for

example, classism). Factors that place individuals at risk may well co-occur and the risks may be additive or exponential (Gabarino, 1985; Rutter, 1979). Rutter (1979) found that people exposed to one risk were no more likely to suffer a negative outcome than those with no risk at all; however, when the number of risks exceeded five, the probability of negative outcome increased by twenty fold.

Despite difficult circumstances, some students at high risk for negative consequences succeed. Resilience is defined as the ability to overcome risk and succeed (Masten, 1994; Rutter, 1987; Xue, Zimmerman, & Caldwell, 2007). These factors disrupt the trajectory from risk to negative outcomes (Fraser, et al., 2004). In a college setting, compassionate professors and a well-developed sense of community and place are examples of protective factors that encourage resilience (Herrenkohl. Chung, & Catalano, 2004; Kerby, in press; Powell & Jenson, 2010). Small classes that foster close relationships with faculty ameliorate risk (Baker, Balkdwin, & Makker, 2012; Noddings, 2007).

By building models of collaborative learning and reciprocity among all institutional and community entities not only constructs a relationship of reciprocity and ethics of care but creates protective factors that reduce risks of attrition. In this way, institutions can begin to respond to the current crisis in higher education by employing an ethic of care that draws on ecological systems, resistance and resilience, and reciprocity. An ethic of care has its theoretical foundation in the work of Gilligan and Noddings and their challenge to dominant definitions of "justice" and "education" as hierarchical models. Noddings (1984) describes an ethic of care as one that acknowledges the caring relationship as one that hinges on reciprocity between the "one cared for" and the "one caring." Within this educational model, the institution and its faculty represent the "one-caring" while the student represents the "one cared-for." This reciprocal relation engenders subjective agency in the student because both teacher and student recognize their investment in the learning environment.

An Environment of Reciprocity Through Collaborative Learning

Collaborative learning encourages students to share ideas with other students in an active, constructive manner and to collectively work through problems. The connections between the students (interaction) are a vital part of the process (Gerlach, 1994). Examples of collaborative learning would include projects that encourage students to interact in order to accomplish a specific goal or develop a content specific product (Panitz, 1996). Similarly, collaborative learning encourages students to engage in activities that benefit the outcome of the entire group (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1991).

Commensurate with the push for a business model approach to higher education, beginning in the 1980s, a marked increase occurred in the interest in collaborative learning. Many viewed collaborative learning as a remedy for problems ranging from low student involvement to low rates of student persistence during the first-year of college (Tinto & Goodsell, 1993). Others believed, however, there was not enough empirical evidence to support the impact of these programs. While a good deal of anecdotal evidence and program evaluations exist, researchers have not gathered the variety of comparative longitudinal evidence necessary to indicate collaborative learning programs independently enhance student persistence (Tinto & Goodsell, 1993). A central focus of many first-year courses is to increase student involvement in programs organized by the institution, which can be achieved through cooperative relationships among student affairs and academic affairs professionals (Barefoot, 2000). Research indicates similar to student-to-student interaction and faculty-to-student interaction, student involvement in campus activities, and time spent on campus impact social integration.

Alexander Astin (1984) views the purpose of higher education as one of talent development. These talents are developed through involvement in the campus community. Astin's Theory of Involvement includes five postulates: (a) involvement requires the investment of psychological and physical energy, (b) involvement is a continuous concept, (c) involvement has both quantitative and qualitative features, (d) the amount of learning or development is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of involvement, and (e) educational effectiveness of any policy or practice is related to its capacity to induce student involvement (Astin, 1984). The practical application of this retention model would manifest in the reciprocal relationships that define the higher educational system-- between the institution and community, administrators and faculty, faculty and faculty, and faculty and students--as well as in town-

gown collaboration in response to community-based research, innovative use of technology for content delivery, and smaller teacher-student ratios.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Creating a Model of Care

In order to build sustainable institutions and increase retention rates, the business model of education must be revamped. It is imperative to note that business models rarely consider factors external to the organization that *directly* impact adaptation, resilience, and sustainability. While the business model approach positioned institutions to survive state and federal budget cuts, it is not useful in improving retention rates. An understanding of these complexities can be gained from an examination Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory of human ecology and the notion that interactive influences of social context occur within nested systems and each segment is as important as the next. Because institutions are concerned with these nested systems and how to solve problems with long-term benefits, developing a model of care that incorporates protective factors for those at risk is imperative.

