

STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF FACULTY CLASSROOM PRACTICES THAT  
INFLUENCE STUDENT PERSISTENCE

EDU 776 RESEARCH PROJECT

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore students' perspectives of classroom activities and behaviours that contribute to their academic success and their decisions to remain in college. This study demonstrates that faculty do play a significant role in the success of students and can influence student retention rates. Faculty teaching techniques and classroom behaviours affect how the students perceive the institution as well. Students believe that faculty who use active learning techniques and who demonstrate a general positive attitude toward his or her students are concerned about the students' academic success and overall well-being. This fosters loyalty to the institution and enhances the students' commitment to his or her studies.

The researcher proposed the following six hypotheses for the purposes of this research: professors' use of active learning techniques in the classroom will lead to higher student retention rates; since active learning contributes to student engagement and student engagement leads to student persistence, then active learning influences student persistence; professors' classroom behaviours influence students' decisions to persist in college; students can identify specific classroom practices that influence their decision to persist; Professors play an important role in student success and student persistence; and the qualitative data gathered in the focus group sessions with students will match the empirical data from previous research studies on the topics highlighted in the current research study. The researcher reviewed related literature and gathered student feedback during the focus group sessions, which supported five of the six hypotheses.

Based on the participants' feedback and the review of the literature, the researcher identified a list of recommendations for faculty and institutional leaders. These recommendations suggests that faculty and institutions recognize the proven benefits of the use

of active learning techniques in the classroom and the importance of academic support for students in order to enhance student engagement and persistence. Furthermore, the researcher also recommends that institutions do further research on the educational needs and barriers of its upper year students and adult learners.

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## CHAPTER I: DEFINITION OF THE PROBLEM

### Background

In 2005, the provincial government introduced the Reaching Higher (2005) action plan for Ontario colleges and universities. The plan to infuse millions of dollars into postsecondary education focused on the following:

- funding opportunities,
- strategies to increase student enrolment,
- new initiatives to improve quality teaching and learning; and,
- plans to enhance the student experience.

The provincial government also introduced the *Second Career* program in 2008, to entice recently laid-off workers back to post-secondary to retrain for new high-demand careers. Furthermore, based on government statistics, strategists also forecast an impending need for a significant skilled labour force (Rae, 2005; Miner, 2010) as older generations prepare for retirement.

Because of the looming skilled trades shortage, and with numerous initiatives underway, the government continues to promote its postsecondary, apprenticeships, and skills training programs available through its community colleges. As well, the province of Ontario, postsecondary institutions, and government affiliates such as Colleges Ontario and the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) conduct valuable research to explore student retention issues, identify barriers to post-secondary education, and invest in projects aimed at promoting the benefits of higher education.

In response to these and other government initiatives, educators and institutional leaders dedicate a great deal of time and effort researching best practices, conducting student-based

surveys such as, the Key Performance Indicators (KPI) Student Satisfaction Survey, and creating institutional strategies such as Strategic Enrolment Management (SEM) initiatives. Colleges analyze the various survey results and implement plans such as SEM with the intention of improving student educational outcomes and retention rates, enhancing overall student satisfaction and engagement, and ultimately, increasing graduation rates.

Evaluating student engagement and instituting practices that will enhance the student college experience are important goals for postsecondary institutions. Studies conducted over the past several years clearly established that student involvement in and outside the classroom leads to overall student success and engagement in postsecondary education (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005; Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2008; Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005). Researchers such as Demaris and Kritsonis (2008), Major and Palmer (2002), and Svanus and Bigatti (2009) continue to evaluate student engagement and the social, institutional, and academic factors that contribute to student success and persistence. There are numerous studies demonstrating the value of social integration as a key factor for student engagement (Braxton, Milem, & Sullivan, 2000; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1997), and, more recently, researchers are evaluating the impact of faculty teaching techniques and their influence on student persistence (Braxton, Jones, Hirshey & Hartley, 2008).

Stemming from Chickering and Gamson's (1987) seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education, researchers such as Michael (2004), Braxton et al. (2008), and Braxton et al. (2000) are praising the effectiveness of faculty's use of active learning techniques in the classroom as an influence on increased engagement and persistence in postsecondary education.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to explore students' perspectives of classroom activities that contribute to their success and desire to persist in their studies. The research will compliment the abundance of empirical data regarding student engagement and persistence with a qualitative research study that focuses on the students' perceptions of faculty's use of active learning techniques. The findings will also determine if the use of active learning fosters student engagement, and enhances student persistence at XXXX College, a mid-sized community college in Ontario.

The researcher will compile data based on the common themes mentioned in the focus group sessions and will establish a list of recommendations for college faculty members to consider when developing curriculum, creating lesson plans, and delivering course material in the classroom. College leadership and administration can also use the recommendations for promoting these practices to their full-time and part-time faculty.

### Statement of the Problem

The core problem addressed in this study is that a large percentage of college faculty use lecturing as their main teaching method and rarely incorporate active learning techniques in their classrooms, which may be hindering their students' opportunities to be successful and persist in college. Previous research conducted by Statistics Canada (Barr-Telford, Cartwright, Prasil, & Shimmons, 2003) demonstrated that the most common reason why students leave post-secondary education is a lack of fit in their area of study. One measure of lack of fit is described as not having enough interest or motivation in the course content (Barr-Telford et al., 2003, page 10). Studies clearly revealed that the use of active learning techniques increase students' engagement



in classroom activities and thus increase the students' likelihood to persist in their educational endeavours. The researcher will gather qualitative data directly from discussions with students and evaluate what teaching practices encourage students to thrive academically and remain in school.

### Research Questions

1. Do professors' teaching methods, such as the use of active learning techniques, lead to higher student retention rates?
2. If active learning leads to student engagement, and student engagement leads to student persistence, then does active learning lead to, or influence, student persistence?
3. Do professors' classroom behaviours influence students' decisions to persist in college?
4. Specifically, what classroom practices influence students' decisions to stay in college?
5. What role do professors play in student success and student persistence?
6. Does the qualitative data gathered by the research match the empirical data from previous studies?

### Definition of Terms

1. Active learning: Students engaging in activities that require them to reflect upon ideas and think about how they use those ideas. Requires students to participate and contribute regularly to class discussions and promotes critical thinking and problem solving skills. Active learning techniques include activities such as, classroom discussions, group work, and role playing.
2. Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology/Community College: In Ontario, Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology offer Ontario College Diploma (OCD), Ontario College

Advanced Diploma (OCAD), and a limited number of degree programs, which are two years, three years, and four years in length. Some courses of study lead to official certifications in skilled trades that are regulated by professional associations.

3. **Commuter College:** A college or university which caters primarily to the needs of commuting students. A commuter college provides the instructors, buildings and support facilities needed to complete a course of instruction, but not necessarily the dormitories, student life centers, or sports facilities associated with traditional colleges.
4. **Commuter Student:** The commuter student population is a diverse group, which encompasses full-time students who live with their parents, part-time students who live in off-campus apartments, parents with children at home, and full-time workers.  
  
Commuters range in age from the traditional college student (eighteen to twenty-four years old) to the older adult. They attend every type of higher education institution, including two-year and four-year public universities or private colleges. They often attend classes and then go home or to work, rarely spending additional time outside of the classroom on campus. Commuter students may have competing responsibilities outside the academic classroom, such as family, home, and work interests.
5. **Liberal Arts College:** College or university curriculum aimed at imparting general knowledge and developing general intellectual capacities, in contrast to a professional, vocational, or technical curriculum. Generally, a full-time, four-year course of study at a liberal arts college leads students to a Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science degree. These schools are American institutions of higher education that have traditionally emphasized interactive instruction. These colleges also encourage a high level of student-teacher interaction at the center of which are classes taught by full-time faculty

rather than graduate student TAs (who teach some of the classes at Research I and other universities). They are known for being residential and for having smaller enrolment, class size, and teacher-student ratios than universities.

6. **Student Engagement:** Described as the time and energy that students devote to educationally sound activities inside and outside the classroom. Also described as students' willingness to participate in routine school activities, such as attending class, submitting required work, and following teachers' directions in class. It can also involve active participation in extra-curricular and student life activities on campus.
7. **Student Persistence:** Students who continue year after year and eventually graduate from postsecondary education.
8. **Student Retention:** Institutional actions and practices used in order to keep students in school until graduation.
9. **Second Career Student:** Second Career students are students who have recently been laid off from their work and who have qualified for Second Career funding by the provincial government. Second Career is a program that provides laid off worker with skills training to help them find jobs in high-demand occupations in Ontario and offers financial support for books, tuition, transportation, and basic cost of living allowance.
10. **First Generation Student:** A first generation student is a student whose parents/guardians have not attended a post secondary institution. If the student's siblings have attended a post secondary institution but their parents/guardians have not, they are still considered a first generation student.
11. **Mature Student:** A mature student is a student who has been out of school at least one year.

12. Traditional Student: A traditional student is a student who began their post secondary education immediately after high school.

#### Limitations of the Study

Surveyor fatigue is a valid concern for this research project. Throughout the year, academic schools and service departments strive to evaluate departmental performance and enlist students to engage in multiple surveys and focus groups. As a result, it may be difficult to obtain students willing to participate in yet another study.

Furthermore, the students who volunteer to participate in the study may not represent the average student and may not be the ideal candidate for the research. For instance, the ideal participants will be the traditional learner, aged 18 to 22, but given the growing number of adult learners, Second Career, First Generation, and international students attending college, the researcher will likely conduct interviews with students from these emerging demographics as well. Academically astute students with above average grades, A+ students, who may persist regardless of teaching techniques used in the classroom may not be ideal participants for this study. These students may have different academic priorities and diverse needs; therefore, their responses may influence the results of the study.

In addition, the researcher recognises that students may not provide accurate accounts of their experiences for fear of judgement from their peers or identification by their professors even though the responses are confidential and the participants will remain anonymous.

## CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

### Introduction

The theoretical framework for this study is Tinto's Theory of Departure (1975), which investigated various personal, external, and institutional factors that influence a student's decision to continue or leave post-secondary education. Tinto's theory explored interactions within the college environment in depth, and predicted that positive social interactions with peers and faculty, academic success, and goal commitment are significant contributors to student persistence.

For the purposes of this study, the research will explore the college classroom environment and focus specifically on teaching and learning factors that affect student persistence. Tinto's theory argued that both early academic and social experiences in postsecondary correlate with persistence or dropout outcomes. He noted, "it is the individual's integration into the academic and social systems of the college that most directly relates to his continuance in that college" (Tinto, 1975, p.96). However, Tinto (1975) stated that students are more likely to succeed and persist in college regardless of social interactions, if they are fully committed to their academic goals and to completing their college education (p.93 & p. 96).

Lambert, Zeman, Allen, and Bussiere (2004) researched postsecondary education pursuers and leavers using numbers from Statistics Canada's Youth in Transition Survey (YITS). Their findings concluded that fifteen percent of students enrolled in postsecondary education left before completing their degree (p13). This study also revealed that of those who left, the majority of students "were less engaged in their postsecondary studies than those who stayed the course" (p.13). A related review by Barr-Telford, Cartwright, Prasil, & Shimmons, (2003), again using data from YITS, demonstrated that of the 250 thousand youth enrolled in postsecondary

education, 50% identified lack of fit with the program as the main reason for leaving. One of the “reasons included under lack of fit is not having enough interest or motivation” (p.10) in the program or in postsecondary education in general. Finnie, Childs, and Qui (2010) also gathered data from YITS for their project, and noted that “there is a strong relationship between PSE grades and PSE persistence; better performing students are considerably less likely to switch programs or leave” (p.28). All of these findings corroborate Tinto’s theory and reveal that academic engagement and success are important predictors of student persistence.

### Student Engagement and Persistence

Tinto’s theory is fundamental in the conceptualization of student engagement models. In 2009, CCI Research Inc. reviewed various theories, including Tinto’s model of student departure, to develop a working definition of student engagement. Although there is no one definition for student engagement, researchers have used the term to measure student involvement and academic success. One explanation from CCI’s study described student engagement as “student’s involvement with activities and conditions likely to generate high-quality learning” (CCI, 2009, p.15). Kuh (as cited in CCI, 2009) described student engagement as “the time and energy that students devote to educationally sound activities inside and outside the classroom” (p.15).

Kuh (2001) described Chickering and Gamson’s (1987) principles as “the best-known set of engagement indicators” (p. 1). Chickering and Gamson (1987) introduced the seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education and recommended their use to faculty of undergraduate institutions. Years of studying both faculty teaching methods and student learning

outcomes guided Chickering and Gamson's findings. The seven principles for good practice include:

- Encouraging students-faculty interaction
- Developing peer cooperation
- Promoting active learning
- Providing timely feedback
- Emphasizing time on task
- Communicating high expectations
- Respecting varying talents and learning styles

Student engagement is an important aspect of this research study, therefore it is worthwhile to explore the use of Chickering and Gamson's practices in the classroom, and more specifically, the use of active learning, which will be examined further in this literature review. Although Chickering and Gamson's findings are over 20 years old, recent studies by Caboni, Mundy and Duesterhaus (2002); Kuh (2001); Nelson Laird et al. (2008); Koljatic and Kuh (2001), Seifert et al. (2010); and Umbach and Wawrzynski (2005) concluded that Chickering and Gamson's model remains relevant in today's classroom and promotes student engagement and academic success. Researchers continue to use the principles as indicators of student engagement while conducting further research that explores the impact of their use on student persistence (Kuh, 2001; Nelson Laird et al., 2008).

