

1. PROPOSAL COVER PAGE

2007 AIR DISSERTATION FELLOWSHIP PROPOSAL

From Access to Success: Factors Predicting the Educational Pathways and Attainment of Baccalaureate Aspirants
Beginning at Community Colleges

Data sets of interest
National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS: 88/2000)
Postsecondary Education Transcript Study (PETS)

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2. PROJECT SUMMARY

Studying factors that predict bachelor's degree attainment has generated considerable empirical interest over the past few decades. Relatively few studies, however, have focused on bachelor's degree-seeking students beginning at community colleges and the unique factors that predict their educational trajectory and outcomes. At the same time, though community college transfer students compose a substantial proportion of the undergraduate student body at many four-year institutions, they receive little attention in the discussion of retention policies and graduation rates as measures of institutional success.

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine factors that affect the transfer and educational attainment of community college students whose degree goals are baccalaureate or higher. The conceptual model guiding this study draws on literature on community colleges, transfer students, and college persistence, as well as upon theories in psychology. Using data from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS: 88/2000) and the Postsecondary Education Transcript Study (PETS), this study will test logistic regression models to predict bachelor's degree-seeking community college entrants' transfer to four-year institutions, and conditional upon successful transfer, baccalaureate degree attainment. An OLS regression model predicting student academic performance at four-year institutions will also be tested.

This dissertation seeks to contribute to a better understanding of factors explaining the educational outcomes of baccalaureate aspirants beginning at community colleges as they navigate a less traditional postsecondary pathway to achieve their educational goals. The study will generate useful knowledge for community colleges in providing effective educational practices to help students move further towards their degree goals. Such information is particularly relevant for higher education policy in a time of increased accountability pressures. As college tuitions keep spiraling upward, community colleges are likely to increasingly become the entry into postsecondary education for many disadvantaged students. Findings from the study will also have important policy implications for four-year institutions receiving community college transfers. Understanding their students better is the starting point for increasing their retention and graduation. Based on its results, this study will suggest ways to promote the educational success of bachelor's degree-seeking students who begin at community colleges, as well as improve the performance of higher education institutions hosting an increasing number of these students.

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4. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

a. Statement of Problem and Variables

Statement of Problem

Postsecondary education, one of the surest ways to overcome deprived social conditions, has profound impact on the lives of individuals (Swail, 2000). Research has indicated that attaining a bachelor's and more advanced degrees positively affects economic return (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Between 1980 and 2004, individuals with at least a bachelor's degree consistently had much higher median earnings than those with less education (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). The outcome of postsecondary education determines not only earning capacity, but also the very quality of human life (Davies, 2001).

For various reasons, many students aspiring to earn a bachelor's degree or higher begin their postsecondary education at a community college, often with hopes of transferring to a baccalaureate-granting institution (Laanan, 2004). Among high school graduates of 1992 who first enrolled in public two-year institutions, nearly two-thirds reported that they were seeking a bachelor's degree or higher (Hoachlander, Sikora, Horn, & Carroll, 2003). Through the open door policy and transfer function, community colleges provide an alternative route for baccalaureate aspirants who did not attend four-year institutions in the first place. However, although gaining entry into the postsecondary world is necessary, persisting to degree goals is what really matters eventually (Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003). While national and state policies have promoted greater access to higher education over the last forty years, access does not guarantee persistence and graduation (Heller, 1997). As both the transfer function and the number of baccalaureate aspirants at community colleges continue to be substantial, so do concerns about the transfer, persistence, and educational attainment of these students, for whom the process of persisting to their degree goals is structurally convoluted by the two-phase nature of the road to the baccalaureate.

Research literature focusing on community college enrollees has largely pointed to the negative effect of attending community colleges on bachelor's degree attainment (e.g. Christie, 1999; Crook & Lavin, 1989; Dougherty, 1987, 1994; Ganderton & Santos, 1995; Rouse, 1995; Whitaker & Pascarella, 1994; see Adelman, 1999; Lee, Mackie-Lewis, & Marks, 1993, for exceptions). Based on their review of research evidence over three decades, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) concluded that "students seeking a bachelor's degree who begin their college careers in a two-year public institution continue to be at a disadvantage in reaching their education goals compared with similar students entering a four-year college or university" (p. 381). They further argued that part of the

disadvantage appears to be associated with whether students in fact transfer to a four-year institution. Unfortunately, a considerable number of students who expect to earn a bachelor's degree but begin at a community college never transfer (Berkner, He, & Cataldi, 2002).

Preparing students to transfer to four-year institutions has been a primary function of community colleges since they began (Cohen, 1990). A number of studies have explored factors that affect student transfer from two-year to four-year colleges and final degree attainment (Anderson, 1981; Bailey, Jenkins, & Leinbach, 2005; Breneman & Nelson, 1981; Brint & Karabel, 1989; Cohen & Brawer, 1996; Deng, 2006; Dougherty, 1987, 1994; Lee & Frank, 1990; Meznik, 1987; Roksa, 2006; Velez, 1985; Velez & Javalgi, 1987). Significant individual predictors for the transfer probabilities of community college students include student background variables such as sex, socioeconomic status (SES), and ethnicity (e.g. Velez & Javalgi, 1987), first-generation status and family income (e.g. Bailey et al., 2005), as well as students' academic preparation in high school (e.g. Cohen & Brawer, 1996), and their academic performance in community colleges (e.g. Lee & Frank, 1990). With regard to institutional factors, empirical research has focused on the vocational versus liberal arts orientation of community colleges (e.g. Brint & Karabel, 1989; Deng, 2006; Dougherty, 1987, 1994; Roksa, 2006). Results from the studies in this stream have been equivocal. For example, Brint & Karabel (1989) and Dougherty (1987, 1994) found that the vocational focus of community colleges decreases transfer rates and therefore hinders bachelor's degree attainment. This criticism, however, was challenged by more recent research. Roksa (2006) argued that controlling for individual and state characteristics, students attending vocationally focused community colleges do not inevitably have lower educational attainment.

