IMPACT OF ATTENDING ENTERTAINMENT EVENTS ON FIRST YEAR RETENTION AND SUCCESS

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ABSTRACT

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FIRST YEAR RETENTION AND SUCCESS

MEGAN MARIE PROCTOR NEFF

This study examined the relationship between attendance at entertainment events and first year retention. First year retention is a strong indicator that a student will persist through to completion of a bachelor's degree. The purpose of the study was to determine if a significant relationship exists between student attendance at social events on campus and student academic achievement and first year retention at the university level. This study utilized a quantitative methodology, specifically a retrospective (ex post facto) causal comparative research design was used to examine the retention rates of first-year students who attended on campus entertainment events and those who did not. The population included freshmen full-time, degree-seeking undergraduate students. The two sources of information for this study included event attendance data and student retention and academic data. To answer the research questions for this study, the researcher utilized several different analysis procedures. The first and third questions intended to use an Independent Samples *t*-test and the Shapiro-Wilk test while utilizing the Levene's Test to determine the homogeneity of variance. The Mann-Whitney *U* test was utilized as a non-parametric statistic when the Independent Samples *t*-test assumptions were not met. The second question used an analysis of variance (ANOVA). The researcher predicted that there would be a significant relationship between attending on campus entertainment events and first year retention. This outcome advances the research related to successful retention tactics and may serve to increase the value of the events to the institution.

Keywords: entertainment events, first year retention, retention, student success

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE PAGE

DEDICATION

This dissertation and the journey to get here is dedicated to my family. To Kate who told us over and over again, “you gotta keep the main thing the main thing” and to “never, never, never give up”. Priorities shift and change throughout life, but these statements apply to them all. Thank you for always being my sounding board and for always believing in me, even when I wasn’t so sure myself. To my mom who has been cheering me on for my entire life and never misses an opportunity to tell me how proud of me she is. Thank you for always being there for me, even when the finish line seemed impossible. To my kiddos who have grown up alongside this dissertation - I hope that someday you will be able to look back on this journey and realize your own potential is so much greater than you can imagine. And finally, to my husband Isaac – thank you for joining in on this journey wholeheartedly and for your unwavering support and encouragement. You believed in me and had never doubted that this day would eventually come. Time to take on our next adventure together!

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Campus entertainment is often what is portrayed in media focused on college life. College life in the 21st century is more than just academics; this researcher believes campus events are a critical component of a student's overall experience. The experience that students have while they're in college may impact the trajectory of their entire life. As more and more people choose to attend college, it's not always about attending the most prestigious academic school. The "college experience" can take on a variety of forms and is more personalized than ever before. One aspect of the college experience for many students is the school sponsored, although purely entertainment, events that a student chooses to attend. There has been a great deal of research around co-curricular activities and the benefits they provide to students. This research focused on events and activities that were intended for entertainment purposes only and were sponsored and funded by the university directly. Campus entertainment can have a large impact on individuals, as well as the campus environment overall. In recent years, a great deal of financial resources have been allocated for campus entertainment, particularly for campuses that are considered to be residential. Residential campuses focus a great deal on the overall college experience and offer more programs beyond academic-specific activities. As costs for higher education continue to increase, it is important for institutions to be able to justify their expenses and remain transparent. Recruiting a student to attend a specific school is only part of the equation; retention is increasingly important. Colleges and universities have goals and metrics associated with student retention with the goal of increasing graduation rates.

Academics should be the main focus for a student while they are earning their bachelor's degree; however, everyone needs to take a break from the rigors of academics once in a while.

Offering on-campus entertainment can help students decrease their stress level, feel connected to their campus community and enjoy unique experiences. Faculty have long been focused on the student experience (Schetlin, 1969). As early as 1823, student organizations were formed and eventually grew to engage students in other interests including hobbies, literature, poetry, and other recreational activities (Arminio, 2015). Feeling connected to their campus community helps students develop their own identities. It is important to offer a variety of activities from which students can choose to meet the needs of an institution's diverse student population. "Increased participation matters as research consistently shows that involved students have long been known to achieve higher grades and persist at higher rates" (Komives, 2019, p. 16). It is possible to have students who are involved, but not specifically engaged. Students who are engaged and participate outside of their academics expect a return on their investment of time and effort to support them to accomplish the goals of those purposeful activities more successfully (Komives, 2019). Offering activities that fit with the institution's mission and values is important. Different kinds of schools will have different kinds of activities. "A rural faith-based institution would have different activities than would an urban community college or a doctoral-granting research university" (Komives, 2019, p. 16). Campus activities can include paint nights, comedians, speakers, concerts, game nights and a myriad of other interactive activities and performance shows. Campus activities professionals are expected to be experts in their field. They are uniquely positioned to offer activities that aren't available elsewhere. This first chapter further defines the purpose of this study as well as defines the research questions and methods that were utilized in gathering the data.

Background

College is challenging in many ways for students. If a student does not have the drive or passion to stay in school, then their chances of being retained are lowered. On-campus, non-academic, entertainment opportunities provide a reason for students to be on campus outside of their classes. Such events allow for mental breaks, an opportunity to rejuvenate and a way to create a connection to the campus community. Universities are spending a great deal of money on these activities in a time when college is increasingly expensive. It's important to be able to justify the funding that is directed to these events and activities. The over-arching goal for a university is for their students to persist to graduation. Being connected to the university is beneficial and leads to retention. Berger and Milem (1999) found that student involvement has a powerful impact on students. More specifically, Astin (1996) indicated that student involvement with their academics, faculty, and other student peers are the most impactful forms of positive involvement, while noninvolvement with campus life has a strong negative impact on student success outcomes.

This study looked specifically at entertainment events that were offered to students on a residential campus. Institutions of higher education are spending large sums of money to provide social, non-academic entertainment options for their students with the intention of retaining those students through to graduation. Entertainment may benefit different populations in varying degrees. For example, George Kuh, et al (2008, p. 551) found that "African American students benefited more than White students from increasing their engagement in educationally effective activities." This study took into account several demographic pieces of data, including race, GPA, and familial socio-economic status levels. An infinite number of things can draw students

to a specific college or university. Entertainment options may not be a specific category on their initial list, but they can have a direct impact on a student feeling connected to their campus.

Statement of the Problem

This study focused on the relationship between event attendance and first year retention. First year retention is a strong indicator that a student will persist through to graduation. If event attendance has a significant and positive relationship with first year retention, then the university is able to justify the funds that are directed toward non-academic entertainment opportunities. Universities are focused on student retention with the expectation of students persisting through to graduation. A great deal of financial resources are directed toward retention efforts. While retention metrics are broad brush and generalized, the individuals who are retained have different needs and goals for their time at the university. Students who choose to attend a four-year residential university are paying for an experience. Often attending a university is the first time a student lives away from their family. This experience can be intimidating and scary. Students who successfully make connections to other students and who feel a connection to their university are more likely to remain at their institution. Social events offer an opportunity for students to connect with others and to feel connected to their university. Students who choose not to attend social events may feel a lack of connection to their university, which may impact their decision to stay or leave. University professionals whose work focuses on social events can attest to the individual impacts that social events have on students. Their work is focused on keeping up with the trends in an effort to provide social events that pique the interest of the students. Meeting the needs and desires of the entire campus population can be a challenge. The onus is on the student to take advantage of opportunities and attend the social events in order to feel a

stronger connection with the university; and ultimately to remain at the institution through graduation.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine if a significant relationship exists between freshman student attendance at social events on campus and student academic achievement and first year retention at the university level. It's important to have these data because it is important to be able to justify spending the money on such activities. Beyond simply the financial ramifications, retention is an important topic. It is less expensive for a university to keep a student than it is to recruit an additional student to replace them. Additionally, prospective students are looking beyond just acceptance rates – they want to know about persistence and ultimately graduation rates. "Only half (51%) of students who enrolled at four-year institutions in 1995-96 completed bachelor's degrees within six years at the institutions at which they started" (Kuh, George, et al, 2008, p. 540). Prospective students are interested in what opportunities exist for them after college – many of them will be using financial aid to pay for school and they want to ensure they will be able to pay off any incurred loans after graduation. Retention and graduation rates are more important than ever.

Research Questions

This research addressed the following questions:

1. Is there a significant relationship between the number of social events students attend on campus during their freshman year and freshman year retention?

2. Is there a difference in average total number of events attended by students with different levels of academic achievement – as measured by their GPA range?

3. Is there a significant relationship between living on campus freshman year and the number of social events attended?

In order to address these questions, the researcher intended to use de-identified data from the fall 2018 incoming freshmen cohort. The attendance tracking system and ticketing system indicated which events each student attended. Then the researcher analyzed what the results suggest about how attending social events affects first year retention. The expectation was that students who attend events will be more likely to be retained. Alternately, the researcher anticipated that students who did not retain will have attended fewer, or zero, events during their freshmen year. Each of these findings would support the concept that students who make a meaningful connection on campus are more likely to be retained after their freshmen year.

Hypotheses

1. Is there a significant relationship between the number of social events students attend on campus during their freshman year and freshman year retention?

$H_0$1: There will not be a statistically significant relationship between first year retention when students attend social events on campus during their freshmen year.

H1: There is a statistically significant relationship with first year retention depending on the number of social events students attend on campus during their freshmen year.

2. Is there a difference in average total number of events attended by students with different levels of academic achievement – as measured by their GPA range?

$H_0$2: There will not be at least one significant difference in average total number of events attended by students in different GPA ranges.

H2: There will be at least one significant difference in average total number of events attended by students in different GPA ranges.

3. Is there a significant relationship between living on campus freshman year and the number of social events attended?

$H_0$3: Students living on campus are not more likely to attend social events on campus during their first year.

H3: Students living on campus are more likely to attend social events on campus during their first year.

Significance of the Study

This study advanced the research on successful retention tactics. It extended the research to include the impact of non-academic and entertainment events specifically. The results of this study may be able to help higher education administrators to determine best practices and resource allocations to increase the support for entertainment-based events to support retention efforts across the institution. Additionally, currently allocated funding may be justified using the results of this study. Ultimately, specifically associating entertainment-based events with retention efforts in a specific way may serve to increase the value of the events to the institution. It may help with increasing awareness of the events themselves to increase attendance and therefore increase the impact on retention rates.