Several other studies also demonstrated a strong connection between student engagement and persistence. Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, and Gonyea (2008) sourced data from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), and concluded that first-year students who are engaged in their academic activities have better grades and are more likely to persist to second year,

despite factors that might have otherwise impeded on academic success, such as academic under-preparedness and/or financial barriers. Pascarella and Terenzini's (2005) research review underlined the vast amount of empirical evidence demonstrating grades as a predictor of student persistence. They noted, "virtually without exception, students' grades make statistically significant, frequently substantial, and indeed often the largest contribution to student persistence and attainment" (p. 397). This statement further corroborates Tinto's theory that academic achievement is a predominant factor and influencer of a student's decision to stay in school.

Once again, referring back to Kuh's description of engagement, "time and energy that students devote to educationally sound activities" (CCI, 2009, p.15), academic involvement is fundamental to college students' educational success and is a convincing measure of student engagement. Svanum and Bigatti's (2009) research also evaluated student engagement based on academic involvement in their courses. However, they narrowed their scope down even further and focused specifically on engagement measure, such as time spent completing assignments, attending class, and studying notes. They deduced the following based on their findings:

The advantage of such an approach is that it provides a narrow but clearly measured construct and thus provides a strong test of the hypothesis that academic course engagement influences college success. This measurement approach is also consonant with a fundamental assumption of engagement theory – namely, college success is greatly influenced by what students actually do. (Svanum & Bigatti, 2009, p.121)

As it relates to student persistence and goal attainment, Svanum and Bigatti's (2009) research demonstrated that students who were academically engaged in their courses not only completed their course, but they were also 1.5 times more likely to obtain their degrees and graduate in less time. (p. 128)



The evidence from US and Canadian based studies appears to be consistent. Regardless of other issues that may impede persistence (e.g. financial problems, parental and environmental background, and college under preparedness), academic success, demonstrated in the form of good grades and overall academic achievement, contributes positively to student persistence (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Finnie, Childs & Qui, 2010; Kuh et al. 2008, Svanum & Bigatti, 2009).

### Active Learning

College leadership teams devote a great deal of time, funding, and human resources to ensure their students receive quality-learning experiences during their time at the institution. Over the past several years, numerous studies clearly demonstrated that students who actively participate both inside and outside the classroom succeed and persist in their academic endeavours. Of particular interest is the growing focus on the influence of the classroom experience on a student's decision to stay in school.

As demonstrated in various studies, one of Chickering and Gamson's (1987) seven principles, promoting active learning, has gained a great deal of attention in the past decade. The research regarding active learning stems in part from the growing criticism surrounding the use of lecturing as the predominant teaching technique used in many of today's college classrooms. According to Weimer (2010) (p.82), 76% of faculty noted the use of lectures as their main teaching method. In another study, Nance and Nance (as cited by Dahlgren, Wille, Finkel & Burger, 2005) determined that 92% of college students indicated that their professors used primarily lecturing and they rarely participated in any classroom discussion (p49). Although lectures can be an effective way of delivering a large amount of course content and are somewhat stimulating at times, they result in students passively learning the course material (Armbruster,

Patel, Johnson & Weiss, 2009; Dahlgren, et al., 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Nunn (as cited by Weimer, 2010), conducted classroom observation studies and concluded that only six percent of the time spent in class was dedicated to student participation. Armbruster et al. (2009) noted the following about lecture-based learning:

... these one way exchanges often promote passive and superficial learning (Bransford et al., 2000) and fail to stimulate student motivation, confidence, and enthusiasm (Weimer, 2002). As a consequence, the traditional lecture model can often lead to students completing their undergraduate education without the skills that are important for professional success (Armbruster et al. 2009, p. 203).

Findings from these and other bodies of research have reinforced the need to look closely at reforming college curriculum and course delivery, and to pay particular attention to the benefits of using active learning techniques in the classroom environment.

Although there is no formal definition for active learning, there are various descriptors for the term. Chickering and Gamson (1987) described active learning as the action of talking and writing about the learning and relating the course content to previous and current life experiences. Michael (2006), citing the Greenwood Dictionary of Education, describes active learning as “the process of having students engage in some activity that forces them to reflect upon ideas and how they are using those ideas” (p. 160). Dahlgren et al. (2005) refer to active learning as “a paradigm of teaching that emphasizes active participation in order for higher levels of learning to occur” (p. 50). The fundamental basis of the active learning principle is that students are actively participating in the classroom and are engaged in their learning experiences (Prince, 2004, p.223).

There are a number of examples of active learning techniques, such as classroom discussions, role-playing and simulation activities, and peer group work. Other examples of active learning include involving students in decisions regarding their choice of course assignments and assessment measures. Combining these and other characterizations from the literature generates a detailed and complete understanding of active learning.

### Active Learning and Student Engagement

Several research studies have concluded that the use of active teaching and learning practices in the classroom contributes to a host of positive outcomes for students, including engagement. Callahan's (2008) research evaluated the influence of active learning techniques used in mathematics courses. His review of this topic suggested that active learning promoted deeper thinking and enhanced attitudes toward mathematics. He also noted that students involved in peer cooperative-learning activities might increase their ability to retain course content (p.364). Armbruster, Patel, Johnson, and Weiss's (2009) research resulted in similar outcomes. Their study evaluated the effects of redesigning a lecture-based biology class to include some form of active learning during every lesson. Their findings concluded that students' attitudes toward the course improved significantly in the years that professors incorporated active learning into the classroom (p. 208) and that academic performance and higher-order thinking skills also increased because of the course redesign (p.211). They determined the following based on their research: "The course restructuring led to significant improvement of self-reported student engagement and satisfaction and increased academic performance" (Armbruster et. al, 2009, p. 203). Their study also revealed that although the

students ranked the effectiveness of group work low, faculty noted that they appeared to be very engaged during in-class group activities (p.209).

Dahlgren, Wille, Finkel, and Burger (2005) also evaluated the influence of active learning on student engagement and determined that first-year students are more involved in their learning when group activities are used in their psychology classes. They conducted surveys with students in four classrooms whereby two professors used primarily lecture-based methods and the other two professors integrated group activities to their lectures. The results concluded that in the classes practicing group activities, 93% of the students participated more actively and 94% indicated that they learned to work better with their peers (p. 59).

These studies demonstrated that the use of active learning in the classroom contributes to enhanced knowledge of the course content, improved attitudes toward the subject matter, and overall higher levels of satisfaction and engagement among college students (Callahan, 2008; Armbruster et al., 2009; Dahlgren et. al, 2005; Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005). It is also evident that active learning techniques, such as classroom discussions and group work, lead to increased student engagement by way of quality- interactions with faculty and other students.

### Active Learning and Student Persistence

One of the research questions for the current study asks the following: if active learning leads to student engagement, and student engagement leads to student persistence, then does active learning lead to, or influence, student persistence. The review of the literature has associated active learning to student engagement, and it finds that the use of active learning techniques also influences student persistence. Tinto's (1975) theoretical research highlighted academic and social integration as key influencers on persistence.

...the model argues that it is the individual's integration into the academic and social systems of the college that most directly relates to his continuance in that college. Given prior-levels of goal and institutional commitment, it is the person's normative and structural integration into the academic and social systems that lead to new levels of commitment. Other things being equal, the higher the degree of integration of the individual into the college system, the greater will be his commitment to the specific institution and to the goal of college completion (Tinto, 1975, p.96).

Tinto's model described how both goal and institutional commitment impact academic and social interaction respectively. He created a diagram that displayed peer and faculty interactions (social integration), academic performance, and intellectual development (academic integration) as the determining factors leading to a complete integration into college. This notion led to various studies regarding the possible correlation between active learning and persistence (Braxton, Jones, Hirschy, & Hartley, 2008; Braxton, Milem, & Sullivan (2000); Dahlgren et al., 2005).

For instance, Braxton et al. (2000) researched active learning and persistence in an effort to review and expand on Tinto's (1975) original student departure theory. Braxton and his associates (2000) argued that Tinto's model did not effectively describe the concept of social integration and proposed that the use of active learning techniques through student-peer and student-faculty interactions led to higher levels of social integration and student retention. They hypothesised that students who are involved in active learning in the classroom are likely to spend more time socializing with peers and spend less time studying because they have acquired greater in-depth knowledge of the course material while in class. They also gathered that through active learning based activities, students develop friendships and peer support groups. They proposed "...active learning course practices may directly influence social integration and

indirectly affect subsequent institutional commitment and student departure decisions” (Braxton et al., 2000, p. 572). Specifically they explored the extent of social interaction, institutional commitment, and persistence resulting from the use of the following active learning techniques:

- class discussion;
- knowledge-level examination questions;
- group work; and
- higher order thinking activities (Braxton et al., 2000, p.572).

Their studies concluded various results. First, both class discussion and higher-order thinking activities had a positive and direct influence on social integration (p. 577). Secondly, class discussion and social integration had direct and indirect influences on institutional commitment and persistence, whereas higher-order thinking practices had an indirect influence only on these two measures. The research further concluded that group work and knowledge-level exam questions influence institutional commitment and persistence but not in a meaningful way. It is important to note that knowledge-level exam questions in this study were initially determined to be an active learning technique but was further defined as non-active learning because it promoted surface-based learning of the course content (p. 576). Interestingly, the research concluded that knowledge-level exam questions negatively affected social integration, institutional commitment, and persistence levels.

Braxton, Jones, Hirschy, and Hartley (2008) extend on prior research performed by Braxton, Milem and Sullivan (2000) and also evaluated the importance of the faculty’s use of active learning techniques in the classroom and the practices’ affects on students’ social integration, institutional commitment, and persistence. One difference in this study is that it also attempted to evaluate the effect of active learning on a student’s perception of the institution’s

level of commitment to his or her welfare. Braxton et al. (2008) described this attribute as an important measure because the student interprets the use of active learning to mean that the faculty are interested in student success and that the institution is interested and committed to student welfare (p.74). Their findings resulted in various conclusions, namely that the use of active learning techniques positively influences the student's perception of the university or college's commitment to the student's wellbeing. They noted the following:

The positive relationship between active learning and student perception of the institution's commitment to student welfare indicates that pedagogical practices that encourage students to engage in doing and thinking during class as opposed to passively listening influences students' belief about how much their institution cares about their success (Braxton et al., 2008, p. 80).

Although Braxton et al.'s (2008) research did not reveal a direct correlation between active learning and persistence, it successfully demonstrated an indirect link. The study revealed that factors such as a student's commitment to the institution and their perception that the institution cares about his or her wellbeing influence the student's degree of social integration into the college community, thus affecting the student likelihood to persist (Braxton et al. 2000; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 426).

Dalhgren et al.'s (2005) research also investigated whether the use of active learning techniques, specifically group-work activities, affected student persistence. The results revealed that of the students who attended classes with the professors who used both lecture and group activities, 93% persisted to the end of term and wrote all of their exams. On the other hand, of the students attending the lecture-based classes, only 80% persisted to the end of term.

For the purposes of the current study, the studies conducted by Braxton et al. (2000, 2008) and Dahlgren et al. (2005) are quite significant as they emphasized the positive influence of the use of active learning practices in the classroom on student persistence. It also clearly underlines the important role that faculty, in particular, play in a student's decision to continue in postsecondary.

### Faculty Behaviours and Student Persistence

The literature review so far has explored the impact of teaching practices and classroom experiences in relation to student engagement and persistence. Faculty behaviours are another important factor to consider when evaluating student academic achievement and persistence. Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, and White's (2005) article provided an overview of student engagement indicators at high performing institutions. The article focused on the main factors that contribute the student success at colleges and universities selected for the DEEP project and outlined institutional practices that clearly linked student engagement factors to student success and enhanced learning outcomes; "Improving the quality of learning and teaching is pretty much the order of the day at DEEP schools" (p. 46). The general mission of these institutions is to employ faculty and staff who share and adhere to the college or university's educational values. DEEP schools "unapologetically emphasize to potential faculty the importance of high-quality undergraduate teaching and probe the extent to which potential hires are enthusiastic about and committed to it" (p.49). The DEEP project emphasised the importance of teaching and learning and focused on institutional factors, particularly faculty behaviours and teaching practices and their influence on student engagement and success.

Faculty behaviours and their use of effective teaching practices greatly influence students' perceptions of their own academic success (Pascarella, Seifert & Whitt, 2008;



Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Kinzie, 2010). Pascarella et al. (2008) reviewed the effects of effective classroom teaching on student persistence and revealed that student exposure to faculty behaviours such as clarity of instruction, organization, and preparedness of content materials, and student-faculty classroom interactions greatly influence a student's decision to persist. They noted that because these students are more satisfied with their educational experience they are more likely to remain at the institution (p.67).

Thomas' (2002) qualitative research also studied the role of faculty behaviours, intuitional values, and their influence student retention. Thomas described the faculty members' roles as fundamental to ensuring students overall success in higher education. During the focus group sessions with students, faculty-student relationships were deemed very important. Thomas noted, "If students feel that staff believe in them, and care about the outcomes of their studying, they seem to gain both self-confidence and motivation, and their work improves" (p.432). Thomas' study also revealed that important behaviours such as, respect for students, empathy, accessibility to, and support from faculty, greatly affects how the student perceives his relationship with the faculty and the institution thus influencing his or her decision to continue post-secondary education.

