THEORY TO PRACTICE: THE USE OF ASSESSMENT IN SHAPING FIRST-YEAR STUDENT SERVICES AND SUPPORT

Amanda L. Martin
Louisiana State University

Ashley B. Clayton
Louisiana State University

Abstract

This article focuses on the role of theory and assessment in shaping student services and support through collaboration between student and academic affairs. Specifically, this paper highlights the use of a first-year student assessment tool that informs student support practices in the College of Agriculture at Louisiana State University (LSU). Guided by Tinto's (2012) model of institutional action, the assessment tool examined the transition experiences of first-year students, which ultimately provided feedback on ways the academic college could better support their academic and social integration. The major innovations include strategic initiatives focused on three areas: first-year seminars, goal check-in meetings, and academic and social support. The article concludes with four recommendations for scholar-practitioners to help inform practice with first-year experiences and retention initiatives within higher education broadly.

Keywords: assessment, collaboration, academic and student affairs, first-year experience, first-year transition

While college enrollment rates have increased over time, college persistence and completion rates have remained stagnant (Castleman & Meyer, 2017; National Student Clearinghouse [NSC], 2020). From 2015 to 2018, the national first-year persistence rate has remained steady at around 67% (NSC, 2020). Additional pressure on higher education institutions to retain students has highlighted the importance of first-year student success. Further, institutions are focused on the changing student demographics, as the success rates and disparities vary across different student populations (Keup & Kilgo, 2014). When considering the purpose of higher education institutions to improve the opportunities for students, attrition works against that very mission (Frankfort et al., 2015). Further, while retention rates have remained relatively stagnant, there are still disparities by race and ethnicity. In particular, first-to-second year retention rates of Asian (86%) and White (81%) students are much higher than the rates of their Hispanic (72%) and African American (66%) counterparts (NSC, 2020). Thus, in recent years, colleges and universities have shifted their focus to retaining students and closing the equity gaps, especially using low-cost, evidence-based solutions (Castleman & Meyer, 2017; Frankfort et al., 2015).

Improving retention rates is complex and challenging, and there is no simple solution. Each university and unit needs to examine the major challenges students face and address them directly (Andrews & Schulze, 2018). One way to examine the challenges students face is through robust assessment measures, particularly in the first year of college. Of all students who do not persist in college and eventually drop out, most are likely to drop out before starting their sophomore year of college (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Tinto, 2012a). According to Tinto (2012a), "since much of the attrition in the second year reflects what happened or did not happen in the first year, it is understandable that many institutions allocate a sizable portion of their scarce resources to the first year in college" (p. 3).

Purpose and Significance

The purpose of the article is to highlight the use of theory in developing an assessment tool and, importantly, how the results informed student services and support. Acknowledging the importance of the first year of college within the broader retention conversation, this article highlights the use of a first-year student assessment tool that informed student support practices in the College of Agriculture at Louisiana State University (LSU). Guided by Tinto's (2012a) model of institutional action, the assessment tool examined the transition experiences of first-year students, which ultimately provided feedback on ways the academic college can better support students' transition to college. This article adds to the scholarly literature and is significant for three primary reasons. First, it provides a real-world way practitioners used scholarship and theory to inform practice in an undergraduate academic college. Second, this project provides a theoretical rationale for utilizing a collaborative approach between a staff member and faculty member to support first-year student success. Dr. Amanda Martin serves as the Assistant Dean of Recruitment and Student Development in the LSU College of Agriculture. Dr. Ashley Clayton is a faculty member in the LSU Higher Education Administration graduate program. Third, this project serves as an example of how to develop a meaningful and theoretically-based assessment for first-year student programs. We will share implications and recommendations for practitioners interested in implementing a similar assessment initiative to improve students' first-year experiences.

Literature and Framework

First-Year Experience

Since the 1980s, the "freshman year experience" or first-year experience has become a movement

within higher education to support student success (Barefoot, 2000). To address the growing needs of the student transition to the institution, first-year experience programs were developed (Schrader & Brown, 2008). Over time, the resources devoted to assisting with student support and transition evolved from institutional centers to include courses and seminars and expanded to an overall process designed with linked programs with the objective of first-year student success (White et al., 1995).

Although there are many program and initiative examples across institutions, these efforts associated with the first-year experience are not always succinctly coordinated among the academic and student affairs divisions (Young & Chung, 2019). The key to implementing meaningful programs that help students transition in the first-year experience is continual evaluation and assessment (Kuh, 2010). The impact of assessment on improving programs and policies for first-year students depends heavily on developing strategies and decisions on how the data is used (Keup & Kilgo, 2014). The success of these programs also requires academic and student affairs professionals to coordinate and connect across the organization to support the success of first-year students (Young & Chung, 2019).