Definition of Terms

First year retention. For the purposes of this study, first year retention means that a student returns to the same institution of higher learning for a second year of education. This means they have successfully completed the required number of units to elevate their student status to the next level, generally from freshman to sophomore.

On-campus vs off-campus living. In this study, a student who lives on-campus is living in a space that is located physically on the campus and managed by the university. They may reside in a traditional residence hall, suite style or apartment style spaces. Off-campus living indicates that there is no association with the university and students leave campus to be at their home. It is seemingly easier for a student who lives on campus to attend on campus entertainment events as their home is physically closer.

Social events. These types of activities are for entertainment purposes only, there is no academic component included in the activity. The activities take place on campus and are funded using university money. These activities are generally sponsored by a specific department, student government or programming board and typically have full time staff oversight.

Abbreviations Used

All acronyms are spelled out, including citations as appropriate.

FAFSA. Free Application for Federal Student Aid

GPA. Grade point average

Assumptions

This study included a couple of assumptions. First, it was assumed that students started their first year at the university with the intention of persisting through to completion of the

undergraduate degree. Additionally, it was assumed that students were aware of the events that were available for them to attend.

Limitations

As with all research studies, limitations existed in this particular study. Due to the causal-comparative research design, a general lack of control exists from the researcher as the groupings of individuals are pre-determined. In the case of this study, the students themselves unknowingly self-selected into groups based on whether or not they attended events or chose to live on-campus or off-campus. Additionally, the apparent cause and effect relationship between these variables may in fact be from other reasons or unrelated causes. Students will persist through first year retention for a variety of reasons. One example is that the hypothesized cause and hypothesized effect are in fact reversed. Alternatively, a student could choose to remain at their institution because of financial factors including scholarships, cost of attendance and familial support available. Additional factors that could be driving retention of first year students include successful academics, positive connections with professors, positive connections with friends, a positive experience with the region and area surrounding the university, as well as a myriad of other potential factors. The decision to remain at an institution of higher education is highly individualized and personal. Each student's specific list of reasons will be unique to them.

Delimitations

This study only included students who matriculated as FTFT degree-seeking students in the fall of 2018 at a large, public, doctoral-granting institution in the southwest. Single-institution studies offer a convenient population for research and can be "useful in establishing patterns" (Swaner & Brownell, 2010, p. 100). Single institution studies limit the generalizability

of the results to similar institutional types. The findings and results may not necessarily generalize to other students, locations or future time periods.

Summary

Institutions of higher education are focused on retaining students in order for them to persist through to completion of their undergraduate degree. Many programs and supports are typically in place to help students to successfully graduate. Entertainment-based events have long been a part of higher education. To help support the benefits of university sponsored entertainment events, this study used a retrospective (ex post facto) causal comparative research design to explore the retention relationship between students who attended on campus events and those who did not. The results of this study offer institutions of higher education additional justification for entertainment-based events as a specific retention tool to help students persist through to graduation.

Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five distinct and consecutive chapters. Chapter 1 provided an overview of the problem and offers a framework for this study. Chapter 2 reviews the existing literature. Chapter 3 explains the research design for this study. Chapter 4 describes the research findings. Chapter 5 includes a summary of the findings and implications, presentation of conclusions, and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Universities are generally focused on academics and the coursework completed by a student during their time at an institution. Student engagement on university campuses may be overlooked by some, but it is an important factor in the overall student experience. More and more research points to the importance of student engagement (Dungy, G & Peck, A., 2019). Student retention is becoming more and more important for universities to consider in their overall efforts. Student retention can include many different components and factors; this study is focused on attendance at entertainment events as a specific component in overall student success and retention. A variety of out-of-class experiences have the potential to contribute to the overall positive outcomes of college (Kuh, G., 1995). This chapter is divided into the following sections: History of higher education in the United States; Retention as a major focus of universities; Types of engagement on campuses; and Summary to explore what is already known about student engagement on university campuses.

The purpose of higher education originated to advance to philosophical thinking of a society. In more recent history there are two general views on the purpose of a university education - education for social good and education for economic gain (Inglis, R.H., 2016). Shapiro refers to the university's role as a place where learning, knowledge, skills and traditions are preserved, re-evaluated, and transmitted (2006). "A university education therefore should be preparation for an individual to take part in meeting the challenges facing society, either from continuing debates within academia, expanding the boundaries of knowledge further, or outside of academia, where the experience of scholarly rigor and ability to question will be of benefit to wider society (Inglis, R.H., 2006, p. 1). When the purpose of higher education expands beyond the realm of academia there are new factors to consider. This transition relocates the student to a

consumer position with considerable power. Higher education must meet the needs of the students, including providing a well-rounded and balanced experience for the students. “Given the frequency with which students mentioned interactions with peers as antecedents to their learning, more research is needed on how to harness peer influence to further the educational aims of the institution (for example, nurturing student cultures that foster a high level of student involvement in educationally purposeful activities)” (Kuh, G., 1995, p. 149). Thus, making the overall student experience more important than ever before.

History of Higher Education in the United States

Higher education in the United States has existed since the colonial period. The first institutions were founded in the north and are commonly referred to as the ivy league schools. As was true of many areas in this time period, the opportunity to study at these institutions of higher education was limited to wealthy white males. Both the Revolutionary War and the Civil War brought expansions of higher education within the United States. The Morill Act brought about the expansion of higher education institutions to the west and the establishment of the land grant institutions that focused on agriculture and mining (Thelin, J.R., 2011). This shift toward more skill-specific education promoted scientific and technical education. “As the curriculum continued to diversify so did the conversion from college to university… The consensus agreed that among other things (university) implied an increase in the number of graduating PhDs, an increase in the number of professors with PhDs, and an increase in research and scholarly writings” (Thelin, J.R., 2011, p. 138).

In 1890 there was a shift from colleges and universities focusing solely on academics and expanding their perspective to include the well-being of students outside of the classroom. In this time Charles Eliot, President of Harvard College, was focused on transforming Harvard College

into a university. As Eliot engaged in institution building, it was determined that a different person was needed to look after the undergraduates (Sandeen, A, 2004). The Harvard College President appointed a popular professor to serve as Student Dean (Sandeen, A., 2004). This position "mainly represented an attempt to retain the humane values of the old college at a time when the more worldly goals of the university were becoming dominant" (Sandeen, A., 2004, p. 30). The work of the first Student Dean was an important part of the students' overall education (Sandeen, A., 2004). "The student affairs function in higher education has become more complex as the age, ethnic, academic, social, and financial backgrounds of students have become more diverse" (Sandeen, A., 2004, p. 30).

The twentieth century was when the changes toward modern day experiences occurred. "The twentieth century brought about a growth in the size of institutions of higher education as well as the diversity of the student body" (Thelin, J.R., 2011, p. 138). World War II and the G.I. Bill are credited with the drastic growth in enrollment at institutions of higher education across the country.

Impact of the GI Bill on Campus Populations

The impact of the G.I. Bill may be difficult to pin down specifically. However, "both contemporaneous assessments and subsequent analyses by historians and economists point to the G.I. Bill as a policy instrument with dramatic effects on the level of educational attainment of returning veterans, as well as on the overall landscape of American higher education. For example, Sydney Burrell (1967) concludes that the G.I. Bill led to one of the most important education and social transformations in American history (Bound, J. & Turner, S., 2002). Additionally, "observers have credited the GI Bill with playing a vital role in opening the doors of higher education to millions" who previously would not have had an opportunity to attend

(Stanley, M., 2003, p. 671). Not only did the number of people seeking higher education increase, but the demographics of the student population changed and expanded.

Section four of the GI Bill of Rights includes all the education specific benefits that the veterans would be offered upon their return. The education piece of the readjustment act was different than after previous wars. Generally, returning veterans had been offered some kind of cash reward, bonus or pension. The American Legion leaders "considered employment to be a more appropriate long-term solution for veterans than costly pensions" (Mettler, S., 2005, p. 359). The two conditions placed on these benefits were that the veterans had served in the active military or naval service on or after September 16, 1940, had served for ninety days or more and that they had been discharged under conditions other than dishonorable (GI Bill of Rights, 1944).

"The G.I. Bill dramatically reduced the cost of attending college. Not only did the benefits effectively cover tuition, but the generous stipend dramatically reduced the opportunity costs associated with college attendance" (Bound, J. & Turner, S., 2002, p. 809). The GI Bill of Rights allowed for up to $500 per year per veteran for tuition and fees, plus an additional $50 per month stipend for single veterans and $75 a month for married veterans (The GI Bill of Rights, 1996). This was considered to be a generous amount of money as the tuition costs at that time at private colleges were about $300 per year, and less at state universities (The GI Bill of Rights, 1996). There were many skeptics who were concerned that few veterans would take advantage of the education provisions; they were under the impression that vets wanted to get back to farms and factories, not to school (The GI Bill of Rights, 1996). In retrospect, those skeptics could not have been more incorrect. The financial provisions of the bill were generous and made the opportunity more enticing to veterans (Stanley, M., 2003). Approximately 1 million veterans enrolled in colleges and universities from 1946-1948 to use their GI Bill benefits. The veteran

population made up 40 to 50 percent of college enrollment in this time period (The GI Bill of Rights, 1996). Ultimately, approximately 7.8 million veterans took advantage of the GI Bill to further their education (Gordon, J.S., 2005). Because of the GI Bill, higher education enrollment spiked. “Enrollment at most colleges and universities doubled and even tripled in the postwar years” (The GI Bill of Rights, 1996). Overall higher education enrollment increased by more than 50% from the prewar (1939) level of 1.3 million to over 2 million in 1946, with further increases through 1949. Over 2.2 million veterans, or approximately one in eight returning service men, attended college under the G.I. Bill (Olsen, K.W., 1973). Bound and Turner’s estimates suggest war service increased college completion rates by almost 50% (2002). “However, the GI bills were evolutionary and not revolutionary legislation. Educational growth was rapid before the war” (Stanley, M., 2003, p. 703). The G.I. Bill was able to maintain the pre-war trend of growth in higher education and accelerated it only moderately (Stanley, M., 2003). Regardless, the sudden increase in students affected every area of the colleges and universities.

Originally there were two groups opposed to the GI Bill, those who feared the costs associated, and those in academia. University of Chicago president Robert Maynard Hutchins contended that education was not a mechanism for coping with mass unemployment. He suggested that colleges and universities would find themselves converted into educational hobo jungles (Gordon, J.S., 2005). Veterans had the power to choose the institution they wanted to attend, as well as their course of study. There were some for-profit fly-by-night schools that opened with the intention of accepting tuition payments (Levine, M., Levine, A.G., 2011). Most veterans chose to attend traditional colleges and universities, despite their status as non-traditional students.