#### Faculty Influence on Student Persistence

Tinto's (1975) original theory explored student engagement and persistence factors, and noted in his later studies that researchers have ignored the academic aspects in engagement research models (Tinto, 1997). Furthermore, he stated that researchers have so far underestimated the value and importance of the classroom experience, academic behaviours, and the faculty's role in student engagement and persistence. His study highlighted the impact of learning communities, the importance of various social aspects of the learning environment, and

their positive correlations to student persistence. Demaris and Kritsonis's (2008) article echoed Tinto's statement that there is very little research exploring the postsecondary classroom and its effects on student satisfaction and persistence. The article determined that the classroom environments, student involvement, and student perceptions of the classroom experience are key factors in student satisfaction and persistence. Svanum and Bigatti's (2009) work also investigated the impact of academic engagement factors on student persistence and concluded that, "Academically engaged students were indeed more likely to attain a degree..." (p. 128). As more research explores the factors that influence student engagement, learning, and persistence at college, it is becoming clear that faculty play a crucial role.

Tinto's (1997, 1998) work investigating classrooms as communities sparked a thorough review of faculty's role in the classroom and their influence on student engagement and persistence outcomes. Umbach and Wawrzynski (2005) examined the value and importance that college faculty have on student behaviours, engagement, and academic success. This study focused specifically on faculty who encourage cooperation among students, support active learning, and communicate high learning expectations and outcomes for their students. The study also surveyed faculty who use active learning techniques and who promote student-faculty contact in and outside the classroom. The results showed that students displayed higher levels of engagement, as well as elevated learning outcomes at institutions where faculty reported they emphasized the use of best practices in the classroom environment and challenged students in their lessons. Umbach and Wawrzynski, (2005) concluded that faculty behaviours and teaching practices are critical for academic success, have a profound effect on students, and "play the single-most important role in student learning" (p. 176).

Other engagement studies linked faculty involvement and academic practices with student academic success and persistence, particularly at liberal arts colleges (Demaris & Kritsonis, 2008; Nelson Laird et al., 2008; Tinto, 1997, 1998; Seifert et al. 2010; Umbach & Wawrynski, 2005). However, researchers are concentrating more on retention efforts at community and commuter colleges as a number of today's students have various other priorities such as work, and family (Nelson Laird et al., 2008). Oftentimes for these types of students, their only social interactions while on campus are in the classroom with their peers and professors. With less time spent interacting with classmates outside of class, students' social engagement and integration needs fall heavily on the professors and other classroom related interactions and activities. Nelson Laird et al. (2008) noted the following observation from their research:

The majority of students commute to school, with most working at some point during their studies, some many hours a week. For these students and nontrivial numbers who attend so-called residential campuses but live off-campus, the classroom is the only venue where they regularly have face-to-face contact with faculty or staff members and other students. This means that classroom learning environments and teaching and learning practices are ever more important, all of which makes the instructor's job more demanding and complicated (p. 86).

Students who commute and those who do not spend time on campus outside of classroom hours certainly face more challenges in the area of social integration. Therefore, academic integration, described as academic performance and intellectual development (Tinto, 1975), is critical in order for these students to succeed (Halpin, 1990). Halpin's (1990), study examined first-year commuter-college students and the influence of academic integration on persistence.

His findings demonstrated that students are particularly impressed with institutions that have faculty who are concerned for their academic and intellectual development, and if there are opportunities to interact with faculty. Furthermore, Halpin stated that students are more likely to become integrated and therefore persist, at institutions that promote more student-faculty contact by way of smaller class sizes, and accessible, involved faculty members (p.31).

Canadian college administration can learn a great deal from the teaching practices used at many liberal arts colleges situated in the United States. Liberal arts colleges tend to promote effective educational practices more than other types of institutions. Umbach and Wawrzynski's (2005) research demonstrated that students at liberal arts colleges are active, engaged learners. Seifert et al. (2010) also determined that students at liberal arts colleges experienced good teaching and quality interactions with faculty. It is also important to note that today's community college students differ greatly from those of the past. The Ontario government's Reaching Higher (2005) plan announced that more and more students, regardless of their academic background, age, and socioeconomic status, now have the opportunity to attend and access post-secondary education. However, a growing number of these students are less academically prepared, posing further challenges to both the incoming students and faculty members. Therefore, it is essential for faculty to explore alternative teaching methods, such as active teaching and learning, and possibly adjust their classroom behaviours in order to effectively instruct students at different academic attainment levels and with varying learning styles.

### Summary

Post-secondary institutions are constantly measuring their performance based on student satisfaction, retention, and graduation rates, through various institutional and provincial surveys

and reports. These types of scorecards and reports are necessary because they help institutions track their performance and measure students overall satisfaction of the college's academic programs, quality of instruction, and provision of services to students. Post-secondary institutions also use these reports to identify barriers to student success and retention, and to provide administrators the opportunity to make the adjustments necessary to ensure that students receive a quality education and a positive college experience. These report mechanisms also show where the institution is successful and allows administration to continue to improve on the initiatives and strategies that are working.

Clearly, all areas of the institution have a significant role to play at ensuring that the students' experience at college is gratifying and successful. However, as student populations continue to grow in numbers and as their backgrounds and academic requirements become more diverse in nature, the role of college faculty is always changing and expanding. As Tinto (1975) expressed, academic and social integration are key components to student academic success, engagement, and persistence. Therefore, faculty are not only charged with ensuring that students learn the course material, they are becoming the core of the college experience for a growing number of students whose only time spent on campus is in the classroom.

Years of research have demonstrated that faculty behaviours and use of active learning techniques in the classroom contribute to a host of positive outcomes for students, most notably, student engagement and academic success. Nelson Laird et al. (2008) findings determined that faculty classroom practices that foster academic challenge in the form of active and collaborative learning environments and support for students are optimal determinants for success and persistence. Faculty classroom behaviours such as clarity of instruction and organization of the course content can also influence students' decisions to persist in post-secondary (Pascarella et

al., 2008; Thomas, 2002). Active learning promotes deeper and higher-order thinking, enhanced attitudes toward course material, increased ability to retain course content, and enhance classroom participation (Callahan's (2008); Armbruster et al., (2009); Dahlgren et al., 2005). The research also concluded that active learning in the form of classroom discussions with faculty and peers, group work, and other active learning techniques influences students' institutional commitment and student perceptions of institutional commitment toward student welfare, two other factors known to influence student persistence. Thus, it is conceivable that faculty behaviours and use active learning techniques do influence students' decisions to persist in their college endeavours.

Yet, despite the growing body of evidence showing that faculty's use of active learning techniques relates to positive student learning outcomes, many faculty members still subscribe to lecturing as their main teaching technique (Weimer, 2010). Weimer's (2010) analysis of faculty teaching practices and classroom behaviours identified that faculty perceptions of how students learn and want to learn, as well as a sense of tradition might influence the faculty's tendency toward lecturing (p83). Weimer recommended that faculty use active learning to engage student in their learning activities rather than have them wait for the learning to be "done unto them" (p. 83). Furthermore, based on their findings, Umbach and Wawrzynski (2005) strongly recommended that college administration find ways to support and reward faculty members who are committed to providing quality learning environments and support for their students. Thus, the challenge for institutional leadership is to educate, train and promote the benefits of the use of active learning techniques to faculty, and provide support and rewards to faculty who demonstrate classroom behaviours and practices that engage students and foster persistence.

The researcher of the current study anticipates that the qualitative data gathered and analyzed through the focus group sessions will match the vast amount of empirical data from previous research. The researcher will then create a useful list of recommendations that faculty can use as guidelines in the structuring or revising of course curriculum , outlines, and classroom preparation and delivery.

## CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

### Population and Sample

The population for this research includes second year level students from all academic schools at XXXX College, a mid-sized community college in XXXXX, Ontario. The researcher anticipates that students ranging in ages 19 to 24, both male and female, of varying ethnic backgrounds and programs of study will volunteer to participate in this study. It is possible that some adult learners will also volunteer to participate in the focus group sessions. The researcher decided to study second year students because they have already demonstrated their ability or willingness to persist from their first year to their second year of post-secondary education.

The researcher will invite students from each of the following seven academic schools at XXXX College to participate in the study:

1. School of Media, Art & Design
2. School of Business, IT & Management
3. School of Justice & Emergency Services
4. School of Health & Community Services
5. School of Science & Engineering Technology
6. School of Interdisciplinary Studies & Employment Services
7. School of Skilled Trades, Apprenticeship & Renewable Technology

The researcher expects to attract approximately five to seven students from each school for a total of approximately 35 to 50 second-year students.

Secondary data was evaluated mainly from 1997 to 2010 with the exception of two reference from 1975 and 1987, which were used as historical resources to ground the topic in both theory and practice.



### Data Collection Methods

The researcher requested and was granted permission from XXXX College's Vice President, Academic as well as each Academic school Dean to invite the college's students to participate in the focus group sessions. The letters of permission are provided in APPENDIX A. The researcher was also granted permission to request assistance from each of the academic schools' Student Liaisons in order to promote the research study to students. The researcher created an invitation and the Student Liaisons will forward it via e-mail to their schools' second-year students. The invitation (see APPENDIX B) clearly describes the purpose of the study and requests that students volunteer to participate in a hour-long focus group session.

The researcher will facilitate the focus group sessions, and lead a question and answer discussion with the students regarding their perceptions of their faculty's classroom behaviours and use active learning techniques. The participants will also be asked whether their faculty's behaviour or use of active learning had in any way influenced their desire or decision to persist in their educational endeavours. See APPENDIX C for the list of focus group session questions.

The focus group session discussions will be audio recorded and the researcher will manually transcribe the feedback from students and group discussion as much as possible during the sessions. The audio recording will assist in the data gathering, transcription, and analysis processes.

The participants will also be asked to fill in a brief survey consisting of demographic type questions which will be used to describe and categorize the types of students who participated in the study. The participant consent form and survey questions are provided in APPENDIX D. The subjects' identities will remain confidential and they will be asked not to identify themselves or other students who participated in the focus group sessions.

### Variables and Measures

The variables in the present research study include the number and the different types of students who volunteer to participate in the study. The number of students who participate in the focus group sessions may influence the quality of the output; the larger the group, the greater is the opportunity for a variety of points of view and responses collected for analysis. Also, certain demographic characteristics of the participants such as age, gender, and program of study may influence the discussions and the outcomes for the study.

The survey uses a nominal scale to collect some general data regarding the participants' characteristics. The survey will gather demographic data such as age, gender, and level of education of the students as well as information pertaining to some of the themes reviewed in the study.

### Data Analysis Methods

The researcher will observe the data, form opinions, and develop conclusions. The data will be analyzed to determine if it supports or does not support the hypotheses. The researcher will gather the data using audio recordings and manual transcription methods during the focus group sessions. Note-takers may be present during the sessions as well to help gather the data and feedback from the students throughout the group discussions. Once the recordings and handwritten notes are transcribed, the researcher will carefully explore the data in search of general sense and sentiments of each focus group participants. The information will then be coded and categorized in search of common, broad themes. Finally, the researcher will analyze the data based on the research hypotheses and will determine whether or not the data supports the hypothesis statements.

The data gathered from the initial survey questionnaire (APPENDIX D) will be reviewed and categorized in order to form a general analysis of the types of students who participated in the study. The data from the survey questionnaire will not be used as correlational evidence in support of, or against the hypotheses.

### Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Professors' use of active learning techniques in the classroom will lead to higher student retention rates.

Hypothesis 2: Since active learning contributes to student engagement and student engagement leads to student persistence, then active learning influences student persistence.

Hypothesis 3: Professors' classroom behaviours influence students' decisions to persist in college.

Hypothesis 4: Students can identify specific classroom practices that influence their decision to persist.

Hypothesis 5: Professors play an important role in student success and student persistence.

Hypothesis 6: The qualitative data gathered in the focus group sessions with students will match the empirical data from previous research studies on the topics highlighted in the current research study.

## CHAPTER IV: ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

### Data Analysis

This study examines participants' perceptions of faculty classroom behaviours and teaching techniques that affect student success and influence their decision to remain in school. The qualitative data analysis in this study was a complex process, whereby the researcher reviewed the transcription notes for common themes and specific commentary gathered from the participants' responses to the questions.

For the purposes of this study, the researcher collected data over the course of several days, between September 29 and October 12, 2010. The researcher facilitated five focus group sessions with second-year XXXX College students. There are approximately 2500 second-year students enrolled at XXXX College; in all, twelve students participated in the focus group sessions and provided their impressions in response to the questions posed by the researcher (see APPENDIX C for focus group questionnaire). The researcher gathered information regarding student perceptions of their professors' behaviours and teaching techniques that possibly influenced their decisions to persist in college programs. Based on the participants' feedback, the researcher compared the data with the empirical evidence described in the literature review and formulated a set of recommendations, which are outlined in Chapter V.

Demographic data was gathered from each participant using a survey questionnaire (See APPENDIX D) in order to form a general idea of the types of students who participated in the study. As per the survey data described in the table (see APPENDIX E), the twelve participants who attended focus group sessions were asked to complete the survey prior to the focus group session. The researcher specifically used second-year students as subjects for this study since

they have demonstrated persistence from first to second year, therefore able to provide the feedback and perspectives necessary to fulfill the objectives of this research. Of the participants, seven females and five males were aged 18 and over, whereby 50% were between the ages of 18 and 24 and 50% were over the age of 25. The highest level of education acquired by the majority of the participants, 66.6%, was a secondary school diploma, whereas 50% had been enrolled in another postsecondary academic program or institution and 33% had obtained another college credential at one time or another. These figures, along with the fact that the participants were all second-year students, demonstrates they are persisters and appropriate subjects for this study.