Academic and Student Affairs Collaboration

According to Campbell and Mislevy (2013), institutions can build deeper connections with students by contributing to their experiences with quality services and, through these actions, universities hope to actively identify and engage students by being proactive with supplying these resources. The connection to the classroom and student success should not be overlooked as retention initiatives and programming cannot stand alone in the first-year experience. To increase retention, actions must also be centered on the classroom experiences (Tinto, 2012a). By developing a structured plan for a "supportive and seamless learning environment" (O'Halloran, 2019, p. 301), academic and student affairs can avoid the silo approach to maximize the opportunity for student success. As Tinto (2012b) stated, "The success of an institution reflects the ability of its various programs to improve, endure, and scale up over time in ways that are systemic and aligned to the achievement of the same goal: enhanced student retention and graduation" (p. 82).

Using collaborative efforts between academic and student affairs is important to higher education. The result should ensure compatibility with the university mission while also improving retention and enhancing the college experience for students (O'Halloran, 2019). When considering the relationship between academic and student affairs, high-impact practices (HIPs) are a perfect example of how resources and strategies can be leveraged across both academic and social experiences to increase retention rates and student engagement (Kuh, 2010). Examples of these practices can include first-year seminars, learning communities, undergraduate research, and e-portfolios. Woven throughout these practices are opportunities for students to build relationships with faculty and staff and develop a deeper connection to the institution, ultimately increasing retention.

Institutional Action Framework

Tinto's (2012a) model of institutional action focuses on the conditions and environment on campus that sets the tone for student success. The model shifts the focus to the specific actions that the institution has control over to influence student retention. The student attributes and external environments are not the focus of the model, as the intent is to focus on the expectations, support, assessment and feedback, and involvement that shape student academic and social involvement, ultimately influencing student commitment through the actions of institutional commitment (Tinto, 2012b). This model represents a true theory-to-practice framework, outlining four key elements that guided this assessment project: expec-

tations, support, assessment and feedback, and involvement (see Figure 1).

Tinto's (2012b) model of institutional action addresses some of the gaps and weaknesses from his earlier model. Tinto's (1993) model of student integration was extensively tested and examined (Barnett, 2007; Braxton & McClendon, 2002), but researchers like Braxton et al. (2004) questioned how this model addressed student retention at various institutional types, as well as the effectiveness of retention practices based on smaller institutions versus large-scale institutions. The model of institutional action provides more focused insight to address these weaknesses and creates an opportunity for universities to further explore the institutional commitments in place through institutional action. Tinto (2012b) explained that institutional commitment to student success "sets the tone for the expectational climate for success that students encounter in their everyday interactions with the institution, its policies, practices, and various members (faculty, staff, administrators, and other students)" (p. 259).

Academic and student affairs collaboration can be reflected throughout the Tinto (2012a) model. As expectations, support, assessment and feedback, and involvement overlap within the model, so do the collaborative efforts needed to direct student success (Tinto, 2012a). Working together, faculty and staff can influence the quality of effort, learning, and overall success of the students they serve. Through collaboration from setting expectations at orientation through the supports offered academically, socially, and financially, concentrated efforts where academic and student affairs colleagues can work together to monitor and assess student progress are crucial to student success and commitment. This process is the most effective when academic and student affairs can work simultaneously and strategically to intervene early in the first year and provide feedback to direct student success.

Expectations are what drive student success. Tinto (2012a) shared that "high expectations

are a condition for student success, low expectations a harbinger of failure. Simply put, no one rises to low expectations" (p. 7). These expectations can be established through advising, orientation, and coursework as well as through informal networks on campus. The key is to establish an environment that provides students with a path to success. To hold students to high expectations, providing necessary support is crucial. It has been established that support is critical during the first year of college (Tinto, 2012a). This ranges from academic support to social support and even financial support for students. Assessment and feedback also increase a student's likelihood to succeed, as this frequent communication can help students adjust behaviors for success. This includes the behaviors of students, faculty, and staff. These assessment efforts to address retention can include entry assessments, end-of-first-year assessments, and additional specific assessments based on courses, programs, and the overall institutional experience. Finally, involvement is the fourth crucial piece to the student retention model. Students' connections to campus relate to success as students are more likely to succeed if they are academically and socially engaged with faculty and student affairs (Tinto, 2012a).

These four elements pertain to specific retention initiatives with students' first-year experiences. What students encounter after college enrollment matters more than the commitment the student makes to attend the institution (Drake, 2011; Tinto, 1987; Wilder, 2016). It is crucial to understand institutional commitment from a student perspective through their experiences with institutional actions created to address retention. Further, students are more likely to succeed when the university provides a setting that encompasses high expectations, academic and social support, frequent feedback, and involvement with peers and faculty (Tinto, 2012b).

In utilizing the four key elements of Tinto's (2012a) model, we created questions for a first-year student assessment to address how stu-

dents were transitioning to college and identify areas where students needed additional resources or support to be successful. The collaboration between academic and student affairs to create, administer, review, and address the results of the assessment reflect not only the tenets of Tinto's (2012a) model in how an institution can create a setting and expectation for success but also successful partnerships that can be developed within higher education to address needed interventions of student support.