Though these and many other studies have generated fairly important knowledge regarding the transfer and degree attainment of community college students, there are several weaknesses with the current state of research in this area. First, most of the studies were based on student populations of the 1960s, 1970s, and early 1980s, and were therefore bound to the time periods in which the studies were conducted. As community colleges and their student populations are changing with the economic situation as well as federal and state policies regarding the finances of higher education (Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Vaughan, 2000), new research addressing the educational outcomes of more recent community college student populations is greatly warranted.

Moreover, among the studies exploring the factors associated with community college student transfer and bachelor's degree attainment, the consideration of student precollege characteristics is seldom beyond demographic

variables, often introduced as statistical controls. The importance of such demographics as ethnicity, SES, and gender granted, these studies have not explored the potentially powerful influence of student psychological attributes. The psychological perspective places emphasis on the role of individual psychological characteristics in the college student departure process (Tinto, 1987, 1993) and provides a possible basis for the refinement of existing college persistence models (Braxton, Sullivan, & Johnson, 1997). Since what people think, believe, and feel often affects how they behave (Bandura, 1986), such factors as motivation, perceived locus of control, and self-concept may help predict how well college students cope with their postsecondary education career. Understanding the role psychological attributes play in student persistence and attainment will benefit both the community college and four-year institution by informing their decisions regarding programs and interventions to transform motivational beliefs in a positive sense, since motivational beliefs may be overcome by training (Graham & Weiner, 1996; LaVargne, 1992).

In addition, most existing studies in this area often did not distinguish between students whose initial goal is baccalaureate or higher and students who do not have this degree goal. Prior research has suggested that students' degree aspirations are strongly and positively associated with eventual educational attainment (Camburn, 1990; Carter, 2000; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005). Therefore, analyzing in aggregate baccalaureate aspirants and students who aim at less than a baccalaureate degree may produce results that lead to unjustified criticism of community colleges for hindering students' educational attainment.

Aiming to address the above-mentioned gaps in research and scholarship surrounding community colleges and their students, this study will explore factors associated with the educational outcomes of baccalaureate aspirants beginning at community colleges. To accomplish this objective, the study will estimate models explaining student transfer to four-year institutions and conditional upon successful transfer, student persistence, performance and degree attainment at four-year institutions. Restricting the sample to baccalaureate aspirants, rather than using degree aspirations as a control variable, permits the conceptual framework and the choice of variables to concentrate on factors and attributes that might be uniquely associated with this particular group of students. This focused approach will help produce evidence regarding the distinctive characteristics and persistence patterns of these students and will lead to a more valid assessment of the role community colleges play in shaping student postsecondary experience.

Conceptual Model, Variables, and Relevant Literature

Conceptual Model

The theoretical model guiding this study conceptualizes the influences of precollege characteristics and community college experience in predicting the transfer and educational outcomes of baccalaureate aspirants. This model provides the conceptual and analytic underpinnings of the proposed research by integrating college persistence literature, empirical evidence on community college student outcomes, and theories in psychology. I developed the model with two main purposes in mind: to reassess the effects of some of the established influencers such as SES by applying these variables to a more recent national sample, and to explore the impact of some little studied, but theoretically sound factors such as psychological attributes (See Appendix A: *A Model of College Persistence Among Baccalaureate Aspirants Beginning at Community Colleges*).

Variables and Relevant Literature

There are four dependent variables in this study, three dichotomous and one continuous. Given the study's primary focus on the transfer and final educational attainment of bachelor's degree-seeking community college students, the first two dependent variables, both dichotomous, include whether a student transfers to a four-year institution (a dummy variable that equals to one if the student transfers to a baccalaureate-granting institution and zero otherwise) and whether a student attains a bachelor's degree (a dummy variable that equals to one if the student attains a bachelor's degree and zero otherwise). Another two dependent variables are persistence and academic performance at four-year institutions. Persistence, considered to be the progressive college reenrollment either continuous from one term to the next or temporarily interrupted and then resumed, "can legitimately be considered a necessary, if not sufficient, condition for degree attainment" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, p. 370). Following this definition, persistence is measured as a dichotomous variable that equals to one if the student's college enrollment is progressive and zero otherwise. Also, because college grades are arguably the single best predictor of degree completion (Adelman, 1999; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), academic performance at four-year institutions (measured by college GPA) is also modeled as a continuous dependent variable. Including persistence and academic performance as additional outcome measures not only acknowledges the well documented literature regarding the inseparability of persistence and attainment as well as the strong relationship between performance and attainment, but also addresses one limitation of the NELS: 88/2000 database: Because NELS only followed students over a span of eight and a half years after high school graduation, some community college transfer students are likely to still

remain in school in 2000. For this group of students who haven't completed a bachelor's degree yet, additional information about their persistence and academic performance is particularly relevant for its strong predictive power for students' final attainment.

Two broad sets of independent variables are included in the model: precollege characteristics and community college experience. Three groups of precollege characteristics are hypothesized to influence the probability of transfer and educational outcomes of baccalaureate aspirants attending community colleges: demographic background, academic preparation, and psychological attributes.

Demographic Background

Student demographic background variables include sex, race/ethnicity, and SES. Most of the models discussed in the student persistence literature have explored the contribution of these entry characteristics on the probability of staying in college and, ultimately, attaining a degree (Adelman, 1999; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993). Extensive empirical research has confirmed the pronounced impact of these characteristics on educational outcomes of the general student population (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005). Specific to community college students, prior research has also indicated that sex, SES, and race/ethnicity influence the likelihood of transfer as well as degree attainment (e.g. Lee & Frank, 1990; Velez & Javalgi, 1987).

