Too Many Challenges, Limited Opportunity? Exploring the Experiences of Students who want to Leave

Alicia Sepulveda & Jessica Lundgren
Alicia.Sepulveda@unco.edu
Jessica.Lundgren@unco.edu
University of Northern Colorado
Overview

- Purpose
- Literature Review
- Context
- Theoretical Framework
- Methodology & Research Design
- Findings & Major Themes
- Discussions and Implications
Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of students engaged in a brief coaching intervention and to better understand the decision-making process of students who want to leave an institution.
“Academic Success Coaching is the individualized practice of asking reflective, motivation-based questions, providing opportunities for formal self-assessment, sharing effective strategies, and co-creating a tangible plan. The coaching process offers students an opportunity to identify their strengths, actively practice new skills, and effectively navigate appropriate resources that ultimately result in skill development, performance improvement, and increased persistence” (Robinson, 2015, p. 126).
• Purpose of coaching to increase retention, support academic probation students, or to offer a “unique service” (Robinson, 2015, p.60).

• Can improve retention, persistence, and graduation rates (Bettinger & Baker, 2014).

• Enhance academic and social engagement (LaRocca, 2015)

• Improved retention rates for at-risk and first-generation students (Strand, 2013)

• Roles and responsibilities of coaches (Sepulveda, 2017)
Coaching students with learning disabilities or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

- **Study skills** (Field, Parker, Sawilowsky, & Rolands, 2010; Mitchell & Gansemer-Topf, 2016)
- **Strategies** (Mitchell & Gansemer-Topf, 2016; Prevatt & Yelland, 2015)
- **Self advocate** (Mitchell & Gansemer-Topf, 2016)
- **Time Management** (Prevatt, Lampropoulos, Bowles, & Garrett, 2011; Prevatt & Yelland, 2015)
- **Improve satisfaction with school and work** (Prevatt & Yelland, 2015)
- **BSA’s** (Prevatt, et al., 2011)
Context

• Mid-sized institution located in the Western region of the US.
• Approximately 9,000 undergraduate students; 3000 graduate students
• Pilot program Year #2

Brief Coaching Intervention

• Identified in Mapworks early October
• Proactive outreach
  – Email, calls, texts, postcards
• Meet 2x in Fall, 2x in Spring
  – Discuss Mapworks survey results, academics, finances, homesickness, social integration, and commitment to the institution
  – Facilitate decision-making
  – Holistic
Tinto’s Model of Student Departure (1993)
Methodology, Data Collection, & Analysis

**Narrative**: Helps to understand the meaning of experiences (Merriam, 2009)

- Brief, semi-structured interviews
- $10 gift cards to participants
- Approved through IRB

**Analysis**

- Both researchers transcribed interviews
- Open coding separately (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009)
- Discussed codes
- Axial coding (Merriam, 2009)
- Categorized into themes
- What are we really seeing here?
- What is really going on?
- Trustworthiness
Participants

Selection Criteria:

• Students who want to leave the institution
• Participated in at least 4 coaching intervention sessions

• Alex – “When I first got here, I didn’t really want to be here or anything. So that’s why...it reflected a lot of my Mapworks answers.”
Major Themes

• Challenge of Transition into College
• Logistics of College
• Goals
• Coach/Student Relationship
Challenge of College Transition

Interviews confirmed high-intent to leave

Expectations

Confidence

• Kim - "...college just wasn't like what I was expecting it to be and the environment was a lot different that like I was hoping it to be."

• Kara - "...my personal life...it was pretty rough first semester. And so she just helped me...gave me motivating words and to push through it and stuff."
Logistics of College

Hesitancy

Connect to Opportunities

Logistics

• Financial Aid

• Major Options

• Kim - "ways to intern and like scholarships and just like a lot of stuff that you just kinda hear about baseline but you don't really know about how to like get them yourself. So she's like helped me out with different resources of like how to like make college more successful I guess"

• Jenna - "This last meeting was really good, cuz I didn't really understand much of my financial aid and she explained it well to me so that was really helpful."
Goals

Goal Setting

Follow up

Big picture and today

Belief in goals

- Sarah - "I noticed that it was a common theme, like it's the whole goal thing. Like that's the reason you go to college because you are trying to reach this thing that you are trying to get. And just being reminded about that on the weekly, it's like, it's pretty empowering..."

- Alex - "I think a lot of times, I know personally, I can get so focused on one semester that I don't plan anything beyond that. And a lot of times I can get focused on like my personal life, so I can't focus on school"

- Drew - "helped me out with like setting up a plan, cuz that really helped me out... so that kind of gave me things not to worry about"
Coaching-Student Relationship

Holistic approach

Supportive, helpful

Options and Decision-Making

Honest and open

• Wanting More

• Alex "So I think it would definitely help to have someone who would be able to talk me through all of it in like one sitting, so I can see how my whole life connects...Because when you realize that one thing is affecting the other thing, you know like what to change to change some other thing."

• Kim - "They're more like, they're really like guided towards the person so it's not like just like baseline questions that like might not even apply to you. Like every single meeting had a lot of relevance to me"

• Jenna - "She was supportive of whatever decision I made. She wasn't really like, oh you should stay here, or you should go there. So it's like.. she first understood before she gave me like her opinion or help"
Initial Experience

- Didn't want to be here
- Lack of confidence
- finances
- family influence
- hesitancy
- lack of involvement
- uncertain about major
- change/transition
- living situation
- lonely
- academics
- decision making
- logistics in higher education
- honest/open
- normalized situation
- reflection
- supportive
- connected the dots
- goal setting
- mutual relationship
- strategies
- options
- trust
- helpful
- challenged

Coaching Experience

Results

- taking ownership - not about the institution
- self awareness
- growth
- knows someone cares
- staying at the institution
- leaving the institution
- not feeling alone
- challenged me to get started
- back up plan
Discussion

• Coach-student relationship is crucial - frequent meetings
• Students want more than what we think they want
• Logistics in HE - we still make assumptions about what students know/don’t know
• Goal setting
Implications

Clear benefit for students
• Relationship, individualized nature of coaching
• Goal setting
• Holistic

• Hesitancy
• Students who want to leave still need support
• Understanding the student takes time
• Challenging Assumptions
• Decision Making from a neutral standpoint
References


• Field, S., Parker, D., Sawilowsky, S., & Rolands, L. (2010). Quantifying the Effectiveness of Coaching for College Students with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder.


References


Discussion and Questions