Overview and Purpose of the First-Year Assessment

While LSU has improved the first-to second-year retention rates since 1987 (68.4%), these rates have only increased by 2% from 1995 (81.7%) to 2017 (83.7%). Over the past 10 years, the first-to-second year retention rate at LSU remained relatively stagnant, changing only from 83.6% in 2007 to 83.7% in 2018. While a bit higher than the institutional rate, the College of Agriculture's first-to-second year retention rate changed from 81.9% in 2008 to 84.6% in 2017. In the fall of 2018, the College of Agriculture wanted to work more intentionally on retaining students and increasing their retention rates. The Dean's office noted a gap in retention practices with first-year students and a lack of organized purpose and structure to retention-based initiatives. This is a similar occurrence for many other institutions with new retention initiatives implemented without much assessment on how students perceive these initiatives (Dunn et al., 2013). The desire to increase retention rates and better serve the needs of the first-year students in the College of Agriculture led to the development of a first-year assessment project.

TIGA Assessment Design

In fall 2018, the LSU College of Agriculture created a new initiative called the Tiger Intrusive Group Advising (TIGA) assessment. Assessment data collected from first-year students can be uti-

lized for various purposes to better understand the background and experiences of a student cohort (Keup & Kilgo, 2014). TIGA is a tool to assess students' current situation to diagnose and intervene in their first year. In developing the questions on TIGA, we relied on three key sources: Tinto's (2012a) theoretical framework, publicly-available instruments from other universities, and feedback from faculty, staff, and students.

Utilizing Tinto's (2012a) Theory of Institutional Action, we developed our questions and the follow-up plan around the four key elements of the model. Regarding support and involvement, we included questions about campus resources students were utilizing and how they were getting involved on campus. For the expectations and feedback elements of the model, we included questions focused on where students were experiencing challenges and what areas they would like additional help.

The Dean's office staff worked on developing a specialized communication plan to provide students with feedback, resources, and to reaffirm the expectations for college. In developing our instrument, we reviewed publicly-available examples from other institutions, including North Carolina State University and the University of South Carolina. We worked together to finalize the assessment and sent it to faculty and student services staff in the College of Agriculture to provide feedback. We then administered the questionnaire to a small population of undergraduate students who would not be in the sample population for a final round of feedback. We made finals edits and officially launched the instrument in the third week of the fall 2018 semester.

The questions on the instrument were focused on: determining the level of involvement a student has exhibited in the first month of being on campus, their perceptions of their academic experiences so far, their satisfaction level with the college and university experience, their likelihood to continue enrollment, current challenges, and their identified areas for personal and profession-

al growth. Students could "check" what resources or services they have utilized since they have been on campus, list organizations they were involved with, or choose options of why they were not involved. The instrument also included scale questions to collect feedback on students' satisfaction with their university experience and how likely they were to return in the spring semester. Additionally, students were asked to check all "challenges" they were experiencing. The examples of challenges that students indicated on the TIGA assessment are outlined in Table 1.

Additional open-ended questions were listed to allow students to share information on how they felt about their major and general feedback on their transition from high school to college. A key focus of the assessment was to understand the resources students needed. Students were asked to check all that apply in terms of areas that they would like additional help with during their first year (see Table 2). Notably, the assessment was not anonymous, and students were asked to share their names and contact information so that they could be contacted afterward.

Data Collection and Analysis

We distributed the TIGA assessment to all first-year students in the College of Agriculture in the third week of the fall 2018 semester. We selected the third week as we wanted to get feedback from the students early in the semester while also giving students a couple of weeks to transition to college. To increase response rates, Amanda visited a class associated with the residential college experience for first-year students to provide students with information on the assessment and sent an additional email to all first-year students in the college. The staff in the College of Agriculture explained that the assessment data would be utilized to provide students with personalized outreach in their first semester.

The College of Agriculture continues to modify and administer the assessment each fall semester during the third week of classes. In fall

of 2018, the College of Agriculture administered the TIGA assessment to all 334 first-year students in the LSU College of Agriculture. In 2019, the College distributed TIGA to 412 first-year students and recently distributed TIGA to 407 students in 2020. Overall, there were high response rates: 71%, 78%, and 90% over the three years, respectively. Altogether, 1,024 first-year students completed TIGA from fall 2018 through fall 2020.

After we closed the assessment, the Dean's office staff in the college compiled the information students provided. The primary goal was for staff to figure out the main challenges students were experiencing (see Table 1) so that they could do larger-scale interventions. Additionally, staff analyzed the data at the individual student level. Staff members then created targeted personalized emails, text messages, and phone calls related to their areas of interest (see Table 2). Overall, the instrument served as an early identification tool to connect students with faculty and staff for personalized "coaching" to address the issues of concern that the student indicated on the assessment.