The survey also questioned student status and asked the participants to categorize themselves as per the following characteristics: traditional student; first generation; second career; international; or mature student. It also asked if the students work while they were in school, whether or not they commute and how much time they spend on campus outside of classroom hours. When these questions were originally devised for the survey, the researcher anticipated a larger group of participants and expected to correlate the survey data with the empirical data. Since only twelve students volunteered in the focus group sessions, the survey data is insufficient to be conclusive or correlational to the empirical evidence described in the literature. Therefore, the data from the survey questionnaire will not be used as correlational evidence in support of or against the hypotheses.

Increasing student retention rates is an ongoing and complex issue for postsecondary institutions since there are various factors that contribute to students' decisions to stay or leave school. As described in the literature review, there is clear evidence demonstrating that faculty behaviours and teaching techniques do have a significant effect on student learning outcomes

and influence students in their decision to persist. Pascarella, Seifert and Whitt (2008) revealed that students are more likely to re-enroll in postsecondary institutions if they are exposed to well organized and effective classroom instruction. Faculty behaviours such as organization, clarity of instruction, and presentation skills were some of the behaviours discussed during the focus group sessions. Students are also influenced by faculty who they feel believe in them and their accomplishments. Thomas's (2002) research concluded that students gained both self-confidence and motivation when they perceived that their professors were genuinely concerned about them and their academic success.

Faculty teaching techniques also influence students, and the use of active learning in the classroom clearly contributes to increased student engagement and persistence. Students demonstrate increased engagement when active teaching techniques are employed in the classroom. Active learning is attributed to enhanced knowledge of the course content, increased higher-order thinking skills, improved attitudes toward the course, and overall higher academic performance (Callahan, 2008; Armbruster et al., 2009). The following hypothesis analysis provides an overview of students' perceptions of their classroom experiences and the role of their professors.

### Hypothesis Analysis

The research project analysed six hypotheses to determine if faculty behaviours and the use of active learning techniques influence student persistence. .

Hypothesis 1: Professors' use of active learning techniques in the classroom will lead to higher student retention rates.

In response to question eight, the participants of this study all agreed that the majority of their professors used some form of active learning techniques in the classroom . The researcher provided the participants with a definition of active learning and listed the following examples of active learning techniques:

- Class discussion
- Teamwork in small groups
- Group presentations
- Problem solving exercises - with or without peers
- Relating tasks or discussions to student everyday life and past experiences
- Visual-based instruction
- Case studies
- Debates
- Roleplaying and simulation
- Peer teaching

The participants agreed that their professors used many of the techniques listed above when presenting the course material. The following evidence in support of the first hypothesis demonstrates that the use of active learning techniques and teaching methods that enhance the lectures contribute to student engagement and will lead to higher student retention rates.

In questions two and three, focus group participants were asked to think about their preferred courses and their experiences in their first year of postsecondary at XXXX College. They were also asked to identify the professors' teaching techniques that encouraged them to learn the course content and kept them engaged in those classes. The participants' responses were varied, and they listed different teaching methods that enhanced their classroom experience



and made courses more stimulating. The majority of the participants agreed that describing personal experiences, telling stories related to the lecture topic, and relating the material to everyday situations were both interesting and engaging. For example, one participant described the technique as follows:

And real world examples, or relating things to the real world is if we're doing something in class that we will actually be doing in the field or when we get out of school it's great as opposed to something that you know like you're like okay we're never going to do this why are we doing this, we're going to lose interest right there. The technique is the relationship to, you know, the actual experiences. *[sic]*

The participants explained that relating personal experiences and telling stories often led to class participation and opened the floor for further discussions. One student remarked that when her professors related their personal and professional experiences to the lecture, it helped her memorize the course content, and better understand the concepts of the lessons.

Other active learning techniques identified by the participants were class and group discussions and debates, as well as the use of powerpoint slides and videos relating to the lecture and lesson topics. The students agreed that group discussions and class debates encouraged them to learn from their peers as well, as one student noted, when asked if the professor's teaching techniques helped to learn the course content:

Again, I'll make the reference back to university. If I was in a classroom sitting there every week listening to my professor talk, it was like everything was going in one ear and out the other. I didn't get anything. Here it's like the, you know, their techniques when they're doing the group, like the group work for example because we're teaching each other, and we're talking about different things since everyone gets to talk about it with

each other we're also learning while we're speaking to each other which I really like because then everyone in the group kinda gets it at the same time and everyone learns it at the same time. *[sic]*

Here again, the participants commented that group assignments, discussions and debates helped them grasp the course concepts and kept them engaged in the material. However, three participants argued that group work was not their preferred teaching method and favoured completing group work assignments in class if and when permitted.

The participants also noted that reviewing and discussing assignments, labs and exercises in class with the professor kept them engaged, encouraged them to learn and retain the course content, and made them want to return to class. One participant described the following experiences:

I personally liked it when I was just able to go in and have everything given to me, so all the notes, all the work done and then have something assigned that we take up the next time to see if you actually learned what you've taken up that day. 'Cause there were other classes where you'd be given all this work and then class time to work on it. I'd like to have more, a lot more review in my classes before I go home and attempted to do it myself. I kinda like the teaching. *[sic]*

Several students also mentioned that they appreciated having access to the class materials, such as assignments, PowerPoint slides, or notes in Word format in advance of the class or lab. They acknowledged that having the notes and slides in advance helped them prepare for class and allowed them to focus on the lecture and presentation rather than having to take extensive notes during the class.

One student noted that “the use of technology is huge”. PowerPoint slides and videos specifically relating to the topic and other visual aids were described as helpful learning tools by a number of students. One group noted how much they also appreciated their professor’s use of audio lectures posted on WebCT. They agreed that the ability to review the lecture helped them retain the materials and reinforced the concepts.

Two groups mentioned that the hands-on exercises and simulations lab settings were beneficial because they provided the students with valuable, practical experiences and allowed them to review and practice what they had learned during the lectures. However, the same groups also noted that students should be allotted more time in the labs, and the college should acquire more lab equipment in order to add value and increase the effectiveness of the time spent in the labs.

When asked if the participants had ever considered dropping a course or leaving college altogether but decided to stay because of the teaching techniques used by the professors, the answers varied from “no, overall I had a good experience,” and “no, I picked the right program,” to “yes, teaching techniques made the difference especially group work and presentations.” Some of the participants who considered dropping out mentioned that the professors’ teaching techniques influenced their decision to stay in the course or the program. One participant noted the following:

I guess some of the stuff I was doing over the summer time is knowledge that I wish I had. There was this semester and in one class, just the way he [the professor] provides you with the information I was confident that I was going to come in and I was going to learn what I needed to know because I know the way that he sets things out and it’s very,

you know, specific and I talked to him before about what we would be learning. So, I was looking forward to coming back to learn that stuff. And actually that was one of the classes when I was really thinking about not coming back. It's like, you know, I should stay and it would be really good to learn this stuff. So, his teaching techniques really brought me back. *[sic]*

The evidence so far has established that students are more engaged when professors use active learning techniques in the classroom. Furthermore, the literature review demonstrated that faculty indirectly influence student persistence when they use active learning techniques in the classroom. When students are engaged by their professors, they believe that their professors and the institution are truly committed to their success and concerned about their wellbeing, thus indirectly promoting persistence (Braxton, Milem & Sullivan, 2000; Braxton, Jones, Hirschy & Hartley, 2008; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Prior research also revealed that active learning leads to increased social interactions with peers and professors, a factor also believed to influence student persistence (Braxton, Milem & Sullivan, 2000). Most of the participants mentioned that they enjoyed class discussions and debates. One student noted, "I liked the debates; I liked the interactions between the groups."

Status of Hypothesis 1: The data supports the hypothesis. Together with the research examined in the literature review, the data presented in support of hypothesis 1 demonstrates that the use of active learning in the classroom will lead to higher student retention rates. The evidence also established that professors' use of active learning techniques engages students and enhances the classroom experience.

Hypothesis 2: Since active learning contributes to student engagement, and student engagement leads to student persistence, then active learning influences student persistence.

Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, and Gonyea's (2008) research determined that first-year students have better grades and are more likely to proceed to second year when they are engaged in their academic activities. The students who participated in the focus group sessions unanimously agreed that they performed better academically when they were engaged in a course. The students noted they were more interested and focused on the subjects, and they exhibited more self-discipline with their studies. In response to question five, one student stated that when he was engaged in a course, he felt more passion and he wanted to learn more about the subject; "[when you are engaged]...shows that you're interested, you have a passion for it... that you want to learn as much as possible because you know you'll be using it later." Another student admitted that she does not retain as much in the courses for which she is lacking interest:

If I'm not engaged in it obviously I'm sleeping...I'm not going to be learning a thing...I should be trying even in courses I don't like...but you have to be engaged, or you're not going to get a thing out of that course. *[sic]*

Furthermore, students could easily recognize when they were engaged in their courses. In question four, participants were asked to describe how they behaved in classes they were engaged in. Most of the participants identified very similar behaviours and mentioned when they are engaged in a class they are more alert, ask, and answer questions, and they take part in discussions and classroom activities. They also noted that they know they are engaged because they put forth more effort in their studies and they do more research so they can continue learning. On the other hand, when they are not engaged, they observed that they are easily

distracted, and sometimes fall asleep in class. Other students mentioned that they would skip classes that they did not like or in which they did not feel intellectually stimulated.

Furthermore, focus group participants identified several active learning techniques that engaged them in the classroom and helped them retain the course content. Among the most popular techniques, participants noted relating personal experiences and class discussions. Nearly all the students remarked that the lessons improved when professors related the course content to their real-world experiences in the field. One student said, “Relaying of personal experiences by professors was helpful. They have shared stories and experiences and helped us understand that problems arise, but solutions can be found.” When another participant was asked question three regarding what teaching techniques helped her retain the course content, she answered:

I like it when examples are based on relating personal experiences. It’s very interesting to know about their work and I memorize it better. If they link their experience to the topic, I memorize it for sure. *[sic]*

The participants also mentioned that they enjoyed class discussions because they learn more about the topic and gained knowledge from their professors and their peers again by listening to other people’s experiences. One participant described his preference for class discussions:

One professor...spoke to the whole class, got into discussions; wasn’t opposed to discussing stuff in class instead of following his outline strictly which I think personally creates the best ideas and the best discussion when you get a thing rolling, you get more people involved...instead of just sitting and listening to somebody talk. *[sic]*

Of class discussions, one student stated, "...when I take part in a discussion and I get to a test, I think, "hey, I remember talking about this", so it makes things a bit easier...It keeps it more recent." Class discussions and in-class group work, also increases faculty-student and peer interactions and strengthens social interactions (Braxton et al., 2000). In response to question two regarding teaching techniques that kept the students engaged, another participant remarked how she appreciated it when her professor asked questions throughout his lesson and she stated the following:

Asking questions so it isn't just our teacher talking the entire time. Teachers breathe life into the courses they teach-but it is their choice to do so. My science teacher even said himself, it's worth seeing a light bulb turn on when a student understands something, you can see it. And it's very rewarding. Teachers that motivate and praise and keep a positive environment. Then there should be no reason to not want to attend class. *[sic]*

The aforementioned examples demonstrate that students are can identify active learning techniques that keep them engaged in their studies and enhance their learning and retention of course content. They also agree that they perform better academically in courses in which they are engaged. Furthermore, most of the participants agree that in some instances, their professors' teaching techniques influence their decisions to remain in a course, program, or college in general. When asked focus group question seven, some students answered that at one point or another, the professors' instruction method encouraged them to attend and participate in class, as noted in the following statement:

Attending class is extremely important...They [the professors] post the PowerPoint but there is so much extra in the class so it's important to attend the lectures...There are

discussions and the floor is always open for questions or clarifications. If you have a train of thought during the lecture, you can raise your hand and have your questions answered.

Status of Hypothesis 2: The data supports the hypothesis. Together with the evidence displayed in Hypothesis 1, the use of active learning techniques in the classroom contributes to student engagement and influences student persistence.

Hypothesis 3: Professors' classroom behaviours influence students' decisions to persist in college.

This study also asked second year XXXX College students to identify their professors' qualities, interpersonal skills, and behaviours, exhibited inside the classroom. The focus group participants explained that personal qualities such as happy, humourous, personable, and friendly were behaviours that kept them engaged in their studies and made them want to come to class. One student explained, "Our teacher really made it fun for us, put humour into it...helps you remember things better." The following passage describes another participant's experience:

The professors know who you are, they're very personal with you, and they really interact with the students, which I like. They know my writing styles, they know who I am by name, and they always used humour in the classroom. *[sic]*

Students noted that they also appreciated those professors who are flexible and understanding, as well as those who are helpful and spend time assisting the students. Furthermore, students indicated that they want to be treated equitably and with respect. One student mentioned that she liked it when "they [the professors] allowed us to call them by their first name which made them seem more approachable."



Students also mentioned that they preferred teachers who evidently enjoyed teaching. They identified characteristics such as knowledgeable and passionate about the material, and commitment to student success. An article entitled “Creating the Perfect Instructor” (Inside Higher Ed, 2010), lists eight qualities that students look for in the perfect instructor. The top quality, identified by 30.5 percent of the students, is “good teaching”, followed by general positivity at 28.1 percent. They also noted that they appreciated professors who are still involved or working in the industry and those who share relevant information about the sector or trade. One student described what he values in a professor in the following statement:

He was good with questions too and conversation...and he'll find answers for you right away. It just seems like those guys, you can really tell, they are the ones who have been working in the industry for a long time, which I think is key for professors. They have the experience and they are still involved in it somehow; and it really shows in their behaviour and their skills because they are passionate about what they do and they pass that on to the student and that's why I felt those are the classes that I felt were a good learning experiences. *[sic]*

As mentioned in the analysis of Hypothesis 1, students learn more about the course content when they understand its usefulness and can relate what they are learning to their own experiences or to those of their professors’.