Colleges and universities had to react quickly to the increase in student enrollment by hiring additional faculty and adjusting to an older population of students. Veterans had no interest in joining fraternities or engaging in other social activities on campus. Veterans proved to be focused students who took many honors level courses and improved higher education by their eagerness to learn (Levine, M., Levine, A.G., 2011). While much of the modern research supports the value and importance of social activities, the students benefiting from the GI Bill were non-traditionally aged and had a different focus. Despite the high costs associated with the educational benefits provided with the GI Bill, the return on investment was even higher in both financial and intangible ways for the country.

The GI Bill offered access to higher education in an unprecedented way. The GI Bill of Rights was able to convert higher education from an elitist institution to a more accessible, meritocratic institution (Toch, T., 1994). Prior to World War II, higher education was only an option for children of the elite and wealthy families. The veterans who served in World War II had grown up in the Great Depression, when college was only available to the wealthy. Most parents of veterans had only a grade school education or at best, they were high school graduates (Levine, M., Levine, A.G., 2011). For most who went off to fight the war, higher education was not an attainable achievement (Levine, M., Levine, A.G., 2011). The educational benefits of the GI Bill provided an opportunity unlike any other that many veterans accepted wholeheartedly (Levine, M., Levine, A.G., 2011). Many of the veterans who took advantage of the educational benefits reported that they had exceeded their parents levels in both income and social status and that they were upwardly socially mobile, which contributed to the overall financial benefits of the GI Bill (Levine, M., Levine, A.G., 2011). The majority of the veterans who attended colleges and universities with the GI Bill benefits would have otherwise not had the opportunity to attend.

Their success and the diversification of the student population can be attributed specifically to the GI Bill and the educational benefits it provided.

The benefit to society extends beyond that of the veterans themselves. The children of many veterans also went to college which made college education the norm for middle class students and families (Levine, M., Levine, A.G., 2011). American children, on average, have obtained two more years of education than their parents before them. The educational benefits of the GI Bill have been evident throughout the generations since (Gordon, J.S., 2005). The GI Bill adjusted the expectations surrounding higher education for all post-World War II generations to come.

Further Changes to Student Demographics

The 1960 and 1970s decades saw a different shift in higher education trends and priorities. The Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) has conducted an annual freshman survey since 1966. The survey had been completed by over 9 million students entering their freshmen year at more than 1,500 accredited colleges and universities by its 30-year anniversary in 1996 (Astin, A., 1996). Due to the longevity of this survey, the national trends of higher education can be seen through the changes in the data. In part because there was well-known data available, students shifted to using data to decide which institution to attend. Regardless of the validity of such data, there is ample evidence to suggest that an institution's selectivity is a good measure of its perceived quality from a student perspective (Astin & Lee, 1971; Karabel & Astin, 1975). If an institution was more selective in their admitted students, then the perceived quality of that education increased.

One of the largest societal forces in modern history has been the women's movement (Astin, A., 1996). Higher education saw a marked increase in women who were attending college

with the intention of earning a degree in the late 60s and into the 70s (Astin, A., 1996). In this same time, the trends related to values held by men and women converged. “Gender convergence in values has come about primarily as a result of changes in women’s values”, suggesting in general that men’s values have not changed as drastically in the same timeframe (Astin, A., 1996, p. 7).

Moving into the 1980s and 1990s decades, the student perspective changed a bit and was more focused on the financial aspects of higher education. “Record-high percentages of freshmen say that they will have to ‘get a job to help pay for college expenses’… (which is) especially troubling in light of …studies suggesting that working off campus increase(s) the likelihood that the student will drop out of college” (Astin, A., 1996, p. 14). This shift in focus also changed how students were selecting their institution of higher education as more students select their college on the basis of costs and available financial aid than the quality of programs offered (Astin, A., 1996). The survey data also suggest higher levels of stress among students in more recent years.

In 1960 the National Association of Campus Activities (NACA) was organized to address student organizations and activities (Komives, 2019). “Building on such essential functions as programming, contracting major events and being experts in entertainment, NACA leaders in the 1970s substantially raised expectations of activities advisors and activities staff toward higher levels of professionalism” (Komives, 2019, p. 15). This transition in higher education shifted the dynamics of higher education to include a broader base of students. Student retention became paramount for higher education institutions.

The concept of “student engagement” dates back to the 1930s when psychologist Ralph Tyler researched the time students spent on their academic work and attempted to show its

effects on learning (Axelson, R & Flick, A., 2011). "(M)any historians of education would agree that Alexander Astin's student involvement research of the 1980s deserves credit for originating what would eventually become modern engagement research" (Axelson, R & Flick, A., 2011, p. 40). The research around student engagement and retention has continued to grow and change in the years since Astin's original work.

Retention as a Major Focus for Universities

Student Retention is a top priority for institutions of higher education as it is a measure of the school's performance for a variety of stakeholders – from parents to policymakers (Armstead, K. & Gragg, M., 2022). Student retention is defined as "the measure of students that enroll, continue, and finish their academic studies in the same school" (Armstead, K. & Gragg, M., 2022). Retention is important to an institution; and there are many factors that contribute to an individual student remaining at the school. Different institutions use different retention strategies to encourage students to persist through their educational journey. Some retention strategies include identifying at-risk students early on, interventions for at-risk students, a student-centered culture, high quality instructors, staff and other academic support and creating an engaging experience for students to feel connected to their campus community (Armstead, K. & Gragg, M., 2022). Tinto's research in 1993 about student departures from higher education established that one of the three major causes of departure was being disconnected from the intellectual and social life of an institution (Wooten, B. et all, 2012).

Retention of students as a generalized effort has been the topic of many studies in modern history. There are several indicators that have been determined to generally predict student persistence and retention. Tinto's (1975) global perspective on retention suggests that students who fit the university's social and academic structure, integrate into academic and social life and

show commitment to the university and to graduating have a much higher likelihood of graduation. A pre-enrollment indicator of success is the student's high school GPA. "Students with lower high school GPAs may have a more difficult time meeting the academic expectations of college. They may also find it difficult to strike a balance between completing homework and developing social relationships" (DeWitz, S.J., Woolsey, M.L., Walsh, W.B., 2009, p. 20). Development of social relationships can occur in many different circumstances – including student facing, entertainment only events sponsored by the university. Predictably, the opposite is true as well – when a student does not feel connected to the institution, they are less likely to retain from year to year. Students who considered leaving college described little or no connection with their institution and felt like no one would help them (Freeman, Hall, Bresciani, 2007). Tinto also suggests that the student experiences during the first year have more influence on retention than the characteristics the students bring to the university (1975). This suggests that students who come into higher education with lower GPAs or little familial support can still be successful in achieving a degree. It may be more challenging for these students, but one way they can increase their success is to find ways to be involved and find connections on their campus.

While university professionals may be keenly aware of the benefits for students to be highly engaged their first year, transitioning from high school to college life requires adjustment. "Strategy is useful for considering freshman transitions because it recognizes the part that students play in managing their experiences and actions in college" (Clark, M.R., 2005, p. 296). "Students perceived social integration as the most prominent challenge in their transitions to college… For these (first-generation) nontraditional students, the transition to college was a more complicated, difficult blend of academic, social, and cultural challenges" (Clark, M.R., 2005, p. 297). One of the participants in Clark's qualitative study chose to participate in as many

extracurricular opportunities as possible in order to gain as many experiences as possible (2005). By the middle of the second semester, the participant was struggling to figure out how to balance all of the activities they had committed to (Clark, M.R., 2005). “The transition to college is not something that just happens; it is something that students build. It is largely the result of conscious and intentional efforts to address challenges and pursue goals” (Clark, M.R., 2005, p. 314).

A student’s initial transition into the university setting can be a challenging adjustment for some. “College students whose parents had some college experience reported higher levels of adjustment than students whose parents had none. This may be because parents who have a college education are more knowledgeable about college and have more financial resources than parents who did not attend college” (Yazedjian, A., 2007, p. 30). Fortunately, being a first-generation college student does not indicate immediate failure. Researchers have discovered a positive relationship between peer support and social adjustment, suggesting that peer support seemed to be more critical to college adjustment than parental support (Yazedjian, A., 2007).

Increased retention can be seen when students participate in a variety of engagement and activity opportunities. Students who participate in social fraternities or sororities or participate in extracurricular activities of almost any kind are less likely to drop out and leave the institution (Astin, A., 1999). Smaller colleges and universities are at a bit of a disadvantage because they tend to offer fewer activity specific opportunities for students. “None of the small colleges (in the study) hosted fraternities and sororities. The absence of such groups and the activities and events they spawn reduce the number of opportunities for students to assume responsibility for organizing programs, accentuating the influence of peers, work, and the institution’s ethos” (Kuh, G., 1995, p. 147). Astin determined that part-time employment in an on-campus job is

connected to retention (1999). "(P)articipation in extracurricular activities has been a more accurate predictor of workplace competence than grades" (Kuh, G., 1995, p. 124).

Any kind of engagement opportunity can positively impact retention of that student. Factors that contribute to retention can be as unique as each student; at the same time, engagement on campus and feeling connected to the campus community is a common factor among university students.

Types of Engagement on Campus

Engagement on campus is an important aspect of student retention. Scholars who study the impact of college on students agree that what happens outside the classroom – the non-academic curriculum – contributes to positive outcomes of college (Kuh, G., 1995). "Increased participation matters as research consistently shows that involved students have long been known to achieve higher grades and persist at higher rates" (Komives, S., 2019, p. 16). Scholar George Kuh (1995) advanced a definition of "engagement" as the time and effort students "devote to activities that are empirically linked to desired outcomes of college and what institutions do to induce students to participate in these activities (p. 683). This perspective on campus engagement requires the active role of the campus in creating and offering educationally purposeful activities and reaching out to students to ensure their meaningful involvement to the mutual benefit of the student and the campus community (Komives, S. 2019). "Campus activities provide rich experiential opportunities for student learning and development *if* students take advantage of them and get involved" (Komives, S., 2019, p. 16). Axelson and Flick suggest that "the phrase 'student engagement' has come to refer to how involved or interested students appear to be in their learning and how connected they are to their classes, their institutions, and each other" (2011, p. 38). The definitions of student engagement bring up the question of

responsibility – and who is ultimately responsible for the engagement of students? Student engagement is not just a measure of how involved students are in their academic learning; it is also an indication of the opportunities institutions are providing for their students (Axelson, R & Flick, A., 2011). Student engagement continues to be an important topic in the current time period of higher education as the needs of the students entering higher education continue to change.