Rigor of Assessment Design

The development of the assessment occurred through an academic affairs and student affairs collaboration. The idea for this assessment project began when Amanda was a doctoral student in Ashley's Retention and Student Success graduate course. Amanda developed an initial draft of a first-year assessment tool for the final course project that she wanted to administer in the College of Agriculture. After the course ended, we met several times to finalize the instrument and submitted our assessment project to LSU's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval. While IRB approval was not required, we wanted to have the opportunity to publish this work and ensure that we were protecting human subjects.

Major Innovations from the Assessment Results

The results of the TIGA assessment directed the college's student services staff to develop initiatives focused on the students' needs. The staff utilized specialized programming, individual meetings, organized events, and targeted emails, text messages, and phone calls to reach out and engage with the students based on their responses. The TIGA assessment tool created opportunities for students to have personalized resources directed to them at a crucial point of transition in the first semester. In specific circumstances where students indicated they were not satisfied with their experience or did not plan to return to the institution, the staff communicated directly with these students to assess the situations and address obstacles to student success. The feedback gathered from the TIGA assessment helped to guide practice in retention strategies. In this section, we highlight three of the primary innovations from the TIGA assessment results: first-year seminars, goal check-in meetings, and academic and social support.

First-Year Seminars

In reviewing the feedback from the first-year students completing the TIGA assessment and comparing their target areas of interest to the current course structure of the first-year seminar, topics were not in sync. Utilizing both the feedback from TIGA and the literature on high-impact practices, the Dean's office decided to restructure the first-year seminar course for the college (Kuh, 2010; Padgett et al., 2013; Skipper, 2017). A first-year seminar course can be defined as "a course that intentionally includes a range of effective educational practices in its design and delivery to support the development of skills and dispositions leading to academic and personal success in college and in 21st century global society" (Skipper, 2017, p. 155). When the first TIGA assessment was administered in 2018, not all first-year students were required to enroll in the college's first-year seminar course. One section was required for students living in the Agriculture Residential College, which enrolled over 100 students in the course with one instructor. Graduate students taught additional smaller units for incoming students. This model was not sufficient when leveraging this as a retention-based tool and utilizing this course to build a connection to the college and important resources for the first-year experience. When reviewing literature on first-year seminar classes, the top three goals of these courses were to: develop essential academic skills, provide orientation to campus, and ease transition to campus (Tobolowsky, 2005). Considering the experiences necessary to set high expectations for students' success, a restructured first-year seminar created an opportunity to foster foundational growth to assist students with setting a tone for success at the institution.

The suggested changes resulted in what is now structured as a specialized extended-orientation style first-year seminar course connected to agriculture topics, with 10 sections being offered each year. The class size ranges from 35-45 students in each section with at least two undergraduate peer mentors and an instructor, who either serves as a full-time staff member in the college's student services office or a faculty member in the college. The curriculum for this course closely aligns with areas essential for a successful transition to college, provides connections to agriculture issues, and focuses on the development of an online portfolio in an atmosphere smaller sections to allow for more meaningful connections with the instructors. Directly connecting to the four tenets of Tinto's model (2012a), this course is structured in a way: to assist students in developing goals and reaching high expectations through self-reflection and portfolio development; implement feedback and support through consistent check-ins on weekly quizzes and personalized portfolio feedback, and involvement through structured assignments meant to build connections with the cam-

pus community. It is important that high quality and honest assessment of the first-year seminar course continues to determine how it contributes to first-year success (Young, 2020).

Goal Check-In Meetings

Goal check-in meetings were another important change implemented based on the initial TIGA responses. It was evident that most of the students wanted more academic and career development support. In reviewing the advising support model, the college lacked consistency in how students were advised on resources on these topic areas. To better acclimate students to resources and important deadlines and a personalized meeting opportunity, "goal check-in meetings" were established as part of the first-year seminar restructure. According to Gordon (2019), the key to developing a meaningful advising experience is through the development of regular scheduled contact with an advisor.

Currently, each first-year student is required to meet with their peer mentor during the first month on campus and then meet with their seminar instructor following the completion of the TIGA assessment. The purpose of the peer mentor meeting is to assist students in becoming comfortable with the peer mentor as a resource and address any challenges the students may be experiencing early in their transition to campus. Developing structures that allow upper-level students to serve in a mentoring capacity to new students is influential, especially with at-risk populations (Barefoot, 2000). During the meeting with the instructor, feedback from the TIGA assessment is used to determine the key areas for discussion during the one-on-one appointments. These meetings are also held at important times in the semester, before midterms, to help students take advantage of academic support resources. The meetings are personalized to discuss the "challenges" that students indicated they are experiencing based on their TIGA assessment feedback (see Table 1). Again, the use of the goal check-in meetings di-

rectly aligns with Tinto's model (2012a). These meetings allow students to receive feedback on their progress and for instructors to intervene early in the student experience to provide resources and support.