In addition, the participants indicated behaviours such as professionalism, organizational skills, and being well prepared for class as those that influenced their perceptions of the professors. Pascarella, Seifert, and Whitt’s (2008) research defined organizational skills and preparation as “effective use of class time and use of course objectives” (p. 56), and a focus

group participant of this study noted that “being organized is a big deal...organization makes all the difference in the world.” Another student commented professors should come to class prepared for the lesson and deliver high-quality teaching: “if the professor is expecting good quality than they have to deliver good quality teaching.” Furthermore, the participants noted that presentation skills and the ability to manage the classroom also enhanced their educational experiences. The students pointed out that professors who maintained good control of the classroom were able to keep the students free from distractions, allowing for a more favourable learning environment.

When asked if these types of interpersonal behaviours and skills influenced their decision to persist, a number of students indicated that although certain interpersonal skills made for an improved and more engaging classroom experience, their professors’ behaviours did not influence their decision to remain in school. Some participants noted that in order to graduate, they have no option to drop any of their courses. Others answered that they “want to finish because we’ve come this far...no sense in dropping out half way through”. Moreover, some stated that they are pleased with their program and had no intention of dropping out.

However, two students remarked that certain professors’ behaviours had definitely influenced their decision to persist. One Second-Career student described how her professor helped her overcome her personal challenges in the following account:

For my course, I must attend fitness. This summer my family doctor phone and said I have osteoporosis. So I cannot, physically, I cannot attend and I start to have like, back pain. But I have to and I really, really like my teacher; she is so enthusiastic and I do as much as I can even what is prohibited for me, but I try to do it. And, I think that the

teacher can see when a person really tries or when someone is just lazy. I didn't know I would pass but I did so good. *[sic]*

Another student explained the story of how two of his professors successfully encouraged him to stay in college when he was struggling with personal conflicts and academic pressures:

Yes, I did have a professor who convinced me to stay. She spent quite a bit of time sitting down with me because I had quite a bit of stress. She assured me to stay. I was ready to go. She bought me a coffee, sat me down; she wanted me to get through it... Actually, and somebody else – I went in the office and telling my problems and life story. He didn't care about the college numbers; it was about me. *[sic]*

Both of these examples illustrate that faculty interactions and their behaviours toward students can influence students' decisions to persist in college. Personality traits such as commitment to students, flexibility, empathy, and sympathy demonstrate to students that their professors care about their well-being and their personal and academic success (Thomas, 2002). One student expressed what she values in her professors:

[Professors] teach you what you needed to know and would do extra hours with people if they needed help. It's when you can see in your teacher that they want to see you succeed and help you as much as possible. *[sic]*

Status of Hypothesis 3: Inconclusive: although professors' behaviours and interpersonal skills can enhance the classroom experience, the majority of the students interviewed in the focus group sessions indicated that they would have carried on their studies regardless of their professors' interpersonal behaviours.

Hypothesis 4: Students can identify specific classroom practices that influence their decision to persist.

Focus group questions six and seven asked participants if their professors' classroom behaviours or teaching techniques had ever influenced them to persist in a course, program, or college in general. Some of the students indicated that they did not intend to leave college because they enjoyed the programs in which they are enrolled and are committed to complete them. One participant remarked, "It was my own motivation to stay in the program. You all want to stay in the program. Look at the long-term goal. This has always been in my heart. This is my motivation." These same students admitted that although some of the courses were difficult, they had no intention of dropping any of them because they needed to complete them in order to graduate. Others remarked that since they are now in their second year of school, there was no sense in dropping out and they too intended to finish.

In contrast, the students who had considered leaving college or dropping a course indicated that teacher responsiveness made a difference and influenced them to stay. They remarked how important it was that their professors responded to their inquiries and their academic needs in a timely manner. One student, who considered dropping a class mentioned that the teaching skills made a difference for her:

When things got tough, my teacher was willing to meet me with to help. No matter when, no matter how many times I needed help. He understood everyone learns a different way, so he tries his best to teach his material in more than one way.

In the following account, another student recalls her anxiety about taking her first on-line classroom experience:

I was scared because I thought I could not ask anyone for help. I would have to do everything by myself. And my first reaction was to drop this class. But then I realized that, okay, I can try and we will see. The teacher explained very well. When I asked her a question I thought I would wait many days or weeks before getting a response from the teacher and it would be too late; but she replied right away, immediately; not second day, she replied immediately! She was responsive. I didn't drop it and my last assignment I got 100%. *[sic]*

These students recognized that their professors' responsiveness helped them succeed and persist in their classes.

The students also mentioned that their professor were concerned for their well-being and success. One student, who considered leaving college, explained that his professors had a lot to do with his decision to persist. He was persuaded to stay and noted, "It's part of the college atmosphere; they want you to succeed. It was about me, not the teacher, not the numbers of the college."

Status of Hypothesis 4: The data supports the hypothesis. Although most students identified they had no intention of dropping their studies, those who had considered leaving college or dropping a class were able to identify professors' behaviours that influenced them to persist.

Hypothesis 5: Professors play an important role in student success and student persistence.

Based on the responses of the focus group participants, it is evident that students attribute the value of their learning experiences to the quality of the classroom activities and their professors' attitudes and behaviours toward the students and the subject matter. The participants' emphasised that a quality instruction includes interesting and stimulating lectures,

use of relevant examples, use of technology, lab and simulation exercises, and class discussions. They also underlined the importance of interpersonal behaviours such as organizational and presentation skills, passion, personable, knowledgeable, and the ability to teach. They attest that classroom practices and behaviours such as these enhanced both their levels of engagement, academic success, and contributed to student persistence.

In question 11 the researcher asked participants, “Who do you think has a bigger impact on your academic success, you, or your professor?” The majority of the responses acknowledged that the professors and the students were equally important in their educational outcomes, and their answers varied from, “yourself...you are the one learning,” to “both...it’s definitely 50/50.” A few participants remarked that their professors exclusively were responsible for their success since the college hired and paid them to teach. One student stated that, “It should be the professor; we are the customer, and they should have the biggest impact on our success.”

The participants’, who attributed the onus of succeeding in their education upon themselves, highlighted that it was their own responsibility to attend classes, study, and complete the assignments. These students acknowledged that the professors’ were accountable for the teaching aspect; however, in the end, it was the student’s responsibility to do the learning, as one focus group participant stated:

...I have to say it’s me, the student. For I am there to listen, do the work and in the end learn. My teachers are there to help and teach. I have to take the pride in my work, I have to take the time to study and understand, to learn. *[sic]*

These students also mentioned that the time and effort put into their education would make the difference in their success. Some students expressed the significant importance of being in the right program and being stimulated by, and passionate for, the subject matter, "...Good teachers help, but for the most part it's the student; you have to have passion and you have to love it or you're just asking to fail." *[sic]*

Some of the participants also attributed their success to both themselves and their professors. They noted that the professors are responsible for keeping the students motivated and engaged in their studies and compelled to learn, as one participant said, "It is a 50/50, you have to want to be taught, and the professors have to be willing to teach." One student expressed her feelings in the following explanation:

It's so hard to say. If I say just my professor and how good they are but I didn't make any effort, I wouldn't stay. I think it's both. I am nothing without them and I think [they are] the same without us as well. It's definitely both. *[sic]*

The final question the researcher asked the participants was what role they believed their professors played in their academic success. For the most part, the participants based their responses on their professors' role as educators. They highlighted that their professors' interpersonal behaviours were imperative, and they should support, motivate, and guide the students. The students also expect their professors' to provide quality instruction, to reinforce the course content, and to ensure they acquire the skills they need to be successful. One participant's comment summarized the overall sentiments in the following statement:

In my opinion, my teacher is my teacher. He or she is my mentor, my tutor, my friend and sometimes my motivator. They are the ones that can make or break a course or even

a program. They are the ones that make a class worth going to rather than just sitting in a chair for three hours straight. *[sic]*

Status of hypothesis 5: The data supports the hypothesis. Professors play an important role in the overall success of their students and influence student persistence. They act as mentors and provide academic guidance and emotional support to students. Good teachers also motivate students to learn. Students thus perceive that the institution is concerned for their overall well-being, enhancing their loyalty and influencing their decision to remain at that institution.

Hypothesis 6: The qualitative data gathered in the focus group sessions with students will match the empirical data from previous research studies on the topics highlighted in the current research study.

There is an abundance of literature and empirical data examining the significance of the professor's role in the classroom, particularly regarding the use of active learning techniques and the academic benefits of enhancing student engagement levels in the classroom. The following hypothesis analysis explored the relationship between the empirical data and the qualitative data gathered from the focus group sessions.

According to Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, and Gonyea (2008), student engagement is reflected by the amount of time students spend on academic activities inside and outside of the classroom. The purpose of Kuh et al.'s (2008) research was to "determine the relationship between student behaviours and institutional practices and conditions that foster student success" (p. 542). Kuh and his colleagues concluded that student engagement is related positively to academic outcomes and influences both grades and persistence. The focus group participants of the current study indicated that they were engaged in most of their courses, partly due to their



professors' teaching practices and behaviours and partly because of their own passion for their program and personal motivation to succeed. The participants agreed that enhanced engagement in their studies contributed to improved academic performance. One student commented that he "is more focused...more self-disciplined...and put more pressure on myself to learn the material...When you are engaged you will do better and your marks will display that." Furthermore, the participants described that when they were engaged in their studies, they attended class, asked more questions, and participated in class discussions.

The data revealed in various research studies also acknowledges the tremendous benefit active learning plays on student engagement, academic achievement, and persistence. Various studies concluded that the use of active learning in the classroom promoted higher order thinking skills and enhanced attitudes toward the subject matter (Callahan, 2008; Armbruster et. al, 2009) The use of active learning techniques such as practicing in group activities also contributed to improved student participation and learning (Dahlgren et. al, 2005). Furthermore, according to Braxton and his colleagues (2000), active learning techniques, such as classroom discussions and debates, led to increased student interactions between classmates and professors and positively influences student retention.

The empirical data detailed above matches the data gathered from the focus group sessions. The participants indicated that the use of active learning techniques such as class discussion, relating personal experiences, using technology, and group assignments contributed to their overall engagement and understanding of the course content. One student noted that she particularly liked group work and class discussions because of interactions with other students and she described her sentiments in the following statement:

The group work I liked a lot better...I like working with people a lot more I like having feedback from other people. So we did a lot of that which I liked. The class discussions... they [the professors] use that a lot, which you got to hear what everyone else wanted to say about something specific. It was fun because you could debate about different things...[sic]

Another student noted the following of the importance of attending class and participating in class discussion:

Attending class is extremely important. They [the professors] post the PowerPoint's but there is so much extra in the class so it's important to attend lectures. There are discussions and the floor is always open for questions or clarifications. If you have a train of thought during the lecture, you can raise your hand and have your questions answered. [sic]

Furthermore, active learning techniques, such as relating personal experiences and hands-on exercises helped develop problem-solving skills. According to an article written by MacDonald (2010), including relevant examples in their lectures, professors are helping students relate topics to their own experiences and enhancing their understand course content. One focus group participant supported the article's conclusion when she stated, "While relating complicated science to a real life application allows me to understand how things work, or why I would need to learn this information in order to solve for an answer." [sic]

Professors' interpersonal skills and attitudes in the classroom also influenced student success and retention. Thomas' (2002) research concluded that behaviours such as respect and empathy for students affects their perceptions toward the institution and influences their decision

to remain in school. Two participants from the current research revealed that indeed their professors made a difference influenced their decision to persist. One stated that she thought of dropping out because of her husband's illness. She was grateful to her professors who encouraged her to stay and provided emotional support during a stressful period. She stated that her "teachers explained and helped me. They provided moral support...helped me to carry on. They supported me so much."

Faculty use of effective teaching practices, preparedness of course materials, organization, and presentation skills influenced student satisfaction, as well as their perceptions of the quality of their learning experiences (Pascarella, Seifert, & Whitt, 2008; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The current research also revealed that students have high expectations for their professors and highly commend those who are well organized and prepared for class. Some students remarked that professors who were not organized were not dedicated to the students or to teaching. The following statement acknowledges the significance of one student's feelings regarding his professors' organizational skills or lack thereof:

Organization makes all the difference in the world...Personally, I have feel I have a pretty high level of expectation from my own work and if they are setting expectations for us to have grammatically correct reports, correct spelling, correct layout, and on time - you expect that from me, then I expect that from you as a paid professional. And I am paying you...I'm the customer!... I expect you to be the leader, and in control, and organized and knowing what you are doing. *[sic]*

Timely responses to students also increase student perception of faculty. According to Fairchild's (2005) research, "Feedback provided on the Responsiveness to Students Survey

indicated that students perceived me as accessible, approachable, and helpful.” (p.89). Students who participated in the current research also indicated the importance of timely responses and noted that quick responses to questions contributed to enhanced engagement levels, learning outcomes, and persistence. For one student the timeliness of the responses she received from her professor influenced her decision to stay in a course mandatory for completing her program:

When I asked her a question I thought I would wait many days or weeks before getting a response from the teacher and it would be too late; but she replied right away, immediately; not second day she replied immediately. She was responsive. I didn't drop it my last assignment I got 100%. *[sic]*

Status of hypothesis 6: The data supports the hypothesis. The qualitative data gathered in the current research project matches the empirical evidence from previous research.

### Summary

Chapter IV investigated the six hypotheses developed in Chapter III. The researcher facilitated five focus group sessions, collected and analysed the data, and determined that the data supported hypotheses 1, 2, 4, 5, and 6. The data reflected in hypothesis 3 was determined to be inconclusive.