One approach derived from earlier research (Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1975) is to create a conceptual model for sustainable retention rates using causal diagramming to articulate the understanding of the dynamics of interconnectedness (Kerby, in press). These models are valuable resources for linking key variables and indicating the causal relationships between and among them. The purpose of the causal diagram in Figure 1 is to construct a general model for an ethic of care.

Without an ethic of care in an organization, the participants are at risk and vulnerable. For example, Figure 1 is a general model that begins with considering the influences of macro-level influences external to the individual and the organization (i.e., national climate, community, corporation, and federal funding). External factors are then connected by directional arrows to both pre-existing factors and internal factors through varying paths. Adaptive factors, including risk and protective factors, are connected to outcomes related to sustainability (vulnerability, sense of place, and resilience and sustainability) (Kerby, in press). While administrators do not have control over the external and pre-existing factors (macrosystems and chronosystems), and little input in internal factors, it is the responsibility of leaders to ensure protective factors are included in adaptation.

Model of Care in Higher Education

The model of care outlined in Figure 1 illustrates a general application of care in terms of adaptive protective factors in the larger community. Figure 2 is an adaption of the model specifically related to higher education. The paths from internal factors to protective factors emphasize the importance of intellectual development (rather than GPA attainment only), social integration, and institutional commitment in retaining students. It is important to note that focusing on pre-college factors, particularly high school GPA, without attention to the internal and protective factors and academic performance can lead to academic dismal, especially for students who are underprepared or marginalized.

While the business model in higher education may ease some of the burden of budget cuts, it is not sustainable paradigm. For example, when universities raise ACT/SAT and high school GPA requirements and recruit honors students without integrating protective factors, there is heightened risk for voluntary dropout, or attrition due to reasons other than poor academic performance (Figure 1, Outcomes). An analysis of past literature concerning retention issues reveals that persistence in higher education is a longitudinal process involving more than students' cognitive ability to succeed academically (Bean, 1985; Spady, 1970; Terenzini, 1980; Tinto, 1975). In fact, some research (Astin, 1993; Pascarelli & Terenzini, 1991) would indicate academic skills are secondary to educationally *purposeful* learning and personal development in college.