When a student enters college their expectations may be based on what they've seen in movies and other media. Students entering higher education often expect to expand their social life and spend a great deal of time participating in activities. According to the BCSSE and NSSE data, approximately 32 percent of student spent no time with activities during their first year of school (Kuh, G, 2007). More than 80 percent of students come to campus with an expectation that they will attend campus events and interact with students from different backgrounds, but most students reported that their institution did not emphasize these areas in the way they expected (Kuh, G., 2007). The same surveys suggest that for both first-year students and seniors, how often they went to fine or performing arts events was positively related the students' perceived importance placed on attending campus events and activities by the institution (Kuh, G., 2007). While not always accurate to the institution's intention, a student's perception of institutional priorities impacts the experience the student has with the institution.

When a student enters their college experience, it's generally agreed that making a connection with their institution is important, but there are many ways to find that connection. Living on campus is an important aspect of college life for students. There are a variety of environmental factors related to a student's involvement. "Probably the most important and pervasive was the student's residence. Living in a campus residence was positively related to

retention, and this positive effect occurred in all types of institutions and among all types of students regardless of sex, race, ability, or family background" (Astin, A., 1999, p. 523). Additionally, it was clear that students who live in residence halls have more time and opportunity to get involved in all aspects of campus activities and offerings (Astin, A., 1999). Living on campus eliminates the transportation time and makes it convenient for students to participate in activities offered on campus. The same is true for students who choose to work on campus, instead of finding a job off-campus. "On-campus work is positively linked to persistence while off-campus work negatively affects persistence" (Kuh, G., 1995, p. 141). Living and working on campus offers additional opportunities to engage with other students, participate in activities and generally feel connected to the institution and campus.

Another type of connection opportunity is leadership programs. A leadership program is defined as "a collection of activities or experiences 'intentionally designed with the purpose of developing or enhancing the leadership skills, knowledge, or abilities of college students'" (Haber, P., 2006b, p. 29). Many leadership programs take the concept one step further and include peer leaders in their program. The term "…peer leaders is used to describe those students have a role in the program in which they serve as a leader or educator for other students" (Haber, P., 2011, p. 70). While there are many benefits of peer leadership within a leadership program, one specific example is that "peer leaders can provide a support system for younger, less-experienced participants and can assist in their overall campus life experience and holistic development" (Haber, P., 2011, p. 71). Peer leadership can lead to a personal connection within the program, further helping the new student to connect to peers within their institution. Peer leadership and mentoring programs provide an opportunity for students to build meaningful relationships with other students (Haber, P., 2011). "Experiences that actively engage the

students, such as hands-on activities, real-life scenarios or situations, service-learning projects, particularly when coupled with intentional reflection activities, can allow for greater meaning-making for the students" (Haber, P., 2011, p. 73).

George Kuh writes of the "involvement principle" as it relates to student involvement and engagement on university campuses. "The involvement principle is simple but powerful: the more time and energy students expend in educationally purposeful activities, the more they benefit.

1. Involvement is the expenditure of psychological and physical energy in some kind of activity, whether specific (for example, organizing a blood drive, singing in an ensemble) or highly general (for example, attending a concert, going to the library).
2. Different students invest varying amounts of energy in different activities. That is, an elected student government officer may devote many hours to related tasks over several semesters, other students may attend only a few meetings of their residence hall governing body.
3. Involvement has quantitative and qualitative features. Measures of involvement could include something as simple as the number of organizations to which one belongs, or the number of times a student uses the library.
4. The benefits derived from involvement are a function of the quality and quantity of effort students expend. For example, similar to the positive relationship between grades and the amount of intellectual effort put into studying, organizing a campus-wide event requires more effort and is potentially a more powerful learning experience than merely attending the event. Thus, it follows that students in the humanities devote more effort to personal

and social activities and benefit more; engineering, business and physical science majors expend less effort in personal and social activities and benefit less in those areas.

5. The effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is related to the extent to which it encourages students to take initiative and become actively engaged in the activity.

As Pace put it, 'good things go together; that is, those who benefit the most intellectually seem to benefit more in the personal development domain as well. Seniors typically demonstrate greater gains than do first-year students, after controlling for level of involvement" (Kuh, G., 1995, p. 125-126).

In a keynote speech delivered at the ALTC FYE Curriculum Design Symposium in early 2009, Vincent Tinto perfectly sums up the importance of student engagement on a university campus:

> …Involvement or what is now commonly referred as engagement is a condition for student success. The more students are academically and socially involved the more likely are they to persist and graduate. At no time does involvement matter more than in the critical first year of university study when student success is still so much in question and no where it is more important than in the classrooms of that year for it is there that success is constructed, one class at a time. …. Students are more likely to persist, learn and graduate when they find themselves in settings that hold high expectations for their learning, provide needed academic and social support and frequent feedback about their learning, and actively involve them with other students and teachers in learning…

As the student population continues to change there are many challenges for institutions in terms of offering activities and programs that will be well received and effective for students. "One of the challenges confronting student personnel workers these days is to find a 'hook' that

will stimulate students to get more involved in the college experience: taking a different array of courses, changing residential situations, joining student organizations, participating in various kinds of extracurricular activities, or finding new peer groups" (Astin, A., 1999, p. 526-527).

Change has always been a part of higher education, and higher education professionals continue to need to adapt to keep up (Dungy, G & Peck, A., 2019). A current focus of change in higher education is the rising cost of obtaining a college degree. "Addressed less often is the extent to which this change shapes students' expectations of college" (Dungy, G & Peck, A., 2019, p. 6). One way for students to adapt to the rising costs of higher education is to work while going to school. "In his message to members in the NASPA Leadership Exchange magazine, NASPA-Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education President Kevin Kruger notes that '40 percent of full-time students and almost 80 percent of part-time students work while attending college' (Kruger, 2018, p. 4). This fact alone dramatically changes the college experience for many. It deprives these individuals of time for study and likely inhibits their participation in co-curricular experiences. From a practical standpoint, the more hours a student works, the less time they have for involvement on campus" (Dungy, G & Peck, A., 2019, p. 6). Working on campus can be one way that students can create connections with their campus and develop relationships with their coworkers. This is particularly true when the students find value and can see the impacts of their work on campus.

Increasing costs of higher education led to a shift in perspective about the value of education. "This shift might be best described as moving from selling education as *transformational* to selling it as *transactional*. In this context, it may appear as though the purpose of college is simply to complete a degree, rather than to develop, grow and learn. Participating in experiences outside of the classroom may feel likewise superfluous since it is not

required to complete the degree" (Dungy, G & Peck, A., 2019, p. 7). It is important that campus activities avoid the trap of the transactional approach to higher education. Campus activities must fully embrace the transformative possibilities of this work as it would be limiting to view the role of campus activities as simply providing engaging events for the campus. Such a perspective suggests that campus activities lack of substance. This misnomer could result in fewer resources allocated by campus leaders who may see students' entertainment as a luxury in a time of limited resources (Dungy, G & Peck, A., 2019). It is important for student affairs professionals to continue to use student engagement data to illustrate the importance of such activities for student retention purposes.

The value of student engagement and involvement extends beyond the college experience. The experiences a student has while on campus will impact their life in many ways. While serving as student body president for an institution, one student learned how to plan budgets and manage resources and communicate with different groups of people. Being involved in campus development projects translates well to future career skills (Kuh, G., 1995). Students may not always immediately see the longer-term benefits on their involvement on campus, but they will when they are able to use their skills and experiences in their careers after leaving the university.

Summary

Many factors contribute to a student's overall success in higher education. There are some pre-enrollment indicators of success, including high school GPA, familial support and a general sense of self-efficacy. There are many other indicators of success once a student has enrolled in an institution of higher education. Student engagement and connectedness to their college or university is a key factor in whether or not they will persist through their first year and

retain to their second year of school. There are many ways a student can achieve the feeling of connectedness to their university. Students can participate in any number of clubs, fraternities and sororities, on-campus residential life, and a variety of entertainment-based events. "Participation in extracurricular activities, living in a campus residence, and conversations with faculty and peers have been positively related to persistence and satisfaction and gains in such areas as social competence, autonomy, confidence, self-awareness, and appreciation for human diversity" (Kuh, G., 1995, p. 124). Higher education in the United States has been evolving and changing since the colonial times. Today's students are different than decades past, as are the needs and goals of higher education in society. Institutional policies must be created, and faculty and staff attitudes adjusted in such a way that supports out-of-class experiences as essential rather than in competition with or tangential to the attainment of institutional and individual student goals (Kuh, G., 1995).

While entertainment only events may not appear to be particularly impactful on the surface, they provide meaningful opportunities for students to feel connected to their university. Despite the perception that higher education is only about obtaining a degree, much of the value of the degree is obtained outside of the classroom. "Light (2001) conducted a study of Harvard students, asking them about the most influential learning experiences during their college years, writing:

> *I assumed the most important and memorable academic learning goes on inside the classroom, while outside activities provide a useful but modest supplement. The evidence shows the opposite is true… When we asked students to think of a specific, critical incident or moment that had changed them profoundly, four-fifths of them chose a situation or event outside the classroom." (p. 8)*

This feeling of connectedness is paramount to the persistence of students through to graduation. Institutions cannot require students to participate in organized campus activities or perform leadership roles. However, they do have a responsibility to offer opportunities that promote such behavior (Kuh, G., 1995).

The subsequent chapters will focus specifically on entertainment-based events taking place on campus and sponsored financially by the institution. These events generally do not have an academic connection and are intended to provide an entertaining social experience for students on campus. The types of activities and events range from interactive experiences to performance-based opportunities to concerts with well-known and popular artists. Many institutions dedicate a great deal of financial resources to create and offer these entertaining events for students in an effort to increase the potential for retention from the first year to the second year. Offering events and activities in subsequent years is also important, but this study will focus only on first year to second year retention. Connecting these events to student retention is a way for student affairs professionals to justify the expenses associated with the events and activities. Entertainment-based events provide more value than simply a fun time for students. As George Kuh (1995, p. 146) suggests, “what matters most (while in college) is what one does with one’s time outside of class”.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter outlines the method and design used to compare the first-year retention rates for students who attended social events on campus and those who did not. This study focused on social events that were open to all students and first-year retention of freshmen level students. First year retention was defined as enrollment in second year coursework at the 21-day census date. Some social events are intended for a specific population of students, whereas the social events that are included in this study are wide-reaching and open to all students.