Academic and Social Support

The development of the TIGA assessment also allowed for the college to structure a team approach to creating a communication campaign and specialized events based on the students' feedback. These target areas included: involvement in organizations, undergraduate research opportunities, major exploration, time management issues, study abroad, academic and study skills, internships, career, and managing financial costs (see Table 2). These target areas highlighted the resources the office could provide to assist students with academic and social support. Increasing involvement and time on campus, faculty to student interactions, and helping students to connect them with resources on campus are influential parts of how faculty and staff can support students academically and socially (Barefoot, 2000). The structure of the communication outreach efforts aligns with this focus of academic and social integration and support.

For each "target area," the staff members in the College of Agriculture collaboratively decided who would lead the communication and event initiatives associated with that area. Some areas included one-on-one meeting opportunities, and others were set within a group setting. The team of staff members worked together to develop a communication calendar to ensure campaigns did not overlap among the target area initiatives. Over the three years that the TIGA assessment has been administered, the team of core staff members has proceeded to modify their outreach plans based on the previous year's results to continue to improve support initiatives for the student population.

Students who indicated they were not planning to return to the institution were classified as a priority population for a one-on-one appointment.

These personalized meetings allowed the staff member involved to have a deeper conversation on what challenges the student may be experiencing and what interventions could be implemented to assist the student. Connecting back to Tinto's model (2012a), the targeted communication following the assessment addressed both academic and social support efforts to lead students to additional resources to improve opportunities for success.

Discussion and Implications

Tinto's (2012a) Model of Institutional Action provides a focused insight for universities to explore the institutional commitments in place through targeted efforts. Tinto (2012b) explained, "Institutional commitment to student success, in turn, sets the tone for the expectational climate for success that students encounter in their everyday interactions with the institution, its policies, practices, and various members (faculty, staff, administrators, and other students)" (p. 259). Through this assessment project, the LSU College of Agriculture demonstrates a commitment to student success and supports the four conditions outlined within Tinto's (2012a) model.

The findings from the TIGA assessment initiative have implications for future research and assessment initiatives. First, we encourage cross-campus partnerships to address student success. This was a successful example of faculty (academic affairs) and student services staff (student affairs) working collaboratively on developing an instrument. Through partnership, faculty and staff can design a project grounded in theory and research, and they can realistically implement the necessary changes through practice. There are numerous opportunities for academic and student affairs individuals to work collaboratively on projects through coordination and relationship-building. We encourage more campus departments to collaborate with higher education faculty and for higher education faculty to develop class assign-

ments (e.g., questionnaires, interview protocols) that can translate to practice beyond the classroom.

The findings from this assessment project can help inform practice with first-year experiences and retention initiatives within higher education broadly. The TIGA assessment is an example of assessing students' needs and challenges early on to best support student success. There are implications for other universities and colleges that want to implement similar initiatives. While many interventions are reactive, colleges must be proactive in assessing students at multiple time points throughout their college career, most notably during the critical first year. For colleges interested in developing a first-year assessment tool, we provide a few recommendations in the next section.

Recommendations

We provide four recommendations for academic colleges and units interested in implementing similar initiatives to address student success in the first year. These recommendations are connected to Tinto's (2012a) model of institutional action, identifying examples of actions that fall under the four conditions of assessment and feedback, expectations, support, and involvement.

Recommendation 1: Administer Assessment (Assessment/Feedback)

Our first recommendation is to administer a questionnaire to meet the assessment and feedback condition of Tinto's (2012a) model. We suggest developing a comprehensive instrument with feedback from faculty, staff, and students. This instrument provides data for the college to direct retention efforts, which creates a supportive experience for first-year students. This type of assessment allows for students to self-identify areas where they need assistance early in the semester before reaching the midterm check-ins. When considering environments that foster success, stu-

dents are more successful in settings where they receive feedback on their performance (Tinto, 2012b). The questions and follow-up procedures allowed staff to assess student concerns and provide feedback and resources personalized to their needs. We encourage other colleges to develop a similar instrument and administer it to first-year students within the first month of college. One way we have incentivized student participation in the assessment is by incorporating TIGA into the first-year seminar as an assignment. Since we require the first-year seminar now for all incoming students, this approach has been beneficial to bridging the connection of gathering data and implementing the outreach.

Recommendation 2: Incorporate Student Feedback (Assessment/Feedback)

Aligned with Recommendation 1, we encourage colleges to be very intentional in their efforts to incorporate student feedback from the assessment. For example, we suggest asking students questions on the instrument about what types of support students need and what information would have been helpful to know in advance about college. As students identified the specific challenges they were facing, staff members were able to create programming initiatives to address these challenges. These actions were driven by the response rates with the challenges students outlined, and the staff members were able to determine if one-on-one or group programming would be used to meet the needs of the students. It is important to assess the needs of students by asking directly what support they need to help guide programs and policies. Further, we recommend that administrators follow up with students to let them know the assessment results and what actions the college is taking as a result. It is crucial that a team approach is taken to review the data and develop the targeted outreach strategies. This approach works best when a model can be developed where there are specific contacts for the resources provided to students. Sharing the overview of

the results with students is also key to normalizing some of the challenges they are experiencing and, again driving home the message of the resources available. With our approach, we summarize the TIGA feedback within the first-year seminar class to have an additional discussion with students.