Academic preparation

Academic preparation in the model is represented by high school academic performance, measured by 12th grade GPA, and academic resources, measured by the academic intensity of high school curriculum. Apart from grades, the academic resources students bring to college have emerged as one of the strongest predictors of transfer to a four-year institution among community college students (Hoachlander et al., 2003) and bachelor's degree attainment (Adelman, 1999).

Psychological attributes

A common limitation of existing persistence models is that most of the factors included in the models are external rather than internal to students. Even when it comes to student entry characteristics, most operationalized definitions of these characteristics are limited to family background, race, gender, and prior academic achievement. Including student precollege attitudinal and motivational traits, an important internal dimension shaping individual behaviors, is especially relevant for studying baccalaureate aspirants beginning at community colleges, who, by nature of their more complicated path to the bachelor's degree, obviously encounter more barriers and have to deal

with more challenges as they experience more transitioning in postsecondary education. It seems reasonable to assume that students who are successful in transferring and then transitioning from one educational setting (the community college) to another (the four-year institution) are an especially motivated and resilient group (Lee et al., 1993). These qualities are difficult to capture with the measures traditionally incorporated in educational research, such as SES, race, gender, or academic performance. Therefore, this study's conceptual model also includes a set of precollege psychological attributes (perceived locus of control, self-concept, and motivation for degree attainment) as predicting variables.

Rooted in social learning theory (Rotter, 1966, 1975; Lefcourt, 1981, 1982, 1983), locus of control explains a person's sense of control (internal locus of control) or lack of control (external locus of control) over his or her environment. Locus of control as a psychological construct is often studied in conjunction with academic outcomes and has generated hundreds of studies (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Perry, 1991). Substantial evidence exists to suggest the importance of internal locus of control in the academic development of college students. Research on the effects of locus of control has addressed academic achievement (Findley & Cooper, 1983; Grimes, 1997; Kaiser, 1975; Martin & Bowman, 1985), self-motivation (Nelson & Mathias, 1995), college student academic success (Martin & Bowman, 1985; Grimes, 1997), educational and occupational attainment (Li-Ya, Kick, Fraser, & Burns, 1999), and academic achievement and retention of first year college students (Gifford, Mianzo, & Bricerio-Perriott, 2006). By and large, these and numerous other studies have suggested that perceived internal locus of control is positively associated with various educational outcomes. There is reason to believe, therefore, that internal locus of control, as baccalaureate aspirants perceive themselves, may play an important role in determining whether they can successfully negotiate the complicated process of persisting to their degree goals.

Self-concept refers to the individual's thoughts and feelings with reference to self (Rosenberg, 1986). Self-concept has been documented as influencing the individual's educational, social, and occupational performance and as motivating and guiding behavior (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Thus, self-concept has a profound impact on student future success (Goleman, 1995; McClelland, 1993). Though empirical evidence on self-concept has been largely derived from studies of preschool, elementary, and secondary school youth, existing research on college students has also shown self-concept to be important in explaining performance outcomes (Smart & Pascarella, 1986). To sum up, a high self-concept is related to the ability to cope with the environment and to a greater degree of commitment and participation. In this sense, it is reasonable to argue that the baccalaureate aspirants who have

higher self-concept are more likely to follow their educational goals than those with similar abilities and backgrounds but with lower self-concept.

A third psychological attribute in the model is motivation for degree attainment, which refers to how motivated the student is to attain a baccalaureate degree or higher. This construct draws on expectancy-value theory. Motivation theorists in this tradition believe that an individual's choice and persistence in a given activity can be explained by beliefs about how well they will perform on the activity (expectancy), and the extent to which they value the activity (value) (Atkinson, 1957, 1964; Atkinson & Feather, 1966; Wigfield, 1994; Wigfield & Eccles, 1992). If a bachelor's degree or higher is considered the ultimate goal for baccalaureate aspirants, the amount of efforts they expend in achieving this goal may depend partly on their perceived possibility of obtaining the degree (expectancy) and perceived importance and value of a better education (value). These dynamics are presumed to influence the likelihood of bachelor's degree-seekers' educational outcomes.

Community college experience

Apart from precollege characteristics, student experience at community colleges is also posited to affect transfer, persistence, performance, and eventual degree attainment at the four-year institution. Previous studies have indicated that students' experience in college may be as important for their persistence to degree goals as their pre-college characteristics (Cabrera, Nora & Castaneda, 1993; Tinto, 1993). This group of variables in the conceptual model includes student involvement, remediation, and academic performance. Much research has suggested that student involvement and integration on campus are key to persistence to degree (e.g. Bean, 1990; Swail et al., 2003; Tinto, 1993). For this study, student involvement is represented by participation in extracurricular activities, formal tutoring received, and counseling services students receive on personal and academic choices. For many community college students, remediation is often a necessary part of the curriculum. A considerable amount of empirical evidence has indicated that remedial interventions appear to promote persistence and degree completion (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). However, some other studies have suggested the opposite: that enrolling in remedial courses has a negative effect on graduation and degree attainment (Adelman, 1999; Bailey & Alfonso, 2005). This study will contribute to this research debate by investigating the effect of remediation on the final educational outcomes of baccalaureate aspirants. Also, academic performance has been proved to be the single strongest predictor for degree attainment (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005). Academic performance at community college is measured by student GPA in the first academic year, as voluminous studies have found that first-year grades play

a significant role in explaining final degree completion (e.g. Adelman, 2006; Desjardins, Kim & Rzonca, 2003; Reason, 2003).

A complete list of variables including variable names, a brief description, and NELS/PETS labels is provided in Appendix B.

b. Proposal of Work

Research Questions

Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. For baccalaureate aspirants beginning at community colleges, how do their demographic background, psychological attributes, high school academic preparation, and their experiences while matriculating at community colleges, including campus involvement, remediation, and academic performance, affect the probability of transferring to baccalaureate-granting institutions?