Restatement of the Problem and Purpose

This study focused on the relationship between event attendance and first year retention. First year retention is a strong indicator that a student will persist through to graduation. Students who successfully make connections to other students and who feel a connection to their university are more likely to remain at their institution. Social events offer an opportunity for students to connect with others and to feel connected to their university. Students who choose not to attend social events may feel a lack of connection to their university, which may impact their decision to stay or leave. The purpose of this study is to determine if a significant relationship exists between freshman student attendance at social events on campus and student academic achievement and first year retention at the university level. First year retention is individually important to students, but also has a larger impact on the university as a whole. Prospective students are increasingly interested in the longer term statistics for a university. They want to know what percentage of students retain from their first year into their second, and how the graduation rates line up beyond that. This information will help prospective students understand what the university is doing to support the students and how likely they are to be successful as an

individual at this university. Additionally, understanding how event attendance impacts retention will encourage universities to continue supporting these kinds of experiences financially. The impact of social events on campus extends far beyond their surface level entertainment value.

Research Questions and Hypothesis

1. Is there a statistically significant difference in the number of social events attended by students who were retained from their first year to their second year and those who were not?

$H_0$1: There will not be a statistically significant difference in the number of social events attended by students who were retained from their first year to their second year and those who were not.

H1: There will be a statistically significant difference in the number of social events attended by students who were retained from their first year ot their second year and those who were not.

2. Is there a difference in average total number of events attended by students with different levels of academic achievement – as measured by their GPA range?

$H_0$2: There will not be at least one significant difference in average total number of events attended by students in different GPA ranges.

H2: There will be at least one significant difference in average total number of events attended by students in different GPA ranges.

3. Is there a statistically significant relationship between living on campus freshman year and the number of social events attended?

$H_0$3: Students living on campus are not significantly more likely to attend social events on campus during their first year.

H3: Students living on campus are significantly more likely to attend social events on campus during their first year.

Variables

The variables for this study were related to events and retention. For the first research question, the variables are the number of social events attended by students and retention. This numerical variable will be measured in intervals. Retention is measured using a nominal categorical scale – the student was either retained or they weren't. There are two options, and there is no order to the categories. In the second research question the researcher examined the number of social events attended by a student, again measured in numerical intervals, and the student's academic achievement as measured by their cumulative first year GPA. GPA is a continuous numerical variable. Lastly, the variables for the third research question include the number of social events attended by a student and the nominal categorial variable of living on campus or off campus during their freshman year.

Research Methodology

This study utilized quantitative research methodologies. Deductive reasoning was utilized to test a hypothesis, followed by collecting and analyzing data to retain or reject the null hypothesis (Check & Schutt, 2012). Quantitative research allows researchers to "draw inferences from data and make generalizations from the results" (Johnson, 2010, p. 39). There is

not a significant amount of research that exists to specifically examine entertainment specific events with first-year retention. It was determined that utilizing a quantitative approach would best fit the needs of the research. A quantitative study allows for generalizations to be made from the research, while additional research might analyze specific relationships and other correlations. Retention is a broad topic of interest for institutions of higher education. Individual students have their own unique experiences. Retention rates are broad-stroke numbers generally viewed administratively from a 30,000 foot view. It was determined that a qualitative approach would not offer the same broad view of the research. A qualitative approach would provide a deeper look at a smaller population of student experiences. Ultimately, a quantitative approach allowed for the most applicable data to meet the needs of the proposed study.

Research Design

The methodological approach for the study was quantitative. There is a great deal of research about student success when students feel connected to their university (Tinto, 1975). The purpose of this study was to examine retention rates specifically related to students who attend social events on campus. The extent to which a student feels connected to their university is highly subjective, whereas the institution's first year retention rate is quantifiable. The purpose of this study was to create quantitative data to examine event attendance as compared with first year retention rates. Universities focus a great deal of time and energy to recruiting students and then ensuring that they are retained and persist to the completion of a degree. The governing board for this institution has set several goals and metrics for the university with each of these ideas in mind.

For this particular study, a retrospective (ex post facto) causal comparative research design was used to examine the retention rates between first-year students who attended on

campus entertainment events and those who did not. Researchers using causal-comparative research seek to compare relationships between groups to determine the causal effect or consequences (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009).

Population and Sample

Institution

This study focused on student data from a mid-size, public institution of higher education located in the southwest region of the United States. The university is located in a small city, surrounded by smaller towns. Larger metropolitan areas are approximately 150 miles away from the university's main campus. The institution is considered to be largely residential with "nearly 10,500 students" living on campus (Arizona Board of Regents, 2023).

Population

The target population for this study will be freshmen full time degree-seeking undergraduate students. The fall 2018 cohort at the institution included a total of 6,075 freshmen, full time degree-seeking undergraduate students. Freshmen status is defined as having 29 or fewer units completed of college-level credit courses (Arizona Board of Regents, 2023b).

Sources of Information

Two sources of data were utilized for this project.

Event Attendance Data

The event attendance data include information about the event – including the date and time of the event as well as the title and location for the event. For each event there is attendance data to collect information about the individuals who attended each event. The system used for most student events is an internally developed system called "Event Manager". The Campus Services and Activities Branch of the university maintains oversight of this system. When a

student attends an event, they tap their university identification card on a reader that scans their card and notes their attendance in the Event Manager system. Based on the card scan the system records the student information including their unique identification number which can then be used to associate data in other systems.

Student Retention and Academic Data

The other set of data that was necessary is the student retention and other academic information. These data are retained by the university and are specifically housed within the Enrollment Management division of the university. This data set provided information about which students were retained from their first year to their second year, using enrollment data from the census date within the semester. These data also provide academic information, including GPA data. This data set was provided to the researcher in such a way that all identifiable data have been scrubbed and removed prior to receiving the data.

The combination of both data sets provided the full data necessary to be able to answer the research questions put forth by this project.

Informed Consent

All data received by the researcher was de-identified prior to receipt. There was no specific informed consent because individual participants could not be identified.

Data Collection Procedures

Event Attendance Data

Event attendance data was collected from the Event Manager system by downloading a spreadsheet for each event that occurred during the 2018-2019 academic year. The spreadsheets were combined for analysis. The data within the spreadsheets was able to tell the researcher which students attended any events, as well as how many of those students attended multiple

events. Furthermore, the spreadsheets were able to define how many events a student attended within the academic year.

Student Retention and Academic Data

Information regarding student retention is a critical component for this study. The data was collected from the university directly. The information was scrubbed to protect the identity of the individual students. It was important that the data collected for this component of the project was able to be matched up with the event attendance data in some way.

Data Analysis Procedures

First, the researcher set out to ascertain if there is a statistically significant difference in the number of social events attended by students who were retained from their first year to their second year. This question was addressed using an Independent Samples *t*-Test. The independent variable is retention which includes two categories, either the student was retained or not retained, thus verifying the first assumption of the Independent Samples *t*-Test. Each subject is only able to belong to one group at a time – retained or not retained, there can be no overlap between the two groups. The dependent variable is the number of events each student attended. The number of events that were available to attend during the year is a finite number, therefore eliminating the possibility of any outliers in the data set. Once calculated, the results were analyzed using a 0.05 alpha error rate. The normality of the data was tested by computing the Shapiro-Wilk test for each group (Kassambara, A., 2018). Lastly, the homogeneity of variance was tested using the Levene's Test to determine if the variance for both groups is statistically similar (Top Tip Bio, 2020). In the event that the assumptions are not met for the Independent Samples *t*-Test then the researcher would pivot to using the Mann-Whitney *U* Test. This test is the non-parametric equivalent to the Independent Samples *t*-Test (Tokoph, K., 2018). The Mann-

Whitney *U* test does not have the same assumption requirements and is still considered to be a robust statistic to use.

The second research question asked if there is a difference in the average total number of social events attended by students with different levels of academic achievement, as measured by their cumulative first year GPA. This question utilized an analysis of variance (ANOVA) with a 0.05 alpha error rate. There were several assumptions to be considered when using an ANOVA. First, the responses should have a normal population distribution. The data must be independent, and the distributions should have generally the same variance (Penn State Eberly College of Science, 2023). These assumptions are not hard and fast, the statistic allows for some variation in the population distribution and variance so long as it follows general rules of thumb (Penn State Eberly College of Science, 2023). For this research question the GPA variable has been segmented into groups: 0-2.49; 2.5-3.49 and 3.5-4.0. The number of events attended by a first-year student is continuous. Each piece of data has a related pair, meaning that for each student represented by the data there was a GPA value and a value for the number of events the student attended, satisfying the requirement of independent data. There are a defined number of events that took place throughout the year and GPA is defined on a scale from 0.0 to 4.0. Therefore, there is no potential for outliers to skew the results.

The third research question focused on whether or not living on campus impacts the number of social events that a student attends in their first year on campus. The percentage of students who choose to live off campus at this particular institution is low. The analysis for this question will utilize an Independent Samples *t*-Test. The independent variable was the location of residents during their freshman year – which included two categories, on campus or off campus, thus verifying the independence of each group. The students are not able to exist in both

categories at the same time. The dependent variable was the number of social events that the student attended. The number of social events during the academic year is a finite number, therefore eliminating any potential outliers in the data. The normality of the data was tested using the Shapiro-Wilk test for each group. Lastly, the homogeneity of variance was tested using the Levene's Test to ensure that there is no significantly different variance in the two groups. This research helped the researcher to determine if there was a statistically significant difference in the average number of events attended by students who lived on campus and those who lived off campus during their freshman year. In the event that the assumptions are not met for the Independent Samples *t*-Test then the researcher would pivot to using the Mann-Whitney *U* Test. This test is the non-parametric equivalent to the Independent Samples *t*-Test (Tokoph, K., 2018). The Mann-Whitney *U* test does not have the same assumption requirements and is still considered to be a robust statistic to use. All three research questions will have a type 1 error rate of 0.05.