Recommendation 3: Require Advising Meetings (Expectations and Support)

Our third recommendation is guided by two of Tinto's (2012a) conditions: expectations and support. We suggest that colleges require advising meetings for all first-year students. Prior to the TIGA assessment, there was a noticeable variation in advising requirements across academic programs. Based on student feedback on TIGA, the college prioritized advising and required students to set up an appointment, either with a faculty advisor and/or student services staff member. The connection to an advisor is influential, as "the inability to obtain needed advice during the first year or at the point of changing majors can undermine motivation, increase the likelihood of departure, and for those who continue, result in the increased time to degree completion" (Tinto, 2012b, p. 256). By implementing required advising appointments each semester, advisors could check in on student progress and again help ensure students are on track with their academic and career goals throughout their careers. This practice can be implemented college- or university-wide to provide a unified, consistent experience of expectations.

Formal and informal advising meetings also serve to communicate expectations to students. Not only can students share their expectations, but the advisors can clearly state the high expectations that students should strive for. It is key that students are exposed to environments that provide clear expectations on how to succeed in college (Tinto, 2012b). Many students referenced struggling with time management and were worried about classes or grades. Colleges or universities should consider ways to communicate

expectations early in the student experiences, from orientation to throughout the first semester experience, and consider additional strategies to assist first-year students in developing these areas. Simply, students do not rise to low expectations (Tinto, 2012b). Students must be encouraged to commit to meet the high expectations of the college and the university. An advising strategy model that can be implemented to check in on student progress is an area where collaboration across student and academic affairs can be beneficial. In our model, first-year advising is now mandatory in the first semester. For larger majors that may struggle to provide individual advising appointments with faculty, colleges can consider utilizing a group advising model through the collaboration of student services staff and faculty advisors.

Recommendation 4: Provide Focused Programs and Opportunities (Involvement)

Our fourth recommendation is to provide focused programs and opportunities in the first year of college to align with Tinto's (2012a) condition of involvement. Students who are academically and socially involved are more likely to persist (Tinto, 1993, 2012a). It is critical that practitioners develop events, programs, and organizations that connect students socially and professionally. These events are an important part of the first-year experience and help students build social support networks and find confidence in their persistence goals at the institution. The focus on developing a commitment and connection to the institution is crucial, and "this is especially true during the first year of university study when student membership is so tenuous yet so critical to subsequent learning and persistence" (Tinto, 2012b, p. 257). The institution may consider finding opportunities for students in undecided majors to find opportunities to engage. To maximize resources and time, we would encourage the development of partnerships and cross-collaboration across the campus to host events and programming. Encouraging student participation and assisting with structured events

are ways practitioners can develop influential relationships across campus to serve their students better.

Conclusion

TIGA has continued to serve as a guiding tool to implement changes to the retention practices in place for students in the college. The college has experienced a higher first-to-second year retention rate, with a 2.7% increase from the fall 2019 cohort. While many factors contribute to this increase in retention, it is encouraging to see the rate increase after implementing the TIGA assessment and targeted support initiatives. We caution readers that we are not making a causal claim between TIGA and retention rates but note that there appears to be a positive relationship. The increased collaboration with academic and student affairs planning has allowed for a more focused and direct approach to addressing the first-to-second year retention. By creating an assessment tool to guide the practices related to retention efforts and utilize direct feedback from the students, this approach has created a streamlined plan to address the needs of students. The tool provides a specific recommendation to overcome challenges and obstacles or to reach their goals within the first-year experience. With the three major innovations highlighted and the four recommendations for scholar-practitioners, this paper can help to inform practice with first-year experiences and retention initiatives within higher education broadly.

References

Andrews, C., & Schulze, R. (2018). Challenges in retention and access. In J. L. Blanchard (Ed.), Controversies on campus: *Debating the issues confronting American universities in the 21st Century* (pp. 44-63). Praeger.

Barefoot, B. O. (2000). The first-year experience: Are we making it any better. *About Campus, 4*(6), 12-18.

Barefoot, B. O. (2004). Higher education's revolving door: confronting the problem of student drop out in US colleges and universities. *Open Learning, 19*(1), 9-18. https://doi-org.libezp.lib.lsu.edu/10.1080/02

6805104200017818

Braxton, J. M., Hirschy, A. S., & McClendon, S. A. (2004). Understanding and reducing college student departure. *ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report, 30*(3), 1-105. https://doi.org/10.1002/aehe.3003

Braxton, J. M., & McClendon, S. A. (2002). The fostering of social integration and retention through institutional practice. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice, 3*(1), 57-71.