The first hypothesis concluded that professors who incorporate active learning techniques into their lessons influence student retention. Together with the research examined in the literature review, the data collected during the focus group sessions demonstrated that the use of active learning in the classroom led to higher student retention rates. The evidence also

established that professor's use of active learning techniques engages students, enhances the classroom experience and contributes to positive academic outcomes.

Hypothesis two declared that active learning contributes to student engagement, and therefore influences student persistence. The literature review and evidence from the focus group sessions concluded that professors, who use active learning techniques in the classroom, motivate and stimulate students thus keep them engaged in their studies. Increased student engagement encourages students to attend and participate in their classes, enhances student learning and positively influences student perceptions toward the subject matter and the institution; all of these factors contribute to student persistence.

In the third hypothesis, the researcher attempted to reveal that faculty's classroom behaviour and interpersonal skills influence a student's decision to remain in school. However, the evidence is deemed inconclusive. Although in many respects professors' attitudes do enhance the classroom experience, the majority of the students interviewed in the focus group sessions indicated that they would have carried on in their studies regardless of their professors' interpersonal behaviours.

The evidence clearly supported hypothesis four. The focus group participants identified several classroom practices that influenced their decision to persist, such as teacher responsiveness to questions, willingness to help during or outside classroom hours, and general concern for student emotional and academic well-being.

The literature and focus group data also supported hypothesis five. Professors do play an important role in student success and persistence. They act as mentors and provide academic guidance and emotional support to students. Good teachers also motivate students to learn.

Students thus perceive that the institution is concerned for their overall well-being, enhancing their loyalty and influencing their decision to remain at that institution.

The sixth hypothesis determined that the qualitative data gathered in the current research match the empirical evidence from previous research studies. The participant responses corroborated with various sources of evidence taken from the literature review as well as new research introduced in Chapter IV. The focus group participants and past research demonstrated that professors' use of active learning techniques and their classroom behaviours enhance student engagement, contribute to overall student success, and influence student retention.

With the exception of hypothesis three, the evidence collected by the focus group participants and the secondary literature supported all the hypotheses. Chapter V will provide an overall summary of the study, conclusions, and recommendations for the faculty and institution.

## CHAPTER V: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Summary

Chapter I of this qualitative research study reviewed the background, the purpose of the study, and the statement of the problem. The chapter also developed a set of research questions, listed the definition of terms, and described the various limitations of the study. The researcher described the provincial government's ongoing task of emphasizing the importance of post-secondary education in Ontario, and the institutions' responsibility to ensure students who attend college are successful and persist in their academic pursuits. The researcher focused on the significant and ever-changing role of the faculty through the eyes of their audience – the students. Accordingly, the purpose of this study was to explore the students' perspectives of classroom activities and faculty behaviours that contribute to student success and influence students' decisions to remain in college.

The researcher listed various limitations she expected to encounter including surveyor fatigue and attracting the ideal research subjects to participate in the focus group questions. In fact, both concerns proved valid; for one, out of over 2000 potential subjects, only 12 students registered in the focus group sessions. Secondly, the researcher identified that the ideal subject would be the traditional learner, aged 18 to 22, because they represent the majority of the students at XXXX College. However, six of the twelve participants identified themselves as a mature or Second Career student, a growing demographic within the college system.

In Chapter II, the researcher provided an overview of the vast amounts of current literature relating to the positive effect of active learning on student engagement and persistence. The literature also demonstrated that faculty's interpersonal skills and behaviour in the classroom

impacts tremendously on student success. Furthermore, the research concluded that faculty use of active learning techniques and their behaviour in the classroom influences students' institutional commitment and the students' perceptions of the institution's dedication to the students' welfare and academic achievement. The researcher completed the literature review by highlighting the research that indicated that despite the evidence supporting the relationship between active learning and enhanced educational outcomes, many faculty members continue to use lecturing as their main teaching style.

Chapter III described the methodology used to conduct the research. The researcher extended an invitation to all second-year XXXX College students asking them to participate in one of seven focus group sessions. The population included students varying in age, gender, and programs of study. The volunteers who participated in the focus group session became the population sample for the research. The secondary data included recent literature on the topic published between 1997 and 2010. The researcher developed six hypotheses based on the research questions, which were used as a preliminary guide to the investigation and subsequently, to create the focus group questionnaire (see APPENDIX C). The researcher gathered and transcribed the data from the responses given by the focus group participants.

In Chapter IV, the researcher examined the transcription data and categorized it by the most common and broad themes (see table in APPENDIX E). With the exception of the third hypothesis, the researcher determined that the data collected from the focus group participants supported the research hypotheses. The following section describes the conclusions formed by the researcher, based on the literature and the participants' responses.



## Conclusions

The researcher deduced the following conclusions in support of the hypotheses, based on the literature review and subsequent analysis of the focus group participant responses. Foremost, the evidence supports that faculty play a significant role in the overall academic success of their students. Students comprehend that faculty, regardless of the teaching methods used, are their primary resource for gathering the knowledge they require to be successful in their studies. They also understand their own responsibilities as students; nonetheless, they rely heavily on their professors to provide them with knowledge, guidance, and mentorship.

Furthermore, particular activities, teaching techniques, and interpersonal behaviours contribute to the students' learning outcomes and influence the students' decision to remain in college. Students realize that the use of active learning techniques in the classroom, such as class discussions, and relating personal experiences, enhances the level of engagement in their studies, encourages students to continue attending and participating in class, and improves students' ability to retain course content. Students also appreciate professors who are well organized and prepared for lessons, and those who display positive attitudes in class. They also recognize the value of good teaching and presentation skills. In some instances, students attributed these types of behaviours to their decision to remain in their program or college in general. Students perceive to know when their professors are committed to students and when they are making an effort to deliver quality lessons. In return, students work and study harder, remain loyal and committed to the institution, and persist in their educational endeavours.

In order to support government and institutional initiatives regarding student retention, it is imperative that faculty heed the opinions and conclusions revealed in the vast amounts of current and past research on the topic of student persistence. Not to mention the overwhelming

financial, social, and emotional barriers that students overcome to complete college, faculty have the demanding challenge and a unique opportunity to influence students positively. Faculty can make a significant impact on the overall academic success of their students simply by incorporating active learning into their course delivery and by relating to students in an open, respectful, and professional manner.

It is important for the reader to understand the various limitations of this study. First, surveyor fatigue may have affected the rate of participation in that the researcher intended to attract approximately 50 participants to attend the focus group sessions and only 12 volunteered. Furthermore, only 50 percent of the students who participated were identified as traditional students while the other 50 percent were either adult or Second Career students. These two variables may have influenced the outcomes of the hypotheses.

Concerning the research process for this qualitative study, the researcher had difficulty attracting participants via e-mail invitation hence the low numbers. The researcher was conscientious of the process for attracting volunteer subjects; however, in the future, she will consider a different method for recruiting student participants. Time was also a factor in this study; therefore, the researcher was not able to conduct additional focus group sessions. Regardless, the researcher gathered a great deal of valuable feedback during the focus group sessions despite the low attendance.

### Recommendations

The following recommendations further emphasize how institutions and faculty members can influence and contribute to student engagement, academic success, and student persistence.

The first recommendation for faculty is to introduce or continue the use of active learning techniques in the classroom. The evidence from past research along with the feedback from the students who participated in the focus group sessions demonstrated that active learning contributes to a host of positive outcomes for students including enhanced engagement, increased attendance, and class participation. The researcher recommends that faculty members use or incorporate activities such as relating personal experiences, class discussions, and technology into their lesson plans. Although indirect, the literature concluded that the use of active learning also influences students' decisions to remain in school.

The second recommendation is for faculty to invest in creating a positive classroom environment for the students. The participants of the focus groups acknowledged that professors who were good humoured, empathetic, professional, responsive, and respectful to students were more pleasing, encouraged them to want learn more, and motivated them to attend and participate in class. They also agreed that organizational and presentation skills were significant attributes that benefit the classroom atmosphere and enhance their learning experience. In an article published by Inside Higher Ed (2010), good teaching and general positivity ranked number one and two, with 30.5% and 28.1% respectively in what students most value in an instructor.

The third recommendation is for institutional leadership teams. The researcher suggests that institutions acknowledge and actively promote the overarching academic benefits of using active learning techniques in the classroom. Although the researcher gathered evidence from only 12 participants by way of focus group sessions, the feedback provided by XXXX College students, in all programs of study, matches the vast array of research accumulated and published over the past 30 years. Many of the most recognized and reputable investigators in the study of

engagement and persistence recognize that active learning and student-centered instruction greatly benefits student-learning outcomes by way of improved academic performance and engagement levels. XXXX College highlights the provision of exceptional learning experiences in their business and strategic plans; therefore, it is imperative to reiterate the value of student-centered instruction and to ensure that faculty members incorporate active learning techniques in their lessons.

The fourth recommendation is for institutions and comes from the literature on engagement, persistence, and active learning. The researcher suggests that it is in the best interest of the students and the institutions to acknowledge, support, and reward faculty who already incorporate active learning practices in the classroom. Umbach and Wawriynski's (2005) article summarizes the important role of college faculty and highlights various active learning strategies and behaviours displayed by faculty at institutions with high engagement levels. Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, and White (2005) described how institutions evaluated in the DEEP project have benefitted from integrating their commitment to good teaching into their hiring practices. Institutional leaders should therefore consider recognizing faculty who make the extra effort of incorporating active learning exercises into their lesson plans.

In order to facilitate the process of introducing active learning into the classroom, the researcher suggests in this fifth recommendation that institutions provide the training and tools required to assist faculty in their endeavours to incorporate active learning into the classroom. Active learning requires more efforts on the part of both the professors and the students. Research studies have acknowledged the difficulty and resistance to incorporating active learning into the classroom by both the instructors and the students (Felder & Brent, 1996; Pundak, Herscovitz, Shacham, & Wisser-Biton, 2009). Faculty who traditionally use lectures as

their main teaching method are concerned about incorporating active learning for fear that they will not get through the entire syllabus (Felder & Brent, 1996). Therefore, faculty need encouragement and support from the institution to carry out its mandate in support of student-centered instruction.

The sixth recommendation is also for the institution. The researcher suggests that institutions do their utmost to ensure that students are in the right program from the onset of their college education. The literature demonstrated that program fit or lack thereof is one of the primary factors attributing to student persistence or attrition. As noted in the statement of the problem, lack of fit is described as not having the interest or motivation in the course or program of study (Barr-Telford, Cartwright, Prasil & Shimmons, 2003). Many of the focus group participants attributed their success in first-year to the passion for the program and their strong will and desire to be top in their profession. They also mentioned that regardless of other barriers, they would not quit, they want to work, and they want a job in the profession of their choice. This evidence suggests that appropriate program fit contributes to increased student persistence levels.

The seventh recommendation for institutional leaders and faculty is to continue to provide students with academic support through facilitated academic counselling, and peer tutoring opportunities. Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, and Gonyea (2008), underlined that “institutions should ensure that interconnected learning support networks, early warning systems, and safety nets are in place and working as intended” (p.556). XXXX College offers supplemental academic support to students through its Student Academic Learning Services (SALS). Several students who participated in the focus group session identified that the services and tutoring offered by SALS was invaluable and in many instances instrumental to

their academic achievements. The researcher strongly recommends that colleges continue to promote these types of service and acknowledge the tremendous affect they have on students. The researcher also encourages institutions to continue to infuse the resources necessary to accommodate ongoing initiatives and strategies to augment student academic success.

The final recommendation relates to future research opportunities that could improve overall student retention. The researcher found that the literature focused particularly on factors that influenced persistence rates of traditional and first-year students. Based on the feedback provided during the focus group sessions of the current investigation, the researcher suggests that further studies are required to determine factors that affect the retention and address the particular needs of second and third year students. Given that 50 percent of the individuals who participated in the focus group sessions were mature and/or Second Career students, faculty and institutional leaders could benefit from examining studies on the topic of androgogy, the framework of adult learning, (Ross-Gordon, 2003) and other academic and service requirements of this emerging demographic.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A Letter of Permission from Vice President, Academic

July 12, 2010

XXXX  
c/o XXXX College  
XXXXX  
XXXX, ON L1H 7K4

Dear . XXXXX:

I have reviewed your request to conduct a research project regarding student persistence along with the survey, focus group questionnaire, and materials used to promote and entice students to volunteer for this study. I feel this project will be beneficial to XXXX College as well as to the project participants.

You have my permission to survey second-year students from all the academic schools as the subject pool for this project provided you acquire similar permission from the Deans of each of the schools involved in this study.

Do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions regarding this letter of approval.

Sincerely,

XXXX  
XXXX  
Vice President, Academic

c.c. XXXX, Dean, School of Applied Sciences, Apprenticeship, Skilled Trades & Technology,  
XXXX Campus  
XXXX, Dean, School of Applied Sciences, Apprenticeship, Skilled Trades & Technology,  
Whitby Campus  
XXXX, Dean, School of Business, IT & Management  
XXXX, Dean, School of Communication, Language & General Studies  
XXXX, Dean, School of Health & Community Services  
XXXX, Dean, School of Justice & Emergency Services

## APPENDIX B Letter of Invitation to Participants

Dear Student,

My name is XXXX and I am a graduate student with Central Michigan University, XXXX College Cohort, working on my Master of Arts Degree in Education with a concentration in Community Colleges. I am also an employee at XXXX College working as an administrator in the Student Affairs Department. As part of the Masters Degree program, I am conducting a research study for my Capstone Project and I would like to invite you to participate in a focus group session.