2. For those baccalaureate aspiring students who successfully transfer to four-year institutions, how do these modeled characteristics affect the probability of attaining a bachelor's degree?

3. For those baccalaureate aspiring students who successfully transfer to four-year institutions, how do these modeled characteristics affect their college persistence?

4. For those baccalaureate aspiring students who successfully transfer to four-year institutions, how do these modeled characteristics affect their academic performance at four-year institutions?

5. To what extent do the effects of the independent variables other than demographics vary by gender, race/ethnicity, and SES?

Databases

To explore the proposed research questions, I will draw on data from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS: 88) and the Postsecondary Education Transcript Study (PETS). Initiated by National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), NELS: 88 followed a nationally representative sample of eighth-graders first surveyed in the spring of 1988. In total, the NELS: 88 survey system includes five waves of data which are most efficiently utilized as three separate datasets: NELS: 88/92, NELS: 88/94, and NELS: 88/2000 which is the main dataset of interest for this study. NELS: 88/2000 is the fourth and final follow-up planned for the 8th grade class of 1988 and contains data files and updated electronic codebook for the Base Year (1988) through Fourth Follow-up (2000). PETS, a special and supplementary study of NELS: 88/2000, was conducted in 2000 to collect information

on postsecondary education experience and enrollment information. Transcripts were requested from 3,213 postsecondary schools that NELS: 88/2000 students reported attending during data collection of either the third or the fourth follow-up. The study aimed at providing reliable information about student postsecondary school attendance patterns and supplementing the NELS: 88 data system with factors that may predict student postsecondary educational outcomes.

One limitation of NELS and PETS is that because the studies followed a particular high school cohort, the sample is not representative of all community college students. In particular, this sample is not representative of students who attend community colleges many years after high school graduation. However, the role community colleges play in facilitating bachelor's degree attainment is arguably more distinct for the group of students in the NELS sample: recent high school graduates who access higher education through community colleges, nearly two-thirds of whom expect to earn a bachelor's degree or higher (Hoachlander, et al., 2003). Traditional age students starting at community colleges tend to have higher degree aspirations, compared to their older counterparts who are more likely to enroll in community colleges for job retraining and lifelong learning (Laanan, 2003). Similarly, previous studies have also found that older community college entrants are much less likely to transfer than students entering college soon after high school graduation (Dougherty & Kienzl, 2005; Peter & Forrest Cataldi, 2005), and this gap is explained mostly by the lower educational aspirations of older students and external demands (Dougherty & Kienzl, 2005).

NELS: 88/2000 and PETS contain rich information that allows researchers to examine student access to postsecondary institutions, persistence, and completion of postsecondary degrees. In addition, NELS's unique merit is that it includes student psychological and motivational variables that are of substantial interest to this study, thus making it possible to explore the relationship between psychological, demographic, and academic characteristics and later educational outcomes. Together, NELS: 88/2000 and PETS provide all the variables that will be used to operationalize this study's conceptual model and investigate the research questions. In addition to the variables noted in Appendix B, appropriate sampling weights will be utilized to adjust for the effects of oversampling and nonresponse.

Sample

The NELS: 88/2000 database consists of 12,144 cases. Among them, over 2,600 students (approximately 22%) began postsecondary education by enrolling in a community college within two years of high school

graduation. For the purpose of this study, only community college entrants who expected to complete a bachelor's degree or higher are retained. As a result, approximately 1,650 respondents (63% of the community college sample) will make up the initial dataset. I will further restrict the sample to those students for whom complete information is available in each of this study's variables. The final sample is estimated to consist of approximately over 1,000 students. I will weight this sample by proper weight variables and correct standard errors for NELS design effects. This sample is representative of baccalaureate aspiring high school graduates of 1992 who entered community colleges soon after completing high school.

Statistical Analyses

After initial data screening and cleaning, a two-stage estimation approach will be used. At the first stage, binomial logistic regression analysis will be conducted on the sample consisting of all baccalaureate degree-seeking students starting at community colleges to estimate the relative influence of each set of independent variables in predicting the probability of student transfer to a baccalaureate-granting institution. At the second stage, only those students who successfully transferred to four-year institutions will be retained. Two separate binomial logistic regression models will be used to measure the effects of the same sets of independent variables on the probability of this second sample's attaining a bachelor's degree as of 2000, and the probability of their enrolling in college in a progressive manner (persistence). Binomial logistic regression is chosen to explore the first three research questions because it is the appropriate form of regression analysis when the dependent variable is dichotomous and the predictor variables are categorical, ordinal, or continuous, as in the present study. The focus of logistic regression analyses is on the probability of the outcome variable. The coefficients from the analyses are represented in a log-odds metric, which allows for comparison across coefficients to determine the relative effects of the predictors as well as the significance level of each effect. Goodness-of-fit tests will be employed to determine the best prediction with the fewest predictors. Tests of interaction effects will be conducted to examine to what extent the effects of the modeled predictors of transfer and educational attainment vary by gender, race/ethnicity, and SES. A separate Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression model will be estimated to predict student academic performance at four-year institutions.

Work Plan

Regarding this proposed dissertation, I have made substantial progress in conducting a detailed literature review, obtaining the NELS: 88/2000 dataset, and initial coding of variables. I plan to proceed with my work as

follows:

Database building and variable selection (March 2007- June 2007)

Request to obtain the PETS dataset. Take information from the third and fifth waves of the NELS study with variables drawn from the NELS: 88/2000 dataset and its complementary PETS dataset.

Data preparation (July 2007- September 2007)

Run descriptive statistics. Screen data to check for irregularities. Examine data to check for non-compliance with assumptions for regression analyses. Make any adjustments necessary to address possible non-compliance, missing values, etc.

Data analysis and dissemination of findings (October 2007- December 2007)

Run the proposed models and analyze results. Submit a proposal for presentation at the 2008 AIR annual forum.