Campbell, C. M., & Mislevy, J. L. (2013). Student perceptions matter: Early signs of undergraduate student retention/attrition. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice, 14*(4), 467–493. https://doi.org/10.2190/CS.14.4.c

Castleman, B., & Meyer, K. (2017). Nudges, norms, and navigation: Behavioral insights to improve student success. In R. Feldman (Ed.), *The first year of college: Research, theory, and practice on improving the student experience and increasing retention* (pp. 249- 276). Cambridge University Press.

Drake, J. K. (2011). The role of academic advising in student retention and persistence. *About Campus, 16*(3), 8-12. https://doi.org/10.1002/abc.20062

Dunn, J. R., Hains, B. J., & Epps, R. B. (2013). Stakeholders' perspectives: Students' perceptions of retention efforts in a college of agriculture. *North American Colleges and Teachers of Agriculture, 57*(1), 2-9. http://www.jstor.org.libezp.lib.lsu.edu/stable/nactajournal.57.1.2

Engle, J., & Tinto, V. (2008). *Moving beyond access: College success for low-income, first-generation students*. Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education. http://www.pellinstitute.org/downloads/publications-Moving_Beyond_Access_2008.pdf

Frankfort, J., O'Hara, R. E., & Salim, K. (2015). Behavioral nudges for college success: Research, impact, and possibilities. In B. L. Castleman, S. Schwartz, & S. Baum (Eds.), *Decision making for student success: Behavioral insights to improve college access and persistence* (pp. 143-161). Routledge.

Gardner, J. N., Decker, D., & McNairy, F. G. (1986). Taking the library to freshmen students via the freshman seminar concept. *Advances in Library Administration and Organization, 6*, 153-71.

Gordon, V. N. (2019). Development advising: The elusive ideal. *NACADA Journal, 39*(2), 72-76. doi:10.12930/NACADA-19-201

Keup, J. R., & Kilgo, C. A. (2014). Conceptual considerations for first-year assessment. *New Directions for Institutional Research, 2013*(160), 5-18. https://doi.org/10.1002/ir.20058

Kuh, G. D. (2010). High-impact practices: Retrospective and prospective. In J. E. Brownell & L. E. Swan-
er, *Five high-impact practices: Research on learning outcomes, completion, and quality* (pp. v-xiii). Association of American Colleges and Universities.

Kuh, G. D., Kinzie, J. I., Schuh, J. H., Whitt, E. J., & Associates. (2005). *Student success in college: Creating conditions that matter*. Jossey-Bass.

National Student Clearinghouse [NSC]. (2020). *First year persistence and retention 2018 beginning cohort.* https://nscresearchcenter.org/wpcontent/uploads/PersistenceRetention2020.pdf

O'Halloran, K. C. (2019). A classification of collaboration between student and academic affairs. *College Student Journal, 53*(3), 301–314. https://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/prin/csj/2019/00000053/00000003/art00005

Padgett, R. D., Keup, J. R., & Pascarella, E. T. (2013). The impact of first-year seminars on college students' life-long learning orientations. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice, 50*, 133-151. doi:10.1515/jsarp–2013-0011

Schrader, P. G., & Brown, S. W. (2008). Evaluating the first year experience: students' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors. *Journal of Advanced Academics, 19*(2), 310-343.

Skipper, T. L. (2017). *What makes the first-year seminar high impact? An exploration of effective educational practices*. (Research Reports No. 7). University of South Carolina, National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience & Students in Transition.

Tinto, V. S. (1987). *Leaving college: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition*. University of Chicago Press.

Tinto, V. S. (1993). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition* (2nd ed.). The University of Chicago Press.

Tinto, V. S. (2012a). *Completing college: Rethinking institutional action*. University of Chicago Press.

Tinto, V. S. (2012b). Moving from theory to action: A model for institutional action for student success. In A. Seidman (Ed.), *College student retention: Formula for student success* (pp. 251-266). Rowan and Littlefield Publishers.

Tobolowsky, B. F. (2005). The 2003 national survey on first-year seminars: Continuing innovations in the collegiate curriculum (Monograph No. 41). University of South Carolina, National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition.

White, E. R., Goetz, J. J., Hunter, M. S., & Barefoot, B. O. (1995). Creating successful transitions through academic advising. In M. L. Upcraft & G. L. Kramer (Eds.), *First-year academic advising: Patterns in the present, pathways to the future* (pp. 25–34). University of South Carolina.

Wilder, M. B. (2016). *A qualitative case study on intrusive academic advising.* Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses A&I. (1873009630).