I am studying students' perspectives of classroom activities that contribute to a student's success and desire to persist in his or her college education. The research study focuses on the students' perceptions of classroom practices, such as active learning techniques, and the professor's behaviours and/or teaching techniques that foster student engagement, and enhance student retention at college. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to attend a focus group session with me and a group of other students. At the session, you will complete a short survey describing a little about yourself and then you will participate in a group discussion about the topic.

Specifically, you will be asked a series of questions about your classroom experiences, your professors' behaviours and teaching techniques and evaluate whether or not these factors have influenced your academic success and/or your desire to persist in college.

The meeting will take place at [insert date, time, location] and should last approximately 60 minutes.

I am happy to answer any questions you have about the study or to discuss your participation in the focus group session. You may contact me at XXXX

You may also contact my faculty advisor, XXXX if you have study related questions or problems.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Central Michigan University Institutional Review Board by calling 989.774.6777 or by addressing a letter to the Institutional Review Board, 251 Foust Hall Central Michigan University, Mt. Pleasant, MI 48859.

Thank you for your consideration. If you would like to participate, please attend the focus group session on [insert the date, time and location].

With kind regards,

XXXX  
Graduate Student, Central Michigan University

APPENDIX C Focus Group Session Questionnaire

**Questionnaire for Student Focus Group**

Presented by XXXX

My name is XXXX and I am a graduate student with Central Michigan University. I am working on my Master of Arts Degree in Education with a concentration in Community Colleges. I am also an employee at XXXX College; I work as an administrator in the Student Affairs department. As part of the Masters Degree program, I am conducting research for my capstone project, which is studying students' perceptions of professors behaviours and teaching techniques that affect or influence the students' decisions to stay in a program and persist in their postsecondary education.

Your feedback and input in this session is essential for my research to be successful. Your participation helps me tremendously, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for attending today's focus group session.

When you have finished reading the consent form and filling out the small survey, I am going to ask you a series of questions. I will be recording today's session using a digital recorder and I will be taking notes as well. The audio recording will be used to help me with transcribing the data accurately and so that I do not miss the important themes and aspects of the discussion. If you prefer not to be audio recorded during today's session please let me know at any point during the session.

This session should take no more than one hour to complete.

**Reminder:** You are under no obligation to stay. This session is confidential and your identity and responses will remain confidential throughout the entire study. I remind you also not to identify yourself, other participants, or professors by name during the session.

Are there any questions/comments/concerns?

Let's begin!

1. Looking back at your first year here at XXXX College, think about your favourite classes; please identify the qualities, behaviours, and interpersonal skills of your professors' that kept you engaged in your studies, and made you want to keep attending that class.
2. Looking back at your first year, think about your favourite classes, please identify your professors teaching techniques (lecture, group work, class discussions, simulation, relating personal experience, role playing, projects, assignments etc.) that kept you engaged in your studies, encouraged you to learn, and made you want to keep attending that class.



3. Again, looking back at your first year here at XXXX College, think about your favourite classes, please identify your professors' teaching techniques (lecture, group work, class discussions, simulation, relating personal experience, role playing, projects, assignments etc.) helped you best learn the course content.
4. How do you know when you are engaged in a course/program? (give examples of student behaviour linked to engagement) What behaviours do you exhibit in the courses that you are engaged in versus those courses you are not engaged in?
5. Do you think that when you are engaged in a course that you will perform better academically? If so, why do you think this is the case?
6. At any point in time in your college experience did your professors' classroom behaviours/interpersonal skills influence your decision to stay in a course, program, or college in general? (For instance, you disliked the course but you really liked the professor so you stayed in the course.) Please elaborate or give an example.
7. At any point in time in your college experience, did your professors' teaching techniques (lecture, class discussion, group work, assignments, etc) influence your decision to stay in a course, program, or college in general? (For instance, you disliked the course but the way the professor taught the course kept you motivated and engaged enough to persist.) Please elaborate and/or give an example.
8. Do the majority of your professors use some form of active learning techniques in the classroom? (Michelle: give examples of active learning)
9. Have you ever taken a course that you wanted to quit but you did not? If so, why did you stay?
10. Do you believe that your grades or academic success or failure in a course or program influence your decision to persist?
11. Overall, who do you think has a bigger impact on your academic success, you, or your professors?
12. In your opinion, what role does your professor play in your academic success?

**Active learning:** Promoting active learning can be described as instructional activities involving students in doing things and thinking about what they are doing. It involves talking; listening; writing; reading and reflecting: The use of active learning in the classroom increases motivation to master material, fosters communication and interpersonal skills, and improves critical thinking skills. Also, students engage in higher-order thinking tasks such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

Examples of active learning techniques used in the classroom:

Class discussion

Teamwork in small groups

Group presentations

Problem solving exercises - with or without peers

Relating tasks or discussions to student everyday life and past experiences

Visual based instruction

Case studies

Debates

Role-playing and simulation

Peer teaching

Regular “low-stakes” assessments (e.g. assignments and quizzes)

APPENDIX D Consent Form and Survey Questionnaire



Consent Form for Anonymous Surveys

**Study Title:** Perceptions of Faculty Classroom Practices That Influence Student Persistence

Contact information of researcher: XXXX, Contact information for researcher advisor: XXXX

**Introductory Statement**

My name is XXXX and I am a graduate student with Central Michigan University working on my Master of Arts Degree in Education with a concentration in Community Colleges. As part of the Masters Degree program, I am conducting a research study for my capstone project.

Thank you for taking the time today to participate in this focus group session. Your involvement in this study will help me gather your perspectives of classroom teaching and learning practices and provide me with important data to compliment the empirical research regarding student success, engagement, and persistence.

As the researcher of this study and the facilitator of this focus group session, I am the only person who will have access to your feedback. Please read on for the details of this study and feel free to ask questions at any time during the focus group session.

**What is the purpose of this study?** The purpose of this research study is to explore students' perspective of classroom activities that contribute to students' success and their desire to persist in their college studies. The research study focuses on students' perceptions of classroom practices, such as teaching techniques used by the professors that foster student engagement, and enhance student retention at college.

The researcher will compile the data based on the common themes of the focus group sessions, and will be used to establish a list of recommendations for college faculty members to consider when creating their lesson plans, delivering future course content, and developing course and program curriculum. College leadership and administration can also use the recommendations for promoting best practices to their full-time and part-time faculty.

**What will I do in this study?** During the focus group session, the participants will answer a short survey asking various demographic/background type questions. Participants will then take part in a focus group discussion regarding their classroom experiences. You will be asked to reflect upon your previous year(s) at college and discuss your impressions of your professors' behaviours and the teaching techniques used in class.

**How long will it take to do this?** The participants will take part in an hour-long focus group session.

**Are there any risks of participating in the study?** There are no risks to participating in this study. Your identity and responses will remain confidential.

**What are the benefits of participating in the study?** As the participants in this study, you have the opportunity to provide the researcher with information and feedback about your classroom experiences. The results will be collected to create a list of recommendations, which will be presented to college faculty, administration, and leadership. Although you may not benefit directly from participating in this study, your input will benefit future XXXX College students. I believe the results and recommendations derived from the study will positively affect faculty, administrators, college leadership, and more importantly, XXXX College students.

**Will anyone know what I do or say in this study (Confidentiality)?** The data collected during the session shall remain under strictest confidence. The participants' identities will not be disclosed to anyone and the answers provided will remain confidential. In all other instances, any data under the investigator's control will, if disclosed, be presented in a manner that does not reveal the subject's identity, except as it may be required by law.

The focus group sessions will be recorded using an audio recorder and the discussions will be transcribed during and after the focus group sessions. A note-taker may be present to assist with capturing your feedback but only the researcher will analyze the data recordings. The recordings and transcriptions will be held under lock and key, and again, the participants' identities and the information/input will remain confidential throughout the entire study. Once the data is transcribed, the recordings will be erased.

*Note:* If you do not wish to be audio recorded, please indicate this to the focus group facilitator at the beginning of the session.

You may feel uncomfortable answering some of the questions; therefore, you are not obligated to answer the questions. Participation is confidential. Study information will be kept in a secure location at XXXX College. The results of the study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but your identity will

not be revealed. Participation is anonymous, which means that no one (not even the researcher) will know your answers. So, please do not write your name or other identifying information on any of the study materials.

*Others in the group will hear what you say, and it is possible that they could tell someone else. Because this will be a group discussion, it is possible that what you say will not remain completely private. Therefore, you and the other group members will be asked to respect the privacy of everyone in the group. Also, please do not identify yourself, other participants, or your professors by name at any time during the focus group session.*

Taking part in the study is your decision and you are under no obligation to participate. You may quit being in the study at any time and/or decide not to answer any question(s) you are not comfortable answering. Participation, non-participation, or withdrawal will not affect your grades or your standing with the college in any way.

**Will I receive any compensation for participation?** There is no monetary compensation for participating in this study. Refreshments will be offered during the focus group session.

**Whom can I contact for information about this study?** For more information about this study, please contact the researcher, XXXX at XXXX. If you wish to remain anonymous to the researcher, please direct your questions to your student liaison.

You are free to refuse to participate in this research project or to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation in the project at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your participation will not affect your relationship with the institution involved in this research project.

***To the participants:***

*Your return of this signed form (below), and the attached survey implies your consent to participate in this research; and you have been given a second copy of this form to keep for your records. You agree to be audio recorded and have been advised that your identity and your input will remain under strictest confidence.*

**Note:** *If you do not wish to be audio recorded, please indicate this to the focus group facilitator at the beginning of the session.*

If you are not satisfied with the manner in which this study is being conducted, you may report (anonymously if you so choose) any complaints to the Institutional Review Board by calling 989-774-6777, or addressing a letter to the Institutional Review Board, 251 Foust Hall Central Michigan University, Mt. Pleasant, MI 48859.

Participant Signature : \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher Signature : \_\_\_\_\_

Questionnaire to Participants

1. Gender:
  - Male
  - Female
2. Age:
  - 18-24
  - 25-30
  - 31-35
  - 36-40
  - 41-45
  - 46+
3. In what program are you currently enrolled?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Have you ever been enrolled in another postsecondary academic program or institution?
  - Yes
  - No
5. If **yes**, please indicate which one(s):
  - Another program at XXXX College
  - Another program at a different college
  - Another program at a university
  - Other: \_\_\_\_\_
6. Highest level of education attained:
  - Secondary school diploma
  - College certificate
  - College diploma
  - Post diploma
  - University degree
  - Other: \_\_\_\_\_
7. Do you consider yourself (check all that apply):
  - First Generation Student (first of you immediate family to attend college)
  - Second Career Student (recently laid off and obtained government funding to return to postsecondary)
  - International Student (you are studying away from your home country)
  - Traditional Student (began college right out of high school)
  - Adult/Mature Student (at least one year out of school or working)
8. Do you have a job while you are attending college (excludes summer employment)?
  - Yes
  - No
9. Do you commute to school (drive or take the bus)
  - Yes
  - No
10. How much time, in hours do you spend on campus outside of classroom hours?
  - Less than 1 hour
  - Between 2-5 hours
  - Between 6-10 hours
  - Between 11-20 hours
  - More than 21 hours

APPENDIX E Theme Analysis Table

**Theme Analysis**

Perception of Faculty Behaviours on Student Persistence

Question	Themes	Quotes
<p><b>1. Looking back at your first year here at XXXX College, think about your favourite classes; please identify the qualities, behaviours, and interpersonal skills of your professors' that kept you engaged in your studies, and made you want to keep attending that class.</b></p>	<p>Helpful, understanding,            Committed to the students            Emphasis success – ask for help if you need it.            Happy and smiling            Humorous/fun            Friendly, nice person            Engaged with students            Personable/ Easy to talk to/approachable            Knows the student / more personal /Ask about personal experience/Relate to students            Want to see you succeed            Treat students as equals and with respect            Self Confident</p> <p>Passionate about the material and about what they do – Teach – Teachers that motivate and praise and keep a positive environment            Precision – no discrepancies in assessments of assignments, exams, or tests            Knowledgeable and have experience            Still involved or working in industry            Relate personal experiences, tell stories from time in the industry</p> <p>Organized</p>	<p>The professors know who you are they're very personal with you and they really interact with the students, which I like, they know my writing styles, they know who I am by name, they always used humour in the classroom. (used in Hypothesis 2)</p> <p>He was good with questions too and conversation...and He'll find answers for you right away. It just seems like those guys, you can really tell, they are the ones who have been working in the industry for a long time, which I think is key for professors is that they have the experience and they are still involved in it somehow; and it really shows their behaviour and their skills because they are passionate about what they do and they pass that on to the student and that's why I felt those classes that I felt were a good learning experiences. (used in Hypothesis 2)</p> <p>Teach you what you needed to know and would do extra hours with people if they needed help. It's when you can see in your teacher that they want to see you succeed</p>