Dissertation writing and further dissemination of findings (January 2008 – May 2008)

Write up the results, discussion of the results, and policy and research implications as dissertation chapters. At the conclusion of this project, prepare a research article outlining the whole project for publication in *Research in Higher Education*. Submit another article focusing on the theoretical discussions to *Journal of Higher Education*. Develop presentations and articles highlighting policy implications of the study for audiences in the communities of higher education researchers and/or practitioners.

c. Dissemination Plan

I am strongly committed to disseminating the results of this study through a wide array of outlets. Upon final completion of this dissertation, I plan to submit a research paper based on the study to *Research in Higher Education* for publication. I will also seek publication opportunities for a scholarly paper that emphasizes the theoretical discussion of the study. Prior to possible journal publication, I plan to present this study's findings as widely as possible, both within and beyond the institutional research community. I expect to present the findings at the 2008 Annual Forum of Association for Institutional Research (AIR). Other aspects of this study will be presented at the annual meetings of American Educational Research Association (AERA) and the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE). In addition, I anticipate that I will make presentations focusing on policy implications of the study to academic and student affairs leaders and professionals at my home institution, a large public research university where community college transfer students constitute almost one-third of the

undergraduate student population.

d. Description of Policy Relevance

By the mid 1990s, the discussion of public policy in higher education moved from access to persistence and attainment (Swail et al., 2003). For community college students aspiring to the baccalaureate, the issue of retention and progress to degree is particularly a persistence and attainment problem. Empirical evidence suggests that on the one hand, many students with a baccalaureate degree goal never transfer; on the other hand, those who do transfer to four-year institutions are at a disadvantage in terms of degree attainment in comparison to their counterparts who began at a four-year institution. By examining the issue of persistence to degree among baccalaureate degree-seekers starting at community colleges, this dissertation will identify factors that affect the transfer, persistence, academic performance, and degree attainment of these students. This knowledge is of paramount importance for its ability to inform leadership of both community colleges and baccalaureate-granting institutions in formulating policies to positively impact student persistence and progress to degree goals. Based on findings of this study, institutions sending and receiving these students can work independently and/or collaboratively in creating programs and services aiming to promote the educational success of students for whom a community college serves as an alternative route to the baccalaureate degree.

Moreover, results of this study will contribute to an informed policy debate over the role community colleges play in shaping student educational attainment. As the debate on whether community colleges serve as a democratizing force in higher education or a mechanism that perpetuates social inequality continues (Dougherty, 1994), a systematic study of factors predicting their students' educational outcomes is much required. This dissertation is planned to develop an accurate understanding of these factors, thus helping inform state and national leaders seeking to improve the performance of community colleges, which are very likely to continue to serve as the entry into postsecondary education for many disadvantaged students.

e. Discussion of Innovative Aspects of Project

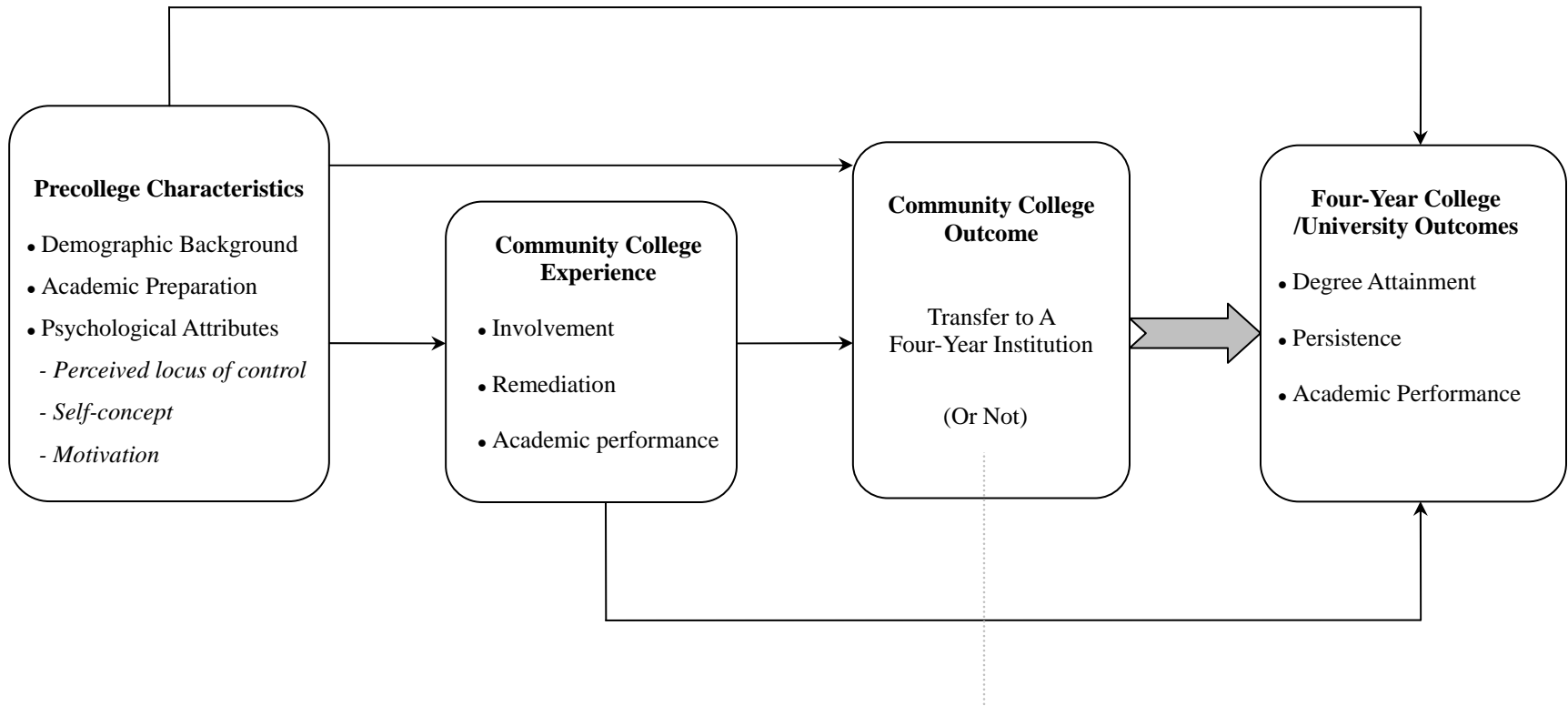
This dissertation will contribute to higher education research with two major innovative aspects. First, the study focuses on community college entrants who aspire to a bachelor's degree or higher. This student subpopulation is largely neglected in the research literature. Knowledge uniquely relevant to these students is greatly needed to inform higher education policies and practices with regard to student retention and success. It also helps evaluate accurately the role community colleges play in shaping student educational trajectories.