Young, D. G. (2020). Is first-year seminar type predictive of institutional retention rates? *Journal of Student Development, 61*(3), 379-390. https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2020.0035

Young, D. G., & Chung, J. K. (2019). Introduction. In D. G. Young (Ed.), *2017 National Survey on the first-year experience: Creating and coordinating structures to support student success* (pp. 11-18). National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition.

Ashley B. Clayton (she/her) is the Jo Ellen Levy Yates endowed assistant professor in the School of Education at Louisiana State University.

Amanda L. Martin (she/her) is an assistant dean in the College of Agriculture at Louisiana State University.
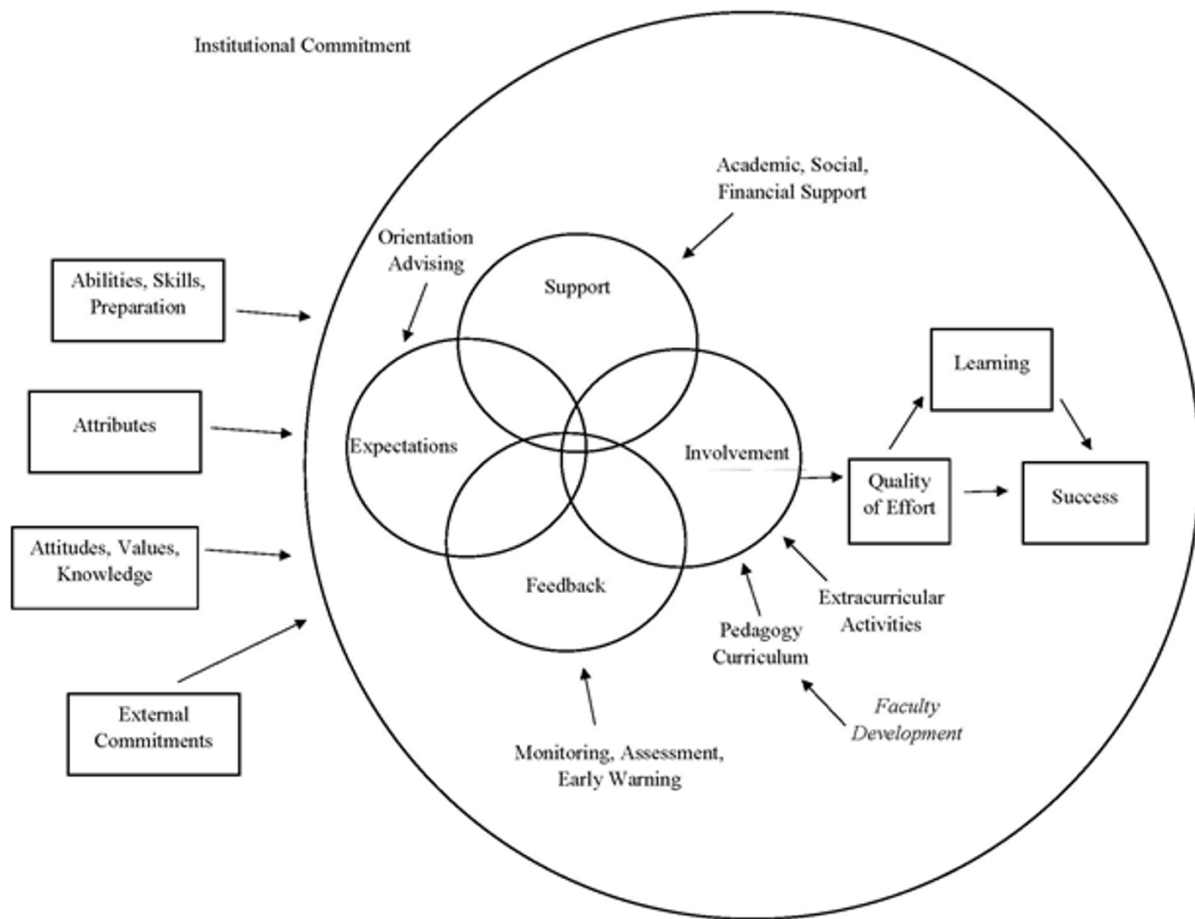
Figure 1. Tinto's (2012a, 2012b) Model of Institutional Action

Table 1

Tiger Intrusive Group Advising (TIGA) Assessment Data: Challenges

Challenges	Number of Students
Struggling with time management	106
Not sure I am in the right major	44
Having trouble acclimating to college life and being away from home	52
Feeling like I do not belong here	22
Worried about my classes and grades	184
Financial issues	67
Need some career coaching advice	56
Understanding accommodations available through Disability Services	8
None-I feel that I am on the right path	29
Other	12

Table 2

Tiger Intrusive Group Advising (TIGA) Assessment Data: Targeted Areas

Target Area	Number of Students
Undergraduate Research Opportunities	51
Managing Financial Costs	58
Deciding on Major	60
Getting Involved	82
Time Management Planning	94
Study Abroad Planning	130
Academic and Study Skills	136
Internship and Career Planning	155