	<p>Prepared Professional Presentation Skills/ Manages the class well Gets people involved Use technology such as WebCT, youtube,</p>	<p>and help you as much as possible. (used in Hypothesis 2)</p> <p>During my first semester. It was stressful because I didn't know what to do because I had to take care of my husband; I thought I would drop out. But then teachers explained and helped me; provided moral support. Teachers helped me to carry on. Students, most of who are teenagers and nobody they didn't ask me how I was doing. But all teachers , all teachers asked me everyday, how are you; how's your husband, how is he feeling. They supported me so much.</p> <p>Need to practice what you preach; feel I have a high expectation for my own work so professors work needs to be what is expected from professor; so if professor is expecting good quality than they have to deliver good quality teaching;</p> <p>Being organized is a big deal – organization makes all the difference in the world.</p> <p>Every professor should have to post the information online. We can review and go back to review if you're having problem with the questions. It's good to have marks up too.</p> <p>Good teachers can pass the information and their knowledge onto the students</p>
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		<p>...because in first semester, you're nervous and so are they right. You're new to them and they are new to you. So it's nice to be in a comfortable atmosphere...I don't want the grumpy professor, I want the happy one. (used in hypothesis 2)</p> <p>I like how they emphasis success too. In first semester they are always empasising success. Ask for help if you need it. (use for hypothesis 5)</p>
<p><b>2. Looking back at your first year, think about your favourite classes, please identify your professors' teaching techniques (lecture, group work, class discussions, simulation, relating personal experience, role playing, projects, assignments etc.) that kept you engaged in your studies, encouraged you to learn, and made you want to keep attending that class.</b></p>	<p>Relating Personal Experiences/stories/Ideas relate to everyday topics or situations. Real world examples that are related to the field.</p> <p>Practical examples Teachers/ professors breathe life into the courses they teach- but it is their choice to do so.</p> <p>Lecture PowerPoint slides Videos that accompany the lecture</p> <p>Gives material (Powerpoints, notes in Word) in advance of class or lab for preparation. Discusses the labs in class and then go and practice Information is available on WebCT</p> <p>Class participation and discussion and</p>	<p>My science teacher even said himself, it's worth seeing a light bulb turn on when a student understands something, you can see it. And it's very rewarding.</p> <p>And real world examples, or relating things to the real world is when like when if we're doing something in class that we will actually be doing in the field or when we get out of school its great as opposed to something that you know like you're like k we're never going to do this why are we doing this, we're going to lose interest right there. The technique is the relationship to, you know the actual experiences.</p> <p>I personally liked it when I was just able to go in and have everything given to me, so all the notes all the work done and then have something assigned that we take up the next</p>

	<p>debates; asking questions                  Videos that relate to the lecture                  Role playing, simulation, labs                  Group work (some like it some don't)                  Individual assignments – some students don't like group work</p> <p>Negative:                  Need more time in labs, SIM labs or provide more resources.                  Group work – work equity is a problem; some adults find it difficult to work with younger students – some do not share in all the work equitably.</p>	<p>time to see if you actually learned what you've taken up that day. Cause there were other classes where you'd be given all this work and then class time to work on it. I'd like to have more, a lot more review in my classes before I go home and attempted to do it myself. I kinda like the teaching. (quote used in Hypothesis 1)</p> <p>Asking questions so it isn't just our teacher talking the entire time. Teachers breathe life into the courses they teach-but it is their choice to do so. My science teacher even said himself, it's worth seeing a light bulb turn on when a student understands something, you can see it. And it's very rewarding. Teachers that motivate and praise and keep a positive environment. Then there should be no reason to not want to attend class. (Quote used in Hypothesis 3)</p>
<p><b>3. Again, looking back at your first year here at XXXX College, think about your favourite classes, please identify your professors' teaching techniques (lecture, group work, class discussions, simulation, relating personal experience, role playing, projects, assignments etc.) helped you best learn the course content.</b></p>	<p>Hands on, visual learner                  Relating personal experiences that relate to the field and link to lecture – easier to remember content when it's linked to an example.                  Review in class prior to labs/assignments/exercises                  Visual aids, video and PPT.                  Prompting you to think about your mistakes rather than give you the answers.                  Class discussion help learn different point of</p>	<p>Oh yeah. Again I'll make the reference back to university. If I was in a classroom sitting there every week listening to my professor talk, it was like everything was going in one ear and out the other. I didn't get anything. Here it's like the, you know, their techniques when they're doing the group, like the group work for example because we're teaching each other, and we're talking about different things since everyone gets to talk about it with each other we're also learning while we're speaking</p>

	<p>view.</p> <p>Using technology, audio lectures and WebCT – providing information prior to attending class so you are prepared for the lesson. (related to the article by dawson) can also review after class. (audio learners can listen to the lecture over again)</p> <p>Group assignments should be completed in class.</p> <p>Course outlines that clearly highlight course objectives</p> <p>Negative: Don't read the slides – students can read.</p>	<p>to each other which I really like because then everyone in the group kinda gets it at the same time and everyone learns it at the same time. (used for Hypothesis 1)</p> <p>I like the labs because I can see what's going on.</p> <p>Lecture and teacher explanation. I like when examples based on relating personal experiences. It's very interesting to know about their work and I memorize it better. If they link their experience to the topic I memorize it for sure. (quote used in hypothesis 3)</p> <p>While relating complicated science to a real life application allows me to understand how things work. Or why I would need to learn this information in order to solve for an answer. (Quote used for Hypothesis 3 and 6)</p>
<p><b>4. How do you know when you are engaged in a course/program? What behaviours do you exhibit in the courses that you are engaged in versus those courses you are not engaged in?</b></p>	<p>I'm awake, alert paying attention</p> <p><b>Engaged:</b> Asking question answering questions get work done immediately writing notes, well prepared for class want to learn material involved in the course/don't want class to be</p>	

	<p>over.</p> <p><b>Not engaged:</b>          Bored, will not pay attention          will not interact          work doesn't get done          distracted, zone out          sleep          skip class          can't focus</p>	
<p><b>5. Do you think that when you are engaged in a course that you will perform better academically? If so, why do you think this is the case?</b></p>	<p>Yes (all students)          Reasons:          More focused          More passionate          Want to learn, interested in learning          Developing as a whole; learn all the material</p>	<p>Of course, that's the biggest thing. If not engaged I'm not learning...I should still try in courses, but you have to be engaged, or you're not going to get a thing out of it. I'm not going to learn because I'm sleeping if I'm not engaged. You won't get anything out of the course if you are not engaged.</p> <p>Want to learn as much as possible and you'll us</p> <p>When you find the course not relevant to what you are taking it's hard to be engaged with that as well.</p>
<p><b>6. At any point in time in your college experience did your professors' classroom behaviours or interpersonal skills influence your decision to stay in a course, program, or college in general? (For instance, you disliked the course but you really liked the professor so you</b></p>	<p>Most students said not really</p> <p>We have to stay – no choice to quit any class because they are all prerequisites.</p> <p>Yes: professor related to me; prof assured me to stay college wants to help you succeed.</p>	<p>Yes, I did have a professor who convinced me to stay. She spent quite a bit of time sitting down with me because I had quite a bit of stress. She assured me to stay. I was ready to go. She bought me a coffee, sat me down; she wanted me to get through it... Actually, and somebody else – I went in the office and</p>

<p><b>stayed in the course.) Please elaborate or give an example.</b></p>	<p>Want to stay to finish because we've come this far; already finished year one, no sense in dropping out half way through the program.</p>	<p>telling my problems and life story. He didn't care about the college numbers; it was about me (used in Hypothesis 3)</p> <p>Yes – about fitness because for my course I must attend fitness. This summer my family dr. Informed me that I have osteoporosis. Physically I cannot attend because I have to do it for my course. I really really like my teacher she is so enthusiastic and I do as much as I can even what is prohibited for me. Teacher can see that when person really tries or when someone is very lazy. I didn't know I would pass. (used in Hypothesis 3)</p> <p>Our teachers even congratulated us at the end of the first year. They know it's a hard program and their praise really made my efforts that much more rewarding.</p> <p>I was really looking forward to coming back to my second year - I was confident I was going to learn what I needed to know. The professor made me look forward to learn more of the same. I was thinking of not coming back but it would be good to learn this stuff. His behaviour and interpersonal skills made the difference.</p>
<p><b>7. At any point in time in your college experience, did your professors' teaching techniques (lecture, class discussion, group work, assignments, etc) influence your decision to stay in a course,</b></p>	<p>NO – overall good experience – picked the right course</p> <p>Yes – teaching techniques made the difference – group work and presentations</p>	<p>Picked the right program</p> <p>If you don't have the concept than it's really hard to grasp what's being taught to you. The way the teacher would talk it was very</p>

<p><b>program, or college in general? (For instance, you disliked the course but the way the way the professor taught the course kept you motivated and engaged enough to persist.) Please elaborate and/or give an example.</b></p>	<p>One course – thought about dropping but the way the teacher lectured made the difference. Very interesting course</p> <p>One online course – didn't think I could do it but the professor was very responsive (maybe better example for #6)</p>	<p>interesting. It was hard to grasp. But the lectures were interesting. Delivery and the way she lectured was interesting. She is a very good lecturer.</p> <p>I guess some of the stuff I was doing over the summer time is knowledge that I wish I had. There was this semester and in one class, just the way he [professor] provides you with the information I was confident that I was going to come in and I was going to learn what I needed to know because I know the way that he sets things out and its very, you know, specific and I talked to him before about what we would be learning. So, I was looking forward to coming back to learn that stuff. And actually that was one of the classes when I was really thinking about not coming back. It's like, you know, I should stay and it would be really good to learn this stuff. So, his teaching techniques really brought me back.</p> <p>They post the ppt but there is so much extra in the class so it's important to attend the lectures. There are discussions and the floor is always open for questions or clarifications. If you have a train a thought during the lecture you can raise your hand and have your questions answered. (quote in hypothesis 2)</p> <p>My first reaction, I was scared because I thought, I could not ask anyone, I would have to do everything by myself. And my first</p>
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<p><b>8. Do the majority of your professors use some form of active learning techniques in the classroom?</b></p>	<p>Yes!</p>	
<p><b>9. Have you ever taken a course that you wanted to quit but you did not? If so, why did you stay?</b></p>	<p>Yes – stayed because I needed the credit!</p> <p>No choice of dropping a class – need them to</p> <p>Yes – professor had no interpersonal skills (professor interpersonal)</p> <p>Yes – class is so hard (not ready academically)</p> <p>No – every course is valuable</p>	<p>No – not since high school felt like I would be failing. I'm going to stick this out.</p> <p>Yes – professor had no interpersonal skills I finished because I like being at school and I like the guys in the class. Seeing classmates is a huge factor for coming back.</p> <p>Yes – class is so hard - High school didn't prepare us for what we are experiencing in college. Science courses are so hard. Downer</p>



	<p>Yes – had a problem with the professor (professor teaching techniques)</p>	<p>because grades are lower.</p> <p>I had a problem with the professor. I had to take the class, there wasn't a way I could drop it. I was trapped. I couldn't understand his teaching methods. And he didn't seem to care at all.</p>
<p><b>10. Do you believe that your grades or academic success or failure in a course or program influence your decision to persist?</b></p>	<p>Yes – high expectations of getting good grade</p> <p>Yes high expectations of myself</p> <p>No – sometimes it's more about what you learn than the grade you get.</p>	<p>Getting good marks makes you want to keep learning.</p> <p>Yes – came in with high expectation of getting good grades; a lot of information and overwhelming; lower grades are not what you are used to. Crushing when you don't meet your own expectations. Grades are huge but you want to be top of the line in your profession – sometimes a de-motivator but makes you want to work harder</p> <p>No - I will get through this course, I'm here to learn, If I have the skills and abilities to continue my grades say nothing about me and who I am, I'm big on grades but it won't deter me. I'm going to finish my schooling. Grades will not deter me from doing what I want to do.</p> <p>Yes, when you fail you feel down and kinda crappy. Like you tried your best and you still got a poor mark, what's the point of trying? But then the flip side is to look at your other courses and look how well you did, knowing you earned those marks.</p>

<p><b>11. Overall, who do you think has a bigger impact on your academic success, you, or your professors? Why? Please elaborate on your answer.</b></p>	<p>Most students said both: Have to want to be taught and professors have to be willing to teach.</p> <p>Professor: They are being paid to teach you...</p> <p>Yourself: student has to put in the effort.</p>	<p>Both: Professor helps you get there and you have to push yourself – Good teacher helps but for the most part it’s the student; you have to have passion and you have to love it or you’re just asking to fail</p> <p>Both: but the professor should keep students engaged because they should want you to learn, if they don't want you to learn then it's not the job for them. Professors have to want to teach and the student should want to learn.</p> <p>It’s so hard to say. If I say just my professor and how good they are but I didn’t make any effort, I wouldn’t stay. I think it’s both. I am nothing without them and I think [they are] the same without us as well. Definitely both. (quoted in hypothesis 5)</p> <p>The teachers give you what you need to succeed than you have to reciprocate.</p> <p>Professor: Professor is being paid to teach Should be the professor - we are the customer and they should have the biggest impact on our success.</p> <p>Yourself – your professors are here to teach but the student has to attend class, prepare</p>

		<p>Yourself: Yes, your professors are there to teach you but you are the one there learning</p> <p>Yourself:...I have to say it's me, the student. For I am there to listen, do the work and in the end learn. My teachers are there to help and teach. I have to take the pride in my work, I have to take the time to study and understand, to learn. (quote used in hypothesis 5)</p>
<p><b>12. In your opinion, what role does your professor play in your academic success?</b></p>	<p>Motivator          Provide guidance          Help develop skills to help you develop who you are          Support          Mentor          Reassurance          Human support/understanding/Good person          Friend</p> <p>Face of the school          Teacher – ensure you learn content          Want you to succeed          Excited about the field you are in.</p>	<p>Play a big role - they are the face of the school, they are providing the information; deciding what goes into the courses curriculum; what we are being taught; they have a huge role and important role in our academic success.</p> <p>In my opinion, my teacher is my teacher. He or she is me mentor, my tutor, my friend and sometimes a motivator. They are the ones that can make or break a course or even a program. They are the ones that make a class worth going to rather than just sitting in a chair for 3 hours straight.</p>