Summary

This quantitative study utilized multiple statistical tests to make conclusions about the impact of social events for a student during their freshman year. This information is highly useful to a prospective student seeking an institution of higher education as well as the institution as a whole. Students are looking for a school that will be a good fit for them where they can be successful and achieve their goals. Institutions are looking to recruit the right students, so they will be retained through to graduation and become productive members of society. While there are a multitude of factors involved in retention, social events have an important and unique impact on the student's overall experience and ultimately their ability to persist through to graduation.

Data Analysis Chart

Research Question 1:	Is there a statistically significant difference in the number of social events attended by students who were retained from their first year to their second year and those who were not?
Statistics:	Mann-Whitney *U*
Dependent Variable(s):	Number of social events attended
Level of Measurement:	Numeric Interval scale: number of events attended is a finite number
Independent/Predictor Variable(s):	First-year retention
Level of Measurement:	Categorical: There are two categories - retained or not retained
Sample Size Required:	6,075 students, alpha = .05
Population:	First-year, full-time, degree seeking, undergraduate students, fall 2018 at a large, public institution in the southwest
Research Question 2:	Is there a difference in average total number of events attended by students with different levels of academic achievement – as measured by their GPA range?

Statistics:	Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)
Dependent Variable(s):	Number of social events attended
Level of Measurement:	Numeric Interval scale: number of events attended is a finite number
Independent/Predictor Variable(s):	Academic achievement – measured by cumulative first-year GPA
Level of Measurement:	Categorical – 0-2.49; 2.5-3.5; 3.5-4.0
Minimum Sample Size Required:	6,075 students, alpha = .05
Population:	First-year, full-time, degree seeking, undergraduate students, fall 2018 at a large, public institution in the southwest

Research Question 3:	Is there a statistically significant relationship between living on campus freshman year and the number of social events attended?
Statistics:	Mann-Whitney *U*
Dependent Variable(s):	Number of social events attended
Level of Measurement:	Numeric Interval scale: number of events attended is a finite number

Independent/Predictor Variable(s):	Location of housing – on-campus or off-campus
Level of Measurement:	Categorical: There are two categories – on-campus or off-campus housing
Sample Size Required:	6,075 students, alpha = .05
Population:	First-year, full-time, degree seeking, undergraduate students, fall 2018 at a large, public institution in the southwest

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter will present the findings and results of this research study. The data set included all students who were enrolled as full-time freshmen students for the fall 2018 semester at the institution. There was a total of 6,075 students included in this cohort. The research questions looked at the number of social events that the students attended. Academic achievement as measured by cumulative GPA, where the student lived during this period – whether on campus or off campus, and whether or not they remained at the institution and retained to their second year on campus - were other variables that were examined during this study.

There was one minor change from the original research design related to the students' academic achievement. The original intent was to use the students' exact GPA. Ultimately, the data set that included GPA for each student was provided using banded categories, for example 2.5-2.99, 3.0-3.49, and so on. To accommodate this change, the researcher adjusted the statistical analysis from the Pearson Correlation Coefficient to using an ANOVA. The researcher further compacted the GPA categories to three separate categories – low academic GPA (0-2.49), average academic GPA (2.5-3.5) and high academic GPA (3.5-4.0). The impact of this adjustment was minor in the overall study.

Findings and Results

Research Question 1

The first research question investigated the difference in the number of social events attended by students who were retained from their first year to their second year and those who were not. The researcher intended to us an Independent Samples *t*-Test. The Independent

Samples *t*-Test includes several assumptions that must be met to ensure appropriate usage of the statistic. First, each subject can only belong to one group – in this particular study that assumption is met because each student either retained to the next year or they did not. A student could not belong to both groups simultaneously. Additionally, the Independent Samples *t*-Test expects that the data are normally distributed and have homogeneity of variance. The homogeneity of variances is tested using the Levene's test, also with a *p*-value of 0.05. If the *p*-value is less than 0.05 then the null hypothesis is rejected, if the *p*-value is greater than 0.05 the null hypothesis is retained. In this case, the null hypothesis is that the data do have the same variance. The Levene's Test resulted in a *p*-value equaling 1.12E-40, which is significantly smaller than 0.05. The *p*-value confirms that the data sets do not have the same variance. Because the assumptions were not met for the Independent Samples *t*-test, the researcher adjusted the statistic to use the Mann-Whitney *U* test. The Mann-Whitney *U* test is a non-parametric test and therefore does not require the same assumptions as the Independent Samples *t*-test.

For the Mann-Whitney *U* test the complete data set was put into a ranked order. The first group – those students who were retained – included 4,068 students and the second group – those students who were not retained – included 2,006 students. The formula for the Mann-Whitney *U* test resulted in a *U*_stat value of -4,068. Using the Mann-Whitney *U* Table (see Appendix B) the *U*-critical value used was 274. The statistical value is less than the critical value, confirming that the null hypothesis can be rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is retained. Therefore, there is a statistically significant difference in the number of social events attended by students who were retained to the following year as compared with those students who did not return for their

second year. Table 1 shows the specific values that were used in the Mann-Whitney *U* test for the first research question as well as the outcome values.

Table 1

Mann-Whitney U Test – Research Question #1

Results of the Mann-Whitney U Test		
*n*1	4,068	*n*1=retained students
*n*2	2,006	*n*2=NOT retained students
*n*1*n2	8,160,408	
*n*1+1	4,069	
*n*2+1	2,007	
Middle Term 1	8,276,346	*Middle Term = *n*1(*n*1+1)/2
Middle Term 2	2,013,021	*Middle Term = *n*2(*n*2+1)/2
*R*1	8,276,346	
*R*2	10,177,497	
*U*1	8,160,408	*U*1 = *n*1 + Middle Term 1 – *R*1
*U*2	-4,068	*U*2 = *n*2 + Middle Term 2 – *R*2
		**Use the smaller *U* value as the *U*_stat value
*U*_stat	-4,068	
*U*_critical	274	at 0.05 alpha level

Research Question 2

The second research question investigated whether or not there was a difference in the average total number of events attended by students within different GPA ranges. GPA data were first combined into three different groups – GPA ranging from 0-2.49; GPA ranging from 2.5-3.49; and GPA ranging from 3.5-4.0. The groups were not exactly even in terms of how many students were in each group. The first group (GPA 0-2.49) included 1,641 students. The second group (GPA 2.5-3.49) included 2,333 students. The third group (GPA 3.5-4.0) included 2,100 students. The researcher determined that using an ANOVA would be the best approach to

determine the variance between the groups of GPA scores. An ANOVA includes three assumptions. First, ANOVA assumes that the data are independent. In this case, the data are independent because each student only has one GPA score and they cannot be in more than one group at time. Secondly, ANOVA assumes that the data are normally distributed. The data in this data set were determined to not be normally distributed based on the histogram created with the data set. However, the researcher determined that this assumption can be ignored because "ANOVA is robust against violations of the normality assumption, which means the Type 1 error rate remains close to the alpha level specified in the test" (Caldwell, A.M. et all, 2022). Lastly, ANOVA assumes that the groups have an equal variance. Using the Levene's test, the researcher calculated a *p*-value of 0, which is less than the required 0.05. However, violating this assumption is not considered to be serious so long as the ratio of the smallest and largest variances falls within 0.5-2 (Penn State Eberly College of Science, 2023). In this case, the ratio of variances was determined to be 1.64. Despite the assumptions for ANOVA not being exact, the researcher determined that ANOVA was an acceptable statistic to use for this research question.

The ANOVA performed using the event attendance data indicated an *F* critical value of 2.9972 and an *F* value of 70.8074, and a *p*-value of 0. These findings indicate only that there is in fact a difference somewhere between the groups, but not which groups are significantly different from the other groups. A post-hoc analysis was performed to further investigate the differences between these GPA categories. The post-hoc analysis used a *t*-Test for each combination of GPA groups: 1. 0-2.49 & 2.5-3.49; 2. 2.5-3.49 & 3.5-4.0 and 3. 0-2.49 & 3.5-4.0. Using the Bonferroni Adjustment and the *p*-value from each of the *t*-Tests, it was determined that each of the group combinations tests positive for significance. Therefore, the researcher rejects

the null hypothesis and retains the alternative hypothesis; there is at least one significant difference in average total number of events attended by students in different GPA ranges. Table 2 contains the numerical values that were used in the ANOVA as well as the outcome values that were used in research question 2. Tables 3, 4 and 5 show the outcomes of the post-hoc analysis tests that were used to ascertain if the assumptions for the ANOVA were true. All three post-hoc analyses resulted in a "TRUE" finding. This determines that there are significant differences between each of the groups.

Table 2

AOVA: Single Factor – Research Question #2

Results of the Anova: Single Factor						
SUMMARY						
Groups	*Count*	*Sum*	*Average*	*Variance*		
0-2.49	1641	2740	1.669714	6.059137052		
2.5-3.49	2333	5030	2.156022	7.580277825		
3.5-4	2100	5866	2.793333	11.20929331		
ANOVA						
Source of Variation	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*P-value*	*F crit*
Between Groups	1192.97253	2	596.4863	70.80741375	0	2.997211003
Within Groups	51142.4993	6071	8.424065			
Total	52335.4718	6073				

Table 3

t-Test– Research Question #2, Comparison #1

Results of t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Equal Variances		
	0-2.49	*2.5-3.49*
Mean	1.66971359	2.156022289
Variance	6.05913705	7.580277825
Observations	1641	2333
Pooled Variance	6.95221366	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	3972	
t Stat	-5.72464041	
P(T<=t) one-tail	5.5656E-09	
t Critical one-tail	1.64523734	
P(T<=t) two-tail	1.1131E-08	
t Critical two-tail	1.96056141	
Bonferroni Adjustment	0.01666667	
Significant?	TRUE	

Table 4

t-Test– Research Question #2, Comparison #2

Results of t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Equal Variances		
	2.5-3.49	*3.5-4*
Mean	2.156022289	2.793333333
Variance	7.580277825	11.20929331
Observations	2333	2100
Pooled Variance	9.299371373	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	4431	
t Stat	-6.947727877	
P(T<=t) one-tail	2.12624E-12	
t Critical one-tail	1.645197588	
P(T<=t) two-tail	4.25248E-12	

(Table 4 continued)

t Critical two-tail	1.960499509	
Bonferroni Adjustment	0.016666667	
Significant?	TRUE	

Table 5

t-Test– Research Question #2, Comparison #3

Results of t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Equal Variances		
	0-2.49	*3.5-4*
Mean	1.669713589	2.793333333
Variance	6.059137052	11.20929331
Observations	1641	2100
Pooled Variance	8.950332022	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	3739	
t Stat	-11.39908186	
P(T<=t) one-tail	6.4782E-30	
t Critical one-tail	1.645261262	
P(T<=t) two-tail	1.29564E-29	
t Critical two-tail	1.960598653	
Bonferroni Adjustment	0.016666667	
Significant?	TRUE	

Research Question 3

The third research question investigated the difference in the number of social events attended by students who lived on-campus during their first year and those who lived off-campus. The researcher intended to use the Independent Samples *t*-Test to investigate this question. The Independent Samples *t*-Test includes three assumptions that must be met to

validate the use of this test. The first assumption is that the data are independent. This can be confirmed because the students within this population can either live on-campus or off-campus, it would not be possible to belong to both groups. Next, the homogeneity of variances is tested using the Levene's test, also with a *p*-value of 0.05. The Levene's Test resulted in a *p*-value equaling 2.97E-40 which is significantly smaller than 0.05. The *p*-value confirms that the data sets do not have the same variance. Because the assumptions are not met for the Independent Samples *t*-Test, the researcher adjusted the statistic to use the Mann-Whitney *U* test. The Mann-Whitney *U* test is a non-parametric test and therefore does not require the same assumptions as the Independent Samples *t*-Test.