Additionally, this study incorporates in its conceptual model important precollege psychological and motivational attributes and assesses their effects on student educational pathways and outcomes. Though previous models of college persistence (e.g. Bean, 1980; 1982, 1986; Cabrera et al., 1993; Tinto, 1987; 1993) acknowledged the importance of student entry characteristics, including psychological constructs, these models focus on students who begin in a four-year institution, and the majority of research utilizing these models does not examine how psychological constructs are related to student decisions in postsecondary education. Given the nature of community college transfer students' complicated educational pathways, it stands to reason that psychological attributes, such as perceived locus of control, self-concept, and motivation for degree attainment, may have a pronounced impact on whether students make it to the upper division of higher education in order to accomplish their degree goals. This study introduces a new psychological model to produce information that will address the knowledge gap about baccalaureate aspirants at community colleges. This knowledge will also help design effective educational practices that can mediate psychological traits to positively influence student learning and educational outcomes.

f. Discussion of Audience to Whom the Project Will Be Important

The topic and results of this study will be of interest to a wide range of stakeholders in higher education, including scholars, institutional researchers, college and university administrators, and policymakers at the state and national levels. Scholars and researchers in higher education and educational psychology will be interested in the study's empirical results as well as its theoretical addition to the fields of postsecondary persistence and attainment, motivational research, and community college transfer students. Community college researchers and administrators and their counterparts at four-year institutions can use the knowledge produced by this study to understand better the relationship between student characteristics, college experiences, remediation, and educational outcomes. Based on this understanding, they can design programs and services accordingly to promote student persistence and graduation. Finally, information provided by this study will be particularly interesting and relevant to policymakers at both the state and national levels in formulating well-informed policies to assist students with successful baccalaureate completion.

A Model of College Persistence Among Baccalaureate Aspirants Beginning at Community Colleges



Note: The block arrow pointing from Community College Outcome to Four-Year College/University Outcomes illustrates the direction of student transfer.

Appendix B

List of Variables to be Used in the Proposed Study

Variable Name	Variable Description	NELS/PETS Label
Dependent Variables		
Transfer	Transfer to a four-year institution or not	INSTCOMB; HDEG
Educational Outcomes at Four-Year Institutions	Bachelor's degree attainment; Persistence; academic performance	HDEG; CONTIN; GPA_PETS
Independent Variables		
<i>Precollege Characteristics</i>		
<i>Demographic Background</i>		
Sex	Respondent's sex	COMPSEX
Race/Ethnicity	Respondent's race/ethnicity	RACE4
SES	Socioeconomic status: a composite score of parents' education, occupations and family income	F2SES1
<i>Academic Preparation</i>		
12th Grade GPA	High school grade point average	HSGPAV
Academic Resources	Academic intensity of high school curriculum	ACCURHSQ
<i>Psychological Attributes</i>		
Perceived Locus of Control	A composite measuring respondent's perceived locus of control	F2LOCUS2
Self-Concept	A composite measuring respondent's self-concept	F2CNCPT
Motivation for Degree Attainment	Importance of getting good education; How far in school respondent thinks she or he will get	F2S400; F2S43
<i>Community College Experience</i>		
Involvement	Participation in extracurricular activities extracurricular activities; Formal tutoring received; Counseling (on personal, academic, financial or career choices) received	INTRATH, PERFARTS, NEWSRADI, STDTGOV, SOCLCLUB, VOLUSTDT, TUTOR, COUNSEL
Remediation	Training in remedial or developmental courses received	RENGGLISH, RMATH, SPECINST
Academic Performance	Student GPA in the first academic calendar year	GPA1

5. REFERENCES CITED

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6. BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

Principal Investigator/Doctoral Student: Xueli Wang

I am currently a third year Ph.D. student in the Higher Education program at the Ohio State University. I received a bachelor's degree in English and an MA degree in Applied Linguistics from Beijing International Studies University, where I also worked as a full time faculty member in the Department of English from 1999-2003. I have a long-standing interest in the impact of individual characteristics and college experience on student educational outcomes. A strong motivation to explore these factors through scientific inquiry prompted me to apply to the Ph.D. program in Higher Education at the Ohio State University, and I joined the program on a University Fellowship in Autumn 2004.

During the past two and a half years, I have benefited from coursework in Higher Education, Educational Psychology, my cognate area, as well as Education Statistics. I have fulfilled all the coursework requirements and completed a graduate minor in quantitative research methods. I plan to advance to candidacy in March 2007.

As I developed my Ph.D. program substantively, I have also placed an emphasis on building and strengthening my research skills. I have studied survey research methods, experimental design, and a range of multivariate data analysis techniques including regression analyses and structural equation modeling. My current graduate research assistantship at the Ohio State University Office of Student Affairs Assessment also provides me with a lot of opportunities to develop and hone my research and dataset skills. In the summer of 2006, I was awarded a fellowship to attend the AIR/NCES/NSF National Summer Data Policy Institute in Washington, D.C. During the Institute, I gained extensive knowledge on national longitudinal surveys administered by NCES and NSF. I also received adequate training in using analysis weights (also referred to as nonresponse-adjusted weights or final weights) to analyze complex longitudinal survey data. In addition, with intensive training and hands-on practice, I became skilled in using online data tools such as DAS, IPEDS Peer Analysis System, COOL, SESTAT, etc.