FIGURE 1
CAUSAL DIAGRAM OF ETHICS OF CARE

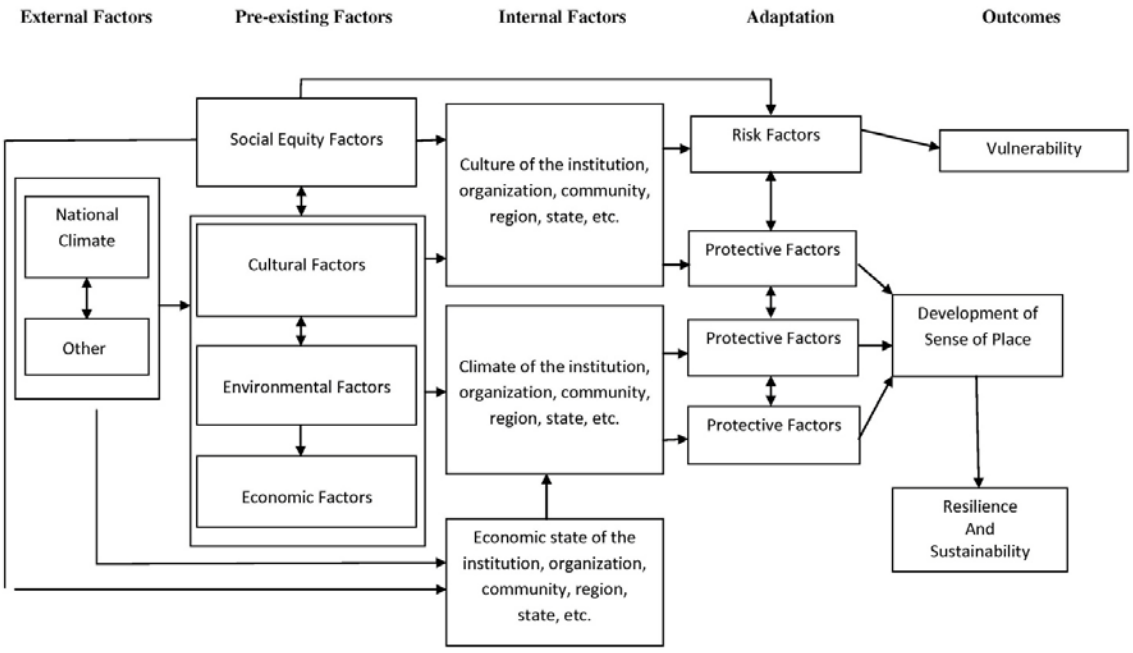
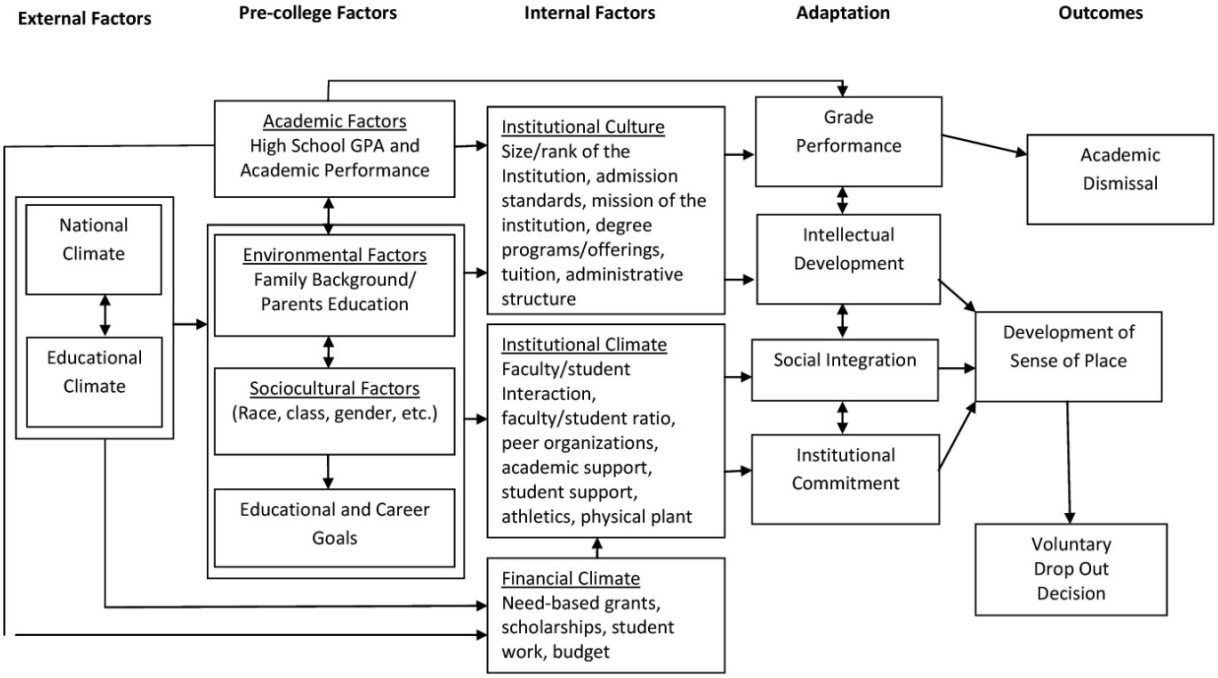


FIGURE 2
MODEL OF CARE IN HIGHER EDUCATION



According to the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (2010) 60% of students entering our colleges and universities are academically underprepared (lacking basic skills in at least one of the three basic areas of reading, writing or mathematics) and students at four-year, comprehensive institutions were more likely than those at private institutions to enroll in remedial courses. While thousands of high school graduates enter college academically unprepared and require remedial or developmental work before entering college-level courses, little is known about the causal impact of remediation on student outcomes (Bettinger & Long, 2005). Bettinger & Long point out that public colleges alone spend over one billion dollars every year on remedial education and there is growing debate about its effectiveness. The researchers, however, suggest that students participating in remedial course are more likely to persist in college in comparison to students with similar test scores and backgrounds who were not required to take the courses and are more likely to complete a bachelor's degree.

In summary, while academic achievement may be an important factor in persistence in higher education, the foundation for success requires a model of care that provides protective factors that reduce the risk for both academic dismissal and voluntary withdrawal. Further investigations of the effects of remedial education on persistence are necessary to determine if this approach actually increases persistence. The bottom line is the business model is broken, lacks resilience, and is not sustainable.

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