For the Mann-Whitney *U* test the complete data set was put into a ranked order. The first group – those students who lived on-campus – included 5,372 students and the second group – those students who did not live on-campus (lived off-campus) – included 702 students. The formula for the Mann-Whitney *U* test resulted in a *U*_stat value of 14,678,631. Using the Mann-Whitney *U* Table (see Appendix B) the *U*-critical value used was 274. The statistic value is greater than the critical value, which means that the null hypothesis is retained. Therefore, there is not a statistically significant difference in the number of social events attended by students who lived on campus as compared with those students who lived off-campus. Table 6 shows the specific values that were used in the Mann-Whitney *U* test for the third research question as well as the outcome values.

Table 6

Mann-Whiteny U Test – Research Question #3

Results of the Mann-Whitney U Test		
*n*1	5,372	*n*1 = students living on-campus
*n*2	702	*n*2 = students living off-campus
*n*1**n*2	3,771,144	
*n*1+1	5,373	
*n*2+1	703	
Middle Term 1	14,431,878	*Middle Term 1 = *n*1(*n*1+1)/2
Middle Term 2	246,753	*Middle Term 2 = *n*2(*n*2+1)/2
*R*1	16,758,597	
*R*2	1,691,178	
*U*1	1,444,425	*U*1 = *n*1 + Middle Term 1 – *R*1
*U*2	2,326,719	*U*2 = *n*2 + Middle Term 2 – *R*2
		**Use the smaller *U* value as the *U*_stat value
*U*_stat	1,444,425	
*U*_critical	274	at 0.05 alpha level

Summary

Results from the research questions revealed several findings. The researcher determined that students who stayed at the institution from their first year to their second year attended more events than students who did not retain at the institution. The analysis concluded that there is a statistically significant difference in the average number of events attended by students in different GPA categories. It was also determined that event attendance was not impacted by where a student lived – whether they lived on-campus or off-campus. Two of the research questions were found to have positive outcomes for this data set. Chapter Five will present the conclusions drawn from these findings, recommendations for using this research as well as recommendations for further research to expand the information available about this topic.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Introduction and Overview of the Study

This study sought to solidify the importance of entertainment events on university campuses and provide a foundation for which funding and personnel could be justified as important components in a student's institutional experience. The purpose of this study was to determine if a significant relationship exists between freshman student attendance at social events on campus and student academic achievement and first year retention at the university level. This information is important and useful because universities are spending large sums of financial resources on social events, and they should be able to justify that spending. Additionally, prospective students are looking for information about retention rates and what their overall experience on campus will be like when they become a student. This discussion chapter contains five subsequent sections, including a summary of the findings and conclusions, discussion from the researcher perspective, recommendations for practical applications, recommendations for future related research and the implications of this study.

The research questions that framed this study included the following:

1. Is there a significant relationship between the number of social events students attend on campus during their freshman year and freshman year retention?
2. Is there a difference in average total number of events attended by students with different levels of academic achievement – as measured by their GPA range?
3. Is there a significant relationship between living on campus freshman year and the number of social events attended?

Summary of Findings and Conclusions

The researcher sought out to answer three research questions within this study. For the first question the researcher compared the number of events that freshmen students attended and examined if students who retained from their first year to their second year at the university attended more events than those who left the university and were not retained. Ultimately, the researcher determined that students who retained from their first year to their second year did attend a statistically significant number of events more than their peers who did not retain. This finding suggests that event attendance may play a role in the overall retention of a student from one year to the next. It also suggests that students who are successful on campus are doing things outside of their classes and academic focuses. They are spending time doing activities and attending events that are intended for entertainment. These kinds of events may help students reduce stress levels in addition to feeling a sense of belonging and connection to the university and the community of students.

The second question examined the difference in average total number of events that students attended within different GPA ranges. It was determined that there were statistically significant differences between each of the GPA ranges. The average number of events that were attended by students in each of the GPA ranges increased along with the GPA range. Higher achieving students, on average, attended more events than their lower achieving counterparts. This finding reinforces that high achieving students are doing more than studying for their classes while they are at the university. This conclusion promotes the larger concept of the student as a whole person and that their general well-being plays an important role in their success as a student.

The last question included information about whether a student lived on-campus or off-campus. It was determined that there was not a statistically significant difference in the number of social events attended by students who lived on campus when compared with those students who lived off-campus. The number of students who lived on-campus during their first year was significantly larger than the number of students who lived off-campus. There are several possible explanations for this result.

The final research question examined whether students who lived on-campus attended more events than their counterparts who lived off-campus in their first year. It was determined that this conclusion could not be confirmed with the data and research methods that were utilized in this study. The institution represented in this study considers itself to be a residential campus and encourages students to live on campus, particularly in their first year. A large majority of the first year students do choose to live on campus. Only a small percentage of first year students were represented in the group who lived off-campus. There is a possibility that the significant difference in group size played a role in this statistic not supporting the researcher's original expected outcome. Despite this question not having a positive result, it can be concluded that students who are considered to be more successful because they retained to their second year and those who earned higher GPA scores attended more events than their counterparts who did not retain and those with lower GPA scores. The findings indicate that living on-campus did not specifically impact the number of events students attended.

Discussion

This study did not attempt to determine if attending events is a stand-alone retention factor. The study focused more on the differences in how many events students in different groups attended in their first year. While event attendance may not be a direct indication of

student success or retention, it does offer another venue for students to feel a connection to the university and peers around them, which in turn does directly impact the likelihood of a student staying at the university beyond their first year. On-campus events are part of the overall student experience when attending a university.

Whether or not a student attends an event, there is a perception regarding the priority the university places on the student experience by the events that are offered and sponsored by the university. It is important for a university to have some kind of on-campus event offerings for their students. The events that are offered on a university campus are just as important for recruitment purposes as they are for retention purposes. A prospective student who is comparing colleges and universities might use any number of criteria to evaluate each institution, including what kinds of events are offered and available to students. The student may not intend to participate in those events, but they want to know what possibilities exist. Particularly for institutions that are located in more rural areas, the on-campus event offerings become even more important.

A variety of researchers have examined various aspects of college-life related to retention and the student experience, however the research that is specific to events is limited at this point. George Kuh, Vincent Tinto and others put a great deal of effort into research of the non-academic components of attending a university. Their work guides many of the principles followed by Student Affairs professionals in higher education today. Some of their studies look at extra-curricular activities that are happening outside of the classroom. They generally have determined that extra-curricular activities are valuable and support the student in being successful. These kinds of activities tend to include peer mentoring, tutoring or other academic support, supplemental lectures or guest speakers – all of which are directly related to academics

for a student. Often events that are associated with or related to academics are referred to as co-curricular events. This study stepped away from the academic perspective and examined events that existed for no other purpose than to provide entertainment to the students. Entertainment specific events show the student that the institution understands that they are more than a student in the classroom, they are a human within the larger community. There is a need for students to make connections with their peers while they are attending college. Entertainment events provide another avenue for students to find and create these connections outside of their academic classes.

The results for the last question were unexpected. It seemed to make logical sense that living on-campus would lead to attending more events due to the proximity of the students to the events themselves. The population of students who lived on-campus for their first year was significantly larger than the group of students who lived off-campus. Living on-campus allows the student direct access to events happening on-campus and removes many of the barriers that off-campus students may encounter. While the statistical analysis does not give a positive result for the test that was run, it can be assumed that living on-campus provides students with many benefits that their off-campus peers may not experience. Generally, attending events indicated positive outcomes for students.

Recommendations for Practical Application

The vast majority of colleges and universities have some type of campus events or activities that are offered to the students. There is a wide range of what these event offerings look like from campus to campus. Some universities are able to offer headlining concerts for their students to attend while other institutions may only be able to offer paint nights and ice cream socials. The specifics of the events are likely less important than the opportunity for students to

connect with each other and feel a sense of belonging at their own institution. It is important for higher education professionals to understand that any type of entertainment event is impactful for the student experience. Working closely with current students will help professionals to understand the types of events and activities that will be well received by the current population of students. The events should be tailored to the specific students who are currently attending the institution. Putting on an event that is outdated is a poor use of financial resources. Finding a way to meet the students where they are in a way that makes them feel comfortable and supported is important in the planning of the entertainment events.

Professionals working in the realm of campus events and activities can utilize this study to justify the financial resources that are directed toward campus events and activities. There is value in these events for the university because they ultimately help to retain students from year to year. Every institution has different priorities. This study supports the concept that entertainment events should be included in that list of priorities as both recruitment and retention efforts.

Despite the fact that the research question focused on living on-campus and off-campus did not have a positive finding, other studies have examined the benefits of living on-campus. On-campus event professionals can take this information and adjust their event marketing strategies to specifically target students who are living off-campus as well as those who may be struggling academically. Much of the focus of events happening on campus is pointed toward students who are living on-campus. The students who live off-campus are paying the same event or activity fees that any other student is paying. Intentional outreach efforts to the off-campus students could help to increase their attendance at the on-campus events and potentially increase the rate at which those students retain and persist through to graduation at the same institution.