My research interests focus on the involvement, performance, and degree attainment of college students, particularly community college transfers. My long term research goals are to identify the general trends and patterns of transfer student involvement, academic performance, and persistence to the bachelor's degree, as well as factors that affect the educational outcomes of community college transfer students. With the support from the director of the Office of Student Affairs Assessment at Ohio State, I have finished several research projects on the involvement patterns and academic and social experiences of transfer students in comparison to students who entered as new

freshmen. We have also presented our research findings at several national conferences, including AIR and ASHE annual conferences. During the 2006 AIR Summer Data Policy Institute, I had the opportunity to study the general profile, academic performance, and college experiences of community college transfer students within the national data context. More importantly, the learning experience at the Institute also helped further develop the topic and research design of this dissertation proposal.

For my dissertation, I propose to explore factors that affect the transfer, persistence, academic performance, and degree attainment of baccalaureate aspiring students beginning at community colleges, using National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS: 88/2000) and Postsecondary Education Transcript Study (PETS) data. I plan to apply theories in psychology and higher education to explore my research questions. The study will conceptualize the effects of psychological factors, demographic background, and student college experience on transfer decisions, persistence, and degree attainment.

Hopefully, this proposed dissertation research will contribute to the scholarship surrounding community college transfer students and generate knowledge that informs leadership in postsecondary education on policies, programs, and practices aimed at improving the transfer process, retention, and graduation of community college students seeking a baccalaureate degree or higher. The support from the AIR/NCES/NSF/NPEC Grant Program will provide me an important opportunity to focus exclusively on my research during the 2007-2008 academic year, facilitate my participation in professional conferences to disseminate findings, as well as further improve my data and information skills. I would welcome and deeply appreciate financial support for my project in the form of a 2007 AIR/NCES/NSF/NPEC dissertation fellowship.

Curriculum Vitae

Xueli Wang

Education

Ph.D. Student, Higher Education, The Ohio State University, 2004 - 2008 (Expected)

Graduate Minor, Research Methods in Human Resource Development, The Ohio State University, 2006

M.A., Applied Linguistics, Beijing International Studies University, Beijing, China, 1999

B.A., English, Beijing International Studies University, Beijing, China, 1996

Experience

Graduate Research Associate, 2005 to present

Office of Student Affairs Assessment, The Ohio State University

Responsibilities:

- Design and implement survey research on select topics
- Coordinate and perform data analysis, reporting and distribution of existing survey research projects
- Provide statistical data verification and analysis necessary to create and verify research reports produced by the office
- Produce written research reports and edit existing research reports, including reviews of research literature, data summaries and statistical data analysis
- Prepare papers and newsletters on completed research projects or existing datasets
- Provide research data and information for other university divisions to support strategic planning and institutional decision-making

Lecturer, 1999 to 2003

Department of English, Beijing International Studies University

Responsibilities:

- Taught undergraduate level courses (Advanced English, Literature and Culture, Comprehensive English, and English Writing)

- Coordinated course and curriculum development; Participated in compiling textbooks for the course Literature and Culture
- Served as advisor for B.A. graduation thesis
- Served as academic adviser for undergraduate students

Fellowships, Scholarships, and Awards

- Fellowship for the AIR/NCES/NSF National Summer Data Policy Institute, 2006
- Dan H. Eikenberry Scholarship, College of Education, The Ohio State University, 2006-2007
- Third Place, The 20th Edward F. Hayes Graduate Research Forum, The Ohio State University, 2006
- Roald F. and Della J. Campbell Scholarship, College of Education, The Ohio State University, 2005-2006
- University Fellowship, The Ohio State University, 2004-2005
- Award for Excellent Teaching, Beijing International Studies University, 2002-2003
- Second Place, Teaching Competition, Beijing International Studies University, 2000

Selected Presentations and Publications

- Wharton, B. I., & **Wang, X.** (2007). *What influences the patterns of campus involvement among transfer students?* (Proposal accepted). Presentation at the 47th Annual Forum of Association for Institutional Research, Kansas City, Missouri.
- Wharton, B. I., **Wang, X.**, & Whitworth, P. (2007). *Demonstrating links between student affairs functions and student academic progress.* (Proposal accepted). Presentation at ACPA/NASPA 2007 Joint Meeting, Orlando, Florida.
- Wharton, B. I., **Wang, X.**, and Whitworth, P. (2007). *Assessing the effectiveness of student affairs services: Student awareness, usage, and satisfaction.* (Proposal accepted). Presentation at the 2007 OCPA/OASPA Conference: Ohio's Conference for Student Affairs, Worthington, Ohio.
- **Wang, X.**, & Wharton, B. I. (2006). Any differences in patterns of involvement? A comparative study of transfer students and native students at a four-year public research university. Presentation at the 31st Annual Conference of Association for the Study of Higher Education, Anaheim, California.
- Wharton, B. I., & **Wang, X.** (2006). *Studying transfer student engagement on campus: A dialogue on approaches and practices.* Presentation at the 46th Annual Forum of Association for Institutional Research, Chicago, Illinois.

- **Wang, X.** (2006). *Understanding graduate teaching assistant development: A conceptual model.*
Presentation at the Annual Convention of ACPA- College Student Educators International, Indianapolis, Indiana.
- **Wang, X.** (2002). The application of memory psychology in teaching college-level English courses.
Journal of Beijing International Studies University, 2002 (3), 16-20.