Marketing efforts are an important component of event planning that can sometimes be overlooked. Sometimes there is an assumption that students will be aware of the events that are available to them. Getting the information in front of students in a variety of formats is increasingly important.

This study can also serve to motivate event professionals in university settings to track attendance at the events they are putting on for students. Tracking attendance helps to evaluate the success of individual events, as well as the overall impact that the events are having for the larger population of students. Events that garner the largest attendance numbers may not always be the most effective events. Different types of students will be drawn to different types of events. There would be value in surveying students to determine the types of events they would be inclined to attend. Additionally, once the event attendance has been tracked successfully, higher education professionals can examine the data to make further conclusions. For example, if the university is showing movies each weekend on-campus it would be helpful for event organizers to understand if they are reaching different student each weekend with different movie titles or if the same core group of students is attending each week. If the events are drawing different students to attend, then the events are reaching more students and will make a broader impact in the campus community. Without event attendance data this study would not have been possible.

Recommendations for Future Related Research

There are a variety of opportunities when it comes to research related to events on university campuses. There is little research to be found that is specific to attending events and the impacts of that attendance on a students' educational success. Every aspect of attending events on campus could be researched further to gain a deeper understanding of the impacts

being made. Additionally, looking at the exact same study in 2023 would be another way to expand the research. Using data from the class of 2023 would include an additional layer of complexity from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and may provide insights regarding the longer-term effects of the pandemic on event attendance. Instead of looking at one specific year, a time series study could examine the past five years to determine if there are discernible trends in event attendance and related retention. In addition to changing the cohort and expanding the timeframes, other studies could look at more specific aspects of attending events.

Further research could focus on the direct impact of attending events. Qualitative studies could be done to dig into the reasons why a student chooses to attend or not attend an event. A researcher could seek out a group of diverse students, based on a number of different factors, and ask questions to ascertain why they attended certain events and not others. A mixed method study could combine a Likert survey, open ended questions and interviews aimed at understanding why students do or do not attend events. As the student population size increases it can be more and more challenging to meet the needs of the entire population. Understanding the student culture and community on a specific campus will provide a unique insight into what kinds of events will have the most impact for that group of students. Longer-term studies could be performed to evaluate the overall impact event attendance has on the student experience. This kind of study would likely start with a focus group of students in their first year on campus. On a regular rotation, at least semesterly, the researcher would interview each student to see if their perception of events had changed and which events they had been aware of, which ones they attended, and which they chose to not attend. The reason that a student attends or doesn't attend is likely to be as unique as the individual students. But there may be similarities and themes that could be gathered from this kind of research study.

Another study might look at various personality traits of students and how that impacts the number of events they attend. For example, do introverted students attend different events than extroverts choose to attend? Are extroverted students more likely to attend a higher number of events than an introverted student? In addition to personality traits, a research study could look at specific demographic traits or groups of people – including military veterans, married students, students who are also parents or students who are attending classes at satellite campuses or online. That study could go a step further and examine the types of activities and events that each type of person chooses to attend. A researcher could decide to look all events offered on a university campus, including athletic games, performing arts, and others and look at event attendance data based on event category. A similar study could look at student athletes, or students in different colleges or majors and the choices they make about attending events. Another research study could be more proactive and construct a predictive regression model to forecast either how likely a student is to attend events or predict the total number of events a student will attend using potential predictor variables. This predictive model would help universities understand what kind of capacity they need to be able to accommodate at various types of events to meet the needs of the student population.

An alternative perspective to consider related to continuing the research about event attendance on campus would be the marketing aspects of events. The researcher could look at the different marketing techniques that the university is utilizing to communicate about events to the student population. Are all events marketed using the same methods or do different kinds of events warrant different types of marketing? Furthermore, how do the marketing plans relate to the overall attendance for each event? This type of study places less emphasis on the individual students and steps back to determine if the university is communicating sufficiently and

effectively. If the students aren't aware of the events, then they certainly can't attend them and reap the benefits of attending. There is so much information for a student to take in when they are at a university, particularly in the first year when everything is new. It would be a shame if the students were not even aware of the event offerings that were available to them. One of the limitations of this study was that the apparent cause and effect relationship between variables could be from other unrelated causes, which could include a lack of awareness because of poor marketing efforts. It may have appeared that a low performing student didn't attend as many events in the data, however the reality may have been that they did not know that there were events that they could have attended. Examining the marketing efforts for on-campus events would provide insights into best practices for on-campus event planning and marketing.

More specific studies could look at the direct impact event attendance has on retention factors. Retention can be a challenging topic because each student is unique in their background, their on-campus experience and what their goals and expectations are related to their education. However, there are studies that have determined positive indicators of student retention. Those studies along with this one could be combined to examine if event attendance is a positive indicator of student retention and ultimately of student success.

Implications

This study is intended to advance research related to successful retention tactics and specifically how that relates to event attendance. The results of this study can be utilized by campus leadership to allocate funding to entertainment-based events in an effort to support general student retention. To view entertainment events as simply events on campus implies a lack of substance and importance. This could result in fewer resources allocated by leadership who may not understand the true value of these events (Dungy, G & Peck, A., 2019).

On-campus entertainment events should be utilized strategically by the university at every stage of the student journey - from their initial inquiry as a prospective student through their first year of being on campus and into their final semester before graduation. When a student decides to attend a specific university, they begin the next step of their enrollment journey. The early stages of this journey are particularly important as they set the tone for the overall student experience. This is when a student learns about the opportunities available to them and how they will fit into the university. Providing entertainment events as early as possible in the student's on-campus journey will help to solidify the importance to the student. Orientation and the general process of integrating new students into the larger student community provide opportunities to teach students how and where to find information about events, among other important information and resources. These transition programs also offer an opportunity for students to have early positive experiences at entertainment events, which may encourage them to attend additional events throughout their educational career. If the qualitative data suggests that students are unaware of on-campus events and happenings, then higher education professionals can use that information to reinforce opportunities and campus traditions for incoming students. Retention rates and graduation rates are more important to stakeholders now than ever before.

Summary

The experience that a student has while they are on campus at a university extends far behind the classroom. Academics are one part of the overall experience that shapes the students into the people they will become, the skills they will learn and the impacts they will have on the world. Events on campus fill in the colorful components and make for a more vibrant overall experience. Attending events on campus is not simply entertainment, it could be the opportunity

for a student to make the connection that leads to their educational success, a best friend or a lifelong memory.

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Appendix A: Mann-Whitney *U* Table

Alpha = .05 (two-tailed)

n1\n2	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
2							0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2
3				0	1	1	2	2	3	3	4	4	5	5	6	6	7	7	8
4			0	1	2	3	4	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	11	12	13	14
5		0	1	2	3	5	6	7	8	9	11	12	13	14	15	17	18	19	20
6		1	2	3	5	6	8	10	11	13	14	16	17	19	21	22	24	25	27
7		1	3	5	6	8	10	12	14	16	18	20	22	24	26	28	30	32	34
8	0	2	4	6	8	10	13	15	17	19	22	24	26	29	31	34	36	38	41
9	0	2	4	7	10	12	15	17	20	23	26	28	31	34	37	39	42	45	48
10	0	3	5	8	11	14	17	20	23	26	29	33	36	39	42	45	48	52	55
11	0	3	6	9	13	16	19	23	26	30	33	37	40	44	47	51	55	58	62
12	1	4	7	11	14	18	22	26	29	33	37	41	45	49	53	57	61	65	69
13	1	4	8	12	16	20	24	28	33	37	41	45	50	54	59	63	67	72	76
14	1	5	9	13	17	22	26	31	36	40	45	50	55	59	64	69	74	78	83
15	1	5	10	14	19	24	29	34	39	44	49	54	59	64	70	75	80	85	90
16	1	6	11	15	21	26	31	37	42	47	53	59	64	70	75	81	86	92	98
17	2	6	11	17	22	28	34	39	45	51	57	63	69	75	81	87	93	99	105
18	2	7	12	18	24	30	36	42	48	55	61	67	74	80	86	93	99	106	112
19	2	7	13	19	25	32	38	45	52	58	65	72	78	85	92	99	106	113	119
20	2	8	14	20	27	34	41	48	55	62	69	76	83	90	98	105	112	119	127
21	3	8	15	22	29	36	43	50	58	65	73	80	88	96	103	111	119	126	134
22	3	9	16	23	30	38	45	53	61	69	77	85	93	101	109	117	125	133	141
23	3	9	17	24	32	40	48	56	64	73	81	89	98	106	115	123	132	140	149
24	3	10	17	25	33	42	50	59	67	76	85	94	102	111	120	129	138	147	156
25	3	10	18	27	35	44	53	62	71	80	89	98	107	117	126	135	145	154	163
26	4	11	19	28	37	46	55	64	74	83	93	102	112	122	132	141	151	161	171
27	4	11	20	29	38	48	57	67	77	87	97	107	117	127	137	147	158	168	178
28	4	12	21	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	101	111	122	132	143	154	164	175	186
29	4	13	22	32	42	52	62	73	83	94	105	116	127	138	149	160	171	182	193
30	5	13	23	33	43	54	65	76	87	98	109	120	131	143	154	166	177	189	200
31	5	14	24	34	45	56	67	78	90	101	113	125	136	148	160	172	184	196	208
32	5	14	24	35	46	58	69	81	93	105	117	129	141	153	166	178	190	203	215
33	5	15	25	37	48	60	72	84	96	108	121	133	146	159	171	184	197	210	222
34	5	15	26	38	50	62	74	87	99	112	125	138	151	164	177	190	203	217	230
35	6	16	27	39	51	64	77	89	103	116	129	142	156	169	183	196	210	224	237
36	6	16	28	40	53	66	79	92	106	119	133	147	161	174	188	202	216	231	245
37	6	17	29	41	55	68	81	95	109	123	137	151	165	180	194	209	223	238	252
38	6	17	30	43	56	70	84	98	112	127	141	156	170	185	200	215	230	245	259
39	7	18	31	44	58	72	86	101	115	130	145	160	175	190	206	221	236	252	267
40	7	18	31	45	59	74	89	103	119	134	149	165	180	196	211	227	243	258	274