Professional Association Memberships

- Association for Institutional Research
- Association for the Study of Higher Education
- American Educational Research Association
- ACPA- College Student Educators International

Technical Skills

- Computer Applications: Microsoft Office including Word, PowerPoint, Excel; eListen Survey and Data Collection Software, Statistical software packages including SPSS, SAS, LISREL, and STATA.
- Languages: Chinese (Native language); English (Fluent); German (Reading knowledge)

Faculty Dissertation Director: Leonard L. Baird, Ed.D.

Leonard L. Baird is Professor of Higher Education in the School of Educational Policy and Leadership at the Ohio State University. Dr. Baird holds an Ed.D. in Educational Psychology from the University of California, Los Angeles. His research and teaching interests include the impact of college on students, the developmental growth of students, assessment of college environments, community colleges, as well as the development of graduate and professional school students.

Dr. Baird spent most of the first half of his career as a research psychologist and senior research scientist at the American College Testing Program and the Educational Testing Service. From 1983 to 1994, he was Professor and Director of the Office of Research in Higher Education at the University of Kentucky. Dr. Baird joined the Higher Education faculty at Ohio State in 1994 and has since served as Editor of the *Journal of Higher Education*, the leading scholarly journal in the field and the oldest journal in the world focusing exclusively on higher education. Apart from his job as Executive Editor of the *Journal of Higher Education*, Dr. Baird has also served on the Editorial Boards of *Research in Higher Education* and *Review of Higher Education*, and as reviewer for many other journals.

Dr. Baird's research centers round the psychological and sociological analyses of the structure of postsecondary education and its influences on students. His major interests and publications concern college environments, the assessment of college outcomes, the study of the impact of college on students, and graduate education. Dr. Baird is author or editor of more than 200 publications including books, book chapters, monographs, book reviews, journal articles, and research reports. He has also made over 100 presentations at scholarly and professional conferences.

Recognized for his ongoing scholarly efforts, Dr. Baird received the Sidney Suslow Award for "significant, scholarly and original contribution to research and administrative decision making" from the Association for Institutional Research in 1991.

7. BUDGET

Project Title: From Access to Success: Factors Predicting the Educational Pathways and Attainment of
Baccalaureate Aspirants Beginning at Community Colleges

Xueli Wang

September 1, 2007 – May 31, 2008

ITEM	REQUESTED FUNDS
Personnel	
Salary support: Xueli Wang (September 1 st , 2007- May 31 st , 2008 @ \$1,300/month)	\$11,700
Fringe Benefits	
8.0% of salary	\$936
Travel	
2008 AIR Forum (Seattle, Washington) 2008 AERA Annual Meeting (New York City, New York)	\$1,800
Materials and Supplies	
Reference books directly related to the project, file storage, and printing and copying services	\$564
TOTAL AMOUNT OF AWARD	\$15,000

Budget Explanation

I am requesting salary support for the autumn, winter, and spring quarters of the 2007-2008 academic year (9 months in total). The monthly salary requested is consistent with the rate at which my current graduate assistantship pays doctoral candidates. Fringe benefits cover worker's compensation, which is required for fellows and graduate students at the Ohio State University. Travel to the 2008 AIR Forum and 2008 AERA Annual Meeting includes the costs of the registration fees, economy round-trip airfares, hotels, and other travel-related expenses.

8. CURRENT AND PENDING SUPPORT

Currently, I am holding a graduate research assistantship at the Ohio State University Office of Student Affairs Assessment. The assistantship provides a monthly stipend and covers graduate tuition and fees. The support will end on August 31, 2007. At this point, no support for the 2007-2008 academic year has been guaranteed. I plan to apply for an AERA Dissertation Grant.

The Ohio State University Graduate School has committed to providing the appropriate Graduate School Matching Tuition and Fee Awards should I be selected to receive an AIR Dissertation Fellowship. The official letter showing support is included in Section 10 of the proposal.

9. FACILITIES, EQUIPMENT, AND OTHER RESOURCES

The key resources I need for this dissertation research are the NELS: 88/2000 dataset and its supplementary PETS dataset, as well as appropriate computer software for statistical analysis. Access to the datasets is provided through Dr. Helen Marks, one of my dissertation committee members. Dr. Marks is the Principal Investigator for the NCES restricted-use data license agreement and I am included as a notarized user of the restricted data. As of now, we have obtained the NELS: 1988/2000 restricted-use CD. We will request the PETS CD from NCES and expect to obtain the data soon. I have my own non-networked computer that complies with the security requirements outlined in the NCES Restricted Use Data License. I have access to all software needed to conduct this study including SPSS, SAS, STATA, and the AIR-sponsored AM software. In addition, all academic resources at Ohio State including libraries and statistical and technical supports are available for me to complete this dissertation study.

10. SPECIAL INFORMATION AND SUPPLEMENTARY DOCUMENTATION

The signed letter of recommendation from the Faculty Dissertation Director has been mailed to the AIR office.



Graduate School

250 University Hall
230 North Oval Mall
Columbus, OH 43210-1366

Phone (614) 292-6031
Fax (614) 292-3656

January 8, 2007

Professor Philip L. Smith, Graduate Studies Chair
School of Educational Policy and Leadership
145B Ramseyer Hall
29 West Woodruff Avenue

Dear Professor Smith:

The Graduate School is pleased to learn of Xueli Wang's application to the Association of Institutional Research for a Dissertation Fellowship. We are pleased to cost share with the proposed fellowship by providing the appropriate Graduate School Matching Tuition and Fee Awards for Fellows and Trainees should Ms. Wang be selected for funding.

The Graduate School applauds Ms. Wang's pursuit of the fellowship and wishes her the best of luck.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Elliot E. Slotnick".

Elliot E. Slotnick
Associate Dean

C: Donna Roxy, OSURF
Scott Sweetland, Educational Policy and Leadership
Xueli Wang, Educational Policy and Leadership